“Le Zonard déchaîné”

The delinquent figure in the early songs of Renaud
1968-1980

"AUTEUR PAR PLAISIR, COMPOSITEUR PAR NÉCESSITÉ, INTERPRÈTE PAR PROVOCATION"

COSA NOSTRA...

Le Zonard déchaîné

...MA TÊTE EST MALADE !

- TANT VA LA CRUCHE ALLO, QUI EST A L'APPAREIL ? -

RENAUD INVESTIT BOBINO

SANS HAINE, SANS ARMES, SANS VIOLENCE.

QUE FAIT LA POLICE ?

(ON S'DEMANDE !)

RENAUD et son orchestre de musiciens ont, hier soir 11 mars, pris possession du music-hall Bobino, et ce, pour un mois. Ce coup de force soigneusement et habilement préparé, devait être prévu de longue date puisqu'il s'est déroulé de main de maître, sans coups férir. Seul un pompier de service a été blessé par un éclat de rire dont il se remet fort bien.

Dans les milieux autorisés, on s'interroge sur les mesures à prendre. On s'attend de toutes façons à des représailles. Celles-ci seront d'autant plus malvenues que les occupants bénéficient d'un large soutien populaire et de l'appui d'une partie des médias. Notre reporter Jean CON a pu obtenir, après bien des efforts, une interview exclusive de RENAUD. Celui-ci lui avait, en effet, donné rendez-vous la veille dans un pressing de Barbès, puis, après lui avoir bandé les yeux, lui a fait faire trois fois le tour de Paris en mobylette. Ce n'est qu'après bien des détours, afin de s'assurer qu'ils n'étaient pas filés, qu'ils sont arrivés dans ce que notre reporter a cru reconnaître comme étant une loge de music-hall : « Il y avait par terre des peaux de banane. J'ai tout de suite fait le rapprochement avec Joséphine BAKER. Aucun doute possible, nous étions dans sa loge, à Bobino. RENAUD était assis dans un coin, près du lavabo, un rectangle noir sur les yeux, il fumait nerveusement un de ces merveilleux petits cigares que l'on offre volontiers. Il a très peu parlé; de toutes façons je serai bien incapable de vous répéter ce qu'il m'a dit, puisqu'en partant il m'a piqué mon mini-cassette. Ça je peux encore pardonner, mais le coup de m'avoir confisqué mon loden, non ! »

QUE FAIT LA POLICE ?

DE NOTRE ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL A TÉHÉRAN

DJAMEL COHN-BENDIT, LEADER DES ÉTUDIANTS ISLAMIQUES, NOUS DÉCLARE :

« NOUS RENDRONS LES OTAGES QUAND RENAUD LIBERERA BOBINO ! »

RENAUD "JE NE CEDERAI PAS !"

NOTRE PHOTO : 1974. Renaud, Flanqué d'un accordéoniste aux cheveux démesurément longs pour l'époque chante dans la rue. Attention ! le type au chapeau, sur la droite, déguisé en Mobylette est un producteur véreux qui va bientôt faire signer à Renaud son premier contrat.

DE SOURCE SURE

A PROPOS DES ORIGINES de RENAUD :

LINE RENAUD NOUS DÉCLARE

"Il n'y a jamais eu aucun lien de parenté entre lui et moi ou alors ça remonte à loin !"

MADELEINE RENAUD :

"Moi non plus, ou alors j'avais bu !"

LA RÉGIE RENAULT :

"On a ouvert une enquête. Rien n'est impossible"

LA MAMAN DE RENAUD :

"Mon fils à toujours été orphelin, il n'a pas d'origine"

RUBRIQUE SPORTS

(BONJOUR LA SUEUR)

ROUCON bat LUZIER (3-0)
CAEN bat CÉRÉS (2-1)
TOULOUSE-LAUTREC (Match Nul)
MICHEL-ANGE MOLITOR bat MOUTON-DUVERNET 1 PARTOUT

Ne mélangeons pas "LE SPORT ET LA POLITIQUE" déclare Guy DRUT à la Tribune du R.P.R.

Le Chili veut organiser le prochain mundial. L'Argentine boycotte. « Les droits de l'homme sont bafoués au Chili ! Nous n'irons pas ! », déclare le Général VIDELA. « Nous n'irons pas non plus ! », affirme le Nicaragua, « Nous n'avons pas de ballons ! »

UN VRAI SCANDALE !

Cette photo retrouvée dans les archives de l'U.N.I.C.E.F. parle d'elle-même. Voilà ou Renaud a passé les plus belles années de sa vie. Dans une bassine de Viandox négligeamment posée au beau milieu d'un terrain vague. A l'époque, l'association pour la sauvegarde des Terrains Vagues s'était indignée. Commentaire du Malheureux Bambin : "Demain je déménage. J'ai une combine pour habiter un Sac-Poubelle".

James Matthew Cannon B.A. (Hons)

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Contents

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Declaration of Authorship

I, James Matthew Cannon, declare that this thesis comprises only my original work, except where due acknowledgment has been made in the text to all other materials used. This thesis does not exceed 30,000 words in length, exclusive of bibliographies, footnotes and appendices.

Signature: ..... Date: .....

Abstract

This thesis seeks to understand the significance of the delinquent figure in the early songs of Renaud. Renaud conceived this figure during May 1968, when the radical, predominantly middle-class student movement to which he belonged found an unlikely ally in the *blousons noirs*, young delinquents from the suburban housing estates of outer Paris. The violence and visceral antiauthoritarianism of the *blousons noirs* appealed to students whose exclusion from traditional, authoritarian working-class institutions precipitated their quest for a revolutionary identity. The contempt which both the French Government and Communist Party expressed towards the "underworld" incarnated by the *blousons noirs* made the latter seem even more alluring to many student revolutionaries. During the first half of the 1970s, Renaud immersed himself in the marginal culture of a group of delinquents whom he befriended at a Latin Quarter bar. Here he also rediscovered the old-fashioned genre of *chanson réaliste* (realist song) which portrayed the delinquents of a bygone era, that of the Belle Epoque and interwar years. After reviving the realist classics and writing a number of original songs in a similar style, Renaud reinvented the realist genre during the second half of the 1970s by singing about *zonards* (latter-day equivalents of the *blousons noirs*) in their own language. He established a place for these *zonards* in the realm of popular culture, liberating them from stereotypical images disseminated by the media and unleashing them, figuratively, upon bourgeois audiences. This dual aspect of Renaud's oeuvre was encapsulated in a concert program which he wrote to accompany his recital at the Bobino music hall in March 1980, a whimsical pastiche of the satirical newspaper *Le Canard enchaîné* entitled "Le Zonard déchaîné" ("The Unchained Delinquent"). The delinquent figure in Renaud's songs represented both a topical cause célèbre and a way of preserving the heritage of May 1968.

for Dr. George Christie

Despairing of ever taking part in a revolution which we could call our own, we spoke about our quest for action in delinquent mode.

Serge July, quoted by Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Génération: 2. Les Années de poudre*

renaud n.m. 1. Colère (anger) . . . Être à renaud, être en colère (to be angry). Mettre à renaud ou en renaud, irriter (to irritate). Monter au renaud, se mettre en colère (to get angry) . . . 2. Esclandre, tapage (scene, scandal) . . . Chercher du renaud, chercher querelle (to pick a quarrel).

ÉTYM. *déverbal de* renauder. - *1. vers 1673* [*Esnault*]. *Être à renaud, 1885* [*Chautard*]. *Mettre à renaud, 1844* [*Dict. complet*]*; mettre en renaud, 1886* [*Esnault*]. - *2. 1798* [*bandits d'Orgères*]. *Chercher du renaud, 1883, Macé* [*Esnault*].

Jean-Paul Colin, Jean-Pierre Mével, Christian Leclère, *Dictionnaire de l'argot*

Introduction

Over the past twenty-five years, French singer-songwriter Renaud has emerged as his country's leading exponent of *chanson sociale*, a rich and diverse tradition of popular song which has helped to rally, educate and galvanise dispossessed groups in French society since the first half of the nineteenth century. Renaud became well-known in the second half of the 1970s by singing about *zonards* (delinquent youths) from the housing estates of suburban Paris. Since then, he has tackled a range of themes, from military service and heroin addiction to the destruction of the environment and capitalist imperialism in the Third World. His repertoire includes love songs, *chansons idiotes* (a comical, risqué genre), traditional *chansons réalistes* from the Belle Epoque and interwar years, and songs by his idol, Georges Brassens.[1] He has produced a series of charmingly naive illustrations to accompany his own songs. He has also performed as an actor, most notably in the role of Etienne Lantier, in Claude Berry's 1993 screen adaptation of Zola's *Germinal*. He has written a children's book entitled *La Petite vague qui avait le mal de mer* (1989) as well as a regular column for the satirical, left-wing weekly, *Charlie-Hebdo*. An outspoken supporter of numerous minority causes, he recently joined the Régions et Peuples Solidaires list led by the Corsican autonomist Max Simeoni at the 1994 European elections.

Renaud is known primarily for the provocative anarchism and linguistic inventiveness which characterise his songwriting. He has roused the ire of politicians on both the Left and the Right. Some of his songs have been banned outright; others have simply been given little or no airplay. However, he has achieved spectacular commercial and critical success. By 1981, his album sales generated 45% of Polydor's annual profits.[2] His lyrics are studied in university French departments all over the world and were extensively used as a primary source by the authors of the

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1 The genre of *chanson idiote* was launched by Dranem in the Parisian music-halls of the early twentieth century and transformed into an art form by Boby Lapointe in the 1950s and 1960s. Its chief characteristics are word play and sexual innuendo. Realist songs and Georges Brassens are discussed later in this thesis.

2 Thierry Séchan, *Le Roman de Renaud*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1989, p. 84

Dictionnaire de l'argot, published by Larousse in 1990.[3] His songs have been turned into *bandes dessinées* (comic books) by the leading exponents of the genre.[4] Thirty-one per cent of respondents to a Sofres-*Le Nouvel observateur* survey conducted among 16 to 22 year-olds during the student demonstrations of December 1986 chose Renaud from a list of public personalities as their preferred role model.[5] Courted by the French Socialist Party and feted by the former Minister for Culture Jack Lang, Renaud has nonetheless been reviled by a number of left as well as right-wing intellectuals, for whom his success exemplifies the decline of high culture and the dumbing down of French youth.[6]

This thesis seeks to understand the significance of the delinquent figure in Renaud's early songs, from the heady days of May 1968 to his consecration as a popular star at the end of the 1970s. These songs were shaped by the confluence of various factors, including Renaud's family background, his experiences as a student revolutionary in May 1968, the marginal social circles which he frequented during the early 1970s and his fortuitous exposure to a range of popular music styles. They offer a detailed and frequently controversial account of contemporary issues while providing a fascinating insight into the itinerary of a former *soixante-huitard* (participant in the May 1968 movement).

Renaud's description of himself as a "writer for pleasure, composer by necessity, singer by provocation," while intentionally facetious, contains an element of truth.[7] Like the working-class *chansonniers* (social songwriters) of the nineteenth century, he has used popular song primarily as a vehicle to convey verbal messages. My analysis therefore emphasises the thematic and linguistic content of Renaud's lyrics. I discuss other aspects of his art, such as musical and performance styles, when these add to the thematic significance of the songs. I also discuss, where possible, public reactions to Renaud's songs; however, as Peter Hawkins rightly states, "a

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3 Jean-Paul Colin, Jean-Pierre Mével and Christian Leclère, *Dictionnaire de l'argot*, Librairie Larousse, Paris, 1990

4 See for example Frank Margerin et al., *La Bande à Renaud*, Editions Delcourt, Paris, 1986

5 *Le Nouvel observateur*, 1152, 5-11 December, 1986, p. 26

6 His critics include the left-wing philosopher Alain Finkielkraut and the right-wing editorialist Louis Pauwels.

7 "Auteur par plaisir, compositeur par nécessité, interprète par provocation" Renaud, "Le Zonard déchaîné," concert program, 1980

thoroughgoing sociological study of the reception of *chanson* by different milieux . . . would be enormously expensive in terms of resources and man-hours, and well beyond the means of the individual researcher."[8]

Renaud's lyrics have been published in several collections. The first collection, now out of print, was published by Gérard Lebovici at Les Editions Champs Libre in 1980, under the title *Sans zikmu*. Les Editions du Seuil published a new collection in 1986 entitled *Mistral gagnant: Chansons et dessins*, which they incorporated two years later into an expanded edition, *Le Temps des noyaux, suivi de Mistral gagnant: Chansons et dessins*. The most recent collection was published by Livre de Poche in 1993 under the title *Dès que le chant soufflera*. The lyrics reproduced in this thesis are from *Le Temps des noyaux*; the translations are my own. I have tried where possible to capture the general flavour of Renaud's style, although many of his songs contain cultural references, rhymes and word games which cannot be easily rendered in English. I have provided explanatory notes where necessary.

Most of the details concerning Renaud's personal life are drawn from three authorised biographies by Jacques Erwan (1982), Régis Lefèvre (1985) and Renaud's older brother Thierry Séchan (1989), and from interviews with Renaud conducted by Laurent Boyer for M6 television in 1991 and by myself in February 1992. There has been little scholarly work published on Renaud. Heinrichs Volkhard has written a short textual analysis of one song, *Les Charognards*, and Christian Schmitt has explored the social dimensions of Renaud's songwriting through a linguistic study of another song, *Dans mon HLM*. French linguist and popular song theorist Louis-Jean Calvet has written a number of articles on Renaud's contribution to the spoken French idiom. A great deal has also been written about Renaud in the French musical press.[9] Quotations from French

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8 Peter Hawkins, "How Do You Write about *Chanson*?" *French Cultural Studies*, vol. 4, 1, no. 10, February 1993, p. 79

9 When I interviewed Renaud in 1992, he kindly allowed me to browse through several volumes of press clippings which he had amassed over the years. Many of the articles seemed to rehash, in a somewhat sensationalist manner, the same themes: Renaud's use of *verlan* (a type of backwards slang discussed later in this thesis) his social origins and his attitude towards François Mitterrand. Renaud also had in his possession three *maîtrise* (honours) theses which I perused with interest but which covered different ground to my own study. One discussed how Renaud's songs could be used in the French language classroom, one offered a semiotic analysis of his lyrics, music and performance style, while the other was a linguistic comparison of the slang used by Renaud and by

secondary sources are translated into English in the main body of this thesis and reproduced in their original form in the footnotes.

his predecessor Aristide Bruant. Another technical thesis, entitled Etude de stylistique: les chansons de Renaud, was submitted by Nicole Braekman at the Université Libre de Bruxelles in 1985.

Chapter 1

May 1968: "La pègre, on en est"[10]

By the time the first barricades appeared in the Latin Quarter on 3 May 1968, Renaud was a precociously militant fifteen year-old. Born Renaud Pierre Manuel Séchan on 11 May 1952, along with his twin brother, he grew up in a large family at the Porte d'Orléans, on the southern edge of central Paris. His mother belonged to a working-class family from the mining region of northern France and worked in a factory until she married. His father belonged to a cultivated, if financially modest, Protestant family from the Montpellier region and was a translator, teacher and successful author. Despite their different backgrounds, Renaud's parents were both left-wing and shared a strong sense of social justice. He later recalled: "As far back as I can remember, my parents always discussed politics at home, were always left-wing and were constantly exasperated by the news of the world."[11]

Renaud was particularly attached to his maternal grandfather, who had started work as a coal miner after leaving school at the age of thirteen. A self-educated, card-carrying communist, Renaud's grandfather visited the Soviet Union during the 1930s, a disillusioning experience which led him to leave the party upon his return. He also worked in a Parisian factory and was active in the anarcho-syndicalist movement. Renaud fondly remembered his grandfather in the song *Oscar* (1981):

L'avait fait 36 le Front populaire
Pi deux ou trois guerres pi Mai 68
Il avait la haine pour les militaires
J'te raconte même pas c'qu'y pensait des flics
Il était marxiste tendance Pif le chien
Syndiqué à mort inscrit au parti
Nous traitait d'fainéants moi et mes frangins
Parc'qu'on était anars tendance patchouli

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10 "We're part of the underworld" The opening line of Dominique Grange's song *La Pègre* (May 1968) expressed a position taken up by many *soixante-huitards*.

11 "Aussi loin que je me souvienne, mes parents ont toujours parlé politique à la maison, ont toujours été de gauche, toujours été excédés par les infos" *Renaud en liberté*, interview with Laurent Boyer for M6, Metropole Television, 1991

Il était balaise fort comme un grand frère
Les épaules plus larges que sa tête de lit
Moi qui suis musclé comme une serpillière
Ben de c'côté-là j'tiens pas beaucoup d'lui

L'avait sur l'bras gauche un super tatouage
Avec un croissant d'lune et une fleur coupée
La couleur s'était barrée avec l'âge
Il avait l'bleu pâle d'un jean délavé
Quand j'allais chez lui des fois d'temps en temps
J'lui roulais ses clopes avec son tabac gris
Pi j'restais des heures avec des yeux tout grands
A l'écouter m'baratiner sa vie

_____

He'd fought in 36, the Popular Front
Then two or three wars and May 68
He hated military types
Don't even ask what he thought about the cops
He was a Marxist from the Groucho school
A die-hard unionist and a party member
He used to call me and my brothers lazybones
'Cause we were anarchists from the patchouli school
He was built like an ox, strong like a big brother
His shoulders were broader than his bedhead
I'm a puny runt
In that respect at least I don't resemble him much

He had a great tattoo on his left arm
With a crescent moon and a cut flower
The colour had faded with age
It was pale blue, like a pair of stone-washed jeans
Now and then, when I went to his place
I'd roll his smokes for him with his shag
And I'd spend hours listening wide-eyed
To the stories he told me about his life

Renaud gained his first direct experience of political activism within the ranks of the anti-war and anti-nuclear movements of the mid-1960s. In 1965, he joined the Comités Vietnam de Base, organised in response to the first American bombings in Vietnam. In 1966, he took part in his first protest march with the Mouvement Contre l'Armement Atomique. In September 1967, he enrolled at the Lycée Michel Montaigne, where he helped to establish a Comité Vietnam and one of the many Comités d'Action Lycéen (CAL) which began to proliferate throughout Paris at the end of that year. He brawled with right-wing students from school and

from the neighbouring Law Faculty of the Sorbonne. In the months leading up to May 1968, he acquainted himself with the authors of nineteenth-century revolutionary theory, including Bakunin, Stirner, Proudhon and Marx. Under the influence of charismatic Maoist friends, he read *The Little Red Book* and briefly joined the Parti Communiste Marxiste-Léniniste Français (PCMLF) as well as the Amitiés Franco-Chinoises. He participated in factory expeditions organised by these Maoist formations, whose attempts to provide workers with material and moral support were generally greeted with overt contempt. Jacques Erwan writes that Renaud himself soon became fed up with the Maoists' "extreme intellectualism" and "demagogic promotion of worker power."[12] In May 1968, Renaud realigned himself with the anarchists.

Renaud's involvement in the May events stemmed initially from a simple desire to express his solidarity with the students who had been beaten up by CRS riot police. On 11 May 1968, he spent his sixteenth birthday fighting under the black flag on the barricades of the Latin Quarter. After students occupied the Sorbonne two days later, he made himself useful by sweeping up the university courtyard. He sold revolutionary newspapers such as *Action* and *L'Enragé* by day and camped inside the university grounds by night. He joined the Comité Révolutionnaire d'Agitation Culturelle (CRAC) before forming a splinter group with two friends which they baptised the Groupe Gavroche Révolutionnaire.[13]

The diminutive hero of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862) was an apt role model for the young *soixante-huitards*. Gavroche dies a martyr's death while fighting on the barricades of a popular insurrection. As an independent street urchin with tenuous family ties, he personifies something of the *soixante-huitards*' quest to liberate themselves from their parents' generation. In his capacity as a homeless child who roams from the outskirts of Paris through the city's inner districts, imposing his mark in a rowdy, humorous and festive manner, he asserts his "right to the city," to borrow the title of Henri Lefebvre's influential book, in a way replicated by the *soixante-huitards* during their occupation of the Sorbonne and the

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12 "Intellectualisme outrancier . . . ouvriérisme démagogique" Jacques Erwan, *Renaud*, Seghers, Paris, 1982, p. 17

13 Ibid., pp. 15-18; *Renaud en liberté*

Odéon Theatre, their protest marches down the Champs-Elysées and the carnivalesque euphoria which characterised their revolt.[14] Most importantly, Gavroche sings throughout his adventures:

> Who had written these verses which Gavroche sang as he walked along, and all the other songs which he happily chanted from time to time? Who knows? Himself, perhaps? Gavroche knew all the popular refrains around and combined them with his own warbling.[15]

Like Gavroche, Renaud turned to popular song to shape his experience of the world. He had inherited from his father a passion for the anarchistic songs of Georges Brassens and set his first lyrics, which he wrote at the age of nine or ten, to music by "Tonton Georges." Brassens's highly literary style belied his identification with, and celebration of, all manner of social outcasts. Although he adopted a somewhat detached position in relation to the May events, his influence on Renaud was greater than that of any other songwriter.[16] Renaud was also a fan of Johnny Hallyday, the first singer to Frenchify rock and roll in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Hallyday's music became a catalyst for the emergence of French youth as a distinct social class in the years leading up to the explosive events of May 1968. Renaud was further inspired by contemporary protest singers who revived the folk tradition of Depression-era America to attack the Vietnam War, racism, consumerism and the paternalistic, authoritarian aspects of post-war capitalist society. Hugues Aufray and Graeme Allwright introduced French audiences to *le protest-song* in the mid-1960s by translating or adapting Bob Dylan's songs into French. The simplicity of American-style folk music meant that it could be reproduced by anyone who had learnt a handful of chords on an acoustic guitar. Although the genre was rapidly commercialised, it enabled an entire generation of teenagers like Renaud to express themselves directly through song. Finally, students in May 1968

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14 Henri Lefebvre, *Le Droit à la ville*, Editions Anthropos, Paris, 1968. A Marxist sociologist and lecturer at Nanterre, Lefebvre sympathised with the *soixante-huitards*, despite being associated by the latter with the university system which they were attempting to overthrow.

15 "De qui était ce couplet qui lui servait à ponctuer sa marche, et toutes les autres chansons que, dans l'occasion, il chantait volontiers? nous l'ignorons. Qui sait? de lui peut-être. Gavroche d'ailleurs était au courant de tout le fredonnement populaire en circulation, et il y mêlait son propre gazouillement" Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris, 1951, p. 1096

16 Renaud is seen by many as Brassens's natural heir. In 1995, he released an acclaimed album entitled *Renaud chante Brassens*. His musicians played his idol's old guitar for the recording, which underlined the continuity between the two singer-songwriters.

resurrected a home-grown tradition of protest song. They adapted the lyrics of revolutionary classics like *Ça ira* and *La Carmagnole* to reflect contemporary events and defiantly chanted the hymn of the working-class movement, *L'Internationale*, on numerous occasions. Written by Eugène Pottier in June 1871 in response to the brutal repression of the Paris Commune and set to music by Pierre Degeyter seventeen years later, *L'Internationale* resonated deeply with the students' aspirations. It announced in heroic, messianic tones the imminent collapse of the bourgeois social order and the birth of an international brotherhood of workers united by the core ideals of cooperation and self-determination:

Debout les damnés de la terre
Debout les forçats de la faim
La raison tonne en son cratère
C'est l'éruption de la fin
Du passé faisons table rase
Foules, esclaves, debout, debout
Le monde va changer de base
Nous ne sommes rien, soyons tout

C'est la lutte finale
Groupons-nous, et demain
L'Internationale
Sera le genre humain

_____

Arise, ye pris'ners of starvation
Arise, ye wretched of the earth
For Justice thunders condemnation
A better world's in birth
No more tradition's chains shall bind us
Arise ye slaves no more in thrall
The earth shall rise on new foundations
We have been naught, we shall be all

'Tis the final conflict
Let each stand in their place
The International Union
Shall be the human race[17]

Renaud was inspired to write his first protest song, *Crève salope!* after meeting Evariste, a university lecturer turned songwriter and the first artist to record under the auspices of the CRAC. Accompanying himself on

[17] Translation by Charles H. Kerr

guitar, Renaud performed the song for an audience gathered in one of the Sorbonne's lecture theatres. *Crève salope!* is a ferocious parable of the May events which follows the itinerary of a young rebel as he confronts a series of emblematic authority figures, starting with his father:

> Je v'nais de manifester au Quartier.
> J'arrive chez moi fatigué, épuisé,
> mon père me dit: Bonsoir fiston, comment qu'ça va?
> J'ui réponds: Ta gueule sale con, ça te regarde pas!
> et j'ui ai dit: Crève salope!
> et j'ui ai dit: Crève charogne!
> et j'ui ai dit: Crève poubelle!
> VLAN! une beigne!
>
> _____
>
> I'd just been demonstrating in the Latin Quarter.
> I arrived home totally exhausted,
> my father says, "Good evening junior, and how are we?"
> I go, "Shut your face, jerk, and mind your own business!"
> And I said, "Die, bastard!"
> And I said, "Die, arsehole!"
> And I said, "Die, shithead!"
> WHAM! Biffed!

The terms "charogne," which literally means "carrion," and "poubelle," which literally translates as "rubbish bin," constitute a forceful attack on paternal authority with their associations of putrefaction and obsolescence. On a personal level, these lines could be read as a challenge to Renaud's own father who, despite having instilled in his son a healthy dose of antiauthoritarianism, refused during this period to allow him to sit at the family table because of his long hair. On a broader level, they give credence to the theory that powerful Oedipal forces were at play during the May events.[18] The sudden eruption of paternal violence in the last line can be associated with the punitive attitude of the CRS and of the Gaullist regime as a whole.

The narrator – and by extension French youth – appears initially to be simply spoiling for a fight, but the fourth verse suggests that his virulence stems in part from feelings of abandonment and despair. He explains that after being expelled from school:

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18 Keith Reader, *The May Events in France: Reproductions and Interpretations*, MacMillan, Basingstoke, 1993, pp. 31-32

Je m'suis r'trouvé dans la rue, abandonné,
j'étais complètement perdu, désespéré,
un flic me voit et me dit: Qu'est-c'tu fous ici?
à l'heure qu'il est tu devrais être au lycée,
et j'ui ai dit: Crève salope!
et j'ui ai dit: Crève charogne!
et j'ui ai dit: Crève fumier!
VLAN! bouclé!

_____

I ended up in the street, abandoned
Totally lost and in despair,
A cop saw me and said, "What the hell are you doing here?
You should be in school at this hour,"
And I said "Die, bastard!"
And I said "Die, arsehole!"
And I said "Die, shithead!"
BANG! locked up!

The crescendo leading up to the onomatopoetic "vlan!" in each verse is replicated in the song's narrative structure, as the authorities take ever more desperate measures to contain the narrator's insolence. The song ends with a hyperbolical flourish:

Je m'suis r'trouvé enfermé à la Santé,
puis j'ai été condamné à être guillotiné;
le jour d'mon exécution j'ai eu droit au cur'ton,
y m'dit: Repentez-vous mon frère dans une dernière prière,
et j'ui ai dit: Crève salope!
et j'ui ai dit: Crève charogne!
et j'ui ai dit: Crève fumier!
VLAN! y z'ont tranché!

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I ended up in the nick,
And was sentenced to death by guillotine;
On the day of my execution I had the right to a priestling,
He said, "Repent my son with a final prayer,"
And I said, "Die, bastard!"
And I said, "Die arsehole!"
And I said, "Die, shithead!"
"ZING!" headless!

