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*Régis Debray: a study of his political and theoretical works: 1962-1992*

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by

Melvyn Cox

A Doctoral Thesis
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Volume One.
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Finally, I would like to thank M. Régis Debray for the interview he accorded me at the outset of my research.

'Sa première sortie sur le grand scène du monde, raté sur le plan de l'action, mais non sur celui de l'expérience acquise, équivalait à une initiation qui présagait des entreprises futures. Pour l'instant, il lui fallait faire quelque chose qui donnât un sens à sa vie. Il éprouvait le désir d'écrire; de parvenir au moyen de l'écriture et les disciplines qu'elle impose, aux conclusions qui pourraient éventuellement être dégagées de ce qu'il avait vu. Il n'arrivait pas à définir ce que serait ce travail. Quelque chose d'important, en tout cas, dont l'époque en tout cas avait besoin. Quelque chose qui peut-être déplairait fort à Victor Hugues, et il se complaisait à y penser. Peut-être aussi une nouvelle théorie de l'Etat, ou une révision de l'Esprit des Lois; ou une étude sur les erreurs de la révolution'

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Introduction
1 – An unfinished account in a changing milieu.

Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman (1) chose to begin their epic chronicle of the political generation which came of age in France in the early 1960’s, with a brief, almost metaphorical image of Régis Debray, then thirty nine years old, attending the funeral of his friend Pierre Goldmann, in September 1979.

Plus voûté encore qu’à l’ordinaire, très pâle, Régis Debray promène un regard d’une infinie tristesse sur les gens qui l’entourent, serre des mains d’un geste mécanique, mais ne voit ni n’entend rien. Il flotte, happé par le disparu avec lequel il partageait tant de vies; comme lui révolutionnaire, guérilllo, taulard, écrivain. Une sorte de doublure mal lamée, obsédé par la mort.

The authors had no doubt seen in Debray, the most recognisable, the most caricatured, and perhaps the most revered symbol of a whole French generation, now grimly wiping its hands, and definitively walking away from ‘Les Années de Rêve’. Their choice contained not only a strong element of nostalgia, but no little fascination for the young French intellectuel, who, by participating in revolutionary struggle in Latin America, had been condemned, in 1967, to thirty years imprisonment in the Bolivian garrison town of Camiri. All the more untimely in as much as Debray’s search for a new political homeland was to sideline him from the barricades in Paris in May of the following year.

Jules Régis Debray was born on the 2nd September 1940, into a wealthy bourgeois family from the ‘rue de Lübeck’ (16e). His grandfather was an industrialist from Calais, his father, politically a liberal, was an Appeal Court lawyer, and his who mother had a seat on the Parisian Municipal Council was also a member of the Senate. Debray left the ‘lycée Janson de Sailly’, in 1957, and received third prize in the
'Concours Générale de philosophie'. The theme of his essay was 'Responsibility'. It appears that the teenager Debray was a rather refined, typically upper middle-class, and dandy-like young man, who frequented the jazz clubs and cinemas of St-Germain-des-Prés. He even spent some weeks at a commune in London. However his studies were to continue with a year spent at the 'lycée Louis-le-Grand', in preparation for the 'école Normale Supérieure' entrance examination.

Although as a fifteen year old Debray recalls hawking the right-wing 'Action Française' on the streets of Paris, his first real political instincts were stirred by Dien Bien Phu, and then Algeria, particularly against French use of torture there. A growing awareness of colonial oppression and the potential to defeat it, allied to an increasing conviction that the bourgeois democracies were ridden with lies and propaganda led Debray towards a reflection upon the infrastructures of exploitation in the Third World. These concerns, combined with a sense of rebellion against his middle class background persuaded him to join the 'Union des Etudiants Communistes' in the late 1950's. Within this factional organisation Debray felt himself closest to the Maoist section, not least because they were faithful adherents of the Marxist theoretician Louis Althusser.

In 1960, aged twenty, and after two attempts, Debray came first in the 'ENS' entrance exam, and it was there that he became a pupil, and eventually a friend and correspondant of Althusser. As a reward for his success in his studies, his parents paid for a flight for him to go to the USA, and it was via a boat from Miami that he made his way to Cuba. This first visit to the Carribean island lasted some three months, and Debray became so inspired by Castro's socialist regime, that on his return to Paris he learned Spanish and immersed himself in Latin American history, geography and economics. In the summer holiday of 1961 he went back to Cuba for a second time.

He returned again to Latin America in 1963 and stayed until the end of 1964. His travels, with his Chilean girlfriend, were to take him to almost every country on that continent, where he also made contact
with several guerilla groups. He even stayed for several days at a guerilla base in Venezuela.

The following year, 1965, Debray was to go back to Havana, this time on an official basis due to a cultural exchange agreement made between the French and Cuban governments. His presence there was effectively in lieu of his National Service, and in theory he was to have taken up a philosophy lectureship at the University of Havana. However, in reality, whilst he was initially employed as an inspector of schools during the literacy drive which was in full swing at that time, he was in due course to become a full-time guerillo.

However, it was the appearance, in a Cuban review of two articles (5) written by Debray in 1965, about those Revolutionary strategies he had observed first-hand during his journeys in Latin America were to trigger off a remarkable sequence of events. Within eighteen months his face was to be projected onto the front pages of newspapers all over the world. Presented as either militant revolutionary icon and theorist of Castroism, or exposed as Marxist secret agent, murderous terrorist, or indeed misguided prodigal son, his arrest and military trial in Bolivia, where he was found guilty of being a Castroist envoy to Guevara's guerilla unit there, led to a thirty year jail sentence. Indeed it is arguable that he was only spared execution due to international pressure being placed upon the Bolivian regime.

The fact that Debray had also had published in the same year, 1967, a political tract, titled Révolution dans la Révolution, (6) advocating and advising upon the logistics and installation of clandestine communist guerilla units throughout Latin America, provided the Bolivian authorities with the additional conviction of 'intellectual' culpability.

Debray was in fact given an amnesty in 1970 after serving almost four years as a lone prisoner, and the story of his mission in Bolivia, as well as his Castroist-inspired essays of the period have already been examined at great length by those on the political right and left, as well as by Debray himself. (7) All of which sharply contrasts with the
fact that Debray no longer claims to be a Marxist, that he has never joined a political party since his youth, or that he has latterly written a book extolling the vision of President De Gaulle. Even as long ago as 1970, in his prison diary, Debray was to write, 'Rien n'assure que le socialisme n'apparaîtra un jour comme la lubie momentanée d'un siècle, une illusion risible et sans conséquences mémorables.' (8) And by 1975 he was even referring to the study of revolution by European thinkers as 'Un divertissement d'obsédés'. (9).

It is certainly the case that the collapse of International Communism as a potential World Revolutionary force by the late 1980's does effectively place Debray's earlier works into a category of almost pure historical or at best geo-political interest. Debray does not today either defend his former Marxist views, or comment politically about contemporary guerilla activity. Consequently the chronological inclusion and treatment of these years (between approximately 1962 and 1974), within the present study will be concise and subordinate, yet necessary to give dimension to the development and shift in his intellectual and professional preoccupations. In any case, the complexity and variety of what comes after 1975 simply cannot be simplified into some kind of correction, or proof of a volte-face away from the younger man's writings and motivations, as Walter Laqueur first suggested, and despite conceding the fact that Debray merits a certain respect when compared to those whose political and philosophical pedigree has never taken them very far from the 'beaux quartiers' of Paris. (10)

Unquestionably the development of Debray's thought has been deliberate and meticulous, controversial, complex, sometimes repetitive, and frequently a labour of love for the reader. Inaccessible too for all but the resolute reader of French. Between 1967 and 1996 Debray published thirty eight books, of which only only nine have been translated into English, and a derisory four out of the twenty published since 1979. (11) In addition, the research for this study, as detailed in its appendix, has located ninety six articles written by Debray for
newspapers and periodicals in the same period, as well sixty five
transcribed interviews with him up until 1995. This is a compilation
Debray himself had not kept a record of when interviewed by the writer
in 1990.

The number of secondary reviews and diverse articles from all other
sources concerning Régis Debray (and listed largely due to the kind
access given to consult the press dossiers of his three main
publishers), totals nine hundred and eighteen references. This
considerable source, to our knowledge, is the most comprehensive
compilation available, and its very volume poses the question as to why
book-length works of research and criticism about him number come to a
mere eight, of which only five have been published, and why
locatablespecific book chapters amount to a paltry five.

Laqueur, in his review of Debray's A Critique of Armes of 1975
wryly suggested that this book would have been more satisfactorily
translated under the title 'The Education of Régis Debray'. For in this
essay, Debray was to reflect painstakingly upon why Latin American
guerilla warfare, and its anticipated triggering off of 'People's Wars' there had never materialised. In effect, a mere seven years after Révolution dans la Révolution, Debray was not only revising his theories about the armed struggle, but to a considerable extent, suggesting they were practically redundant. Pleased as Laqueur was that the re-education had indeed been begun, he went on to suggest that Debray's new text still omitted a key piece of theory. Namely, (and of considerably more relevance), what exactly was 'The Revolution' ever likely to accomplish and consolidate in the long term for the people of Latin America? By producing a revised critique of the armed struggle, which he had done here, and which dealt only with military logistics, suggested to Laqueur that the reasons for the failure of 'true' socialism to take root in Latin America, even after the armed revolution had been won, as in Cuba, had not occurred to Debray. In other words, why were existing Marxist regimes, all so unenviable, so drab, and so 'off course'? That was the
'Critique', he suggested which would have been the truly radical and purposeful undertaking.

What this study seeks to demonstrate however is that Debray, in many of his subsequent works, has indeed attempted this very analysis, and that the almost universal failure of communism indicated to him that forces other than flawed strategy, (as he had supposed in La Critique des Armes) incompetent leadership, or a wrong application of theory requiring an Althusser-like re-reading of the opus, (12) could ever be the panacea. Such critiques, he was soon to realise, were missing the point, and by the late '70's Debray was to begin to look at the nature of what is political in society in a much less diagnostic manner. For whilst he did remain committed to the Left, and accepted a political role at the Elysée under François Mitterrand between 1981 and 1988, in parallel to this, his writing was beginning to move in a different direction. His concerns now were increasingly directed towards the task of identifying those coercive, and even archaic structures which in his view are common to all human collectives, and which invariably subvert the very rationality of the political design. For if these could be located and described, then they could contribute to an explanation of how and why idealistic political projects, subject to them, are doomed to failure. (13) More recently he has undertaken to expose the way in which noble and ambitious political designs can even become hijacked by advances in technology. (14)

Debray did ask during an interview conducted in October 1989, which aspect of his work this study intended to focus upon. When it was suggested that at that preliminary stage the project envisaged was a linear evaluation, including all facets and periods, his reply was to suggest that establishing a synthesis to all of his work would be very difficult. (15) However this can hardly justify why latterly he has been so neglected, nor why there has not been a sizeable and scholarly appraisal of Debray's later theories, his journalism, or even his role at the Elysée as Presidential advisor, or indeed of the relationship between all of these. In fact Hartmut Ramm's comprehensive
but now dated assessment of Debray's thought, printed in 1978, (the last
study to have been appeared since his imprisonment until the publication
in Britain of Keith Reader's introductory critical appraisal of 1995)
(16), focussed painstakingly upon unravelling which aspects of Debray's
writings were Leninist, from those which were Guevarist in inspiration
(although certainly Debray's 'Guevarism' has often been perceived as but
a local variant of Leninism). Notwithstanding several modest articles
(17) this remarkable biographical gap begs the question about how to
consider the progression, in critical terms, from the motivations of the
young revolutionary (18) to the preoccupations of the older writer. The
rapport between the Presidential advisor and the freelance journalist,
the bourgeois intellectual of the left and the human scientist.

Considered by Le Monde (19) to be a writer 'tout terrain', from
Debray's definitive return to France in 1974 to date, he has published
three copious essays on the guerilla movement in Latin America, two
novels, a collection of literary and art criticism, and numerous
political essays and articles upon East/West relations, European
defence, internal French politics, foreign policy, and French
Republicanism. In addition, an autobiography, and a work on De Gaulle
have also appeared, and most controversially he has undertaken a study
of the nature of Intellectual Power as an important aspect and
illustration of his research into a new social science which he has
postulated, 'Nâdiology'. (20) After spending several years as a
Presidential advisor to François Mitterrand, he became a 'Conseiller
d'État', and in 1992 he was appointed coordinator of the French
'Pavillon', at the Universal Exhibition in Seville. He did in fact
successively resign from all of his official posts.

These publications and positions of course do show that Debray
remains a significant influence within the intellectual left in France,
involved as he is in the three main markets for intellectual production:
publishing in the realm of theory, political comment in the serious
press (21), and a recognised, if reluctant television guest. But it is
certainly today the first of these, the role of the enquirer seeking to
understand community behaviour, (and much less that of the political animal seeking to suggest what it ought to be), to which Debray attaches most personal commitment. He has frequently contrasted these two realms by labelling them 'La Politique', and 'Le Politique', terms he originally contrasted in his first philosophical essay, of 1981, Critique de la Raison Politique, and which could be translated into English as 'Political Activism' as opposed to 'The Nature of Collective Organisation'. Certainly the failures of the first of these have not in any way led Debray towards a position of cynicism or aloofness, particularly since his books of the mid and late-1980's in particular continued a contribution to contemporary political debate. (22) But what is now obvious is that within this evident breadth of writing, his research into political anthropology has become the main filament of Debray's work, and has involved a sustained stripping away at the layers of Marxist, Religious and Liberal doctrine to uncover identical structures more deeply ingrained in all of them. Structures which are in turn articulated by man's religious penchant on the one hand, and by his successive tools of communication on the other, where the technology he has at his disposal dictates his vision of the world.

Since by 1991, the former advocate of armed struggle was now writing that those former key dialectic concepts such as 'contradiction', 'conflict' and 'strategy', now required examination in a 'milieu anti-historique', (23) and, as another critic has perceptively stated, 'Debray a décidé de penser d’abord contre ce qu’il fut', (24) (not only against his former Marxism, but self-critically against the very traditional and assumed supports which had privileged his own status as an intellectual) one may well be close to the truth in suggesting that tracing this gradual yet very significant shift from political participation to observation may most aptly reveal the essential Régis Debray. In fact, this is a purpose and a separation he has acknowledged in his own journalism, which he has described as being both 'à mi-chemin de la pensée et de l'intrigue', and yet also as the ideal 'vulgarisateur du travailleur de concept'. (25)
Having established this duality nevertheless certainly does omit a third, more independent facet of Debray's work meriting attention, that of Debray the novelist and literary and art critic, with tastes and views which are separate from his theoretical and political convictions. (26) And whilst a critique of the aesthetic Debray remains outside of the scope of this study, he does add his own weight to the argument that at very least a duo-disciplinary awareness of his work has been necessary for some time. He wrote in 1981 that,

’......le théoricien est, contrairement à l'intellectuel, celui qui dit le vrai sans se soucier des incidences de cette vérité sur sa vie et sur celle des autres. Le théoricien est géomètre ou psychanalyste et il ne saurait en aucun cas, être tenu pour responsable. À cet égard, et pour dévancer vos objections, j'assu­me la coupure qu'il peut y avoir entre mon travail de théoricien et mon activité d'intellectuel. Entre l'un et l'autre, il y a toute la différence qui sépare un manuel de géométrie et un plan d'architecture,’ (27),

Régis Debray today is part of an elitist, albeit greatly esteemed intellectual milieu which is peculiar to France - or more specifically to Paris. This phenomena, almost exclusively one of contestation, and whose complexity cannot be explained in a succinct way here, is however closely bound up with France's turbulent political history since the French Revolution, the position of Paris under liberal republicanism as cultural magnet and stimulus for thinkers, and also the competitive and meritocratic education system set up under Napoleon, which in turn concentrated the best talent upon Paris. Ultimately, this intellectual 'network', which in turn has undeniably had a considerable influence upon France's modern history, has become in some respects too an 'école Normale Supérieure' old-boy micro-society of disputes, friendships, exclusions and splits.

One could argue that the resulting intellectual prestige which prevails in France has created writers of considerable social and ethical influence like Maurras, Gide, Malraux, and Sartre in particular
(who undoubtedly became a kind of moral guide and reference for Debray's own generation) of whom there are few equivalents in other western cultures. Men (and considerably fewer women) of an almost mythical status who have been referred to as both those who express the France's national conscience, (28) but who are also 'The Militants of Culture'. (29) Indeed in Debray's own view, this essentially French intellectual mix of clout plus fascination is an integral part of the kind of mystique which De Gaulle expressed in his famous 'certaine idée de la France'. (30) Although to restore some balance here one might usefully refer to the English critic Alexandra Duval-Smith, who has classified France as the navel of the world, where her cult of herself, today an anachronism, is above all a symptom of Hexagonitis. (31)

Notwithstanding, any intellectual biography of Debray, would lack some perspective were it not to be depicted and evaluated through reference the to political, theoretical and artistic realm within which Debray has chosen to live and work for much of the last 30 years. A contextualisation which is all the more relevant because Debray himself has written at length about the role of the intellectual and the radical changes forced upon that role since the 1960's, in terms of causes, roles, statuses, arenas, and the identities of the Left Bank contesting community. And much as he may disdain these changes he has after all succumbed to what Keith Reader calls a Parisian Intellectual 'homing instinct'. (32)

Philip Boggio (33) has contended that whilst the political Right had held power for almost 25 years until Mitterrand's presidential success in 1981, this state of affairs had permitted the intellectual Left, within both its humanist and its Marxist strands, to be much more at home in criticising than in administering. And even though, (or indeed one could argue 'because') they were in opposition they succeeded in retaining a very powerful 'cultural' hegemony within France. Bolstered also by the post-war discredit of Rightist ideologies, the significant numerical strength of the 'Parti Communiste Français' (despite the 'de-stalinisation' controversy), and the moral and symbolic leadership of
Sartre, the first 'trente glorieuses' years of the Fifth Republic were a period when the 'causes' for the Left were numerous. The expansion of Communism, Third World liberation struggles, and, people's wars in Algeria, China, Cuba and Viet Nam being amongst the most prominent.

Until the 1970's then, for numerous intellectuals of the left like Debray, the world map represented above all a bourgeois/proletarian conflict at home, and a miserable Third World - hostage to Yankee imperialism - abroad, where for militants of a younger generation countries like Cuba and Viet Nam shone as beacons of pragmatic emancipation. The lack of a credible Social Democratic alternative in France during these years most certainly contributed to heightened focus upon successes overseas.

Yet, by the early 1970's several chinks in this intellectual armour had appeared. If the events of May 1968 had proven to be a lost opportunity, it has been suggested that one explanation for this was because the only project that occupied much of the thinking left in France, was that of comfortably 'reading on', largely under the influence of Louis Althusser, in the belief that the route to revolution was through study. A theoretical 'university' Marxism as a kind of research programme, which contained no imminent practical project for the Left acquiring power at all. (34) Furthermore, adding to the doubt about the direction they were all supposed to be travelling in was rise of the extreme Left after the 'PCF' inertia of 1968 as the Soviets occupied Prague, Solzhenitsyn's revelations about the 'Gulag', Cambodia, the Vietnamese Boat People, and eventually Afghanistan. At home too the French Communist Party was twice to pull out of potentially successful electoral and economic common programmes with the Socialist Party in the 1970's.

One key intellectual proponent of complete disillusion concerning the working classe's privileged position as 'the' agent of social change was former Macist Bernard-Henri Lévy (35). Arguing in 1977 against the Hegelian/Marxist tradition which viewed history as a linear process containing the possibility of man's redemption through liberation, Lévy
was claiming now that communism was just another version of a political movement which had become nothing else but a repository for power and domination, and that in its ultimate form it was nothing less than a totalitarianism. In crediting Solzhenitsyn for awakening the left from their long 'dogmatic slumber', Levy went on to describe Marx as the 'Machiavelli of the century'. Only four years later Max Gallo's (36) famous analysis of the shortage of intellectual enthusiasm following Mitterrand's 1981 victory argued that the 'political' victory came 10 years too late for it to benefit from a complementary intellectual endorsement, and that this was a considerable disadvantage to it.

Furthermore, the old signposts for professional thinkers of the left in France were beginning to point in different directions not only on an ideological level but on the levels of communication and status as well. By the mid 1960's the very idea that a progressive culture could be handed down from a few mandarins at the pinnacle of a broadening education structure was being implicitly challenged by the increasing accessibility of mass culture and consumerism, in the form of films, magazines, cars, and television. Television in particular, as a medium for the dissemination of high culture was forcibly alien to the intelligentsia. Apart from the fact that the Gaullists kept a tight rein upon TV broadcasting for so long, this medium, still in its infancy, was in any case inappropriate and unreceptive to their 'penned' pronouncements concerning great national debates. Eventually, subjected like pop stars to an effective commercial plebiscite, intellectual credibility in this medium began to be measured in terms of their ability to manipulate a time slot, or counter a media-man's brief to sniff out a flaw, or a U-turn in their work. Sirinelli (37) has even referred to the rise of television actually atrophying thought. Not because, it totally ignores intellectuals and writers, but because it creates the terms on how they are presented.

An additional factor in the demise of the traditional militant scholar has been technological expansion itself, which has engendered an increase in the requirement for expertise in very specific areas of
research. This has forcibly impaired the possibility (and the credibility) of intellectuals continuing today in fulfilling that symbolic, universalist and proselytising role as Sartre was no doubt the last to do. The fact that new 'maitres à penser' to replace men like Sartre, Aron, and Barthes have not appeared has been more to do with these mutations than lack of intellectual talent in itself. There is no little irony either in the fact that true specialists nowadays, working in very specific domains of research, operate and communicate necessarily on an international level, something that their precursors were much less able to do.

