

*Solitary or Solidary: Dialogue and Intersubjectivity in the
Political and Philosophic Thought of Albert Camus*

by

Jim Morrow

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Supervisor: Dr. James Tully

Abstract

Dialogue, as a principle and activity, is the axis that bisects all of Camus' ideas and conceptions. Accordingly, Camus' political and philosophic postulates hinge on an intersubjective understanding of ontology and human relation. As a consequence of this proposition, it can be demonstrated that Camus developed unique hypotheses that require a reassessment of contemporary models of human action and freedom, and the constitution of public spaces and citizenship.

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1 Genre

a. context/hypothesis

Since his untimely death in January 1960, Albert Camus has frequently been apostatised and misconstrued; in most instances, Camus is singularly characterised as being: an ancillary philosopher; a professional critic; a journalist; a noble soul; a moralist; and, amongst countless other classifications, an existentialist. Some commentators have gone so far as to declare that Camus was the “conscience of his generation.”¹ While such annotations may be insightful, Albert Camus personally contested any particular, external categorisation of himself or his compositions. Indeed, in the instances where he did brand himself, Camus only stated that he was a “fellow man”; he imagined himself to be akin to any other person who has come to “bear... [the] common joys and sufferings” that situate all human subjects.²

In effect, Albert Camus’ earnestness dictated the tone of his collected works. In accordance with a personal aversion to abstract and indiscriminate forms of exposition – for he did not want to confound his audience – Camus wrote in a candid style that encourages his readers to cooperate with him and engage in a dialogue that he intended to neither command nor govern, but initiate. In reference to Nietzsche, Camus believed that his dialogic writing style could nourish a public knowledge that “not the judge but the creator will rule, whether he be a worker or an intellectual.”³ Conjointly, Camus sought

¹ Wilfred Sheed, “A Sober Conscience” in *Camus: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Germaine Bree (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1962), 25.

² Albert Camus, “Banquet Speech,” Nobel Banquet, 10 December 1957.

³ Ibid.

to advance a general recognition that any person can hold efficacy: the capacity to “not compromise with lies and servitude.”⁴

Therefore, in accordance with Albert Camus’ explication of what he termed his ‘art’ and of himself, any study of Camus – suchlike that proposed here – should be an overt analysis and discussion of his ideas, not an assay of his persona or association with specific scholastic traditions. To substantiate this claim, it is important to consider an assertion that Camus made in his work, *The Rebel*, in which he states that: “A character is never the author who created him. It is quite likely, however, that an author may be all his characters simultaneously.”⁵ Such a point presupposes that an author’s ideas suffuse and animate their texts; a single quote or exemplification will never provide extensive insight into the précis of an author’s tract, nor their complete works. To understand Camus, one should not dissect him; but acknowledge him as a ‘fellow man’ and explore his ideas by participating in the dialogue that he implores his audience to affirm.

The discourse that Camus advocated is the basis for this specific study of his political philosophy. In fact, it is the central thesis of this manuscript that dialogue, as a principle and activity, is the axis that bisects all of Camus’ ideas and conceptions. Accordingly, Albert Camus’ political and philosophic postulates hinge on an intersubjective understanding of ontology and human relation. It can be determined that Camus developed unique hypotheses that require a reassessment of contemporary models of human action and freedom, as well as the constitution of public spaces and citizenship.

⁴ Camus, “Banquet Speech.”

⁵ Camus, *The Rebel* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 37.

b. proposed contribution/status of previous research

The focus of the study proposed here is exceptional only in the fact that no other text has rooted itself in a hypothesis that is exact to that established here. Unfortunately, the most common means of assessing and evaluating Camus and his texts, specifically literary criticisms and biographies, dedicate themselves to an exclusionary form of examination. Such are compelling, but limited approaches, as the deliberations of literary criticism and biographies too often preoccupy themselves with singular aspects of Camus: his fictional prose and private life.

As is the general case in their judgments, works of literary criticism are discriminative in focus and limited by their segregation of Camus' political meditations and literature. The most notable of those who have applied this style of analysis are: Germaine Bree, John Cruikshank, and Philip Thody. Analytic texts can be provocative and have ductile lines of reasoning, but are nonetheless constricted. Therefore – not because there is no phenomenal example of this approach that should be annotated – it ought to be noted that most works of literary criticism have limited influence in the study proposed here; as these works too often neglect the literate importance of Camus' political and philosophic thoughts.

Comparably, biographies furnish context, but cannot provide an unconditional commentary to supplement the ideas and actions of their subject. One of the most anomalous examples of a biographic narrative that retains Camus as its principal is *Albert Camus: A Life*, by Oliver Todd. This text, which is an attempt by its author to be “neither an expose nor a hagiography,” is nearly incomparable in its insights and the use of its sources; it augments a conventional biography with personal correspondences and

journals that have been previously unavailable.⁶ Most interesting is Todd's implicit discussion of Camus' struggles to be committed to the politics of his time while remaining able to "judge without prejudice."⁷ As Todd explains, Camus "advised others not to confuse creation with propaganda." Such an avowal is supported by Camus' proclamation that: "It seems to me that a writer must know everything about the dramas of his time and must take sides every time he can, but he must also keep a certain distance from history, at least from time to time."⁸ Fittingly, Todd eulogistically states that Camus was "an artist" who, through his repudiation of "politics without morality," greatly "contributed to advances in political philosophy."⁹

With specific focus on Camus' political and philosophic thought, there are a good number of texts that circumvent exclusionary forms of analysis – one the most laudable examples of this style of examination is Jeffrey C. Isaac's text, *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion*. Distinctively, Isaac maintains that Camus is a proponent of "rebellious politics."¹⁰ In elucidating his thesis, Isaac explains that Camus developed a normative political theory that "call[ed] for a more modest conception of human knowledge... [that] in no way involves an abdication of human freedom."¹¹ Isaac resolves that Camus, along with Arendt, sought to establish a novel form of political action that is brought into being by rebellion. However, in spite of his ambitious conclusions, Isaac's analyses are limited by his recurrent comparisons of Camus and

⁶ Oliver Todd, *Albert Camus: A Life* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2000), 420.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 322.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 418.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 418.

¹⁰ Jeffrey C. Isaac, *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992), 227.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

Arendt – as he often attempts to correlate the two theorist’s sometimes-divergent ideas to one another.

Lastly, it is remiss not to include in this discussion David Sprintzen’s work, *Camus: A Critical Examination*. This text is the product of an author who is determined to reintroduce Camus’ political and philosophic ideas to both general and academic audiences. Sprintzen aptly presents Camus as being “a thinker at grips with the drama of Western civilization”; that he addresses “the deepest mythic level of our being.”¹² What is more important though, is the way in which Sprintzen concludes that Camus is a proponent of discursive democracy: that the concept of dialogue has made Camus distinct from most every other political and historical figure of the twentieth century. To Sprintzen, Camus’ inception of discourse propagates “the social formulation of the doctrine of open inquiry” and engenders a “movement toward and [for] continuing support of the community that Camus sees as our only possible salvation.”¹³

1.1 Conceptualisations

Unlike other studies that specifically concentrate on Camus’ personal life or literary affiliations, this work intends to establish that Camus was, politically and philosophically, a theorist of intersubjective communication: dialogue. The difficulty of substantiating a hypothesis that, for-itself, assigns specific attention to dialogue, is the fact that the term is rather anomalous. Several philosophers, namely Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Edmund Husserl and Martin Buber, have developed intricate schemas in reference to dialogue. However, such models are highly verbose and circuitous – often requiring

¹² David Sprintzen, *Camus: A Critical Examination* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1988), xiv.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 268.

entire texts to validate their logic. In the defence of concision and the ability to create an effective, or un-nuanced, enquiry of Camus' discursive ideals, it is vital that this work adopt a succinct definition of dialogue. Consequently, Karl Jaspers, in his essay "Truth as Communicability", provides the most satisfying annotation of dialogue, as he states that:

... we [being humanity] are what we are only through the community of mutually conscious understandings. There can no man who is a man for himself alone, as a mere individual... [Therefore, communication] is the emergence of the Idea of a whole out of the communal substance. The individual is conscious of standing in a place which has its proper meaning only in that whole. His communication is that of a member with its organism. He is different, as all others are, but agrees with them in the order which comprehends all. They communicate with one another out of the presence of the Idea... In general then, it applies to my being, my authenticity, and my grasp of the truth that, not only factually am I not for myself alone, but I can not even become myself alone without emerging out of my being with others.¹⁴

More simply put, ontology can be conceived only through interaction, disclosure, and the mutual understanding of human agents. When compared to the definition advanced by Jaspers, the political and philosophic ideas of Albert Camus are dialogic.

In addition, it is important to expound the term and precept of *l'esprit serieux*, which will serve as the leading salvo for this study. As best stated by Hannah Arendt, *l'esprit serieux* is "the original sin" according to the philosophical propositions of Albert Camus. It is "the very negation of freedom," because "it leads man to agree to and accept the necessary deformation which every human being must undergo when he is fitted into society."¹⁵ For Camus, and as it is generally understood, *l'esprit serieux* is a standard of living that is devoted to banal respectability, pretence, and habit. One who subsumes themselves to 'the serious' is a person who has abdicated their capacity to actively

¹⁴ Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz* (London, U.K.: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), 77-82.

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, "French Existentialism," *The Nation*, 23 February, 1956, 226-228.

participate in the projects that are constructed within public spaces; and, thusly, in Jasperian terms, confirm their 'being'.¹⁶ The serious person is a type of atomized, or monadic, individual who is alienated from – and incapable of interacting with – the world that swathes them. In resignation to their perceived inefficacy, the serious person identifies themselves with instrumentalities and arbitrary titles: by sublimating their existential being to objects and values. Instead of engaging their fellow-subjects, those who bond themselves to a serious life fetishise their function within a collectivity; they no longer think of themselves as being a person, but as: a father, a boss, a member of a religious sect or a specific political party. The serious person reveres themselves as being a servant of the objects and values with which they associate. Irrevocably, those who defer to *l'espirit serieux* refuse to acknowledge or dignify fellow human subjects and abandon the possibility of any mode of communicable truth or common public life.

1.2 Organisation

To evidence a hypothesis that Albert Camus' political and philosophic thoughts are ingrained with intersubjective and communicative ideals, this project will give rise to five different chapters. Each chapter will clarify the different means by which Camus provides the substratal logic for, and textually advances, his dialogic constructs. Successively, the second chapter in this thesis will examine *l'espirit serieux* and the processes by which such an attitude and lifestyle deforms a solitary agent and, in consequence, a human community. Drawing mostly from Camus' novel *The Stranger* and from his philosophic tract *The Myth of Sisyphus*, it will clarify why Camus believed

¹⁶ There is also little variation between Camus' and Simone de Beauvoir's conception of *l'espirit serieux*. For further explanation of the concept, see Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

that *l'esprit serieux* is a monologic standard of life that oppresses and problematises concerted human action and critical thought. As well, this chapter will include a practical consideration of how Camus believed that *l'esprit serieux* has come to be existent in contemporary history. To support these inquiries, ideas will also be drawn from Hannah Arendt's few written critiques of Camus.

The third chapter will expressly focus on rebellion and dialogue, and Camus' theoretical development and inclusion of such concepts into his non-fictional texts. Primarily, it will contrast Camus' perception of monologue – “the silent hostility that separates... the small part of existence that can be realized on this earth through the mutual understanding of men” – and his intersubjective “communities of dialogue.”¹⁷ This chapter will also discuss Camus' concept of rebellion, which he holds to be a discursive act, and ‘the Meridian’ – a space wherein Jasperian ‘reality-through-communication’ can occur.¹⁸

The fourth chapter will elaborate on Camus' exposition of dialogue, but also describe where Camus specifically introduces his discursive ideas into his compositions. Primarily, this analysis will focus on two manuscripts, *The Plague* and *Exile and the Kingdom*. In addition, this chapter will disclose the means by which Camus cultivates a practical formulation for the intersubjective constitution of human communities and distended public spaces.

The fifth chapter will discuss how the ideas forwarded by Camus can benefit contemporary political philosophy. In respect to dialogue and solidarity, this chapter will concentrate on Camus' conception of freedom and action: as he considers freedom to be a

¹⁷ Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, translated by Anthony Bower (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 283.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

human value and faculty that is perpetuated through action within common, public spaces. From this, it can be explicated that Camus' political and philosophic thoughts necessitate a fundamental reconsideration of citizenship, especially in cosmopolitan terms.

The sixth chapter, and last in this thesis, will peruse Camus' lasting effect in contemporary politics. Such will mark out Camus' involvement in the formation of the Groupes de Liaison Internationale, which is a precursor to Amnesty International; his hopes for peace in his native Algeria; and, lastly, his influence of those who seek the abolition of the death penalty and political radicals.

2 The Serious

Haven't you noticed that our society is organized for... liquidation? You have heard, of course, of those tiny fish in the rivers of Brazil that attack the unwary swimmer by thousands and with swift little nibbles clean him up in a few minutes, leaving only an immaculate skeleton? 'Do you want a good clean life? Like everybody else?' You say yes, of course. How can you say no? 'O.K. You'll be cleaned up. Here's a job, a family, and organized leisure activities.' And the little teeth attack the flesh, right down to the bone. But I am unjust. I shouldn't say their organization. It is ours, after all: it's a question of which will clean up the other.

- *The Fall*, 7-8

Albert Camus often agonised over how future historians would describe the twentieth century; inconsolably, he believed that they would only be able to conclude that: "A single sentence will suffice for modern man: he fornicated and read the papers."¹⁹ Such a statement may be farcical, but Camus would almost certainly never have disputed William Faulkner's claim that the best fiction is often far more true than any kind of journalism.²⁰ Nevertheless, what Camus made evident in his assertion about 'modernity' was his own loathing for the prevalent forms of culture and urbanity that enveloped him.

The origin of Camus' discontentment was *l'esprit serieux*, literally translated the spirit of seriousness: a philosophic concept also embedded within the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, Soren Kierkegaard, Franz Kafka and contemporaries of Camus, like

¹⁹ Albert Camus, *The Fall and Exile and the Kingdom*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: The Modern Library, 1959), 6-7. Any gender-related, or misogynist, expressions, here, and in any part of this text, are colloquialisms, and are always cited in quotation. As well, it is important to note, that such are a matter of context and their use in this work is not of malicious intent.