One of the most striking features of *Crève salope!* is the narrator's abusive tone. He cuts quite a different figure from the heroes of nineteenth-

century revolutionary songs, who were frequently portrayed as noble, industrious and law-abiding citizens of the Republic. Working-class *chansonniers* like Pottier were anxious to counteract what Louis Chevalier has described as the persistent confusion between "the labouring classes and the dangerous classes" – that is, between workers and criminals – which existed in public consciousness during the first half of the nineteenth century and which was still being cynically exploited by the *Versaillais* forces at the time of the Commune.[19] Renaud's protagonist, on the contrary, has nothing to prove. He speaks and acts like a delinquent, even though he shares the fate of many a revolutionary hero. It could be argued that this merely reflected a juvenile desire on Renaud's part to be provocative. However, *Crève salope!* also points to the significant struggle which the *soixante-huitards* faced in attempting to establish their own revolutionary identity. Their idolisation of the working class was rarely reciprocated. On the contrary, Renaud's earlier experience with his Maoist friends announced the hostile attitude which students would encounter among certain sections of the working class during May 1968. The old guard of the more authoritarian working-class institutions such as the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) had supported De Gaulle during the Resistance and, despite their revolutionary heritage, were more inclined to legal negotiations with the government than to revolutionary acts. They tended to dismiss the student radicals as reckless thrill-seekers and bourgeois "fils à papa" ("daddy's boys"). The signature of the Grenelle Agreements by government, employer and union representatives on 27 May 1968 highlighted the division between working-class leaders primarily interested in economic gains and students fighting against the consumerist values of the capitalist system.[20]

The *soixante-huitards* found a more receptive audience among younger workers and in particular among the *blousons noirs*, delinquent youths with a propensity for violence who came from the *grands ensembles* (housing

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19 Louis Chevalier, *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle* [1958], Hachette, Paris, 1984

20 The Grenelle agreements, while guaranteeing substantial wage increases and shorter working hours, did little to encourage a more democratic system of industrial relations or greater participation of workers in management practices. Although they were initially rejected by rank and file strikers and were followed in June by extraordinarily violent clashes between police and workers at factories such as Renault-Flins and Peugeot-Sochaux, they foreshadowed the withdrawal of working-class involvement in the May movement.

estates) of suburban Paris.[21] While the *blousons noirs* did not possess the same level of education or political awareness as the predominantly middle-class *soixante-huitards*, they experienced even more acutely than their student allies a sense of having been relegated to the margins of society. The *grands ensembles* of the Parisian suburbs or *banlieue* – which literally translates as "a place of banishment" – were originally designed as a temporary solution to the city's chronic housing shortage, exacerbated by the post-war baby boom. Although they provided a reasonable standard of physical comfort and hygiene, many were poorly linked to the workplace and to the city's central districts. They were generally built in great haste and with cheap materials, and lacked basic community facilities. The absence of traditional social structures and of a unifying culture in the *grands ensembles* led many of their teenage inhabitants to seek refuge in delinquent gangs.

The *soixante-huitards*, for their part, strongly identified with the *blousons noirs*. The Nanterre campus where the May movement began was located in the city's industrial west, near a housing estate of *habitations à loyer modéré* or *HLM* (low-rent apartment blocks) and a *bidonville* (shanty town). Henri Lefebvre's book *La Proclamation de la Commune* (1965), which interpreted the Commune of 1871 as the re-appropriation of central Paris by those who had been pushed out to the city's periphery, seems to have struck a chord among his students at Nanterre.[22] The symbolic significance of urban space and the sociological consequences of town planning became important themes of discussion, particularly among architecture students from the Ecole des Beaux Arts. They argued that the construction of *grands ensembles* primarily served the class interests of professional architects and the bourgeoisie:

> We believe that the architect's objective function in capitalist society is to design the built environment of an oppressive structure. In our opinion, the expression "watchdog of the bourgeoisie" is not a hollow one. Those architects who have designed so-called "social" housing, who have given contracts to the cheapest developer, who reduce the surface area of housing developments to bring down the ceiling cost, those town planners who have reinforced social segregation

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21 The term *blouson noir* was used metonymically to refer to youths who wore a type of black biker jacket.

22 Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, translated and edited by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, Blackwell, Oxford, 1996, p. 18

> through zoning know this. As do secondary school students in their school-barracks and patients in hospital-prisons.[23]

The belief that educational institutions and suburban housing estates were symbols of the same oppressive system was reinforced when students and *blousons noirs* joined forces in some of the most spectacular riots of May 1968. This gave the French government and the PCF a welcome opportunity to discredit the May movement by claiming that it had been coopted by criminal elements. After a group of protesters set fire to the Paris Stock Exchange during the night of 24 May, the Minister of the Interior, Christian Fouchet, notoriously lashed out at what he described as "la pègre," an "underworld from the slummiest parts of Paris, whose rage is real and which is hiding behind the students." Fouchet further invited Paris to "throw up this underworld which dishonours the city."[24] His outburst elicited counter-accusations that the government itself had hired agitators to infiltrate and compromise the May movement. The Coordination des Comités d'Action at the Sorbonne turned Fouchet's accusation around by insisting that "the real underworld is that pack of plutocrats who are holding onto power against the will of the people."[25] For the most part, however, Fouchet inadvertently reinforced the students' identification with the low-life represented by the *blousons noirs*. One group of committees declared: "Workers, clerks, teachers, students, farmers, we all belong to what the government insultingly refers to as the underworld."[26]

The criminal milieu offered the *soixante-huitards* an alternative model of revolt; however, their appropriation of a delinquent identity did not mean that they lost interest in the working-class cause and its revolutionary mythology. Instead, it put them in the position of supporting both "the

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23 "Nous pensons que le rôle objectif de l'architecte dans la société capitaliste est de fixer le cadre bâti d'une structure oppressive. Pour nous, l'expression 'le chien de garde de la bourgeoisie' n'est pas un vain mot. Ceux des architectes qui ont fait du logement dit 'social,' qui ont passé les marchés à l'entrepreneur le moins coûteux, qui réduisent la surface des habitats pour diminuer le prix plafond, ceux parmi les urbanistes qui en zonifiant ont renforcé la ségrégation sociale le savent. Comme le savent les lycéens dans leurs lycées-casernes, les malades dans les hôpitaux-prisons" Reproduced by Alain Schnapp and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Journal de la Commune étudiante: Textes et documents, novembre 1967-juin 1968*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1969, pp. 806-807

24 "Pègre qui sort des bas-fonds de Paris et qui est véritablement enragée, dissimulée derrière les étudiants . . . vomir cette pègre qui la déshonore" Quoted by Patrick Hamon and Hervé Rotman, *Génération: 1. Les Années de rêve*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1987, p. 550

25 "La pègre c'est ce ramassis de privilégiés qui se cramponnent au pouvoir contre la volonté populaire" Schnapp and Vidal-Naquet, *Journal de la Commune étudiante*, p. 287

26 "Ouvriers, employés, professeurs, étudiants, paysans, nous appartenons tous à ce que le gouvernement ose appeler la pègre" Ibid., p. 289

labouring classes and the dangerous classes" which working-class activists had been at pains to differentiate since the second half of the nineteenth century. The *soixante-huitards*' position nonetheless had a theoretical basis in the work of Mikhail Bakunin, the nineteenth-century Russian anarchist fascinated by the "poetry of destruction." According to Peter Marshall, Bakunin became "the most influential thinker during the resurgence of anarchism in the sixties and seventies."[27] Unlike Marx, who despised the lumpenproletariat, Bakunin believed that social change must proceed "from the bottom up, from the circumference to the centre": "I have in mind . . . the 'riffraff,' that 'rabble' almost unpolluted by bourgeois civilisation, which carries in its inner being and in its aspirations, in all the necessities and miseries of its collective life, all the seeds of the socialism of the future."[28]

Bakunin's theories were echoed in the 1950s and 1960s by the Internationale Situationniste. The Situationists adhered to the Marxist belief in the revolutionary vocation of the proletariat; at the same time, they were interested in the subversive potential of social groups at the fringes of the working class. The *blousons noirs*, whose violent exploits during the period 1959-1963 fed a nascent anxiety in French society about its readiness to accommodate the first generation of "baby boomers" to reach maturity, attracted the attention of the Situationist Raoul Vaneigem:

> Their puerile will to power has often managed to preserve almost intact their will to live . . . If the playful violence inherent in gangs of young delinquents were to stop being expended in often ridiculous and "spectacular" gestures, and were instead to turn into the poetry of rebellion, then this would no doubt cause a chain reaction, a substantial shock wave. Most people are, in fact, acutely aware of their own desire to live authentically and reject restrictions and specific social roles. All it needs is a spark and an appropriate strategy. If the *blousons noirs* ever manage to achieve a revolutionary consciousness, by simply discovering what they are, and demanding to be more than this, they will in all probability determine where the epicentre of the future revolution will be. To federate their gangs would be the one action which would both reveal this consciousness and also allow it to express itself.[29]

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27 Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*, Fontana Press, London, 1993, p. 265

28 Quoted by Marshall, ibid., pp. 282 and 304

29 "Leur volonté de puissance puérile a souvent su sauvegarder une volonté de vivre quasi intacte . . . Si la violence inhérente aux groupes de J.V. [jeunes voyous] cessait de se dépenser en attentats spectaculaires et souvent dérisoires pour atteindre à la poésie des émeutes, le jeu devenant insurrectionnel provoquerait sans doute une réaction en chaîne, une onde de choc qualitative. La

The Situationists had a stronger influence on the cultural production of May 1968 than any other group. Renaud's first song bears a striking resemblance to a tract published in Bordeaux in April 1968 by the Situationist-inspired Comité de Salut Public des Vandalistes:

> La lutte contre l'aliénation se doit de donner aux mots leur sens réel ainsi que de leur rendre leur force initiale:
>
> | *aussi ne dites plus:* | *mais dites: . . .* |
> | --- | --- |
> | . . . . . | . . . . . |
> | Monsieur le professeur | crève salope! |
> | bonsoir, papa | crève salope! |
> | pardon, m'sieur l'agent | crève salope! |
> | merci, docteur | crève salope![30] |

Crève salope! is also noteworthy for the way in which it was popularised. Its simple structure and repetitive elements made it easy to learn. A number of Renaud's friends with rudimentary guitar skills copied down the words and presented the song to school audiences in different parts of Paris. By lending itself to this type of shared experience and by creating an impact outside the world of show business, *Crève salope!* exemplified the ideals of the Situationists, on the one hand, who denounced the alienating, mass-produced culture of what Guy Debord described as "la société du spectacle" ("the entertainment society"), and, on the other hand, of contemporary folk singers who, like their nineteenth-century working-class predecessors, believed that popular song was most likely to mobilise revolutionary sentiments if performed collectively and if it remained independent of the market forces of the entertainment industry.[31]

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plupart des gens sont en effet sensibilisés au désir de vivre authentiquement, au refus des contraintes et des rôles. Il suffit d'une étincelle, et d'une tactique adéquate. Si les blousons noirs arrivent jamais à une conscience révolutionnaire par la simple analyse de ce qu'ils sont déjà et par la simple exigence d'être plus, ils détermineront vraisemblablement l'épicentre du renversement de perspective. Fédérer leurs groupes serait l'acte qui, à la fois, manifesterait cette conscience et la permettrait" Raoul Vaneigem, *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*, Gallimard, Paris, 1967, pp. 251-252. I owe this reference and translation to Brian Rigby, *Popular Culture in Modern France: A Study of Cultural Discourse*, Routledge, London and New York, 1991, pp. 166-167. However, for clarity's sake, I have replaced "teddy boys" with the "blouson noirs" of the original.

30 "The struggle against alienation must give words their real meaning and return to them their original power" Reproduced by René Viénet, *Enragés et situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations*, Gallimard, Paris, 1968, pp. 291-292

31 Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle*, Editions Buchet-Chastel, Paris, 1967

Renaud wrote a second set of song lyrics in May 1968 entitled *C.A.L en bourse*, which bore witness to the violent methods used by the CRS riot police:

La grenade qu'un CRS m'a envoyée
L'autre soir au Quartier m'a beaucoup fait pleurer,
J'ai rejoint en courant la place Edmond-Rostand,
Y'avait des flics partout, et pourtant j'en rosse tant!

Dans la semaine ils mettent leurs petits PV,
Et le vendredi soir relancent nos pavés,
Ces bourreaux, ces SS, qui nous filent des mornifles
Et qu'on attaque sans peur à coups de canif!

Les flics ne cognent jamais de la même façon,
Tout dépend de la fille, tout dépend du garçon,
Moi je suis le polisson du centre Beaujon.[32]

Là j'ai connu un flic que l'on appelle Eugène,
Car sa spécialité c'est la lacrymogène;
Je lui ai dit cent fois: Arrête les crimes, Eugène!

———————————

The grenade which a riot policeman threw at me
The other day in the Latin Quarter made me cry a lot,
I ran to Edmond-Rostand Square,
There were cops everywhere, but I still beat up heaps of them!

During the week they hand out their little fines,
And on Friday nights they throw back our cobblestones,
Torturers, SS men who clip us over the ear
And who we fearlessly attack with our pocket knives!

Cops never bash the same way twice,
It all depends on the girl or the boy,
I'm the "little rascal" of the Beaujon Centre.

I met a cop there called Eugene
He specialty is tear-gas
I told him time and again, "Stop committing crimes, Eugene!"

Like *Crève salope! C.A.L. en bourse* owes something to Situationist theory. In particular, it illustrates the cultural tactic – frequently used in May 1968 – of what the Situationists called "détournement," which involved the

32 The CRS assaulted scores of protesters at the "centre Beaujon," a former hospital tranformed into a detention centre.

"diversion" of artistic forms for other purposes than those originally intended. Here, Renaud uses the sonnet, a poetic genre usually reserved for refined expressions of love, as a vehicle for social protest. In addition, the lyrics derive a large part of their subversive impact from a series of semantically loaded puns. The song's title plays on the French word for pun itself, *calembour*, by juxtaposing the acronym for the Comités d'Action Lycéens, CAL, with the French word for Stock Exchange, *Bourse*. The CAL were an active force in the May uprising, while the *Bourse* symbolised the capitalist system which the *soixante-huitards* sought to overthrow. In the first verse, the narrator's triumphant boast about the number of policemen he has beaten up, "j'en rosse tant," simultaneously alludes to the name of Jean Rostand, the founder of the Mouvement Contre l'Armement Atomique which Renaud had frequented in the mid-1960s. Finally, "les crimes Eugène" is an approximate play on *lacrymogène* (tear-gas).

The narrator of *C.A.L. en bourse* possesses an endearing mixture of street wisdom, idealism and child-like ingenuousness. This makes him strongly reminiscent of Gavroche, who, in many respects, was the prototypal literary incarnation of the convergence between "the labouring classes and the dangerous classes." Gavroche moves effortlessly from the Parisian underworld to the revolutionary barricades. It is his child-like status which makes this possible; according to Hugo, the Parisian street kid

> swears like a trooper, hangs out in pubs, knows thieves, is overfamiliar with girls, speaks in slang, sings obscene songs and has nothing bad in his heart. This is because his soul contains a pearl – innocence – and pearls don't dissolve in mud. As long as man remains a child, it is God's will that he be innocent.[33]

May 1968 was a rite of passage which compelled Renaud to leave behind the external reality of his own childhood. Expelled from the Lycée Montaigne, he enrolled in September 1968 at the Lycée Claude Bernard, located in the conservative and exclusive sixteenth *arrondissement* (district) of Paris. According to Renaud, most of the students at his new

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33 "Jure comme un damné, hante le cabaret, connaît des voleurs, tutoie les filles, parle argot, chante des chansons obscènes, et n'a rien de mauvais dans le coeur. C'est qu'il a dans l'âme une perle, l'innocence, et les perles ne se dissolvent pas dans la boue. Tant que l'homme est enfant, Dieu veut qu'il soit innocent" Hugo, *Les Misérables*, p. 590

school were either apolitical or had ultra right-wing tendencies.[34] He managed nevertheless to find a like-minded spirit with whom he teamed up to form the Groupe Ravachol. Renaud's last published text from 1968, *Ravachol*, is both a political manifesto and a eulogy for the notorious anarchist after whom the group was named. François-Claudius Ravachol was condemned to death in 1892 for having perpetrated a series of bomb attacks in protest against what he saw as the victimisation of workers by the beneficiaries of the capitalist system:

Il s'app'lait Ravachol, c'était un anarchiste
qu'avait des idées folles, des idées terroristes
Il fabriquait des bombes et les faisait sauter
pour emmerder le monde, les bourgeois, les curés.
A la porte des banques, dans les commissariats,
ça f'sait un double bang, j'aurais aimé voir ça.
Mais un jour il fut trahi par sa meilleure amie,
livré à la police, la prétendue justice.
Au cours de son procès, il déclara notamment
n'avoir tué aucun innocent,
vu qu'il n'avait frappé que la bourgeoisie,
que les flics, les curés, les fonctionnaires pourris.
Mais le juge dit: Ravachol, on a trop discuté,
tu n'as plus la parole, maint'nant on va trancher!
Devant la guillotine il cita, ben voyons,
le camarade Bakounine et l'camarade Proudhon:
Si tu veux être heureux pends ton propriétaire,
coupe les curés en deux, tue les p'tits fonctionnaires!
Son exemple fut suivi quelques années plus tard
par Emile Henry[35], autre ennemi du pouvoir.
Camarade qui veux lutter autour du drapeau noir,
drapeau d'la liberté, drapeau de l'espoir,
rejoins le combat du Groupe Ravachol
et n'oublie pas qu'la propriété, c'est l'vol!
Il s'appl'ait Ravachol, c'était un anarchiste
qu'avait des idées pas si folles, des idées terroristes.

His name was Ravachol, he was an anarchist
who had crazy ideas, terrorist ideas
He made bombs and set them off
to bug people, the bourgeoisie and clerics.
In front of banks and at police stations,

34 Erwan, *Renaud*, p. 21

35 Not long after Ravachol's execution, Emile Henry bombed the Café Terminus at the Gare Saint-Lazare in Paris in retaliation against the "insolent triumphs" of the bourgeoisie. At his trial, he taunted his accusers by insisting that the anarchist movement was an irrepressible force. See Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 438

There were simultaneous explosions which I'd love to have seen.
But one day he was betrayed by his best friend
who fingered him to the police, the so-called upholders of the law.
During his trial, he proclaimed
that he had never killed an innocent person,
given that his victims were only the bourgeoisie,
cops, clerics and corrupt bureaucrats.
"That's enough discussion, Ravachol, you've had your say,"
said the judge, cutting him short.
Beneath the guillotine he quoted, let's see...
comrade Bakunin and comrade Proudhon:
"If you want to be happy hang your landlord,
cut the clerics in half, kill petty bureaucrats!"
His example was followed a few years later
by Emile Henry, another enemy of the system.
Comrade, if you want to fight under the black flag,
the flag of freedom, the flag of hope,
join the struggle of the Groupe Ravachol,
and above all, don't forget that property is theft!
His name was Ravachol, he was an anarchist
who had ideas that weren't so crazy, terrorist ideas.

Ravachol exemplifies the *soixante-huitards*' wish to see themselves as part of an historical revolutionary tradition and builds upon a series of anarchist songs from the early 1890s which commemorated the terrorist's exploits. During this period, anarchist songwriters in general began to couch their revolt in gritty, colloquial language rather than in the lofty style favoured by *Communards* like Pottier, thereby creating a precedent for the kind of songs which Renaud would write three quarters of a century later. This was certainly true of *Le Père Lapurge*, a well-known song in revolutionary circles of the 1890s which Ravachol actually sang as he mounted the scaffold. He added a new verse which, according to legend, he had written himself:[36]

Si tu veux être heureux,
Nom de dieu!
Pends ton propriétaire,
Coup' les curés en deux,
Nom de dieu!
Fouts les églis' par terre,
Sang-dieu!
Et l'bon dieu dans la merde,
Nom de dieu!

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36 Robert Brécy, *Florilège de la chanson révolutionnaire de 1789 au Front Populaire*, Les Editions Ouvrières, Paris, 1990, pp. 146-147

Et l'bon dieu dans la merde!

_____

If you want to be happy,
God dammit!
Hang your landlord,
Cut the clerics in half,
God dammit!
Pull down the churches,
For God's sake!
And shove the Lord in shit,
God dammit!
Shove the Lord in shit!

One of the most famous slogans of May 1968 was a Situationist maxim which bore a striking resemblance to Ravachol's verse: "Humanity will only be truly happy the day the last bureaucrat has been hanged with the guts of the last capitalist."[37] However, most *soixante-huitards*, including Renaud, did not translate this type of verbal violence into real acts of terrorism. Those who did not belong to authoritarian Marxist groups were strongly influenced by anarchist principles, but few seriously contemplated promoting those principles by imitating Ravachol's brand of "propaganda by the deed." The Fédération Anarchiste Française (FAF), in an effort to correct the popular preconception of anarchists as dangerous psychopaths, included the following statement in its manifesto of 25 May 1968: "Madmen, nihilists and die-hard extremists have no place among the anarchists."[38] Perhaps *Ravachol* should be seen as a cathartic expression of the frustration and rage which Renaud must have felt after the collapse of the May movement and his subsequent "exile" to the sixteenth *arrondissement*. Nonetheless, the terrorism into which the most embittered revolutionaries channelled their revolt in the 1970s can make *Ravachol* appear in hindsight as a harbinger of a new, more cynical era.

Renaud's first songs forcefully convey his youthful passion, even though they lack the linguistic mastery and finesse of his subsequent work. They also show that from an early age, he was able to draw creatively upon a range of cultural forms. Hugo's half-romantic, half-realist epic about "the

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37 "L'Humanité ne sera vraiment heureuse que le jour où le dernier bureaucrate aura été pendu avec les tripes du dernier capitaliste" Quoted by Hamon and Rotman, *Génération: 1*, p. 394

38 "Les fous, les nihilistes ou les extrémistes-à-tout prix, n'ont rien à faire parmi les anarchistes" Schnapp and Vidal-Naquet, *Journal de la Commune étudiante*, p. 370

labouring classes and the dangerous classes" of the first half of the nineteenth century, anarchist songs of the early 1890s and Situationist rhetoric of the 1960s all presented a vision of class struggle in which criminal elements and illegal tactics assumed pride of place. Such a vision inevitably appealed to *soixante-huitards* at odds with the more respectable and authoritarian working-class institutions. May 1968 also provided Renaud with his first direct experience of how popular song could both articulate social problems and serve as a rallying point for the disenfranchised. However, this experience had not given him a strong sense of vocation, and he was far from imagining that his own songs would one day give voice to an entire generation.

Chapter 2

1969-1974: "Amoureux de Paname"[39]

The political defeat of the May movement led many of its participants to seek new outlets for their revolutionary impulses. The first half of the 1970s saw the emergence of the feminist and environmentalist movements as well as a disturbing proliferation of terrorist activity. Many former *soixante-huitards* sought enlightenment through travel and contact with distant cultures.

Renaud left school in March 1969 and started working in July of that year at a Latin Quarter bookshop, the Librairie 73. Freed from the constraints of formal education, he began to read voraciously. He spent his savings on his first motorcycle after seeing Dennis Hopper's 1969 road movie, *Easy Rider*. The first French translation of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* appeared two years later and, like Hopper's film, encouraged the trend among disappointed *soixante-huitards* of redirecting their utopian quest towards remote or exotic destinations. However, Renaud's involvement in this diaspora of disaffected youth was short-lived. With a group of friends, he founded in the mountains of the Cévennes the Communauté Anarchiste Nestor-Makhno, an experience which he later described with dry humour:

> We'd left for several years; we lasted at least four days. One of our mates had convinced us that we were going to replenish ourselves by "making love with nature." Two days before we left, he told us he was bringing his girlfriend. For the nights when nature had a headache...[40]

In September 1972, Renaud left Paris again after being dismissed from his position at the Librairie 73 because of frequent lateness, absenteeism and collusion with shoplifters. Planning to hitchhike to Kathmandu, he travelled no further than Avignon, where he stayed for eight months.

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39 *Amoureux de Paname* (*In love with Paris*) was the opening track on Renaud's first album, released by Polydor in early 1975.

40 "Nous étions partis pour plusieurs années, l'expérience a duré au moins quatre jours. Un des potes en question nous avait convaincus que nous allions nous ressourcer en 'faisant l'amour avec la nature.' Deux jours avant le départ, il nous annonce qu'il emmène sa gonzesse. Pour les soirs où la nature aurait la migraine..." Renaud, *Renaud bille en tête*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1994, p. 87

Despite his initial attraction to the town, he soon became bored, and imagined leaving the following year for South Africa or Chile. Instead, he returned to Paris, the setting of his first revolutionary experience, and made it his definitive home.[41]

During the early 1970s, Renaud frequented two different Parisian milieux, both of which would strongly influence his future direction as a singer-songwriter. At his favourite Latin Quarter bar, Le Bréa, he befriended a group of delinquent youths, similar to the *blousons noirs* who had taken part in the May riots. Fascinated by their folklore – "bikes, street-fighting, the heist of the century" – Renaud adopted their language and dress codes so that he could "look like a delinquent and terrify the bourgeoisie."[42] He discovered first hand the world of the *grands ensembles*, reinforcing in the process his identification with the social milieu contemptuously described by Fouchet in May 1968 as "la pègre." At around the same time, the actor Patrick Dewaere introduced Renaud to Roman Bouteille's theatre troupe at Le Café de la Gare, the best-known *café-théâtre* (theatre workshop) of this period. The *cafés-théâtres* were an important locus of 1970s counter-culture which sought to emphasise the spontaneous and collective aspects of theatrical production and to establish a direct, intimate link between actors and audience. Most importantly, they cultivated the gritty style of language spoken by the youthful population of the *grands ensembles*.[43]

Renaud thus gained entrance both to a social milieu whose visceral antiauthoritarianism and delinquency gave him a sense of continuity with the formative experience of May 1968, and to an artistic milieu interested in the expressive possibilities of delinquent slang. At this point, he was more interested in acting than in singing, and accepted the lead role in *Robin des quoi?* (a humorous deformation of Robin des bois, the French name for Robin Hood) at Le Café de la Gare. However, his friendship with Michel Pons, whose father ran Le Bréa, steered him back in the direction of popular song.

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41 Séchan, *Le Roman de Renaud*, pp. 36-37; *Renaud en liberté*

42 "La bécane, le baston, le casse du siècle . . . pour faire voyou et effrayer les bourgeois" Quoted by Erwan, *Renaud*, p. 74

43 Pierre Merle, *Le Blues de l'argot*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1990, p. 79. Merle notes that Bertrand Blier recruited three members of Le Café de la Gare, Patrick Dewaere, Miou Miou and Gérard Depardieu, for his 1973 film *Les Valseuses*, about three *zonards* on the run from the police.

Pons was an accordionist whose repertoire included the *accordéon-musette* classics of the 1920s and 1930s. *Accordéon-musette* was a hybrid musical form which originated in the *bals-musettes* (working-class dance-halls) of the Bastille district at the turn of the twentieth century. This district had a large population of immigrants, both from the Auvergne region and Italy. Local dance-hall bands played traditional *auvergnat* folk dances, driven by a kind of bagpipes known as the *cabrette*. Around 1905, the more melodious accordion imported by the Italians replaced the *cabrette* as the leading instrument in these bands. Adapted to a variety of dance-steps, including the *java*, the waltz and the tango, *accordéon-musette* also provided a musical setting for numerous "realist" songs.[44]

The genre of realist song, or *chanson réaliste*, pre-dated *accordéon-musette*; its origins were in the *goualantes* and *complaintes criminelles* peddled by Parisian street singers throughout the nineteenth century. Aristide Bruant formalised and commercialised the genre in the 1880s and 1890s at his Montmartre cabaret, Le Mirliton. His "chansons et monologues réalistes" evoked the marginal existence of the criminals, pimps, prostitutes and vagabonds who haunted the working-class *faubourgs* (inner suburbs) of Paris and the historic *zone* (shanty town) on the embankments of the city's fortifications. Some of Bruant's songs presented a tragic and brutal image of low-life Paris; some evoked, on the contrary, an idealised world free from the constraints of bourgeois morality; many others flaunted the behavioural and linguistic exuberance of their protagonists in a way that seems to have been intended to humiliate, intimidate or perhaps simply titillate the more fortunate members of society. Bruant drew out the poetic qualities of the exotic slang spoken in the margins of Paris and performed his songs in a declamatory fashion; conversely, the music which accompanied his lyrics was based on rather monotonous-sounding military marches, funeral dirges or hunting tunes. In the early decades of the twentieth century, a new generation of songwriters influenced by Bruant churned out reams of realist lyrics. Oddly, these lyrics were sometimes accompanied by romantic salon music;

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44 *Paris Musette*, a television documentary produced by Les Films du Village and La Sept/Arte in 1993, covers in detail the history of *accordéon-musette*.

more often than not, they were set to the newer, heady rhythms and dithyrambic melodies of *accordéon-musette*.

