

Baudelaire and the Government of the Imagination

CHRISTOPHER PRENDERGAST

Let me begin by stating in summary mode the various frames of reference that inform the following remarks: first, an author (Baudelaire and his writings on criticism and aesthetics); second, a historical context (the insurrections of 1848, the failure of the short-lived Second Republic and the *coup d'état* of Louis-Napoleon); thirdly, a topic (theories of the Imagination); and finally, two framing questions, which stand at the centre of an extraordinarily rich intellectual history running from the early eighteenth century through to the later nineteenth century.

Simply put, the two questions are as follows: first, what did it mean or come to mean to be a free subject of aesthetic experience? I phrase the question in this way to make as clear as I can that by “subject” of aesthetic experience I do not primarily mean the artist, the figure of the sovereign creator that was so central an idea and a value in romantic aesthetics, theoretically formalized in German aesthetic thought but then travelling in various guises across much of the European romantic and post-romantic landscape. This emphasis on the sovereign artist will in fact return in the later section of my remarks, with a lethal twist in the tale that takes us to freedom’s opposite, the condition of unfreedom. However, that is an endpoint. In the context of my initial framing question, by “subject” I understand not the sender but the receiver, that is, not the artist, but the spectator (or reader, or listener, etc; though here I will refer principally to the category of the spectator, mainly because, while Baudelaire’s thinking on this front evolves through his writings on nearly all the arts, including poetry and music, the primary or more extended source is his essays on the visual arts, crucially modern painting). The question then, slightly reformulated, is this: how was the work of art conceived as a space for the exercise of imaginative freedom by the spectator? This was not an entirely new question in Baudelaire’s time. It has an eighteenth-century lineage and, in the context of French aesthetic thinking, is particularly

associated with Diderot (the Diderot of the *Salons*) and Diderot's promotion of what Michael Fried described as a new kind of spectatorial subjectivity governed by what Fried called "a state of absorption" and the nineteenth century was to call, over and over again, the condition of "rêverie" (Fried, 1980). What happens to that category in Baudelaire's thinking is very much at the heart of what I am here interested in.

The second question concerns the ways in which answers to the first (what it meant to be an aesthetically free subject) mapped onto what it meant to be a *politically* free subject, understood broadly in terms of the different and often competing currents of thought linking liberty and democracy. Concepts of freedom and imagination were natural bedfellows in European aesthetics from the early eighteenth century through to Kant, Romanticism and beyond. Freedom and imagination, the exercise of the one and the enjoyment of the other, typically came together in the notion of "imaginative free play". What the latter consisted in was variously understood, involving all manner of themes deriving largely from Kant's philosophy, to do with the subject's transcendence of the realms of coercion, necessity and instrumentality. But the notion was often inflected by, or at least related to, political conceptions of liberty, sometimes explicitly (as, for example, in the thought of Barry and Schiller), sometimes implicitly, such that there was often considerable overlap between my two questions – what it meant to be a free subject of aesthetic experience and what it meant to be free politically.

However, at this point a methodological caveat, elementary, even naïve, but which in connection with an inquiry of this type needs to be entered: it cannot be a matter of implying any straightforward equivalence of aesthetic values and political values, whereby one can automatically read off or derive one from the other. When, to take an example from Baudelaire's writings, in the poem "L'Idéal", the poet-narrator speaks of his search for "une fleur qui ressemble à mon rouge idéal" (Baudelaire, 1961, p. 21)¹, the adjectival noun 'red' of the sought-for poetic flower (the poem is of course from *Les Fleurs du Mal*) cannot simply be taken to signify the red flags or the Phrygian hats of the revolutionary barricades in 1848. Indeed the entire history of aesthetics as a theoretical practice and then later a constituted discipline is not only directly bound up with, but also a distinctive manifestation of, a broader history of cultural specialization in which the aesthetic was explicitly assigned a form of "autonomy" designed to separate it off from other areas of thought and practice. This, however, should

1 All references to Baudelaire's writings are to the 1961 Pléiade edition, except where otherwise indicated. Quotations of Baudelaire in English are from P.E. Charvet's translation (Baudelaire, 1972).

not discourage us, but merely alert us to a fairly obvious potential trap. If, bearing the caveat in mind, we were to map theories of the imagination in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in particular notions of imaginative freedom, onto a set of terms from the lexicon of politics, there are essentially two models of liberty directly pertinent to the inquiry – the republican and the liberal conceptions (to which in the later nineteenth century will be added the utopian, the communitarian and the mass-democratic).

