

Étienne Balibar

The Metamorphoses of the Death Drive

We present an unpublished text by Étienne Balibar, which is a transcription of its intervention at the presentation of Jacques Lezra’s *Wild Materialism: The Ethic of Terror and the Modern Republic*, on Wednesday, October 20th, 2010, at The Humanities Initiative of New York University, in New York. The text has been lightly edited, but no systematic effort has been made to eliminate the traces of its original, spoken delivery. We wanted to extend Balibar's thinking by asking Jacques Lezra, editor of *Lucretius and Modernity*, a few questions about his Wild Materialism, Lucretius and Althusser.

Thank you so much. I am very pleased that I could take advantage of this stay in New York to become part of tonight’s event, that is the presentation of the book by my dear friend Jacques Lezra. Until now I had not seen the book itself so I hadn’t seen how beautiful it is, with its Goya picture, *de verdad, materialismo salvaje*, but I had the privilege of receiving the galley proof copy, which I read with enormous pleasure, excitement and enthusiasm, and it is a little of that that I would like to communicate to you tonight. I apologize in advance for a number of defects, first of all my accent in English. It is not too bad when I speak just like that... but when I read from the book (and how to present a book without reading from it!), well, you’ll have to excuse the mistakes I make.

The old Althusserian can of course only be very strongly driven or attracted to a book titled *Wild Materialism, materialisme sauvage*, which in fact as you will discover when you get to the chapter entitled “*Materia* in the Critique of Autonomy” takes its inspiration from Althusser (though I don’t believe that Althusser uses the phrase: Lezra of course already produced a translation or a transformation from such Althusserian expressions as “aleatory materialism” or “materialism of contingency” or “materialism of the encounter,” which all represent so many attempts at offering alternatives to such traditional terms as *dialectical materialism*, not to mention *mechanical materialism*, in order to draw the attention to materialism’s literary dimension). Indeed, I had the considerable and pleasant surprise in one of the many extraordinary encounters that Lezra stages, so to speak, in the course of his book that in fact the famous altercation or confrontation between Hegel and Marx, in particular in the extraordinary 1843 manuscript called the *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of the State* (which is also in fact a continuation of that philosophy, reversing it or opposing it to itself and in the end yielding this first indication of the material or materialist process of the production of concepts, a process which particularly interests Lezra), that this encounter between Hegel and Marx has a literary model in the description of the Inquisition’s *santa casa* that we find in

Schiller's play *Don Carlos*, during the very heated controversy about the fate of the Marquis Posa between King Philip and the Grand Inquisitor – certainly one of my favorite plays and intrigues. What Lezra particularly wants to borrow from this Althusserian context, among other things, is what he later in the book calls “the weak concept” adapted to the presentation or the understanding of the strength of terror. This is a concept, or a notion of concept, where the emphasis is not put on the stability of the semantic content, but on the contrary on the aleatory, pragmatic element of interruption, therefore also a notion of the concept that does not so much aim at subsuming differences under a general, common or ideal representation, as it aims at displaying and so to speak distributing or dispersing their incompatibilities. This is a little bit abstract, but I very much share this way of thinking about concepts, especially in the political and aesthetic realms, and not only because both Lezra and I have this common Althusserian reference.

Allow me to pass to the substance of the book. It is not easy to summarize, and in a sense it's absurd to try to cover the totality of a book like this, but I understand it in particular as an attempt at bringing together two sorts of concerns. On one hand, the preoccupations that have obsessed most of us, that is, both in the US and outside the US, in particular after the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent attempt by the American administration, to which I will return in a minute, to regain something of its vacillating and probably mythical or imaginary sovereignty. On the other hand, a concern with finding or deriving a genealogy of the idea of republicanism, and therefore also with providing a vindication of that idea. Republicanism is in fact too broad and vague a term. It has to be qualified. So Lezra speaks of “radical republicanism” or “radical republican alternative,” which already involves a privileged reference to famous passages in the oeuvre of the Marquis de Sade, undoubtedly or most likely linked with a certain trace of the reading that Blanchot had made of those passages. Although Blanchot's treatment of Sade is not one of the most insistent references in Lezra's book, which provides rather a recreation of Sade's problematic, Sade's recreated problematic is one of the book's constant references. Allow me to read one passage that perfectly summarizes what I take to be the book's way of bringing together these two concerns. In a sense what I want to do is pure and simply comment on the terms of this summary.