If however it is the case that the careers of many of the high intelligentsia in France were being more lucratively pursued in new domains, Debray was at least one of the few who were willing to try swimming against that tide. In accepting an invitation to join the Élysée advisory staff in 1981, he undoubtedly risked his intellectual credentials by being seen as a participant in authority, (rather than contestor of it), who was involved in testing the waters of a specifically left-leaning social democratic project for government.

Finally, does there not remain something unique in firstly describing and then appraising Debray's intellectual career? Few, if any political theorists have ever, at the age of twenty six, been so revered, so influential and so publicised. This was due in part to his subversive activity in Bolivia, as well as his accomplishment as a writer with personal access to Castro's opinions in the composition of Révolutioin dans la Révolution. But it was above all a result of Guevara's death that the baton of Latin American Revolutionary theory immediately passed on to Debray, and thereby turned his every utterance into publishable wisdom and hope for Guevarists throughout the world. So great was the publicity surrounding his trial, so radical his message, and so clichéed his image, that Debray lives, and will no doubt continue to live with this outdated and now irrelevant 'guérillo' label for the rest of his life.
Debray has stated that in his view all ideologies are 'perishable commodities'. (38) In referring to his collected Latin American articles of the 1960's and early 1970's he accepts that once the sound and the fury of the 'moment' have gone, 'on ne voit plus que l'idiot qui raconte'. (39) In art, perhaps the freshness of youth can retain its charm over mature reflection. But in the labyrinth of revolutionary theory the passing of time suggests that this is not the case.

An attempt to locate and evaluate Debray's most influential domain and to decide ultimately which seam of writing reveals the most authentic Régis Debray may well be the next best thing to seeking a twenty five year synthesis of him, which arguably does not exist. He conceded in Les Masques, (40), that his own trajectory is permeated with contradictory references; 'Latino', yet French, 'guérillo', yet journalist, marginal, yet in a position of influence. If Debray does straddle today the domains of 'technocratic and policy-oriented intellectual', as well value-oriented intellectual' (41), social science researcher, serious press journalist, occasional TV guest, as well as literary figure, then trying to fit all of these neatly together in such a hybrid animal may well prove more confusing than enlightening.

Over and above the actual completion of an account of the work of an important intellectual, our fundamental aim nonetheless is to trace and evaluate an obvious shift which is central to his work. A shift which has involved a steady and reasoned movement away from the political domain towards the realm of social scientific research, and which, importantly, requires an appraisal of the tensions and incompatibilities where these apparent opposites overlap. In view of this, a simple chronological treatment of Debray's work has been rejected, since it would tend to suggest and emphasise contradictions, if not double standards in him, in favour of a structure demonstrating 'La Politique' competing with 'Le Politique'. An examination which in revealing synchronistically the process of a slow change, may well permit a more balanced judgement of it. To this end the fulcrum point of our enquiry is unusually with those chapters at half way point, where
the political conclusions lead us to the rationality of part two, the scientific study.

Lastly, on a historical and sociological rather than a personal basis, one could suggest in the final analysis suggest that Debray's configuration begs the very question; what becomes of the combative intellectual of the Left when 'their' theories, hopes and beliefs expire? And to what extent could it be estimated that he is an archetypal, if modern day case, of that age old ultimate retreat back to the ivory tower?
Chapter 1. Notes


4 - The editors of Louis Althusser's uncompleted autobiography, L'Avenir dure longtemps, Stock, 1992, believe Debray's relations with Althusser to have been of a filial nature, p.546.

5 - Debray, Régis, 'Castroises: La Longue Marche de l'Amérique Latina', Les Temps Modernes, no. 224, jan. 1965. (This article was also published in the Cuban Magazine Casa de las Americas), and 'Problèmes de stratégie Révolutionnaire en Amérique Latine', Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes, 1965.

6 - Debray, Régis, Révolution dans la Révolution, Maspéro, 1967.


12 - Two of Althusser's key works which focussed upon a plea for a return, to the younger Karl Marx, were, Pour Marx, 1965, and Lire le Capital, 1965.

13 - The theory behind Debray's Critique de la Raison Politique, Gallimard, 1981.

14 - This was one of the main tenets of Cours de Médiologie, Gallimard, 1991.
15 - Private interview with Debray in October 1989. Similarly, ibid, Gollier: in the transcribed interview with Debray dated 15 Nov. 1987, p. A16, and which forms an appendix to Gollier's study, Debray states, 'Mon trajectoire est affreux. Extérieurement, esthétiquement, c'est l'horreur'.


18 - Debray's last work to be published on the Latin American Revolution was La Guérilla du Chê, Seuil, 1974, although both novels he has published, L'Indésirable, Seuil, 1975, and La Neige Brûle, Grasset, 1977, are set largely inside South American Revolutionary organisations.


21 - Publications to which he has occasionally contributed include, Le Nouvel Observateur, Esprit, Le Monde, Le Monde Diplomatique, and Libération, and interviews in L'Événement du Jeudi, Nouvelles Littéraires, Le Point, Globe, and Vendredi. Paul Thibaud, in 'A propos des revues, à propos l'intelligentsia', Esprit, mai 1977, writes that in the 1970's a review directed by Debray called Fa
tira, appeared in its zero edition.


23 - Cours de M édiologie Générale, p. 381.


26 - Two short stories by Debray were published without his consent during 1967 by Seuil, La Frontière suivi de, Un jeune homme à la Page. The two novels he has written appeared in the 1970's, L'Indésirable, Seuil, 1975, and La Neige Brûle, Grasset, 1977, Debray's prison writings Journal d'un Petit Bourgeois entre deux feux et quatre ours, Seuil, 1976 contains a proportion of literary discussion. Two autobiographical works have appeared, Comète au Comète, Gallimard, 1986, (summarily an autobiographical account of his relationship with his then young daughter), and Les Masques, 1988. Eloges, 1986 is a collection of published literary and artistic criticism, Debray's biography of De Gaulle, A Domain De Gaulle, 1990, and Christophe Coloro le visiteur de l'aube, La Différence, 1991, in many respects merit consideration as part of this strand of Debray's work.

27 - 'La Longue Marche de Régis Debray'.
28 - Boggio, Philippe, 'Le Silence des Intellectuels de Gauche', Le Monde, 27 juil, 1983. Whilst there is not space here for a lengthy discussion of the peculiarities of the French intellectual tradition, Keith Reader ('The Intellectuals: notes towards a comparative study of their position in the social formation of France and Britain', in Media, Culture and Society, Vol. 4, 1982, p.265), has emphasized in particular the setting up, by Bonaparte, of the 'Grandes écoles'. In his view their competitive and meritocratic bases were ultimately to become an advantage to the rising bourgeoisie in leading to the creation of a symbolic intellectual aristocracy. It is interesting to note that Zeldin, writing initially for an English-speaking readership, ('How not to be intimidated by Intellectuals', in The French, 1983, p.394) chooses to debunk their guru-lite status by describing them as 'professional manufacturers of opinions', and that they retain their cachet because they appeal to a typically French 'hste for the Abstract which, 'delights in systemisation and speculation' (p.401), 'finding a wealth of significance in the lost trivial details of life' (p.403).

To quote an eldner of the inner circle itself, André Gluckslann, (quoted in 'Enseignement: Les Nouveaux Gourus' (Le Nouvel Observateur 12 juil, 1976) demonstrates a similar frustration at their imperspicuity and inflated self-image.

'L'écriture c'est fondamental. La révolution est une chose difficile. Ce n'est pas une raison pour la laisser à un cénacle d'initiés, Ecrire difficile, c'est une fermeture, une manière de satisfaire les gens. Si, parland du Goulag, que cinq mille types au maximum puissent le comprendre en France, tu es en dessous de tout. C'est pourtant ce qui se fait tous les jours chez nous. On écrit universitaire, théorique. On jargonne, Le sort du monde se décide à la virgule près. Et il ne sort rien de nouveau. Il faudrait prêter l'oreille à des gens qui ne sont pas des professionnels de la pensée, comme on le fait partout dans le monde, sauf à Paris'.

30 - Les Rendez-vous manqués, p.144.


33 - Boggio, 'Le Silence des Intellectuels de Gauche'.

35 - Lévy, Bernard-Henri, 'La Barbarie à visage humain', Grasset, 1977. The two quotes are from pp. 166 and 169 respectively. Lévy became the most widely recognised critic of Totalitarian society within an intellectual tendency which came to be referred to as 'La Nouvelle Philosophie'.


Part One. *La* Politique
2 - Latin American Revolution: Case History

In January 1974, Régis Debray, whose wife Elisabeth (1) was at that time was studying at Berkeley, applied for a visa to visit the USA. A month later his request was rejected. The American Embassy informed him that according to Washington he fell under Article 212.28 of the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act, whereby representatives of International Communism were forbidden access to American territory. (2) Seven years later in autumn 1981, when he arrived at the 'United Nations', in an official capacity as one of President Mitterrand's advisors, he was assured by an American official that his visa had been issued in error. (3)

A succinct resume of how and why Debray acquired such a high profile on CIA files will help us to understand why Washington was so jittery. Whilst we may now justifiably label the writings, issues and events which surrounded his incarceration in Bolivia as 'early' Debray, confined to a historical moment and a geo-political terrain, they are without doubt important in assessing the evolution of his thought, the relevance of his enforced isolation to this thought, and they explain too how he became a household name.

As a 'professeur stagiaire' at the 'école Normale Supérieure', and having come top of it's competitive entrance exam, Debray became involved in the early sixties with the 'Union des étudiants Communistes', in particular the 'rue d'Ulm' clan. Their exclusive, almost benedictine preoccupation, (in contrast to the Italian and Trotskyite factions), was revolutionary theory. (4) This was to a considerable degree a consequence of the influence of the Marxist Louis Althusser, who was a lecturer at the 'ENS'. His particular project was to attempt to re-charge French Marxism with science. What he viewed as a 'PCF' revisionism in the early 1960's, involving an increased dialogue and compromise with others in the political arena, as well as the party's tolerance of tendencies inside its youth wing, was considered by Althusser as being little more than an eclectic and
subjective humanism. A proposed way forward where man was seen as the autonomous subject of history, and could therefore acquire freedom step by step. Such fragmentory eclecticism, itself an ideology, argued Althusser, was far removed from the pure and orthodox Marxist principles of determinism.

Whilst Marx had seen the economy as the primary structure whose internal contradictions would inevitably lead to the collapse of Capitalism, Althusser's theoretical project for the party was to seek to uncover other structures and forces which determine our culture over and above the economic domain. These would include such notions as class, politics, and law, and whose internal contradictions evolve unevenly. (5) Dialectic struggles which were historically determined, but whose successful outcome could not be pre-determined at any given point in time. Therefore, went the argument, a theoretical re-examination and return to the works of the later, 'scientific' Marx was vital, and would restore the value of theoretical investigation as a vital practice. The authentic revolutionary thinker had to divorce himself from his bourgeois mentality of becoming involved in polemics, demonstrations, and petitions (items of piecemeal progress born of the frustrations of inaction), and realise that the responsibility of the theoretician was to provide pure, revolutionary concepts, which Lenin's 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' in Althusser's view had done. He believed that there was an urgent requirement for rigorous theoretical analyses which would make a true militant of the intellectual.

Not surprisingly, this project to resolve the division between the thinker and suspicious proletarian looked for many critics very much like a valid reason to consider oneself a revolutionary from the comfort of one's own armchair. But this was also a frustrating 'excess' of theory back in Europe, which, recognised early on by Debray, did anything but compensate for an insufficiency of action. (6)

Additionally disillusioned by those 'done things' his family may well have expected of him, greatly irritated by the 'PCF's' decision to support the socialist presidential candidate François Mitterrand, (7) and since in
Althusser's Paris, 'L'écosystème nuisait aux fantasme' (4), the twenty five year old Debray decided to leave France for Latin America in 1965, and even though he did put his name down for the 'Agrégation' examination in anticipation of an early, if unexpected return home, his decision to fly to Cuba, motivated by several other factors, requires some explanation.

Having witnessed De Gaulle's accession to power, and in being uninspired by either the 'PCF' leadership or by Mollet's socialist 'SFIO', two young 'UEC/EMS' students, both 'over-politicised' yet 'under-committed' (9), decided to go to the Cuban Embassy in Paris as far back as 1961 to offer their services to the Cuban Revolution. Debray and his friend Bernard Kouchner were politely turned down. (10) Undeterred, that summer, Debray took a charter flight to New York. He stayed at the 'YMCA' there, hitch-hiked to Miami, (11) and arrived by boat on July 14th in a Havana pulsating with revolutionary fraternity and spontaneity. (12) Cuban communism did not equate to that grey, static 'Popular Democracy' model from Eastern Europe. For here,

"La foule est proche de ses leaders - les grands meetings n'ont rien d'un cérémonial figé. Fidel et son peuple entament une sorte d'ininterminable duo, parlé, chanté, dansé,........et les vieux Stalliniens ont baissé pavillon". (13)

This was an atmosphere which ought not be under-estimated in assessing Debray's succeeding commitment to Cuba, for he was to write in later years (14) that setting out for the Carribean had far more to do with his reading of Carpenter's exotic setting in Le siècle des Lumières (15) than in digesting Das Kapital.

Impressed, yet aware at the same time of those Althusserian concepts he and his intellectual friends had been wrestling with back in Paris, Debray could not help but put his mind to what the very best act of solidarity with the Cuban Revolution could be, given that here was a whole continent which the Euro-centric Marx had ignored. For in Cuba, what had begun as an anti-imperialist, and nationalist civil war had been subsequently proclaimed by Castro to have been a Marxist revolution,
validated overwhelmingly by the 'Bay of Pigs' victory over the US backed emigré invasion two months before Debray's arrival. Low and behold, here, theory was 'following' events.

Having made numerous Latin American contacts and friends at the ex-Havana Hilton, Debray's attachment to Cuba grew, as did his desire to see the Revolutionary success repeated elsewhere, and it was early in 1962 that his first article, *J'ai vu Cuba apprendre à lire* appeared in France. (16) He was in a position to write this vivid and intrepid journalistic documentary report because within a month the tourist had become a civil servant. With only a letter of recommendation from the Cuban Embassy in Paris, he was nonetheless commissioned to write a report for the Cuban authorities, on the success of two teacher training schools which had been recently set up in the countryside. The readers of *Les Lettres Françaises*, may well have judged with some scepticism the 'Inspector's' degree of objectivity as they read this very enthusiastic elegy to revolutionary fervour and solidarity. Interspersed with reported conversations (one where a Cuban worker tells Debray all about the Paris Commune), it is the story the pioneering literacy brigades, made up of uniformed trade unionists, workers, peasants, soldiers, and students, marching into the countryside, armed with a mere three books, one of which was on revolutionary themes and images, and another on the rudiments of imperialist economics. Reminiscent of Gide's first visit to Russia in 1936, the Revolution, in Debray's first article, appears almost to have been responsible for ushering in the picturesque itself, for the brigades are, 'enseignant à lire sur les chalutiers, ou dans des barques, aux pêcheurs illétrés, entre deux remontées de filet'. And Debray rhetorically asks how many future poets and novelists the campaign will unearth. (17)

Debray had in fact returned to Paris by the time of the 1963 Cuban missile crisis, and he recalls that back at the 'rue d'Ulm' many of his former student colleagues barely paid him any attention since his dabbling in the 'material' world across the ocean effectively took the shine off of their un tarnished theoretical analyses of revolution. (18) However, as a young man with few financial restrictions, he left for Cuba again, where he
spent another three months at an literacy camp in the Sierra Maestra, but he went on to Venezuela the same year, initially with the idea of making a film on the armed struggle in Latin America, but becoming progressively committed to the cause of revolution itself after having visited the 'Falcon' guerilla there. (19) In part due to an accreditation letter from Sartre whereby he was to write an article for Les Temps Modernes, but also with help from his girlfriend who he had met at Caracas university Debray went on to make contact with clandestine movements in Colombia, Equador, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina and Uruguay, where he was to realise increasingly that Cuba, and not Russia or China was the Continent's reference point for uprising. (20) His and Elisabeth's peregrinations lasted some eighteen months, and yet another visit took place in 1964 to the striking miners of Bolivia where he was to witness at first hand their syndicalist struggles against army repression. (21)

It was at the beginning of 1965 that Sartre published Debray's article, Castroisme: La longue Marche de l'Amérique Latine, and shortly afterwards Problèmes de Stratégie Révolutionnaire en Amérique Latine appeared in Althusser's Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes. (22) Of these both articles analysed and contextualised the Cuban Revolution. But whilst Debray by now had returned to France and had begun teaching philosophy at the 'lycée Poincaré' in Nancy in September 1965, he was to resign the post three months later after he received a telegram from Castro himself inviting Debray to go back to Cuba. What looks in hindsight like a very fateful decision to leave France again, this time on a more permanent basis, did indeed lead to a truly remarkable series of events.

Fidel Castro, having been shown the Spanish translations of Debray's two articles by none other than Guevara, personally invited Debray to the Tri-Continental Conference of Socialist countries, to be held in Havana in January 1966. In fact Hamon and Rotman describe Debray as being captivated by Castro. Debray was twenty five years old, and from the day of his arrival back in Havana he was to be effectively co-opted into the international dissemination of the Castroist revolution. If an argument that he was 'used' could viably be put forward, he was now at least able to
witness the regime's progress from a very privileged position, and Golfier (23) contends that by now Debray was consciously making a break from Althusser by participating in the continuing Revolution in accordance with his 'own' convictions. No doubt meeting Castro, the then scourge of the West, helped to dispel the myth that the Party was everything. After all 'his' 'barbudos' had made the revolution. Not a group of thinkers, not a party, nor even the masses.

It appears too that Castro was certainly the type of leader with whom this young 'European' Intellectual could become familiar. Over and above a series of long conversations he had with Debray, from whence came Debray's book, Révolution dans la Révolution, (24) Castro also asked Debray if he wished to help out, as someone unknown and unrecognised, in a geo-political survey of potential guerrilla country north of La Paz, in Bolivia, which in fact Debray undertook in September 1966, (25). Much more significantly though he accepted the undertaking of being a secret liaison messenger between Castro, and Guevara, who in November 1966, had set up a clandestine guerrilla unit in an isolated mountainous area near the river Nancahuazu, in Bolivia. It was thus under the cover of being an accredited journalist for a Mexican newspaper that Debray arrived in La Paz, via Zurich, in early March 1967. Having first of all made the necessary contacts in the capital, he arrived at Che's guerilla camp several days later, although Guevara was at this time absent on training manoeuvres.

Guevara noted in his diary that Debray (alias Danton, or Francès) wished to join the guerrilla (26), but Guevara refused his request claiming that Debray's skills in building a support network back in Europe would be of greater value to Revolution on the continent. In any case Debray was far from being the toughened guerilla Guevara required. In fact, at this point, things were going badly for Che. No Bolivian peasants had been recruited at all. After two men had deserted during February the unit was discovered in March by the Bolivian army. After engaging in combat, when several soldiers were killed, it was forced to keep on the move. Debray, rifle on his shoulder, took his due turn at guard duty.
Chapter 2. Notes

1 - Debray's ex-wife, Elizabeth Burgos, an anthropologist in her own right, is best known for her interviews with Rigoberta Menchu, the Guatemalan Indian peasant woman who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992.


4 - Debray, Régis, Les Rendez-vous Manqués (Pour Pierre Goldman), Seuil, 1975, p. 32. On page 52 in this work Debray explains that since his political education had taken place in time, then it was possible to be a Marxist without joining the French Communist Party: 'Ni caballant, ni poursuivi, ni rien du tout, Un Intellectuel quoi', Jacques Henriques, in his review of 'Les Rendez-vous manqués', Tel Quel, août 1975, refers to the fact that these clans or groups revolved around an almost exclusively male fraternity.

5 - A theory that the political domain is anything but evolutionary is an argument Debray was to put forward in later years, notably in Critique de la Raison Politique, Gallimard, 1981.


7 - Les Rendez-vous manqués, p. 33.

8 - Les Masques, p. 47.


11 - François Naspéro was to publish in 1967, without Debray's consent, two short stories in the same volume which Debray had written back in 1963, La Frontière and Un jeune homme à la page. In Les Masques, p. 46, he states that the first of these, La Frontière, was a parodied version of a true incident in which he was involved on his hitch-hike south from New York. Mauro, an Italian also hitching to Florida to find work is given a lift by three white men in South Carolina. They say he has more chance of finding a job than do the masses of Cuban émigrés who have recently arrived there, after all, 'Cie dingue de barbu de Rouge aussi...Qu'est-ce qu'ils attendent pour lui botter les fesses', (p. 17) At a local plantation the three men inexplicably swap the car for a Studebaker. At a stop after nightfall, Mauro innocently walks into a black bar, and is beaten up by the three whites when he returns to the street. The blacks simply look on through the bar windows, anxious to avoid trouble with the white police. The three white men, we discover, are on the run, having killed a black 'agitator', and once the State frontier had been passed they no longer need a decoy 4th figure in the car. Mauro, bleeding in the gutter, passes his own symbolic frontier in realizing too late what the reality of racist America is.

Opinion about Debray's first Literary efforts were divided. The reviewer in the Times Literary Supplement, August, 1968, p. 865, saw the publication of this 'weak', 'unmemorable', fiction as a disservice to a philosopher and brave political prisoner, in contrast Pierre de Boisdeffre in Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 3 nov. 1967, saw in them the work of a born writer, 'l'aube d'un grand talent'.

12 - Hamon, and Rollan, p. 90.
13 - ibid, p.93.
14 - Les Masques, p.46.
16 - Debray, Régis, 'J'ai vu Cuba apprendre à lire', Les Lettres Françaises, 26 avril-2 mai, 1962, (This article also appears in Debray's collected journalism, L'Espérance au purgatoire, Alain Moreau, 1980, pp. 72-101).
17 - 'J'ai vu Cuba apprendre à lire', p.86.
24 - Debray, Régis, Révolution dans la Révolution, Maspéro, 1967.
26 - Hamon and Rotman, p.377.