Republican conceptions of liberty (so-called “positive liberty”)² impacted on aesthetics in different places at different times, but was perhaps most consistently a preoccupation of eighteenth-century English aesthetic thought (as described for instance by John Barrell in connection with eighteenth-century painting-theory, above all in the *Discourses* of Joshua Reynolds). In this context “freedom” was tied to ideas and ideals of citizenship, the active, equal and freely assenting participation of the person in the self-governing republic. According to this model, art – both its production by the artist and its reception by the viewer – has a properly public function; and in subordinating private interests to public ones, it is a conception that encourages a focus on the general and the universal, what can be seen, held, and enjoyed in common. The free exercise of the Imagination in the virtuous republic of taste comes down to everyone concerned (let us say, before a painting in an exhibition) seeing and experiencing the same, as the aesthetic equivalent of the common good in the political sphere. One indication of what such an aesthetic can look like is Reynolds’ prohibition on ambiguity as encouraging “division” (its effect, in Reynolds’s words, is “to divide the attention”, both of the individual viewer and across the collection of viewers that make up a “public”). Ambiguous pictures are to be deplored because they encourage multiple seeing, different points of view, and thus the fragmentation of a community of shared taste into a collection of purely private interests and pleasures.³

-
- 2 The expression is famously Isaiah Berlin’s. In terms of contemporary re-thinking of republicanism, “positive liberty” is generally associated with Pocock’s version of republican freedom, a version rooted in the “Aristotelian” conception (as distinct from Skinner’s ‘neo-Roman’ version, which Skinner describes as “third concept of liberty” situated in a space beyond or to the side of the narrow “negative/positive” polarity).
 - 3 “A painting that is ambiguous on the level of form will have one of two effects, either of which will disable it from performing the function of creating a public. Either it will divide the attention of the individual spectator, in such a way as to leave him at a loss as to how to respond to it – for he will not know where to look first, or in what proportion to bestow his attention on the various images it contains; or else it will

On the other hand, what the eighteenth-century republican or civic-humanist way of thinking deplored or feared as the enemy of true freedom (ambiguity and multiplicity), in the early nineteenth century acquired a different value under the influence of the other dominant model, historically and ideologically the great rival of the classical-republican conception, the one based on the liberal-individualist idea, which Benjamin Constant placed at the very heart of what he called “modern” liberty. This was the version favoured by romantic liberalism (in the writings of, for example, Hazlitt and Stendhal), according to which free imaginative play is basically the freedom of *individuals*, often based on a modern notion of “rights” accorded to subjects in their particularity and their differences.

One can see from even this schematic snapshot the outlines of a vast intellectual-historical narrative, with many different chapters. The particular chapter that interests me is one that comes later, the one centred on the pivotal example of Baudelaire. Baudelaire is pivotal for several reasons. The first is that aspects of the history I have just summarized flowed, if sporadically, quirkily and non-systematically, into his thinking about the fate of modern art in modern commercial society. However, the second reason – and what for the purposes of this collection I shall foreground here – concerns a set of developments that involve a radical break with the tradition linking freedom and imagination: developments which brought Baudelaire in his critical and theoretical writings to close down the spaces for the autonomous exercise of the imaginative faculty, in a manner which replaced an imputed condition of freedom with an imposed condition of *unfreedom*; where the “subject” becomes a subject in the sense familiar to political thought (namely as understood in relation to forms and agencies of subjection).