²⁰ Such an assertion can be corroborated by the fact that Camus translated several of William Faulkner's novels into French; and that he had adapted *Requiem for a Nun* for the French stage. In addition, it was Camus who labelled his texts *The Fall* and *Exile and the Kingdom* "fictions," such is interesting as every story he told in the two works within the text were consciously and transparently biographic in character.

Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Albert Camus never imparted a personal definition of *l'esprit serieux*, as he proximately referred to it as being a “game” that is played by “society.”²¹ Veritably, there are some ancillary definitions of the concept, as Hannah Arendt, in an article that was meant to make clear the ideas of Existentialism to a popular audience, probably provides the most astute denotation, as:

L'esprit serieux, which may be the original sin according to the new philosophy, may be equated with respectability. The ‘serious’ man is one who thinks of himself *as* president of his business, *as* a member of his Legion of Honor, *as* a member of the faculty, but also *as* father, *as* husband, or as any other half-natural, half-social function. For by doing so he agrees to the identification of himself with an arbitrary function which society has bestowed. *L'esprit serieux* is the very negation of freedom, because it leads man to agree to and accept the necessary deformation which every human being must undergo when he is fitted into society.²²

Moreover, it is Camus’ belief that *l'esprit serieux* is singular, imperious, and annihilative. Camus asserts that, under the dominion of *l'esprit serieux*, human subjects have become collectively atomised, and have created a world that is not communal, and therefore not communicable.

Within the corpus of his works, Camus ceaselessly pursues *l'esprit serieux*; it is always situated somewhere within the framework and explication of his texts. For Camus, *l'esprit serieux* is an aberrant human response to the Absurd; it pretences the organisation and institutions of modern life. *L'esprit serieux* is the decimation of human existence – the means through which human subjects have found themselves to be prostrate, unable to bear themselves: to lay their thoughts and being before the world.

²¹ Albert Camus, “Preface to ‘The Stranger’,” *The Nation*, 16 November 1957, 355-356. A better definition of *l'esprit serieux* is provided by Beauvoir

²² Hannah Arendt, “French Existentialism,” 226-228.

2.1 The Absurd

In almost all analyses and discussions of Camus and his writings, it is customary to concentrate on the metaphysics of the Absurd. While the conclusions of such parlances are faithful to the logic developed by Camus, and are usually quite perceptive, such an approach repeatedly neglects the context and situation from which an agent's consciousness of the Absurd emerges. Whenever Camus discusses the Absurd, it is always within a modern condition: which indicates that the Absurd, at least for Camus, has an existential countenance. For instance, Camus writes in the *Myth of Sisyphus* that:

It happens that the stage sets collapse. Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm – this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the “why” arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. “Begins” – this is important. Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. It awakens consciousness and provokes what follows. What follows is the gradual return into the chain or it is the definitive awakening.²³

Furthermore, beyond the citation just presented, it is important to note that Camus reasons that awareness of the Absurd always occurs in approximation to effects that are commonplace in modern life: “a streetcorner”; “a restaurant's revolving door”; “behind the glass partition” of a telephone booth; or even “a mirror.”²⁴ Camus was fond of Nietzsche's certainty that great problems are in the street; noticeably, the Absurd was not an exception.²⁵

Most simply put, for Camus, the Absurd is given form and definition by the fact that there is a basic homelessness of humanity within the space, the world, that all human subjects are confined to – everything is given and nothing ever explained. The

²³ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 12-13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-15.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

Absurd arises from a stark demand for lucidity and clarity in a measureless and silent universe. Camus observes that in “a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.”²⁶ Whilst there is an unquestionably metaphysical element to the Absurd – as there is no discernable directive in a universe where ‘God is dead’ – there is also a phenomenological property to the Absurd. Such a point is verifiable because of the emphasis that Camus places on situation, since he insists that: “The absurd depends as much on man as on the world.”²⁷ It is in the confrontation between the world, as a seemingly permanent space, and humanity, as a corporeal being, that it becomes evident that the two do not appear to be existentially conceived for one another. “In this particular case and on the plane of intelligence,” Camus “can therefore say that the Absurd is not in man nor in the world, but in their presence together.”²⁸ The Absurd evokes a “waterless desert where thought reaches its confines.”²⁹

Most interpretations of Camus’ Absurdist notions languish due to an essential presumption that the world, terrestrial earth, is a fixed and imperishable biome, and not a construct: an immanent space that is continuously delimited and redefined in accordance to external consequences, whether environmental or astrophysical. The Absurd is in itself the ephemeral character of a subject’s worldly experience. For Camus, there is no obtainable verity or unity; only epistemic fragments and ambiguities that exist in plural

²⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

forms: “In reality, the purely historical absolute is not even conceivable... [there is an] impossibility of man’s grasping totality. History, as an entirety, could exist only in the eyes of an observer outside it and outside the world.”³⁰ Camus emphasises humanity’s being-in-the-world; despite consciousness of their earthly presence, humans inhabit a sensible space where experiences are discordant and what is perceived as being familiar can be superfluous and specious. If the world were diuturnal, history would always be recognisable and without discontinuity or antinomy – humanity would be planate: a prescient and self-possessed being residing within St. Augustine’s *civitas Dei*.³¹ Even so, this is exactly why Camus was not an essentialist, as he confides to his readers: “We must despair of ever reconstructing the familiar calm surface which would give us a peace of heart. After so many centuries of inquiries, so many abdications among thinkers, we are well aware that this is true for all our knowledge. If the only significant history of man were to be written, it would have to be the history of its successive regrets and its impotences.”³² It is not a case of humanity having been given the world and having failed to realise the subtleties of being; to Camus, it is a saga of humanity’s inability to adapt to the transitory and indefinite circumstances within which subjects have perpetually found themselves.

The correspondence between the Absurd and *l’esprit serieux* begins with the confrontation between a subject and the world. Following Kierkegaard and Heidegger, Camus believes that the most familiar, and near universal, human response to the Absurd is anxiety. In anguish, a subject often nihilistically recoils from their encounter with the

³⁰ Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 289.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 223.

³² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 18.

Absurd and seeks solace in *l'espirit serieux* – and it's custom of equating persons with instrumentalities and functions: “irrelevancies” that only clothe what is “foreign and irreducible to oneself.”³³ Worse, Camus frets over the fact that humanity, in order to conceal the Absurd, has incessantly attempted to condition the world and its landscapes. Camus equates modern life and *l'espirit serieux* to a style of living: a mode of appearance that includes speech; disposition; and even our work, the way we sustain our standards of living. All the same, Camus notes that “style, like sheer silk, too often hides eczema.”³⁴ Nothing can effusively repress the Absurd; it smoulders in a space that exists between the human consciousness and terrestrial objects, whether congenital or manufactured.

2.2 Histoire

Camus concentrates on modern life in his discussions of *l'espirit serieux* and the Absurd because he is driven by a belief that modernity constitutes an “insane” epoch in which the “world [is] threatened by disintegration.”³⁵ Camus states that modernity is defined by “a corrupt history, in which are mingled fallen revolutions, technology gone mad, dead gods, and worn-out ideologies, where mediocre powers can destroy all yet no longer know how to convince, where intelligence has debased itself to become the servant of hatred and oppression.”³⁶ All that which Camus describes of modernity – especially the segment of the twentieth century that he directly experienced – incriminates *l'espirit serieux*; he deems it to be an essential factor in the events and

³³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 14.

³⁴ Camus, *The Fall*, 5-6.

³⁵ Camus, “Banquet Speech.”

³⁶ Ibid.

actions that led to the “nihilism of the era.”³⁷ Unlike the Romantics that precede him, Camus does not envisage a resurrection of previous forms of human order – he maintains what Hannah Arendt referred to as being a “definite modernity of attitude which does not try to hide the depth of the break in Western tradition. Camus especially has the courage not to even look for connections, for predecessors and the like.” For Arendt, Camus “apparently suffer[s] no longer for the good old days”; though he may know that “in an abstract sense those days were actually better than ours” he does not believe in “the magic of the old.” Camus makes “no compromises whatever.”³⁸

In *The Rebel*, Albert Camus outlines the historical construction of *l'espirit serieux*. As elucidated in his text, Camus primarily believes that the origins of *l'espirit serieux* rest in the events of the French Revolution and post-Napoleonic Europe, when “bourgeois jurists” – who had been ennobled by the Reformation and Europe’s exploration and early colonial conquest of the globe – began to construct a form of society that was fixed and dependent on public expropriation.³⁹ In their shared deposition of the ‘great chain of being’, the jurists that Camus writes of, specifically the Jacobins and later Hegel and his adherents, never encouraged the procreation of a type of worldly order in which a human subject can bear an existence without transcendence. More accurately, they assisted in the organisation of a closed social order in which a subject is thrown back upon themselves. The human subject is forced to anxiously subsist in a “heavy sleep” where “one consents, no longer actively, but passively, to accept the order of the world, even if the order is degrading.”⁴⁰ In Camus’ account of modernity,

³⁷ Camus, “Banquet Speech.”

³⁸ Arendt, “French Existentialism,” 228.

³⁹ Camus, *The Rebel*, 131.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

existence, the circumstance of being-in-the-world, has been reduced to a solipsistic and sterile dissertation between a person and their own mind. An ontology of ennui, a life dedicated to *l'espirit serieux*, is seemingly uncomplicated; in modern life human subjects have become further alienated from the world than when faced only with the Absurd. To avoid confrontation with the Absurd and ease their anxieties a subject deforms himself. *L'espirit serieux* is not care of the world, it is atomisation, the removal of an agent from the world.

Modernity is an edifice, a construct that suppresses what Kierkegaard termed *Angst*. While Camus finds there to be “a mystery attached to the banality achieved by brilliant young girls whom marriage transforms into adding or knitting machines,” he posits that *l'espirit serieux* is a part of a greater human project that is intended to circumvent any particularized consciousness of the Absurd – to erect a “concrete society” where “reason... [could be] incorporated into the stream of historical events.”⁴¹ Thereafter, in order for a public to come into contact with their supposedly lost modes of transcendence, or even worldly experience, subjects have had to sublimate themselves to the service of progress – the human conquest of the world. In consequence, value and objective significance can only come through self-deformation and the promulgation of *l'espirit serieux*: “The rule of action... thus become[s] action itself – which must be performed in darkness while awaiting the final illumination.”⁴² This form of action, because of human expropriation, is a type of productivity that leads a subject to become dependent on the institutions that they hope will offer them objective meaning. Respectively, given that modern modes of productive ‘action’ do not end with the

⁴¹ Camus, *The Rebel*, 89.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 133-134.

fabrication of a single item, but in the advancement of the processes of a human “Empire” over terrestrial and material effects: the human subject becomes a means, an instrument that further provides signification to an object.⁴³ Camus attests that, “By the logic of history and of doctrine, the Universal City... has been little by little replaced by the Empire, imposed by means of power.”⁴⁴ As a result, in identifying oneself with their function in the organisation of *l’esprit serieux*, by living in pretence, a subject becomes a complicitous use object, “a cog in the apparatus” that intends to destroy the “universal possibilities” of human agency: “reflection, solidarity,” and even “absolute love.”⁴⁵

2.3 Monologue

Albert Camus associates *l’esprit serieux* with monologue, an imperious form of speech and action that seeks only to impound subjectivity:

To ensure man’s empire over the world, it is necessary to suppress in the world and in man everything that escapes the Empire, everything that does not come under the reign of quantity: and this is an endless undertaking. The Empire must embrace time, space, and people, which compose the three dimensions of history. It is simultaneously, war, obscurantism, and tyranny, desperately affirming that one day it will be liberty, fraternity, and truth; the logic of its postulates obliges it to do so.⁴⁶

Monologue, like *l’esprit serieux*, is singular and suppressive: void of ethics and virtue, acceptant of all means that propagate Empire. Under monologue, reticence and passivity are the foundations of modern life. In the service of Empire a subject refuses direct interaction with the world around them; because of their attachment to abstractions and banalities, the subject effectively abrogates their existence. As Camus bears out: “We

⁴³ Camus, *The Rebel*, 235.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 234.

have seen men lie, dishonour, deport, torture; they could not be persuaded to stop because they were so sure of themselves, because it is not possible to persuade an abstraction – that is, the representative of an ideology.”⁴⁷

According to Camus, the subjugation of a public to monologue and Empire is effacement of human agency. In an age that is defined by *l'espirit serieux*: “We live in terror because dialogue is no longer possible, because man has surrendered entirely to history, because he can no longer find that part of himself, every bit as real as history, that sees beauty in the world and in human faces.”⁴⁸ In an essay published in the French Resistance newspaper *Combat*, for which he was the editor-in-chief, Camus writes that humanity lives in “a world of abstractions, bureaucracies and machines, absolute ideas, and crude messianism,” all of which lead to the extirpation of subjectivity by functionaries: “people who think that they are right in their machines as well as their ideas.”⁴⁹ Consequently, monologue is correlative to a coerced silence: “For those who can live only with dialogue, only with the friendship of men, this silence means the end of the world.”⁵⁰ Under the dominion of monologue, human subjects are detached from the world, deprived of a facility or space where they can congregate and deliberate over their situation – and the construction of the world around them.