'Un peu de Lénine en contrabande'. (1)

Published early in 1967 in Spanish, French and English, Régis Debray's one hundred and twenty page book, Révolution dans la Révolution, (2) was born of a series of long, late-night conversations that Debray had had with Fidel Castro. And as a piece of Marxist theory it was nothing less than a 'succès de scandale'. Fidel, whom Debray recalled years later as, 'un grand seigneur accessible et curieux de tout' (3), appears to have cultivated the young Frenchman, (4) not simply because of Debray's knowledge of Latin America, but since in his two previously published articles he had already demonstrated that he could intellectually anchor the ground rules of Castroism inside Marxism. (5) From a part of the world which the classic Marxist writers had never acknowledged, Blackburn, writing in 1970 believed that Debray's work had, 'quickened the spirit of rebellion in a new generation of revolutionaries', (6) not only on the Andes cone but amongst students in Europe and North America as well.

In the same vein as Lenin's hallowed blueprint What is to be Done?, (7), Debray's Révolution dans la Révolution, was purely about means, and not ends. It was an urgent, yet coherent and original liberation strategy based upon a call to arms. It popularised the notion and development of guerilla warfare, by advocating the idea of a communist avant-garde being organised in a different way, by means of a party in arms. Its proposal was to kick-start conditions ripe for revolution, rather than to stoically wait for them to appear as peacetime capitalism gently imploded. In addition, this type of direct action was in itself deemed capable of creating a vital revolutionary consciousness.
It is perhaps neither irony nor surprise that Révolution dans la Révolution's construction has been compared to a typical 'dissertation de Khâgneux', (the preparation class for the 'ENS'). (8) Thesis: What is to be learned from the Cuban experience? Antithesis: How not to commit the errors of the past in other Latin American countries brought about by imported revolutionary theories. Synthesis: a third way, whilst still requiring patience, the proliferation of rural, strategic mobile guerilla units.

In this Castrist/Debrayist model for insurrection then, the 'small compact core of reliable, experienced, hardened and secretive revolutionaries' (9) were to be in permanent fatigues. Away from the city, they were to be the metaphor of the Party in this particular agrarian society, but with that same fundamental aim of catalysing and organising a permanent caucus. These guerilla groups would be independent of both the civilian population and any urban political control. Through their mobility they would seek to create a numerical illusion of strength. They would be formed only in the countryside, living from the land, from where they could ultimately swell into the size of an army. Their main objective would be the destruction of the enemy's military potential, by focussing upon its most vulnerable point. Crucially there would be no artificial division of political and military command, since so frequently in the past political directives had lead to military error, and hence to their predecessor's annihilation. The guerilla group, the 'Foco' was to be 'the' apex of all command. Whilst for Marxists of course it was axiomatic that violence would occur to depose a class from its power, here, a totally military solution to a political problem was envisaged. The cadre was to be the soldier. The 'Independent' Political Commissar the General, and the theoretician would be he who, reasons 'from experience'. This was hardly an endorsement of the Althusser method of separating thinker from participant of course. The Revolution, formed through struggle was also to be a project giving place, location, a preference over time and programme, (10) and certainly Debray's attribution of great importance here to the primacy of
tertiary can be seen as a feeder to his later assertions about the importance and durability of the nation state.

The key metaphor for the whole process which Debray used in *Révolution dans la Révolution* was that of a small motor setting a big motor into action as a deliberate revolutionary process. (11) In the Cuban Sierra Maestra, it was argued, insurrection had made revolutionaries, and not the reverse. Hence waiting and theorising about opportune moments could now be seen to be implicitly counter-revolutionary.

Debray's primer for Marxist insurrection was seen as revolutionary too in the sense that it jettisonned all compromise, piecemeal reformism, or any wait-and-see policy. It advocated by-passing Communist Party bureaucracy and prevarication. It spurned crisis-watching and Marxist 'divining' of societies ripe for upheaval, and it scorned 'agitation', the Trotskyite belief in the awakening of the industrial classes, which did not exist in much of Latin America anyway. *Révolution dans la Révolution* sought equally to avoid the rise of the populist leader who would invariably turn to demagogy to combat those who put him in power, and it also eschewed the idea of the self-defence of communities which would be open to military repression, encirclement, or at best attrition. Furthermore it rejected urban terrorism, with its inevitable heavy losses, except as distraction of the regular army, and it argued that a traditional Leninist revolutionary model had in any case only worked as a unifying force against an invader or coloniser, which was not the case here in Latin America.

Debray's book claimed as well that the heroic abnegation of guerilla life would be instrumental in shaping the new socialist man. (12) No doubt reminded by Castro of the physical and psychological demands which a 'barbudo' would encounter over several years, or even decades, Debray was to write, 'In the early months the enemy to be conquered is himself', (13) but once this stage was over, the experience in survival and comradeship would reinforce his determination. Indeed Golfer (14) perceived in this widely-read convocation to young men to take up arms and head for the
countryside, the tempting opportunity to become a noble combatant, with the additional promise of a cure from verbalism and inactivity.

Whilst this was the logic behind the strategy, Debray was just as eager to provide practical tactical advice too. Being fully responsible for their own security, the flexible, disciplined, elusive and combative guerilla vanguard would take advantage of their knowledge of the terrain, by concentrating their attacks upon military targets, and in that way avoid all compromise of locals. They would choose when, and how to make attacks, and use the tactics of speed and surprise to the full. Both in preparation for, and after offensive raids, they would distribute tracts and organise political meetings in the countryside. Thus the trust of peasants was to be gradually won, and army and police defections would steadily increase. Eventually, a guerilla haven, containing a true expanding people's army, capable of engaging an opposing army, would be achieved in zones of liberated territory, which would become prototype societies for the future state.

Essentially then, Debray was arguing that Cuba's inspirational revolution could be replicated throughout the whole of Latin America, and indeed even further afield. An existing Marxist regime there showed that this route to liberation was a decisive addition to Marxist-Leninism, if not a potential regeneration of it on the whole continent. *Révolution dans la Révolution*, was an attempt to reconcile Marxist theory and revolutionary practice, and precisely what Che was doing, in the depths of the Bolivian forest as this book appeared, was applying its theories in an attempt to escape the inertia that the orthodox Communist parties of Latin America had found themselves in. In fact Debray was even prepared to credit Althusser with a great deal of influence upon his thinking out of this model of the revolution in claiming that the theory remained scientific precisely because its pre-condition was to take stock of all local conditions before any offensive was begun. Hence guerilla warfare was not, as some were to accuse it, a rash, empirical pragmatism. (15)

*Révolution dans la Révolution* raised hostility on both the political Left and Right, not least since insurgency aims to give power to those who
in the final analysis can procure the most arms. Seizing power of course does not mean you have discovered a theory of history, nor that you have the capacity to create a non-authoritarian superior society. One could pointedly ask where do the tactics end, and the opportunism begin.

Verdès-Leroux's later, but sceptical analysis of the Cuban Revolution (16) was based upon the belief that throughout the 1960's, many French intellectuals were guilty of being just too credulous towards Castro, and only too willing to believe in his 'Marxist-Leninist' guerilla victory over the former dictator Batista, when in her view this was actually a myth which Castro had deliberately propagated. Her contention was that such figures were not only fascinated by this accessible young leader, but so seduced by Cuba's exotic, fête-like, dance, and rhythm-filled atmosphere, that they attributed such local traditions to the revolution itself, believing that everything which had gone on beforehand had been unbearable and feudal. Similarly they conveniently overlooked the fact that Castro had wisely avoided declaring his Marxist-Leninism until after he acquired power in order to prevent a US intervention (17), or that his victory was to a significant extent achieved with the assistance of urban terrorism.

Thus Castro's claim that there had been a Cuban Socialist Revolution in May 1961 was not a 'third way' at all, but a camouflage, and a romanticising of a victorious and heroic guerilla to legitimise a chauvinistic, populist and caudillist power. (18) The facts of the matter, in Verdès-Leroux's estimation, were that the new regime had successfully cashed in on naive intellectual awe of the revolutionary sentiment for risk and sacrifice, and even the exaltation of violence itself. Analysing, systematising and accepting Castro's military victory of the rural guerilla as an alternative theory to Lenin's, Mao's or Trotsky's, as Révolution dans la Révolution tried to do, was considered thus by her to be a text based on something which never took place. Portraying very different events as a communist revolution, which was what Debray had done (or was perhaps to some extent duped into doing) was, she argued, anything but lucidity, or valid new theory. The reality, according to her analysis was that President
Batista's increasing unpopularity stemmed from a spiral of violence and repression in urban areas, instigated by the urban Communist M-26 movement, and that he finally fled the country after a General strike call and a refusal for assistance from Washington. And it was only at this point was that Castro able to enter Havana and seize power.

Walter Laqueur (19) too supported the view that Castro's theory and practice simply didn't coincide. He reasoned that if the Cuban Revolution involved very little armed combat in a country which was relatively affluent anyway, then it was much more the weakness of the regime which was the cause of the cause its downfall, and not the successful strategy of its contestant. Guevara himself even acknowledged that the Cuban Revolution was not essentially a class revolution but a liberation movement which overthrew a dictatorial government. (20)

Verdes-Leroux in fact maintained that the roving rural guerillas were only in total involved in some thirty sporadic ambushes or skirmishes with the army in the south-east of the country, and that at most some eighty guerillas faced some fifty soldiers. This was hardly therefore a significant set of events upon which to inspire a continent into insurrection. (21) One could neither justify the label of 'People's Revolution' however much sympathy and admiration for Castro may have grown. For whilst it may have been true that the belief in guerilla-inspired revolution gave birth to a new hope for millions of people by appearing to have re-cast and breathed new life and direction into the Leninist theology of organising revolutionary elites all over the world, for Verdes-Leroux, what was actually taking place was the use of 'the Revolution' to exalt Cuban nationalism. (22)

In this context, the objective of the much proclaimed Cuban literacy campaign of the time, which Debray himself had extolled, was primarily an attempt to politicise, rather than to educate, and it took place against a background of executions, arrests, imprisonments, mobilisations, strike bans, forced labour and constraints on free speech. (23) All of which was conveniently ignored by many intellectuals, including Debray, who were only too happy to see professional revolutionaries once more don the mantle the
working classes had failed to take on, yet who nonetheless peddled a myth that Cuba was an ideal model for a quick emancipation.

Debray in fact made scant reference too to the fact that Castro's survival was helped considerably by exterior circumstances, above all the 'Cuban missile crisis' of 1962. The consequent anti-Washington sentiment after the 'Bay of Pigs' émigré invasion, and the establishment of a Soviet bridgehead in the Caribbean were in fact to become the two main bulwarks of Castro's regime, and not Revolutionary enthusiasm in itself, although both of these events undoubtedly prompted the US to strangle at birth any further revolutions - Marxist or other - waiting to be triggered off in their back yard.

If one does accepts Verdès-Leroux's argument however, some explanation for this probable lack of intellectual rigour with regards to the Latin American revolution did undoubtedly have its roots in the fact that this was also a period close in French minds to the Algerian and Viet Namese wars. There was no doubt a widespread belief that on a global level, the armed struggle had begun. Writers like Fanon (24), also lamenting the lack of Marxist theory for pre-capitalist countries, had similarly advocated violence, and focussed upon the proud sacrifices of an enlightened peasantry.

Criticism of Debray and his call to arms came from some perhaps unexpected quarters as well. Action Étudiante, rejected in Révolution dans la Révolution what it interpreted as an incitation to violence and murder, motivated by,

...impuissance, mauvaise conscience, sentiment de culpabilité ou de péché. C'est toute la maladie de la petite bourgeoisie Européenne qui ressort à travers les lignes du petit livre de "combat" de Régis Debray. (25)

In yet another respect the book received more than its fair share of attention because it was a compact and convenient channel for criticising Castro and Guevara's confrontational Cuban foreign policy. It also incurred wrath from traditional communists in that the Castroist vulgate was seen to
be elitist, and evacuated the role of the Marxist party as vanguard, the only guarantor that a People's Army would uphold the interests of the working class. In fact the Marxist critic Marcelo de Andrade (26) perceived in Debray's writing nothing less than the creation of a distinct demarcation line on the Left. Guerilla or Party, with those orthodox Marxists like himself affirming that destroying the army would not automatically destroy the bourgeois state.

Most of all though it was the Bolivian failure in itself which led to the widespread belief that there were flaws in Debray's theory. Within months of the book's publication two US commentators had edited a collection of essays, which whilst sympathetic to the Left were hostile towards Cuban 'focism' as a route for success. (27) On a practical, rather than theoretical level, Ramm (28) pointed to the lack of advice in Révolution dans la Révolution, prior to the opening of any hostilities, about how to procure both vital arms and willing recruits. Commenting in 1969 upon Debray's work on the Latin American Revolution up to this point, the Brazilian Communist Party, (29) believed fundamentally that the errors in 'Debrayism' were rooted in the fact that he had not theorised more specifically about how to get the masses politically with you so that 'with them' you could go on to obtain power by militarily means. Demonstrating how former struggles failed did not, they argued, in itself validate one's own conception of success. Their theoretician accused Debray, as an unrealistic European intellectual, of having analysed matters from the outside, and thus being too prescriptive, too dismissive of complementary forms of struggle, and undialectic in that his projects did not examine deeply enough the current state of the class struggle, both nationally and internationally. For them, Debray's call had to be rejected because it was specifically tactical, and not a concrete stepping stone to a strategic people's war at all. At best it was an impatient military conquering of a zone, preceding a force-fed politicisation of locals. At worst, it was pie in the sky.

Guevara's Bolivian disaster may well have been the pretext for many to dismiss 'focism' out of hand. But to do some justice to Debray, he had not
planned that particular enterprise. By the time his book appeared Guevara was already on the terrain. Hence those who believed him naive enough to have assumed that the Cuban model, however bogus it was in reality, was ideal for the very varied demographic, geographic, and historical conditions of the whole of Latin America had missed some important contextualisations, and provisos.

Debray had been in fact at pains in Révolution dans la Révolution to cite the Cuban Revolution as an example, and not a constraint, stressing that each guerilla movement will act 'within the conditions peculiar to it'. Hence it would have tactical freedom within a carefully planned strategy. (30) It should not be forgotten (as several critics clearly did), that it was this very issue that Debray had tackled in his two essays which preceded Révolution dans la Révolution. Castrisme: La Longue Marche de l'Amérique Latine, and Problèmes de Stratégie Révolutionnaire en Amérique Latine, (31) both dating from 1965, and which he had originally wanted to be published in the same volume as Révolution dans la Révolution for this specific reason. (32) These two essays' inclusion would certainly have put the latter thesis in context by including additional reportage and analysis from his personal contact with revolutionary militants throughout the Continent between 1961 and 1965.

In Castroïsme: la Longue Marche de l'Amérique Latine, (whose title clearly had Maoist overtones), whilst Debray he adamantly upheld 'Fidelism' as the only theory capable of 'thinking out' Latin America, and of having effectively encountered Marxism 'en route' as its own truth. (33) Tactical lessons, he agreed, were to be learned rather than the strategy abandoned. In accepting that whilst no additional sustained guerilla progress had yet been made on the Continent, even though eleven different countries had established guerilla forces, he did proceed by analysing in some detail exactly why this was so. He suggested that in objective terms it was to be explained by the fact that national struggles in Latin America were not the same as struggles of de-colonisation, and that they were therefore more difficult to enthuse. In addition, spontaneous supportive strike action too
had always been violently repressed, because no advanced resilient industrial class existed there, as it did in Europe.

In subjective terms though, Debray acknowledged that much theoretical work would still be required because the whole guerilla movement still lacked maturity, just as Leninism did in 1905. Duplication of the Cuban model, he admitted, in the late 1950's and early 1960's, in other South American countries had simply been too hasty. Whilst poor supplies primarily had led to their downfall, 'education' campaigns had failed to win over illiterate and suspicious Indian peasants in the mountains. And he realised that their sympathies would never have been gained without first procuring for them fertile and defendable land.

Furthermore, guerilla experiences would need pooling, training would have to be stricter, co-ordination with secondary support in the towns, even neighbouring countries, would have to be established, and retreat to the mountains would need to be a 'result' of recruitment. Weakest army links would require location, and key officers would need to be liquidated. Combat would have to be in areas most favorable to the guerilla, and where militants would not be wastefully sacrificed. All the preparation work would need to be done at the most fruitful dialectical point, and that would depend upon local conditions.

In *Problèmes de Stratégie Révolutionnaire en Amérique Latine*, Debray demonstrated how the USA, firstly through arms sales, and secondly by impregnating all of these societies with US anti-Cuban ideology mitigated against Revolutionary progress. Yet, he argued, if the Continent could free itself from Spain, then why could it not free itself of the USA?. in Marxist terms its dialectic catalyst. Crucially too the Communist Parties of Latin America needed to liberate themselves from the then Soviet policy of peaceful co-existence with Washington.

This summary of the many issues which *Révolution in the Révolutio* raised for many militants, and which in terms of our study of Régis Debray is still unhesitatingly concerned with the political Marxist cause, has nonetheless omitted one very major factor pertaining to what was after all a rather thin volume from an unknown writer. That is to say, why did his
book acquire such notoriety, and such a wide readership in so short a time? The story of Debray's trial and imprisonment certainly sheds considerable light upon this matter.
Chapter 3. Notes


4 - Ram, Hartmut, The Marxism of Régis Debray: Between Lenin and Guevara, Kansas, 1978, p 61. Ram states that Debray was also given access by the Cuban authorities to many unpublished documents, including military ones. He also maintains that Castro revised and read the proofs to Révolution dans la Révolution.

5 - One critic points to the fact that Guevara, in his speeches, had already formulated the theory of opportune countryside violence, and that in many respects, after his death, Debray was mistakenly accredited with the inspiration for it. See, 'A New Old Interview' in Che Guevara Speaks, Pathfinder, 1985. This speech was originally made in 1959.


7 - V.I. Lenin, What is to be Done?, 1992. English edition, Laurence & Wishart. 1962. Debray was to write in 1974 in his essay La Critique des Armes I, Seuil, p.163, 'Il nous avait semé l’idée de Lénine, la vérité cachée de tout ce qui se cherchait à tâtons dans la Gauche Révolutionnaire d’alors.' Debray today still frequently uses 'nous' stylistically to mean 'I'.

8 - Golfer, Dominique, Régis Debray, Serge July, Alain Krivine. Itinéraires Comparés, unpublished Mitrasso, Paris I, Sorbonne, 1987, vol 1, p.120.

9 - Lenin, p.181.

10 - Ram, p.20.

11 - Révolution dans la Révolution, p.63.

12 - Ram, p.91

13 - Révolution dans la Révolution, p.71.

14 - Golfer, p.120


18 - Verdès-Leroux, p.176.


22 - ibid., pp.22-31.

23 - ibid., p. 34, Claude Delmas, in Crises à Cuba, (note 17 above), p.39, claims that there were 234 executions in the first week of Castro's takeover.


28 - Ramm, pp.99,94.

29 - de Andrade.

30 - Révolution dans la Révolution', p.78.


32 - See also Debray, Régis, 'Report from the Venezuelan Guerilla' in Blackburn, p.29. This was Debray's first article on Latin America, and includes both theoretical and reportage angles on Douglas Bravo's FALN group, after he had personally made contact and stayed with them. He reasons that they were bound to have to confront bigger problems than did their Cuban counterparts not only because the US was now much more alert to peripheral disturbance, but also because Venezuela's urban population was much bigger than Cuba's. Debray clearly shows a good deal of admiration and optimism for the twenty improvising guerillas, who acquire two new recruits from the regular army whilst he is there. 'It is astonishing to see this circle of hirsute and dirty men, half dead with fatigue and cold in the middle of the jungle, jumping to attention as if they're on parade'. (Blackburn, pp.105-6).

33 - Blackburn, p.74, in 'Castroisme: La Longue Marche d l'Amérique Latine'.
After forty three days on April 19th, Debray, with two other men, came down from the guerilla hideout in the Bolivian mountains before it was entirely surrounded by Bolivian soldiers. (1) The three, in civilian clothes, were passing through the small Bolivian village of Muyupampa, at 6am, in the south-eastern Oriente province where they attempted to hire a jeep, but since one of them rather suspiciously had his face cut (the result of a hasty dry shave in the forest before dawn), (2) they were stopped for questioning by local police. One of the three announced in French that he was a journalist, working for a Mexican weekly.

Whilst at the police station a local journalist photographed the men, and according to Perry Anderson, (3) the subsequent appearance of their photographs in Bolivian newspapers served as evidence that they had indeed been alive, and in military hands, and that this fact alone prevented their summary execution and recording as being shot in guerilla action. Their cover however was blown on the same morning when a former local miner who had recently deserted the guerillas, recognised them and informed the police exactly who they were, and where they had come from. An hour later Debray, Bustos and Roth were taken away by soldiers in a helicopter to the nearby military post at Camiri. For three days they were badly beaten, threatened with execution, and shot at by their soldier jailers. France-Soir, on the 24th April even reported the death of a Frenchman in Bolivia.

It was only several days later though that the Bolivian military realised that they had captured someone whose book, Révolution dans la Révolution, published a matter of weeks beforehand, was already wielding influence as an impetus for immediate armed insurrection on the whole continent. Hence the opportunity to place Cuban-inspired 'Creole-communism' in the dock, in the person of Debray, a foreign revolutionary theorist, terrorist and Castrist 'agent provocateur' to boot, who had just descended
from Guevara's secret base, was a publicity coup for the Bolivians to be grasped with both hands.