What is, what was, the modern republic? Does it have a future? Can the modern republic, the formal regime for the contingent distribution of sovereignty (of divisible sovereignty) across the wounded concept of the class of subjects, be imagined outside of the terrorism of identitarian mythology? (p. 204)

Although here Lezra speaks of “regime,” it seems to me indeed, and again the Sade-Blanchot connection is at play here, that it is essentially the *insurrectional* dimension of that republicanism that provides what he calls here that “alternative”.

In passing just a quick remark on the complicated and always very sensitive relationship between the two notions of “republicanism” and “democracy”. The “republicanism” it is a question of here is not identical with democracy. Lezra is not reclaiming or vindicating the democratic idea through its literary and philosophical representations and the discussion of its aporia; rather, he is focusing on the idea of republicanism. Republicanism, however, is not necessarily democratic, but nevertheless *radical* republicanism it seems to me necessarily involves a reference to democracy or to some sort of ultra-democracy related to the notion of divisible sovereignty, so in a sense what *Wild Materialism* seeks to provide is the opposite of the standard Rousseauist definition of democracy or a democratic regime understood as the indivisible sovereignty of the people. As a French reader and a speaker of French I cannot be unaware of or insensible to this aspect of the book’s argument, since our constitution, the French constitution, begins precisely with that formula, *la France est une république indivisible, laïque, sociale*, etc. This particularly takes the form of a very interesting disjunction that Lezra later proposes between this radical republicanism and the notion and practice of populism, something undoubtedly very relevant in today’s political actuality. So perhaps we might want to suggest that the relationship to democracy or to the democratic issue has to do with the possibility, the project of disjoining democracy from its populist simulacrum. The words are not chosen at random, but they also include an element of convention. The fact is that yesterday I was giving a lecture on the current conjuncture in Europe, and I renewed a call to what I myself called an “European populism”, trying to combine paradoxically the notion of populism with a certain notion of the civic, and of course also to distance that populism from the nationalist, xenophobic, conservative populisms which are again on the rise right now.

It’s not that I take *Wild Materialism* as a complete refutation of what I was saying, nor that I’m projecting my obsessions on this book as I am reading it now, but just in passing I want to suggest that the dispute over terminology, republicanism, democracy, populism, whose importance is absolutely crucial, is also perhaps in some sense an infinite process, a *regressio ad infinitum*. And this certainly has to do with the fact that the concepts that we are using here are not precisely semantically stable concepts. They always include an excess – this refers to an interesting epistemological discussion in Lezra’s book – but above all they become immediately divided or displaced, a favorite expression of Althusser’s.

What I’d now like to suggest is that the interest or the interests raised by *Wild Materialism*, which combines an extraordinary diversity of readings and interpretations ranging across works of legal theory or political theory, philosophy, pure speculative philosophy, and of course literature in different languages and at

different moments of modern European history in order eventually try to circumscribe something like the ethical dimension of literature, that the interest of *Wild Materialism* flows in part from a confrontation or an articulation of two question that are intimately linked. The first is the question of the difference between *terror* and *terrorism*. Here I will not spare you my reading of a very important and extremely provocative passage in the introduction of the book. The passage immediately follows a reference to Freud's famous essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which the category of the death drive was introduced. I will postpone for the time being my discussion of the role that the death drive plays in *Wild Materialism*, and read you Lezra's comments immediately following.

I opened this Introduction by glancing at the second normative context in which the word terror operates today: the context of the "terrorist" threat to the city (to the nation, to liberal democratic values, to the West) and of the "war on terror." The construction of terror that I am suggesting – of the city, of biopolitical and ethico-political life, and of the relations among them – is necessarily inflected by this context. But "terrorism" is not "terror," though what are vulgarly called "acts of terror" or "terrorism" can produce "terror" in the sense I intend it. Incidentally, however. The term terrorism works in part – by association, by contamination, by displacement – to obscure the necessary work of terror in the modern republic. ... The figure of the terrorist, abjectly embodied, displayed imaginatively for us here in pain, connected fluidly, electrically, to our own, shelters our imagination from more unsettling thoughts. We apply the electrodes to the terrorist, and the current flows in both directions, though always (our fantasy is a prophylactic: terrorism is prophylaxis) with different signs, different effects. "Our" active, deciding body – our ethico-political body – comes to life alongside the body we are tormenting; modern political subjectivity flows from the decision to subject another to "the most excruciating possible pain." A Gothic scenario: a biopolitics that draws its life from abjection; a necropolitics. ... Terror works otherwise, and must be thought otherwise. For me to tie myself to another today or to find myself bound to him or her, with unutterable or unspeakable links, rather than with the current of necropolitical subjection-subjectification requires that I distribute responsibility for the survival of ethico-political life and that I attend to and guard the occurring of that distribution. Both of these are ethico-political tasks, roughly of a public and a private sort, respectively; each is both (in Berlin's sense) a positive as well as a negative task, entered into both affirmatively and passively.