Renaud was mesmerised by Pons's music, which, he later speculated, "must have resonated with something in my past."[45] Indeed, Renaud's mother was a devotee of *le musette* and had frequently listened to such music in the family home. As an adolescent, Renaud blocked his ears to *accordéon-musette*, partly because of its associations with his mother's generation and partly because he was more interested in the contemporary popular music of the 1960s. At twenty-one, the epiphany which he experienced upon rediscovering the music of his childhood inspired him to borrow his mother's old records and to acquaint himself more fully with the history of *accordéon-musette* and *chanson réaliste*.

Renaud and Pons developed a repertoire which included traditional realist songs from the Belle Epoque and interwar years as well as original songs which Renaud had written in a similar vein. They performed in the streets of Paris, in public squares and market places, and in the courtyards of old apartment blocks. Joined by a second guitarist in 1974, they played for audiences queuing outside Le Café de la Gare and were hired as the support act for Coluche's one-man show at Le Caf'Conc', a *café-théâtre* on the Champs-Elysées.[46] Renaud was noticed at this venue by two independent producers associated with Polydor,[47] who subsequently offered him his first recording contract.

Renaud's first, eponymously-titled album was released in early 1975 and included a series of his own realist-inspired songs. In *La Java sans joie* (1974), he announced:

> Moi j'aime bien chanter la racaille,
> la mauvaise herbe des bas quartiers,
> les mauvais garçons, la canaille,
> ceux qui sont nés sur le pavé.
> J'ai bien du mal à les chanter,

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45 "A dû faire vibrer quelque chose dans mes racines" *Renaud en liberté*

46 Coluche was also a member of Le Café de la Gare and went on to become the most famous stand-up comedian in France. Renaud and Coluche formed a close friendship, tragically cut short by the latter's death in a motorcycle accident in 1986.

47 Jacqueline Herrenschmidt and François Bernheim

tell'ment qu'elles sont tristes mes histoires,
mais celle que j'vais vous raconter,
elle fait même pleurer ma guitare.

_____

I like to sing about low-life,
the bad seeds from bad neighbourhoods,
larrikins and riffraff,
those who are born in the street.
I find it quite hard to sing these songs,
the stories they tell are so sad,
but the one I'm about to relate
makes even my guitar weep.

Born into poverty, Renaud's hero takes to crime like a fish to water. After making a name for himself as a gangster, reveller and dandy, he falls foul of the law and is guillotined. Renaud designates the locations which frame his hero's milieu – "la rue du Four," "Saint-Mandé," "Ménilmontant" and "Sacré-Coeur" – and imitates the *parigot* or *faubourien* accent associated with such areas. He uses with relish and assurance the picturesque slang spoken by the underworld of the past, although he combines archaic terms such as "surineur" (someone adept at handling a *surin*, or knife) with more contemporary expressions such as *s'envoyer en l'air* (to have it off). He even seems to have invented the colourful verb *voyouter* – probably on the basis of the feminine adjective *voyoute*, in itself quite rare – as a synonym for *faire voyou* (to lead the life of a delinquent). The fatalistic perspective, geographical precision and exuberant slang of *La Java sans joie* are strongly reminiscent of Bruant's style.

As the title of the song suggests, the lyrics are accompanied by a *java-musette* arrangement.[48] The movement of the dance could be said to embody both the hedonism and circularity of the protagonist's life, even though the combination of festive music with an ostensibly "joyless" melodrama may seem surprising. The sensuous imagery is complemented by rhapsodic accordion runs, while the accordion features in the story itself as an intrinsic backdrop to the hero's exploits:

Il commençait à s'faire un nom,
et dans les petits bals musettes,

48 The *java* was originally a rural folk dance, similar to the waltz.

lorsque jouait l'accordéon,
on voyait tournait sa casquette.
Il buta son premier larron
alors qu'il n'avait pas vingt ans,
le crime c'était sa vocation,
l'arnaque c'était son tempérament.

_____

He began to make a name for himself,
and at local dances,
when the accordion played,
you could see his cap turning.
He bumped off his first villain
by the time he was twenty,
crime was his vocation,
swindling was his nature.

These lines echo Ambrose Bierce's description of the accordion as an "instrument in harmony with the feelings of a murderer," which Renaud would later quote in one of his concert programs.[49] They also remind us that the accordion used to be considered an instrument of moral degeneracy. Associated not only with the low-life celebrated in realist lyrics and with foreigners (the Italians who introduced the instrument to the Bastille dance-halls) but also, more generally, with unbridled pleasure, it was condemned by the Catholic Church and even, initially, by the *Auvergnats* themselves.[50]

By the time Renaud wrote *La Java sans joie*, the accordion had long since lost its subversive novelty, if not its class connotations. As he later recalled, it was seen in the music industry as both old-fashioned and unfashionable: "There were hardly any singers or songs on music television using an accordion. It was still considered taboo, working-class, common, an instrument of the people . . . with everything contemptible which that implies."[51] Nevertheless, Renaud's revival of his city's musical heritage attracted a sizeable and diverse audience. Passers-by both young and old responded enthusiastically to the realist songs which he performed with

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49 "Instrument en harmonie avec les sentiments d'un assassin" Quoted by Renaud, "Dictionnaire énervant à feuilleter négligemment pendant l'entracte...," 1988

50 *Paris Musette*

51 "Il n'y avait quasiment pas de chanteurs ou chansons qui passaient à la télévision de rock, qui utilisaient l'accordéon. C'était encore un instrument tabou, populaire, vulgaire, du peuple . . . avec tout ce que ça a de méprisable" Personal interview

Michel Pons in the streets of Paris.[52] The producers of his first album clearly believed in the marketability of such songs, even though it sold only several thousand copies in its first year of release.[53]

What was it about these "golden oldies" of the Belle Epoque and interwar years that appealed to both Renaud and listeners of the mid-1970s? Pascal Ory writes that "rétrophilie" ("retromania") was a significant feature of popular culture during this period and suggests that people turned to the past to escape a pervasive sense of uncertainty provoked by the collapse of revolutionary ideologies, the emerging economic recession and an aesthetic crisis which challenged the value of avant-garde culture.[54] For academic and music critic Louis-Jean Calvet, the retrospective dimension of Renaud's repertoire was, on the contrary, dynamic rather than escapist:

> *Java*, accordion-waltz, tango, Renaud sings like in that fantastic film *Casque d'Or* and, what's more, revives Bruant's slang even in his rhymes. His singing and guitar-playing are awful, but, behind the approximate music and lightweight texts of this anarchist street kid, one can sense something about to be born, on the fringe of today's main popular song trends. He has a deliberately retro style, but in the good sense of the term, a retro which takes us back to popular song of the turn of the century.[55]

Renaud himself clearly believed that the past could inform and enliven the present. In *Ecoutez-moi, les gavroches* (1974), he urged the street kids from the *grands ensembles* to reclaim their city by exploring what remained of its historic sites:

> Traînez vos vies dans les ruelles,
> dans les vieux bistrots, dans les cours,
> et sur les pavés éternels
> qui n'ont pas quitté les faubourgs.

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52 Erwan, *Renaud*, p. 27

53 Séchan, *Le Roman de Renaud*, p. 45. Renaud's brother notes that ten years later, Renaud's first album had become a *disque d'or* twice over.

54 Pascal Ory, *L'Entre-deux-mai: Histoire culturelle de la France, mai 1968-mai 1981*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1983, p. 108

55 "Java, valse musette, tango, Renaud chante comme dans *Casque d'Or*, ce merveilleux film, avec en sus la langue verte de Bruant retrouvée jusque dans les rimes. Il chante mal comme ce n'est pas permis, joue de la guitare comme un pied, mais, derrière les musiques approximatives et les textes un peu légers de ce gavroche anarchiste, on sent quelque chose à naître, en marge des grands courants de la chanson d'aujourd'hui. Délibérément rétro dans la forme, mais rétro au bon sens du terme, un rétro qui nous ramène à la chanson populaire du début du siècle" Quoted by Erwan, *Renaud*,
pp. 34-35

Allez respirez sur la Butte
tous les parfums de la Commune,
souvenirs de Paris qui lutte
et qui pleure parfois sous la lune.

Ecoutez-moi, les gavroches,
vous les enfants de la ville:
non, Paris n'est pas si moche,
ne pensez plus à l'an 2000.

_____

Spend your life hanging around the side-streets,
in the old pubs and courtyards,
and on the everlasting cobblestones
which haven't left the old neighbourhoods.

Go and breath the air of Montmartre,
all the smells of the Commune,
memories of Paris in arms
and which sometimes cries under the moon.

Listen to me, street kids,
Children of the city:
Paris isn't that ugly,
Forget about the year 2000.

Chanson réaliste and *accordéon-musette* were the musical equivalent of these three-dimensional vestiges of Parisian history, and helped to restore a sense of colour and historical grounding which had been destroyed by the *grands ensembles*. One can imagine Renaud's delinquent friends identifying strongly with the *mauvais garçons* (bad hats), *marlous* (hoodlums or pimps) and *apaches* (exuberant gangsters who terrorised Paris in the early years of the twentieth century) of realist song. One can also imagine their fascination upon discovering that the colloquial term *zone*, frequently associated with the most dilapidated of the *grands ensembles*, used to evoke another slum belt, where appalling living conditions could be offset by picturesque surroundings and a sense of conviviality:

Y a des tas d'citoyens amoureux d'la nature
Et qu'ont pas les moyens d'voyager
Ils la connaissent seulement par la littérature
La rive où fleurit l'oranger
Ils n'rêvent que d's'en aller dans les landes en Bretagne
Dans les auberges à coups d'fusil

Sans s'douter qu'il existe un vrai pays d'cocagne
A dix centimètres de Paris

Sur la zone, mieux que sur le trône
On est plus heureux que des rois
On applique la vraie République
Ils vont sans contraintes et sans lois
Y a pas d'riches et tout l'monde a sa niche
Et son petit jardin tout pareil
Ses trois pots d'géraniums et sa part de soleil
Sur la zone

_____

There are heaps of citizens in love with nature
And who can't afford to travel
They only know through books
The shore where the orange tree blooms
Their one dream is to go to the moors in Brittany
And stay in an inn where you pay through the nose
They don't even suspect that there's a real land of milk and honey
Just ten centimetres from Paris

On the *zone*, its better than on the throne
People are happier than kings
They live in the real Republic
Without constraints or laws
There are no rich people and everyone's got their own possie
And their little garden as well
Their pots of geraniums and their place in the sun
On the *zone*

Sur la zone (M. Hely and J. Jekyll), recorded by the great realist *chanteuse* Fréhel in 1933 and later revived by Renaud, made the historic *zone* seem far more idyllic than it actually was. However, as Adrian Rifkin points out, in old photos of the *zone*, "it is possible to imagine . . . at least a dream of poverty and freedom, of cheap shops and dance halls, lilacs and French fries . . . the alcoholism, the tuberculosis, the murders, and the trash are only a part of life there."[56] When demolition of the historic *zone* began in 1919, many *zoniers* (inhabitants of the *zone*) were loathe to move into the new, government-subsidised apartment blocks built on top of or close to their old neighbourhoods.[57] With the massive and chaotic suburban sprawl

56 Adrian Rifkin, "Musical Moments," *Yale French Studies*, 73, New Haven, 1987, p. 136

57 Françoise Choay, "Pensées sur la ville, arts de la ville," in Georges Duby (ed.), *Histoire de la France urbaine*, vol. 4, Maurice Agulhon (ed.), *La Ville de l'âge industriel: Le Cycle haussmannien*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1983, p. 355

of the interwar years, the term *zone* acquired a more generic sense and came to designate "any poor suburb of a large city, especially Paris, inhabited by the unemployed, the derelict and the marginal."[58] Some realist songs of this period were filled with nostalgic longing for the historic *zone*, which was gradually disappearing. Rifkin argues that the demolition of the *zone*, while it may have been experienced as a genuine loss by the *zoniers* themselves, was cynically exploited by realist songwriters – many of whom came from a bourgeois background – and a show business industry primarily interested in the perennial marketability of nostalgia as a commodity. However, as Ray Pratt suggests:

> The longing for a past located somewhere and connections to a place that is real seem important desires to which popular music has continually spoken and which give popular music part of its appeal as a utopian critique of a present-day existence that has grown increasingly rootless.[59]

This was even more true for audiences who had experienced the urban upheavals of the late 1950s and 1960s and the dehumanising environment of the *grands ensembles*. The last remnants of the historic *zone* were demolished on either side of the Porte de Champerret in 1970, as the problems associated with the contemporary *zone* of the *grands ensembles* were beginning to emerge in public consciousness as a major social issue.[60]

As a child, while his mother was listening to the realist classics of the interwar years, Renaud spent hours playing with friends in the wastelands of the historic *zone* at Montrouge, near his family home. As a young adult, realist song not only had nostalgic associations with his childhood, but also offered an indirect way of expressing his identification with his new delinquent friends. In addition, the historical evolution of realist song brought together "the labouring classes and the dangerous classes" in a way which might have resonated with a former *soixante-huitard*. This may seem like an odd assertion, to the extent that realist lyrics focused on the daily life of the Parisian underworld rather than on the industrial proletariat

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58 "Banlieue misérable des grandes villes, en partic. de Paris, peuplée de chômeurs, de clochards et de marginaux" Colin, Mével and Leclère, *Dictionnaire de l'argot*, p. 675

59 Ray Pratt, *Rhythm and Resistance: Explorations in the Political Uses of Popular Music*, Praeger, New York, 1990, p. 7

60 Bernard Rouleau, *Villages et faubourgs de l'Ancien Paris: Histoire d'un espace urbain*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1985, p. 287

and its political struggles. The famous *Communard* songwriter Jean-Baptiste Clément hated the realist cabaret culture spawned by Bruant, in which, he claimed, "everything connected with progress, justice and humanity is made a laughing stock, and where on the pretext of realism the poor are made to speak like whores at the barriers and the working-class talk like pimps."[61] Moreover, realist songs attracted a large bourgeois and even aristocratic audience whose interest appeared to stem from voyeuristic rather than socialistic impulses.[62] However, this did not preclude the powerful appeal of such songs to the working-class masses whose interests Clément had in mind. On the contrary, Richard Sonn affirms:

> The thief, the pimp, the whore, served as cultural symbols for many in the working class while remaining at the boundaries of that class, respected for their hostility toward the dominant classes, sentimentalized for their suffering, and reviled when they betrayed their fellows for personal gain.[63]

While realist lyrics may have retained the symbolic value ascribed to them by Sonn, their fusion with *accordéon-musette* dance-music gave them an additional association with working-class sociability and leisure time. Chantal Brunschwig writes:

> The realist genre took on the role of tragedy while the comic genre took on the role of farce. But this initially dramatic expression of society's outcasts became, with *le musette*, the music of celebration for the new proletarian family. The realist genre therefore helped both to integrate those living on the margins of society (to make them less frightening by transforming their lives into folklore) and to structure a new social group. Above all, realist song and *accordéon-musette* have remained the symbols of working-class Paris.[64]

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61 Quoted by Jacques Rancière, "Good Times or Pleasure at the Barriers," in Adrian Rifkin and Roger Thomas (eds), *Voices of the People: The Social Life of 'La Sociale' at the End of the Second Empire*, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, London, 1988, p. 88

62 Bruant copiously insulted the wealthier members of his audience, but this was as much a contrived (and highly profitable) marketing gimmick as an expression of genuine contempt.

63 Richard Sonn, "Language, Crime and Class: The Popular Culture of French Anarchism in the 1890s," *Historical Reflections*, 1984, 11 (3), p. 369

64 "Le courant réaliste assume le rôle de tragédie comme le courant comique celui de la farce. Mais cette expression d'abord dramatique des rejetés de la société devient avec le *musette* le signal de la fête pour la nouvelle famille prolétaire. Ainsi le courant réaliste est-il à la fois un facteur d'INTEGRATION DE MARGINAL ('folklorisé' donc moins inquiétant) et un facteur de STRUCTURATION D'UN NOUVEAU GROUPE SOCIAL. *Chanson réaliste* et *accordéon musette* sont surtout restés les symboles du Paris populaire" Chantal Brunschwig, "Courants de chanson et mutations sociales," *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History*, 15, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, 1988, p. 17

In an attempt to reach a larger working-class audience, anarchist songwriters from the 1890s onwards increasingly abandoned the portentous, classical style of Clément and Pottier for the type of street slang popularised by Bruant. The *chansonnier* who combined most successfully the political militancy of the *Communards* with the truculent style of cabaret performers like Bruant was Montéhus, who became the idol of the working classes in the years leading up to the First World War. Renaud included in his realist repertoire one of Montéhus's most famous songs, *La Butte rouge* (1922), which denounced the use of honest workers as cannon fodder. The "red hilltop" in question was situated in the town of Bapaume, in Champagne, which had been destroyed during the First World War. Montéhus's antimilitaristic lyrics were set to an *accordéon-musette* arrangement by Georges Krier:

Sur c'te butte-là, y'avait pas d'gigolettes,
Pas de marlous, ni de beaux muscadins.
Ah, c'était loin du moulin d'la galette,
Et de Paname, qu'est le roi des pat'lins.

C'qu'elle en a bu, du beau sang, cette terre!
Sang d'ouvriers et sang de paysans
Car les bandits, qui sont cause de guerres,
N'en meur'nt jamais, on n'tue qu'les innocents!

La Butt' Roug', c'est son nom, l'baptème s'fit un matin
Où tous ceux qui grimpèrent, roulèrent dans le ravin...
Aujourd'hui y'a des vignes, il y pousse du raisin
Qui boira d'ce vin-là, boira l'sang des copains!

On that hilltop, there were no working girls,
Pimps or popinjays.
Ah, it was far from the Moulin de la Galette,
and from Paris, that most noble of villages.

So much beautiful blood has quenched that earth!
The blood of workers and peasants
Because the bandits who cause wars
Never die in them, only the innocent get killed!

The Red Hilltop is its name, the baptism took place one morning
When all those who climbed its slopes rolled down into the ravine...
Today there are vines bearing grapes
Whoever drinks that wine, drinks the blood of our mates!

While the themes and historical context of realist songs gave them a dynamic relevance to former *soixante-huitards* and delinquent youths from the *grands ensembles*, other listeners may have experienced such songs quite differently. In *La Coupole* (1974), Renaud combined an *accordéon-musette* arrangement with a series of playful rhymes to satirise the camp decadence of the fashionable Montparnasse nightclub which he had himself frequented in the early 1970s and where the "retro" fad was in full swing. La Coupole was a bastion of "radical chic" and a favourite meeting place for aficionados of "underground" culture:

> Andy Warhol, à la Coupole,
> peint les gambettes de Mistinguett,
> il les dessine très longilignes,
> leur donne la forme du cou d'un cygne.
>
> _____
>
> Andy Warhol, at La Coupole,
> Paints Mistinguett's legs,
> He draws them long and rangy,
> in the form of a swan's neck.

Mistinguett was a former star of the realist genre who had introduced, along with Max Dearly, the daring *Valse Chaloupée* or *Apach's Dance* [*sic*] at Le Moulin Rouge in 1909.[65] The assonance of Renaud's word games complements the surrealism of Warhol's whimsical sketch and suggests an hallucinatory trip procured by either the hashish or the LSD with which the French underground had been experimenting since the mid-1960s. However, Warhol's approach to realist culture is that of an aesthete (and, possibly, that of a bourgeois fop attracted to rough trade). It becomes clearer as the song progresses that La Coupole is not Renaud's natural milieu and that his interest in the past is at cross-purposes with that of his fellow patrons. In what becomes a bizarre historical pantomime, a cheeky and street-wise *apache* of the Belle Epoque, played by Renaud, pairs off with a glamorous Hollywood movie star of the 1950s, played by vacuous young women who appear to have stepped straight out of Warhol's famous serial portrait of Marilyn Monroe:

> Elles me fascinent, toutes ces gamines,

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65 Charles Rearick, *The French in Love and War: Popular Culture in the Era of the World Wars*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1997, p. 108

avec leurs mines de Marilyn,
sortant de l'école, vers la Coupole,
elles caracolent et elles racolent.

Quand vient le soir, j'aime aller boire
un verre d'alcool à la Coupole,
pour faire du gringue à toutes ces dingues
à toutes ces folles bien trop frivoles.

_____

They fascinate me, all these girls
made up like Marilyn,
on their way from school to La Coupole,
they tout and prance about.

In the evening, I like to go
and have a drink at La Coupole,
so I can chat up all these nutters,
all these crazy airheads.

In many traditional realist songs, it was the bourgeoisie who ventured into low-life establishments in search of cheap thrills; that situation is reversed here as the *apache* consumes with detached mockery the fashionable pleasures on offer at La Coupole. Moreover, these pleasures are not necessarily what they seem. The terms *folle* and *Caroline*, which Renaud uses to refer to the female clientele of La Coupole, mean "homosexual" in slang. *Caroline* can also mean "transvestite" and has associations with the *Gazolines*, a flamboyant group of transvestites enamoured of 1950s Hollywood glamour and who frequented La Coupole in the early 1970s:[66]

Toutes les idoles, de la Coupole,
les midinettes, les gigolettes,
les Carolines en crinoline,
ne sont en fait que des starlettes.

_____

All the idols of La Coupole,
young working girls
and queens in crinoline,
are really just starlets.

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66 Colin, Mével and Leclère, *Dictionnaire de l'argot*, pp. 112 and 272; Alexis Bernier and François Buot, *L'Esprit des seventies*, Bernard Grasset, Paris, 1994, pp. 51-53

Ironically, the Belle Epoque *apaches*, despite their violent and fiercely masculine rituals, were themselves frequently accused of effeminacy by factory workers because of their sartorial flashiness.[67] However, the *apaches* were closer in spirit to the American Indians after whom they were named than to the cross-dressers of La Coupole; their dandyism was primitive and belligerent rather than foppish.

The most eloquent example of how a musical culture such as *chanson réaliste* could be appropriated for quite conflicting purposes was an advertisement in the pages of *France-Soir* on 12 May 1974 for a "people's ball hosted by Marcel Azzola and Aimable" in support of the conservative Giscard d'Estaing's presidential candidature.[68] Marcel Azzola had been a leading exponent of *accordéon-musette* for many years. Giscard himself also played the accordion, a talent which he publicly exploited on several occasions in what could be seen as an attempt to promote himself as a man of the people. In reality a well-heeled member of the French plutocracy, Giscard was the antithesis of everything that Renaud stood for.

Renaud's revival of the realist genre enabled him to express his identification with his delinquent friends while at the same time providing them with a sense of connection to the past. However, in some respects, realist songs went against the current of contemporary radical thought. Such songs traditionally promoted a macho, sometimes frankly misogynous, view of gender relations. The narrator of Renaud's *Gueule d'aminche* (1974) is shocked by the love which has developed between a fellow *marlou* and a young bourgeois woman:

> Mais l'angoisse c'est qu'un beau soir
> il a rencontré c'te môme,
> son sourire en balançoire,
> ses grands airs et ses diplômes.
>
> L'aurait mieux fait d'la maquer
> su'l'trottoir pour trois cents balles,

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67 Michelle Perrot, "Dans la France de la Belle Epoque, les 'Apaches,' premières bandes de jeunes," in *Les Marginaux et les exclus dans l'histoire*, Cahiers Jussieu no. 5, Université Paris 7, Union Générale d'Editions, Paris, 1979, p. 391

68 "Grand bal populaire animé par Marcel Azzola et Aimable" Quoted by André Halimi, *Le Show-biz et la politique*, Editions Ramsay, Paris, 1987, pp. 16-17. Ironically, Azzola later played as a session musician on Renaud's third album (1979). He is interviewed at length in *Paris Musette*.

plutôt que d's'amouracher
de cette salope en cavale.

_____

The trouble is, one night
he met this kid
with a sultry smile,
a snobby, educated type.

He should have made her
Turn tricks for fifty bucks,
Instead of falling
For this bitch on the run.

The narrator's brutal response reflects a world in which relationships between men and women are over-determined by the needs of the delinquent gang. The young delinquents of Belle Epoque Paris were often both lover and procurer to their female partners; the term *marlou* could mean "pimp" as well as "hoodlum."[69] As Michelle Perrot points out in her study of the *apaches*, these women had more independence in certain areas of their life than the wives of respectable bourgeois men, but were ultimately controlled by their exploitative and often violent boyfriends.[70] The affair described in *Gueule d'aminche* is tantamount to class betrayal; it threatens the gang's cohesion and spoils the excitement of street life:

Depuis qu'il l'a dans la peau,
c'est plus le marlou qu'j'ai connu,
y parle de s'mettre au boulot,
de plus traîner dans les rues.

Pour y offrir des dentelles
y renonce même au fric-frac,
aux coups d'surin et d'semelles,
aux combines et à l'arnaque.

_____

Since he's had her under his skin,
he's not the larrikin I once knew,
he talks about getting a job,
and not cruising the streets any more.

To give her fine lace
he's even given up burgling,

69 Colin, Mével and Leclère, *Dictionnaire de l'argot*, p. 391
70 Michelle Perrot, "Dans la France de la Belle Epoque, les 'Apaches,' " pp. 393-394

> he's put away his knife and boots
> and left the con game.

Renaud seems to have adopted the machismo of realist mythology as part and parcel of the culture of "the labouring classes and the dangerous classes." This was not necessarily in contradiction with his *soixante-huitard* heritage; David Caute points out that "rampant male chauvinism" was a feature of radical circles in the late 1960s.[71] However, by the time Renaud wrote *Gueule d'aminche*, the feminist movement was well-established; the release of his first album in 1975 coincided with the "Année Internationale de la Femme" ("International Year of Women"). Such songs must have seemed anachronistic to many listeners; Jacques Erwan, in his otherwise sympathetic biography of 1982, argues:

> If one looks at the ideology which Renaud expresses in his texts and which he confirms in most of his statements and actions, there is one area in which a flagrant contradiction becomes apparent: the portrayal of women in his songs is not always progressive, far from it.[72]

However, it is unclear to what extent the narrator of *Gueule d'aminche* reflected Renaud's real attitude towards women. The distinctly anti-macho stance, intimate tone and self-mockery of many of his later songs suggest that he was not inherently misogynous. A song like *Gueule d'aminche* nonetheless set him apart from the substantial number of his peers who were fighting in the mid-1970s for sexual equality.