Monologue is the privation of communal, public spaces. Human subjects are bereaved of any capacity to communicate with one another, and an open domain within which they can overtly confront the anesthetized world of *l'espirit serieux*. Likewise, “Dialogue and personal relations have been replaced by propaganda and polemic, which

⁴⁷ Albert Camus, “19 November 1946. The Century of Fear,” in *Between Hell and Reason: Essays from the Resistance Newspaper *Combat*, 1944-1947*, trans. Alexandre de Gramont (Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1991), 118.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴⁹ Camus, “The Century of Fear,” 118.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

are two kinds of monologue...The gospel [that is] preached... in the form of a monologue [is] dictated from the top of a lonely mountain. On stage, as in reality, the monologue precedes death.”⁵¹ As humans have become instrumentalities, they have also become the servile force through which the language of monologue, *l'espirit serieux* and Empire, proliferate. An instrumentality, or what Camus terms “a logician,” is a vassal, the property of whatever they have appended themselves.⁵² As they industriously act in the interest of Empire, the ‘logician’ creates an aesthetic rooted in invariability and staid refutation – to which aggregated public spaces are enclosed and assimilated in the construction of a sated and prohibitive “rampart.”⁵³ Monologue transforms the human mind into an armed camp; it is unbearable for any relationship or communication between subjects to be based on anything but “power and efficiency,” which are cognate to “servitude, falsehood, and terror.”⁵⁴ For Camus: “There is, in fact, nothing in common between a master and a slave; it is impossible to speak and communicate with a person who has been reduced to servitude.”⁵⁵ As follows, human agents lose their capacity to relate to one another, they become analogous, “planetary bacilli” that are unable to receive or process anything dissimilar to what exists within Empire.⁵⁶ Hence, within such a singular and closed institution, each human subject’s “consciousness will be nothing more than a mirror reflecting another mirror, itself reflected to infinity in infinitely reflecting images.”⁵⁷

⁵¹ Camus, *The Rebel*, 239-240 and 284

⁵² *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 121 and 142.

2.4 *The Stranger*

Camus' *The Stranger* opens with the unease of Meursault, the novel's "poor, naked" lead, over whether his employer will give him leave – so that he may attend his mother's funeral.⁵⁸ The story of Meursault is that of a man who is outwardly an exemplar of a human subject that is confined to a world interpolated by *l'esprit serieux*; he is not alien to modern society. Meursault, much like any other person bound by *l'esprit serieux*, superficially maintains a most ordinary life: he holds an office job, he tends to his affinity for mundane Fernandel films, and passes his leisure time in a pub or at the beach.⁵⁹ To all appearances, there is nothing exceptional about Meursault. Even in the wake of his mother's death, and having expressed some desire to cavort in the Algerian landscape, Meursault admits that he must remit himself to the decorum of modern life: "somehow I'd got through another Sunday, that mother now was buried, and tomorrow I'd be going back to work as usual. Really, nothing in my life had changed."⁶⁰

The Stranger is Camus' finest illustration and assessment of *l'esprit serieux*; it is a chronicle of the general ambivalence of modern life; a narrative of an unsentimental man who appears to be the effluence of "the game."⁶¹ As Meursault states several times in the early chapters of the novel, "one life was as good as another, and my present one suited me quite well"; he "didn't care one way or another."⁶² Such a perspective is seemingly innate for Meursault: it is how he impassively responds to an offer for advancement in his career, or his girlfriend's appeals for marriage. Meursault persistently reacts to events and incidents with passive indifference, without prudence or

⁵⁸ Camus, "Preface to 'The Stranger'," 355. Note the similarity between the novel's introduction of Meursault and that of Joseph K. in Franz Kafka's *The Trial*; such was intentional on the part of Camus.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 30.

⁶¹ Camus, "Preface to 'The Stranger'," 355.

⁶² Camus, *The Stranger*, 52.

forethought. Every aspect of Meursault's existence is banal and mundane, admittedly interchangeable with anyone else's. As it appears, Meursault lives in the midst of *l'esprit serieux*; he – like every other subject around him – has been deformed to fit into the construct of modern society.

However, there is something unique in Meursault's attitude; it is the fact that he seems to have no concern for playing the game that dominates the organisation of society, in actively maintaining the function of *l'esprit serieux*. Meursault concurrently lives amongst the modern world and inside his own private, somatic existence. Meursault does not necessarily wander through life; as much as he is incapable of faithfully enacting the function in society that *l'esprit serieux* imparted him. In basic terms, Meursault is not fervent in his actions. Camus writes in the introduction to *The Stranger* that "Meursault refuses to play the game. The answer is simple: he refuses to lie. Now, lying is not only saying what is not. It is also saying more than *is*, and in matters of the human heart more than we feel. We all do this every day, in order to simplify life. Meursault, contrary to appearances, does not want to simplify life. He tells the truth, he refuses to exaggerate his feelings."⁶³ Meursault is the literary expression of Camus' philosophic assertion that a person feels to be alien to a universe devoid of evident absolutes, what he terms "effulgence."⁶⁴ As he discloses himself throughout the progression of the novel, it becomes clear that Meursault is not an effective component of modern life, but rather the demur through which *l'esprit serieux* is distinguished; for this, Meursault is executed.

⁶³ Camus, "Preface to 'The Stranger'," 355.

⁶⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 11.

As he is presented in the text, Meursault is atypical in comparison to every character that he encounters. Literally, Meursault is a stranger; he does not earnestly abet *l'espirit serieux*, he is seemingly incomprehensible to everyone he encounters. Meursault is perilous, disruptive to modern life because he does not seriously maintain his function in society. In Part Two of the novel, in which Meursault is put on trial for having killed an Arab, the prosecution's evidence presented against him has absolutely nothing to do with the physical act of murder; it is all circumstantial, based on character. Meursault is not tried for his crime; more accurately, he is fated by the "implacable machinery of justice" based on what is deemed to be, his "great callousness," his active affront to custom – that "on the next day after his mother's funeral that man [Meursault] was visiting the swimming pool, starting a liaison with a girl, and going to see a comic film."⁶⁵ The correlation between Meursault's trial and his ominous relationship with *l'espirit serieux* is especially evident in an exchange between Meursault and an examining magistrate:

After a short silence he suddenly leaned forward, looked me in the eyes, and said, raising his voice a little:

"What really interests me is – you!"...

Suddenly he rose, walked to a file cabinet standing against the opposite wall, pulled a drawer open, and took from it a silver crucifix, which he was waving as he came back to the desk.

"Do you know what this is?" His voice had changed completely; it was vibrant with emotion.

"Of course I do," I answered.

That seemed to start him off; he began speaking at a great pace. He told me that he believed in God, and that even the worst of sinners could obtain forgiveness of Him. But first he must repent, and become like a little child, with a simple trustful heart, open to conviction. He was leaning across the table, brandishing his crucifix before my eyes.

... he had drawn himself up to his full height and was asking me very earnestly if I believed in God. When I said, "No," he plumped down into his chair indignantly.

⁶⁵ Camus, *The Stranger*, 79, 118, and 136.

This was unthinkable, he said; all men believe in God, even those who reject Him. Of this he was absolutely sure; if ever he came to doubt it, his life would lose all meaning. "Do you wish," he asked indignantly, "my life to have no meaning?" Really I couldn't see how my wishes came into it, and I told him as much.

... I noticed that his manner seemed genuinely solicitous...⁶⁶

While this segment of the novel's narrative is symbolically open to many interpretations, what Camus is directly referring to is the force and monologic character of modern institutions. The magistrate had no concern for the crime committed by Meursault; he was only interested in the fact that Meursault is an apparent stranger to *l'esprit serieux*. Because he had not deformed himself, that Meursault had not come to identify himself by an arbitrary function, he depreciated the meaning and purpose of the magistrate's life and subsequently that of the whole of society.

Most disturbing, however, is Meursault's comprehension of the fact that his trial was an effort to extinguish all human subjectivity. One of the most peculiar introspections of Meursault lays in the fact that all parties involved in the case were signified by formal titles and appellations: "I did not follow his [the Prosecutor's] remarks at first," states Meursault, "as he kept on mentioning 'the prisoner's mistress,' whereas for me she was just 'Marie'."⁶⁷ Moreover, the monologic process of extorting subjectivity was further consummated in the indictment and requisition of Meursault's capacity, as a subject, to take action or speak in public. Of considerable significance is the fact that Meursault's attorney refused to allow his client to testify on his own behalf: "It seemed to me that the idea behind it was still further to exclude me from the case, to put me off the map, so to speak, by substituting the lawyer for myself."⁶⁸ Additionally, Meursault realises that his "debt owed to society" is paid for by the public's passive

⁶⁶ Camus, *The Stranger*, 82 and 84-86.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

involvement, as silent members of the audience, to be a part of “a conspiracy to exclude me from the proceedings; I wasn’t to have any say and my fate was to be decided out of hand... The futility of what was happening here seemed to take me by the throat, I felt like vomiting, and I had only one idea: to get it over, to go back to my cell, and sleep... and sleep.”⁶⁹ All of which led to the prescription of Meursault’s new function in relation to *l’esprit serieux*: the condemned man, whom he prefers to think of as being “the patient.”⁷⁰

Appropriately, the trial of Meursault was the means through which the institutions of modernity are reified and resect what is perceived to be a malignancy. Camus, therefore, does not conclude *The Stranger* with a description of Meursault’s fate. Rather, the novel ends ambivalently, with the acknowledgement that the internecine procedure would be successful; but also with Meursault remaining easily defiant: “all that remained to hope was that on the day of my execution there should be a huge crowd of spectators and that they should greet me with howls of execration.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Camus, *The Stranger*, 124, 132, and 137.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

3 The Meridian

You see, I've heard of a man whose friend had been imprisoned and who slept on the floor of his room every night in order not to enjoy a comfort of which his friend had been deprived. Who, *cher monsieur*, will sleep on the floor for us?

- *The Fall*, 32

As depicted by Albert Camus, *l'espirit serieux* does appear to be an affect of Max Weber's 'iron cage': a technically regimented, rigid, and base form of social organisation. However, in some measure this is misleading, as, for Camus, *l'espirit serieux* is something more like a rusty cage. As has been previously inferred, *l'espirit serieux* and, accordingly, Empire and monologue, are fabrications – artificial constructs and habituations that seek to obscure the Absurd: the exigent and transitory character of human existence. In consequence, *l'espirit serieux* is not essential, something that is elemental and fated. As Camus demonstrates numerous times throughout his works, there are various means by which human subjects can break from the confines of an acute condition, that of anxiety and *l'espirit serieux*, and lay their "heart[s] open to the benign indifference of the universe."⁷²

The form of the rusty cage is evidenced by the prominence of situation in the development of a subject's consciousness of the Absurd. It is within a situation where a subject encounters an incongruence: a piercing and peculiar unfamiliarity with the "chain of daily gestures."⁷³ Whether it is before a mirror, in the eyes of a lover, or amongst the

⁷² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 154

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 12.

fittings of modern life: the Absurd, for Camus, arises from a sudden awareness that there is a “denseness and strangeness of the world.”⁷⁴ In all spaces, “At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman, and these hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of these trees at this very minute lose the illusory meaning with which we had clothed them”; existence is inconsequential, without specific purpose.⁷⁵ Hence, with the recognition of the Absurd – a seemingly unbridgeable fissure between humanity and the world – a subject becomes conscious that their situation is an “artifice,” a set of “images and designs,” created to mechanically proxy the implicit contingency and apparent nothingness of human experience.⁷⁶ As Camus points out, consciousness of the Absurd is an installation, a point from which a subject can chose to return to the ‘chain’ – to clothe the eczema that they have discovered with sheer silk – or awake from their restive sleep. Like so, modernity is a rusty cage, it is something that can be disjoined and circumvented; it does confine much of humanity, but it is not authentic to a human ontology.

In respect to the rusty cage, it is the choice between retrogression and a life lived in congruence with the Absurd that concerns Camus; he is most interested in the consequences that coincide with a subject’s perception of the Absurd. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus asserts that: “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide.”⁷⁷ For Camus, suicide, whether philosophic or physical, is a visceral reaction to the Absurd; it is a brusque assent to “the absence of any profound reason for living... and the uselessness of suffering.” In subscribing to *l’esprit serieux*, a subject expropriates themselves from the world.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 14.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 6.

To move beyond suicide and the rusty cage, Camus believes that a human agent should choose to keep the Absurd alive by engaging it: “Living an experience, a particular fate, is accepting it fully... Keeping it alive is, above all contemplating it.”⁷⁹ To live amidst the Absurd is to rebel – to admit the Absurd and test the confines of the worldly spaces that the rusty cage seeks to repress and mask by habit. As Camus makes clear in *The Rebel*: “The final conclusion of absurdist reasoning is, in fact, the repudiation of suicide and the acceptance of the desperate encounter between human inquiry and the silence of the universe.”⁸⁰ For Camus, suicide is equivalent to disengagement from the Absurd, an act wherein an atomised subject resigns themselves to the afflictions of *l’esprit serieux*, Empire, and monologue. Taken to the scale of the expropriated collectivity that resides within the rusty cage, Camus deems that suicide is requalified as murder, the monologic and abject denial of humanity’s ability to encounter and enquire the Absurd. Camus asserts that it “is obvious that absurdism hereby admits that human life is the only necessary good since it is precisely life that makes this encounter possible and since, without life, the absurdist wager would have no basis. To say that life is absurd, the conscience must be alive.”⁸¹ Accordingly, rebellion is the acceptance of an incomprehensible and exigent condition, a realisation that existence “has no meaning” and is “*without appeal*.”⁸² Rebellion, then, lays claim to an agent’s place in the world: an existence within the silent universe that rests on the margins of the rusty cage. As Camus states: “The actor taught us this: there is no frontier between being and appearing.”⁸³

⁷⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 53-54.

⁸⁰ Camus, *The Rebel*, 4.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 53.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 117.

3.1 Rebellion

For Albert Camus, the human condition is determined by the choices that agents make in their confrontation with the Absurd:

We know today that there are no more islands and that borders are meaningless. We know that in a world which moves faster and faster, where the Atlantic can be crossed in less than a day and where Moscow can speak to Washington within a matter of hours, we are forced into either fraternity or complicity. The 1940s have taught us that an injury in Prague strikes down simultaneously a worker in Paris, that the blood shed on the banks of a central European river brings a Texas farmer to spill his own blood in the Ardennes, which he sees for the first time. There is no suffering, no torture anywhere in the world which does not affect our everyday lives... Today tragedy is collective.⁸⁴

Subsequently, Camus' rebel, in the austere act of confronting the Absurd, asserts the capacity of an agent to engage and relocate themselves in the worldly spaces that are forsaken by those who have seriously assumed a function in society. Rebellion is a choice to immerse oneself in the Absurd, to bear it witness, and concomitantly accede to it – thereupon allowing fellow subjects to become conscious of it. An act of rebellion is an affirmation of a particular existence, a demand for recognition, but also a cooperative act that lays claim to a condition that is just and equitable for all of humanity. “The malady experienced by a single man,” the Absurd, is “a mass plague... [a] feeling of strangeness [that] is shared with all men... In our daily trials rebellion plays the same role as does the ‘cogito’ in the realm of thought: it is the first piece of evidence. But this evidence lures the individual from his solitude. It founds its first value on the whole human race. I rebel – therefore we exist.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Albert Camus, “26 November 1946. International Democracy and Dictatorship,” in *Between Hell and Reason*, 128-129.