In custody Debray was made to wear prison uniform no.001. Only after four days when two CIA agents Kirsch and Heller arrived, was a doctor sent for. Washington, according to Debray, had had a file on him stretching back to 1965, but at this time they also knew of his acquaintance with Castro, the fact that he had been living in Cuba, and that Guevara was in Bolivia. (4) even though Debray at first claimed that the guerilla was being led by another Cuban. Peredo. However, when after three weeks Debray learned that both the guerilla deserters and Bustos (who was 'persuaded' to talk in view of what could happen to his two daughters) had confirmed that Guevara was 'up there', he concurred, but claimed to have kept quiet since from his journalist's viewpoint he had wanted to keep his interview scoop with Che a secret. (5)

Continuing to deny the accusation that he was Castro's envoy, and claiming that back in Cuba a stranger had given him a letter from Che inviting him to interview him in Bolivia, Debray had to fabricate further by adding that it was back in Paris that his publisher had been anonymously given the information about how Debray was to find a contact in La Paz, who in turn would take him up to the base. (6) He protested as well that had he been a true guerilla he would have neither left the group nor been so easily picked up. These were clearly additional fabrications which were designed to stall, resist bribery, and to protect the surviving guerillas still out on the terrain. Under interrogation he was even offered his freedom if he were to publicly renounce his adhesion to Cuba. (7) Unimpressed by Debray's version of his presence in the country, the colonel in charge of the Camiri section, bluntly stated that he would have liked permission to shoot this 'venomous snake' Debray. (8)

For two months the prisoner was held in secret, in solitary confinement, and treated as a terrorist. Debray has recalles in the autobiographical Les Masques (9) that by now, and in stark contrast to his former feeling of invincibility, that he felt desperately alone and
miserable. Yet only by July did he become aware of the 'Debray Affair', and the extensive publicity it was attracting all over the world.

Back in France July's Marie-Claire ran the touching story of Debray's mother flying out alone to Bolivia to see her son, stating that, "Régis avait toujours été différent des autres: plus profond, plus exigeant, plus épris d'idéal". To add to the heartbreak she was confronted at the airport by a woman clothed in black, a widow of one of the soldiers who had died in a guerilla ambush. Alone(!) in her hotel room, Marie-Claire evoked her peering into the street to see a poster announcing that, 'Ceux qui assassinent les citoyens de pays libres et indépendants méritent la mort'.

(10) Although Mme. Debray had a personal letter from De Gaulle to hand to President Barrientos, he was apparently too busy to see her.

On 18th August an article in Nice-Matin (11) described Debray's cell with its partly blocked-off window, its steel bars, its permanent armed guard on the door, and the thirty minute daily walk he was permitted to take in the courtyard. His hair had been shorn and only after a two day hunger-strike was he given back his civilian clothes. The same newspaper reported Debray as defiantly stating that only those in Nazi concentration camps were forced into a condemned man's clothes before their trial.

By contrast, Hamon and Rotman have emphasised that certain sections of society back in France were much less sympathetic than Marie-Claire. If 'L'Extème droite a fait de Régis un "traitre" à sa classe, à sa patrie', the 'Grande Bourgeoisie' were rather more content to categorise him as a dreamy young man, 'généreux, donquichottesque, christique, un peu toqué peut-être, en bref, récupérable demain, même si l'on doit le surveiller d'un peu près'. (12)

Debray's irritation, and dawning realisation after his isolation that the media circus was a thousand times more interested in him, than in any revolutionary potential in Bolivia, is probably a first reference to the power and the logic of the media which was to preoccupy him in later years. Ironically, it was he who had wanted to promote the class struggle but he was now powerless to stop the diversion of attention away from it and on to something of considerably less importance - himself. He bemoaned too, at
this time, the fact that his own publisher had eagerly jumped on the same band-wagon in publishing two short stories, without his permission, which Debray had written four years before, and which were not about revolutionary struggle at all. (13)

With the West's eyes fixed on Bolivian justice, and the press attributing to the guerilla project an importance it simply had not had, the opening of Debray's trial, in the garrison town of Camiri, some six hundred kilometers from La Paz, was postponed twice, on the 18th and 26th September. A decision to try him, along with Ciro Bustos, and four Bolivians by a five man military tribunal was finally made on October 10th. The charges were: murder, robbery, intellectual authorship of the Guerilla, and lack of respect for Bolivian institutions. (14) The prosecution, from the very outset, called for the death penalty.

According to one French newspaper report (15) some forty soldiers gave evidence for the prosecution saying that in the ambushes of 23rd March and 10 April 'Danton', (Debray), had been seen as an armed guerilla, although none could testify to having watched him in combat, and Debray insisted throughout the trial that he had held a rifle on guard duty only. As a result, it was the charge of 'Intellectual authorship of the guerilla' which was to become the primary focus of the prosecution even though the 'crime' of preaching guerilla warfare was not part of the Bolivian penal code.

Predictably the trial's supposed irregularities were highlighted, particularly in the French press. The Anglo-Chilean journalist Roth with whom Debray had been arrested had been inexplicably released in July. Having been initially reported as dead, Debray, incommunicado for several months prior to the trial, had been denied facilities to prepare his defence in private. He had no option but to accept the Bolivian lawyer Novillo, and the original agreement that Mr. Roger Lalemand, a delegate of the 'League of the Rights of Man' in Brussels, would be his assistant, was subsequently refused, as indeed was the right for Debray's defence to call its own witnesses. Debray's father, himself a lawyer was permitted to be present at the hearing, but not to contribute. Guevara's diary, seized from
a hastily evacuated camp, made no reference to Debray's armed participation, yet it was not made available to the court. Debray's own notebooks were even confiscated, declared lost, but then used in evidence against him. The publishers Feltrinelli and Maspéro, who in July had come to testify that Debray was in Bolivia researching for a book on Latin American politics, were expelled from the country. (16)

Once back in France, François Maspéro, at the press conference, questioned whether the Bolivian government had any control whatsoever over the military court's proceedings, and he even suggested that a fake escape opportunity, as a pretext for shooting the fleeing prisoner, could not be discounted. The military's pre-trial affirmation of Debray's guilt, as well as their tolerance of the proliferation of posters in Camiri appealing for the return of the death penalty were, in his view, additional threats to the neutrality a fair trial would require. (17) Apart from his lawyer, only Debray's mother was permitted to see him, and their meeting was taped. The French Ambassador in La Paz, in contravention of the Vienna Congress, was also refused the right to see his fellow citizen. One French scoop at the time (18) referred to the Ambassador being aware of a possible commando-style rescue of Debray. (19)

L'Express (20) was convinced that what the trial was really about was Debray being set up as the symbol of something through which Guevara himself could be condemned. It was natural therefore that all of these judicial scruples were seen as little more than irritations in the eyes of the military. In the words of the army prosecutor Iriarte, Debray was quite simply guilty because his book was, 'L'instrument le plus efficace pour motiver l'action des terroristes à l'intérieur'. (21) Evidently using a logic relevant to the defence of a particular client, and not an ideological movement, Debray's Bolivian lawyer countered by asking why a man of Guevara's experience would be relying on the theoretical work of a novice university type, (22) and that in any case Révolution dans la Révolution was fundamentally an examination of recent history, and an analysis of the guerilla as a social phenomenon. Furthermore, even if it could be
interpreted as a call to arms. it had only been in print since the 27th January, by which time the guerilla in Bolivia had already been installed.

It was on October 9th, that the news came that Guevara, with only 16 remaining men, had been shot. Debray, realising he could no longer compromise the guerilla courageously abandoned his former line of defence and asked to be treated henceforth as co-responsible for the acts committed by them. He boldly claimed now that had Che asked him to take up arms he would have done so, and defiantly made known his view to the court that he was guilty in their eyes only because he believed in Che's final and forthcoming victory.

Réforme. recorded that public opinion appeared to change at this point back in France. From the unfortunate victim and, 'fils de bonne famille, journaliste égaré dans la jungle bolivienne', now the main question about Debray had become, 'que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?' (23)

After this, and for the rest of the trial, Debray was forced to stay silent until his own final defence plea, upon which the judge had to clear the courtroom when demonstrators calling for him to be executed burst in. When he finally did begin to speak he began by reminding the judges that he had not taken part in any military activity, and that there was indeed no proof to the contrary. He added that if however, moral responsibility, in the form of an ideological crime, was suddenly going to be recognised as a punishable offence, then they should not forget that there was only one true defendant in the courtroom, and that was Yankee imperialism and its lackeys. (24) Debray's defiant attitude undeniably mixed courage with humility, as well as clear faith in the armed struggle. He went on:

'Si écrire est un acte et un engagement, si Brasillach est responsable d'avoir justifié la collaboration, je suis responsable d'avoir justifié et prôné la guerre de guérilla, et j'accepte cette responsabilité comme une faveur'. (25)

He was to finish his indictment of the procedures on a note of disdain.
In spite of a personal appeal from De Gaulle to President Barrientos for clemency, Debray's personal participation in any other revolutionary activity was postponed by the thirty year jail sentence he received on November 17th 1967. (27) He was also ordered to pay indemmites to the families of the fifteen soldiers lost in combat with the guerilla. Combat of 19th November reported that Debray expressed no emotion as his sentence was read out. Back in Paris his father who had returned home four days before the verdict issued a press release, with his son's agreement, claiming that since no proof of assassination or theft had ever been established Debray was indeed a political prisoner.

Predictably sales of Révolution dans la Révolution soared, even if in the streets of Camiri the wives and families of the Bolivian soldiers shot by the guerilla bayed for Debray's blood, and still other street posters claimed that it was Debray who had carelessly exposed Guevara's presence in Bolivia, and therefore led him to his ultimate failure. Yet, by contrast, Hamon and Rotman recall that the whole affair, linked as it was to Guevara's martyr-like death led to an obsession with Latin America back in the Latin Quarter, Paris, in the autumn of 1967, 'c'est la Havanne-sur-Seine'. (28) Debray's declaration of solidarity with Guevara, claiming both his deeds and his writings to be forms of combat elevated this former 'normalien gonflé' into the realm of hero, evangalist even. A man who was nobly paying the price of intellectual commitment. Sartre indeed wrote a preface to the trial's transcript, whilst L'Événement du Jeudi (29) did see one positive outcome of Debray's personal tragedy in that the harsh Barrientos regime had been put under a great deal of international scrutiny, and would have to change its ways.

Debray had originally expected be in Bolivia for some three weeks. Guevara's belief that the revolutionary melting-pot of favourable
conditions, time, place, militants and nationalists merely needed stirring, had turned into a fiasco. But with his death the theoretical mantle undoubtedly passed on to the twenty seven year old Debray. *Le Canard Enchaîné* of the 22nd November could not resist a reference to 'La Littérature encagée'.

Saul Bellow (30) has said that Debray has to be considered as the very last in a series of French intellectuals, stretching back some forty years, to have presented themselves in the West as soldiers of the Revolution. Yet apart from Malraux, one would surely be justified in asking which of the post-war theoreticians such as Sartre, Vailland, Althusser, and Aragon could be meaningfully labelled as 'soldiers' who almost gave their life for the cause? However if Debray is a special case in the sense that he did pay personally for his convictions, we should take care before we label him as a true died-in-the-wool combatant. There is a strong argument to suggest that whilst he was a man still young enough to visit the scenes of guerilla action, it would be wrong to cite him as an embodying that intellectual dilemma between theorising and participating, or to put the case that he somehow managed to successfully reconcile the two. After all, if in Marxist subjective terms he was a gifted young intellectual with a desire to express a solidarity with the under-privileged, in objective terms he was carried along by events, the consequences of Castro's original invitation to him, and which he could never have anticipated at all.
Chapter 4. Notes

1 - Ciro Bustos was an Argentinian who had been summoned to the 'foco' by Guevara to set up a liaison with Argentinian guerrilla movements. Roth was an Anglo-Chilean journalist who succeeded in reaching the camp under his own resources.


5 - Debray, Régis, Les Masques, Gallimard, 1987, p.81. Many details concerning the guerilla as well as the trial were unavailable until Debray wrote his autobiography in 1987.

6 - Ibid, p.82.

7 - Debray, Régis, 'I regret that I am Innocent', Blackburn, p.221.


9 - Les Masques, p.87.

10 - 'Le Calvaire d'une mère', Marie-Claire, juii. 1967, pp.5-11.

11 - 'Régis Debray passe le plus clair de son temps à lire', Nice-Matin, 16 août 1967.

12 - Rayon, Hervé and Rotman, Patrick, Génération, J, Les années de rêve, Seuil, 1987, p.592

13 - 'Letter to my Friends', Blackburn, Debray refers here to La Frontière, and Un jeune homme à la page, Seuil, 1967, as two childish boy-scout style stories which were unpublishable at the time they were written. Hence his irritation that they should suddenly acquire literary merit.

14 - 'I regret that I am Innocent', Blackburn, p 210. To the prosecution's accusation that the guerrillas were little more than bandits, Debray emphasised here that all of the soldiers who were captured by them were unharmed, and that only their boots were taken from them.

15 - 'Trente années de Prison (peine maximale) pour Régis Debray', Union-Rheims, 18 nov. 1967.

16 - Maspero's additional role in Bolivia was as spokesman for the 'Régis Debray solidarity group' which had been formed back in France, and whose president was François Mauriac.


18 - 'Le petit enfer de Régis Debray', Le Nouveau Candide, 28 août-3 sept. 1967, pp.11-12.
19 - Ambassador Ponchardier in his autobiography, La Mort du Condor, Gallimard, 1976, claimed much credit for saving Debray's life both before and after the trial. He also recalled the frosty pale young man who at the beginning of 1967 had gone to the Embassy and strongly asserted that his political views were not at all those which were held by his father (an acquaintance of Ponchardier).

20 - 'Preuves à la Bolivienne', L'Express, 2-8 oct. 1967, p.81.


22 - 'I regret that I am Innocent'.

23 - Niedergang, Marcel, 'Un prisonnier trop encombrant', Réforme, 18 nov. 1967, p.16.

24 - 'I regret that I am Innocent', p.226.

25 - Blackburn, p.23.

26 - 'I regret that I am Innocent', p.208.

27 - President Barrientos had asked parliament to restore capital punishment for Debray, but constitutionally there was not enough time to implement it before he was sentenced.


30 - Bellow, Saul, 'Marx at my table', The Guardian, 10 April 1993, p.23.
5. Prison Writings

Few column inches were devoted to Debray once the 'Affaire' had reached its conclusion and Debray was jailed. Notably in February 1968 he was allowed to marry his Venezuelan girlfriend Elizabeth Burgos which gave her visiting rights. His mother and a representative from the French Embassy were the only witnesses. Quite clearly though Debray's jailers were going to limit the influence of their prisoner's pen. Of the four texts and one interview to appear during his incarceration, the one of primary interest here surfaced in Les Temps Modernes (1) in mid 1970 although it was undoubtedly written in prison during the months before his trial. Its title was Un Curieux Réquisitoire, (A Curious Indictment) given to it by the editorial board, (who are in fact derided in it), but it was neither about the trial nor the Revolution, but a largely literary piece concerning Debray's awareness of his own 'disadvantaged' background.

Un Curieux Réquisitoire is certainly a text which has to be read taking into account the probable anger and resentment in the forefront of Debray's mind at this time. Essentially it is a very cynical indictment of his middle-class and self-satisfied background. He cites as its typical and pitiable product the grave young man, with his adolescent malaises, his illusions of gravity, his yearning to live dangerously and make an impact, and who is vainly playing out his life as if he were the tragi-romantic subversive hero of a novel. Someone, like so many of his similarly privileged friends, who self-indulgently sought for an authentic existence, whilst kicking against 'La vie sans fin de petit bonheur'. (2) Now Debray perceived all of this false despair, from which he too 'suffered', as but a prelude to that ultimate aspiration of becoming predictably 'casé', 'settled down' in later years. Someone he categorises as part of a pathetic genetic bourgeois code of, 'les mammifères avec leurs femelles réglées'. (3) And what is worst, the culmination of this petit-bourgeois mentality, 'celui qui se préfère', is to comfortably and safely fall back onto that
vocation of becoming a 'writer'. The profession par excellence which will magically provide some relief from all of this 'contingence indécise' (4). Writing as an escape from a soulless humdrum culture. A promise of redemption through the haughty fame of the Man of Letters. Art as the refuge against insignificance. Debray's mockery appears ultimately to be a challenge to his contemporaries to escape this obsession with Literature - the product of a class and society in decline, and of a childhood like his own, which is 'trop instruite'. (5) Of course we now know that this is a challenge which Debray himself has not completely lived up to in view of the fact that today he describes himself as an 'écrivain'. Although, if imaginative literature was indeed his prime target in this piece, he has in fact written only two novels, with nothing to indicate that he will add to them.

Ramm agreed that Debray had been so conditioned as a bourgeois, that had he always remained in France, he would have forever been alien to the rank and file. (6) Indeed one could contend that today he remains so. He forwarded the argument that it was only in Cuba that Debray could come face to face with what he saw as a fresh, superior social reality which contrasted so markedly with the bookishness, serenity, and circumspection of the French bourgeoisie.

Françoise Giroud. (7) perceived in the motivations for Un Curieux Requisitoire a subtext to the whole Debray affair, and in fact a guilt which Debray coped with by transferring it onto his upper middle-class upbringing, especially since his biggest burden had now become the burden of responsibility. For suddenly, everything he would now say was going to have some gravity, for supporters and opponents alike. Debray languishing in jail represented for her a cameo of Western man trying vainly to purge that privilege of being white, wealthy, and satisfied, and defiantly refusing to accommodate the real scandal of abject poverty in the world.

She also pointed an accusing finger at the intellectual community in general in a similar challenge to their predictable reflexes about Debray's imprisonment. For whilst one did not have to be a Guevara to want to see an
end to misery, for the Left Bank to get hot under the collar about one man's fate, was in her view, to cover up the very guilt and inertia in themselves that Debray had at least challenged, and for which he was now paying. She was to sarcastically suggest that,

"Jamais révolutionnaire n'est apparu davantage comme le protégé d'une classe, et même d'une caste, soudain outrée que l'on puisse traiter un ancien élève de l'ENS comme un vulgaire paysan bolivien - c'est-à-dire de façon scandaleuse'.

In fact, later on in Les Masques (9) Debray himself was even to accept that his thirty year sentence was a just one.

Castro's agent had served almost 3 years of his sentence inside Camiri's barracks when after some military changes his restrictions on reading and writing material were eased between March and June 1970. His prison diary from this period was however only published in 1976, and titled Journal d'un petit bourgeois entre deux feux et quatre murs. (9) A strong hint that Debray has attached little importance to it comes from Eloges, where he has suggested that those having taken the trouble to sit down and read something he had never intended for publication anyway were 'farfelus'. (crazy), and in the introduction to the book, Debray (writing in 1974), refers to it disparagingly as a series of, 'épanchements rétro-, intro- et prospectifs.....une indécente enquête psychologique'. (10)

Claude Mauriac (11) interpreted the 'deux feux' as metaphors which contrast the political and the poetic elements in it. and Seuil, probably for want of a better categorisation, classed this book as Literature. However, whatever its literary merits may be are secondary here to some modest excavation of the tensions and lines of thought at the source of, and common to Debray's preoccupations in later works.

Given his isolation and ignorance of possible release, one can understand the content of this book being for the most part a set of unstructured reflexions, sometimes with long, complex and obscure paragraphs. But they do reveal a Debray who, as he stated in his brief introduction, was for the first time neither trying to argue, nor convince
From a man condemned to thirty years of psychological self-investigation it was devoid of any possible vanity. (12) or even more poetically depicted by Debray, it was a product of a situation whereby, 'Narcisse s'aveugle solitaire'. (13) The crippling effect the inertia of jail had upon his thinking was most obviously present and lucidly captured,

'L'esprit ne débute jamais rien en toi, il justifie, s'exalte un moment puis retombe, jusqu'à l'émotion suivante et ainsi de suite. Ton actuelle solitude est stérile, inexploitable, car elle n'a pas d'écho à renvoyer, de vibration à répercuter, d'ébranlement à transmettre. Personne à refléter, pas d'image à relancer. Une solitude sans tain ni ton. Qui te renvoie uniquement ton image'. (14)

Debray even described the few books at his disposal as funeral urns, and the reading of them as nauseous. (15)

Like many long term prisoners, he went on to question his sanity. He admitted to talking to himself and pacing endlessly up and down. (16) His few books, his notebook and the occasional visit being the only variation in his day. Twenty four hours of biological existence and a mere few minutes of real life. (17) 'Ermetique et clownesque, un désastre: jusqu'à quand cette vie? (18)

Debray's notes, perhaps the best description of what they really are, equally touched upon what were quite disparate subjects. Poetry, cinema (particularly Welles 'Ton Dieu') (19), his past, his scorn of Catholicism after a visit from a papal delegate, his affection for Althusser, his admiration for writers, like Musil, Milhe, Leiris, Kafka, Stendhal, and again a humble recognition of his own dilettantism, with the conviction that he still remained ignorant of Marx and Lenin.

Alongside these items though there was much reflection, and a recurrent questioning of the efficacy of political projects, and indeed whether he could lead his life exclusively within this domain. Meditations bordering not only on indecision, but contradiction as well. By way of example, one particular theme was an acknowledgement of the simple things he most painfully missed, 'La nostalgie d'une odeur de frangipane ou la
courbe d'un sein sous la paume', and which, 'réduira à néant ma vérité de militant'. (20) Yet several pages on he expressed disgust at his attempts to write a literary page by saying to himself, 'Tu es en train de trahir ton devoir d'affronter l'immonde objectif, le monde objectif de l'impérialisme'. (21)

In direct contrast again, (most tellingly in view of Debray's future theoretical work), acknowledging the ephemerality of political beliefs when measured against great art, he wrote, 'Les textes d'une époque n'ont pas tous le même âge. On vieillit plus dans l'idéologie que dans l'artistique'. (22) But pulling himself together again after these moments of doubt and upon learning news of a burst of guerilla activity on the continent, he steeled himself again against his disillusion.