The celebration of urban Paris in realist songs was also at odds with contemporary radical thought. Large cities were anathema to the nascent environmentalist movement, whose concerns were being relayed by folk musicians all over France. As mentioned earlier, the "return to nature" had been a short-lived experience for Renaud. In the opening song of his first album, *Amoureux de Paname* (1974), he mercilessly taunts the evangelists of this new religion. Paradoxically, the jingling acoustic guitars give the song a folksy flavour. However, this is offset by elements more reminiscent

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71 David Caute, *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey through 1968*, Harper and Row, New York, 1988, pp. 265-266

72 "Si l'on se réfère à l'idéologie qu'expriment ses textes et que confirment la plupart de ses déclarations et de ses actes, il est tout de même un domaine où une contradiction flagrante apparaît: la conception de la femme dans ses chansons est loin d'être toujours progressiste" Erwan, *Renaud*, p. 57

of the realist genre, such as the accordion riffs and the term “Paname,” an old, slang synonym for Paris.

Renaud begins by cheerfully dismissing the “return to nature” as a backward-looking, genteel fantasy and further belittles the movement’s adherents by suggesting that they do not even warrant a well-crafted song:

Ecoutez-moi, vous les ringards,
écologistes du sam’di soir,
cette chanson-là vaut pas un clou,
mais je la chante rien que pour vous.
Vous qui voulez du beau gazon,
des belles pelouses, des p’tits moutons,
des feuilles de vigne et des p’tites fleurs,
faudrait remettre vos montres à l’heure.

_____

Listen up you bunch of has-beens,
weekend environmentalists,
this might be a crappy song,
but I’m only singing it for you.
Forget your grassy lawns,
your little sheep,
your fig leaves and flowers,
the times are changing!

In the following verses, Renaud proclaims his attraction to the thrusting forms of his city’s skyscrapers and gives free reign to the kind of absurd hyperbole seen earlier in *Crève salope!*

Moi j’aime encore les pissotières,
j’aime encore l’odeur des poubelles,
j’me parfume pas à l’oxygène,
l’gaz carbonique c’est mon hygiène.

_____

I also love public urinals,
the smell of rubbish bins,
oxygen’s not my kind of perfume,
I clean myself with carbon dioxide.

The flamboyant and derisive humour of *Amoureux de Paname* gives the song an infectious quality, but leaves one wondering at the same time why Renaud should have chosen to ridicule a philosophy which had captured

the imagination of many of his *soixante-huitard* peers, and to support instead an aggressive, modern form of urban landscape, much of which, ironically, was a legacy of the Gaullist years. The song can perhaps best be understood as an attack not so much on the environmentalist movement as such as on the fashion-conscious, humourless or fundamentalist traits of its more pompous followers. Renaud may also have been loathe to associate himself with the self-indulgent escapism which sometimes characterised the movement in its early stages and which seemed oblivious to the class issues raised in May 1968. Michel Gheude and Richard Kalisz argue:

> Because it separates environmental issues from the socialist struggle, the "return to nature" is a utopian and backward-looking fantasy which seeks a peaceful haven free from struggle, an oasis, a long weekend. That is why it was quickly snapped up by commercial interests and transformed into an immensely profitable business.[73]

Amoureux de Paname could also be interpreted as an attack on Giscard d'Estaing's presidential campaign of early 1974, in which environmental issues were a major theme. The conservative candidate asserted his commitment to improving

> the quality of city life by reducing high-density areas, preventing the sprawl of high-rise blocks, conserving all urban parklands, whether publicly or privately-owned, and drafting a ten-year plan to provide every residential area with at least 10m^2 of public parks and gardens per person.[74]

While such policies had bipartisan support, Renaud doubtless wished to distance himself from the privileged milieu in which they were formulated. Although *Amoureux de Paname* focuses on central Paris, and while other songs like *Ecoutez-moi, les gavroches* indicate that Renaud's purported love of concrete and asphalt did not extend to the city's suburban housing estates, it could be seen as an indirect expression of solidarity with his

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73 "Le 'retour à la nature,' parce qu'il n'inscrit pas la revendication écologique dans le cadre de la lutte pour le socialisme, rêve d'une utopique marche arrière de l'histoire, d'un havre de paix sans lutte, d'un oasis, d'un weekend prolongé. Et c'est pourquoi le commerce s'en est vite emparé et en a fait une affaire très rentable" Michel Gheude and Richard Kalisz, *Il y a folklore et folklore*, Editions Vie Ouvrière, Paris, 1977, p. 56

74 "La qualité de la vie dans les villes en y réduisant les densités excessives, en empêchant la prolifération des tours, en sauvegardant tous les espaces verts urbains, publics ou privés, et en établissant un plan de dix ans pour donner à chaque agglomération au moins 10m^2 de parcs et de jardins publics par personne" Quoted by Bernard Marchand, *Paris, histoire d'une ville: XIXe-XXe siècle*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1993, p. 323

delinquent friends, who had to make do with the high-rise flats to which they had been relegated and who did not have the luxury of taking part in political discussions about environmental issues.

Amoureux de Paname anticipates the emergence of the British punk movement, which, as Paul Yonnet writes, "hates the countryside . . . and accepts the city – its everyday environment – for what it is: 'We like London, blocks and concrete,' confides Joe Strummer."[75] The way in which Renaud alludes in the chorus to one of the most famous graffiti of May 1968 – "sous les pavés, la plage!" – suggests, at face value, that he has left behind that era's idealism:

> Moi, j'suis amoureux de Paname,
> du béton et du macadam,
> sous les pavés, ouais c'est la plage,
> mais l'bitume c'est mon paysage,
> le bitume c'est mon paysage.
>
> _____
>
> I'm in love with Paris,
> with concrete and tarmac,
> okay, so there's a beach under the cobblestones,
> but the asphalt's my countryside,
> the asphalt's my countryside.

However, while he shared the provocative, iconoclastic spirit of the punk movement, and although some of the delinquent protagonists of his subsequent songs would embody the movement's slogan, "no future," many of his other songs indicate that Renaud himself remained profoundly attached to the utopian dreams and political militancy of May 1968. *Amoureux de Paname* is also too melodious to be considered a hard-core punk song. Moreover, its realist elements contrast somewhat paradoxically with the modern architecture which Renaud appears to glorify elsewhere in the song. Paris clearly embodied for Renaud a more robust form of revolt than the hippy communes of the countryside, but the other songs discussed in this chapter suggest that the city's vestiges, rather than its recent additions, were a more significant source of poetic inspiration.

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75 "Déteste la campagne . . . et prend la ville – son milieu de vie – comme elle est: 'Nous aimons Londres, les blocs, le béton,' confie Joe Strummer" Paul Yonnet, *Jeux, modes et masses: La Société française et le moderne 1945-1985*, Gallimard, Paris, 1985, pp. 172-173. Joe Strummer was the lead singer of British punk band The Clash.

Renaud's realist songs set him apart from the social formations of environmentalism, feminism and "radical chic" in which many of his *soixante-huitard* peers regrouped during the first half of the 1970s. The history of "the labouring classes and the dangerous classes" of Paris, as expressed through the popular music of the Belle Epoque and interwar years, offered him less an ideological credo than a way in which to speak and a place from which to do so. He expressed his political views more explicitly – albeit with the same delinquent voice – in a number of other songs, of which the most notorious and enduring example is *Hexagone* (1974).

Hexagone is a diatribe of epic proportions which became something of a signature song during the first ten years of Renaud's career. He was considerably less enamoured of the *hexagone* (a synonym for France derived from the shape of the country's external borders) than of its capital city. In twelve verses, each corresponding to a month of the year, he uses a perennial event or anniversary to accuse the French people of failing to maintain the basic principles of liberty, equality and justice. The two-chord structure and simple arrangement comprising acoustic guitars, bass and harmonica foreground the lyrics and give the song a Dylanesque feel, while the rapid tempo sustains the impetus of Renaud's relentlessly bitter denunciation.

He introduces shock tactics from the first verse by juxtaposing an image of his compatriots embracing each other and the New Year with a series of insults which emphasise their conservatism, incompetence and hypocrisy:

Ils s'embrassent au mois de janvier,
car une nouvelle année commence,
mais depuis des éternités
l'a pas tell'ment changé la France.
Passent les jours et les semaines,
y'a qu'le décor qui évolue,
la mentalité est la même,
tous des tocards, tous des faux-culs.

They kiss each other in January,
because a new year is beginning,

But France hasn't really changed
In ages.
Days and weeks pass,
Only the scenery moves on,
Attitudes stay the same,
They're all losers, two-faced pricks.

In the second verse, France is portrayed as a police state in which political opposition and the preservation of its memory are repressed in the name of public order:

Ils sont pas lourds, en février,
à se souvenir de Charonne,
des matraqueurs assermentés
qui fignolèrent leur besogne.
La France est un pays de flics,
à tous les coins d'rue y'en a cent,
pour faire régner l'ordre public
ils assassinent impunément.

———————————

Hardly anyone in February
Remembers Charonne,
and the meticulous job
the boys did with their truncheons.
France is a country of cops,
There's a hundred on every street corner,
To maintain public order
They kill with impunity.

The first lines allude to an anti-OAS demonstration organised by trade-unions on 8 February 1962 which led to the death of nine participants.[76] Eight of the victims suffocated while attempting to escape from charging riot police via the Charonne metro station. This tragedy had special significance for Renaud; not only had OAS bombs exploded in the apartment blocks inhabited respectively by his immediate family and grandparents, but his mother and father had also taken part in the 8 February demonstration. He later remembered his parents returning home in tears after attending the public funeral and massive demonstration for the Charonne victims held at the Père-Lachaise cemetery on 13 February

[76] The OAS (Organisation de l'Armée Secrète) was a terrorist military organisation which supported French rule in Algeria.

1962.[77] As a general critique of the French police, the second verse of *Hexagone* also echoes an earlier incident in October 1961 during which police killed scores of Algerian demonstrators in the streets of Paris and threw their bodies into the Seine, as well as the confrontations between students and the CRS in May 1968. Similarly, it would have resonated with contemporary audiences familiar with the punitive attitude adopted by Raymond Marcellin, Minister of the Interior during Pompidou's presidency, towards recalcitrant radicals whose revolutionary fervour remained undamped by the political defeat of the May movement. The Charonne metro station was once again the scene of violent demonstrations after a security guard shot dead the young Maoist activist Pierre Overney at Renault-Billancourt on 25 February 1972.[78]

In the third verse, Renaud again uses a specific incident to comment on broader issues:

> Quand on exécute au mois d'mars,
> de l'autr'côté des Pyrénées,
> un anarchiste du pays basque,
> pour lui apprendre à se révolter,
> ils crient, ils pleurent et ils s'indignent
> de cette immonde mise à mort,
> mais ils oublient qu'la guillotine
> chez nous aussi fonctionne encore.
>
> _____
>
> An execution in March
> on the other side of the Pyrenees,
> of a Basque anarchist,
> to teach him a lesson,
> Makes them shout, cry and condemn
> This hideous killing,
> But they forget that the guillotine
> Is still in operation here.

The anarchist in question was Salvador Puig Antich, a 26-year old Catalan separatist sentenced to death by a Spanish court after being charged with

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77 Dominique Sanchez and Thierry Séchan, *Renaud: L'Album*, Messidor, Paris, 1987, p. 7; *Renaud en liberté*. Like most of the French population, Renaud would not have known when he wrote *Hexagone* that the Chief of Police in 1962, Maurice Papon, had also been responsible for the deportation of Jews from the Bordeaux region to the Nazi death camps during the German Occupation: *Le Canard enchaîné* published the first revelations about Papon's past in 1981.

78 Bernier and Buot, *L'Esprit des seventies*, pp. 54-55

the murder of a policeman. Despite the absence of proof, an international campaign to have the sentence commuted and the relatively infrequent application of the death penalty in Spain, Puig Antich was garrotted in a Barcelona prison on 2 March 1974.[79] In retrospect, Renaud's reminder that the guillotine continued to operate on French soil assumes additional significance when one considers that France became in 1981 – some four years after Spain – the last Western European nation to abolish the death penalty. Puig Antich's execution would also have been symbolically important to separatist movements in France, where only two months earlier the government had dissolved the French Basque organisation Enbata, the Breton Front de Libération de la Bretagne (FLB) and the Corsican Fronte Paesanu Corsu di Liberazione (FPCL). Regional autonomy had been a key demand in the struggle against centralised power structures during May 1968 and returned as a theme in Renaud's later songs.

In the fourth verse Renaud evokes a lacklustre proverb diffused by the media – "en avril ne te découvre pas d'un fil" ("never cast a clout till May is out") – to ridicule the French population's fastidious adherence to outdated or meaningless principles and traditions. He then turns in the next verse to the events of May 1968:

> Ils se souviennent, au mois de mai,
> d'un sang qui coula rouge et noir,
> d'une révolution manquée
> qui faillit renverser l'histoire.
> J'me souviens surtout d'ces moutons,
> effrayés par la liberté,
> s'en allant voter par millions
> pour l'ordre et la sécurité.
>
> _____
>
> They remember in May
> the red and black blood
> of a failed revolution
> which almost changed the course of history.
> I especially remember them,
> terrified by freedom,

---

79 Edouard de Blaye, *Franco and the Politics of Spain* [1974], translated by Brian Pearce, Penguin, Middlesex, England, 1976, p. 365; Stanley G. Payne, *The Franco Regime, 1936-1975*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin, 1987, p. 596. Puig Antich's execution has been interpreted as a retaliatory measure both against the assassination of Spanish Prime Minister Carrero Blanco by the ETA in December 1973 and against the Catalan regionalist movement in general.

voting in their millions like sheep
for order and safety.

These lines highlight in heroic terms the injuries sustained by protesters in May 1968 and Renaud's belief in the May movement's real potential to change French society: the widespread description of the events as a "révolution mimée," ("pseudo-revolution") with its patronising and diminishing overtones, is replaced here by the more ennobling image of a "révolution manquée" ("failed revolution"). They also convey the depth of feeling Renaud continued to experience some six years later towards the "silent majority" who had ensured the landslide victory of the Gaullists at the legislative elections of June 1968.

This leads logically in the sixth verse to an attack on the myth of the French Resistance which had played an important part in establishing De Gaulle's authority:

Ils commémorent, au mois de juin,
un débarquement d'Normandie,
ils pensent au brave soldat ricain
qu'est v'nu se faire tuer loin d'chez lui.
Ils oublient qu'à l'abri des bombes,
les Français criaient: vive Pétain,
qu'ils étaient bien planqués à Londres,
qu'y avait pas beaucoup d'Jean Moulin.

———————————

They commemorate in June
the Normandy landing,
they think of the brave Yankee soldiers
who came to get killed miles from home.
They forget that far away from the bombs
the French were shouting "long live Pétain!"
that they were well-hidden in London,
that there were few like Jean Moulin.

The implication that not only Vichy collaborators but also De Gaulle's forces lacked the moral courage to resist the Germans at home must have scandalised many listeners in the mid-1970s, especially when one considers that French attitudes towards the occupying authorities had only recently come under close scrutiny with the release of Marcel Ophüls's documentary *Le Chagrin et la pitié* (1971), Robert Paxton's book *La*

France de Vichy (1973) and Louis Malle's feature film *Lacombe Lucien* (1974).[80]

In the seventh and eighth verses, Renaud vents his spleen on the working-class masses for accepting their lot and thereby abandoning their historical revolutionary mission. Drunken revelry on 14 July and seaside holidays in August evoke the pathetic pleasures sanctioned by a parsimonious and manipulative government. The official celebrations of Bastille Day appear as the antithesis of the spontaneous festiveness which characterised May 1968, as a popular distraction rather than a renewal of revolutionary values. However, Renaud's frustration with the working-class masses did not diminish his loyalty to the working-class cause. The vitriolic imagery of these verses represent a challenge to, rather than an outright rejection of, the working class. Renaud takes a similar stance to the working-class *chansonniers* of the nineteenth century, who were determined to goad their frightened or complacent listeners into action.[81]

After berating the French working classes for allowing themselves to be governed like pawns, Renaud attacks what he considers to be the fascist tendencies of the French government:

> Lorsqu'en septembre on assassine
> un peuple et une liberté
> au coeur de l'Amérique latine,
> ils sont pas nombreux à gueuler.
> Un ambassadeur se ramène,
> bras ouverts il est accueilli,
> le fascisme c'est la gangrène,
> à Santiago comme à Paris.
>
> _____
>
> The murder in September
> of a people and their freedom,
> in the heart of Latin America,
> arouses few cries of protest.
> An ambassador turns up

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80 This was a period when it was still possible for a collaborationist like the former head of the Lyons militia, Paul Touvier, to receive a discreet Presidential pardon (1971).

81 For example, Montéhus's *La Vérité en marche*: "J'accus' la classe ouvrière / De n'pas se sout'nir / Elle regard' trop en arrière / Au lieu d'voir l'avenir / Allons, peuple, du courage / Lève ton drapeau / Abolis ton esclavage / N'sois plus un troupeau" ("I accuse the working classes / Of not supporting each other / They look too much to the past / Instead of seeing the future / Come on people, be brave / Raise your flag / Abolish your slavery / Stop behaving like sheep")

and is welcomed with open arms,
fascism is like gangrene,
Be it in Santiago or Paris.

Salvador Allende's socialist "experiment" in Chile, which survived against all odds for nearly three years until Auguste Pinochet's coup d'état on 11 September 1973, had enormous exemplary value not only for former *soixante-huitards* but also for the major French political parties. The French Right, whose grip on power was seriously threatened since the signing on 26 June 1972 of the "Programme Commun de Gouvernement" by the Parti Socialiste, the Parti Communiste and the left-wing of the Parti Radical, had sought to discredit Allende's government and hastened to recognise Pinochet's authority. Jean Daniel was one of the few French commentators to protest in his editorials of *Le Nouvel observateur*. On 17 September 1973 he pointed out:

> The Chileans have experienced the problem – a theoretical one in France at the moment, but which may not remain so – of making a legal and peaceful transition to socialism. They have conducted this experiment for our benefit as well.[82]

Daniel attacked the French government the following week for its precocious and zealous support of Pinochet's authoritarian regime. Such support, he argued, paved the way for the subsequent atrocities perpetrated against Allende's sympathisers:

> There was one week to play with. The French government made quite sure it didn't: the more crimes committed by the Chilean fascists, the more the French will fear the consequences of a left-wing electoral victory. This sordid and calculated self-interest is enough to make you feel sick.[83]

Among Pinochet's victims was the celebrated protest singer Victor Jara. Renaud opened his preface to Claude Fleouter's *Un Siècle de chansons* (1988) by evoking Jara's memory:

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82 "Les Chiliens ont vécu le problème – bien théorique en France pour le moment mais qui pourrait ne pas le rester – du passage légal et pacifique vers le socialisme. Cette expérience, ils l'ont faite, aussi, pour nous" Jean Daniel, "Le Chili c'est aussi un peu la France," *Le Nouvel observateur*, 462, 17-23 September 1973, p. 20

83 "Il y avait une semaine dont on pouvait profiter. Le gouvernement français s'en est bien gardé: plus le fascisme chilien commet des crimes, plus, selon lui, les Français auront peur des conséquences d'une victoire de l'Union de la gauche. Ce calcul sordide donne la nausée" Jean Daniel, "L'Etat français et le régime chilien," *Le Nouvel observateur*, 463, 24-30 September 1973, p. 20

> In September 1973, Chilean soldiers used their rifle butts to break the fingers of Victor Jara, a singer who supported Allende and the Government of Popular Unity, and then cut off his hands with an axe before executing him with a spray of machine-gun fire.[84]

It is not clear whether Renaud already knew the horrific details of Jara's fate when he wrote *Hexagone*; one can imagine nonetheless the profound emotions such knowledge might have provoked. Luckily for Renaud, the "gangrene" of fascism was less advanced in Paris than in Santiago: French authorities were content simply to ban *Hexagone* from the radio.[85]

In the tenth and eleventh verses, Renaud returns to the material pleasures promoted by France's capitalist system. He uses the wine harvest of October and November's Car Show as a pretext for a scathing attack on the mercantile Epicureanism of the French and their slavish addiction to commodities such as "la bagnole, la télé, l'tiercé" ("cars, TV, the trifecta").[86] Paul Yonnet notes that "on 31 March 1974, after twenty years of existence, the trifecta stakes (at the Auteuil racetrack) beat a new record: 90.5 million francs."[87] Yonnet adds that the *tiercé* had become so popular that communist politician Gaston Plissonnier felt obliged to reassure voters in the lead-up to the legislative elections of March 1973 that the Left's "Programme Commun" contained no restrictive policies in relation to their favourite pastime.[88] The consumerist values challenged by *soixante-huitards* six years earlier were thus flourishing when Renaud wrote *Hexagone*. Renaud himself continued to regard such pleasures as "the opium of the French people," a line which reiterated the *soixante-huitards*' slogan: "commodities are the opium of the people."

In the final verse of *Hexagone*, Renaud imagines a Christmas blow-out reminiscent of Marco Ferreri's 1973 film *La Grande bouffe*:

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84 "En septembre 1973, les militaires chiliens brisent à coups de crosse de fusil les doigts de Victor Jarra [*sic*], chanteur de l'Unité Populaire, partisan d'Allende, puis lui tranchent les mains à la hache avant de l'exécuter d'une rafale de mitraillette" Renaud, preface to Claude Fleouter, *Un Siècle de chansons*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1988, p. vii

85 James Corbett, *Through French Windows: An Introduction to France in the Nineties*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1994, p. 206

86 The *tiercé* is a bet placed on a horse race and is similar to our trifecta.

87 "Le 31 mars 1974, après vingt ans d'existence, le pari tiercé (couru sur l'hippodrome d'Auteuil) bat un nouveau record d'enjeux: 90 millions et demi de francs" Yonnet, *Jeux, modes et masses*, p. 17

88 Ibid., p. 18

En décembre, c'est l'apothéose,
la grande bouffe et les p'tits cadeaux,
ils sont toujours aussi moroses,
mais y'a d'la joie dans les ghettos.
La Terre peut s'arrêter d'tourner,
ils rat'ront pas leur réveillon,
moi j'voudrais tous les voir crever,
étouffés de dinde aux marrons.

_____

December is the highlight,
with presents and a big spread,
they're still just as sullen,
but there's joy in the ghettos.
They wouldn't miss their party,
even if the Earth stood still,
I hope they all choke to death
on their Christmas turkey.

The four choruses which punctuate the twelve verses of *Hexagone* in the manner of seasonal or astrological changes further deflate French delusions of grandeur. The first chorus offers the following comparison between French and German leaders:

Etre né sous l'signe de l'hexagone
c'est pas c'qu'on fait de mieux en c'moment,
et le roi des cons, sur son trône,
j'parierais pas qu'il est all'mand.

_____

To be born under the sign of the hexagon
isn't the best you could do at the moment,
and I bet the king of dickheads, sitting on his throne,
Isn't German.

This terse comparison was charged with historical connotations. Renaud wrote these lines at a time when De Gaulle's hope of uniting Europe under France's leadership seemed increasingly difficult to sustain in the face of West Germany's superior political and economic clout. By this time too, Pompidou was worried by the prospect that socialist Chancellor Willy Brandt might align his nation's interests with those of the USSR rather than

America or Western Europe.[89] Renaud's comparison would have had further significance for a contemporary audience beginning to confront the extent of French collaboration with Nazi Germany and haunted by the demons of successive German occupations. More generally, the image of the French being ruled by a king rather than a president highlights the failure of revolutionary principles and could even be interpreted as an allusion to Giscard d'Estaing's regal airs.

The comparison between France and Portugal in the second chorus was not a random one either. The Revolution of Carnations in April 1974, which achieved the extraordinary feat of deposing Europe's oldest authoritarian regime with relatively little bloodshed, announced a period of intensive social reform during which the extreme-Left was particularly influential. Popular song had immense symbolic value in Portugal as well as Chile: on 25 April, Radio Renaissance played José Afonso's *Grândola vila morena* – banned by Portuguese authorities – as the signal for the military coup which ushered in the revolution.[90] Although a more moderate, parliamentary system of socialist democracy was established eighteen months later, the Revolution of Carnations resurrected for a brief period the lost hopes of May 1968.

After identifying "le roi des cons" as French in the third chorus, Renaud concludes with a provocative assertion notable for the audacious use of the adjective "bandant" – from the verb *bander*, meaning "to have an erection" – and, most importantly, for implicating the entire French population in the collapse of revolutionary ideals:

> Etre né sous l'signe de l'hexagone,
> on peut pas dire qu'ça soit bandant.
> Si l'roi des cons perdait son trône,
> y'aurait cinquante millions de prétendants.
>
> ———————————
>
> To be born under the sign of the hexagon
> isn't exactly what you'd call a turn-on.

---

89 François Schlosser, "Allemagne 'dangereuse...,' " *Le Nouvel observateur*, 459, 27 August-2 September 1973, pp. 27-29

90 *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, corpus 18, Encyclopaedia Universalis France S.A., Paris, 1993, p. 788

If the king of dickheads lost his throne,
there'd be fifty million pretenders.[91]

One of the most significant features of *Hexagone* is the way it exposes and denounces the patriotic mythologising which characterised the *trente glorieuses*, or thirty years of economic prosperity which followed the Liberation. The term "hexagone" itself, usually employed to distinguish metropolitan France from its overseas departments and territories, must have seemed like an affront at a time when the French were being forced to question the Gaullist legacy while trying to cope with the effects of global recession and establish their authority within the newly-inaugurated European Community.

While it is difficult to think of a more virulently anti-patriotic song, it would be a mistake to interpret *Hexagone* as a crude exercise in nihilistic defeatism. Its disillusioned tone marks a break with the generous optimism of May 1968, yet the entire song resonates with that period's revolutionary fervour. Its plethora of historical and international references is suggestive of the typically *soixante-huitard* call for permanent, worldwide revolution. Above all, it illustrates Jacques Attali's assertion that "true revolutionary music describes not revolution itself but its absence."[92] In another song on his first album, entitled *Société, tu m'auras pas!* Renaud proclaims his refusal to renounce the ideals of May 1968 and prophesies the return of the Commune of 1871, with which the May events were frequently compared:

Y'a eu Antoine avant moi,
y'a eu Dylan avant lui,
après moi qui viendra?
Après moi, c'est pas fini.
On les a récupérés,
oui, mais moi on m'aura pas.
Je tirerai le premier
et j'viserai au bon endroit.

J'ai chanté dix fois, cent fois,

---

91 These lines resonate with the chorus of Georges Brassens's *Le Roi* (1972): "Il y a peu de chances qu'on / Détrône le roi des cons" ("There's little chance of / Dethroning the king of dickheads")

92 "La vraie musique révolutionnaire n'est pas celle qui dit la révolution, mais celle qui en parle comme un manque" Quoted by Pierre-Albert Castanet, "Les Années 1968: Les Mouvances d'une révolution socio-culturelle populaire," in Antoine Hennion (ed.), *1789-1989: Musique, histoire, démocratie: Colloque international organisé par Vibrations et l'IASPM, Paris, 17-20 juillet 1989*, Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, 1992, p. 145

j'ai hurlé pendant des mois,
j'ai crié sur tous les toits
ce que je pensais de toi,
société, société,
tu m'auras pas. . . .

. . . . . .

Demain, prends garde à ta peau,
à ton fric, à ton boulot,
car la vérité vaincra,
la Commune refleurira.

_____

Before me there was Antoine,
and Dylan before him,
after me, who will it be?
After me, it's not over.
They've been brought into line,
but that won't happen to me.
I'll shoot first
and I'll aim well.

I've sung a hundred times,
I've screamed for months on end,
I've shouted from the rooftops
what I thought of you,
society, society,
you won't get me. . . .

. . . . . .

Tomorrow, watch your back,
your money and your jobs,
because truth will out,
the Commune will rise again.