⁸⁵ Camus, *The Rebel*, 22.

In a rhetorical query, Camus asks, “What is a Rebel? A Man who says no, but whose refusal does not employ a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes, from the moment he makes his first gesture of rebellion.”⁸⁶ The rebel’s defiant ‘no’ is an affirmation that they have come to be conscious of “a borderline,” a recognition “that the other person ‘is exaggerating,’ that he is exerting his authority beyond a limit where he begins to infringe upon the rights of others.”⁸⁷ Thereafter, in their confirmatory ‘yes’, the rebel asserts that situational limits do exist within a human condition – and begins a movement to preserve the part of existence, or value, that they had found on their side of the borderline. “The act of rebellion,” Camus proclaims, “carries him [the rebel] far beyond the point he had reached by simply refusing. He exceeds the bounds that he fixed for his antagonist, and now demands to be treated as an equal... We see that the affirmation implicit in every act of rebellion is extended to something that... withdraws him from his supposed solitude and provides him with a reason to act.”⁸⁸ Camus’ rebel, from this rudimentary charge, refuses to allow the borderline that they discovered to be abridged. Rebellion, “in man, is the refusal to be treated as an object and to be reduced to simple historical terms.”⁸⁹

In the vindication of the existential limit that they have come to recognise, the rebel discerns that all human subjects communally share the part of existence that they have found to be defensible. The rebels’ limit is not an introverted, passive space where an agent retreats into their own intelligence and perceive themselves as being free, like the cogito. Rather, consciousness of a limit is the recognition of the spaces that are

⁸⁶ Camus, *The Rebel*, 13.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 14-16.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 250.

suppressed by the banalities of the rusty cage – which again recalls Camus’ emphasis on the relationship between situation and the Absurd. This space, the vacated world of the Absurd, is not derivative or sovereign, but political and coincident: “In order to exist, man must rebel, but rebellion must respect the limit it discovers in itself – a limit where minds meet and, in meeting, begin to exist.”⁹⁰ In an interview entitled “The Wager of Our Generation,” Camus states that: “If our societies must plunge into nihilism, whether totalitarian or bourgeois, then those individuals who refuse to give in will stand apart, and they must accept this. But in their place and within their means, they must do what is necessary so that all can live together.”⁹¹ Therefore, rebellion entails the acknowledgment of other agents and common, public spaces; “the individual is not, in himself alone, the embodiment of the values he wishes to defend. It needs all humanity, at least, to comprise them. When he rebels, a man identifies himself with other men and so surpasses himself... we are... talking of the kind of solidarity that is born in chains.”⁹²

Contrary to appearances, the “solidarity of chains,” as Camus perceives it, is not malignant.⁹³ Solidarity exists in a shared setting, what Camus terms “the Meridian,” a space where a solitary consciousness, being, of an agent exists in a Husserlian ‘life-world’ of fellow subjects.⁹⁴ At the Meridian, an agent is situated in a world that is constrained, or ‘chained’, by a “*community of men*” – the plural consciousness of those around them and with whom they interact with: “I feel a solidarity with the common man.

⁹⁰ Camus, *The Rebel*, 22.

⁹¹ Camus, “The Wager of Our Generation,” in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, 247.

⁹² Camus, *The Rebel*, 17.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 279-306. In this final section of *The Rebel*, entitled “Thought at the Meridian,” Camus provides a model of how “such an attitude [of rebellion] can find political expression in the contemporary world.” In this, Camus never writes specifically of the Meridian, but he gives it a spatial frame of reference, something analogous to “the Mediterranean.” For him, the Meridian is a place in which dialogue can legitimately occur.

Tomorrow the world may burst into fragments.”⁹⁵ Camus avers: “In that threat hanging over our heads there is a lesson of truth. As we face such a future, hierarchies, titles, honors are reduced to what they are in reality: a puff of smoke. And the only certainty left to us is that of naked suffering, common to all, intermingling its roots with those of a stubborn hope.”⁹⁶ Such a tenet is further explained by Camus’ conviction that: “The rebel is a man who is on the point of accepting or rejecting the sacred and determined on laying claim to a human situation in which all the answers are human – in other words, formulated in human terms.”⁹⁷ Respectively, to will and steward the spaces that have not been completely veiled by the rusty cage, the rebel must admit the solidarity of their situation and form a cooperative relationship with the agents they find themselves chained to; thus they enter into what Camus terms “dialogue.”⁹⁸

3.2 Dialogue and Intersubjectivity

For Camus’ rebel, action, “the secret of our resistance,” is a “double and constant rejection of humiliation.”⁹⁹ In choosing rebellious action, an agent commits themselves to the Absurd: to an existence that is measureless, contingent, and immanent. Rebellion is a benign interchange and tangible form of solidarity, an interdependent act wherein human subjects repudiate Empire and monologue – it is movement toward dialogue, “the mutual recognition of a common destiny and the communication of men between themselves.”¹⁰⁰ In dialogue, human agents engage one another and “a common texture, the solidarity of

⁹⁵ Camus, *The Rebel*, 281.

⁹⁶ Camus, “The Wager of Our Generation,” 240.

⁹⁷ Camus, *The Rebel*, 21.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 283. Also, the word “will” is used in the sense that it is the product of a recognition, or cognition of something, and a conclusion that action should be aimed at amending or perpetuating whatever has been acknowledged.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 283.

chains” within the spaces that they have retrieved from the rusty cage. It is “a communication between human being and human being which makes men both similar and united.”¹⁰¹

When contrasted with monologue, which is the privation of communal spaces, dialogue is the act whereby an agent inserts himself into the world. Dialogue is, in effect, a conscientious concern for a community, it “undertakes to struggle against servitude, falsehood and terror,” the “three afflictions... [that] cause... silence between men.”¹⁰² Whereas monologue serves as a means to mask or obscure something that is oppressive and appositely subdue rebellion, dialogue is an expressive effort on the part of Camus’ rebel to give form to the Meridian. Dialogue is not dichotomous, a simple binary opposition to monologue – it has no synthesis. Dialogue is the examination of the points that are *L’envers et L’endroit*, betwixt and between.¹⁰³ In an editorial for *Combat*, headed “Toward Dialogue,” Camus proclaims:

What we must defend is dialogue and the universal communication of men. Slavery, injustice, and lies are the plagues that destroy this dialogue and forbid this communication, and that is why we must reject them. But today these plagues are the very substance of history, hence many consider them evils. It is true one cannot escape history, for we are in it up to our necks. But one can attempt to fight within history to keep a certain part of ourselves out of history.¹⁰⁴

Likewise, colloquy, or conversation – the specific words exchanged between agents – does not necessarily concern Camus, as it is something to be disclosed as dialogue comes to force. Camus is most concerned with the means of a living community, the practises that circumscribe the lives of a fellow-public, and the capacity for agents to engage one another.

¹⁰¹ Camus, *The Rebel*, 281.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 284.

¹⁰³ *L’envers et L’Endroit* is the title of Camus’ first published work.

¹⁰⁴ Camus, “30 November 1946. Toward Dialogue,” in *Between Hell and Reason*, 139.

“We,” testifies Camus, on behalf of *Combat*, its contributors and labourers, “do not believe in political realism.” Instead of founding the affairs of a community on an “absolute State,” suchlike the rusty cage and *l’esprit serieux* – where all problems are “posed in terms of power and efficiency” – Camus proposes that the affairs of human communities should be rooted in dialogue, which is, in character, radical and participatory.¹⁰⁵ Dialogue is an originitive “order”: something communally willed and reinforced by the mutual recognition of fellow agents; it is the rebellious protraction of public spaces and, analogously, the initiation of a subjective communication.¹⁰⁶ Dialogue is not predicated on absolute and infallible doctrines, or even something like parliamentary law, which is aggregative and abstract, “but rather in the tenacious efforts... to improve the human condition.” Dialogue requires that “the fate of man remains always in the hands of man.”¹⁰⁷ Withal, a direct, frank communication between subjects is efficacious: “Dishonesty, even when well-intentioned, separates men and throws each into the most futile of solitudes. We believe, to the contrary, that men should never be isolated from one another, that in facing hard times their solidarity must be total. It is justice and freedom that fashion solidarity and reinforce communion, and justice and freedom make them genuine.”¹⁰⁸

As articulated by Camus, dialogue is the product of humanity’s existential being-in-the-world; it is a means for agents to bear their situation. In order to effectively

¹⁰⁵ Camus, *The Rebel*, 142 and 182

¹⁰⁶ Camus, “12 October 1944. [On social order],” in *Between Hell and Reason*, 63.

¹⁰⁷ Camus, “24 November 1944. [The new form of socialism],” in *Between Hell and Reason*, 86.

¹⁰⁸ Camus, “1 October 1944. [*Combat* wants to make justice compatible with freedom],” in *Between Hell and Reason*, 58. It should be noted here that, for Camus, if justice and freedom are conciliated with one another, they will facilitate equality. As he states in the same *Combat* essay: “We shall therefore call justice a social state in which each individual starts with equal opportunity, and in which the country’s majority cannot be held in abject conditions by a privileged few. And we shall call freedom a political climate in which the human being is respected for both what he is and for what he says.”

engage fellow agents and rebut the rusty cage of modernity, an agent comes to recognise and accept the solidarity of chains; one “learns that he can nourish [himself]... and his difference, simply by admitting his resemblance to all... [and by fashioning] himself in that ceaseless oscillation from himself to others, midway between the beauty he cannot do without and the community he cannot tear himself from... They force themselves to understand instead of judging.”¹⁰⁹ Discursion is the way “through which we come to recognize our similarity and consecrate our destiny” and confront that which has repressed human communities.¹¹⁰ Fittingly, members of a community apprise the values and spaces from which they can subvert and resist further indignation and expropriation.

Albert Camus’ correlative notions of rebellion and dialogue are ingrained with a stout conception of intersubjectivity. The rebel is not a solitary monad, but an agent who lives in a mutually constituted world that is penetrated by common, shared values and meanings. Camus evokes Karl Jaspers’ determination that: “We represent this original phenomena of our humanity thus: we are what we are only through the community of mutually conscious understandings. There can be no man who is for himself alone, as a mere individual.”¹¹¹ Accordingly, what is intersubjective is held among conscious minds – it is common, having emerged out “of a whole out of communal substance.”¹¹²

In his essay “The Power of the Powerless,” Vaclav Havel describes a greengrocer who chooses to rebel against “an extreme version of the global automatism of

¹⁰⁹ Camus, “Banquet Speech.”

¹¹⁰ Camus, *The Rebel*, 283.

¹¹¹ Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz* (London, U.K.: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), 77.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 82.

technological civilization... [a] variant of the general failure of modern humanity.”¹¹³ In his rebellion, the greengrocer:

...snaps and he stops putting up the slogans [provided to him by the State] merely to ingratiate himself. He stops voting in elections he knows are a farce. He begins to say what he really thinks at political meetings. And he even finds the strength in himself to express solidarity with whom his conscience commands him to support. In this revolt the greengrocer steps out of living within the lie... His revolt is an attempt to *live within the truth*.¹¹⁴

This parable is an exceptional corroboration of the forms of rebellion and dialogue advocated by Camus; it is analogous to how Meursault refuses to lie and simplify his life. Havel’s conviction that revolt ‘is an attempt to *live within the truth*’ is akin to Camus’ idea of *L’envers et L’endroit*, humanity’s being ontologically “*solitary or solidary*.”¹¹⁵ To *live within* is to live amid the Meridian; it is a decentration of the subject, a movement away from solitude and solipsism. It follows, that in living *within*, an agent enters into a discourse about a communal, shared world. As Camus wrote in *The Rebel*, rebellion and dialogue are a refusal to silence “the small part of existence that can be realized on this earth through the mutual understanding of men.”¹¹⁶

Because it is impracticable that an agent, in the singular sense, can grasp totality – to achieve an omnipotent and absolute knowledge of the essence of every object and every moment in history – human agents are ontologically and epistemologically limited beings. To overcome the “Absurd Walls” of *l’esprit serieux* and monologue, agents enter into a dialogue with those that share their situation and disclose to one another their diverse perspectives and experiences; they contribute to a communication between

¹¹³ Vaclav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” in Havel et al., *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharp, 1985), 90.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹¹⁵ Camus, “The Artist at Work,” in *The Fall and Exile and The Kingdom*, 306.

¹¹⁶ Camus, *The Rebel*, 283.

agents, what Jaspers qualifies as being 'Idea'.¹¹⁷ In an "untrammelled dialogue," agents come to "think over" and establish a mutual, intersubjective understanding; they set out communally recognised values, meanings, and a "common hope."¹¹⁸ Camus reasons that "We can act only in terms of our time, among the people who surround us."¹¹⁹

In living *within*, Camus' rebels express a mutual recognition of a common condition, the 'chains of solidarity'; they acknowledge that which "unites all of us – and that is the love of our common soil, and our anguish."¹²⁰ From this, an agent becomes a constituent part of a living community where anxieties and passions are moderated through engagement. Inexorably, dialogue and the repossession of the spaces that comprise the Meridian beset the inequities of monologue. The task of a rebel "is not to accept or bow to its laws [those of monologue]... The task... is not to desert historical struggles nor to serve the cruel and inhuman elements of those struggles. It is rather to remain what they are, to help man against what is oppressing him, to favor freedom against the fatalities that close in upon it."¹²¹

In view of Camus' aversion to political realism and expediency, the form of intersubjective discourse put forth by Camus comes to be a limit – something that a rebel discerns as they encounter and engage fellow agents; they come to recognise a 'common destiny' that is revealed in the course of a dialogue. Without mutual recognition and interaction, monologue and Empire parcel "the sufferings of mankind" and bring about "unlimited slavery."¹²² Camus can only conclude that: "Historical absolutism is not

¹¹⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 10.