ART AND IMAGINATIVE FREEDOM

This however was an outcome, not a point of departure. Getting from one to the other means tracing a complex, uneven, and often darkly signposted journey. Baudelaire’s “politics”, and a fortiori their relation with both his aesthetic ideas and his poetic practice, present his biographers and critics with many problems, crucially three. The most basic concern factual gaps in the historical record, especially at the critical time of the 1848 insurrections (where he was when, with whom he was consorting, what he was thinking, whether or not contributions to ephemeral radical newspapers can be reliably attributed to him). A second diffi-

divide one spectator from another, but permitting each to interpret it as he wishes” (Barrell, 1986, p. 101).

culty turns not just on the contradictory nature of the record of Baudelaire's thoughts, opinions and allegiances, but on their *wilfully* contradictory nature. Let us not forget Baudelaire's unusual way with that centerpiece of modern democracy, the discourse of "rights", his own distinctive contribution to it being that there are only two inalienable rights: the right to commit suicide and the right to contradict oneself (*Etudes sur Poe*, Baudelaire 1976, vol. 2, p. 306). The third general difficulty revolves around a number of irresolvable interpretive enigmas. In his writings Baudelaire is notoriously a man of masks. What is seriously (i.e. directly) meant and what is tongue-in-cheek provocation cannot always be distinguished. When, for example, Baudelaire speaks in praise of Robespierre, it is not at all obvious what is to be taken at face value and what is poker-faced irony.⁴ Similarly, when in later years he both recalls and reaffirms his earlier revolutionary allegiances as if he were bizarrely drawing on the works of the reactionary theocrat, Joseph de Maistre, there is an opaqueness that borders on the impenetrable:

"Mais moi je ne suis pas dupe, je n'ai jamais été dupe! Je dis *Vive la Révolution!* Comme je dirais: *Vive la Destruction! Vive l'Expiation! Vive le Châtiment! Vive la Mort!* Non seulement je serais heureux d'être victime, mais je ne haïrais pas d'être bourreau, – pour sentir la Révolution des deux manières!

Nous avons tous l'esprit républicain dans les veines, comme la vérole dans les os, nous sommes démocratisés et syphilités [...]" ("Pauvre Belgique", Baudelaire, 1961, p. 1456)⁵

"But me, I'm no dupe, I never was a dupe! I say *Long live the Revolution!* As I would say *Long live Destruction!, Long live Expiation!, Long live Punishment!, Long live Death!* I should be glad to be the victim, but equally I should not dislike the role of executioner – so as to experience Revolution in both its guises!

Every one of us has the spirit of republicanism in his veins, like the pox in our bones; we are all democratized and syphilitic [...]"

Yet, while these are unsettling and unplaceable Baudelairian utterances, there are nevertheless certain broad lines of inquiry that enable us to situate Baudelaire – or more precisely the significance of Baudelaire – in relation to the two framing

4 For an interesting account of Baudelaire on Robespierre, cf. Pachet (1976), pp. 41-47.

5 T.J. Clark summarises it thus: "The evidence does not add up, nor does it have to. The Baudelaire it suggests is shadowy, confused, open: fluid in his allegiances, hysterical in his enthusiasms, claiming the right to contradict himself" (Clark, 1982, pp. 141-142).

questions with which I began. Baudelaire's early aesthetic formation in 1840s was strongly influenced by the emancipatory and democratising projects that flowered intellectually from eighteenth-century republicanism to nineteenth-century liberal romanticism. His commitment to the idea of an art that would set the imagination free was reflected in his early and abiding promotion of the artistic Sketch and the category of the Unfinished. In his first *Salon* (1845) and the subsequent one (the Salon of 1846, generally held to be Baudelaire's most important theoretical intervention in the field of aesthetics), he described the painting of Corot and above all Delacroix (for Baudelaire *the* exemplary modern painter) as interestingly and productively "unfinished", in the sense of assembling colour masses which, when viewed from a certain distance, appeared somewhat indistinct and blurred: "un contour un peu indécis, des lignes légères et flottantes, et l'audace de la touche" ("shapes that are not too clearly defined, lines that are light and hesitant, and bold touches of colour," *Salon de 1846*, Baudelaire, 1961, p. 892). Unlike the prescriptive, even coercive structures of the neoclassical canon, this was a style of painting that opened the mind and the imagination of the viewer to what Baudelaire, along with many of his contemporaries, called "rêverie" and "suggestion", that is to say, an art which provokes the imagination into its own interpretive work. Delacroix, wrote Baudelaire, is "le plus suggestif des peintres" who "ouvre [...] de profondes avenues à l'imagination la plus voyageuse" ("the most suggestive of all painters who [...] creates deep avenues for the most adventurous imagination to wander down," *ibid.*, p. 889).