Hexagone and *Société, tu m'auras pas!* are striking for their defiant attachment to revolutionary aims at a time when such aims no longer seemed achievable to many former *soixante-huitards* themselves. Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman affirm in their vast study of the May generation:

> This story, which began at the start of the 1960s, stops in 1975. We suspected as much during our endless interviews with the story's heroes. They themselves ended their "confessions" at around this turning-point, when their collective enterprise, multi-faceted but propelled by a common inspiration, broke up into individual destinies. The withdrawal from this enterprise took many forms: the

> return to self-contemplation, to family, children, career, study, community life, religion . . . At the sale of the century, obsolete ideologies were up for grabs.[93]

However, the longevity of a song like *Hexagone*, attributable in part to the allusive, almost allegorical way in which Renaud evokes specific historical events, also suggests that the death of revolutionary aspirations in the mid-1970s was less final or widespread than is sometimes thought.[94] Although the song was never released as a single and was never a hit in show business terms, it acquired the status of an anthem among Renaud's fans.[95] According to James Corbett, *Hexagone* was "on the lips of every teenager" during the heyday of SOS-Racisme in the mid-1980s.[96]

To promote his first album, Renaud presented a short recital over three weeks in June 1975 at La Pizza du Marais, a *café-théâtre* run by Lucien Gibara, where many exponents of the *nouvelle chanson française* of the early 1970s were given their first break.[97] According to Renaud's brother, "the audience was extremely confused by the eclectic nature of the program."[98] Notwithstanding the delinquent tone which suffused Renaud's lyrics, one can imagine listeners not knowing what to make of the relationship between an acerbic protest song like *Hexagone*, with its topical themes, gravity and Dylanesque sound, and an exuberant realist song like *La Java sans joie*, with its nostalgic, playful aspects and melodious accordion riffs. A knowledge of the historical complexities of May 1968 may have helped them to see the common threads which tied these diverse elements together. Even so, it was somewhat unusual for politically militant *gauchisme* to coexist with hedonistic revolt; these represented

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93 "En 1975 s'interrompt ce récit commencé à l'aube des années soixante. Nous le pressentions lorsque nous menions nos interminables entretiens avec les 'héros' de cette histoire. D'eux-mêmes, ils achevaient leur 'confession' vers ce point de bascule où l'aventure collective, diverse mais portée par le même souffle, s'étiole en destins individuels. L''itinéraire de dégagement' a revêtu des formes multiples: le retour à soi, à la famille, aux enfants, l'insertion professionnelle, l'analyse, l'étude, la vie associative, la religion . . . A la braderie du siècle, les idéologies obsolètes se sont retrouvées en solde" Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Génération: 2. Les Années de poudre*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1988, p. 617

94 Renaud was still performing *Hexagone* in public as recently as 1995 and even thought of using it as a model for a new song about the twelve member countries of the European Union. In 1998 he released an updated version of *Hexagone* with rap artist Doc Gynéco entitled *L'Hexagonal*.

95 *Renaud en liberté*; Personal interview

96 Corbett, *Through French Windows*, p. 206

97 For this recital, Renaud was accompanied on accordion by Jo Maurage.

98 "L'éclecticisme du répertoire laissa l'auditoire extrêmement perplexe" Séchan, *Le Roman de Renaud*, p. 50

contrasting, and sometimes opposing currents of the May movement.[99] Furthermore, while the "eclecticism" of Renaud's early repertoire was more a sign of creative ferment than confusion, he was yet to impose his own voice. This emerged more fully in the second half of the 1970s, along with the cause célèbre which had been latent in his first album: the delinquent youth of the Parisian *grands ensembles*.

[99] Bernier and Buot write in *L'Esprit des seventies* that "les gauchistes n'aiment pas le rock'n'roll" ("leftists don't like rock and roll"), p. 44

Chapter 3

1975-1980: "Le Zonard déchaîné"

By the mid-1970s, the problems associated with the housing estates of suburban Paris had reached a critical level. The consequences of global recession – in particular, the de-industrialisation of the Paris region – coincided with the decline of working-class culture and the emergence of a new *quart monde* (lumpenproletariat) in the increasingly dilapidated *grands ensembles*. This *quart monde* included a large contingent of recently-arrived immigrants from diverse destinations, with little in common save their poverty and disorientation.

As early as 1973, one government document had recommended limiting the construction of large residential blocks.[100] In 1976, Giscard d'Estaing affirmed that "the era of concrete at any cost is over."[101] However, although Giscard implemented a series of cultural projects aimed at rehabilitating the Parisian suburbs, his reluctance to build more *grands ensembles* seems to have gone hand in hand with a general neglect of the Paris region. According to Bernard Marchand:

> Michel Poniatowski, minister of the Interior and close friend of the President, recommended fewer community facilities in the Paris region to stop people moving to the city. The unavowed aim was to let the capital fall into ruin and thereby put a halt to migration from the countryside, perhaps even push away the Parisians themselves.[102]

Government policy on suburban Paris seemed at best ambiguous; the "right to the city" was theoretical rather than real for its expanding underclass.

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100 This became known as the "circulaire Guichard," after the name of its author, Olivier Guichard.

101 "Le temps du béton à n'importe quel prix est fini" Quoted by Marchand, *Paris, histoire d'une ville*, p. 326

102 "Michel Poniatowski, ministre de l'Intérieur et ami intime du Président, recommanda une réduction des équipements publics dans la région parisienne afin de tarir les migrations vers Paris. Il s'agissait, sans oser le dire, de laisser péricliter la capitale afin d'en détourner les provinciaux et peut-être les Parisiens eux-mêmes" Ibid., p. 330

Jacques Brun and Marcel Roncayolo observe that "the housing estate 'crisis' of the 1970s was primarily defined in terms of youth problems."[103] The proliferation of youth gangs and the rising incidence of petty crime in the *grands ensembles* fed a pervasive sense of insecurity among suburban dwellers. The old, slang term *zonard* was revived to refer to delinquent youths from the contemporary *zone*. In the early twentieth century, a *zonard* (in contrast to *zonier*, or inhabitant of the *zone*) was an army private stationed at the fortifications of the historic *zone* (*zone* itself was short for *zone militaire fortifiée* or *zone non aedificandi*). By the 1950s, *zonard* could also mean *clochard* (derelict); from about 1974-1975, it increasingly replaced *blouson noir* as a synonym for "jeune voyou de banlieue" ("young suburban delinquent") or "individu vivant en marge de la société" ("fringe-dweller").[104]

May 1968 had encouraged Renaud's political militancy and aptitude for self-expression; this, combined with his subsequent immersion in the marginal culture of his delinquent friends from Le Bréa, put him in the rare position of being able to speak on behalf, as well as from the perspective, of a *zonard*. In the three studio albums which he recorded in the second half of the 1970s, he dramatised the existence of contemporary *zonards* by reinventing the realist genre of popular song, acquiring in the process the nickname of "le Bruant des banlieues."[105]

Some of Renaud's songs from this period have been aptly described by Jacques Erwan as "sung reports" from the *zone*.[106] With a journalist's eye for detail, Renaud used real life as a basis for highlighting the spatial and racial divisions as well as the generation gaps in French society. *Les Charognards* (1975) describes the aftermath of a failed hold-up during which a young North African delinquent and his friend have been gunned

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103 "La 'crise' des grands ensembles se cristallise . . . dans les années 1970, autour des problèmes d'adolescents" Jacques Brun and Marcel Roncayolo, "Formes et paysages," in Duby (ed.), *Histoire de la France urbaine*, Vol. 5, Marcel Roncayolo (ed.), *La Ville aujourd'hui: Croissance urbaine et crise du citadin*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1985, p. 345

104 For more on the fascinating evolution of the term *zone* and its derivatives, see Colin, Mével and Leclère, *Dictionnaire de l'argot*, pp. 674-675 and *Dictionnaire historique*, Dictionnaires Le Robert, Paris, 1992, p. 2303

105 Guy Sitbon, "Leur pote Renaud...," *Le Nouvel observateur*, 802, 24-30 March 1980, p. 46

106 "Reportages chantés" Jacques Erwan, "Renaud, 'chanteur énervant,' " *Paroles et musiques*, March 1986, p. 25

down by the police. The song begins by establishing a contrast between the locations which frame the narrator's life and death:

> Il y a beaucoup de monde dans la rue Pierre-Charron.
> Il est deux heures du mat', le braquage a foiré,
> j'ai une balle dans le ventre, une autre dans le poumon.
> J'ai vécu à Sarcelles, j'crève aux Champs-Elysées.
>
> _____
>
> There are lots of people in Pierre-Charron Street.
> It's two in the morning, the hold-up was a balls-up,
> I've got a bullet in the stomach, another one in my lung.
> I lived at Sarcelles, I'm dying on the Champs-Elysées.

Sarcelles was the first *grand ensemble* built in Paris (1954) and spawned the term *sarcellite* to evoke the malaise experienced by the inhabitants of this new urban environment. In contrast, the Champs-Elysées run through the geographical centre of Paris and represent a bastion of State power, social privilege and commercial opulence. Ironically, the Champs-Elysées of ancient Greek and Roman mythology were an idyllic resting place for the souls of the heroic or virtuous; here they appear instead as the setting of a bitter social conflict in which a delinquent outsider is condemned, rejected and "put to death." The narrator's fate is the inevitable consequence of his attempt to cross the line which separates central Paris, determined to defend its privileges at all costs, from the city's outer suburbs. This would have resonated with former *soixante-huitards* for whom the Champs-Elysées had been a symbolically important site. David Caute describes the "Long March" by students on 7 May 1968:

> At the corner of the boulevard Montparnasse there was a moment of hesitation: eastward toward the working-class districts or westward toward the Champs-Elysées? The temptation to invade bourgeois Paris prevailed . . . By ten, they had reached the Etoile, red and black flags aloft, the massed demonstrators roaring the "Internationale" around the Arc de Triomphe.[107]

In turn, "bourgeois Paris" took to the Champs Elysées at the end of the month, in a massive pro-Gaullist demonstration which sounded the death knell of the May movement.

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[107] Caute, *The Year of the Barricades*, pp. 214-215

In the second verse of *Les Charognards*, the specific circumstances of the narrator's death take on the dimension of a parable:

> Je vois la France entière du fond de mes ténèbres.
> Les charognards sont là, la mort ne vient pas seule,
> J'ai la conn'rie humaine comme oraison funèbre,
> le regard des curieux comme unique linceul.
>
> _____
>
> I can see the whole of France from the darkness of death.
> The vultures have arrived, death doesn't come alone,
> Human stupidity is my funeral oration,
> the gaze of onlookers my only shroud.

The narrator's zoomorphic description of onlookers as "charognards" ("vultures") suggests a milieu devoid of humanity and ruled instead by the law of the jungle. Their contemptuous, pitiless attitude is evoked by the chant-like chorus and the familiar register of their vocabulary:

> C'est bien fait pour ta gueule, tu n'es qu'un p'tit salaud,
> on port'ra pas le deuil, c'est bien fait pour ta peau.
>
> _____
>
> You had it coming, you little bastard,
> you won't be missed, serves you bloody right.

A baker's claim that he is not racist is ironically undercut by his use of the term "bicots," or "wogs," and by his generalising assertion that "les bicots" are involved in every crime. The jungle-like aspects of the city are emphasised by a former paratrooper's comparison of North African immigrants with the "Viêt-minh" he fought against in Indo-China and by his motto: "Shoot first and ask questions later." The aggressive xenophobia of the "charognards" points to the anxiety which intensified in France during this period in relation to its growing immigrant population.

The punitive response of the "charognards" contrasts with the empathetic reaction of younger witnesses to the narrator's fate. In particular, a group of "zonards" denounce the police shooting on moral grounds and as a gesture of solidarity with a fellow pariah:

> Les zonards qui sont là vont s'faire lyncher sûr'ment,
> s'ils continuent à dire que les flics assassinent,

qu'on est un être humain même si on est truand,
et que ma mise à mort n'a rien de légitime.

_____

The street kids hanging around are gonna get lynched,
if they keep saying the cops are murderers,
that even crims are human beings,
and that my execution is unlawful.

The mob frenzy is underlined by the verb "lyncher" ("to lynch") while the contrasting solemnity of the expression "mise à mort" ("execution," literally "putting to death") has the triple effect of incriminating the police, politicising the incident and providing the narrator with the basic dignity of which he has been deprived. By using these "zonards" as a mouthpiece for the message of the song, Renaud reiterates the *soixante-huitards*' belief that the revolutionary values of liberty, equality and fraternity existed in their purest form among the most marginalised social groups.

The narrator's fatalistic, unsentimental closure of the debate ironically augments the song's pathos. His dry observation that he is "almost lucky" in comparison with his friend is followed by a stark reminder that the guillotine was still in operation when the song was written:

Je suis pas un héros, j'ai eu c'que j'méritais,
je ne suis pas à plaindre, j'ai presque de la chance,
quand je pense à mon pote qui, lui, n'est que blessé
Et va finir ses jours à l'ombre d'une potence!

_____

I'm no hero, I got what I deserved,
don't pity me, I'm almost lucky,
when I think of my mate, who's only wounded
And who's gonna die in the shadow of a gallows!

The final verse returns briefly to the brutal realism of the opening lines of the song before concluding with a metaphor in which the night sky becomes the narrator's tomb and the stars replace the material fortune he had dreamt of acquiring. The natural world here seems benevolent, in contrast to the jungle-like environment of the city. The actual moment of death is suggested by the reverberation effect added to Renaud's vocals in the last line:

Il y a beaucoup de monde dans la rue Pierre-Charron.
Il est deux heures du mat', mon sang coule au ruisseau,
c'est le sang d'un voyou qui rêvait de millions.
J'ai des millions d'étoiles au fond de mon caveau,
j'ai des millions d'étoiles au fond de mon caveau.

_____

There are lots of people in Pierre-Charron Street.
It's two in the morning, my blood's running down the gutter,
It's the blood of a delinquent who dreamt of millions.
I've got millions of stars at the end of my tomb,
I've got millions of stars at the end of my tomb.

Les Charognards has much in common with traditional realist song: the gritty language, the specific place names, the narrator's social milieu, his explicitly unheroic stature and the apparent inevitability of his fate. However, the impact of his collision with bourgeois society, the martyr-like role which he assumes despite himself and the way in which his crime polarises public opinion give the song a didactic, political dimension not usually associated with the realist genre. *Les Charognards* shows that Renaud was more than just "le Bruant des banlieues." This is particularly evident in the way he combines street slang with formal terms more in keeping with traditional revolutionary rhetoric. The group of outcasts which he represented were also part of a growing underclass, whereas Bruant's protagonists inhabited a world whose disappearance was imminent and which could be contained by, even transmuted into the material of, realist folklore.

From a musical point of view, *Les Charognards* is difficult to categorise. Like many of Renaud's songs from the second half of the 1970s, it incorporates the accordion of realist song into a melodious blend of styles in which folk, country and blues influences are prominent. When asked to comment on his musical affiliations, Renaud replied:

> Musically, I don't feel close to anyone, although closer to a "folk" than to a "rock" tradition, and also closer to *la chanson française*, an undefined tradition which steals bits from all kinds of music: it's neither folk nor rock, it's not "variety" music in the pejorative sense, it's *la chanson française*, . . . [a style] favouring melodies and arrangements which aren't too aggressive or intrusive.[108]

[108] "Je me sens musicalement proche de personne mais, enfin, plus proche d'un courant 'folk' que d'un courant 'rock,' et aussi plus proche d'un courant assez vague qui est 'la chanson française,' qui est musicalement pas très défini, qui pique un peu à toutes sortes de musique: c'est pas du folk, c'est

The simple musical arrangement of *Les Charognards* certainly throws the lyrics into relief, but also adds to the emotional depth of the song. Steel-string and bass guitars provide a gentle rhythm while sorrowful accordion and cello riffs relay each other during the verses. The short accordion solo which introduces and concludes the narrative evokes the protagonist's isolation and the circularity of his short life.

The narrator of *Les Charognards* refers only briefly to his home ground. Another song, *La Chanson du loubard* (1977), takes the listener into the world of the *zone* itself.[109] The lyrics are by Muriel Huster, but seem deliberately modelled on Renaud's style. In the first two verses, the narrator offers a bleak image of his habitat:

Le jour se lève sur ma banlieue
J'ai froid c'est pourtant pas l'hiver
Qu'est-ce que j'pourrais foutre nom de Dieu
J'ai pas un rond et j'ai pas l'air
Sérieux, sérieux

J'suis un loubard parmi tant d'autres
Je crèche pas loin de la Défense
J'ai l'air crado, c'est pas ma faute
Mon HLM, c'est pas Byzance
Mon pote, mon pote

_____

The day dawns on my suburb
I'm cold, but it's not winter
There's fuck-all to do
I'm skint and don't look
Serious, serious

I'm just one of many delinquents
I live near "la Défense"
I look dirty, but it's not my fault
My block of flats ain't no palace
Mate, mate

The opening lines present the "banlieue" as an environment which is artificial and out of step with the natural world. Paradoxically, this

pas du rock, c'est pas de la variété au sens péjoratif, c'est de la chanson française . . . ça privilégie la mélodie et les arrangements pas trop aggressifs et pas trop envahissants" Personal interview

109 The term *loubard* is synonymous with *zonard*.

environment seems to take on organic qualities in the second verse, permeating the narrator as if by osmosis so that his unkempt appearance mirrors his "HLM." The unusual, contemporary slang term "Byzance" (literally, "Byzantium"), which recurs frequently in Renaud's songs, simply means "fantastic" or "great"; the allusion to the exoticism and opulence of the ancient eastern city nonetheless throws into relief the narrator's poverty and the drabness of his surroundings. Boredom and a pervasive sense of anonymity are also part of his lot. He discloses neither his name nor his address; we are only told that he is "one of many delinquents" who lives "near la Défense." The verb *crécher*, which is synonymous in slang with *habiter*, can also mean "to crash" (in the sense of "to sleep") or simply "to hang out" and thus highlights the lack of any meaningful attachment between the narrator and his home.[110] The etymological link with *crèche* also evokes the absence of family and echoes the term *cité-dortoir* (dormitory town), often used to refer to housing estates deprived of basic community facilities. The narrator's physical environment thus dominates his existence and provokes profound feelings of alienation and despair.

His alienation is compounded by his inability to identify with the work and values of his father's generation:

> A quatorze ans, mon paternel
> M'a fait embaucher à l'usine
> Deux jours plus tard, j'ai fait la belle
> Paraît que j'suis un fils indigne, bordel
>
> _____
>
> When I turned fourteen, my old man
> Got me a job at the factory
> Two days later, I did a runner
> Seems I'm an unworthy son, for fuck's sake

On one level, the narrator's rebelliousness could be seen as typical of any adolescent struggling against paternal authority. One can also imagine him experiencing the repetitive, dehumanising nature of factory work as a mere extension of his habitat. On another level, these lines point to the

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110 Colin, Mével and Leclère, *Dictionnaire de l'argot*, p. 177; *Collins Robert Comprehensive French-English Dictionary*, HarperCollins Publishers and Dictionnaires Le Robert, Glasgow and Paris, 1995, p. 219

disappearance in the 1970s of a strong working-class culture capable of providing younger generations with a sense of structure and belonging.

The narrator is nonetheless acutely aware of social inequalities, for which he seeks compensation through petty crime:

Un soir dans une rue déserte
J'ai fauché une Honda 500
A un fils de bourgeois honnête
Avec elle je fonce à 200
Ouais c'est chouette, c'est chouette

_____

One night in a deserted street
I nicked a Honda 500
From an upright bourgeois kid
I do 200 on it
It's brilliant, brilliant

In many of Renaud's songs of the late 1970s, the motorcycle offers an escape not only from the stultifying world of the *grands ensembles* but also, more generally, from the constraints imposed by bourgeois society. The aspirations of both *zonards* and former *soixante-huitards* overlap in this recurrent symbol of freedom. However, in *La Chanson du loubard*, the promise of liberation is cut short by a sad memory:

Mon copain Pierrot s'est planté
Sur l'autoroute, un jour de pluie
Parfois je l'entends rigoler
C'est sûr qu'il est au paradis
C't'enflé, c't'enflé

_____

My friend Pierrot crashed
On the freeway, one rainy day
Sometimes I can hear him laughing
He's definitely in heaven
Dumb bastard, dumb bastard

The link between the *zone* and May 1968 is reiterated in the following verse by the narrator's evocation of Gavroche, whose immortal youthfulness contrasts with the decrepitude of the high-rise flats:

Et moi j'continue mon cinoche
Au pied de ces buildings miteux

J'voudrais crever avant d'être moche
J'voudrais finir comme toi mon vieux Gavroche

_____

I'm still alive, in my make-believe world
At the foot of these seedy buildings
Hope I die before I get ugly
Hope I end my days like you, Gavroche, old friend

Like the narrator, Gavroche haunted the fringes of Paris, situated in the early decades of the nineteenth century at the city's *barrières* (the tollgates which marked the official limits of Paris). However, as Louis Chevalier has suggested, the *barrières* were invested by Victor Hugo with intense revolutionary symbolism.[111] The whole of Paris belongs to Gavroche; the relationship between the city and the street urchin is a natural, symbiotic one:

> Paris has a child and the forest a bird; the bird is called a sparrow; the child is called a kid. Combine these two ideas, one of which contains a blazing furnace, the other a new dawn, make the two sparks of Paris and childhood collide with each other; out flies a little person. Homuncio, as Plato would say . . . If one were to ask of the enormous city: What's that? It would reply: That's my baby.[112]

Both Gavroche and the narrator of *La Chanson du loubard* are inclined to states of reverie or "cinoche," but Gavroche also interacts dynamically with his surroundings. His ability to appropriate urban space is the prerequisite for his involvement in the vanguard of revolutionary insurrection. In contrast, Renaud's narrator is ultimately defeated by his surroundings:

J'suis un loubard périphérique
J'en ai plein les bottes de ce bled
La France est une banlieue merdique
Comme dit mon copain Mohamed
Aux flics, aux flics

Le jour se lève sur ma banlieue
J'ai froid c'est pourtant pas l'hiver
C'est drôle le bitume est tout bleu

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111 Chevalier, *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses*, pp. 187-194

112 "Paris a un enfant et la forêt un oiseau; l'oiseau s'appelle le moineau; l'enfant s'appelle le gamin. Accouplez ces deux idées qui contiennent, l'une toute la fournaise, l'autre toute l'aurore, choquez ces étincelles, Paris, l'enfance; il en jaillit un petit être. Homuncio, dirait Plaute . . . Si l'on demandait à l'énorme ville: Qu'est-ce que c'est que cela? elle répondrait: C'est mon petit" Hugo, *Les Misérables*, p. 590

Y'a ma bécane qui crame par terre
Bon Dieu, bon Dieu
Oh, bon Dieu, bon Dieu...

_____

I'm a ring-road delinquent
I've walked for miles in this dump
France is one big, shitty suburb
Like my friend Mohamed
Tells the cops, the cops

The day dawns on my suburb
I'm cold, but it's not winter
It's funny, the asphalt's all blue
My bike's burning on the ground
For Christ's sake, for Christ's sake
Oh, for Christ's sake, for Christ's sake...

The narrator's marginalisation is highlighted by his description of himself as "périphérique," an adjective which means "peripheral" in a general sense, but which is also short for *boulevard périphérique* (the ring-road which separates the world of the *grands ensembles* from central Paris). Once more, it is as if the narrator has physically merged with his environment. The phrase "j'en ai plein les bottes de ce bled" describes a state of mind diametrically opposed to the joyous, adventurous spirit of an *enfant errant* (a "stray," or homeless child) like Gavroche. The rhyme between "bled" and "Mohamed" ironically emphasises the idea of dislocation: in Arabic, the term *bled* refers to the home countries of North Africa, whereas in French slang it signifies an isolated region.

La Chanson du loubard powerfully conveys the relentless presence of the *grands ensembles*, which seem to consume both the narrator and his one chance of escape, a stolen motorcycle. However, the significance of the lyrics was eclipsed to some degree by a public controversy which the song provoked about Renaud's social origins. His detractors scornfully dismissed him as a "faux loubard" ("fake delinquent") who had no right to speak on behalf of a milieu to which he belonged by adoption rather than by birth.[113] The authors of *Cent ans de chanson française* claim that "for real delinquents, Renaud is a usurper: at Bobino (1980), he solicits the applause of a middle-class audience who leaves the concert feeling

113 Séchan, *Le Roman de Renaud*, pp. 54-55

reassured."[114] Renaud thus found himself in a similar position to his predecessor Bruant, who was accused both during and after his lifetime of exploiting the poor to win fame and fortune.

Renaud inadvertently created some degree of confusion by adopting the stage persona of a *loubard*, but he never claimed to share the same background as the protagonists of his songs. He explained to Jacques Erwan in 1982:

> I wasn't born in a biker jacket, I decided one day to wear one. Because I feel comfortable with "delinquents": they make me laugh, they fascinate me because of what they have and I don't, they're crazy! And all that violence! I'm not violent, because I don't have the build for it. To be violent, you either have to be crazy or strong: I've never been that crazy, and I've never been strong at all . . . But mentally, I'm like them: I have the same rebelliousness, but perhaps I like life better than they do . . . I tend to be more gentle and to respect others, I even have a romantic side. So there has to be an opposite impulse, I have to find an outlet for my violence somewhere and a way of expressing my revolt, and that happens primarily in my songs.[115]

More recently, he speculated that a particularly censorious attitude exists in France towards singers who seek to represent a social milieu other than their own, "as if you have to live in poverty to denounce it!"[116] Renaud's detractors seem oblivious to the fact that popular culture often emanates from social intermediaries who possess the ability to move back and forth between different classes. Moreover, there is little hard evidence about how "real" *loubards* perceived Renaud. Perhaps, though, the main point which his critics have missed is that he belongs to a generation whose ecumenical, fraternal impulses naturally led it to identify with, and assume the role of advocate for, dispossessed social groups. By singing "je suis un loubard," Renaud invoked the spirit of May 1968, when students chanted "we're all

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114 "Pour les loubards, les vrais, Renaud est un usurpateur, qui va quérir à Bobino (1980) les bravos d'un public petit-bourgeois qui repart rassuré" Chantal Brunschwig, Louis-Jean Calvet and Jean-Claude Klein, *Cent ans de chanson française*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, p. 326

115 "J'suis pas né avec un blouson d'cuir, j'ai décidé un jour d'en porter un. Parce que j'suis bien avec les 'voyous': ils m'font marrer, y m'fascinent dans ce qu'ils ont et que j'ai pas, ils sont fous! Et toute cette violence! Moi qui suis pas violent parce que j'ai pas le physique pour l'être. Pour être violent, il faut être soit barge soit fort: barge, je l'ai jamais été beaucoup, et fort, je l'ai jamais été du tout . . . Mais, mentalement, j'suis comme eux: j'ai la même révolte qu'eux, mais peut-être que j'aime plus la vie qu'eux . . . J'suis plutôt quelqu'un de doux et qui respecte les autres, j'suis même parfois fleur bleue, j'aime ce qui est romantique. Alors, il faut bien qu'il y ait le contre-pied, que je défoule ma violence quelque part et que j'exprime ma révolte: c'est essentiellement dans mes chansons" Quoted by Erwan, *Renaud*, p. 74

116 "Comme s'il fallait vivre dans la misère pour la dénoncer!" "Renaud: 'Je ne suis pas le valet de Tonton,' " interview with Sacha Reins, *Elle*, 2 December, 1991, p. 70

German Jews!" in protest against Daniel Cohn-Bendit's expulsion from France, or "we're part of the underworld!"