This is the first element that I want to suggest Lezra articulates, through the link of his phenomenological and ethical discussion of torture, and it gives us a very precious indication of what the adjective "wild," *salvaje* or *savage* means in this title. Lezra's wild intention and pretention is to rehabilitate or to reconstruct terror as a concept in the Althusserian sense that I mentioned a moment ago, and also (as we discover in other passages) in a Derridean sense, in order to interrupt the instrumentalization, the banalization, the vulgarization (the word is in the text) of the notion of terror, by contemporary politicians, administrations, governments, armies – by would-be sovereigns, I would say. In the present conjuncture, we read the

book in a context where the “war on terror,” which had been announced as indefinite or endless, miserably displays its completely finite and limited character. It’s over, but of course what is *not* over and will not *be* over is a permanent obsession with terrorism, and a constant use, I won’t say a manipulation, but a *use* of terrorism.

For the second element that becomes articulated in *Wild Materialism* I admit that I project a category on the book, but this is also a way of asking Lezra why and whether it would be possible to approach the subject of *Wild Materialism* in these terms, or at least whether it is possible, in the terms the book provides, to take it into consideration. I have in mind the words “tragedy” or “tragic.” Lezra seems at least in my eyes in some passages carefully to avoid it or perhaps to postpone it, perhaps because this word poses very difficult problems of definition. One of the intentions or the guiding threads of this book, however, has to do with the question of the modern tragic, or the tragic element in modern and contemporary politics. What has become, what remains, what emerges again of the famous notion of *phobos* and of course *elios* that goes with it? It seems to me to be a little bit more precise to say that this becomes articulated in Lezra’s book around three ideas, themes and also questions, a multiple articulation that is also part of the notion of weak concepta that Lezra first treats as an epistemological problem. Let me formulate them like this.

There is first the looming idea that the famous “disenchantment of the world” leading to modernity was not so much a secularization of the theological as a withering away of the tragic, in the modality of the tragic associated since ancient times with the foundation of the city, and also of the constitution of the citizen, or its new foundation, that is its rescue from collapsing or from ruin, in terms of a mythical bond (which is not the same as a mystical unity or a mystical bond), a mythical bond linking the private individual to the public community. It cannot be by chance that the book opens with a fresh, or a new reading of the two versions of Oedipus by Sophocles and Seneca between which he already discovers or traces something of this withering away. This has very strong consequences, particularly the following: however important the idea of secularization as it passed for example from Max Weber to Carl Schmitt to reach an absolute, extreme, not to say an extremist formulation in Carl Schmitt, no matter how important that idea is for an understanding of political modernity, or the modernity of the political, it also has, unfortunately we might say, the ideological function for much of contemporary thought of also, first, retheologizing the function of the political, but also, second, of masking the much more crucial question of the tragic. If we had time we would try to combine this general speculative or theoretical interrogation with a discussion of the history itself, in particular the history of European kingship. There are fascinating passages in *Wild Materialism* on the history of the Spanish monarchy, which are in particular

intent on showing how inadequate a certain theologico-political narrative based on the primacy of the category of secularization is.

The second theme is rather a question that I would formulate like this: is it possible to retrieve the tragic element, or the tragic dimension of politics, without fictitiously recreating or reenacting the eschatological horizon that I mentioned just a minute ago, that of the foundation of the city and also the rescue of the city from the catastrophe that the Sophoclean or Oedipian tale illustrates? In other words, is there a way out of the Benjaminian dilemma, articulated in the famous essay “On the Critique of Violence,” between the mythical and the divine? This indicates another crossroads at which Lezra’s book wants, from a theoretical point of view, to stand, that is, its critical, not aggressive, but its critical and distanced relation with the theme of the messianic – hence also his extremely subtle, I would say, relation to the work of Derrida. This book is written *with* Derrida in many passages, particularly in the critique of what I call the narrative of secularization, but to some extent it is also written *against* Derrida. So, what is at stake in a reflective and aesthetic analysis of the matter, of the materiality, of extreme violence or cruelty, where terrorism or torture slips, so to speak, into terror? And of course, when we speak of that *matter*, of the matter of that wild materialism, it can never be separated from a phantasmatic dimension. If matter were not also the matter of fantasy it would never become wild.