The avenues down which the adventurous imagination, whether of poet or painter, would wander belong in various creative topographies. But one of the most important was the boundary-crossing landscape forged from the legacy of eighteenth-century "associationism", and whose nineteenth-century formulations derived principally from the doctrine of *correspondances* and the new interest in synaesthesia. Despite the familiarity of its main outlines, this is in fact a complex idea in Baudelaire's thinking, as it is in the nineteenth century generally. For present purposes, I emphasize the more radical aspect of Baudelaire's use of the idea. The argument from synaesthesia entails a stress on the modern work of art as inherently *mobile*. For Baudelaire the modern is or should be based on the principle of movement, and as such is held to transgress the terms and relations of an inherited neoclassical conception of art, the conception we can perhaps schematically represent as a relation of domination and subordination holding between two categories: the fixed and the free. In its commitment to the mobile, the modern work of art is opposed to fixity. Modern art, according to Baudelaire, permits a "free" circulation of categories, sensations, energies, subjectivities.

Both within the individual art work and between different art works there is a mobile play of actions and impressions that breaks up fixed form, static line and arrested “identity” (in both the generic and the psychological senses of the term). In theory, modern art proclaims everything and everybody as “free”, free to enter into “association” (and that term too, at the heart of the doctrine of *correspondances*, carries various senses, on a spectrum from the psychological to the political). In the process of mobile circulation released by the modern art work, nothing and nobody is assigned any “proper” place or identity within a pre-given system of fixed and hierarchical relations. Or to put this in Baudelaire’s own characteristic vocabulary, modern art is fluid, sinuous and, perhaps above all, “tumultuous”. “Tumulte” is a key term that recurs throughout Baudelaire’s descriptions of modern art works, and notably the paintings of Delacroix and the music of Wagner. In one paragraph of the 1855 *Exposition Universelle* it appears three times in an account of Delacroix’s work, while the essay on Wagner both begins with an account of how Wagner’s music expresses “les tumultes de l’âme humaine” (“the turbulences of the human soul”) and climaxes in a rapid accumulation of terms to do with the ideas of turbulence and excess (“Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris“, Baudelaire, 1961, p.1210).

In reviewing the language of Baudelaire’s accounts of the synaesthetic properties of modern art, and of modern painting in particular, we may find ourselves musing on two metaphors for colour, one in English and one in French: “riot of colours” and “orgie de couleurs”. If by reverse catachresis we reactivate what lies buried in these otherwise dead metaphors (the French is effectively dead in part by having been largely replaced by its semantic neighbour, “débauche de couleurs”), we come up with some interesting considerations. Both denote a mode of excess, forms of dangerous behaviour. “Riot” recalls, precisely, riotous behaviour, either in the taverns or, in the strictly political reference, in the streets and on the barricades. “Orgie” denotes another form of riotous behaviour, in the bed and the brothel. To my knowledge, Baudelaire himself does not use the expression “orgie de couleurs” in his discussions of painting and colour, although the expression does enter pictorial language in the course of the nineteenth century and is to be found, for example, in Hugo. The word “orgie” by itself, however, does have an interesting career throughout virtually the whole corpus of Baudelaire’s writings, as it does in the nineteenth century generally; the tracking of the term across nineteenth-century French writing is something of a fascinating lexical adventure (the high lexical scorers include Balzac, Michelet and Flaubert).