¹¹⁸ Camus, *The Rebel*, 283; and, Camus, "Appeal for a Civilian Truce in Algeria," in *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*, 135 and 136.

¹¹⁹ Camus, *The Rebel*, 4.

¹²⁰ Camus, "Appeal for a Civilian Truce in Algeria," 133.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹²² Camus, *The Rebel*, 294

efficacious, it is efficient... Once it is in possession of power, it destroys the only creative reality."¹²³ It is through engaged communication and communal interaction that human agents initiate an intersubjective, worldly meaning and condition. Dialogue allows an agent to live *within*: "It supposes a limit at which the community of man begins."¹²⁴

¹²³ Camus, *The Rebel*, 292-293.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 290.

4 Pestilence

We have nothing to lose except everything. So let's go ahead. This is the wager of our Generation. If we are to fail, it is better, in any case, to have stood on the side of those who choose life than on the side of those who are destroying.

- "The Wager of Our Generation," 236

To make clear his political and philosophic assertions regarding rebellion and dialogue, Albert Camus made use of one of the French intellectual tradition's more illustrative devices, fictional narrative, which provided his ideas with affective form and meaning. Camus' fictional works, specifically his novel, *The Plague*, and volume of short stories, *Exile and the Kingdom*, provided an evocative means from which he connected with a substantial audience and received his greatest critical acclaim: most markedly, the Nobel Prize for Literature. Consonantly, it was in these works that Camus semiotically annotates his conception of agency – wherein agents can directly confront *l'esprit serieux* and the rusty cage of modernity.

Beyond merely describing or censuring the rusty cage and its impositions, Camus sought to give emphasis to the means by which a human community can create and will public spaces that are exclusive of guise and inanity. As Nicola Chiaromonte extols:

Camus, by the simple act of raising the value of existence, asserted the will to participate actively, in the first person, in the world; that is, to challenge directly the actual situation of contemporary man... With this, one might say, he returned to the *raison d'etre* of writing. Putting the world in question means putting oneself in question and abandoning the artist's traditional right to remain separate from his work – a pure creator. In the language of Camus, this signifies that if

the world is absurd, the artist must live immersed in the absurd, must carry the burden of it, and must seek to prove it *for the others*.¹²⁵

To embody and disseminate his conception “of a community whose struggles must be shared,” of rebellion and dialogue, Camus employed unambiguous and substantive imagery; it was his intent to stir “the greatest number of men by providing them with a privileged image of our common joys and woes.”¹²⁶ Camus believed that “all writers... ought to... bear witness and shout aloud, every time it is possible, insofar as our talent allows, for those who are enslaved as we are.”¹²⁷

4.1 *The Plague*

After its publication, Camus’ novel, some critics condemned *The Plague* for being sermonistic; most often, Camus was accused of rejecting history, of promoting an attitude of political quietism and disengagement. As some critics, like Roland Barthes, contend: the characters developed by Camus in *The Plague* were friends, not militants – that Camus is incapable of offering a concrete proposition of how to end oppression.¹²⁸ In response, Camus confides that: “If there is an evolution from *The Stranger* to *The Plague*, it has moved in the direction of solidarity and participation.”¹²⁹ Even without consideration of his confession of intent, the allegorical narrative of *The Plague* barely cloaks the precepts that Albert Camus sought to give form. *The Plague* is a cumulative, pertinent exposition of Camus’ political and philosophic stances.

¹²⁵ Nicola Chiaromonte, “Albert Camus,” in *The Worm of Consciousness and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 65.

¹²⁶ Camus, “Banquet Speech,” and “Letter to Roland Barthes on *The Plague*,” in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, trans. by Ellen Conroy Kennedy (New York: Knopf, 1963), 339.

¹²⁷ Camus, “Why Spain?,” in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, 83.

¹²⁸ Camus, “Letter to Roland Barthes on *The Plague*,” 340.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 339.

From its inception, *The Plague* retains Camus' criticisms of *l'esprit serieux* and the rusty cage. Oran, the city in which the "unusual events described in this chronicle occurred in," is characterised as being: "Treeless, glamourless, soulless."¹³⁰ As Camus points out in the novel's opening paragraphs:

... there still exist towns and countries where people have now and again an inkling of something different. In general it doesn't change their lives. Still, they have had an intimation, and that's so much to the good. Oran, however, seems to be a town without intimations; in other words, completely modern.¹³¹

Insidiously, Oran's public, by whom the city is conferred its character and vitality, are "bored," devoted "to cultivating habits."¹³² Of Oran, "all that was to be conveyed was the banality of the town's appearance and of life in it."¹³³

Likewise, Camus' portrayal of is a reiteration of his assertion that *l'esprit serieux* erodes the capacity for subjects to interact with one another and the world around them. *The Plague* is a sheer expression of Camus' stricture against the deformation and expropriation of subjectivity by *l'esprit serieux* and monologue. Of primary interest is the way in which Camus lays emphasis on the nondescript and mundane condition of Oran's citizenry. The Oranais, who are mentioned only in a collective sense in *The Plague's* opening chapter, effortlessly associate themselves with their function in society, as instrumentalities: "Their chief interest is in commerce, and their aim in life is, as they call it, 'doing business'... Certainly nothing is commoner nowadays than to see people working from morn to night and then proceeding to fritter away at card-tables, in cafes, and in small-talk what time is left for living."¹³⁴ Lacking any real distinguishing

¹³⁰ Camus, *The Plague*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (London, England: Penguin Books, 1960), 1 and 3.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

characteristics, the Oranais busily placate themselves through habituation; they “can get through the days... without any trouble... [because they] have formed habits. And since habits are precisely what our town encourages, all is for the best.”¹³⁵ In all, Camus portrays Oran’s public as persons who have “complacently” gone “to sleep”: they have assented to living a passive, inconsequential existence.¹³⁶ The lives of the Oranais are regimented by their subservience to propriety and custom.

Camus’ description of Oran’s state of affairs, coupled with his precedent depiction of *l’esprit serieux*, sets about the conditions for pestilence to arise in such a modern polity. Camus depicts Oran as being connate in custom and function; its public reified, dedicated to routine, and variance present only “in the sky.”¹³⁷ Ineluctably, the Plague was afforded the ideal environment from which to emerge and disseminate. Without diversity in the conditions and activities of the Oranais, and in their complacency, there was consonant susceptibility to infection: “Yes, plague, like abstraction, was monotonous.”¹³⁸ Pestilence advanced because the townspeople were indistinguishable, they “were like everybody else, wrapped up in themselves.”¹³⁹ Incidentally, the intrusion of the Plague into Oran was aggravated by the public’s reaction to affliction: “They went on doing business, arranged for journeys, and formed views.”¹⁴⁰ The Oranais symptomatically drew further back into their habits – an indicia that is literally termed ‘malaise’ in medical terms – summarily providing the Plague character, allowing it to be more contagious and formidable. Withdrawal collaborates and

¹³⁵ Camus, *The Plague*, 3.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 1.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 86.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 35.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 36.

augments a synchronic, homogeneous environment wherein affliction can fester and pullulate.

Most characteristic of the environment in which the Plague seethed is the prefecture's officious response to the incidence of affliction. David Sprintzen, in *Camus: A Critical Examination*, infers that:

Anything threatening the normal flow of business is anathema to... public officials. They do not routinely address human concerns. They have their regulations, their standardized ways of processing information and of making decisions. Facts that do not fit the prescribed molds cannot be processed. If they cannot be processed, for the bureaucracy they do not exist. So it is at first with the plague. They deny the evidence.¹⁴¹

Conspicuously, in a conference of the prefecture's 'health committee', there is a quarrel over whether prophylactic measures should be taken against the Plague. Analogously, in the proceedings of the meeting, it is made clear that definitive action will not be taken against the bacillus, unless under certain categorical circumstances. The committee did not want to "attract attention" and disrupt the proprietary activities of Oran's inhabitants.¹⁴²

Ominously, and as Camus had foreshadowed in the debate between the health committee's members, the prefecture was eventually quarantined. However, Oran was exiled from the world only at the point at which the Plague proved to be so oppressive that it could wholly unsettle the routines and habits of the city's public. With the onset of the quarantine, Rieux, *The Plague's* "secret narrator," proclaims that: "From now on it can be said that plague was the concern of all of us."¹⁴³ Herein, the novel came to

¹⁴¹ Sprintzen, 91.

¹⁴² Camus, *The Plague*, 48.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 63.

exemplify Camus' conceptions of solidarity and participation. Oran's public could no longer live by means of seclusion and disingenuity:

... once the town gates were shut, every one of us realized that all... were, so to speak, in the same boat, and that each would have to adapt himself to the new conditions of life. Thus, for example, a feeling normally as individual as the ache of separation from those one loves suddenly became a feeling in which all shared alike and – together with fear – the greatest affliction of the long period of exile that lay ahead.¹⁴⁴

Suitably, with the proclamation of a “state of plague” and the quarantine of the Oran, the presence of the affliction is manifest; pestilence can no longer be “a mere bogey of the mind, a bad dream that will pass away.”¹⁴⁵ According to Rieux, “each of us had to be content to live only for the day, alone under the vast indifference of the sky.”¹⁴⁶ For the Oranais, it is impossible to evade the Plague, no habit or banal act can preclude it. On the part of those it interns behind the city gates, affliction requires moral judgment: engagement, which may perhaps contravene the advancement of the bacillus; or acquiescence, the perseverance of exile. Rieux, the novel's the narrator and one of it's central characters, clarifies: “For nothing in the world is it worth turning one's back on what one loves. Yet that is what I'm doing, though *why* I don't know. That's how it is, and there's nothing to be done about it so let's recognize the fact and draw the conclusions... a man can't cure and *know* at the same time. So let's cure as quickly as we can.”¹⁴⁷

For those that refuse to concede the Plague legitimacy, to deform themselves before the ignominy and force of affliction, rebellion becomes an imminent course of action. “Officialdom” – conventional institutions and customs – had become

¹⁴⁴ Camus, *The Plague*, 63.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 35 and 61.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

“inefficient” and incapable of carrying out even “remedial measures” in the face of the endemic; it “can never really cope with something catastrophic.”¹⁴⁸ Through rebellion, the Oranais enable themselves to directly resist the Plague’s incidence; it is a concerted decision to apprise Oran’s public spaces from the contagion and alleviate their fellow-citizens’ collective anguish. “Thinking in such terms, provided it is done without fear and without pretensions, can help create the conditions of clear thought and a provisional agreement among men who want to be neither victims nor executioners.”¹⁴⁹ In their suffering, mutual to all exiled *within* the city gates, rebellion is the only certainty available to the Oranais; it allows them to lay claim to a more equitable state of affairs and exceed the limits posted by the Plague. “A people who want to live free do not wait for someone to bring them their freedom,” explains Camus. “They take it. In doing so, they help themselves as well as those that would come to their aid.”¹⁵⁰

To bear out rebellion, several of Camus’ characters give support to the creation of “voluntary groups” that posit a means to “sidetrack officialdom” and directly “save the greatest possible number of people from dying and being doomed to unending separation.”¹⁵¹ In this, “These groups enabled our townsfolk to come to grips with the disease, and convinced them that, now that plague was amongst us, it was up to them to do whatever could be done to fight it.”¹⁵² The voluntary groups create an autonomous station from which the Oranais can convene and directly resist the pestilence. Amid the groups, *résistants* cooperate with one another in a communally articulated course of action – the fellow-members of the groups set out an intersubjective, dialogic relation. In

¹⁴⁸ Camus, *The Plague*, 120.

¹⁴⁹ Camus, “To Save Lives,” 122.

¹⁵⁰ Camus, “23 August 1944. They Will Not Escape,” in *Between Hell and Reason*, 41.

¹⁵¹ Camus, *The Plague*, 120 and 129.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 128.

a *Combat* essay, “They Will Not Escape,” which was published as he composed *The Plague*, Camus maintains that in rebellion against affliction:

A new order has been founded. It is an order in which the face of man is seen in bright light. Politics is no longer dissociated from individuals. It is addressed by man to other men. It is a way of speaking... [It is] more than just a moment in our history, it will be remembered for having placed our citizens face to face.¹⁵³

The groups act in solidarity, in the favour of a condition that is dispossessed of the Plague – as the contagion is “the concern of all.”¹⁵⁴ Through their allied expressions and deeds, the groups confirm a form of political action and mutual association in which any subject may come to resist pestilence: the absurd force of resignation and injustice.

In a vindication of the voluntary groups’ confrontation with the Plague, Rieux explains that their engagements were, in principle, “a matter of common decency.”¹⁵⁵ There is no eschatology for the résistants, for “Man isn’t an ideal”; as Rieux professes: “I feel more of a fellowship with the defeated than with Saints. Heroism and sanctity don’t really appeal to me... What interests me is – being a man.”¹⁵⁶ In their actions, the groups’ rebellion is immanent and “relative”; their conduct comprises what John Dewey identifies as being an ‘end-in-view’, an ambit that is amenable to discursion – permitting their actions to be revisable and capable of responding to the provisionality of a given situation.¹⁵⁷ For Camus, a “revolutionary action which wishes to be coherent in terms of its origins should be embodied in an active consent to the relative. It would express fidelity to the human condition.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ Camus, “1 September 1944. Resistance and Politics,” in *Between Hell and Reason*, 48. It is important to note that much of the language in this essay appears verbatim in the novel.

¹⁵⁴ Camus, *The Plague*, 128.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 158 and 245.

¹⁵⁷ Camus, *The Rebel*, 281. David Sprintzen describes this point well in *Camus: A Critical Examination*, see page 265.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 290.