Finally, the question is it seems to me what makes the tragic not only different from the messianic, eschatological theme but also from the *epic*. This is another category that it seems to me in the end it becomes very clear Lezra wants to discuss, bring in, *convoquer* I would say in French, but also to distance himself from. The epic, which is, we know, so intimately connected with the modernist representation of politics and historicity, or the historicity of politics, and in different camps or on different sides, and on both sides: both the progressivist narrative, ultimately pedagogical, or in the revolutionary narrative of emancipation. What forms here the background of Lezra’s analysis is the long confrontation with the ideas, the figures, the icons of heroism and the heroic in modern history, on the background of the Hegeleian thesis, later Brechtian, that there are no longer heroes in modernity, modernity is no longer the place of the epos, heralding the city, rescuing the city, and suffering in its place, but in fact, as we also know (and this is perfectly clear in Hegel, and Marx’s critique, in spite of its radical character, probably remains more than ever caught in the same framework), it means that the heroes are the masses, or those individuals who most deeply identify with the mass, so that modern heroism is most often pictured as the revolt or rebellion of the mass. (Remember the title of Ortega’s book, *The Rebellion of the Masses*.)

I would like to read as swiftly as I can three passages from *Wild Materialism*, from which I will derive a last interrogation or consideration, returning in particular to this very important notion of Freud’s death drive. The first comes from the chapter on *Phares* – this is the last letter written on Belshaz’zar’s wall.

The chapter is called “Phares, or Divisible sovereignty,” a title borrowed from Derrida’s work. Then there is a subtitle, “Divided in their dire division”. Lezra explains:

My subtitle, “Divided, in their dire division”, comes from Richmond’s famous lines closing *Richard III* – perhaps the least equivocal assertion of the so-called Tudor myth of history to be found in Shakespeare’s work and surely his most obscure treatment of political division. The battle is won; the “bloody dog” lies dead; the dreadful, traumatic wars of the Roses draw to a close; the victorious Richmond – the future Henry VII, grand-father of Elizabeth I – is presented by Stanley with the “long-usurped royalty” “plucked” from Richard’s “dead temples.” Richmond’s words run like this:

Inter their bodies as become their Births.
 Proclaim a pardon to the soldiers fled
 That in submission will return to us;
 And then, as we have ta’en the sacrament,
 We will unite the white rose and the red.
 Smile, heaven, upon this fair conjunction,
 That long have frown’d upon their enmity:
 What traitor hears me and says not Amen?
 England hath long been mad, and scarr’d herself;
 The brother blindly shed the brother’s blood;
 The father rashly slaughter’d his own son;
 The son, compell’d, been butcher to the sire.
 All this divided York and Lancaster,
 Divided, in their dire division.

Richard III plays obviously on the cultural association of “division” with the interruption of political succession, a matter of increasing anxiety in British court and popular culture as the childless Elizabeth aged, especially in the years directly after the defeat of the Spanish Armada. Shakespeare’s inquiry into the legitimacy of “Heaven’s substitutes,” as John of Gaunt puts it in *Richard II*, and a fortiori of their substitutes, the usurping Richards and Claudiuses, the Angelos, Hotspurs, and so on, draws much of its urgency from the threat these deputies, surrogates, and usurpers pose to smooth succession in both the genealogical and the temporal sense. Richmond’s distinctly apocalyptic tone is strategic – it reinforces the association of Richard’s reign with upheavals and divisions to be healed by a revealed order, here taking Richmond’s shape.

The extraordinary density of “division’s” overdeterminations should not surprise us. As Lacan also saw, the scene from the Book of Daniel on which Persons’s gloss turns and which stands behind Richmond’s closing words serves as something like the primal scene of textual exegesis for the patristic tradition and its early modern epigones. Jerome’s famous gloss to Daniel is explicit: the words on Belshaz’zar’s wall provoke “a need not only for reading the inscription but also for interpreting what had been read, in order that it might be understood what these words

were announcing” – a need for interpretation that rings out, expressly, in *Richard III*'s closing construction of sovereignty.