'Traiter en Léniniste, dialectiquement, ses "crises personnelles", ses épreuves de passage, Pour ne pas se défiler, garder présent à l'esprit, dans ses moments-farouches, que la fuite en avant est la seule façon de sauver l'acquis. Pour sauver l'acquis de février il faut se lancer dans l'insurrection d'octobre'. (23)

Back in gloomy mode again, he recognised the negative side of dialectic inevitability in the way that Castro had, in spite of himself, become the omnipresent father figure in Cuba (24). And on learning of the deaths of former militant friends he questioned whether there was any point in continuing with the struggle. (25) Uncertainty even raised its head within the lines of a single entry.

'Le timbre de la voix de Fidél, encore plus qu'avant, continue d'incarner pour toi la morale du monde, toute la dignité humaine. Cette voix pédagogique, sereine et opinionaire, te rappelle que le bonheur est dans la lutte'.

Yet several lines further on.

'Tu sais comme tout le monde en 1970 qu'il n'y a plus de voix infaillible, ou d'icône intouchable, que tout doit inlassablement être repris, réfléchi, reconduit et critiqué'. (26)
Whilst Debray expressed a desire to be concise and clear in his own writing (21), he went on to ask (28) if an incurable 'sophophile' (29) such as himself could ever be restrained from wordiness and obscurity, and be thereby condemned to remain in an ivory tower.

In yet another, perhaps predictable outburst against the self-pitying Parisian intellectual set he scorned how they, 'applaudissent à leurs malheurs, à leurs douleurs, à leurs petits bobos d'âme'. (30) But after lamenting his own enforced powerlessness he asked if he was not simply indulging in the, 'pleurnicheries d'intellectuel mis en minorité'. (31) And even more self-contemptuously, 'Toi, le plus irremplaçable des êtres? Fais-moi rire, espèce de sous-espèce'. (32)

In summary here we can justifiably suggest that what these illustrations from his prison writings begin to reveal are elements of Debray's increasing awareness of how collective beliefs and private intuitions are not always reconciled. That the hard-nosed political animal is himself prey to competing compulsions like loss, love, despair, uncertainty, and belonging, often beyond his control.

At least Claude Mauriac (33) was to acknowledge some years later that Debray's tirade hit home, since Journal d'un petit bourgeois pricked 'his' own conscience as an intellectual who, by comparison with Debray, had never made any personal sacrifice, and he did indeed refer to Debray as an intellectual brother he did not merit.

Olivier Germain-Thomas (34), by 1976 was reading into Debray's 'confession' a very early rejection of all of their 'faux maîtres', like Marx, Lenin, and Althusser even, and that the diary contained a virtual auto-destruction of Debray's former faith. He even went as far as lavishing upon it the description that it was nothing less than a testimony or a metaphor for the loss of identity for a whole generation. Perhaps even more astutely his concise psychological interpretation of Journal d'un petit bourgeois, suggested that Debray was progressively regaining both his true middle-class identity, as well as his innate respect for his home, his fatherland, both of which had been repressed and contaminated by that
unreal world. that 'other prison' on the rue d'Ulm, the 'ENS', the world of 'la dictature des mots'.

However scathing Debray's early scorn of his intellectual compatriots during his imprisonment was (something they probably knew little about at the time, just as they were certainly unaware of the importance they were to acquire in his later work), (35) three of them were nonetheless sufficiently moved by Debray's fate to bury their differences for once and attempt to exercise some of their power across the Atlantic Ocean. Thus it was that in November 1969, upon Sartre's instigation, a letter appeared in the French press, which was duly sent to the head of new, less Cuba-hostile, Bolivian President General Ovando, asking for an amnesty for Debray to be considered. The unlikely missive was signed by Sartre, Malraux, (their first contact since 1959) and Mauriac. Daniel Albo (36) suggested that just as much as their prestige, the political variance of these three heavyweights implicitly removed the appeal from the domain of political sympathy with Debray, and placed it in the realm of recognising his intellectual qualities, where it was deemed more likely to succeed. Given that De Gaulle had also recently made a State visit to Bolivia, Albo was optimistic that Debray would be in the frame for the traditional 20th December amnesty. But another year was to pass before this materialised.
Chapter 5. Notes


2 - ibid., 'Un Curieux Réquisitoire' p.1749.

3 - ibid., p.1750.

4 - ibid., p.1759.

5 - Debray's sentiments of disdain for 'Literature' at this time arguably merit a comparison with, and a consideration of Sartre's influence upon Debray, particularly after the publication of Sartre's Les Mots in 1964, which was a very jaundiced and ironic depiction of Sartre's own bourgeois childhood. Jacques Brenner in Histoire de la Littérature Française de 1940 à nos Jours, Fayard, 1978 p.215-7, has explained Sartre's intention in writing this book, and the similarities with Debray's condescension here appear striking. Brenner summarised thus Sartre's self-irony in Les Mots, 'Telle fut sa croyance: il crut que les mots étaient les choses elles-mêmes. La littérature devint religion. C'est par elle que Jean-Paul serait sauve: sa chair, il substituerait l'homme de chair. il substituerait l'homme de mots; il reprendrait sa chair par le style; il deviendrait livre.' Brenner added that ultimately, 'après avoir prétendu tous les écrivains à s'engager dans les luttes du temps, Sartre découvrit que le monde littéraire était terriblement étroit par rapport au monde tout court. Nous avons vu qu'il fut pris pour la littérature de la même haine qu'il vouait à la bourgeoisie'

Sartre's denunciation of his former former illusions about the power of words does of course retain an ambiguity. He was to remain, as Debray was to become, first and foremost a writer

6 - ibid., p.1760.

7 - ibid., p.1761.

8 - ibid., p.1762.

9 - ibid., p.1763.

10 - ibid., p.1764.

11 - ibid., p.1765.

12 - ibid., p.1766.

13 - ibid., p.1767.

14 - ibid., p.1768.
29 - 'The sophists have been sometimes taken as the archetypal "liberators", those who induce in their hearer the confidence in human capacities, and the confidence to make the world anew.' From, Scruton, A Dictionary of Political Thought, Macmillan, 1982, p.440.

30 - Journal d'un petit bourgeois, p.46.

31 - ibid., p.136.

32 - ibid., p.146.

33 - ibid., 'Régis Debray et l'odeur des eucalyptus'.


6. A Chilean Diversion

1970 saw further, more liberal changes within the Bolivian regime, and on Christmas Eve of that year, a team of men, in the confidence of the new President Torres, arrived secretly in Camiri to grant an amnesty to Debray. (1) He was officially expelled from the country. Upon his release Le Monde obtained the briefest of interviews from him where he spoke of his relief at escaping the robot-like existence of his purpose-built prison. A confinement which had been all the more torturous since he felt the need to remind his questioner, 'vous savez bien que je suis manico-dépressif'.

(2) In an attempt to shun personal publicity he preferred to make reference to the men who had died in the guerilla, and who had since been forgotten. In another interview, some weeks beforehand, and perhaps anticipating this release, Debray had already expressed the desire to make his return to anonymity a personal priority. Exasperated with his fame, he forecast that this would be the last time he would appear in the press. (3)

From Bolivia though he took a plane directly to Chile, where the élan of the revolution appeared to be continuing. Hence, in spite of the political doubts a reading of Journal d'un petit bourgeois would have expressed, had it been available in 1971, Debray's decision to go to there, as well as the nature of his next publication which concerned it, suggest that those vacillations might be justly dismissed as peccadillos. In any case the understandable euphoria of his release, as he recalled in Les Masques was to contribute significantly to the reassertion of his wavering convictions.

'Je revi. Un goût de revenez-y. La pulsion évangélique du retour. M'avait-elle jamais quitté? Si..., parfois, à certains petits moments de vérité..., voyez 'Journal d'un petit bourgeois'..., Le Chili matinal dissipe ces tiédeurs, rouvre les fenêtres du salut collectif. Je me soigne derechef à la révolution..., Voie pacifique ou lutte armée.
Réalisme ou Révolution, Avant-Garde ou Mouvements de masse. Programmes minimum et maximum...on repart. (4)

Writing back in 1963, (5) about the potential electoral victory of the Chilean Communist Party, Debray had dismissed the project as irrational, adventurist, and incapable in any case of resisting an inevitable military backlash. Yet on November 4th 1970, the Marxist Salvadore Allende, with the support of the whole spectrum of the Left was elected President of Chile. It was Allende who had in fact taken the risk of going to the Chile-Bolivian border to pick up the survivors of Che’s guerilla in 1967, and as president he was to welcome Régis and Elisabeth at the presidential palace on Christmas day 1970. Afterwards they were to become guests at Allende’s villa, where the President and Debray, in the ensuing months, were to become friends. Debray stayed in Chile initially for some seven weeks, in part because there was no direct air link with Havana.

At that time Chile was the only other country on the continent to have a Marxist Head of State, (6) and Debray recollected in Les Masques how he profited to the full from the freedom and support given to him there. Immersing himself in militancy, living in 1972-73 between Santiago and Havana, he recalled, ‘J’informe, forme, réorganise, encadre, recadre. Monte des opérations ici et là’. (7) Tasks he viewed, in part, as duties to all of those brothers in arms in Latin America who had been killed. Since he inevitably made many friends there Hamon and Rotman claimed that Marxist Chile was to become like a second Cuba for him. (8)

Debray’s next publication could certainly have been construed as a manifestation of his newly-liberated militancy. It was in early 1971 that President Allende agreed to record two long interviews with Debray, which were published by Maspéro in France the same year under the title, Entretiens avec Allende sur la Situation au Chili. (9) Arguably the book’s interest lay primarily in Debray’s preamble to the interviews. Here, in a long historical, schematic, and knowledgeable introduction, which took up a third of the book, Debray recorded his own interpretations of the Chilean experiment, and for those who may well have been disturbed at his apparent
collusion with a parliamentary route toward socialism, he explained the reasons behind his support for the Allende, several of which certainly contained in embryo Debray's later support for Mitterrand.

Indeed Debray stated from the outset in *Entretiens avec Allende* that he was a supporter of this compromise road to revolution after all, and was prepared is to accept this 'scandale théorique' (10), because all tactics have their own validity. Perhaps those who had read and supported an exclusive exaltation of 'focisme' in his three pre-prison texts were to be even more disappointed and confused to learn from him that Chile's difference and her 'chance' in the class struggle was founded historically in her singular specific favourable 'objective conditions' at this particular time: advanced political organisation, a strong Communist party, and an economy neither dependant upon one main industry, nor prey to the whims of foreign investment. (11) Militants would therefore need to interpret and accept Chile's reformist advance whilst remembering that, after all, history never moved forward in a tortuous way, and jettisonned where necessary methods of action from former struggles which had now been superceded. (12)

Crucially, he argued, what had to be recognised was that an irreversible and historic experiment, which was so new as to be difficult to measure, was taking place in Chile, and that the Chillian people were at last the protagonists of their own destiny. (13) Hence it was Chile and her bloodless revolution which was now providing the Marxist focal point for the continent, and Debray ironically illustrated, with a military metaphor that whilst the Popular Forces had not yet truly won power, they had at least built 'quelques fortifications avancées en direction du pouvoir' (14). For in acknowledging that accession to the seat of power by Allende would not automatically lead to true power for the proletariat. (15) he did concede that matters remained in the balance, and that in dialectic terms a substantial Social Democratic governmental programme, such as existed at that time, would either spark off a true social revolution, or indeed lead to counter-revolution.
In connection with this, a very moot concern was the fear of a reactionary uprising against Allende from the military, particularly in view of his decision not to arm the proletariat - something which Castro had done. Yet the brief extract below about the consequences of a putsch are inaccurate, heavily ironic, and look like headstrong panegyric in view of the circumstances of Allende's suicide and Pinochet's vengeful succession.

"Il est tout aussi évident que si la réaction, puissamment aidé de l'extérieur, venait à prendre l'initiative de rompre la statu quo et à se lancer la première dans la lutte armée, alors le fleuve révolutionnaire déborderait de son lit et roserait par contre-coup les diques qui l'enserrent aujourd'hui. Les conditions seraient réunies pour le saut qualitatif, le processus changerait de vitesse et peut-être de nature, jetant les bases à long terme, d'un nouvel État", (16)

Timerman (10) by contrast has suggested that never before in Chilean history did the military have such an influence as it did whilst Allende was in power, and precisely because he was obliged to appeal to it during the frequent crises of his presidency, and to place emergency zones under their control. He added too that initially Allende had little reason to mistrust the army anyway since the last military coup in Chile had been a century beforehand.

Similarly Debray's personal hommage to Allende also fitted badly with some of the sober analyses preceding it, and it even had echoes of an adulation he had indulged in on occasion concerning Castro, and which perhaps only a young intellectual could acceptably express, and get away with.

"Le camarade Salvador Allende, est lui-même le vivant exemple et comme l'incarnation de cette combinaison, inscris dans la dialectique même de l'histoire chilienne: Doctor et Campañero; maçon et marxiste; ancien Président du Sénat de la République et militant socialiste sans taches; de formation bourgeoise et de conviction révolutionnaire: enraciné dans la réalité de son pays,...,et internationaliste conséquent". (18)
Describing Allende as the proven tactician, the intuitive pragmatist, the man of principal, and the personification of the very dialectic in which he was struggling. (19) These were incontestably the words of the pamphleteer.

For a good proportion of the Conversations, (in which Allende does most of the talking) Debray in fact played the role of devil's advocate. Allende's responses were typically diplomatic and presidential. Whilst stating that his objectives were to remain scientific, Marxist and anything but reformist, (20) he stressed that individual countries would have to discover their own route to socialism. He reiterated too the need for permanent vigilance, more education of, and participation from the masses and their representatives, (21) and there was also that inevitable hackneyed appeal for the appearance of the class-conscious 'New man'. (22)

In answering Debray's persistent questions about how to make that qualitative leap from reform to revolution, or if indeed any real revolution had taken place at all since Allende's election had been the result of a parliamentary coalition of the Left, Allende insisted that the political, cultural and syndical structure of the bourgeois state had in fact been tackled. Pleading for patience, and in turn asking Debray who indeed could define what a Revolution was? (23), he reminded his interlocutor that true socialism could not be imposed by decrees. (24)

In summary, one cannot help but question ask what the aim of this book was. Debray had agreed to do the interviews soon after his release from prison, after a suggestion by the left-wing Italian publisher Feltrini, who judged that his name would be recognised in Europe both to spread the Chilean message, and of course to sell the book. Evidently Debray's friendship and respect for the Chilean President were also of some relevance in its appearance. But one senses after all that Debray was uncomfortable in this role, not only as an interviewer, but in political terms as well, and that the desire to re-emerge in print, rooting defiantly for the under-privileged as soon as he possibly could had much more to do with the appearance of Conversations than in any significant intellectual contribution to the Chilean experiment. It is open to question whether at
this stage his hopes and enthusiasm for the regime did truly indicate a rallying to the model of pacific progress. Realistically Allende's position was too precarious to add much more than 'hope' to the contradictory Marxist reformism ostensibly underway there. As Debray was to affirm in his next work, he still felt that the Latin American State functioned by violence rather than persuasion. (25) and in terms of Chile he was to be proven right.

What this transcripted book did also reveal, and in spite of its brevity and often conversational style, was a flavour of the terms of reference (one might even say the straight-jacketed language), which Marxists were still using in 1971, and which now appear to be from another age. Terminology from a period which Debray was later on to describe as the 'graphosphere' or the mediological age of the studied text. (26) The Althusserian medium 'par excellence' where the programme would be deciphered by the scholar, and where reading matter retained the unquestioned power of truth. The recurrent references in Conversations avec Allende to emancipation, stages of struggle, class conscience, dialectics, objective and subjective conditions, historic determination, systems of domination, contradictions, Leninist necessity, avant-gardes, hegemony, imperialism, reaction, struggle, etc; certainly distilled a theoretical earnestness, yet also indicated a communication breakdown. For it was a language which in any case had always been inaccessible for Allende's illiterate voters hoping for food and jobs. And if it had also come to be considered as a dying, opaque style of communication in the educated west, it remained as irrelevant as ever to the increasing numbers of Chileans now tuning in to their TVs, by now societies most influential and in fact normal medium of diffusion, (and which was under the control of the bourgeoisie of course). (27)

The piece of jargon selected from the book below, and which says little more than, 'Let's give Chile's experiment our blessing and see what happens' is typical of the Debray of the time, doggedly using an obfuscating, but seemingly required Marxist style, which now looks quaint, highbrow, and overwhelming of the intended lesson.
Mais dans la mesure où il n'y a pas plus de bonne tactique sans bonne stratégie que de pratique révolutionnaire sans théorie révolutionnaire, on peut tenir ces questions pour mobilisatrices'. (28)

A further choice morsel could be interpreted as trying to add a scientific credibility to the sentiment of being unable to comfortably categorise the Chilean experiment.

'Reste à appliquer dans l'action quotidienne les principes universels du marxisme-léninisme à cette réalité concrète - et cette tâche est de la compétence exclusive des avant-gardes chiliennes. Reste aussi à retrouver une rationalité historique dans cette conjoncture singulière.......et c'est là une tâche collective d'analyse, où chacun quel qu'il soit peut avancer des analyses'. (29)

The military putsch resulting in Allende's suicide, and which installed the harsh and durable Pinochet into power came on September 11th 1973. Timerman (30) has referred to continuing acts of violence by extreme-left groups as providing one of the pretexts for this coup. The peasant and working class population whom Allende had declined to arm being able to do little as the 'transition' to socialism was reversed. 

Albeit the very antithesis of the romantic Guevara, Allende, was in many respects the second of Debray's courageous mentor's to die for the cause. In Les Masques (31) he wrote that in his opinion, this suicide converted a political defeat into a moral victory in that the Chilean experiment certainly sharpened thinking about the potential problems to be confronted were the left to come to power in France. Through Chile one can surely locate a source of Debray's subsequent support for the 'Union de la Gauche'. A rallying to a pluralistic transition, which if shelved, or ultimately impossible in South America, could at least be an aspiration for a modern Western state. Gofier (32) too believed that in this role of fellow-traveller Debray had been in fact the first French intellectual to study Chile, and use it as a reference point for French Socialism.

Two further articles by Debray appeared in France in 1973 concerning
Chile and Allende. The first Le Mythe Chilien (33) before Allende's fall, was a tirade against international national banks, 'confrères de nos Peyrefitte et Giscard', whose financial blockade had compounded Chile's problems, and yet who had had the audacity nonetheless to blame socialism for their dirty work. Chile, Debray asserted was suffering from not enough, rather than too much socialism. He ended the piece with a plea for solidarity with the country's silent struggle, warning that the same financial manipulators would attack the Left in France in the same way, were it to accede to power.

The second article appeared in Le Nouvel Observateur (34), shortly after Allende's suicide. It was a hommage to a friend who lived up to the maxim 'Patria o muerte', and also an account of Debray's last visit to Allende's home. Debray referred to him here as 'Robin des Montagnes', a man who was warm, relaxed, and never aloof. But at the same time a man who in losing a battle against time had the courage to accept that a civil war would cost too many lives, and would be lost. Debray, by now thirty one, could not resist ending the piece with some fighting talk. Allende's defeat, he believed, would ultimately lead to a genuine revolution in Chile. It was too bad that even more blood would be spilled, 'Voici l'heure des brasiers. Elle sera longue'.

Debray's Chilean 'diversion' in one respect looked like a speedy rethink to accommodate into the body of Marxist science what was little more than the unexpected election of a communist president by a concocted parliamentary alliance of the parties of the Left. Yet another interpretation would be to suggest that since the multiplication of guerilla-inspired regimes was quite obviously not taking place in Latin America, Debray's analyses had now simply adapted to reality. But one senses finally that he remained hesitant as far as Chile was concerned. It may even be closest to the truth to suggest that Allende, the man, had to some extent wooed Debray as Castro had done some years before.
Chapter 5. Notes

1 - Bustos, and four Bolivians, Domínguez, Jiménez, Castillo and Taipa were also released.


6 - Allende had been one of the founder members of the Chilean Socialist Party, but which was nonetheless a Marxist Party.

7 - Les Masques, p.111

8 - Hamon and Rotman, p.534, Reference is even made on p.533 to a project whereby Debray, with Serge Klarsfeld planned to kidnap Klaus Barbie, and return to Santiago with him.


10 - ibid., p.17.

11 - ibid., pp.28-30.

12 - ibid., p.62.


14 - ibid., p.117.

15 - ibid., p.50.

16 - ibid., p.59.

17 - Timerean Jacobo, Chile. Death in the South. Pan 1987, p.93

18 - Entretiens avec Allende, p.44.

19 - ibid., p.55.

20 - ibid., p.136.

21 - ibid., p.118.

22 - ibid., p.132.
Debray, Régis, *La Critique des Armes I*, Seuil, 1974, p.166. This estimation almost certainly referred to Althusser's key concept of 'Ideological State Apparatuses' which he had elaborated after 1968. Althusser had argued in 'Idéologie et Appareils Idéologiques d'État' (*La Pensée*, no.151, 1970, pp.3-38, and also published in Althusser, Louis, *Positions*, Editions Sociales, 1976), that the political power of a ruling class consisted not only in their monopoly of the repressive apparatuses of the state, above all the army and the police, but also through their ideological hegemony over society. The latter being wielded in multiple and even autonomous ways through church, school, university, political parties, trade unions etc. Clearly Debray believed that Latin American states, unlike European ones remained almost totally reliant upon repression.


Entretiens avec Allende, p.57.

ibid., p.56.

ibid., p.22.