Here are some examples from Baudelaire: in the projected epigraph poem for *Les Fleurs du Mal* he refers to his own book of poems as “ce livre saturnien,

orgiaque et mélancolique” (“this saturnine, orgiastic and melancholic book“); the great closing poem of the collection, “Le Voyage”, refers – though here the perspective is a self-ironizing one – to the “Orgie de l’imagination”; “orgie” and “orgiaque” occur crucially in Baudelaire’s account of Wagner’s Venusberg music. More appositely, there are two instances to which we might here pay special attention. The first is from the prose poem “le Fou et la Vénus”:

“quelle admirable journée [...] l’extase universelle des choses ne s’exprime par aucun bruit [...] c’est ici une orgie silencieuse. On dirait qu’une lumière toujours croissante fait de plus en plus étinceler les objets; que les fleurs excitées brûlent du désir de rivaliser avec l’azur du ciel par l’énergie de leurs couleurs [...]” (*Le spleen de Paris*, Baudelaire, 1961, pp. 236-237)

“What an admirable day [...] the universal ecstasy of things expresses itself noiselessly [...] this is a silent orgy. It is as if a constantly expanding light makes objects glitter more and more; as if the aroused flowers burn with the desire to rival the blue of the sky through the energy of their own colours [...]”

It will be noted how “orgies” generates and links a series of associations between sexuality, light and colour, a chain that is reproduced in the second example with a further extension into a fourth term, that of political rebellion. The example is from the famous poem of intoxicated rebellious fantasy, “le Vin des chiffonniers”. Recall the scene of this poem: the ragpicker lurches drunkenly down the Parisian streets, surrounded by the spies (“mouchards”) of the Second Empire regime, recalling the lost glories of the Napoleonic battlefields, dreaming of political revenge for betrayed promises (probably of 1848). The fantasy climaxes by bringing the political into contact with terms drawn respectively from the vocabularies of colour and sexuality: “orgie lumineuse” (*Les Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire, 1961, p. 101).

This metaphorical crossing of the themes of colour, politics and sexuality may well remind us of many things, specifically of that particular emphasis in traditional aesthetic systems (which, in the conservative imagination, last well into the nineteenth century) whereby two of the key terms of Baudelaire’s modernist aesthetics – colour and metaphor – are commonly associated with the idea of an unregulated sexuality, a form of aesthetic “licence” held to be cognate with “licentiousness”. More precisely, it is the association with the idea (or, in self-defeating paradox, the metaphor) of the Fallen Woman, the prostitute and the whore. Thus painted colours (especially in oil), by virtue of their assumed closeness to the turbulence of sensual life, are frequently compared to the make-up of

the Harlot, the face and body daubed in alluring but deceptive cosmetics, suggestive of irresponsible and promiscuous sexual activity. Similarly, metaphor and more generally figurative discourse, as Todorov notes in *Théories du symbole* (1977), are from classical antiquity onwards often assimilated to the figure of the painted prostitute, producing relations or “couplings” transgressive of the stern proprieties of rational discourse and therefore appropriately an object of censure and control.

THE ARTIST AS DESPOT

Thus to praise colour and, moreover, to praise it in terms that are systematically metaphorical is to enter dangerous territory; it is to speak of and release energies (another key Baudelairean term) that are disruptive of traditional taxonomies and orderings of reality. The mobilities of the modern art work are seen by Baudelaire – to put the point in terms we are more likely to use – as radically decentering, tearing the subject out of all fixed “identity” and relation to the world, as necessarily involving excess, transgression of given proprieties and a certain violence done to fixed and fixing representations. Yet even as he championed this view of the nature and function of modern art, he had reservations. The wandering imagination, served by an art setting the imagination free from a normative body of rules to construct its own landscape of the mind, could all too easily wander dangerously far from appropriate controls. In the 1846 *Salon* there is a section on sculpture with the wonderfully nonchalant title “Pourquoi la sculpture est ennuyeuse”, which recalls Reynolds disapproval of ambiguity. As a three-dimensional object in space, sculpture licences the body of the viewer to move around, to look at it from different points of view, thus permitting a form of free imaginative play seen as wanton and random free association, crucially of a spectator breaking free of the point of view selected by the artist:

“La sculpture a plusieurs inconvénients qui sont la conséquence nécessaire de ses moyens. Brutale et positive comme la nature, elle est en même temps vague et insaisissable, parce qu’elle montre trop de faces à la fois. C’est en vain que le sculpteur s’efforce de se mettre à un point de vue unique; le spectateur qui tourne autour de la figure, peut choisir cent points de vue différents, excepté le bon [...]” (*Salon de 1846*, Baudelaire 1961, pp. 943-4)

“Sculpture possesses various disadvantages that are the consequence of its medium. Brutally material like nature, sculpture is at the same time vague and elusive, because it displays too many aspects at one and the same time. It is in vain that the sculptor tries to

position himself from a single point of view; the spectator who moves around the figure, can choose a hundred different points of view other than the right one [...].”

The viewing scene described here does not display the autonomy of a person participating in a rational community of equals, but an anarchy of individual taste and appetite, an instance of what towards the end of the *Salon* Baudelaire denounces as “le chaos d’une liberté épuisante et stérile,” (“the chaos of an exhausting and sterile freedom,”) and the “liberté anarchique qui glorifie l’individu,” (“anarchic liberty that glorifies the individual,” *ibid.*, p. 948), and which was to be countered by the ideal sketched in the penultimate section of the 1846 *Salon*, “De l’école et des ouvriers”, which revives the older model of the Master’s studio and adapts it to the sponsoring of a new collective-corporatist spirit. It would, however, be a mistake to interpret this denunciation of rampant individualism as a resurrection of eighteenth-century republicanism or civic humanist thinking. Nor is it a self-affiliating with the more recent strains of nineteenth-century utopian and proto-socialist thought, both at a very general level sharing a stress on the priority of common values and shared tastes over purely individual and private ones. There were of course brief, fragmentary glimpses of these ideas and values in Baudelaire’s reflections on painting and literature before and during 1848. Yet, while definitely important, they are very difficult to map as terms of a coherent outlook, and often – as in this last section of the 1846 *Salon* – they appear to anticipate what after 1848 were to become essentially terms of contempt. The denunciation of the liberal-individualist view of human liberty and what it implied for the forms in which art would be produced and consumed, became increasingly, and often hysterically, anchored in another way of thinking and feeling, authoritarian and – to use a term that will come to mean a very great deal to Baudelaire – “despotic”.

In 1859, Baudelaire published the last of his *Salons*. In it are two chapters or sections on the nature and functioning of the Imagination (“La Reine des facultés” and “Le Gouvernement de l’imagination”). In the second of the two section headings, the preposition “of” is at once a subjective and an objective genitive; both active and passive, nominative and accusative. Government of the imagination is to be understood in the accusative sense of what governs it, the sense of the law-bound processes and disciplinary regimes to which the imagination, in order to function at all, must be subordinated. Baudelaire works hard to specify what he thinks these are, largely as a rule-governed form of mental discipline that distinguishes “imagination” from its weaker brother, mere “fancy”, subject only to the wayward free associations of the undisciplined mind (in many respects this is a continuation of the line of thought that goes back to Coleridge’s

Biographia Literaria; Baudelaire refers to Catherine Crowe, a disciple of Coleridge).⁶ But one is also to read the preposition as carrying the more active sense of government *by*, the imagination as governing rather than as governed. Imagination “governs” by virtue of being primordial and sovereign, originator and organiser of the synaesthetic and metaphoric unity of experience:

“C’est l’imagination qui a enseigné à l’homme le sens moral de la couleur, du contour, du son et du parfum. Elle a créé, au commencement du monde, l’analogie et la métaphore. Elle décompose toute la création, et, avec les matériaux amassés et disposés suivant des règles dont on ne peut trouver l’origine que dans le plus profond de l’âme, elle crée un monde nouveau, elle produit la sensation du neuf. Comme elle a créé le monde (on peut bien dire cela, je crois, même dans un sens religieux), il est juste qu’elle gouverne [...]” (ibid., pp. 1037-38).