So, this first quotation refers to sovereignty as intrinsically divided, or as featuring the paradoxical but necessary division of the indivisible.

The second quotation, if you allow me, is from the concluding chapter. This time, the topic is not sovereignty, but melancholy.

Much transpires between these three moments – an early modern conceptualization of the *res publica* expressed in the idiom of uneven secularization, the grudging early Enlightenment of dictionaries and encyclopedias, the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. These are the three moments I treat punctually and symptomatically throughout *Wild Materialism*. Saavedra Fajardo's brief fable concerning the origin of the republic, the anxious, grudging observation in the *Diccionario de la lengua castellana (de Autoridades)* that popular sovereignty threatens to become mere government by the masses, the tactical condensation in the Royal Academy's 1947 Dictionary of three quite distinct epistemological and politico-administrative functions in the rhetorical construction of the republic's *president* – any story that might stitch together these three moments is hardly uncontroversial. The critical languages available to us today for examining Spain's republicanism, and perhaps radical republicanism more generally, bear strong traces of one such story: the history of cultural personifications, exclusions, anxieties, substitutions, and elisions sketched here, stenographically, in the lexical drift of the term *república*.

But they also bear something more. The defeat of the Second Republic inseparably intertwined the modern notion of the republic with the experience and representation of exile. With the victory of the Nationalist forces and the expulsions and emigrations that followed, Spanish exiles carried the cause abroad, meditated upon it, re-formed *el pueblo* and its personifications in exile, tingeing them with melancholia, with distance. The thought about the modern republic that Spanish republicanism concretely makes possible turns upon this circumstance of exile from the immediate experience, as from the memory and histories of the *república*. A form of witnessing and of critique, to an important degree this thought provides a momentarily general purchase, an angle from which to reflect upon the histories and circumstances that the republic bears – as if from outside, as if from a balcony across the street, or from abroad, *desde el exilio*, contemplating the intertwining of republicanism and exile from another distance. The sort of thought about the modern republic that the Spanish Republic makes possible depends upon something like a reflective exile from the experience of exile. It is work carried out within and without its mythological personification in the historical snapshots or cliché's modernity consumes, exchanges, and circulates.

And finally, the last paragraph of the book, where Lezra refers to the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano, herself an exile, the daughter of exiles, in the context of an analysis contrasting her work to Husserl's 1936 essay *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*.

The disposition Zambrano's argument associates with the disclosing of the fundamentally vulnerable, material, even literary aspect of political concepts is melancholia: because, as the public secret at the heart of things as things, the republic has always been with us; and because, since we are exiles from the exile proper to the republic, which is to say, subjects outside the outside of the city, the republic has always been unreachable; our task is impossible and already, but trivially, accomplished. We never achieve the republic in time, but always, if at all, *a deshora*; never just in person, but only as personifications (the wounded sovereignty of the political subject). We make one more effort, and we become republican; no necessity joins our effort and the republican persona we seek to achieve. Effort and action – including the act that is thought – are threaded together causally; they represent the contingent association produced by blind pleasure or blinding pain. We are far from Husserl.

And yet neither alternative is satisfactory on its own; neither a mythic heroism nor a melancholic disposition is adequate to the tasks I have sought to describe; neither has a future alone. The promotion of terror, in the specific sense I have been outlining throughout *Wild Materialism*, is nothing other than the constant production of the relation – the fissure, to return to the language of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" – between these two dispositions and between the two conceptual practices to which they correspond. None of these terms is given: "producing" a relation entails, correlatively, "producing" the terms (concepts, wounded concepts) related; "producing" takes place where my conduct is intentional and where it is not. I act in person, as a sovereign subject; I act as the personification of a principle, for instance, the principle of sovereign subjectivity, and never as myself. Anything short of a divisive, dividing, and in that sense pharisaical or phares-iacal effort to produce terror out of the theologico-political myths of the modern state imaginary results in the false immediacy of terrorism. (Is most likely to result: it could be otherwise.) A phares-iacal, wild materialism, the promotion of terror as the work of thought, cannot ensure that such efforts will succeed—but only that they may.