Timeman, p.97.

Les Hascues, p.117.


7—Traitor or a Prodigal Son. Debray against Debray

Régis Debray was never to pick up a gun in the cause of guerilla insurrection after he left prison. Neither in the Third World, nor in Europe. He had been jailed as a Marxist, and when he was released, there was no reason to label him anything else. In 1972, and after his Chilean interlude, he duly published a most vitriolic anti-American article following their backing of another right-wing coup in Bolivia, a country which he still believed remained a strong revolutionary symbol for the whole of Latin America, and a decisive link in what he viewed as a new uncertain phase of history, 'pivotant sur ses gonds vietnamiens'. (1)

As we have seen, an appraisal of his writings and activities had already begun whilst he was in prison, although there was at the time of course no public evidence of it in print. On occasion too his essential intellectual dilemma had been expressed in a most sardonic tone. He was to write in Journal d'un petit bourgeois,

'Je savais faire moi aussi de belles dissertations sur sur l'aventurisme à travers les âges, avec citations, illustrations historiques analysées d'essence et synthèse, tricoter sur le concert léniniste de "moment actuel", de "situation révolutionnaire"......,jusqu'au jour ou mon "savoir" à fait contact ou court-circuit avec mon "action". bonne décharge dans les pattes. Raisonner est facile, le difficile est de juger sur-le-champ; trouver du tac au tac les points d'intersection entre le filet de ses mots et la fluidité de sa conduite, entre le réseau du léninisme et ses improvisations au jour le jour'. (2)

Definitive proof of that desire to reconcile sober theory with raw experience was to be the publication, in France, seven years after what he was now referring to as 'Le livre d'un moment'. (3) of three books which were to draw a line underneath the 'contebande idéologique du debravisme'. (4) La Critique des Armes. Les Epreuves du Feu, and La Guérilla du Che were all published by Seuil in 1974. Albeit demonstrating an
impressive knowledge of the various 'focist' movements on the Latin American continent, all by now aborted. These three books filled some nine hundred pages, and for fervent aficionados back in France, the blurb on volume one of *La Critique des Armes* gave a reassurance that the sequel was being rushed to the presses. For in all of these books Debray described meticulously, and as if reporting on some vast public enquiry, how and why he has come to modify his former convictions about how power could be achieved in Latin America. Not forsaking in full the guerilla theory, but concluding finally that an impasse had been reached, the depth of the apology here however appeared out of all proportion with the original sin. After all, even the diminutive *Révolution dans la Révolution* had had its turgid moments.

Not only in copiousness, but in genesis too. *La Critique des Armes, I*, this 'phase two' Debray did nonetheless remain Marxist in its methodology. It sought to learn from the struggle, not abandon it, and it certainly did not advocate a humble return to the inertia of those Marxist Parties, who without a Leninist impetus had by now set themselves up in a figurative yet comfortable 'maison de repos'. (5) The new lesson here was to be underpinned by the maxim that true revolutionary capacity was measurable by the capacity to change the 'form' of struggle. (6)

Whilst still confident of the unifying anti-Washington sentiment throughout the continent, and in making another pointed early reference to US domination through its cultural apparatuses. (7) Debray needed no specific insight to see that the Cuban revolutionary model had failed in Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina, Colombia and Venezuela. If as Ramm suggested most of Debray's readers had been 'too blinded by his astounding erudition and captivating style' (8) to perceive the fallacies in the earlier essays, by 1973 at least, successive catastrophes made it clear that something fundamental had to be wrong. 'Focism' may have taunted traditional Latin American communist parties for their caution, but it too had not made any headway in realising the aspirations of the masses. For not even in Cuba had deprived workers headed for the mountains. As it stood the theory of
évolution dans la Révolution had proved to be strategically inadequate given the forces at play, and with both candour and modesty Debray was now referring to it as being flawed by, 'le biais de certaines formulations à l'emporte-pièce'. (9)

Some credit for a significant part of this re-think, and which, Debray emphasised was still a wholly consistent Marxist analysis, was in fact given to Louis Althusser. In a letter to Debray, (10) as early as March 1967, he had pointed out that the argument for mobile guerilla columns reproducing themselves until general insurrection occurred was not in his estimation a valid deduction at all. Hence it was unscientific, and undialectic since it did not take into account the enemy's dynamic. If 'focisme' were to be successful, then this would be only down to chance, and any isolated success could never be a substitute for a profound material and historical analysis of an individual country. For that which would have to 'precede' any embarcation upon a form of struggle. As far as Althusser was concerned, it was pointless to waste the lives of those who were 'subjectively' class conscious, if there was no 'objective' crisis ripe enough for an overthrow. Heroism in this sense indicated a movement's immaturity rather than its maturity. Tactical military skill, or lack of it, dressed up as a strategic 'Leninisme pressé', (11) Debray now agreed, had been exposed as insufficient. Even the example provided by Guevara, as the personification of revolutionary virtue could not compensate for deficiencies in the theory.

The intellectual courage Debray was demonstrating in his frank reappraisal (or indeed the humble pie he was doggedly swallowing), was undoubtedly a fundamental agreement with Althusser that the appearance of a guerilla movement was historically determined, and not a determining factor in itself. Within the hallowed Leninist parameters of the time, he was at least now more realistically reconsidering his original answers about how to bring about that transition from worker's struggle to revolutionary consciousness, (12) or indeed from National independence to socialism. (13) One wonders how Guevara may have responded now to Debray's jibes at both
theorists and volunteers dreaming they were cogs in strategy for World Revolution.

'Aux micro-organisations, les méga stratégies. Si le temps passé à rediger manifestes, organigrammes et vastes plan de manoeuvres à l'échelle continentale (lesquels trouvent toujours preneurs à l'étranger, l'intelligentsia européenne a même des revues spécialisées pour faire circuler la marchandise), ces camarades l'avaient occupé à cimenter les murs du carton qui les abritaient' (14)

Debray's predictably structured thesis in A Critique of Arms I. began with a historical inquiry into the economic trap the Third World finds itself in, and how, within that context, Latin America specifically has not been analysed by Marxist theoreticians, whose schemas to date had concerned either colonial liberation, or advanced industrialised countries. (15) This was followed by an exposé of how Castro had so tactfully and originally managed to acquire such wide support, something which was made possible, according to Debray, due to the country's unique geography, the presence of a popular militia who undermined any possible army backlash, and an initial duping by Castro of the industrial middle classes. Ramm (16) has stated as well that Cuba was colonised by the USA more than any other Latin American state, and hence an anti-bourgeois nationalism was more easily nurtured there.

Whilst Nationalist, anti-Imperialist struggles are inevitable phenomena, Debray then went on to explain why the anticipated Marxist people's wars elsewhere, which were supposed to have been kickstarted by guerilla activity, had failed to gain mass, and particularly middle-class political support. Now he was saying that the failure came about because this form of avant-garde, in its haste, had always been distrusted and cut off. Also, taking prematurely to the mountains, with no political backing, nor prior education and support amongst the masses meant no food and few recruits. Survival, made possible only by preying upon peasants for sustenance, had taken priority over the destruction of the enemy. In addition, the 'focos' had remained small and outnumbered, fighting, albeit
heroically, from localised and locatable fronts. And furthermore, because
the Latin American guerillas were not an expression of a widespread social
aspiration their marginalisation quickly became a posture and not a
process.

These numerous setbacks thus suggested to Debray that a much longer
gestation period would at least be necessary, and that for a guerilla
warfare to flourish here, it would need to be set up with stable, sanctuary
bases rather than being forced into precarious and permanent mobility. The
establishment of a decisive 'arrière', capable of supplying material,
morale, and political support as well as interdependence with neighbouring
groups would be prerequisites for success. He accepted now too that urban
fronts, and an association of the political and military spearheads would
be necessary for others to continue where Cuba had left off.

It was therefore for all of these reasons that Debray's original idea
that guerilla groups would spread like an oil stain through capillary
action never occurred. And he dismissed too the adoption of the
'leopardskin' model of infiltration, used by the Vietnamese communists. A
method appropriate for a 'village' society, but something which would not
have provided a solution for countries which were demographically and
topographically very different to it. (17) An additional effective deterrent
to be taken into account had been the harsh fact that after Cuba, all of
Latin America's armies, dollars obliging, had been trained in guerilla
prevention.

La Critique des Armes, appearing as it did only a year after Allende's
death, appeared also to contain a hasty turnaround from the optimism Debray
had been willing to show in Entretiens avec Allende. Now, with the
electoral route having shown its limitations the question of how to respond
to violence was tangibly brought back into question. And Chile, as far as
Debray was concerned here, had been subject to, and victim of the same
Leninist truths which were just as much applicable for the Chilean State,
as they were for the guerilla units. Namely, that political struggle is a
struggle of force, and that dialectical forces prevent socialism from ever
being built upon constitutional fair-play. (18) Thus, attempting to fashion
a socialism from above, without a revolutionary ferment below was certainly no more a solution than 'focism' had been. The key theoretical research which would now be necessary would be to explore how a reformist government, once elected, could become revolutionary in practice. (19)

Those readers who had assiduously read volume one of *La Critique des Armes* may well have had their patience more severely strained by the three hundred and eighty pages of volume two. *La Critique des Armes 2*, subtitled *Les Epreuves du Feu*, (20) was an exhaustive, even 'pathological' (21) inquiry into the decline of guerilla movements in Venezuela (1962), Guatemala (1966) and Uruguay (1972), and of course the lessons to be learned for the future. These sites effectively illustrated the arguments of volume one. But it is accurate to state that the content of this second volume as an examination of the organisational and historical minutiae of a period which has now disappeared, make it obsolescent, and Debray himself stated in 1994 that a reading of it would in fact add nothing to an understanding of his work. (22)

*La Guerilla du Che* (23) was the third book to appear in France in 1974, and it appears to have completed a kind of Latin American exorcism for Debray. This book did in fact more concisely repeat some of the main tenets of *La Critique des Armes 1*, and would certainly have been not only more accessible to many more readers, but more saleable with its cover photo of the handsome Guevara in fatigues. In targeting the reasons for the failure of the Bolivian guerilla it began once again with a predictably Marxist analysis of power structures and their inter-relationships there. Class, demography, economic conditions, the absence of both bourgeois dynamism and national sentiment, the role of Syndicalism, with its spasmodic 'journées révolutionnaires' as the traditional channel of protest, the power of the military, their use of coups, the lack of political education in rural areas, and the Left's role since 1945; all were placed in the equation.

He went on to explain that the Bolivian débâcle lay however in circumstances largely out of its control. In fact, according to Debray, Guevara's original project, dating back as far as 1963 had been to set up a secret refuge base in Bolivia from where Peron's Argentina could be
targeted. Hence Bolivia, which had originally been selected as the terrain for a stabilising base to which the tentacles of liberating armies 'à la Bolivar' (24) could fall back, became the 'centre' of operations by default, because Guevara's unsupported group was forced into action much too early, and most crucially without any support from Bolivia's Communist Party.

Reminding the reader that 'he' was not consulted about the project before Guevara went to ground, (25) Debray proceeded to focus again upon how, on a practical level, the lack of preparation compounded the guerilla's problems. Rain, isolation, fighting fatigue, illness, poor supplies, the lack of civilian clothes, no vehicles, no urban contacts, no rapport with mining unions, no transmitter to broadcast a call to arms, these were disadvantages which became compounded by the bad luck of deserters telling the army just where Guevara had set up camp. (26) Not only did that particular factor destroy the originally planned sequence of 'implantation', followed by 'explanation', followed by 'operations', it ultimately reduced the whole enterprise to one of seventeen men on the run from eight hundred soldiers. (27) Debray conceded too that the operation had failed in Marxist terms because it had no dialectic genesis. It was neither prolongation nor consequence of social tensions inside Bolivia, but an artificial implantation, which as a consequence, could not thrive. (28)

However, it is true to say that La Guerilla du Che was at the same time Debray's more personal version of the Bolivian guerilla, in spite of his attempt to explain the miserable logistic failure unemotionally, and in the interests of providing lessons to be learned for the workers movement. It may equally be the case that Debray's personal admiration for the courage of Guevara colours the analysis of what he described from personal experience as a 'Navrante époque, sombre mémoire'. (29) But to be fair he allowed his pen descent into the mawkish on very few occasions. During Debray's stay with the unit there is a reference to Guevara, on one day bursting forth spontaneously with a Rambo-like 'cri de Guerre de joie'. (30) Similarly, in spite of the premature recourse to guns for the unit to defend itself, now at least he believed, was the moment that Guevara had
had been waiting for so long, and that henceforth he was at peace with
himself (31). One particular passage had an epic quality,

'Qui donc en dehors de Fidel et du Che aurait pu dessiner les contours de cet immense
projet historique qui palpait à l'état latent dans beaucoup de coeurs et dans quelques
têtes'. (32)

One of few other real elegies in the book was,

'S'il y eut jamais un projet singulier dans l'histoire contemporaine de l'Amérique du
Sud qui méritât de s'appeller crucial, ce fut bien celui qu'incarna le Che dans ces journées
hésitantes, indécises, brumeuses de l'hiver austral 1967. Jamais dans l'Amérique latine
d'aujourd'hui le sort d'un si grand nombre d'hommes n'aura dépendu d'un aussi petit nombre
d'hommes. (33)

Guevara's project in fact ended up with a mere seventeen men, of whom
eight were Bolivians, and only one of them spoke the local dialect. (34) Six
were to survive the final army ambush. Albeit tinged with an understandable
nostalgia Debray's book, in summary was a sad yet sober balance-sheet of a
rash, even suicidal project.

Writing after the appearance of the English translation of A Critique
of Arms in 1977, and by which time Debray had certainly moved on to other
preoccupations, David Caute was nonetheless to pinpoint an intellectual
progression in comparing Revolution in the Revolution, 'an ardent but
juvenile eulogy of the armed Guerilla', to La Critique des Armes, where
'the boyish romanticism has now ebbed from Debray's pen'. (35) But that merit
was to remain tempered, for whilst Debray might now be less 'cocksure'
about Leninist theories, Caute criticised his silence upon what the 'tidy
packages' of socialism, and revolution really were. For if success over the
Empire (the USA) remained the obsession, merely trying to put the record
straight, and offering neither a firm way forward, nor any new theory on
how to raise class consciousness, demonstrated for Caute no small amount of
petulance.
Walter Laqueur (36) also criticized this lack of 'new direction' now that events had proved that guerilla warfare was not the ideal instrument for realizing the aspirations of the underprivileged, and that was in his view something which ought to have unequivocally said in La Critique des Armes. But what Debray could have more fruitfully spent his time on, he suggested, would have been a theory for the appearance of terrorist activity, which was above all an expression of national sentiment. Merely attaching the socialist label to it, as Castro had done, did not give it any socialist essence at all. There still lacked a pre-Castro Marxist exposé of tensions in Cuban society, let alone anywhere else.

Hartmut Ramm's fastidious study of Debray's Marxism (37), written in 1976, but only appearing as late as 1978 effectively turned out to be a critique of a skin which by this time Debray had shed. Whilst he believed that the primary aim of Révolution dans la Révolution had been a challenge to the vacillation of self-professed revolutionaries, (and that it had been unjustifiable to acclaim it as a new opus on revolutionary theory when its principal aim was how to assure success once a guerilla base had been set up) with some justification Ramm saw in La Critique des Armes itself more vacillation than reappraisal. (38)

His focus was in fact to look at what he interpreted as now having become the Leninist-Guevarist synthesis of La Critique des Armes. For if whilst prior to prison Debray had argued that the truths of Marxism had been discovered by 'process' in Cuba, now, upon enforced reflection, he was conceding that orthodox complementary class analysis would be vital. The new eclectic message for Latin America; action, pending the right time, seemed to Ramm to be little more than a repeat of the old 'dig in', organize, educate and agitate message. (39)

Debray did write a further article on the same theme from Paris in 1977, which commemorated the tenth anniversary of Guevara's death. (40) Here he acknowledged that after all it was because of the very slowness with which societies fundamentally change that the élan of the insurrectional short-cut was broken, and that a return to ruse and tenacity would have to become the order of the order of the day. In a clever turn of phrase, so
typical of his style, and with a reference to Marcel Aymé's short fantasy-story, he wrote, 'La révolution n'a pas chaussée les bottes de sept lieux et, en définitive, qui veut brûler les étapes se fait brûler sur place'.

He did remind his readers though that for those who believed that revolutionary violence implied savagery and degradation, Guevara and his guerilla followers, for a whole ten years, had never taken any hostage, nor harmed any prisoner be they Cuban, Bolivian, regular or mercenary soldier.

These three simultaneous but final Latin American books appeared only a year before Debray published his personal version of the Parisian political and intellectual milieu he had been part of in the 1960's, and in spirit at least, the early 1970's, and which was titled Les Rendez-vous manqués. (41) The last word in the title clearly expressing the idea of misunderstanding or even failure, and in this work he baldly referred to La Critique des Armes' appearance in Europe as a solitary non-productive scourging of the flesh from an eccentric. (42) A fundamental acceptance finally with criticisms like those from David Caute who had accused Debray of having indulged here in little more here than a 'sterile scholasticism'. (43) In later years Debray even likened La Critique des Armes to a 'volée de bois vert au fond d'un puits' (44), its lack of impact equally painful to him in that the ultimately wasted energy in writing so much was bound up with coming to terms with the loss of many friends who had died for the cause. What had been begun in good faith as a thorough examination of the apparent chaos of guerilla activity, had arguably become its very autopsy.

Walter Laqueur (45) believed this tone of regret to be little more than a sham. He even hinted of a certain hypocrisy in recalling the fact that whilst Debray had stated in Révolution dans la Révolution in 1967 that for a revolutionary, life in the city was an act of betrayal, lo and behold, by 1975 Debray was himself right back in the city in the entourage of 'PS' leader François Mitterrand.

A final political article on Latin America appeared as late as 1979. This concerned the military victory of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, and the analogies Debray believed that they had with the Cuban Revolutionaries: what he termed the Castrist trinity, 'le peuple, les armes, l'unité'. (46)
Although written in an enthusiastic and optimistic tone, attributing Sandinista success in part to their broad appeal and tacit alliance with the middle classes, now, the wiser, more perspicacious Debray peered behind all the orthodox Marxist interpretations and suggested after all that the Sandinista guerilla victory had occurred primarily because it was triggered off during the month of May. A time when there was no work to do in the fields, and when the civilian population were able to supply logistical support to the popular Sandinista army and begin a popular uprising. It appeared that all the complex theories about revolutionary conditions could be subordinated to banal levels of employment, although realistically, Debray added, the Front's continuing success and its chances of building a socialist society would depend upon its popular army, avoiding US military intervention, and its success in national reconstruction.

This reference to the importance of Nicaragua's 'National' struggle anticipated a political theme which was to increasingly draw Debray's attention, in both the political and theoretical domains of his work. Nicaragua, like Cuba, had again illustrated the potential power that Revolutionary Nationalism held within it, (just as it explained why those guerillas in Bolivia and elsewhere who had failed to harness it had withered away). Sandino, who in 1927 had taken up guerilla activity only to be killed by the US backed Somosa dictatorship, embodied now what Debray saw as a National and Authentic memory. An enduring and unifying force whose very nature he was to explore two years later in his first philosophical work, but which undoubtedly informed too Debray's future focusses upon French Republicanism and French defence. (47)

Writing in the mid 1990's one is tempted consider the whole of Debray's Latin American work now as being of pure geo-historical interest. Something which is little read, rarely consulted, and never applied. A body of work which could be seen as an almost paradigmatic illustration, if perhaps one of the last, of the Western Intellectual's obsession with emancipating The David of the South from the Goliath of the North. For indeed, on no occasion has Debray since this time ever sought to defend a
Cuba which has now, in his view, become 'a people captured in an unreal cycle of statistics and programmes, where citizens, suffocating and isolated in the "Winter of the Patriarch" have lost the capability of changing anything at all'. (48) But because writing from this period remains part of the complex trajectory of the Régis Debray that we seek to trace, it could not but have an impact upon his future as an intellectual who was saddled with the legacy of a political project which failed. Although in fairness to Debray, who could confidently predict that the political and intellectual obsessions of today will not in turn acquire a similar patina?

If we close this section with a summary about Debray from Ramm, we could perhaps concede that his résumé succinctly captures the terms of reference and the language of many Marxist theorists throughout the 1960s and 1970s, but which were of course so alien to the peasants of the Altiplano. The quote might also be acceptable as a kind of epitaph to the decade of Debray's commitment to the Latin American revolution.

'As a Guevarist Debray contributed significantly to the critique of reformist politics. As an Althusserian Leninist and critic of Guevarism (though not of Guevara), Debray is without peer; and as a synthesiser of Guevarism and Leninism, he has proposed new and provocative relationships between reformism, anarchism, and Leninism'. (49)

However much the legacy of these years may seem like a ball and chain to Debray now (50), the fact that the above description is no longer applicable to him is some indication of his dogged will to peer behind the course of things, to avoid entrenchment, or intellectual fashion. And this first reappraisal of his early work in La Critique des Armes can perhaps be judged somewhat favourably against his aspiration to retain the independence he had placed high on his personal agenda in Journal d'un petit bourgeois, 'pense toujours par toi-même, sans intermédiaires, sans icônes, sans foule à genoux autour de toi'. (51)
Chapter 7. Notes


4 - ibid., p.161.

5 - ibid., p.187.

6 - ibid., p.221.

7 - ibid., p.20.


9 - La Critique des Armes, p.209.

10 - ibid., p.262.

11 - ibid., p.172.

12 - ibid., p.55.

13 - ibid., p.242.

14 - ibid., p.102.

15 - ibid., p.49.

16 - The Marxism of Régis Debray, p.177.

17 - La Critique des Armes, p.81.

18 - ibid., pp.262-84.