“It is the imagination that has taught man the moral significance of colour, contour, sound and scent. At the beginning of the world, it created analogy and metaphor. It decomposes all creation, and with the riches accumulated and arranged according to rules whose origin can be found only in the depths of the soul, it creates the sensation of the new. Since it created the world (one can, I think, maintain that even in a religious sense), it is right that it should govern [...]”

This is the metaphysical warrant (“même dans un sens religieux”) given to the regal place of the imagination in the hierarchy of the faculties (“the queen of the faculties”), at the apex of the division of mental labour, orchestrating the different tasks of the mind and their collaborative contribution to the whole: “Sans elle, toutes les facultés, si solides et si aiguisées qu’elles soient, sont comme si elles n’étaient pas [...] Aucune ne peut se passer d’elle, et elle peut suppléer quelques-unes,” (“Without her all the faculties, however firm and sharpened they might be, are as though they did not exist [...] None of them can do without her, but she can take the place of some of them,” ibid., p. 1038).

Here then are two models or analogies for the work of the Imagination: a monarch and a government. These are terms that clearly resonate with political connotation. Baudelaire’s text does not itself assign explicitly political meanings to the terms. Their universe of reference is cognitive, psychological and aesthetic; and in order to be convincing, any attempt to carry these references over into the sphere of political discourse would obviously require far more than a simple analogy. On the other hand, the analogical web woven by Baudelaire’s

6 *Salon de 1859*, pp. 1040-41. On Crowe and Coleridge, see Clapton (1930).

text is very dense and massively overdetermined: in the two extracts from the 1859 Salon, the personified imagination attracts, along with queen and government, the images of a warrior, an army commander, a cardinal (with crimson robes), and a deity (with the power and authority conferred by having a divine origin). Above all perhaps, it attracts a term that recurs across the whole corpus of Baudelaire's later writings: "despot". Imagination, Baudelaire writes in *L'Oeuvre et la vie d'Eugène Delacroix* (Baudelaire, 1961, p. 1119), is "la grande faculté despotique" ("the great despotic faculty"). And it is despotic not only in ruling the potentially unruly life of the mind; but also in ruling the whole human and social universe of the experience of art.

Baudelaire's late theory of the imagination is expressly designed to ensure a form of "government" that will dominate a community of readers, spectators and listeners. The imagination as despot is crucially, and only, the imagination of the sovereign Artist, conceived as a Master-figure who guides, controls, and dictates. Under this regime the Spectator is disenfranchised, robbed of all rights to the exercise of imaginative autonomy. The spectator is positioned as entirely subordinate to the will of the master, the passive recipient of a transmission from the Artist, the transmission of what Baudelaire calls the artist's "intention"; the spectator is no longer imaginatively free (to dream, to interpret, to construct), but is the prisoner of the intentional disposition of another. Indeed it is not only that the Spectator's autonomy evaporates under this regime, but even the reality of the created art work itself; as handmaiden to the artist's intention, it becomes a mere vehicle of transmission, the dematerialized medium for the despotic projection of one state of mind onto another. The envisaged communicative scenario is stated thus: the Master artist is the one who says: "Je veux illuminer les choses avec mon esprit et en projeter les reflets sur les autres esprits," ("I want to illuminate things with my mind and cast its reflection on other minds," *ibid.*, p. 1044). In short, what had originally been conceived as an art of "suggestion" ("an art that would free the imagination") is replaced by an art of suggestibility, an art of manipulation.

This was an extraordinary place for aesthetic theory to end up in, with a hundred-year history of attempted democratic emancipation of imaginative life reaching a dead-end, a point of exhaustion. I have not the slightest doubt that this was in part Baudelaire's reaction (and I mean "reaction" in the sense of reactionary) to the failure of 1848, in which the discourses of republic, democracy and liberty were stress-tested to breaking point, progressively hollowed out, and decisively routed by the counter-revolutionary *coup d'état* and the Napoleonic dictatorship of the Second Empire. It was an experience that in many ways broke Baudelaire. One consequence was a turning against the whole post-