In another song, *Dans mon HLM* (1980), the *zone* is magnified even further, as the narrator describes floor by floor the occupants of his *habitation à loyer modéré*. The themes of social conflict and racism as well as the jungle-like qualities of the city recall *Les Charognards*; the difference here is that instead of articulating an oppositional relationship between the urban centre and its periphery, they relate to a single building in the suburbs. In the first verse, the narrator's vitriolic portrayal of the *gardien d'immeuble* (caretaker) announces the quality of social relations in his *HLM*:

Au rez-de-chaussée, dans mon HLM,
y'a une espèce de barbouze
qui surveille les entrées,
qui tire sur tout ce qui bouge,
surtout si c'est bronzé,
passe ses nuits dans les caves
avec son Beretta,
traque les mômes qui chouravent
le pinard aux bourgeois.
Y s'recrée l'Indochine
dans sa p'tite vie d'peigne-cul.
Sa femme sort pas d'la cuisine,
sinon y cogne dessus.
Il est tell'ment givré
que même dans la Légion
z'ont fini par le j'ter,
c'est vous dire s'il est con!

On the ground floor in my block of flats
there's a Gestapo type
who guards the entrance,
who shoots at anything that moves,
especially if it's got dark skin,
spends his nights in the cellars
with his Beretta,
chasing kids who flog
grog from the bourgeois tenants.
He thinks he's still in Indo-China
bloody yobbo.
His wife never leaves the kitchen,
if she does, he beats her up
He's so crazy

that even the Foreign Legion
ended up chucking him out,
which shows how stupid he really is!

The *gardien d'immeuble* was a relatively new and controversial figure in the French suburban landscape, who has been described as the "disputed representative of the body corporate's impersonal power, a repressive and moralistic authority figure, both powerless and disliked at the same time."[117] Renaud's description of the caretaker as a "barbouze" ("secret police agent"), reinforces the sense of fear and mistrust which dominates relationships in the *grands ensembles*.[118]

The other floors are occupied by a striking range of social types, including young business executives, former *soixante-huitards*, a returned soldier, a delinquent and a policeman. Few of the tenants seem to like each other. Ironically, the social fragmentation evoked by Renaud was partly the result of a naive, if well-intentioned urban policy applied during the 1950s and 1960s which aimed to create a classless society by housing a heterogeneous population in the same space. Jacques Brun and Marcel Roncayolo explain how this utopian experiment backfired: "Even in the selective, second-generation housing estates, social nuances which had been more or less masked in the urban tradition and mixed up by the multiplicity of signs, took on a kind of caricatured sharpness."[119] While social inequalities were accentuated, class identity and solidarity were weakened. The absence of traditional meeting places such as the neighbourhood street and *bistrot* contributed to a widespread anomie. During the 1970s, many of the better-off inhabitants of the *grands ensembles* moved elsewhere; their place was taken by immigrants with a similar socio-economic status if not the same ethnic background. However, the "caricatured" social differences analysed by Brun and Roncayolo and illustrated by Renaud continued to exist in many areas.

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117 "Relais contesté du pouvoir impersonnel de l'office immobilier gérant de l'immeuble, figure à la fois impuissante et mal aimée d'une autorité répressive et d'un moralisme rigide" Jean-Claude Chamboredon, Michel Coste and Marcel Roncayolo, "Populations et pratiques urbaines," in Duby (ed.), *Histoire de la France urbaine*, Vol. 5, p. 468

118 Colin, Mével and Leclère, *Dictionnaire de l'argot*, p. 38

119 "Même dans les grands ensembles sélectifs de la deuxième génération, les nuances sociales, plus ou moins voilées dans la tradition urbaine ou mêlées par la multiplicité des signes, prennent ici une sorte de netteté caricaturale" Brun and Roncayolo, "Formes et paysages," p. 343

In *Dans mon HLM*, there are small pockets of resistance to the constrictive, antisocial atmosphere which pervades the building. The narrator describes approvingly the communal household on the second floor, which includes the former *soixante-huitards*:

> Y vivent comme ça, relax,
> y'a des mat'las par terre,
> les voisins sont furax,
> ils font un boucan d'enfer.
> Ils payent jamais leur loyer,
> quand les huissiers déboulent,
> ils écrivent à *Libé*,
> c'est vous dire s'y sont cools!
>
> _____
>
> They're easy-going and relaxed,
> there are mattresses on the floor,
> they make a hell of a racket,
> which sends the neighbours wild.
> They never pay their rent,
> when the bailiffs rock up,
> they write to *Libé*,[120]
> which shows how cool they are!

Their noisiness is echoed in the pounding bass and drums and in the wailing electric guitar of the song itself. The musical arrangement of *Dans mon HLM* can be seen as an attempt to burst through the stifling ambience evoked in the lyrics; Renaud's public performances of the song often had a carnivalesque quality.[121] The narrator also seems to be on friendly terms with the Trotskyist who lives on the fourth floor and whose political activism appears incongruous in such a setting:

> Depuis sa pétition,
> y'a trois ans, pour l'Chili,
> tout l'immeuble le soupçonne
> à chaque nouveau graffiti,
> n'empêche que "Mort aux cons"
> dans la cage d'escalier,
> c'est moi qui l'ai marqué,
> c'est vous dire si j'ai raison!

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120 The radical newspaper "*Libé*," or *Libération*, founded in 1973, pursued a rigorously egalitarian philosophy and provided former *soixante-huitards* with a forum for protest throughout the 1970s.

121 See for example the video of his 1986 concert at Le Zénith, *La Chetron sauvage*, Virgin, 1986

———————————

Since his petition,
three years ago, for Chile,
the whole building suspects him
of every new graffiti
But “Death to jerks”
in the stairwell,
I’m the one who wrote it,
which shows how right I am!

However, the narrator’s *HLM* seems finally to engulf and crush any serious attempt to resist its alienating force. Unable to change his environment, he can only subvert its signifier with the drug-inspired pun of the chorus:

Putain, c’qu’il est blême, mon HLM!
Et la môme du huitième, le hasch, elle aime![122]

———————————

Fuck it’s dull, my block of flats
And the kid on the eighth floor loves hash!

With the “kid on the eighth floor,” he withdraws, like the narrator of *La Chanson du loubard*, into dreams about children:

Quand j’en ai marre d’ces braves gens
j’fais un saut au huitième
pour construire un moment
avec ma copine Germaine,
un monde rempli d’enfants.
Et quand le jour se lève
on s’quitte en y croyant,
c’est vous dire si on rêve!

———————————

When I’m sick of all these people
I pop up to the eighth floor
to spend a moment building
with my girlfriend Germaine,
a world full of children.
And when day breaks
we leave each other believing it’s true,
which shows what dreamers we are!

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[122] This pun is impossible to translate into English.

This fantasy contrasts with the apocalyptic image of the caretaker lying in wait, gun in hand, for the children who steal wine from their neighbours' cellars. A "dynamic young manager" from the first floor also dislikes children, an attitude which the song links to his political and class affiliations. He spends his money on material possessions and on litter for his cats,

> parc'que naturellement
> c'bon contribuable centriste,
> il aime pas les enfants,
> c'est vous dire s'il est triste!
> because, of course
> this good, centre-voting taxpayer
> doesn't like children,
> which shows how pathetic he is!

His sentiments are shared by an advertising executive, whose participation in the feminist movement seems motivated primarily by her narcissistic tendencies:

> Aux manifs de gonzesses,
> elle est au premier rang,
> mais elle veut pas d'enfants
> parc'que ça fait vieillir,
> ça ramollit les fesses
> et pi ça fout des rides,
> elle l'a lu dans *l'Express*,
> c'est vous dire si elle lit!
>
> ———————————
>
> At rallies for chicks[123],
> she's in the front line,
> but she doesn't want children
> because it makes you age,
> it makes your bum drop
> and gives you wrinkles,
> she read it in *L'Express*,
> which shows how well-read she is!

Unlike the old working-class *faubourgs*, where large families were the norm and children had the run of the streets, the environment described by Renaud is hostile to the very notion of childhood. This rejection of children

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[123] These are no doubt pro-choice rallies: the Veil laws legalising abortion had only recently been made permanent when Renaud wrote *Dans mon HLM*.

appears as both a symptom of social fragmentation and a metaphor for moribund community values.

After its release as a single, *Dans mon HLM* became one of Renaud's most popular songs. The informative and evocative tableau it offered of life in a suburban housing estate led Socialist politician and writer Jacques Attali to proclaim: "I'd swap thousands of pages of urban sociology for Renaud's *Dans mon HLM*."[124] Renaud's "HLM" was also a metaphor for French society, one which pointed to the increasing difficulty of preserving the communitarian and egalitarian values of May 1968 in the face of the ruthless individualism which emerged at the end of the 1970s.

At a 1988 colloquium entitled *La Banlieue en fête: de la marginalité urbaine à l'identité culturelle*, popular songs and crime novels of the 1970s and 1980s were criticised for portraying the suburbs as an undifferentiated, barren environment, unable to sustain any significant sense of movement, action, community, creativity or redemption. For Danielle Tartakowsky, this bleak vision reflects the fantasies of "outsiders" who have only a tenuous relationship to the suburbs, and contrasts with the more constructive imagery offered by suburban inhabitants themselves. She describes this indigenous imagery in the following terms:

> It is through theatre that they combat the images of disintegration, but also the loneliness, racism and physical dilapidation of their environment. Theatre reveals the potential of a world which was considered hopeless, while the theatrical act in itself fosters new values: solidarity, complementarity and environmental renewal. The aim is to fight against suburban problems while at the same time challenging the negative images of the suburbs created by outsiders, and which suburban inhabitants adopt all the more readily because such images correspond to real difficulties which have nothing to do with fantasy.[125]

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124 "Je donnerais des milliers de pages sur la sociologie urbaine contre *Mon HLM* [*sic*] de Renaud" Quoted by Séchan, *Le Roman de Renaud*, p. 95

125 "C'est à la représentation théâtrale qu'il incombe ici de combattre les images de désagrégation, mais aussi la solitude, le racisme, la dégradation de l'environnement en révélant les potentialités d'un monde que l'on croyait sans espoir et en construisant de par l'acte théâtral même des valeurs nouvelles: solidarité, complémentarité, réhabilitation des lieux . . . [il s'agit de] lutter contre ces effets tout en combattant l'image négative que la banlieue porte désormais sur elle-même, adhérent d'autant plus volontiers aux représentations négatives venues d'ailleurs qu'elles correspondent à un mal de vivre réel qui ne tient en rien du fantasme" Noëlle Gérôme, Danielle Tartakowsky and Claude Willard (eds), *La Banlieue en fête: De La marginalité urbaine à l'identité culturelle*, Presses Universitaires de France, Saint-Denis, 1988, p. 17

Tartakowsky nonetheless accepts that "outsider" and "insider" representations of the *banlieue* occasionally converge. She makes the opposite assertion to the authors of *Cent ans de chanson française*, arguing that "suburban youth recognises itself in the songs of Renaud and a few others."[126]

If this assertion is true, how are we to understand Renaud's success in representing artistically young *zonards* to the point that they themselves felt understood in his songs? One possibility is that, while some of Renaud's songs emphasise the problems of life in the *zone*, many others celebrate instead the rituals, humour and language with which their protagonists attempt to transcend such problems. The narrator of *Je suis une bande de jeunes* (1977) is determined not to let his environment the better of him:

Mes copains sont tous en cabane,
ou à l'armée, ou à l'usine.
Y se sont rangés des bécanes,
y'a plus d'jeunesse, tiens! ça me déprime.
Alors, pour mettre un peu d'ambiance
dans mon quartier de vieux débris,
j'ai groupé toutes mes connaissances
intellectuelles, et c'est depuis

que j'suis une bande de jeunes
à moi tout seul.
Je suis une bande de jeunes,
j'me fends la gueule.

_____

My friends are all in the nick,
in the army, or working in factories.
They've settled down,
all the young people have gone, hey! it really gets me down.
So to liven things up
in my neighbourhood of old dodderers,
I've got together my entire intellectual
acquaintanceship, and since then

I'm a gang of youths
all on my own.
I'm a gang of youths,

126 "La jeunesse des banlieues se reconnaît aujourd'hui dans les chansons de Renaud et de quelques autres" Ibid., pp. 19-20

what a crack-up!

The following verses reveal that he has acquired his ingenuously described "intellectual acquaintanceship" from gangster novels, road movies and comic books. These staples of popular culture provide the key references for a make-believe game which transforms his entire neighbourhood into a playground. His quest for entertainment is complemented musically by the bright picking of acoustic guitars and a quirky percussive arrangement. His adoption of multiple personalities provides the basis for a series of whimsical jokes:

Quand dans ma bande y' a du rififi,
j'me téléphone, j'me fais une bouffe,
j'fais un colloque, j'me réunis,
c'est moi qui parle, c'est moi qu'écoute.
Parfois je m'engueule pour une soute
qu'est amoureuse de toute ma bande,
alors la sexualité de groupe
y'a rien de tel pour qu'on s'entende.

_____

When there's trouble in my gang,
I get in touch with myself,
I organise conferences and meetings,
I do all the speaking, and all the listening.
When I fight with myself over a trollop
who's in love with the whole gang
there's nothing like group sex
to foster good relations.

The game ends with a parody in franglais of Lucky Luke, the "poor lonesome cowboy" created by Goscinny and Morris in a comic-book series which itself parodied the mythology of Hollywood westerns. The Far West, like the underworld, was a particularly important reference for youth gangs of the *zone*. Both the *blousons noirs* of the 1960s and the *zonards* of the 1970s created a look which combined the leather jacket, jeans and tattoos popular among bikers with the Mexican boots or *santiagos* and the bandana worn by cowboys. Some of Renaud's music from the second half of the 1970s was inspired by the dramatic orchestral soundtracks of Hollywood westerns and the bluegrass sounds of the Appalachian mountains. This transposition of Far West mythology to the *zone* often has a humorous intention in Renaud's songs, although the connection is quite natural when

one considers the city's margins as a kind of frontier. Gustave Aimard's adaptations of the novels of James Fenimoore Cooper inspired a similar correlation in nineteenth-century Paris, while the *apaches* and other *peaux-rouges* who frequented the historic *zone* and who emerged not long after Buffalo Bill brought his travelling circus to Paris proudly identified with the American Indian tribes to whom they were compared.

The humour of *Je suis une bande de jeunes* stems in particular from the convergence of the narrator's youthful innocence with the gritty realism of the street. The line "y se sont rangés des bécanes" offers a comically diminutive variation of the expression *se ranger des voitures*, meaning "to go straight" or "to settle down." In the final verse, the narrator unconvincingly compares his moped excursions with the exploits of the biker gang portrayed in *The Wild One*:

> Quand j'me balade en mobylette,
> on dirait l'équipée sauvage,
> quinze décibels c'est la tempête
> dans tout le voisinage.
>
> _____
>
> When I go for a spin on my moped,
> I look like the wild one,
> at fifteen decibels, it's like a storm
> all over the neighbourhood.

At the same time, these lines recall the scene in *Les Misérables* where Gavroche hurtles through the dawn streets of Paris with a cart he has stolen for the barricades:

> Two lampposts broken one after the other and this song which Gavroche was singing at the top of his voice; it was a bit much for such cowardly streets who want to sleep while the sun rises . . . Clearly, the Hydra of Anarchy was out of its box and wreaking havoc in the neighbourhood.[127]

The way Renaud's narrator appropriates space through imagination and a child-like sense of play makes one think of many other passages from *Les*

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127 "Deux réverbères brisés coup sur coup, cette chanson chantée à tue-tête, cela était beaucoup pour des rues si poltronnes, qui ont envie de dormir au coucher du soleil . . . Il était clair que l'Hydre de l'Anarchie était sortie de sa boîte et qu'elle se démenait dans le quartier" Hugo, *Les Misérables*, pp. 1189-1190

Misérables, for example when Gavroche turns Bonaparte's unfinished, vermin-infested model elephant – an entire *zone* unto itself – into a kind of exotic cubby-house, or when Hugo describes the presence of a typical Parisian street urchin in the upper circle of the theatre: "He only has to be there, with his radiant happiness and vibrant enthusiasm, clapping his hands like a bird flaps its wings, for this narrow, fetid, dark, sordid, unhealthy, hideous and abominable hold to be called the Gods."[128]

The narrator of *Je suis une bande de jeunes* can hardly be described as a revolutionary. However, his antics do recall something of the noisy, carnivalesque demonstrations of May 1968. Furthermore, the opening verse could be seen as an allusion to the harnessing of the May movement's youthful energy by the institutions of bourgeois society and also to Renaud's feeling of isolation at a time when many former *soixante-huitards* had renounced all hope of realising their ideals. Similarly, the parody of Lucky Luke at the end of the song is not without a hint of melancholy:

> I'm a poor lonesome young band,
> I feel alone.
> I'm a poor lonesome young band,
> I break my gueule.[129]

The cartoon-like attributes of Renaud's narrator and his resemblance to Gavroche must also have provided a welcome counterpoint to the stereotyped images of youth gangs relayed by the media. These images, which often amplified violent incidents in a paranoid and sensationalist manner, justified repressive attitudes on the part of exponents of law and order and contrasted with a number of more reflective sociological studies which concluded that crime and violence, although they were a feature of youth gangs, rarely constituted their reason for existence.[130] Renaud may

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128 "Il suffit qu'il soit là, avec son rayonnement de bonheur, avec sa puissance d'enthousiasme et de joie, avec son battement de mains qui ressemble à un battement d'ailes, pour que cette cale étroite, fétide, obscure, sordide, malsaine, hideuse, abominable, se nomme le Paradis" Ibid., p. 593

129 At the end of each of his adventures, Lucky Luke rides off into the sunset singing "I'm a poor lonesome cowboy..." Renaud's franglais also produces a deliberate and humorous mistranslation of the expression *se fendre la gueule*, which means "to split one's sides laughing."

130 See for example Jean Monod, *Les Barjots*, Julliard, Paris, 1968; Philippe Robert and Pierre Lascoumes, *Les Bandes d'adolescents: Une Théorie de la ségrégation*, Les Editions Ouvrières, Paris, 1974

have been fascinated by the violence of his delinquent friends, but he was also compelled to demystify their rituals. Many, if not all, of his songs about the *zone* emphasise their protagonists' vulnerability as well as their capacity for humour and play. Others poke fun at the fantasies of omnipotence which underlie their heroes' abortive attempts to emulate real-life gangsters.

Similarly, Renaud often sends up his own tough guy pretensions. In the monologue *Peau aime* (1978), he jokes about his slight build and bandy legs. After explaining to the audience the significance of the tattoos on his arms, he claims:

> Dans l'dos j'voulais m'faire tatouer
> un aigle aux ailes déployées.
> On m'a dit: y'a pas la place,
> non, t'es pas assez carré,
> alors t'auras un moineau.
> Eh! y'a des moineaux rapaces
> ça t'fait marrer, mes conneries?
> Laisse béton,
> j'démystifie!
>
> _____
>
> I wanted a tattoo on my back
> of an eagle with spread wings.
> I was told: there's not enough room,
> nope, you're not broad enough,
> we'll do you a sparrow.
> Hey! some sparrows are birds of prey
> my bullshit stories make you laugh?
> Let's drop it,
> I'm putting things straight!

By presenting both himself and his *zonard* protagonists as comically inept or harmless, Renaud may well have reassured the bourgeois members of his audience, as the authors of *Cent ans de chanson française* suggest. He may also have wanted to pre-empt questions about his authenticity. Perhaps, though, the most important aspect of such demystification was its potential to humanise the *zonards* and, by enabling them to laugh at themselves as well as at the more privileged members of society, to forestall the kind of pathological and ultimately self-defeating hatred promoted by the exponents of "gangsta rap" a decade later.

In Renaud's songs, physical frailty also goes hand in hand with revolutionary ardour. Conversely, he mercilessly derides sporting types. This connection between physical attributes and social values had numerous precedents in French literature and song. Gavroche and his friends admired each other's physical defects.[131] The hero of Emile Goudeau's 1885 novel *La Vache enragée*, a humpback named Tignassou, had a political vision based on what Jerrold Seigel has described as "a biological theory of the conditions of revolutionary purity":

> Until his own time, he believes, every revolution was spoiled by the subsequent corruption of its leaders; success turned the party heads into satisfied conservatives. Revolutionary aspirations could be fulfilled only if new leaders emerged. There was but one group that could be depended on to remain social outcasts, physical misfits, and they must therefore become the Revolution's leaders. Hearing Tignassou's discourses, one of his friends conceives a name for the paper he wants to start: *The Crooked Line: Organ of the Humpbacks, the Bandy-Legged, the Rickety, the One-armed, and the Deaf*.[132]

The image of the street kid as a small bird goes back at least as far as *Les Misérables* and was frequently associated in the 1920s and 1930s with the female protagonists of realist song.[133] In his 1952 song *La Mauvaise réputation*, Georges Brassens expressed his gratitude to all manner of misfits, albeit with an added twist:

> Au village, sans prétention,
> J'ai mauvaise réputation;
> Qu'je m'démène ou qu'je reste coi,
> Je pass' pour un je-ne-sais-quoi.
> Je ne fais pourtant de tort à personne,
> En suivant mon ch'min de petit bonhomme;
> Mais les brav's gens n'aiment pas que
> L'on suive une autre route qu'eux...
> Non, les brav's gens n'aiment pas que
> L'on suive une autre route qu'eux...
> Tout le monde médit de moi,

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131 Jacques Seebacher, "Le Tombeau de Gavroche ou Magnitudo Parvuli," in Anne Ubersfeld and Guy Rosa (eds), *Lire "Les Misérables,"* Libraire José Corti, Paris, 1985, p. 196

132 Jerrold E. Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics and the Boudaries of Bourgeois Life 1830-1930*, Viking, New York, p. 218

133 This was illustrated by the nicknames of the two most celebrated realist singers, "la môme Pervenche" (Fréhel's first stage name) and "la môme Piaf." Chirpy and resilient, but also vulnerable and diminutive in size, the *moineau* or *piaf* in particular embodied both the freedom and suffering of life in the *zone*.

Sauf les muets, ça va de soi.

_____

In my village, without any pretensions,
I've got a bad reputation;
Whether I struggle furiously or remain silent,
I'm taken for a God knows what.
And yet, I cause no-one any harm,
As I go on my merry way;
But good folk don't like
You to follow a different road from them...
No, good folk don't like
You to follow a different road from them...
Everyone speaks ill of me,
Except for the mute, that goes without saying.

While Renaud enriched this tradition of celebrating the diminutive, the disabled and the eccentric, in some songs such as *Adieu minette* (1976), he accentuated instead the robust sexuality, violence and political incorrectness of youth gangs. The lyrics of *Adieu Minette* are set to a moderately-paced waltz of the type one may have expected to hear in a suburban dance-hall of the 1960s. This is something of a last waltz, since the narrator has decided to leave his bourgeois girlfriend on the grounds of social incompatibility. His recollection of their meeting reveals him to be considerably less innocent than the narrator of *Je suis une bande de jeunes* and more like the riffraff of traditional realist songs, whose supposed sexual prowess usually proved irresistible to frustrated bourgeois women:

Sous tes cheveux beaucoup trop blonds,
décolorés, ça va de soi,
t'avais une cervelle de pigeon,
mais j'aimais ça, mais j'aimais ça.

Au fond de tes grands yeux si bleus,
trop maquillés, ça va de soi,
t'avais que'qu'chose de prétentieux
que j'aimais pas, que j'aimais pas.

J'avais la tignasse en bataille
et les yeux délavés.
Je t'ai culbutée dans la paille,
t'as pris ton pied.

Adieu fillette, nous n'étions pas du même camp
Adieu minette, bonjour à tes parents.

_____

Beneath your hair which was far too blond,
and bleached, that goes without saying,
you had a brain the size of pea,
but I liked that, yeah I liked that.

In your big blue eyes,
thick with makeup, that goes without saying,
there was something pretentious
which I didn't like, no I didn't like.

I had a shock of hair
and glazed eyes.
I screwed you in the straw
And you came.

So long kid, we weren't on the same side
So long kid, say hi to your parents

The narrator then recalls being introduced to his girlfriend's entourage at her holiday house in the fashionable resort town of Deauville:

Tu m'as présenté tes copains,
presque aussi cons qu'des militaires.
C'étaient des vrais républicains,
buveurs de bière, buveurs de bière.

Le grand type qui s'croyait malin
en m'traitant d'anarchiste,
j'regrette pas d'y avoir mis un pain
avant qu'on s'quitte.

_____

You introduced me to your friends,
they were almost as stupid as soldiers.
They were real republicans,
Beer drinkers, yeah beer drinkers.

The big one who thought he was being smart
by calling me an anarchist,
I don't regret having biffed him
before we split up.

Another party at his girlfriend's home in the exclusive Parisian district of Neuilly has similarly catastrophic consequences:

J'suis venu un soir à ta surboum,
avec vingt-trois d'mes potes.

On a piétiné tes loukoums
avec nos bottes.

_____

I came one night to your party,
with twenty-three of my mates.
We stomped on your Turkish Delight
with our boots.

The narrator's attempt to explain such behaviour combines serious sociological reflection with an expression of false remorse:

Faut pas en vouloir aux marioles,
y z'ont pas eu d'éducation.
A La Courneuve, y'a pas d'écoles,
y'a qu'des prisons et du béton.

D'ailleurs y z'ont pas tout cassé,
y z'ont chouravé qu'l'argenterie,
Ton pote qui f'sait du karaté,
qu'est-ce qu'on y a mis, qu'est-ce qu'on y a mis!

Ton père, j'l'ai traité d'enfoiré
excuse-moi auprès d'lui:
si j'avais su que c'était vrai,
j'y aurais redit.

_____

Don't blame those jokers,
they've had no education.
At La Courneuve, there are no schools,
just prisons and concrete.

Anyway, they didn't break everything,
they only nicked the silver,
Your mate who did karate
we really laid into him, yeah we really laid into him!

I called your father a poofter
Apologise to him for me:
if I'd known it was true,
I would've said it again.

The contrast between the narrator's ironic if macho sense of humour and his girlfriend's vacuousness, between his virility and her father's effeminacy, and between the spontaneous violence of the narrator and his underprivileged friends on the one hand, and the contemptuous bluster of

his girlfriend's privileged male entourage on the other hand, thus forms the basis for a highly irreverent attack on the bourgeoisie as a class. The evocation of class differences in sexual terms and the assimilation of sexual conquest with the conquest of urban space is brutish and crudely vengeful, but also reflects the difficulty for youths from a *grand ensemble* like La Courneuve to change their circumstances through more gradual, political means. At the same time, the relationship between the narrator's uninhibited sexuality and his antimilitarism can perhaps be linked to the *soixante-huitards*' belief that sexual liberation was a prerequisite for successful social revolution. The juxtaposition of brazen sexual imagery and anarchistic references in *Adieu minette* is no doubt a far cry from the gentle hippy exhortation to "make love, not war"; it is striking nonetheless that the song concludes with an antimilitaristic quip:

> ça fait trois semaines que j'suis bidasse,
> l'armée c't'une grande famille.
> La tienne était moins dégueulasse,
> viv'ment la quille!
>
> _____
>
> I've been a soldier for three weeks
> the army's one big family.
> Yours was less revolting,
> I can't wait for demob!

The seduction of a bourgeois girl or the trashing of her parents' house in *Adieu minette* and the carnivalesque invasion of city streets in *Je suis une bande de jeunes* do not constitute revolutionary acts in any political sense, but they exemplify the kind of primal, expressive energy which has haunted French bourgeois society since the time of the Commune, and can be tied in with the appropriation of space as well as the quest for spontaneous pleasure which characterised May 1968.

The connection between the Commune, May 1968 and Renaud's songs about the *zone* can be extended in a metaphorical sense to his celebration of *zonard* language, in the same way that Michel de Certeau has compared the "prise de parole" ("speech-making" or, literally, "taking of the word") by *soixante-huitards* with the storming of the Bastille.[134] The most striking

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134 Michel de Certeau, *La Prise de parole*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1968

example of this linguistic Commune is *Laisse béton* (1975), the opening track on Renaud's second album and his first major hit. Based on a real incident involving one of his friends, *Laisse béton* describes in picturesque slang a series of violent confrontations between the narrator, who is minding his own business in a typical Parisian bar, and an anonymous stranger who covets the various items of clothing which mark the narrator out as a *zonard*: his "Santiag' " (Mexican cowboy boots), his "blouson" ("jacket") and his "Lévi-Strauss" jeans.