Oran's voluntary groups have no explicit ideologic occupation or vital process, they exist as a riposte with that which is endemic. The groups' actions are not a part of any direct struggle for power; instead, they seek to address the world. Pragmatically, the groups are not a somatic threat to the Plague: the affliction can infect any agent in the course of their actions. However, because their rebellion is directed at the protraction of public spaces as sites of communication and action – public life without exile – the groups effectively disclose the capacity for a public to act by politically viable means. The “conviction is that we can no longer hope to save everything, but that we can at least hope to save lives, so that some kind of future, if not perhaps the ideal one, will remain possible.”¹⁵⁹

The groups willingly rise apace with affliction, their actions directed at an austere refutation of the iniquitous force of the Plague. In their engagement and communal discourse, the groups reveal shared spaces where agents can modestly assemble and express themselves – they apprise “the mutual recognition of a common destiny and the communication of men.”¹⁶⁰ As Tarrou, a traveller and prime organiser of the voluntary groups, discloses:

All I maintain is that on this earth there are pestilences and there are victims, and it's up to us, so far as possible, not to join forces with the pestilences. That may sound simple to the point of childishness; I can't judge if it is simple, but I know it is true. You see, I'd heard such quantities of arguments, which very nearly turned my head, and turned other people's heads enough to make them approve of murder; and I'd come to realize that all our troubles spring from our failure to use plain, clean-cut language. So I resolved always to speak – and to act – quite clearly, as this was the only way of setting myself on the right track.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Camus, “20 November, 1946. To Save Lives,” in *Between Hell and Reason*, 121.

¹⁶⁰ Camus, *The Rebel*, 283.

¹⁶¹ Camus, *The Plague*, 243.

Apiece with Tarrou's determination, without the groups the Oranais are all the more infectious:

... this epidemic has taught me nothing new; except that I must fight it at your side. I know positively... that each of us has the plague within him; no one, no one on earth, is free from it. And I know, too, that we must keep endless watch on ourselves lest in a careless moment we breathe in somebody's face and fasten the infection on him. What's natural is the microbe. All the rest – health, integrity, purity (if you like) – is a product of the human will, of a vigilance...¹⁶²

Commitment requires communication; and discourse provides the relative means to inhibit pestilence. As Tarrou and Oran's voluntary groups corroborate, dialogue places "in the first rank of its frame of reference an obvious complicity among men, a common texture, the solidarity of chains: a communication between human being and human being which makes men both similar and united."¹⁶³ Dialogue sustains human agents and their communities through its proximate and intersubjective preservation of a mutual existence that is exclusive of monologue and Empire: "The mutual understanding and communication discovered by rebellion can survive only in the free exchange of conversation. Every ambiguity, every misunderstanding, leads to death; clear language and simple words are the only salvation from this death."¹⁶⁴

Eventually, the groups, in their mutual communication and common action, do succeed in gaining efficacy, in hastening the liberation of Oran. The groups make it possible for their fellow-public to gather and candidly interact in the city's streets and common spaces. Figuratively, "the whole town was on the move, quitting the dark, lugubrious confines where it had struck its roots of stone, and setting forth at last, like a

¹⁶² Camus, *The Plague*, 242.

¹⁶³ Camus, *The Rebel*, 281.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 283. Included with this statement was a footnote, which should also be cited: "It is worth noting that the language peculiar to totalitarian doctrines is always: a scholastic or administrative language."

shipload of survivors, towards a land of promise.”¹⁶⁵ Albeit, despite Oran’s “immanent release,” as the quarantine is lifted and exile surmounted, the townspeople return to their personal lives and, by implication, certain routines – suchlike before the arrival of pestilence.¹⁶⁶ Camus, even so, is not cynical of the groups’ efforts; having repulsed the Plague in their rebellious actions, the groups had effectively fulfilled their provisional end-in-view. Respectively, in recasting Oran’s public spaces and life within them, “the sense of comradeship persisted and they [the Oranais] were exchanging smiles and cheerful glances amongst themselves.”¹⁶⁷ The voluntary groups were modestly engaged in “attempt[ing], in short, to define the conditions necessary for a political position that is modest – which is to say, free from both messianism and nostalgia for an earthly paradise.”¹⁶⁸ Had the groups not remit – detached from their initial impetus – they would have become closed to variation: obstinate and impositional, an abstract function that is not differentiable from *l’esprit serieux*. “Thus,” Camus makes clear in *The Rebel*, “it [action] cuts itself off from its roots and – abstract and malevolent shade – wanders haphazardly until such time as it imagines that it has found substance in some ideology.”¹⁶⁹ Such is also a validation of the equability and credence of dialogue; assumably, with their charge substantiated – public spaces unbound from endemic – the groups are enfranchised, at liberty to pursue various other projects and intents. In their release, the groups display measure, for which they appear at the Meridian; they have come to exist within an intersubjective condition.

¹⁶⁵ Camus, *The Plague*, 262.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 270.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 283.

¹⁶⁸ Camus, “To Save Lives,” 122.

¹⁶⁹ Camus, *The Rebel*, 285.

In the last paragraphs of *The Plague*, Camus concludes with further vindication of Oran's voluntary groups – Rieux, had “resolved to compile this chronicle, so that he should not be one of those who hold their peace but should bear witness in favour of those plague stricken people; so that some memorial of the injustice and outrage done them might endure; and to state quite simply what we learn in a time of pestilence: that there are more things to admire in men than despise.”¹⁷⁰ The Oranais had addressed their common spaces and attained certain situational influence over their circumstance. Moreover, the voluntary groups serve as “a record of what had had to be done, and assuredly would have to be done again in the never-ending fight against terror and its endless onslaughts, despite their personal afflictions, by all who, while unable to be saints but refusing to bow down to pestilences, strive their utmost to be healers.”¹⁷¹ Though Camus concedes that “the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good”; the groups can be revived, for their legacy is retained in the verve of Oran's public spaces, and renew their efforts to dignify the ‘texture’ that is held to be common.¹⁷²

4.2 The Guest

Contained in a volume of short stories, *Exile and the Kingdom*, is a brief narrative, “The Guest,” which is one of Albert Camus' most masterful explications of his ideals and political positions – in particular, dialogue. It is a work that is all too often passed over by Camus' patrons and critics alike. Nevertheless, as the title of short story and the collection it was contained within suggests, the text's prose overtly represents

¹⁷⁰ Camus, *The Plague*, 296-297.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 297.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

Camus' critical assessment of the Imperial, political, and moral complexities of "the Algerian drama."¹⁷³

The narration of "The Guest" opens with a stark description of a plateau far in the al-Quabail Mountains of northern Algeria; a bleak, wintry landscape that is "cruel to live in – even without men."¹⁷⁴ The story's central character, Daru – a teacher responsible for instructing his "twenty pupils," who reside in nearby villages, the benefactions and enlightenment of French civilization – is "siege" to his setting. Because of a blizzard the children had stopped coming to the schoolhouse, permitting Daru to live "almost like a monk in his remote schoolhouse, nonetheless satisfied with the little he had and the rough life... Daru had been born here. Everywhere else, he felt exile."¹⁷⁵ Thus, in spite of the occasional presence of his students, Daru personifies a very detached, ascetic life.

Abruptly, the subtleties and habituations of Daru's refuge are upset by the appearance of "the old gendarme Balducci" and an Arab prisoner who was transported "at the end of a rope."¹⁷⁶ In a tense exchange, Daru is informed that he is to relieve the gendarme's charge and escort the Arab to the police headquarters at Tinguit, a hamlet below the plateau:

"What's this story?" asked the schoolmaster. "Are you pulling my leg?"

"No son. Those are the orders."

"The orders? I'm not..." Daru hesitated, not wanting to hurt the old Corsican. "I mean that's not my job."

"What! What's the meaning of that? In wartime people do all kinds of jobs."

"Then I'll wait for the declaration of war!"

Balducci nodded.

¹⁷³ Camus, "Preface to Algerian Reports," in *Resistance Rebellion, and Death*, 113.

¹⁷⁴ Camus, "The Guest," in *The Fall and Exile and The Kingdom*, 236.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 235-236.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 236.

“O.K. But the orders exist and they concern you. Things are brewing, it appears. There is talk of a forthcoming revolt. We are mobilized, in a way.”¹⁷⁷

Through the abstract and monologic force of command, Daru is compelled to take custody of the prisoner. Presumably, if Daru refuses his order, he is liable to be disciplined and penalised for his insubordination: his immediate situation – without consultation or consideration – determined by a colonial administrator who lay in a remote prefecture. Daru is incensed; his sentiment magnified by the gendarme’s specification of the Arab’s crime, murder: “Daru felt a sudden wrath against the man, against all men with their rotten spite, their tireless hates, their blood lust.”¹⁷⁸ In sequence, before he departs to return to his patrol, Balducci hands the schoolmaster a revolver – a symbol of colonial authority and Daru’s conscription. Daru objects, explaining his intent to refuse to abide by the orders, which angers the gendarme, who threateningly responds: “You’re being a fool... you can’t let them have their way... It’s an order son, and I won’t repeat it.”¹⁷⁹ In spite of the protestation, Balducci reminds Daru of “the rule” and its implied penalties, coercing the seclusive schoolteacher to carry through the order.

Duly, Camus – through the distressed introspections of Daru – provides one of his most piquant and representative dissertations on human fortune:

For some time he [Daru] lay... watching the sky close over, listening to the silence. It was this silence that had seemed painful to him during the first days here, after the war. He had requested a post in the little town at the base of the foothills separating the upper plateaus from the desert. There, rocky walls, green and black to the north, pink and lavender to the south, marked the frontier of eternal summer. He had been named to a post farther to the north, on the plateau itself. In the beginning, the solitude and the silence had been

¹⁷⁷ Camus, “The Guest,” 239-240.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 241.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 243.

hard for him on the wastelands peopled only by stones. Occasionally, furrows suggested cultivation, but they had been dug to uncover a certain kind of stone good for building. The only plowing here was to harvest rocks. Elsewhere a thin layer of soil accumulated in the hollows would be scraped out to enrich paltry village gardens. This is the way it was: bare rock covered three quarters of the region. Towns sprang up, flourished, then disappeared; men came by, loved another or fought bitterly, then died. No one in this desert, neither he nor his guest, mattered. And yet, outside of this desert neither of them, could have really lived.¹⁸⁰

In an attempt to “be alone with no decision to make,” Daru provides the prisoner opportunity to escape. However, the prisoner refuses his chance and Daru is pressed to resign himself to his circumstance; he even feels obligated to accommodate his guest.¹⁸¹

In a surreal passage, the schoolteacher sets his table for two and eats a meal with the Arab prisoner, as he would a friend or proper company; they even share some conversation.

In the night, as they both try to sleep, Daru muses over his relationship to the prisoner: whether they share anything in common and if there was a specific constitution to their consociation. Camus, again, endows his narrative with philosophic implication:

In this room where he had been sleeping alone for a year, this presence bothered him. But it bothered him also by imposing on him a sort of brotherhood he knew well but refused to accept in the present circumstances. Men who share the same rooms...develop a strange alliance as if... they fraternized every evening, over and above their differences, in the ancient community of dream and fatigue.¹⁸²

Daru was deliberating in a representative manner, he identified with the prisoners' situation; not of having committed murder, but of being subject to the authority of a dominion that is extraneous to their direct participation or contribution. Daru recognises that he and guest both share the ‘bare rock’ of the desert round them; although the

¹⁸⁰ Camus, “The Guest,” 245-246.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 246.

¹⁸² Ibid., 250.

prisoner's "stupid crime revolted [Daru]... to hand him over was contrary to honor."¹⁸³ All the same, Daru wanted to absolve himself of his guest, to not be engaged by the entanglements of the world. Daru, once more, provides the prisoner occasion to walk away, to disappear as a bad dream; the Arab, again, snubs the prospect.

In the morning, the schoolteacher and the prisoner, together, set out for Tinguit, across the deserted expanse. Daru "cursed at one and the same time his own people who had sent him this Arab and the Arab too who had dared to kill and had not managed to get away."¹⁸⁴ As they come to the edge of the plateau, on which the snow was melting, Daru hands the prisoner a package of rations, two thousand francs, and a choice: to travel on to Tinguit, where he was expected, or back across the plateau to an encampment of nomads who would provide him shelter, "according to their law."¹⁸⁵ By either decision, Daru was not going to join the prisoner. The schoolteacher "turned his back on him, took two long steps in the direction of the school, looked hesitantly at the motionless Arab, and started off again"; Daru had defied the orders of the gendarme and the colonial administration.¹⁸⁶ Once more, Daru curiously looked back, the Arab had moved, and in the "slight haze" of daylight: "Daru, with heavy heart, made out the Arab walking slowly on the road to prison."¹⁸⁷

Daru returns to his schoolhouse, the prisoner had made his choice, leading the narrative to end with a most staggering epigraph:

... standing before the window of the classroom, the schoolmaster was watching the clear light bathing the whole surface of the plateau, but he hardly saw it. Behind him on the blackboard, among the winding French rivers [left from a bygone lesson], sprawled the

¹⁸³ Camus, "The Guest," 253.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 256.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 257.

clumsily chalked up words he had just read: “You handed over our brother. You will pay for this.” Daru looked at the sky, the plateau, and, beyond, the invisible lands all the way to the sea. In this vast landscape he had loved so much, he was alone.¹⁸⁸

Daru – despite his affinities, efforts, and affections – was to remain siege to the landscape of the world on which he was patriated; his situation desolate.

Explicitly, “The Guest” confirms the agony that lays in a public’s inability to communicate amongst themselves: to discursively participate in the communal expression of intersubjective and mutually conscious understandings. Monologue, the commandment of Empire, founds the “whole misfortune” that is assumed to befall Daru.¹⁸⁹ Camus writes in his *Notebooks* that: “Progress and true nobility lie in the dialogue from man to man and not in the Gospel... What balances the absurd is the community of men fighting against it. And if we must serve that community, we choose to serve the dialogue carried to the absurd against any policy of falsehood or of silence. That’s the way one is free with others.”¹⁹⁰ Regrettably, Daru is – in part – complicitous for his situation. In his detachment and disengagement, Daru compounds the ‘silent hostility’ that defines his relationship with those that he encounters, whether they be the gendarme, the Arab prisoner, or the militants that have intruded his deserted schoolhouse. There is no space for communication in the story; Daru, the lecturer, allegorically lives on the top of a solitary mountain. In his refutation of action, his irresolution and persistent nostalgia for the sovereignty of his seclusion, it is impractical for Daru to live *within* a community and have any affect in his situation – he is not ‘free with others’.