19 - ibid., p.319.


21 - The Marxism of Régis Debray, p.168.

22 - Personal Interview with Debray, May 1994.

24 - ibid, p.51.

25 - ibid, p.27. Guevara's main argument for going into Bolivia at that time was because he viewed 1967 as a crucial year. His impatience justified by the fact that guerrillas in neighbouring countries urgently needed coordinating before they withered.

26 - ibid, p.131.

27 - ibid, p.122.

28 - ibid, p.156

29 - ibid, p.167.

30 - ibid, p.122.

31 - ibid, p.129.

32 - ibid, p.87.

33 - ibid, p.94.

34 - ibid, p.105.


37 - The Marxism of Régis Debray.

38 - ibid, p.61.

39 - ibid, p.186.


42 - ibid, p.149.

43 - Winning'.

44 - Debray, Régis, Comète au Comète, Gallimard, 1985, p.57.

45 - 'In dubious Battle'.


49 - The Marxies of Régis Debray, p.196.

50 - Coedè sa Cođè, p. 61.

51 - Journal d'un Petit Bourgeois entre deux feux et quatre murs, p.159.
8 - The Return to France, and two lessons.

Geography and Local History

'Les "idées" qu'il avait laissées derrière lui le rattrapaient maintenant dans ce milieu où tout semblait organisé pour les neutraliser'.


After his release from prison Debray had gone to Chile, and then on to Cuba, with the intention of re-immersing himself in preparation and discussion for her guerillo projects. However he was soon to realise that the Cuban regime had become much harsher and was now controlled by a Party-State (1). It was therefore with an increasing sense of being an outsider that by the beginning of 1973 he returned, almost unnoticed to, 'Mon Paris natal où j'ai pris mon parti de mourir', (2) and where Simone Signoret and Yves Montand were to adopt this 'inclassable hurluburlu' (3) into their circle of radical friends. Hamon and Rotmann even claim Jayne Fonda became one of his consorts in Paris at the time. (4)

In his prison writings, only available in France after this homecoming, Debray had already written of his intention to one day leave his brothers in arms. His competing love of music, women and cinema placing him apart from those who had a total dedication for the Revolution. He had even described himself in 1970 as, 'Vaguement "cutcast"...une sorte d'hermaphrodite, de chimère à tête de requin, dents de barracuda mais cœur d'enfant, hélas'. (5)

In the same book he conceded that whilst amongst his original reasons for leaving France were a refutation of his class, with the strong sentiment thus that he had been a 'Fils de personne en quête de pères adoptifs'. (6)
he revealed nonetheless that during his trial, those images and traditions which he had formerly despised and tried to deny now acquired a nostalgic value. At such a harrowing time, not unnaturally perhaps, home, France, her history, her language, even her her 'marronniers', 'Gauloises', and 'poèmes d'Aragon' turned out to be a strong attachment to him after all: 'Tu t'es rappelé que tu avais une famille, que ce n'était pas la honteuse homonymie d'antan, mais ce qui t'avait fait finalement'. (7) These were 'Odeurs d'enfance' more intense for him than any possible satisfaction to be gained by writing political theory.

However, Debray at first decided to keep a low profile amongst his intellectual sympathisers back in Paris, and has said that this was in part because he felt that they would have turned against 'Le Tintin de la rue d'Ulm' (8) had they known of his true participation in ambushes, weapon-carrying and corpse-robbing in Bolivia. But it does appear too that he did for a brief period need to try to 'find himself'. Having ostensibly been such an ascetic militant, devoting so much energy to his political ideas, and thereby denying the personality behind it all, he was to refer to a great tedium in having to live his life with the outwardly neat and coherent label of ideologist permanently attached to him. (9) A daunting sentiment which he had already in fact expressed in prison was that requirement to live up to the very myth he had become. 'parce qu'on est bien placé pour savoir combien ça sent mauvais à l'intérieur, combien c'est fragmentaire, incohérent, précaire, hasardeux'. (10)

Ducking admiration and its responsibilities though was certainly not something he was to find easy to do. Even as much as seven years after his release, one French critic felt the need to remind Debray of the durable legacy he had created, and that for a great multitude of people he still incarnated the future. 'Combien de jeunes rencontrent-on qui se font votre visage, imitent vos hésitations, rêvent de votre aventure'. (11)

Jean-Edern Hallier's description of Debray in his novel Chagrin d'Amour, written in 1974, at least provided a pen portrait of how many on the Left like the narrator/Hallier, viewed the physical as well as the political return. Although contradictory in its burlesque description of
Debray as both man 'on the run' and character from a 'Mills and Boon' novel, it hinted accurately nonetheless at Debray's reluctance to be in the limelight.

'A présent je ne puis décrire Régis Debray que tel que je le vis, en ce soir de décembre 1973. À la veille de son départ pour cette Amérique qui l'avait relâché. Quelle leçon de réalisme pouvait-il me donner? Avec sa moustache de hussard aux coins effilés, paraissant davantage sortir des romans à l'éau de rose de Saint-Loup que des modernes daquerréotypes en technicolor de la guérilla, j'eus l'impression d'un écorché agressif et traqué, gêné aux entournures de son costume retrouvé de petit français. Sa leçon ne serait-elle que pâlement évangélique : le retour du fils prodigue au berceau? Ne l'embrassait-on pas pour mieux l'étouffer?' (12)

Indeed Hallier's prediction was that Debray would be non-recuperable, and too intelligent to settle into a comfortable bourgeois existence. He believed too that Debray would soon be ready to participate in France in a realistic struggle towards a social-democracy. (13) However debatable the accuracy of that prediction, Debray's notoriety upon his return to France still held some potential dangers for him though. When the right-wing Bolivian ambassador was assassinated in Paris in 1975, (14) organised demonstrations in the Bolivian capital were claiming that Debray had armed the assassin, and with the press there crying out for his extradition his flat was searched in his absence two days afterwards.

Three years after Conversations avec Allende, another interview-book was to appear, Demain l'Espagne. (15) This was effectively the first non-Latin American work Debray was to publish, and it was little more than a transcript of the interviews, undertaken by Debray and Max Gallo, with the exiled Spanish Communist Party leader Santiago Carillo who was living in Paris. (16) Much of this book really placed Debray in the role of facilitator for Carillo's monologue of reminiscences from the 1930's and 1940's, rather than in that of political theoretician. Hence these transcripts, rather like La Critique des Armes, appear now as little more than period pieces. Furthermore, the book did not distinguish between the
questions asked by Gallo from those asked by Debray. Yet Seuil's decision to publish this book in their 'Combats' series, taken into account with Carillo's statement in the introduction that it was Debray and Gallo who had had the original idea for the book, did certainly indicate that in 1974, Debray was still concerned with the struggle for socialism, and in this case geographically much closer to home. In fact one small section of the book dealt with Carillo's recollections of the sporadic communist guerilla activities in the sparsely populated northern Spain, involving some 300 men (17) right up to 1949. Upon closer questioning about their movements and contacts Carillo admitted that they had unrealistically carried on this futile activity for too long, (18) with survival soon having become their main priority (19).

The comparisons however to be made between the fall of the Spanish Republic in 1936 and the fall of Allende, and the repressive measures undertaken by Franco and Pinochet respectively were undoubtedly one of the motivations for this interview. But it was plain that Carillo, having suffered thirty five years in the political wilderness was being interrogated as to how exactly he envisaged coming in from the cold, once Franco was dead, and many of Debray's original questions to Allende about achieving and retaining power seem here to have been transported en bloc across the Atlantic ocean. Just how would the legal Spanish Communists bring about political changes within a state apparatus that would be bourgeois and repressive? (20) How would they avoid violence? and counter-revolution?. (21). How could the Communists express the National spirit of Spain? (22) When and how they were going to stop analysing the past and acquire an apparatus and a theory to deal with the present? (23). Did the Spanish Communist Party have an economic and social study of the country's class structure? (24) If any expedient alliances were envisaged, would this not call into question the principal that the working class should play the leading role? (25) How was an ultimate 'break' with capitalism to be foreseen? (26)

Carillo's often vague, if optimistic hypotheses effectively accepted that a form of National reconciliation for Spain would be necessity in the
form of a broad anti-fascist front. (27) A compromise for the sake of strength, although not at the expense of a sell-out social-democratic revisionism was his solution. (28) He agreed that communist parties in the West had lived for too long with what he termed an unimaginative 'storming the Winter Palace' mentality. Those former scruples; the idea of the revolutionary purity of the party, (29) and its allegiance to Moscow would be incompatible with the real world. (30) There needed to be a recognition that rather than political allegiance, the strongest force for unity in Spain was the desire for cultural freedom. (31) The future would also see a plurality of parties, (32) preventing a single party from substituting itself for a State administration. Carillo stressed too that Revolutionary parties needed strong leaders, since masses had never made up their minds on the basis of scientific analyses. (33)

Certainly in this publication Debray and Gallo did choose to play devil's advocate to Carillo. It was of some irony that they should question whether some of his ideas at this time were not somewhat utopian (34) given that in 1974 they appeared much more compatible with the rising French Socialist party than the declining 'PCF'. In fact Debray's last question did pose in stark terms the question of a formal break with Leninism, a subject which was focussing the minds of so many French Communists at the time, and as Mitterrand was making a realistic bid for the presidency. He asked Carillo if the Spanish (and implicitly the French) Communist parties' obeisance to Revolutionary Leninism were maintained merely out of tradition, or even a type of religious inertia (35), although Carillo countered that Lenin's very asset was his realism, thus his ability to act.

Arguably the most stimulating and enlightening of Debray's publications of the mid 1970's did not deal directly with politics. Les Rendez-vous manqués. Pour Pierre Goldman, (36) of 1975, which appeared from its title to be primarily a statement of solidarity with the imprisoned Pierre Goldman, was indeed much more complex, and a work which was both a personal testament, as well as a balance-sheet of that generation of young intellectuals, who like Debray, at the age of twenty, had wanted to make
the Revolution. Goldmann, now the true marginal, and locked up in jail, was seen by Debray as a symbolic representative of their failure, and someone who epitomised how that same generation had effectively missed their appointment with history, to be now 'bel et bien laissés en rade'. (37) He wistfully weighed up within that context, the great cost in human lives against the very mediocre yield that the Revolution had returned. (38)

Les Rendez-vous manqués, appearing only a year after La Critique of Arms, was a parallel to it in the sense that it was a very frank and often acerbic critique of the dreams and projects that he and the bright young things of Parisian set had had as young men in the early 1960s. It contributed a good deal as well to explaining Debray's increasing support for the 'Parti Socialiste', (something which many of course would have seen as a capitulation on his behalf). Appearing some twelve years before Hamon and Rotman's exhaustive study of the same subject, (39) it appears now as a further example of Debray's obstinate, and sometimes painful desire to scrutinise, interpret, and explain the fallacies of their former sacred cows, particularly now that so many of the former contestants of his youth had secured jobs of responsibility and respectability.

If both Debray and Goldman were indeed symbols of lost opportunity for a neurotic and misguided generation, who in their youth had acted like overgrown pupils and precocious mandarins, (40) Debray put the case that this was because, from as early as 1960, these cognoscente of the Revolution had been steeped in the political, yet starved of real action. In writing (post 'mai '68') this new version of Notre Jeunesse, Debray recognised that he had himself, between the ages of twenty five and thirty five, been so thoroughly immersed in his Marxist education that he had unquestionably followed it, like a fashion. (41) And he perceived that at a time of stability at home, with the anti-fascist and anti-colonial issues gone, the intellectual left had been united on an ideological front alone, not out of practicality or necessity. And their powerlessness was actually magnified by the threat of nuclear destruction which they could do nothing about. (42)
Their 'combat', in the shadow of the superpowers reduced them to signing petitions, denouncing Imperialism, and assigning a disproportionate importance to Third World struggle. That their thirst for action was satisfied more by the cinema screen than by revolt itself was a sad irony in that henceforth they would all be spectators rather than actors in the course of things. (43) All of which went a long way towards explaining how their ideals, and their quest for world revolution hinged so heavily upon Althusser's correct interpretation of Marx, yet which was essentially a class struggle without struggle, and a project so out of line with the consumer society lives they were leading. Something all the more pathetic in that they were all 'en tout sérieux comme des papes'. (44)

Now however, that faith in history as the key to understanding the forces at work in society, and a concept about which they had been so certain had become but an indicator that they have missed the boat. Marxist dialectics were increasingly being forced to give way to research in ethnology, anthropology or even those barbarians of the 'Massachusetts Institute of Technology'. Gailbraith, not Marx, had become required reading. 'Nous, les derniers témoins de valeurs qui ne sont pas des chiffres' (45), had come of age at a time when dialectics was dying on its feet, (46) making the preaching of revolution, in 1975, a dated eccentricity. As new thinkers began to lead the way in an intellectual deconstruction of human behaviour,

'Engels, Lénine, Guevara faisaient de nous des lanternes rouges à la remorque de Jackson, Lévi-Strauss, Derrida et Bataille. En ce temps d'analyse il serait imprudent de rêver de synthèse'. (47)

Even Debray's own Marxist-conditioned thinking, as demonstrated but a year beforehand in La Critique des Armes et al., was by his own admission redundant back in Paris. He referred now to his last three books now as, 'coquilles de noix pourries', (48) and, 'volumineuses remises de compte écrites dans cet esperanto marxiste que plus personne en occident ne veut entendre ni ne peut plus même comprendre'. (49)
Debray's political interpretation here of what (§0) looked potentially to have been be the biggest upheaval of all, 'mai '68', was that in essence it was more akin to carnival than revolution. (§1) and anything but the genesis of a 'Long March'. And if indeed the seeds of it were indeed sown by many different malaises within society, it was media sensationalism, that exaggerated it. His very astute, if pessimistic analysis stemmed from a view that the great misunderstanding about 1968 was to believethat in ensuing years it could be repeated, and more successfully the second time around. For what it turned out to be was the very Trojan Horse of Bourgeois ideology, (§2) effective in two distinct ways. Firstly, if it spawned an impetus in ultra-left political groups, who served ultimately to alienate many more people back towards the political right. And secondly, the movement served unwittingly to pinpoint weaknesses in those outdated state apparatuses which could now be somewhat painlessly addressed, or auto-regulated (§3), including schools, universities, hospitals, the judiciary, and the lack of worker participation. The ultra-Left thus ended up by receiving little more than a few crumbs, 'de quoi les apaiser pour une décennie en leur donnant à ronger l'os des grands souvenirs'. (§4) For Debray the activists of May had yearned for a Spartacus, but ended up with Pompidou, (§5) (and eventually Mitterrand). Quite simply those mytho-maniacs of the proletarian left who had taken up the militant, and even the terrorist baton in the early 1970's were in fact involved in a revolutionary infantilism (§5) in believing that France's bourgeois democracy could be compared to those countries where democracy did not exist. Their actions merely had counter-revolutionary consequences. Debray was in fact to state later on that it was not the use of the gun which was wrong but those who like the 'Red Brigade' had taken the decent bourgeois politician to be a bloody torturer and soldier of imperialism. (§7)

Debray's final chapter of Les Rendez-vous manqués. was bluntly titled, 'Et nous autres, les pauvres cons'. That utopian future he and his cohorts had envisaged back at the 'rue d'Ulm' had proved to be a mirage. Now, here in Europe, it was undeniable that, 'la théorie matérialiste de l'histoire n'y intéresse plus qu'une poignée de maniaques'. (§8) The implication being
of course that Debray was no longer one of them, and he was unashamed and realistic enough to state that, in contrast to marginals like Goldman, he was undeniably the re-integrated prodigal son (59), who still retained an access to the wealth and influence of his class. (60) His plea for a political optimism at the end of the book, precisely because there would always be admirable militants like Pierre Goldman to keep the torch of defiance alive, did look to have acquired the rationale of an apology though. As Hamon and Rotman were to emphasise, the very adventure and anticipation amongst the numerous Ultra-Left groups of the early 70's had been in no small way inspired by a desire to imitate the courage of a Régis Debray, (61) but it seemed that the former favorite had long set off down another road. Debray quoted an overheard conversation where he remembered the die-hard Goldman described as, 'un Debray qui a été jusqu'au bout'. (62)

For Jacques Henric in Tel Quel, (63) it was the overriding tone of rancour of Les Rendez-vous manqués which was its most disturbing aspect. Particularly as, in his view, the reader would remain puzzled as to the intellectual and political position Debray was now writing from, not to mention his current lifestyle. Preaching to others, he felt, ought at very least to have begun with that very elementary kind of honesty. Henric in fact hasarded a perceptive guess that the catalogue of failures and errors of the communists and extreme-left was fundamentally a call from Debray to rally behind the 'Union de la Gauche', (an envisaged electoral alliance of socialist and communist parties), even though Debray was not a political party member at all. He conceded however that whilst Debray had undeniably made a superb analysis of 'mai '68', he could not help but remark on, and be irritated by, the tone of the writing which jarred with the substance of the book. The affectation there, part of Debray's frequently insolent and coarse style reminded him of the polemicists of the political right. Furthermore, in his moralising, his attempts to remain aloof from those he had criticised as, 'ramant à qui mieux mieux dans la course à la gloire', hardly rang true. Debray's photograph had appeared recently in the papers during France's annual literary prize-giving circus. (64)
From *Le Monde*, Bertrand Poirot-Delpech (65) was also irked by an Alceste-like sourness aimed at both Debray himself and others, even suggesting that he should move away from writing to some other domain. But he went on to say that whilst the debate was still open as to whether *Les rendez-vous manqués* was primarily an exercise in sackcloth and ashes, or more an intellectual and political declaration of respectability, no-one who read the book could have doubted the acumen of Debray's insight, nor his desire to come to terms with, if not to deny, his past.

Hamon and Rotman, with the benefit of some ten years hindsight and perspective over Debray concerning this whole period, saw in the rejection of the certitudes of the Communist, party-building, definition of struggle, a corresponding rise of other issues: ecology, feminism, minority rights, and even America's very own rock culture which appeared to be challenging solid and conservative 'Middle-American' values more than the working class had ever done. (66) Was it not accurate to suggest that these phenomena were undermining, or indeed causing a revolution in the path of the Revolution? (67) For they were a million miles away from to the one Guevara embodied, the one Mao had decreed, or the one which installed the 'Gulag'. And to such an extent that, 'A la braderie du siècle les idéologies obsolètes du siècle se sont retrouvées en solde'. (68)
Chapter 8. Notes


6 - Ibid., p.49.

7 - Ibid., p.79.

8 - Journal d'un petit bourgeois, p.120


10 - Journal d'un petit bourgeois, p.74.


13 - Ibid., p.276.


16 - Carillo had been a political prisoner in Spain. Since 1939 the Spanish Communist Party had been an illegal organisation. Carillo had also been a member of the Comintern

17 - Demain L'Espagne, p.96.

18 - Ibid., p.15

19 - Ibid., p.99.

20 - Ibid., p.11.

21 - Ibid., p.189.

22 - Ibid., p.30.
23 - Ibid., p.84.
24 - Ibid., p.177.
25 - Ibid., p.178.
26 - Ibid., p.186.
27 - Ibid., p.130.
28 - Ibid., p.87.
29 - Ibid., p.118.
30 - Ibid., p.188.
31 - Ibid., p.185.
32 - Ibid., p.196.
33 - Ibid., p.114.
34 - Ibid., p.206.
35 - Ibid., p.209.

36 - Debray, Régis, Les Rendez-vous manqués, Pour Pierre Goldman, Seuil, 1975. Goldman, a committed communist was a marginal figure who had been associated with the 'UEC', and subsequently the extreme Left. Although he and Debray had been little more than acquaintances in the early 1960's, Goldman, after Debray, had also spent time in Havana, as well as with a group of guerrillas in Venezuela. In his book, Souvenirs obscurs d'un Juif né en France, Seuil, 1975, he described his early 20's as years spent in search of a cause like that of Spain in 1936. (p.58) Goldman claimed in this testament-like book that he was innocent of his conviction for shooting a shop assistant, and that he had been found guilty because of his notoriety rather than any hard evidence. What Debray had begun as an introductory essay to Goldman's Souvenirs grew in volume to the extent that Debray decided to publish Les Rendez-vous manqués, separately, since he felt that as an introduction it would detract from Goldman's own work.

38 - Ibid., p.58.
42 - Ibid., p.82.
43 - Ibid., p.83.
Debray was to expand his theories about the 1968 upheavals in a less overtly political way in 1978 with the publication of Modeste Contribution aux discours et cérémonies du Xe Anniversaire, Maspéro, 1978. This study effectively opened the Debray debate about mediatic power.

Les Rendez-vous manqués, Mikhail Bakhtin, in his studies on Rabelais originally theorised upon the ambivalent nature of the carnival. He argued that ambivalence was the key to its particular structure, where the actor in the event was at the same time the spectator of it. As a consequence carnival lacked a utilitarian aspect because it focussed upon the people themselves as the arena of participation, and thereby circumvented representation. For a resumed and bibliography of Bakhtin's work see John Lechte, Fifty key modern thinkers, Routledge, 1994, pp.7-9.


Les Rendez-vous manqués, p.150.

Hamon and Rotman, Les années de poudre, p.12.


Henric, Jacques, 'Les Rendez-vous manqués, Pour Pierre Goldman, de Régis Debray', Tel Quel, no.67, automne 1976, pp.84-86.

Il may be appropriate to make brief reference here to the only two novels Debray has published, L'Indésirable, Seuil, 1975, and La Neige Brûle, Grasset, 1977. Whilst he has certainly published literary
and art criticism in Elages (1986), his two autobiographical works, Coëtée au Coëtée, (1986) and Les Masques, (1988) as well as certain other publications such as his prison writings, (1976) A Donjon De Salle (1990), Christophe Colomb, le visiteur de l’aube (1991) and Contre Vanina (1995), all of which could be categorised as belonging to his literary output, between 1977 and 1996 he did not publish any 'imaginative' works.