Here, if you allow me, I would like to connect to these passages a quick reflection on a final theme that seems to me to be working throughout Lezra's book. The formulation I found for this is *the metamorphoses of the death drive*. To take this route into Lezra's book we would have to start with Freud himself again, and return to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in order to take account in particular of the ambiguity that Freud's concept has, its two sides and the permanent problem of how to combine them. In Freud, the death drive has indeed a double aspect: on one side a destructive aspect, and on the other side the relationship of the death drive with a tendency to return to absolute immobility and rest, which in a sense is a defense against the aggressive character of life. We would further need to take account of the difficult relation of the death drive to the political context in which Freud obviously, notoriously (I refer you to Samuel

Weber's commentaries, and to Derrida himself), elaborated the category, and understand its relationship with the kind of death which a war, a war of extermination which has terrorist implications, brings or forces us to fear.

It seems to me that in the book Lezra has taken into account successively or simultaneously at least three figures or metamorphoses of the death drive. Whether this is part of an economy which we should try to construct systematically I leave aside; here, I content myself with placing them side by side.

Now one of the metamorphoses of the death drive in *Wild Materialism* is *sovereignty*. But sovereignty emerges in *Wild Materialism* as a very strange figure or metamorphosis of the death drive. It doesn't reveal it in its essence, but rather neutralizes it or rather displaces it in the direction of all the figures of the sublime. This is a thesis that from the point of view of critical theory is far reaching and necessarily problematic. The classical category of the sublime as it becomes powerfully used in contemporary critique does not so much bear the trace of a taking into account of the death drive but much more of a displacement (and in this respect again Sade and others are important).

Then we have *melancholy*. This is the quotation that I read from the final chapter. Lezra based himself on the Freudian idea that melancholy represents the situation or the effects of impossible mourning but that it also permanently underscores or underpins the *Widerholungszwang*, that is, the compulsion to repeat. The applications to politics are in Freud completely enigmatic. It is not that in Lezra's book the enigma is resolved, but that it becomes tendentially problematized, in particular in these last phrases about María Zambrano, which I found not only eloquent but also very interesting from that point of view, inasmuch as they turn around the issue of which repetitions produce immobility and incapacities, and which are in fact ways of distantiating oneself from death in order to become, or to become again, capable of republican politics.

And finally the last of the metamorphoses of the death drive in *Wild Materialism* that I would like to mention is the *tragic* regime of the death drive, indeed the one that was constantly or continuously looked-for by Freud, but in an aporetic manner, or perhaps even worse than that, looked-for in a manner that misses the point of the aporia because it only indirectly addresses the political or the civic dimension of that responsibility without any guarantee that Lezra associates with republicanism.

I apologize for having been so long. To conclude I wanted to ask a little question of Jacques Lezra. There is a final chapter before the conclusion, a very beautiful, very remarkable chapter of which I have made no use until this point. It is called "Three Women, Three Bombs." It deals with the meaning of the work of Gillo Pontecorvo, the Italian movie director who is also intrinsically linked to the whole tragic European history of the 20th century (particularly French colonial history, the war of liberation in Algeria), through the famous film *The Battle of Algiers*. Lezra particularly focuses on the image, the figure,

the stereotype, no doubt extremely relevant in today's discussions and conversations, of the veiled female bomber as a typical figure of terrorism. It seemed to me that his commentary on the film, through detours which I leave aside, and in which Lezra comments upon other works by Pontecorvo, makes a nuanced defense of Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* against the very violent critiques that it had received from the great names of the *Cahiers du cinéma*, who are all themselves critics and at a different moment, or simultaneously, glorious film makers, Rivette and others. Why did they so violently critique Pontecorvo's film? Because they found it too representational, not simply too realistic but too representational, in other words not sublime enough in its presentation of revolutionary terrorism.

My question to Jacques would be simply the following. Today, this figure of the veiled female bomber is created or recreated around us by the media, by political propaganda, by cinema as well – though perhaps not the best movies, and interestingly I hardly find references to that figure in literature, nor in photography, nor in painting, and certainly not in music, though perhaps you could have ticking bombs in music. Does this figure work as a mask, or perhaps as a masquerade, for a tragic heroine, as it can or could still exist in today's world in certain circumstances, or is it on the contrary the derisory instrument of the remythologization of tragic heroism, which today of course can only mean its banalization and denial?