The memory of what must have been a terrifying experience in real life is exorcised by a series of humorous embellishments: the bluegrass musical arrangement transforms the bar into a Far West saloon; the consecutive punch-ups take on a slapstick quality and leave the narrator stark naked; his fate inspires the song's absurd moral, "faut pas traîner dans les bars, / à moins d'être fringué en costard" ("you shouldn't hang around in bars, / unless you're wearing a suit"). However, the appeal of *Laisse béton* stems primarily from Renaud's skilful celebration of *zonard* slang:[135]

J'étais tranquille, j'étais peinard,
accoudé au flipper,
le type est entré dans le bar,
a commandé un jambon-beurre,
puis il s'est approché de moi,
pi y m'a regardé comme ça:
T'as des bottes, mon pote, elles me bottent!
j'parie qu'c'est des Santiag';
viens faire un tour dans l'terrain vague,
j'vais t'apprendre un jeu rigolo
à grands coups de chaîne de vélo,
j'te fais tes bottes à la baston! Moi j'y'ai dit:
Laisse béton!
Y m'a filé une beigne, j'y'ai filé une torgnole,
m'a filé une châtaigne, j'lui ai filé mes grolles.

———————————

I was hanging loose, taking it easy,
leaning on the pinball machine,
the guy came into the bar,
ordered a ham roll,
came towards me,
and gave me this look:

135 According to Renaud, he wrote *Laisse béton* "en une demi-heure sur une table de resto" ("in half an hour at a table in a restaurant"). Quoted by Jacques Bertin, *Chantes toujours, tu m'intéresses*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1982, p. 130

Dig your boots, mate, they're great!
I bet they're Mexican;
come over to the vacant lot,
I'll teach you this cool game
with bike chains,
I'll fight you for your boots! I replied:
Forget it!
He threw a punch, I threw a bunch of fives,
he threw a knuckle sandwich, I threw him my boots.

"Laisse béton" signifies "laisse tomber" in *verlan*, an archaic form of backwards slang revived by *zonards* in the 1970s. When Renaud wrote *Laisse béton*, *verlan* was not widely spoken: this is attested by the translation of the expression into standard French on the album cover. The fact that *tomber* became in *verlan* a homonym for the building material which dominated the world of the *zone* must have given the expression additional resonance for the *zonards* among the song's audience. According to Dominique Sanchez, "the fringe-dwellers of France, proud to have been put on stage and into words in a song, hummed along ecstatically. The broad masses were dumbfounded by the discovery that concrete could be something other than an agglomerate of stones, gravel and sand."[136] The subsequent popularity of the expression *laisse béton* is illustrated by its use as a title both for Serge Le Peron's 1984 feature film about the youth of the *banlieue* and for a French language manual published in Denmark.[137]

Laisse béton contains other exotic terms such as *chouraver*, a verb frequently used by Renaud and based on the Romany *tchorav*, meaning "to steal." He cleverly makes "Lévi-Strauss" rhyme with "craignoss" [*sic*], an adjective referring to anything considered "ugly, dubious-looking or even worrying."[138] The humorous accumulation of synonyms to designate the punches thrown by the song's duelling protagonists is a typical feature of slang and exemplifies what Alphonse Boudard has described as

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136 "La France non-profonde, enorgueillie d'être mise en scène et en paroles dans une chanson, fredonne dans l'extase. Celle des profondeurs découvre médusée que le béton peut être autre chose qu'un agglomérat de cailloux, de gravier et de sable" Sanchez and Séchan, *Renaud: L'Album*, p. 18

137 Erwan, *Renaud*, p. 9

138 "Laid, douteux, voire inquiétant" An uncommon word in 1977, *craignoss* or *craignos* is further described by Colin, Mével and Leclère as "un mot très branché des années 80, malaisé à dater et à définir précisément" ("a very trendy word of the 1980s, difficult to date or define precisely"), *Dictionnaire de l'argot*, p. 173

> the supremacy of the imagination which argot proclaims because, beyond its secretive intent, its innumerable sources, its need to fill in the gaps neglected or considered unimportant by academic vocabulary, it feeds on the magnificent and sensuous pleasure of storytelling.[139]

Renaud no doubt picked up much of this slang from the delinquent friends he made at Le Bréa, some of whom came from the housing estates of Argenteuil, a north-western suburb of Paris. The linguist Claude Duneton also emphasises the influence of Renaud's earlier acquaintances at

> the Porte d'Orléans... The Porte d'O, the linguistic equivalent of the Belleville of yesteryear, spilling over Highway 20, the Vache-Noire! All those seedy areas, partial to bad boy patter. A small witness rocks up and winds the clock forward, instantly bringing things up to date. Renaud is a territorial singer. He doesn't invent the substance of his language, he steals it... That's how he astonishes his listeners, with this ancient method of appropriation, a lot more difficult to achieve than the deceptive evidence suggests. That's where you have to be really clever! In addition to being talented, I mean. So that it strikes just the right chord. More than anything, you need the gift of the gab... Innovation comes later, like artistic and personal style, tenderness and hatred as well...[140]

One could write a whole thesis on the extent to which Renaud's language constitutes a genuine form of argot.[141] However, this type of linguistic analysis, while not without anecdotal or technical interest, would risk missing the point. When informed by Albert Paraz about the creation of the Académie d'Argot in February 1948, Céline responded in his typically obscene but incisive fashion: "They really give people the shits with their argot. You take the language you know, you wiggle it around, either it

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139 "La fantaisie souveraine que proclame l'argot puisque, au-delà de sa vocation au secret, de ses innombrables racines, de la nécessité où il est de combler des secteurs négligés ou méprisés par le vocabulaire académique, il se nourrit surtout d'une superbe et savoureuse volupté de conter" Alphonse Boudard, Preface to Colin, Mével and Leclère, *Dictionnaire de l'argot*, pp. ix-x

140 "La Porte d'Orléans... La Porte d'O, l'équivalent linguistique du Belleville de jadis, avec son débordement sur la nationale 20, la Vache-Noire! Tous ces quartiers douteux, goûteux du jargon largonji des anges mauvais... Un garçon témoin redéboule, il remet tout à coup la pendule à l'heure, d'un tour de cadran. Renaud est un chanteur territorial. Il n'invente pas la matière de sa langue, il la vole... C'est là qu'il crée l'étonnement, par ce vieux mouvement d'appropriation beaucoup plus difficile qu'il n'y paraît sous l'illusoire évidence. C'est là qu'il faut être vraiment, mais vraiment très fort! En plus du talent, je veux dire. Pour que ce soit juste au quart de poil d'émotion près. En plus de tout il faut la langue comme personne. Comme un couteau!... L'invention vient après. L'art et la manière, le jus personnel. La tendresse, et la haine aussi..." Duneton, preface to Renaud, *Le Temps des noyaux*, pp. 8-9

141 Argot is usually attributed with one or more of the following functions: to maintain secrecy; to provide terms for objects or concepts peculiar to a given profession; to foster group cohesion; to allow its speakers to express themselves in a subversive or playful way. The last function certainly seems the most important in Renaud's songs.

comes or it doesn't. Voltaire makes me come, so does Bruant. It's the bedroom that counts, not the dictionary."[142] Céline's metaphor can be extended to Renaud's emphasis on the sensual aspects of *zonard* language, which represent, as suggested earlier, a Commune of words, a linguistic assertion of "the right to the city" and its corollary, "the right to be different."

The intensive mediatisation of a song like *Laisse béton* was a double-edged sword. It both diffused and dissipated what was distinctive and identity-forming in the language used by *zonards*. Since the huge success of *Laisse béton* in the early months of 1978 and of Claude Zidi's 1984 feature film *Les Ripoux* (*verlan* for *les pourris*), *verlan* has been appropriated by French teenagers from all social backgrounds as well as by the show business and advertising sectors. In her 1988 study of *verlan*, Vivienne Mela writes:

> Unfortunately for the *tireurs*, those descendants of the "pickpockets," France has begun to study its housing estates. Singers like Lavilliers, Higelin and Renaud, and illustrators like Margerin, among others, have popularised and poetised the *zone*, its mores and language. *Verlan* has evolved from a form of criminal slang into a teenage language, and has been appropriated by advertisers as a fashion statement, and even by people from the world of show business and politics[143]

Mela emphasises nonetheless that the original speakers of *verlan* renew its esoteric qualities, for example by limiting its usage to carefully chosen words, many of which are slang to begin with, or by "reverlanising" certain words of which the original translation into *verlan* involved more than a straightforward syllabic inversion.[144] Mela concludes her study by asserting that "the use of a word in *verlan*, however innocuous it might be, always marks the speaker as 'marginal' (in the very broad sense of the term) in

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142 "Ils nous font chier avec l'argot. On prend la langue qu'on peut, on la tortille comme on peut, elle jouit ou ne jouit pas. Voltaire me fait jouir, Bruant aussi. C'est la pageot qui compte, pas le dictionnaire" Quoted by Jacques Cellard, *Anthologie de la littérature argotique des origines à nos jours*, Editions Mazarine, Paris, 1985, pp. 7-8

143 "Hélas pour les tireurs, descendants des 'tire-laine,' la France s'est mise à étudier ses cités. Des chanteurs comme Lavillliers, Higelin, Renaud, des dessinateurs comme Margerin, parmi d'autres, ont popularisé et poétisé 'la zone,' ses moeurs, sa langue. D'argot de malfaiteurs le verlan est devenu langue d'adolescents, reprise façon mode par les publicitaires, voire par des personnalités du monde du spectacle ou de la politique" Vivienne Mela, "Parler verlan: Règles et usages," *Langage et société*, 45, September 1988, p. 47

144 The term *arabe*, for example, became *beur* and then *rebeu*.

relation to mainstream values."[145] Pierre Merle laments in a more general sense the supplantation of old-fashioned slang by the "langage branché" ("trendy language") of the 1980s, which he describes in post-modernist terms as a kind of amoeba-like parasite feeding off a variety of sources and demanding easy and instant gratification. Although he acknowledges Renaud's talent and relishes some of the expressions popularised by his songs, he argues that "the language used by the 1980s trendy . . . is somewhere between the intonations of Renaud and the early dialogues of Michel Blanc."[146] Unlike Merle, Duneton does not believe that the widespread diffusion of argot has resulted in a watering-down of its distinctive qualities; on the contrary, he considers this to be a novel and subversive development:

> The novelty is that "Renaud's language" rapidly becomes everybody's language . . . these days, among young people, for example, everyone speaks, or at least understands, in more or less the same way . . . In this sense, it can be said that Renaud is the first authentic "popular singer" of the entire nation. This is the reason – and I don't think I'm too far off the mark – for the adoration in which he is held by his audience, who feel overcome with emotion, with joyful gratitude towards the singer poet. Conversely, it is also the reason for the extremely serious hatred he provokes, for the contempt and sarcasm . . . It is hardly surprising that Renaud is an "irritating singer." He disseminates throughout France the language of its suburbs! Yet another troublemaker. Just like before 1914!...[147]

Indeed, Renaud's use of *zonard* slang has much in common with the fin-de-siècle anarchist culture described by Richard Sonn:

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145 "L'emploi d'un mot de verlan, si anodin soit-il, marque toujours son locuteur comme 'marginal' (dans le sens très large du terme) par rapport aux valeurs établies" Ibid., p. 70

146 "Le discours du branché des années quatre-vingt . . . se situe en général entre des intonations à la Renaud, et des dialogues qui seraient signés Michel Blanc, première époque" Merle, *Le Blues de l'argot*, p. 77. Michel Blanc was prominent in the café-théâtre scene and went on to become a well-known comic actor. He also wrote and directed several films, including *Viens chez moi, j'habite chez une copine* (1981), for which Renaud wrote the theme song, and *Marche à l'ombre* (1984), which took its title from one of Renaud's best-known songs.

147 "La nouveauté c'est que la 'langue de Renaud' devient très vite la langue à tout le monde . . . de nos jours, par exemple dans la jeunesse, tout le monde parle, ou du moins comprend plus ou moins de la même manière . . . En ce sens on peut dire que Renaud est le premier authentique 'chanteur populaire' de toute la nation. C'est la raison – je ne crois pas me tromper beaucoup – de cet engouement spécial qui s'est emparé du public, lequel se trouve envahi d'une émotion, d'une joyeuse reconnaissance à l'égard du chanteur poète. C'est aussi la cause, en revers, des haines très sérieuses qu'il suscite; des mépris, des sarcasmes . . . Comment s'étonner que Renaud soit un chanteur énervant? Il répand aux quatres coins de l'Hexagone le langage des banlieues! Encore un fauteur de troubles. comme avant 14!..." Duneton, preface to Renaud, *Le Temps des noyaux*, pp. 11 and 14. "Chanteur énervant" or "irritating singer" is one of many nicknames which Renaud has invented for himself.

> Not bombs and deputies, not even pimps and thieves, but ultimately social relationships were mediated by argot; the vocations symbolizing critical relationships were therefore deemed important. If the figures chosen to represent these relationships appear less than praiseworthy, that is because argot tended to be demystifying and derogatory, thus operating on a kind of negative logic whereby that which was last came first, that which was most marginal and disreputable was accorded pride of place.
> Anarchist theory and practice corresponded to the "negative logic" of argot in a number of ways. The central anarchist values of revolutionary spontaneity and direct action were paralleled linguistically in argot by the dominance of the concrete over the abstract, of the particular and local over the general and distant. The culture of argot had little use for delayed gratification, as exemplified either by the bourgeois work ethic or by the socialist faith in historical determinism. Neither could it become inspired by the prospect of parliamentary democracy; what politics it did profess was direct and participatory rather than representative.[148]

Sonn's observations provide a useful starting point for analysing Renaud's *Où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue?* (1980), a highly accomplished song comparable in its scope and belligerence to *Hexagone*. Applying the "negative logic" evoked by Sonn, Renaud adopts the persona of a dissolute *zonard*, who addresses his listeners from the bar of "un bistrot des plus cradingues" ("the filthiest of pubs"). The status of this persona and the environment he frequents belie the skilful way in which Renaud weaves together a range of themes, moving seamlessly between a denunciation of the show business industry, an attack on the French Communist Party, an exposition of anarchist principles and an evocation of the social malaise which dominated the end of Giscard's presidency. In the other songs discussed in this chapter, Renaud either defends or celebrates the *zonard* figure; here, he uses this figure as a mouthpiece for his own libertarian beliefs.

The first verses constitute an artistic manifesto in which Renaud excoriates his critics in the music press and are packed with the kind of concrete imagery described by Sonn:

> J'veux qu'mes chansons soient des caresses,
> ou bien des poings dans la gueule.
> A qui qu'ce soit que je m'agresse,
> j'veux vous remuer dans vos fauteuils.

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148 Sonn, "Language, Crime and Class," p. 370

Alors, écoutez-moi un peu,
les pousse-mégots et les nez-d'boeux,
les ringards, les folkeux, les journaleux.

D'puis qu'y'a mon nom dans vos journaux,
qu'on voit ma tronche à la télé,
où j'vends ma soupe empoisonnée,
vous m'avez un peu trop gonflé.

J'suis pas chanteur pour mes copains[149],
et j'peux être teigneux comme un chien.

J'déclare pas, avec Aragon,
qu'le poète a toujours raison.
La femme est l'avenir des cons,
et l'homme n'est l'avenir de rien.

Moi, mon av'nir est sur le zinc
d'un bistrot des plus cradingues,
mais bordel! où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue?

J'vais pas m'laisser emboucaner
par les fachos, par les gauchos,
tous ces pauv'mecs endoctrinés
qui foutent ma révolte au tombeau.

Tous ceux qui m'traitent de démago
dans leurs torchons qu'j'lirai jamais:
"Renaud c'est mort, il est récupéré";

Tous ces p'tits-bourgeois incurables
qui parlent pas, qu'écrivent pas, qui bavent,
qui vivront vieux leur vie d'minables,
ont tous dans la bouche un cadavre.
I want my songs to be caresses,
or smacks in the mouth.
Whoever I attack,
I want to see you squirm.

So listen up,
All you tools, drop kicks,
dorks, folk-singers and journos.

Since my name's been in your papers,
and my mug on the telly,
where I sell my poisoned wares,

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149 This line alludes to the opposite assertion made by the narrator of Daniel Balavoine's 1978 song *Le Chanteur*: "J'suis chanteur, je chante pour mes copains"

you've pissed me off just a bit too much.

I'm not a singer for my friends,
and I can be as nasty as they come.

I don't proclaim, along with Aragon,
that poets are always right.
Women are the future of idiots,
and men are the future of nothing.

My future's at the bar
of the filthiest of pubs,
Fuck! Where've I put my gun?

I'm not gonna take any shit
from fascists or lefties,
all those indoctrinated losers
who think they can bury my revolt.

Those who call me a demagogue
in their rags I'll never read:
"Renaud's finished, he's sold out";

Those incurable petit bourgeois
who can't speak or write, who can only dribble,
who'll live long and pathetic lives,
have all got a corpse in their mouth.

On one level, these verses can be understood as a defence against the accusation of "selling out." This was a sensitive issue for former *soixante-huitards* throughout the 1970s, and particularly at the end of the decade, when bastions of the radical press such as *Actuel* and *Libération* abandoned their revolutionary heritage. Renaud, on the contrary, reaffirms his loyalty to the ideals of May 1968 with passionate intensity. His claim that his critics have "a corpse in their mouth" alludes to a Situationist maxim popularised during that period: "Those who talk about revolution and class struggle without explicit reference to daily life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive about the rejection of constraints, have got a corpse in their mouth."[150]

150 "Ceux qui parlent de révolution et de luttes des classes sans se référer explicitement à la vie quotidienne, sans comprendre ce qu'il y a de subversif dans l'amour et de positif dans le refus des contraintes, ceux-là ont dans la bouche un cadavre" Schnapp and Vidal-Naquet, *Journal de la Commune étudiante*, p. 618

On another level, Renaud's aggressiveness may have helped him to ward off his real anxiety that both his *zonard* persona and the subversive content of his songs had indeed been compromised or emasculated by his involvement in show business and the star-system. This anxiety was heightened by the spectacular success of his concerts at the Bobino music-hall in March 1980. The unanimously positive reviews which these concerts attracted in the music press concerned Renaud almost as much as the carping of earlier critics. According to Jacques Erwan:

> Young people from Paris and the suburbs as well as entire families queued up each night to applaud their "idol." Eager to observe what people were already calling the "Renaud phenomenon," Parisian "society" made its way to Bobino . . . The press was unanimous in its praise . . . all the newspapers paid tribute to Renaud's original talent. But this led Renaud to ask himself: "Am I so innocuous that my lyrics don't scare anyone? Or is the praise of people who are supposed not to like me their way of getting me to sell out?" This is indeed a valid question.[151]

As if to emphasise his resistance to such flattery, Renaud opened his 1982 series of concerts at L'Olympia with *Où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue?* Extracts from the song also appeared on the album cover of the live recording of the concert released by Polydor. During this period, he explained to Erwan:

> If I write songs, it's because I want people to hear them. In the beginning, my audience was five people in a student pad; now, there are hundreds of thousands of listeners. So that people get to know my songs, I have to use the means with which performers are provided these days to promote their "work." Even if I get sucked in... People who enjoy my songs and who criticise me for being with Polydor and for going on TV wouldn't know the songs if I'd refused to use those means...[152]

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151 "Les jeunes Parisiens et banlieusards ainsi que des familles entières se bousculent chaque soir pour applaudir leur 'idole.' Avide d'observer ce que l'on commence déjà à appeler 'le phénomène Renaud,'' le 'Tout-Paris' défile à Bobino . . . La presse, elle, se montre d'une rare unanimité dans l'éloge . . . tous les journaux s'accordent pour célébrer le talent original de Renaud. Mais celui-ci s'interroge: 'Est-ce que je suis aussi peu dangereux que ça pour que je n'effraie personne avec mes textes? Ou bien, dire du bien de moi, est-ce leur façon de me récupérer aux gens qui sont censés de pas m'aimer?' On peut, en effet, légitimement se poser la question" Erwan, *Renaud*, p. 40

152 "Si j'écris des chansons, c'est que j'ai envie que les gens les entendent: au début, ils étaient cinq dans les chambres de bonne et, maintenant, ils sont des centaines de milliers. Pour que l'on connaisse mes chansons, il faut que j'me serve des moyens qui, de nos jours, sont mis à la disposition des artistes pour diffuser leur 'oeuvre.' Quitte à m'faire avoir... Les gens qui aiment bien mes chansons et qui m'reprochent d'être chez Polydor et de passer à la télé, il les connaîtraient pas si j'avais refusé ces moyens-là..." Quoted by Erwan, ibid., p. 57

However, Renaud's decision to work within the system continued to trouble him. In an interview with Sacha Reins some ten years later, he concluded pessimistically:

> Our society is democratic, entertainment-based and capitalistic . . . I criticise this society, I'm given permission to do so, these criticisms become a consumer product. Huge amounts of money are involved and, in the final analysis, I've become a mere link in the chain. Philosophically, I might feel better if I sang in a basement, far removed from crowds, applause and money. An artistic creation, even if it criticises society, becomes a product as soon as the media are involved. The system is extremely shrewd, even in its contradictions. Bossuet used to say: "Only those who can do nothing are allowed to speak." That's certainly my case...[153]

Où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue? represents nonetheless a creative attempt to burst through the alienating effects of "la société du spectacle" and challenges its capacity to contain subversion from within.

Renaud's artistic manifesto leads in to a political one:

> Y'a pas qu'les mômes, dans la rue,
> qui m'collent au cul pour une photo,
> y'a même des flics qui me saluent,
> qui veulent que j'signe dans leurs calots.
>
> Moi j'crache dedans, et j'crie bien haut
> qu'le bleu marine me fait gerber,
> qu'j'aime pas l'travail, la justice et l'armée.
>
> C'est pas d'main qu'on m'verra marcher
> avec les connards qui vont aux urnes,
> choisir c'lui qui les f'ra crever.
> Moi, ces jours-là, j'reste dans ma turne.
>
> Rien à foutre de la lutte des crasses,
> tous les systèmes sont dégueulasses!
>
> J'peux pas encaisser les drapeaux,

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153 "Notre société est démocratique, spectaculaire et capitaliste . . . Je critique cette société, on m'autorise à le faire, ces critiques deviennent un produit de consommation. Ça entraîne un brassage d'argent, des intérêts économiques énormes et, au bout du compte, je ne suis devenu qu'un maillon de cette nébuleuse. Philosophiquement, je serais peut-être plus à l'aise si je chantais dans des sous-sols à l'abri des oreilles, des bravos et de l'argent. Une création artistique, même s'il s'agit d'une critique de la société, devient produit dès qu'elle est sur un support. C'est le système qui est très malin jusque dans ses contradictions. Bossuet disait: 'On ne permet de dire qu'à celui qui ne peut rien.' C'est sûrement mon cas..." "Renaud: 'Je ne suis pas le valet de Tonton,' " p. 72

quoiqu'le noir soit le plus beau.
La Marseillaise, même en reggae,
ça m'a toujours fait dégueuler.

Les marches militaires, ça m'déglingue
et votr' République, moi j'la tringle,
mais bordel! où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue?

_____

It's not just kids, in the street,
who pester me for a photo,
there are even cops who say hi,
who want me to sign the inside of their hats.

I spit in them, and shout out loud
that navy blue makes me spew,
that I hate work, the legal system and the army.

Don't hold your breath waiting to see me
standing in line with arseholes at the ballot box,
voting for the next one who'll make them suffer.
On election days, I stay in my room.

Couldn't give a stuff about crass struggle,
all systems stink!

I can't stand flags,
even though the black one's the nicest.
La Marseillaise, even the reggae version,
has always made me spew.

Military marches really kill me
and your Republic can go screw itself,
Fuck! where've I put my gun?

Renaud's typically anarchistic contempt for parliamentary democracy was no doubt reinforced by the bitter power struggles which divided the French Left in the period leading up to the presidential elections of May 1981. His expression "lutte des crasses," a piquant and inventive deformation of *lutte des classes* (class struggle), lends a shabby, sordid aspect to this sectarianism (Renaud's idiosyncratic use of the noun "crasse" – which literally means either "filth" or "a dirty trick" – in reference to political power mongers is difficult to translate into English). Renaud's depth of feeling is further suggested by his rejection of the reggae version of the French national anthem, released by his friend Serge Gainsbourg in April 1979. This was itself a subversive gag, which provoked a public scandal

and violent protests by paratroopers at Gainsbourg's concerts.[154] It may seem surprising given Renaud's vitriolic rejection of the ballot-box in *Où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue?* that he subsequently voted in the elections, for his friend Coluche in the first round, then for François Mitterrand in the second round.[155] Renaud confessed to Erwan:

> First let me say that I voted. And yet, for an anarchist, to vote is to choose one's master, to go along with the power game and to take part in the farce of democracy in which one buffoon succeeds another. However, even if my vote had only helped to free Knobelspiess, I wouldn't regret having voted for the Left. In *Où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue?* I called upon people not to vote; without renouncing my position, let me say that I wrote the song in a bad mood and without humour. It was an angry outburst.[156]

This contradiction between theoretical ideals and political practice did, however, have significant precedents in the anarchist tradition.[157] Many former *soixante-huitards* through their support behind Mitterrand. Although the presidential candidate had cynically exploited the May movement in a precocious and unsuccessful bid for power in May 1968, he nonetheless represented the Left's best chance of political victory and appeared to support more genuinely egalitarian values than his rival Giscard. He had lost the presidential elections of May 1974 by an extremely narrow margin; notwithstanding the collapse of the Union de la Gauche and the *Programme Commun* in September 1977, the possibility of

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154 Brunschwig, Calvet and Klein, *Cent ans de chanson française*, p. 175

155 Coluche was an official candidate in the first round of what he humorously described as "les érections pestilentielles."

156 "J'ai envie de dire d'abord que j'ai voté. Pourtant, pour un anar, voter c'est choisir son maître, faire le jeu du pouvoir et participer à cette mascarade de démocratie où l'on remplace un bouffon par un clown. Mais, même si mon bulletin de vote n'avait servi qu'à contribuer à la libération de Knobelspiess, je ne regretterais pas d'avoir voté à gauche. Dans *Où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue?* j'avais appelé à l'abstention: j'la renie pas, mais j'dis que c'était une chanson d'humeur écrite sans humour. Sur un coup d'coeur" Quoted by Erwan, *Renaud*, p. 54. Roger Knobelspiess, described by Aymar du Chatenet and Bertrand Coq as the "truand chéri de la gauche caviar" ("darling hoodlum of the chardonnay-drinking Left") and "recordman des grâces présidentielles" ("record holder of presidential pardons"), was sentenced in October 1981 to five years in prison for a series of armed robberies. He received a presidential pardon almost immediately, but resumed his criminal career the following year. See Aymar du Chatenet and Bertrand Coq, *Mitterrand de a à z*, Editions Albin Michel, Paris, 1995, pp. 206-208

157 For example, Peter Marshall writes of Bakunin, "While he was in theory a determined abstentionist from politics, in the particular circumstances of Italy and Spain at the time of the Paris Commune, he advised members of his Alliance to become deputies or help the socialist parties. He held that the most imperfect republic would always be preferable to the most enlightened monarchy", *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 297

a Socialist victory in May 1981 was strengthened by acute social and industrial unrest at the end of Giscard's term in office.