Enlightenment configuration of aesthetics and politics, whether liberal, republican or utopian, in favour of a new aesthetic, based on fear of freedom and hatred of democracy, crucially a theory of the imagination which has no place for the active exercise of freedom by the viewer. Baudelaire, who himself sketched a version of artistic modernity, is often seen as one of the fathers of artistic modernism. That is correct, and it is also true that what he fathered *for* modernism was varied, complex and contradictory. But one of the things he bequeathed was a contribution to the framework for the emergence of an anti-democratic modernism of the autocratic Right, the tradition of right-wing cultural critique that starts with Joseph de Maistre and runs through Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, to Heidegger (for suggestions along these lines, see Burton, 1991, pp. 356-366).

As I have said, substantiating these claims demands a lot more work than an analogical move reading the political into Baudelaire's use of the term "government" in his theory of the imagination. Mere analogical reasoning is vulnerable to precisely the criticisms of Baudelaire and his predecessors of unregulated free association as a symptom of wanton individualism. Nevertheless, as a sort of coda (or prologue to further, more detailed investigations of text and context), let me conclude with an invitation to ruminate on the dense analogical dynamic surrounding a further account of the operations of the imagination, in a passage from another late text, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, the essay that more than any other is Baudelaire's programmatic statement of the aesthetic of "modernité". The passage concerns the "mutinous" claims of the "detail" on the modern art work, and in many ways its terms repeat (or evoke) the contrast drawn way back, in the 1845 *Salon*, between the "finished" and the "complete". The invitation is to consider whether or not, as he speaks unobjectionably of artistic matters, Baudelaire's terms are such that he is also speaking of political matters, a set of terms gathered in a small textual space, all with a lineage in the discourse of art criticism and art history (the subordination of "detail" to a master-design), but which here, in their concentrated in-gathering, are also expressive of fears and anxieties manifestly centred on the political: "riot", "mob", "equality", "justice", "usurpation", "anarchy", "hierarchy" and "subordination":

"Un artiste ayant le sentiment parfait de la forme, mais accoutumé à exercer surtout sa mémoire et son imagination, se trouve alors comme assailli par une émeute de détails, qui tous demandent justice avec la furie d'une foule amoureuse d'égalité absolue. Toute justice se trouve forcément violée; toute harmonie détruite, sacrifiée; mainte trivialité devient énorme; mainte petitesse, usurpatrice. Plus l'artiste se penche avec impartialité vers le détail, plus l'anarchie augmente. Qu'il soit myope or presbyte, toute hiérarchie et toute subordination disparaissent [...]" (*Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, Baudelaire, 1961, p. 1167)

“An artist with a perfect sense of form but particularly accustomed to the exercise of his memory and his imagination, then finds himself assailed, as it were, by a riot of details, all of them demanding justice, with the fury of a mob in love with absolute equality. Any form of justice is inevitably infringed; any harmony is destroyed, sacrificed; a multitude of trivialities are magnified; a multitude of little things become usurpers of attention. The more the artist pays impartial attention to detail, the greater does anarchy become. Whether he be short-sighted or long-sighted, all sense of hierarchy or subordination disappears [...]”

REFERENCES

- Barrell, J. (1986). *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Baudelaire, Ch. (1961). *Oeuvres complètes* (Pléiade). Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1961.
- Baudelaire, Ch. (1972). *Writings on Art and Artists*, translated and introduced by P.E.Charvet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Baudelaire, Ch. (1976). *Oeuvres complètes*, 2 volumes (Pléiade), Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1976.
- Burton, R.D.E. (1991). *Baudelaire and the Republic. Writing and Revolution*, Oxford.
- Clapton, G.T. (1930). “Baudelaire and Catherine Crowe”, *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (July), pp. 286-305.
- Clark, T.J. (1982). *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France 1848-1851*, London: Princeton University Press.
- Compagnon, A. (2005). *Les antimodernes*, Paris: Gallimard.
- Fried, M. (1980). *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Pachet, P. (1976). *Le premier venu: Essai sur la politique baudelairienne*, Paris: Denoel.
- Todorov, T. (1977). *Théories du symbole*. Paris: Editions Seuil.