¹⁸⁸ Camus, “The Guest,” 257

¹⁸⁹ Camus, *Notebooks, 1942-1954*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Knopf, 1966), 125.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 125-126.

Regardless, Daru is not unaccompanied in the circumstance of the story – on the deserted plateau, he is bound by other people, and is not categorically responsible for the misfortune and drama of the narrative. As had been divulged in the storyline, Daru did not always covet his setting, he had initially requested a post in a town that lay on the foothills below the plateau, on the sublime ‘frontier of eternal summer’; instead, he was dispatched and billeted by the institutions of colonial authority. Indicatively, Daru subsists under the providence of Empire. From the conditions of his life to the curriculum he utilises in the instruction of his pupils, Daru is a dependent of the prerogative of monologue – its insular commands and edicts. Though loath, Daru, like anyone else, is mobilised by the mandate of ‘the rule’. Superficially, in the narrative of the story, dialogue is inconceivable: public spaces are the province of dominion, and so, communication between subjects is perceptively futile. Without common spaces, expropriated subjects like Daru or the Arab prisoner’s brothers can only speciously relate to one another and, in congruence, live as accomplices to the afflictions of monologue and Empire.

Alternatively, the militants who leave the message on the blackboard of Daru’s schoolhouse, like the mediaries of Empire, benefact monologue: “Such a plant, in fact, thrive only in the fertile soil of accumulated iniquities.”¹⁹¹ The militants are not rebels, but aggressors; their faculties are derived from the “nihilistic passion” of violence. As Camus defines their actions, the militants “demand the right to destroy the existence and the freedom of others.”¹⁹² Persuasion and deliberation – phenomena of dialogue – exact leisure; however, time is consequent to the militants: their desired ascendancy is

¹⁹¹ Camus, *The Rebel*, 248.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 284-285.

correspondent to the haste by which they achieve their objectives. Unreasonably, the militants are ideologically compelled to apply methods that induce human subjects to endure a solitary existence. If the militants were to discursively engage Daru, they inefficiently protract their function and impede their anticipated ends. To affirm their desires, the militants are determined to confine and partition a public's communal spaces; Camus quotes the Marquis de Sade: "Solitude is power."¹⁹³

In his "Letter to an Algerian Militant" – published in October 1955, just two months after the massacre at Philippeville, Algeria – Camus wrote that all peoples of Algeria "are condemned to live together."¹⁹⁴ Explicitly, Camus asserts that "the essential thing is to leave room, however limited it may be, for the exchange of views that is still possible; the essential thing is to bring about the easing of the situation, however slight and temporary it may be."¹⁹⁵ To surmount their condition, to be civil, all parties in the narration of "The Guest" should do as the Arab prisoner and turn away from monologue's solitary mountain – accepting of their circumstance. Camus refutes any action "that sterilizes any future and any possibility of life."¹⁹⁶ He proposes that all persons acknowledge that they live together at the intersection in history within which they find themselves. Members of a fellow-public can only do so if they "take a few steps toward each other in an open confrontation."¹⁹⁷ Representatively, in mutual engagement, agents can refute the nihilism and terror present in their situation and make a more pacific future possible.

¹⁹³ Camus, *The Rebel*, 248.

¹⁹⁴ Camus, "Letter to an Algerian Militant," in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, 197.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁹⁶ Camus, "Appeal for a Civilian Truce in Algeria," 136.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

5 Reflections

No, freedom is not founded on concentration camps, or on the subjugated peoples of the colonies, or on the workers' poverty! No, the doves of peace do not perch on gallows! No, the forces of freedom cannot mingle the sons of the victims with the executioners of Madrid and elsewhere! Of that, at least, we shall henceforth be sure, as we shall be sure that freedom is not a gift received from a State or a leader but a possession to be won every day by the effort of each and the union of all.

- "Bread and Freedom," 96-97

In his political and philosophic ideals – through means that fosters intersubjective communication – Albert Camus provides tangible alternatives to conventional forms of politics and governance. In his propositions, Camus develops distinctive notions of freedom and cosmopolitan citizenship, whereby it is conceivable that an agent can obtain bearing in the world without having to consign themselves to *l'esprit serieux*, Empire, and monologue. In this, Camus emphasises forms of agency that will "save what can be saved and leave ourselves a chance for the future," and a rebellious style of politics that "like the commune, is the negation, to the benefit of reality, of bureaucratic and abstract centralism."¹⁹⁸

5.1 Freedom

By convention, as represented in the whole of a tradition from St. Augustine and late Classic thought on through the most contemporary of ideas, philosophy has typically sited a distinction between internal and external liberty: the exclusive autonomy of a will

¹⁹⁸ Camus, "Toward Dialogue," 138; and *The Rebel*, 298.

and of unrestrained individual freedom.¹⁹⁹ In basic terms, Albert Camus is not concerned with such a division by itself, since: “Knowing whether man is free involves knowing whether he can have a master.”²⁰⁰ Phenomenally, Camus understands freedom as being a qualifiable substance that is contingent on the actions performed by agents. Freedom and action, for Camus, are coincident: “There are no rights without expression of those rights.”²⁰¹ In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus writes that: “The only conception of freedom I can have is that of the prisoner or the individual in the midst of the State. The only one I know is freedom of thought and action.”²⁰² Therefore, freedom is not foundational for Camus: “There is no ideal freedom that will someday be given us all at once, as a pension comes at the end of one’s life.”²⁰³ Camus cannot conceive of freedom as being an essence that exists beyond the frame of reference of a situated subject or a mutually constituted community. If the Absurd rescinds a public’s appeals for an emancipated, worldly, condition, “it [simultaneously] restores and magnifies... my freedom of action. That privation of hope and future means an increase in man’s availability.”²⁰⁴ Without active expression, freedom is irrelevant and extraneous – estranged from the communication of a public. Thus, Camus articulates that: “It is essential to know that, without liberty, we shall achieve nothing and that we shall lose both future justice and ancient beauty.”²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁹ This point is best illustrated in the works of Kant and Hegel. Also, It should be noted that in French there is no word for freedom, being that liberty is the direct translation from French word, *liberté*, used by Camus; such is a limitation and obstacle set by translators.

²⁰⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 56.

²⁰¹ Camus, *The Rebel*, 290-291. Camus also observes that “creation... always coincides with rational freedom.”

²⁰² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 56.

²⁰³ Camus, “Bread and Freedom” in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, 93.

²⁰⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 57.

²⁰⁵ Camus, “Create Dangerously,” in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, 248.

Acutely, Camus depicts freedom as being a *performative* act; but he does not regard it as being unbound. Like rebellion, which is inferential to liberty, freedom is limited by its common, intersubjective disposition; it does not exist for-itself:

In a flash – but that is time enough to say, provisionally, that the most extreme form of freedom, the freedom to kill, is not compatible with the sense of rebellion. Rebellion is in no way a demand for total freedom. On the contrary rebellion puts total freedom up for trial. It specifically attacks the unlimited power that authorizes a superior to violate the forbidden frontier. Far from demanding general independence, the rebel wants it to be recognised that freedom has its limits everywhere that a human being is to be found – that limit being precisely that human beings power to rebel... He humiliates no one. The freedom he claims, he claims for all; the freedom he refuses, he forbids everyone to enjoy. He is not only the slave against the master, but also man against the world of master and slave.²⁰⁶

This assertion is further explicated in a speech, “Bread and Freedom,” in which Camus remarks that “freedom is not made up principally of privileges; it is made up especially of duties.”²⁰⁷ Camus believes that liberty, if composed of privileges – fixed honours and accords – is null and can exploit a community and segregate culture: the interaction and communication of a public. For Camus, freedom is coincident to an active civic commitment to the rejection of humiliation and the basal expropriation of agency by Empire and monologue: “But to achieve that we must henceforth categorically refuse, without anger but irrevocability, the lies with which we have been stuffed.”²⁰⁸ Freedom, if borne in action and mutual discourse, assures the continued fellowship of a public and their common spaces.

Freedom is bared in engagement; it is the intersubjective movement of an agent away from detachment and solitude – toward candid appearance within a public space

²⁰⁶ Camus, *The Rebel*, 284.

²⁰⁷ Camus, “Bread and Freedom,” 96.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

where communication is manifest: “Liberty alone draws men from their isolation; but slavery dominates a crowd of solitudes.”²⁰⁹ Freedom is embodied in the interactions of a public; it girds a condition where human agents can actively associate and correspond with one another, “freedom preserves the power to protest and guarantees human communication.”²¹⁰ In liberation, an agent inserts themselves into an egalitarian condition; as freedom has no structure. Liberty allows an agent to disclose themselves to the world and, respectively, perpetuate an existent community. Without common spaces, freedom is unendurable: desolated from those who give it reference. “Yes,” attests Camus, “freedom is widowed, but it must be added because it is true: she is widowed of all of us.”²¹¹

In his evidence of freedom being *performative*, Camus recurrently associates freedom with art – the agent with the artist. Camus quotes Andre Gide: “Art lives on constraint and dies of freedom”²¹² It is postulated that art thrives by the limits that it imposes on itself: “Conversely, if it [art] does not constrain itself, it indulges in mere ravings and becomes a slave to itself.”²¹³ In freedom, it is the creator who rules before the judge: “I cannot live as a person without my art. And yet I have never set the art above everything else. It is essential to me, on the contrary because it excludes no one, just as I am, on the footing of all.”²¹⁴ Pointedly, Camus does not necessarily believe that the artist is free in the course of their fabrication; he reasons that the disclosure of a work of art – in appearance before an audience of fellow community members – attests to liberty and

²⁰⁹ Camus, “Create Dangerously,” 248.

²¹⁰ Camus, *The Rebel*, 290.

²¹¹ Camus, “Bread and Freedom,” 89.

²¹² Andre Gide, quoted in Albert Camus, “Create Dangerously,” 268.

²¹³ Camus, “Create Dangerously,” 268.

²¹⁴ Camus, “Banquet Speech.” Camus defers to Nietzsche, astonishingly, citing him as he accepted his Nobel prize.

occasions public association. If a work remains concealed, secreted from viewing, it is banal, without character; therefore, each exhibition of a work of art supplements action and liberty:

The greatest and most ambitious of... the arts... is bent on capturing... the fugitive figure of man, and on restoring the unity of great style to the general disorder of gestures... Its purpose not to imitate, but to stylize and imprison in one significant expression the fleeting ecstasy of the body or the infinite variety of human attitudes. Then, and only then, does it erect, on the pediments of teeming cities, the model, the type, the motionless perfection that will cool, for one moment the fevered brow of man.²¹⁵

In performance, the artist represents a style of life and provides perspective. The work of art is embodied in a common space; it stirs its witnesses by regaling them with a variation of the sufferings and sentiment of those whose condition they share. For having freely allied a public – “as a reward” – the artist “will achieve complete communication among men.”²¹⁶

Camus is adamant; the aim of the work of art is “To give a shape to one’s fate.”²¹⁷ Art – creation – is a cooperative act that substantiates action: “In this universe the work of art is then the sole chance of keeping... consciousness and of fixing its adventures. Creating is living doubly.”²¹⁸ Through its disclosure to a community, a work of art dignifies a public; it allows them to live in liberty. The work of art is the embodiment of a free dialogue. Alone, in solitude, the artist has little affect; but in the communication of their work, the artist conveys the form of liberty. In his Nobel acceptance speech, Camus speaks of his own artistic commitments:

For more than twenty years of absolutely insane history, lost hopelessly like all those of my age in the convulsions of the epoch, I

²¹⁵ Camus, *The Rebel*, 256.

²¹⁶ Camus, “Create Dangerously,” 257.

²¹⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 95.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

derived comfort from the vague impression that writing was an honor today because the act itself obligated a man, obligated him to more than just writing. It obligated me in particular, such as I was, with whatever strength I possessed, to bear – along with the others living the same history – the tribulation and hope we shared.²¹⁹

In liberty, as they depict the afflictions of humanity and the world, the artist assures the posterity of public spaces and action. It follows, that in concomitant, communal performance – as the artist bears their work of art before a public – freedom and action are imparted fecundity. “The aim of art, the aim of a life can only be to increase the sum of freedom and responsibility to be found in every man and in the world... No great work has ever been based on hatred or contempt”²²⁰ The work of art, in augmenting freedom, “does homage to the wretched and magnificent life that is ours” and can ease “the various forms of bondage weighing upon men.”²²¹

5.2 Cosmopolitan Citizenship

Appreciably, Albert Camus was disturbed by officialdom and decorum: the modern State and *l'esprit serieux*. He counsels that:

... the evil of our times can be defined by its effects rather than its causes. The evil is the State, whether a police state or a bureaucratic state. Its proliferation in all countries under the cover of the most varied ideological pretexts... [make] the State a mortal danger for everything that is best in each of us. From this point of view, contemporary political society, in any form, is despicable.²²²

Camus was clearly disgruntled with Empire and monologue; to this, Camus rearticulates the role and fidelity of citizenship, envisioning a means for a public to circumvent conventional boundaries of political authority – and procreate participatory and amiable

²¹⁹ Camus, “Banquet Speech.”

²²⁰ Camus, “The Wager of Our Generation,” 240-241.

²²¹ Ibid., 239 and 241.

²²² Camus, “Why Spain?,” in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, 78.

styles of politics. “The only hope resides in what is most difficult, which is to begin things anew, to build a society that will live within a shell of a society that has been condemned. Men must... create among themselves, both within and across borders, a new social contract which will unite men according to more reasonable principles.”²²³

Consonant with his conception of rebellion and dialogue, Camus’ cosmopolitan ‘new social contract’ is predicated by the Absurd. In his theoretical considerations, the Absurd is equivocal, there is no privilege in human existence; the world is “*without appeal*” – customs and borders are constructs, the contingent effects of history and situation.²²⁴ In the *Myth of Sisyphus* Camus professes that: “No code of ethics and no effort are justifiable *a priori* in the face of the cruel mathematics that command our condition.”²²⁵ Appropriately, as the comportment of a nation and their government is a matter of practise, there is no existential limit on the spaces within which a public may congregate and take action.