It is this unrest which Renaud evokes in the remaining verses of *Où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue?*:

D'puis qu'on m'a tiré mon canif,
un soir au métro Saint-Michel,
j'fous plus les pieds dans une manif
sans un nunchak' ou un cocktail.

A Longwy comme à Saint-Lazare,
plus de slogans face aux flicards,
mais des fusils, des pavés, des grenades!

Gueuler contre la répression
en défilant "Bastille-Nation"
quand mes frangins crèvent en prison
ça donne une bonne conscience aux cons,

aux nez-d'boeux et aux pousse-mégots
qui foutent ma révolte au tombeau.

Si un jour j'me r'trouve la gueule par terre,
sûr qu'ça s'ra d'la faute à Baader.
Si j'crève le nez dans le ruisseau,
sûr qu'ça s'ra d'la faute à Bonnot.

Pour l'instant, ma gueule est sur le zinc
d'un bistrot des plus cradingues,
MAIS FAITES GAFFE! J'AI MIS LA MAIN SUR MON FLINGUE!

Since my pocket-knife was confiscated,
one night at the Saint-Michel metro station,
I never go to a demo
without nunchakus or a [Molotov] cocktail.

At Longwy and Saint-Lazare,
no more slogans when confronted by the pigs,
but guns, cobblestones and grenades!

Yelling against repression
during "Bastille-Nation" marches
when my brothers are dying in prison
only gives arseholes a good conscience,

as well as the drop kicks and tools

who think they can bury my revolt.

If I wind up dead one day,
it'll definitely be Baader's fault.
If I die in the gutter,
Bonnot's the one to blame.

In the meantime, I'm at the bar
of the filthiest of pubs,
WATCH IT! I'VE JUST FOUND MY GUN!

These verses allude to the various movements which had recourse to violent protest in the late 1970s, and constitute a powerful apologia for the anarchist belief in "propaganda by the deed." Two recent incidents in particular enabled Renaud to bring together once again "the labouring classes and the dangerous classes."

At the end of 1978, the "Longwy ville morte" campaign had been launched to counteract the mass layoffs in the Lorraine iron and steel industry announced by the Giscard government in its "Plan Acier." This was followed by clashes between metal workers and the CRS during demonstrations in early 1979. Although most metal workers were law-abiding citizens, Elisabeth Schemla wrote at the time that certain inhabitants of Longwy had become so exasperated by governmental policy that they were threatening to use "shotguns and even explosives" as weapons of resistance.[158] On 7 March, seven riot-police were shot at by a group of demonstrators in Denain. In May, Renaud took part in a benefit concert organised by unions at Longwy and in a radio program organised by the independent communist station Lorraine Coeur d'Acier as well as singing for workers at the USINOR factory on which the crisis was centred.

On 13 January 1979, the Saint-Lazare district of Paris had been the site of a demonstration advertised the previous day in *Libération* as "a New Wave party (organised by the 'Hard Autonome' group) in protest against rising

158 "Le fusil de chasse et même la charge de plastic" Elisabeth Schemla, "Les Sacrifiés de Longwy," *Le Nouvel observateur*, 739, 8-14 January 1979, p. 42

prices, rent and other indirect taxes."[159] The "ringards" ("dorks"), "fêlés" ("loonies") and "zonards" invited to the "party" arrived with iron bars and Molotov cocktails. They intended to attack what they considered to be symbols of capitalist exploitation: temping agencies, a pornographic cinema and the Taxation Office. They smashed shop windows, looted a gun shop and fought with the police. Although subsequent reports vastly exaggerated the violence, passers-by had been terrified. The *autonomes* who organised the demonstration constituted a diverse and loosely-structured formation. Two journalists writing for *L'Express* explained:

> *Autonomie*, which emerged in France in 1976, was originally – and still is – a state of mind, a vague concept, the meeting point for diverse discontents. Disappointed by the extreme Left, which they now call "retro," squatters, unemployed youths, penniless students, drifters and rebels without a cause have all at various times defined themselves as *autonomes*. *Autonomie* was the rejection of dogmatism, of hierarchical organisation, and the justification of direct action. Taking up in their own fashion the slogan of "Long live the Revolution," the Maoist formation which wanted "Everything immediately," they have decided to use, "according to our needs," they say, "this society which subjects us to daily violence."[160]

Although the various groups defining themselves as *autonomes* were not always in agreement – the more political elements, for example, sought to distance themselves from the *zonards* and from the violence at Saint-Lazare – the movement as a whole represented an alarming expression of the growing division in France between rich and poor.

The idea that "the labouring classes and the dangerous classes" could be brothers in arms was reinforced at a demonstration on 23 March 1979 against the redundancies in the iron and steel sector. Plain-clothes policemen dispersed among the crowd with a view to intercepting the notoriously elusive *autonomes* arrested more than a hundred protesters.

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159 "Une fête New Wave (groupe Hard Autonome) contre la hausse des prix, des loyers et autres impôts indirects" Reproduced by Jacqueline Rémy and Eric Schmoll in "Saint-Lazare: des autonomes en vitrine," *L'Express*, 1437, 27 January 1979, p. 63

160 "Née en 1976 en France, l'autonomie, c'était d'abord – c'est encore – un état d'esprit, un concept flou, le point de rencontre de malaises divers. Déçus par un gauchisme qu'ils qualifient maintenant de 'rétro,' des squatters, de jeunes chômeurs, des étudiants fauchés, des paumés, des révoltés sans révolte, se sont tour à tour revendiqués 'autonomes.' L'autonomie, c'était le refus du dogmatisme, de l'organisation hiérarchisée, et la justification du passage à l'acte. Reprenant à leur manière le slogan de 'Vive la révolution,' ce courant maoïste qui voulait 'Tout, tout de suite,' ils ont décidé de se servir, 'en fonction de nos besoins, disent-ils, de cette société qui nous impose une violence quotidienne' " Ibid., p. 62

Spurious charges were brought against several young men, who received between one and three-year prison terms.[161] Renaud may well have had this scandal in mind when he wrote that his "brothers are dying in prison," although this phrase has a more obvious connection with the subsequent reference to Andreas Baader, who, along with Jan Carl Raspe, Gundrun Ensslin and Irmgard Möller, was alleged to have committed suicide in October 1977 while detained in solitary confinement at Stammheim Prison. Baader, Ensslin and Ulrike Meinhof had founded in 1970 the Fraction Armée Rouge, a German terrorist group which sought to promote the ideas of the New Left by adopting the urban guerilla tactics employed by Latin American revolutionaries. One of their key aims was to provoke and thereby unmask what they considered to be the repressive nature of the capitalist system. The violent extremism of the Baader-Meinhof gang pointed to the increasing polarisation in Western society between libertarian and authoritarian forces and foreshadowed the proliferation of terrorist activity in the second half of the 1970s.[162]

Renaud also evokes the name of Bonnot, a legendary Belle Epoque gangster who had been a mechanic and an active member of the anarcho-syndicalist movement before turning to crime in the years leading up to the First World War. Bonnot died on 28 April 1912 following a spectacular shoot-out with the police. Renaud's audience would almost certainly have connected his reference to Bonnot with the fate of contemporary figures such as Jacques Mesrine and Pierre Goldman. Mesrine was France's most wanted criminal, a violent, daring, but highly intelligent and colourful gangster who had captured the imagination of the French public by presenting himself as a contemporary Robin Hood and as a champion of those whom he considered to be the victims of a repressive penal system.[163] On 2 November 1979, Mesrine was shot dead by police during a massive operation involving more than three hundred personnel. Renaud dedicated the album *Marche à l'ombre* to a certain "Paul Toul," among others: this

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161 Jean Daniel, among others, believed that the judiciary had acted unprofessionally in their determination to make an example of the accused. See his editorial, "Ce qui se passe dans la tête des juges," *Le Nouvel observateur*, 758, 21-27 May 1979, p. 37

162 In 1980 alone – the same year in which Renaud wrote *Où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue?* – the Basque separatist movement Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) carried out ninety-three political assassinations.

163 Irène Allier, "Mesrine tout terrain," *Le Nouvel observateur*, 769, 6-12 August 1979, p. 20

was one of the aliases used by Mesrine.[164] Although Renaud himself had never served time in prison, he performed on more than one occasion at Fleury-Mérogis, where the March protesters had been incarcerated, and gave a free concert at Melun Prison on 20 December 1980.

Pierre Goldman had been killed by unidentified assailants only six weeks before Mesrine, on 20 September 1979. A former *soixante-huitard* and member of the Union des Etudiants Communistes (UEC), Goldman left France after May 1968 to join guerilla forces fighting in Venezuela. Following his return to France in October 1969, he drifted into a life of crime and was arrested in December of that year for three armed robberies and two murders. Found guilty on all counts and eventually sentenced to life imprisonment in 1974, he was released two years later after being acquitted of the murder charges. During his seven years in prison, he gained degrees in philosophy and Spanish and wrote his autobiography, *Souvenirs obscurs d'un juif polonais né en France*. The day after his murder, Serge July reflected on Goldman's significance for the May generation:

> In his own brutal, absolute, cut and dried manner, Pierre Goldman was the purest among us. The one who confronted his demons the most directly. That which for others was a literary theme was for him an open wound. That which for others was a conversational topic was for him a tragedy... Before 68, we spoke about the [Latin American] guerilla; he was part of that small group who went and joined it. Despairing of ever taking part in a revolution which we could call our own, we spoke about our quest for action in delinquent mode. Pierre carried out armed hold-ups. While we watched him. Intermittently, without knowing at that point that he was exploring on our behalf the limits of a generation who feared more than anything else the prospect of ending up lost.[165]

Renaud's reference to his role models at the end of *Où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue?* is a pastiche of Gavroche's swan song; this reinforces the

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164 Séchan, *Le Roman de Renaud*, p. 60

165 "A sa manière, brutale, entière, d'une seule pièce, Pierre Goldman était le plus pur d'entre nous. Celui qui avait été jusqu'au bout de ses fantômes. Jusqu'au bout de ses fantasmes. Pour d'autres, c'était des thèmes littéraires. Pour lui, une écorchure. Pour d'autres encore, un thème de salon, pour lui une tragédie... Avant 68, nous parlions de la guérilla: il a fait partie du petit groupe qui y est parti. Dans notre désespoir d'entrer dans une révolution qui soit la nôtre, nous évoquions notre quête d'action sur le mode de la délinquance. Pierre a fait des agressions à main armée. Et nous, nous le regardions. De loin en loin, ne sachant pas alors qu'ils explorait pour nous l'horizon d'une génération qui craignait plus que tout de finir perdue" Quoted by Hamon and Rotman, *Génération: 2*, p. 657

historical connection between the ideals of May 1968 and the various forms of "illegalism" into which they later evolved:

> Joie est mon caractère,
> C'est la faute à Voltaire,
> Misère est mon trousseau,
> C'est la faute à Rousseau.....
>
> Je suis tombé par terre,
> C'est la faute à Voltaire,
> Le nez dans le ruisseau,
> C'est la faute à.....[166]
>
> _____
>
> Joyfulness is my character,
> It's Voltaire's fault,
> Poverty is my uniform
> Blame Rousseau.....
>
> I've fallen to the ground,
> It's Voltaire's fault,
> Face down in the gutter,
> Blame.....

The association of Baader and Bonnot (and, by extension, Mesrine and Goldman) with Voltaire and Rousseau may seem disconcerting, yet both the terrorist and the gangster were powerful symbols of their troubled times and were admired by a significant minority of French youth.[167] This helps to explain the draconian attitude adopted by the French judiciary towards the young protesters of March 1979.

Curiously, *Où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue?* escaped the censorship attracted by *Hexagone* five years earlier. This may have been due to the progressive relaxation of censorship laws during the 1970s or to Renaud's increasing popularity; it may also have reflected the entertainment industry's confidence in its capacity to empty genuine protest of its subversive content by transforming it into a commodity. However, the song provoked a bitter feud between Renaud and the Jeunesses Communistes, one of whose members published an article in *Avant-Garde* entitled "Adieu

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166 Hugo, *Les Misérables*, pp. 1240-1241

167 Baader's prestige was heightened when Sartre visited him in prison in December 1974. Although Sartre rejected anarchism as a workable social system, he supported the notion of violent revolt.

Renaud, on n'est pas du même camp" ("So long Renaud, we're not on the same side"), in which he attacked "a Gavroche of the year 2000 expertly constructed by the show business industry."[168] Renaud had not only made a specific jibe at the revered communist poet, Louis Aragon (and, by extension, at the communist singer-songwriter Jean Ferrat, who set Aragon's poetry to music), he had also ridiculed anti-abstention campaigns and protest marches from the Place de la Bastille to the Place de la Nation, both traditional PCF tactics. This came at a time when the PCF was being eclipsed by the rising star of Mitterrand's Parti Socialiste and when increasing numbers of intellectuals were renouncing their faith in communist ideology. More generally, *Où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue?* celebrated both the lumpenproletariat and the "illegalism" denounced by authoritarian communists since the time of Marx.

In many respects, *Où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue?* was indeed a settling of scores with the PCF, which had not only betrayed the May movement, but which had also withdrawn from the Union de la Gauche in 1977. However, the popularity of the song among other listeners perhaps owed more to the way it forcefully articulated profound feelings of discontent in contemporary French society. Renaud's apparent support for terrorism and the extremely violent tone of his poetry are in some ways quite shocking, but they reflect a period when parliamentary politics often appeared morally bankrupt. Renaud's *zonard* was both an embodiment of social deprivation and a harbinger of violent revenge; coupled with the revolutionary ardour and eloquence of a former *soixante-huitard*, he was a force to be reckoned with.

The figure of the *zonard* was thus Renaud's major source of inspiration throughout the second half of the 1970s. It enabled him to combine and develop in a topical context the political militancy and delinquent manner which he had acquired during May 1968. He experimented with this figure in a number of ways, from the documentary approach of *Les Charognards* and the carnivalesque flavour of *Je suis une bande de jeunes* to the revolutionary posture of *Où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue?* forging in the

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168 "Un Gavroche de l'an 2000 savamment confectionné par le show business" Sanchez and Séchan, *L'Album de Renaud*, p. 106. Sanchez confesses to having been the author in question.

process a mature poetic style and producing a compelling vision of relations in contemporary French society.

Conclusion

The songs of Renaud's early career constitute a journey which began with the effervescence of May 1968 and culminated in the image of "le zonard déchaîné." During this journey, Renaud discovered both a stance and a mode through which he was able to retain and develop the most significant aspects of his experience as a *soixante-huitard*. The stance he found was that of the delinquent outsider; the mode was the delinquent's street slang.

Renaud's first, Situationist-inspired songs of May 1968 exemplified the *soixante-huitards*' quest for a revolutionary identity. The problematic relationship between the *soixante-huitards* and the militant proletariat led the former to look elsewhere for a way in which to express their opposition to the consumerist and paternalistic values of post-war capitalist society. This they found among the lumpenproletariat, whose visceral antiauthoritarianism had already attracted the attention of Situationist theorists like Raoul Vaneigem. The view that the lumpenproletariat possessed untapped revolutionary potential was later summed up succinctly by Henri Lefebvre:

> In the conditions of the modern world, only the man apart, the marginal, the peripheral, the anomic, those excluded from the horde . . . has a creative capacity . . . [he] bears a tension that would kill others: he is both inside and outside, included and excluded, yet without being for that matter torn asunder . . . He passes alongside promised lands, but he doesn't enter . . . Discovery, that's his passion.[169]

Without abandoning the working-class cause, many *soixante-huitards* adopted the provocative and delinquent manner of the *blouson noirs*, disaffected youths from the housing estates of outer Paris who took part in many of the May riots and whose appeal to the *soixante-huitards* was reinforced by the government's vitriolic accusation that the May movement had been infiltrated by the "underworld." The *soixante-huitards*' identification with both workers and delinquents had the intriguing result of reviving the perceived convergence between "the labouring classes and the dangerous classes" which had been a feature of popular culture since the

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169 Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, pp. 36-37

first half of the nineteenth century. In Renaud's repertoire, the black biker jacket worn by the *blousons noirs* and subsequent generations of delinquents would become an emblem akin to the black flag of the anarchists.

The political defeat of the May movement and the decline of working-class culture during the 1970s strengthened the appeal of "the dangerous classes" to former *soixante-huitards*. The old genre of popular song known as *chanson réaliste*, which depicted the Parisian low-life of the Belle Epoque and interwar years, provided Renaud with a way of dramatising his continuing opposition to bourgeois society. At the same time, *chanson réaliste* enabled him to retain an historical connection with "the labouring classes," who had constituted the largest audience for this type of song.

In the second half of the 1970s, Renaud reinvented the realist genre by singing about the delinquent youths or *zonards* from the housing estates of contemporary Paris. These *zonards* embodied a cause which Renaud defended and promoted with the fraternalism, ardour and eloquence of a former *soixante-huitard*. In some of Renaud's songs, the *zonards* themselves appear as successors to the May generation and promise revenge against its adversaries. Although they are keenly aware of social inequalities, Renaud's protagonists tend to remain outside working-class as well as bourgeois society. However, their conquest of urban space recalls in some respects the Commune of 1871. At the end of the 1970s, the accumulating effects of economic recession and de-industrialisation on *zonards* and workers alike and the involvement of both groups in anti-government demonstrations gave Renaud an opportunity to bring together more explicitly "the labouring classes and the dangerous classes" in a song such as *Où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue?*

The marginal world of the *zonards* represented for Renaud a last bastion of resistance against the encroachment of bourgeois values. In some respects, the *zone* of the 1970s was to former *soixante-huitards* what Bohemia had been to student radicals during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when, as Jerrold Seigel has observed:

> The urban underworld drew outsiders toward itself, anxious to explore human possibilities that had emerged nowhere else . . . Violence and strong emotion were part of the attraction; here behavior was permitted that respectability cast

> out. Beyond this was a suspicion that necessity had mothered great inventiveness in these dark margins of the city, even a kind of artistry.[170]

The celebration of criminality in the wake of defeated revolution also had significant precedents. Peter Marshall relates the story of the physician Ernest Coeurderoy and the upholsterer Joseph Déjacque, who both took part in the Revolution of 1848:

> The bitterness of failure and exile led them to apocalyptic celebration of violence and barbarism. 'Anarchist revolutionaries,' Coeurderoy declared, 'we can take hope only in the human deluge, we can take hope only in chaos, we have no recourse but a general war' . . . Déjacque advocated 'war on civilization by criminal means' and secret societies[171]

Similarly, the enormous impact of Aristide Bruant's realist songs in the 1880s and 1890s was perhaps related to the defeat of the *Communards*, whose memory was evoked by the singer's red scarf if not explicitly in his lyrics. Former *Communards* like Jean-Baptiste Clément and subsequent generations of working-class activists struggled, on the contrary, to emphasise the differences between "the labouring classes and the dangerous classes"; Jacques Rougerie's description of the high percentage of *Communards* with prior criminal convictions was considered something of a revelation in 1964.[172] However, Bruant had a profound influence on many of his anarchist contemporaries, who increasingly couched their militant politics in low-life slang. Since the Belle Epoque, successive generations of anarchist songwriters, from Charles d'Avray to Léo Ferré, have included realist songs in their repertoire.

It is in this anarchist tradition, which bridges the gap between Clément and Bruant, that Renaud ultimately takes his place. The collection of Renaud's lyrics published by Le Seuil in 1988 emphasises Clément's heritage; both the title of the collection (*Le Temps des noyaux*) and Max Cabanes's cover illustration, which portrays Renaud sitting on the Butte Montmartre playing a guitar in the form of a cherry, allude to Clément's

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170 Seigel, *Bohemian Paris*, p. 23

171 Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 434

172 Maurice Agulhon, "Les Citadins et la politique," in Duby (ed.), *Histoire de la France urbaine*, Vol. 4, p. 587

most famous song, *Le Temps des cerises*.[173] Montmartre itself was a *Communard* stronghold and a depot for the Commune's heavy artillery. However, it also included a notorious red-light district; its pimps, prostitutes and vagabonds provided the raw material for many realist songs, and it was here that Bruant established his first cabarets. As if to remind us that revolution and street life are two sides of the same coin in Renaud's repertoire, seated beside him in Cabanes's illustration is Gavroche, one of the earliest literary incarnations of the convergence between "the labouring classes and the dangerous classes."

During the 1980s, the *zonard* became a less prominent figure in Renaud's songs. On a personal level, the birth of his baby daughter, Lolita, in August 1980, made the violent, macho culture of the delinquent gang less appealing. Lolita subsequently appeared in many of Renaud's songs as a feminine counterpart to Gavroche, replacing Hugo's protagonist as her father's principal muse. In 1982, Renaud discovered a passion for seafaring, which also drew him away from the *zone*:

> J'ai troqué mes santiag'
> Et mon cuir un peu zone
> Contre une paire de dock-side
> Et un vieux ciré jaune[174]
>
> _____
>
> I swapped my cowboy boots
> And my street kid jacket
> For a pair of docksiders
> And an old yellow oilskin

Several months at sea in a "fameux trois-mâts / Fin comme un oiseau" ("brilliant three-master / sleek as a bird") which he had helped to build inspired Renaud to refocus his attention on the world at large and on universal themes such as environmentalism. On a political level, the figure of the *zonard* may simply have seemed less subversive following Mitterrand's victory at the presidential elections of May 1981. Within its first year of office, the new Socialist government abolished the death

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173 *Le Temps des cerises*, written by Clément in 1866 and put to music by Antoine Renard in 1868, was a love song which acquired revolutionary connotations after Clément dedicated it in 1885 to "Louise," a nurse who had brought supplies to the barricades during the Commune.

174 Renaud, *Dès que le vent soufflera* (1983)

penalty and revoked the "loi anti-casseurs" ("anti-riot law") introduced in the wake of May 1968. More than six thousand prisoners received a Presidential pardon, while 300,000 immigrants were permitted to regularise their residential status.

The *zonard* figure also had its own, internal tensions. As early as May 1968, the alliance between students and delinquents had been a double-edged sword. Lucien Coudrier's contingent of hoodlums, who had been hired to ensure security at the occupied Sorbonne, was finally evicted after terrorising many of the students. According to Patrick Hamon and Hervé Rotman, the *loubards* present during the burning of the Paris Stock Exchange on 24 May 1968 were oblivious to the symbolic significance which this institution held for their *soixante-huitard* allies.[175] While it made sense that the *soixante-huitards* should empathise with dispossessed social groups, the revolutionary potential which they saw in the lumpenproletariat was sometimes a projection of their own aspirations rather than an accurate perception of reality.

Renaud himself subsequently came to accept that *zonards* were not systematically or inevitably victims of repressive and authoritarian social forces. In 1992, he explained:

> I often meet journalists who say that I'm the spokesmen for the suburbs. I may have been – inadvertently – ten years ago . . . now, I feel totally disconnected from suburban youth. When I go to the suburbs now . . . I'm frightened. Now, it's a ghetto, just like the Bronx . . . For a long time, I also thought that delinquents were heroes, that they were all Robin Hoods or Zorros. And [now], I think that there are just as many bastards among the delinquents as there are among the cops. Maybe they've got more reason for becoming violent and full of hatred, for rejecting others.[176]

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175 Hamon and Rotman, *Génération: 1*, p. 545

176 "Souvent, je rencontre des journalistes qui disent que je suis le porte-parole des banlieues. Je l'ai peut-être été – sans le vouloir – il y a dix ans . . . maintenant, je me sens totalement déconnecté avec les jeunes des banlieues. Quand je vais en banlieue maintenant . . . j'ai peur. Maintenant, c'est le ghetto, c'est le Bronx . . . Longtemps j'ai cru aussi que les voyous étaient des héros, étaient tous des Robin des bois ou des Zorro. Et [maintenant], je crois qu'il y a la même proportion d'ordures chez les voyous que chez les flics. Ils ont peut-être plus d'excuses de devenir violents, haineux, de rejeter les autres" Personal interview

Even an earlier song like *Marche à l'ombre!* (1980) evoked what Renaud later described as the "latent racism" which existed in certain delinquent gangs and which ran counter to the fraternal spirit of May 1968.[177]

In other songs, such as *Viens chez moi, j'habite chez une copine* (1981), Renaud debunked the mythology of the *zone* in terms which made his protagonists appear pathetic rather than endearingly human:

Je glande un peu partout
Avec mon sac de couchage
Je suis dans tous les coups foireux
Tous les naufrages
J'ai des potes qu'ont d'l'argent
Ben y travaillent c'est normal
Moi mon métier c'est feignant
Hé mec t'as pas cent balles
J'ai des plans des combines
Pour vivre comme un pacha

Hé viens chez moi j'habite chez une copine
Sur les bords au milieu c'est vrai qu'je crains un peu

———————————

I drift around everywhere
With my sleeping bag
I'm involved in every dead-end scheme
Every shipwreck
Some mates of mine have got money
They work, so that makes sense
I work as a bum
Hey mate, can you spare twenty bucks?
I've got ideas and plans
To live like a king

Hey, come to my place, I live with a girlfriend
It's true that I'm a bit of a totally dodgy character

Two years later, a song which he wrote about a real friend, *Loulou* (a nickname taken from a diminutive form of *loubard*), suggested even more forcefully that the mythology of the *zone* was wearing thin:

T'as pris des coups quand t'étais p'tit
T'en as donné aussi beaucoup
Maint'nant tu prends surtout du bide

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177 Ibid.

Tu prends des rides, Loulou...

You got a few beatings when you were little
You've also given plenty
Now what you're mainly getting is fat
You're getting wrinkles, Loulou...

The narrator of *Deuxième génération*, another song from the same year, is portrayed on the contrary with a great deal of empathy, but inhabits a kind of black hole in which any notion of revolutionary action is unthinkable:

J'ai rien à gagner, rien à perdre
Même pas la vie
J'aime que la mort dans cette vie d'merde
J'aime c'qu'est cassé
J'aime c'qu'est détruit
J'aime surtout tout c'qui vous fait peur
La douleur et la nuit...

_____

I've got nothing to win, nothing to lose
Not even life itself
I only like death in this shit life
I only like what's broken
I only like what's destroyed
I 'specially like the things that you're scared of
Pain and the night...

However, while he recognised its limits, Renaud continued – albeit intermittently – to draw inspiration from the theme of the *zone*. In *Petite* (1988), he used the term "zone" itself as a positive, emblematic adjective to describe the generation of SOS-Racisme who constituted part of his audience:

Une petite main jaune au revers du zomblou[178]
Un côté un peu zone pour crier ton dégoût
De ce monde trop vieux, trop sale et trop méchant
De ces gens silencieux, endormis et contents

_____

A little yellow hand inside your jacket
A street kid side for shouting your disgust
At this world which is too old, too dirty and too mean

[178] The "little yellow hand" was the logo of SOS-Racisme; inscribed on its palm was the phrase "touche pas à mon pote!" ("don't touch my mate!"). The term "zomblou" is *verlan* for *blouson* (jacket).

At these people who are silent, asleep and happy

Marchand de cailloux (1991), in which Renaud's daughter asks him to explain the fate of the *intifada* fighting in ghettos throughout the world, shows a continuity with his earlier songs about the *zone*:

Pourquoi les enfants d'Belfast
Et d'tous les ghettos
Quand y balancent un caillasse
On leur fait la peau
J'croyais qu'David et Goliath
Ça marchait encore
Qu'les plus p'tits pouvaient s'débattre
Sans être les plus morts

_____

Why do children in Belfast
And in every ghetto
When they throw a stone
Get killed?
I thought David and Goliath
Was still a goer
That the smallest could still fight
Without being the deadest

Renaud's direct experience and artistic representation of the Parisian *zone* and its delinquent youth provided the foundation upon which he elaborated the broader vision of his later songs, a vision encapsulated by Henri Lefebvre's aphorism: "Thinking the city moves towards thinking the world."[179]

179 Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, p. 53

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