In contention that “A crisis that tears the world apart must be met on a world scale,” Camus is certain that modern “political thought” has become “antiquated.”²²⁶ Political ideals have become detached from their historical context: “The world has changed far more in the past fifty years than it did in the preceding two centuries. Thus we see nations quarrelling over borders, when we all know that borders have become abstractions.”²²⁷ Traditional forms of governance have been outmoded by international concerns and developments, such as superpowers, the global confrontation of entreated alliances, and the demands of peoples in colonial states for liberty and the protection of

²²³ Camus, “29 November 1946. A New Social Contract,” in *Between Hell and Reason*, 135-136.

²²⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 102.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

²²⁶ Camus, “27 November 1946. The World Goes Fast,” in *Between Hell and Reason*, 132 and 133.

²²⁷ Camus, “A New Social Contract,” 135.

human rights.²²⁸ Incongruously, governments motivated by archaic ideologies – in the defence of historical ends that never envisaged “the age of atomic bombs, sudden mutations, and nihilism,” and in spite of a mounting interdependency of nations – have persistently closed off common spaces and denied the communication of their public.²²⁹ Consonant with the equivocality of the Absurd, Camus proposes a cosmopolitan variant of civil society, where human agents can rebelliously circumvent “current governments” and directly constitute an “international democracy” – a dialogic community that aspires to the “mutual recognition of all parties.”²³⁰ According to Camus, “what we must fight is fear and silence, and with them the spiritual isolation they involve.”²³¹ As such, there is no telos in Camus’ cosmopolitan exemplar, “there are no higher or lower cultures... All we want to do is help a country to express itself. Locally. Nothing more.”²³² Much like the voluntary groups in *The Plague*, the participants in Camus’ ‘new social contract’ rebelliously and autonomously organise themselves, and engage fellow agents through dialogue and common action.

Withal, “Not only will there be no change in property relations anywhere in the world, but even the simplest problems – how to provide bread everyday to end the hunger... or to provide enough coal to keep our society running – will not be solved until we have peace.”²³³ Camus holds that international concord and reconciliation can be achieved, regardless of situation, through an enduring mutual communication of human agents:

²²⁸ Camus, “The World Goes Fast,” 132; and “A New Social Contract,” 135.

²²⁹ Camus, “The World Goes Fast,” 132.

²³⁰ Camus, “A New Social Contract,” 135; and “Toward Dialogue,” 138.

²³¹ Camus, “Toward Dialogue,” 138.

²³² Camus, “The New Mediterranean Culture,” in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, 190-191.

²³³ Camus, “A New Social Contract,” 134.

The movement towards peace of which I speak could start within nations as work communities, and internationally as intellectual communities; the former organised co-operatively, would help as many as possible with their material needs, while the latter would try to define the values by which this international community would live, and also plead its cause on every occasion.²³⁴

There is no pretence in the actions of Camus' international communities and their fellow-members, as the communities seek redress, not power. "It is not, of course, a matter of constructing a new ideology, but simply a matter of pursuing a certain style of life."²³⁵ In discourse and communal action, the task of Camus' international communities is to aver public freedom and secure the conditions and measures that will allow human agents to stand against terror and indignity.

Interestingly, the first concern of Camus' intellectual communities "could be the creation of an international code of justice whose first article would be the abolition of the death penalty, and a declaration of the principles necessary for a civilization in which men speak and listen to one another."²³⁶ Camus, from this, is refusing to concede any privilege to the State. As follows, because of the ambiguous and indeterminate character of the Absurd, dialogue amongst the citizens of Camus' international communities is indispensable: "He who does not know everything cannot kill everything."²³⁷ Camus finds it necessary to denounce the death penalty, as it represents the authority of the State; simply, the death penalty is the physical imposition of quietude – the binding exclusion of an agent from a human community. "Forbidding a man's execution would amount to proclaiming publicly that society and the State are not absolute values, that nothing

²³⁴ Camus, "A New Social Contract," 136.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Camus, *The Rebel*, 289.

authorizes them to legislate definitively or bring about the irreparable.”²³⁸ By lessening the violent force and authority available to the State, the abolition of the death penalty guarantees communal spaces by assuaging conditions that favour intersubjective human communication: “Such work would answer the needs of an age which finds itself with no philosophical justification for the thirst for brotherhood that today burns in... man.”²³⁹ An article against the absolute power of the State grants an agent the opportunity to “think more clearly” and space required to insert themselves into public deliberations. To Camus, “Living at least allows us to discover this and to add to the sum of our actions a little of the good that will make up in part for the evil we have added to the world. Such a right to live, which allows a chance to make amends, is the... right of all men, even the worst man.”²⁴⁰ Without the article, the autonomous and egalitarian character of the international communities, as Camus envisions them, is abrogated.

The international communities that Camus proposes, in their opposition to power and ascendancy by exhortation and dialogue, “leave... a chance for the future.”²⁴¹ Public participation in a discourse exceeds national borders and gives rise to a form of citizenship that is disclosed in action and communal engagement. Akin to liberty, cosmopolitan citizenship cannot be defined by abstract privileges, or procedures and mechanisms, but through the communication and solidarity of human agents – mutual engagement begets interaction. Acutely, in the context of cosmopolitan action, an agent can acquaint themselves with felicity, the ability to have impact in the world through direct participation in a communal discourse that is not regulated in domestic or private

²³⁸ Camus, “Reflections on the Guillotine,” in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, 228.

²³⁹ Camus, “A New Social Contract,” 136.

²⁴⁰ Camus, “Reflections on the Guillotine,” 221 and 229.

²⁴¹ Camus, “A New Social Contract,” 136; and “Toward Dialogue,” 138.

terms. Additionally, the mass plagues of humanity, the ignominy of servitude, expropriation, and terror – which are instigated by Empire and monologue – can be annulled in mutual deference and dialogue. Rebellious action and freedom benefit a common world where agents can congregate as equals; Camus concludes:

... for the moment, all I can ask in the midst of a murderous world is that we agree to reflect on murder and to make a choice... In the coming years an endless struggle will be waged across...continents, a struggle in which either violence or dialogue will prevail. Granted the former has a thousand times the chances of the latter. But I have always thought that if the man who places hope in the human condition is a fool, then he who gives up hope in the face of circumstances is a coward. Henceforth, the only honor will lie in obstinately holding to a formidable gamble: that words are stronger than bullets.²⁴²

Dialogue is boundless and vital to liberty.

²⁴² Albert Camus, "Toward Dialogue," in *Between Hell and Reason*, 140.

6 Remarks

If Albert Camus is correct, and rebellion and dialogue are styles of life, then it is efficacious to judge Camus by whether he had an impact on the world: if his influence extends beyond a limited audience. In his own lifetime, Camus was one of the most popular and acclaimed public intellectuals of the twentieth century. His compositions, specifically: *The Stranger*, *The Plague*, *The Rebel*, and *The Fall*, were best sellers at the time of their publication and remain amongst the top selling texts of modern publishing. In many instances, current pressings of his works are translated into a myriad of languages and are regularly presented as being ‘classics’. Moreover, as confirmation of his popular status, it should be reiterated that Camus – in recognition of his “authentic moral engagement” and devotion to “the great fundamental questions of life” – was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature; at present, he remains the second youngest to ever receive the Prize for literature.²⁴³

However, beyond such cursory and implied details – and in emphasis of what contemporary political and philosophic thought has inherited from his ideas – Camus was highly involved in political engagements that were directed at the defence of human rights: which, in subsequence, has provided cogency to much of his philosophic and political conceptions. Camus was a voluble advocate for those who campaign against inequality and political persecution, suchlike his supporting role in the founding of the Groupes de Liaison Internationale, a forbearer to Amnesty International. The invention of Nicola Chiaromonte, the Groupes worked to secure visas, apartments, and employment for refugees who had been tortured and physically repressed by Fascist and Stalinist

²⁴³ Anders Oesterling, “Presentation Speech,” Nobel Banquet, 10 December 1957.

regimes. In an enthusiastic contribution to their work, Camus composed the Groupes' manifesto – which is a literal expression of his notions of dialogue and cosmopolitan citizenship:

We are a group... who, in liaison with friends of America, Italy, Africa, and other countries, have decided to unite our efforts and our reflections in order to preserve some of our reasons for living.

These reasons are threatened today by many monstrous idols, but above all by totalitarian techniques...

The reasons are especially threatened by Stalinist ideology...

The reasons are threatened also, at a lesser degree it is true, by American worship of technology. This is not totalitarianism, because it accepts the individual's neutrality. But in its own way it is total because, through films, press and radio, it has known how to make itself indispensable psychologically and to make itself loved...²⁴⁴

In the manifesto, Camus recommended two forms of action that the groups could take against totalitarianism and the negation of his conception of human rights:

(1) Concrete international friendship expressed by mutual aid... especially reserved for victims of totalitarian tyranny. Each group's rule will be to try to help itself... We will not imitate European governments which cynically beg for American support without believing themselves obliged to gratitude. (2) The creation of a news agency where our differences will be confronted, and where we will try to gather accurate news to make the actions of American dissidents known in Europe, and to influence American opinion so that it can tell the difference between Soviet leaders and the Russian people themselves... This attempt, limited to these measures, is the only one that can justify us today, on the condition that we accept the necessarily nonconformist lifestyle that it will bring. It is not a question of further adding to the world's hatreds by choosing between two technolatries, even though we know that one of them represents the lesser evil...

The [Group] propose[s] to create communities of men beyond borders which are united by things other than the abstract ties of ideologies.²⁴⁵

In the conclusion to the manifesto, Camus confidently declared that: "We don't have to choose evil, even the lesser... We have only to give a form of protest of men against that

²⁴⁴ Isaac, 182; and, Lottman, 460.

²⁴⁵ Quoted in Todd, 250-251.

of which crushes them, with the single goal of holding on to what can be held, and with the simple hope of being on hand one day, workers in a necessary reconstruction.”²⁴⁶

Rival in importance to his work with the Groupes de Liaison Internationale, is Camus’ efforts to establish a workable peace in his native Algeria. Camus was distressed by the violence and terrorism that had seized Algeria in the 1950s, in what has been signified as being the ‘Algerian crisis’; he feared personally for the security of his own family and all innocent victims of violence. To end hostility, “the storm of death” that obscured the Algerian landscape, Camus resolved “to put his whole heart and all his suffering” into publicly emphasising “the urgency of the effort toward pacification that we must make.”²⁴⁷ In public speeches before combined Arab and French audiences, Camus – in spite of boisterous pronouncements of “Death to Camus!” or “Camus is on our side!” by some attendees – demanded that “the Arab movement and the French authorities... declare simultaneously that for the duration of the fighting the civilian population will on every occasion be respected and protected.”²⁴⁸ His hope: the peaceable preservation of innocent life and public spaces where the Algerian public could reconcile and initiate “a discussion” where a moderate and “joint effort [can be made] toward understanding.”²⁴⁹ To this end, Camus also supported the supplantation of French colonial administration in Algeria with a form of government that would be “based on institutions similar to those of the Swiss confederation, which make it possible for different nationalities to live in peace in the present state of affairs” and “would do justice to all parts of the population.”²⁵⁰ A confederal model would draw together “communities

²⁴⁶ Quoted in Isaac, 182.

²⁴⁷ Camus, “Letter to An Algerian Militant,” 128-129; and, “Appeal for a Civilian Truce in Algeria,” 131.

²⁴⁸ Todd, 336; and Camus, “Appeal for a Civilian Truce in Algeria,” 134.

²⁴⁹ Camus, “Appeal for a Civilian Truce in Algeria,” 137.

²⁵⁰ Camus, “Algeria 1958,” in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, 149.

with different personalities... not different territories,” as Algeria contained diverse populations that overlay the same territory, “here as in every domain, I believe only in differences and not uniformity... because differences are the roots without which the tree of liberty, the sap of creation and of civilization, dries up.”²⁵¹ Nonetheless, Camus’ sanguine ambitions for Algeria were never formally embraced and, at present, indiscriminate violence remains. In hindsight, Camus should be recognised for his efforts and prescience, as he had made clear that without peace “Algeria will be lost and the consequences will be dreadful for the Arabs and for the French.”²⁵²

After his death, Albert Camus’ political and philosophic thoughts have attained a reputation and standing never anticipated in his own lifetime. For example, his essay, “Reflections on the Guillotine,” which was formerly published as an addendum to Arthur Koestler’s treatise, *Reflections on Capital Punishment*, has become a required text – its arguments important talking points – for most any group that opposes the death penalty.²⁵³ Similarly, as confirmed in the Students for a Democratic Society’s (SDS) “Port Huron Statement,” Camus serves as an inspiration to many political radicals who have sought “A new left” in politics. Through expressions formerly employed by Camus, the SDS states that:

Human relationships should involve fraternity and honesty. Human interdependence is contemporary fact; human brotherhood must be willed, however, as a condition of future survival and as the most appropriate form of social relations. Personal links between man and man are needed, especially to go beyond the partial and fragmentary bonds of function that blind men as worker to worker, employer to employee, teacher to student, American to Russian.

²⁵¹ Camus, “Algeria 1958,” 149; and, Camus, “Appeal for a Civilian Truce in Algeria,” 136.

²⁵² Camus, “Algeria 1958,” 153. This sentence was followed by one of Camus’ most passionate declarations: “This is the last warning that a writer who for twenty years has been devoted to the service of Algeria feels he can voice before resuming his silence.”

²⁵³ See, the American Civil Liberty Union’s brief: Hugo Adam Bedau, “The Case Against the Death Penalty,” 31 December 1997, <<http://www.aclu.org/DeathPenalty/DeathPenalty.cfm?ID=9082&c=17>> (13 February 2005).

Loneliness, estrangement, isolation describe the vast distance
between man and man today...²⁵⁴

Within which, the Port Huron Statement also envisions the origination of a communal dialogue that allows “decision-making of basic social consequence be carried out by public groupings,” and political practises that bring “people out of isolation and into community...”²⁵⁵ Conclusively, and with anticipation, Camus’ political and philosophic ideas will continue to bear and endure.

²⁵⁴ “The Port Huron Statement,” n.d., <http://lists.village.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/SDS_Port_Huron.html> (13 February 2005). Also, see Tom Hayden’s autobiography, *Rebel: A Personal History of the 1960s*, and James Miller’s *Democracy Is in the Streets*.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

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