L'Indésirable was in fact a candidate for the Goncourt prize. It is a tense, heavily atmospheric thriller. The story is set in a Yankee oil state amidst clandestine political and military activity. The hero/narrator is Franck, a young Swiss socialist in search of commitment to the Revolution who becomes involved in an arms deal to procure weapons for a rural guerrilla unit. Franck's obsessive love-affair, a political betrayal, a prison escape, an urban insurrection, and his ultimate suicide to save the lives of others, contribute to a plot and narrative reminiscent of Malraux. It is his increasing sentiment that he is an outsider here, and that chaos rather than order prevails, which make this novel a preface of imminent failure rather than a 'roman inspiré'.

La Neige Brûle which was awarded the 'Prix Femina' in 1977 also takes place in Latin America, and again the narrator, frustrated by his difficulty in expressing himself in Spanish is an outsider. The young Frenchman, Boris, falls for the 'pure' romantic Revolutionary Imilla, But having fought alongside Che in the past he has now become the antithesis of her. Unsure, alienated and world-weary, he is pulled along by events. He cannot help himself from following her in her search for material support, throughout the continent. (they even pay Allende a visit) for the urban terrorist group she and her lover Carlos have organised. When guns are discovered at their flat, there is a shoot-out and Carlos is killed, Imilla loses her unborn child, but their ambulance is hijacked en route to hospital by members of their organisation, and she is saved by a doctor from 'Hédecins sans frontières'.

Two years later Imilla comes to meet Boris in Paris, and the two go to Haugbeg where she assassinates the diplomat and former police chief Anya who had killed Carlos. She leaves Guevara's message 'Victoria o Muerte', at the dead man's feet, but we learn in turn that several months later she too has been killed back in Bolivia.

Whilst Debray's narrative in both of these books does convey a vivid and convincing insight into the revolutionary movement, it would be an injustice and a simplification to suggest that either Franck or Boris were just fictionalised summaries of the sentiments Debray had gone through, and finally arrived at between 1962 and circa 1975. What is certain though is that both novels are charged with overtones of pessimism and defeat, and in several respects both a literary expression of La Critique des Armes, as well as a kind of 'Goodbye to all that' as Debray reintegrated himself into the political realities that France was to present him with.

Debray did indeed state in an interview at the time of publication of La Neige Brûle, that he did not consider literature to be a political activity, although he decided to donate the five thousand francs he received for the 'Prix Femina', to Krivine's 'Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire', for its continuing support of Third World liberation struggle, (Le Monde, 30 no, 1977, p.27). An ambiguous comment and action upon which perhaps either of his two heroes could have decided.

67 - ibid., p.324,
68 - ibid., p.617.
9 - A Rallying Call

In contrast to much of Latin America, France clearly had a political and social infrastructure which could be at least modified electorally, and without recourse to civil war. Debray's personal and public decision to support François Mitterrand, who only narrowly failed to become president of the Republic in 1974 was undoubtedly a very profound and relevant marker in his political itinerary, although those who had closely followed his writing would not have been totally surprised. After all, he had been at pains to suggest in Les Rendez-vous manqués, that in spite of the fact that this book was a biography of the failure of the hopes of a whole generation, his message was categorically not one of despair. His plea then had been for militants of all kinds to continue their struggle, (1) and he justified his own political commitment to an electoral route within France precisely because he had personally witnessed the failure of struggle from 'outside' a political system. His conclusion being that it was much more efficient to 'porter le ver dans le fruit'. (2)

Hence, both those he was to label the orphans of mai '68 (3) as well as his Latin American friends, with whom he felt a more natural bond, (4) and who had anticipated that it would be the 'revolutionary' Debray who would come to the surface in France, were to be dismayed at his apparent reconciliation with reformist socialism. Much of Debray's thinking in fact for the next four years, between 1974 and 1978, was to be in the theatre of French political debate as the French Left approached the 1978 legislative elections, and it was to be expounded in a series of important journalistic articles of the time, collected eventually in L'Espérance au Purgatoire, (5) as well as in the book Lettre Ouverte aux Communistes Français et à quelques autres. (6)

Since upon his return to France Debray was at first a personality as much as he was militant, journalist or mandarin, he did acquire something of a free tribune in writing for a range of magazines and periodicals in
the mid 1970's. (7) But this was in fact a rather modest output of some thirty one articles and five interviews, and could not be justifiably placed in the category of the work of a pamphleteer, or polemicist, and he was to describe himself in his preface to *L'Espérence au Purgatoire* as being an intermittent collaborator rather than a true journalist subject to editorial or deadline pressure. (8) With no party line to toe either, he recognised the luxury of basking exclusively in the realm of 'ideas' on the political Left. (9) However, in general terms the evident commitment as fellow-traveller to the rising 'Parti Socialiste', whose own debates and publications were in any case wide-ranging, became the prime rationale behind Debray's writing between 1974 and 1978.

Whilst *Le Canard Enchaîné* (10) reports that Debray first met François Mitterrand at the National Assembly in 1973, where he met a small socialist grouping which had fought for his release, he initially publicised his support for the 'Premier Secrétaire' in an interview with the *Le Nouvel Observateur*, which was provocatively titled, 'N'attendons pas la révolution pour renverser le régime des bedaines'. The magazine's editors clearly felt no compunction to play down the image of an angry young Debray, who was prepared to state that the current executive's downfall was a question of public dignity, salvation, and salubrity. (11)

More importantly Debray was to explain further here the logic behind his declared support for the 'Union of the Left' and their collective bid for presidential power through Mitterrand. His decision to do so came from his conviction that the opportunity for a true revolution would occur perhaps only twice in any one century, and merely waiting around for this to happen would make no sense. Demonstrably the only current feasible way to gain power in Pompidou's decadent and 'ignoble' France was through the ballot box, and social democracy. Denying this was just mindless procrastination. Indeed he was to state some years later that any parading of military or messianic yearnings for a violent revolution there would have been a demonstration of a fascist mentality rather than a revolutionary one. (12)
In making positive reference to the then situation in Chile, and before Allende's fall, Debray argued that the French Left's best hope of acquiring and retaining power would be by means of an organised workers movement. Mitterrand, to his credit had indeed now converted the old 'SFIO' into the credible political force of the 'PS'. A success which was in no small way due to Mitterrand's personal qualities. Although a man whose political heritage was the very opposite of 'The October Revolution', or 'The Long March' he was not only capable of inspiring others by transcending party politics, but a leader with qualities worthy of esteem and friendship. Sceptics could have argued of course that he would have pronounced, in the past, the same bland accolade about Castro and Allende, and that Debray's approbation was hardly proof of Mitterrand's sound judgement.

Several weeks after the 'Bedaines' article, Debray took the opportunity to publish a riposte in Politique Hebdo (13) to those who were now disdaining the tarnished revolutionary whose purity was sullied by talk of alliances, and voting tactics, and it was here that he tried to reassure his readers that there was no 'continuity' between his past activities in Latin America and his current stances in France. His aspiration now was to realistically and practically help build a socialism without pre-conditions. He stated with some impatience that had his hard-left critics taken the trouble to consult the seven hundred page examination he had recently published about armed struggle in La Critique des Armes, they would have seen his current position as logical. He duly went on to chide those intransigent 'groupuscules' and 'amateurs de Posters' of the Latin Quarter who ought to have applied a little more of the Leninist principal that recognising specific conditions in different countries was of paramount importance. The recent transformation of the 'PS', he reminded them, was without doubt a decisive and specific condition of change which ought to be exploited. The ultra-left could in any case hardly incite the masses into insurrection if those same masses they were all now glued to 'ORTF', (French state controlled television) through which the ultra-left wielded no influence whatsoever.
Noticeably though, if there was no clear continuity in content with regards to the earlier Debray here, then the references at least seemed familiar. He was still liberally using Marxist terms like hegemony, proletariat, class consciousness, and social contradictions, and it would be fair to suggest that with such language, he was much more likely to alienate potential middle-of-the-road ‘PS’ voters of the time rather than attract their sympathy.

The same ultra-left purists were targeted again in *Le Nouvel Observateur* a year on in an article called ‘Les Danois de la Révolution’. They, like Sartre, (who had stated that he would never vote for Mitterrand and the ‘Union de la gauche’ because he believed that it would simply lead to a repetition of a watered-down socialism, which had failed before) were simply marginalising themselves from a debate with an increasing impetus. With a wonderful irony Debray attacked again their aloofness, ‘Rapprochez un peu ces insurrections de l'esprit de la réalité historique’.

A third article, appearing in the socialist newspaper *L'Unité*, and titled 'Lettre d'amour', dealt under the surface with the same issues, but it astutely changed tack away from caustic criticism of opponents towards a very emotive exposé of Debray's own patriotic and nationalist sentiments towards France as they were bound up with her possibility of returning a socialist government. If there was any justification in the dismissal of this article as the whining of 'un petit garçon sage en mal d'affection', it was nonetheless a message which by any yardstick revealed a complete turn around from the young disgruntled Debray who had left France in 1965. He theatrically began, 'Permettez que se confesse un peu, au risque de vous décevoir, un amoureux de la France'. His beloved country, which during his absence had become obsessed with 'standing et autoroutes', and whose recent Presidents were but general managers of a consortium of multinational companies, was once again at the crossroads of opportunity. Here was the chance to repatriate socialism back to its country of origin, the country with the richest revolutionary tradition in the world. And Debray provided the added reassurance that he was now sure,
from personal bitter experience, that the best service one could give to the workers' cause was to espouse that cause in one's own country.

In October 1974 Debray also spoke from the podium at the closing session of the 'Assises du Socialisme', (17) which were set up at the 'Hôtel PLM' in Paris to re-consolidate the unity of the Left after Giscard d'Estaing's presidential victory. Hamon and Rotman have in fact described him as having been one of the 'parrains' of this operation. (18) The message of vigilance he was to give there continued to betray a dilemma which appears to run throughout this period. Namely his use of the language of the vehemently anti-capitalist militant at odds with the purpose of getting middle-class voters to put their cross against the 'acceptable' candidate Mitterrand. Debray warned in this speech that whilst France may have appeared to be more politically mature, and at a different stage of development to the many Third World countries who were at that very moment involved in bloody and violent transitions, make no mistake. France's own bourgeoisie, if defeated at an election, would, with the backing of international capital, implacably go on a counter-offensive.

Philippe Gavi writing in Libération (19) referred with scorn to Debray's increased visibility at such gatherings. He was simply nonplussed by this backsliding turncoat, who, from his ivory tower had encouraged a whole Latin American generation to get themselves massacred. What did Debray really understand about the political situation in France? What militant spadework had he ever done there? Could he not see that many voters simply saw no difference between Giscard's and Mitterrand's platforms anyway?

Others, like Michel Gonod in Le Figaro (20) writing after the presidential defeat of 1974, were prepared to look in a little more detail at the 'Repentant Revolutionary's' new credibility. Gonod believed that by the end of 1974, and just a year after returning to Paris, Debray had become one of the most influential intellectual newcomers inside 'First Secretary' Mitterrand's immediate circle. (21) Not only was he a member of a select group who had worked on Mitterrand's speeches, but also, if unofficially, he had become Mitterrand's advisor on Latin American affairs.
For those readers of *Le Figaro*, concerned that this former renegade was acquiring too much influence, Gonod's interview revealed to them that Debray was now firmly of the opinion that politics was ninety per cent realism, and a reassuring ten per cent romanticism. In fact Gonod went on to suggest that without his barbudo-style moustache, Debray, in his suit and tie, would even resemble one of Giscard's young turks.

It was in an article from *Le Monde* in September 1977 titled 'La Névrose Obsessionnelle' (22) that Debray attempted to outline why he was supporting the second and much debated 'Programme Commun' agreed on by socialists and communists as a platform for the 1978 legislative campaign. Whilst it was certainly the case, he argued, that one true step forward was worth more than a dozen 'programmes', at least the idea of this basic manifesto held within it the potential for power to be gained by the political Left. And he went on to make a plea for both partners to stop their squabbling over what the programme's minute detail should be, since such quibbles were both a distraction and an opportunity for their common enemy to exploit their discord.

Ignoring this very logic, it was to be but a short time later that leaders of the French Communist Party tore up the agreement with the socialists, a decision which many believed cost the Left the legislative elections the following year. Thus it was that Debray's next book, *Lettre Ouverte aux Communistes Français et à quelques autres*, (23) appeared at the beginning of 1978. An accessible, if somewhat repetitive book, Debray's purportedly fraternal, yet reproachful epistle (24) focussed now on the militants of the 'Parti Communiste Français', rather than upon the far-left, as he had done in *Les Rendez-vous Manqués*, and he began his critique of the communists here by claiming that because he was not a member of a political party he was writing on no-one's behalf but his own. (25) If this was arguably an unconvincing opening in view of his by now widely known support of Mitterrand, he tried further to situate himself in neutral territory by writing that his profession was philosophy. Attempting to convince his readers that he had never been truly involved in French politics to that date looked rather a thin argument as well. One critic's
willingness to label him 'le solitaire' man of the Left because he had attacked both the far-left and the communists looked like too generous, and too sympathetic an estimation. (26)

Debray's claim to have some credibility to speak to the 'PCF' leaders here did stem, he argued, from the fact that the only political party he had ever joined had been the communist youth movement, and that the period he had spent in Latin America had been in the name of communism. (27) He even went as far as to suggest that that very same political cause which had bred such courage into so many whom he had met there forced him to concede that fundamentally he remained a communist, and he laid bare his credentials by clearly confessing 'Je reconnais être Marxiste'. (28) This was again a declaration which may well have raised some alarm to the soft-left within the 'PS', (although in historically many socialists had similarly considered themselves Marxists, but not communists).

Yet Debray's message, part sociological study of the Communist party, and part demolition of their strategic political position nonetheless contained no other sympathies towards them. He was to launch into a very powerfully argued attack upon M. Marchais and company, who had once again, predictably and wilfully, swindled the strongest Left in Europe out of coming to power by walking out of the 'Union of the Left' in autumn of 1977. (29) Whilst many supporters of the Communists may well have considered this walk-out to have been an error of judgement by the leadership, Debray sought to demonstrate that it was an inevitability. For any Party which considered itself in Marxist terms to be 'the' vital cog in the motor of History would forcibly consider its own preservation to be an end in itself. And this self-preservation order meant that it had become first and foremost a dogmatic, doctrinaire institution. Both apparatchiks and lowly militants had come to identify more strongly with the monolith, than with the causes of their original ideological solidarity, (30) by confusing the progress of the Party's discipline with the progress of its cause (31). 'Du Parti considéré comme un des Beaux-Arts', (32) was in fact one of his lampooning chapter titles, and one could with good cause point to such an
estimation as proof of Debray's own definitive farewell to Leninism, for whom the party was of primary importance.

The consequence of revering the Party to this extent perverted matters such that the French Communists preferred to have no kind of government by the left rather than have no Party. (33) Their proud hallmarks of stability, order and tradition had become nothing more than elements in a rationale of survival and self-sufficiency in a hostile environment, and served now only to preserve a political status quo. The 'PCF' had therefore become a party which did little else but tactically manage situations, the absolute converse of its theoretical Marxist premise. For Debray the question of the whole impasse of the left in France lay precisely within this crisis and disarray of the Communist's thinking, (34) which still functioned upon a model of an avant-garde originated in Czarist Russia. Yet given their very own theory that progress towards socialism hinged upon what was contradictory and dialectical in society, why did they persist in organising themselves in a rigid inflexible way which prevented it from reacting to the dialectical nature of that society?

Debray's challenge was that the French Communists should now state unequivocably whether they wanted to mobilise electors inside a legal framework, as the 'Union' implied, courting the polling booth and prime time TV into the bargain. (35) Or whether they wanted to prepare militants for the overthrow of legal authority. (36) Though if there was any doubt as to where Debray's sympathies lay, he reminded the 'PCF' that experience positively demonstrated Marxist-Leninism as having brought about in reality a very obvious 'immobilism' in the European class struggle. (37)

Debray followed this analysis with a critical expose of the inflexibility of the international communist 'system' of which the 'PCF' stubbornly remained a part. His evaluation of regimes in socialist countries was that rather than behaving dynamically or dialectically, (38) they behaved mechanically. With their long-term leaders, their internal stability, their ceremony, tranquillity and order, these hermetic party/state systems functioned upon a 'monotonie des interventions, monologue de ceux qui ont la parole', and a 'monolithisme du parti qu'a le
monopole', (39) which actually opposed dialectic materialism and was sustained only by a logic of identity, conformity and devotion. Because everything there was handed downwards from within an existing political, theoretical and linguistic order, government in the Soviet dominated communist world had become a form of academicism, whose audience reaction had become an impassive fatalism. (40) Marxist-Leninism, particularly behind the Iron Curtain, was not an enabling tool at all, but a dogmatic ideological tool for notification, (41) where independence was insubordination, (42) originality untrustworthy, (43) and admitting errors taboo. An illusion which purported that what was good for the Party was automatically good for the proletariat. (44) Debray's message about the absurdity of this kind of communism here was aptly and satirically summarised in a quote from Brecht whereby, 'Le peuple n'ayant plus la confiance du parti, le comité centrale a décidé de dissoudre le peuple et d'en élire un autre.' (45)

The partisan, be he inside the Soviet Union, or indeed a card carrying member in France, then merely fulfilled a role testifying to the integrity of his Party, which lacking the promise of utopia, offered in its place only a sentiment of belonging. Ritual self-congratulation through banquets, congresses, gatherings, and parades, subverted the genuine subversion which ought to have been be present. Being part of the corporate body was the only palliative against powerlessness and disillusion. (46)

Indeed Debray prophetically envisaged that this whole system would one day crack under pressure since it accepted no institutional way out. Change would always be explosion, as it had been in Germany, Poland, and Hungary. (47) With the Soviets repeatedly reduced to treating dissent with force, 'c'est fermer le livre de l'histoire et ouvrir grand le code de procédure pénale'. (48)

The French Communist Party's eternal denigration of others' reformism was in fact an extension of this same logic, persisting because criticism and denunciation of others (in this specific case, the 'Parti Socialiste') acted as a preserving order upon those in positions of power within the Party. (49) The nit-picking over the basic minimum wage or percentages of
nationalisations to be included in the joint 'PC/PS accord, the union's two 'apparent' stumbling blocks, were not points of principle at all, but safety valves (§5), since a successful agreement would ultimately have held too many risks for the party personnel in secure posts. (§1) With characteristic hyperbole, Debray was to write, 'Les cadres ont leur raison que les encadrés n'ont pas'. (§2)

With the recent lessons of Chile perhaps still very fresh in his mind Debray now submitted that pursuing revolution via the ballot box was in any case ambiguous because democracy by nature was non-revolutionary and presupposed the possibility of a non-violent dismantling the revolution via the ballot box. (§3) The 'PCF' may have had the right to reiterate its primary characteristic as 'the' Revolutionary Party, but if it maintained this stance then potential voters of the left would have to be aware of the fallacy of any lasting marriage they might arrange with any other parties. Pulling out of the 'Union of the Left' over the small print was in reality the only remaining pretext for an escape from it. The blaming of tactics no less after the strategy had almost been sold. And a sale which would ultimately have destroyed the postulate of the Party. (§4) So, with the 'PS' now gaining uncomfortable ascendancy over the communists, it was quite logical, as recent history had shown, that a revolutionary party would pull the plug on this whole compromise. Now, no more than they had in 1936, 1947, 1958, or 1968, was the Communist party prepared to come permanently out of their ghetto. (§5) A monotonous, and always abortive state of affairs to which they had never provided a solution.

At this time of writing, when the French Communist Party still maintained a very significant percentage of adherents when compared to its decline in the 1980's, Debray's conclusion was that by their closing off of the road to both revolution and reformism, the PCF was a 'bouchon sur la route nationale.' (§5) And this was a state of affairs which he punned as the 'SNCF (Société Nationale des Chemins Fermés), pourrisant sur pied pour la plus grande joie de la bourgeoisie qui elle prend l'avion. (§7)

In asking when and how the communists were going to become operational, he was to suggest that the fundamental question their
intellectuals ought to be addressing now was how to gain and retain power without relying upon the ballot box, just as the bourgeois regimes had done in the nineteenth century. They, after all only subsequently rallied to the idea of Universal Suffrage because it conveniently ratified and legitimised a new status quo. Did today's communists suppose that a liberal bourgeois regime would play fair were they to be voted out of office? The retired, the middle classes, and the conservatives had always been the determining factors in any elections too, and there was simply no precedent for 'them' voting en masse for the Communist Party in its current guise, and which certainly would not be able to convince them that communism in France would be anything other than a drab template of East Germany. And all of this within a context that there had never been, anywhere in the world, a socialist transition which had avoided an initial lowering of standards of living, inflation and shortages. (58) If the Communists were serious about power, this would be a key theoretical hurdle, the one upon which Allende stumbled, which would need to be faced head on.

Debray suggested that there were also several other obvious indicators of the bankruptcy of the communists' theoretical reflexes. Was it not the truth that the desire for sacrifice and civil war as the means of accession to State power had evaporated in a Europe at peace for 35 years? And given that former Communist revolutions had all been articulated upon international conflicts or wars of national liberation, was not the possibility of revolution occurring in Europe even more remote? Furthermore, where now was the traditional industrial militant workforce? Without doubt it had been replaced now by other groups, frequently immigrants, who did not have the same conceptions of organisation and class struggle. (59) Was it not the plain truth that the Party's respect for legality and negotiation back in 1968 had been a tacit acknowledgement of the reality of all of these factors, providing in fact a deliberate brake on a mass movement?

Debray's advice was quite simply that the Communist Party's intellectuals needed to revise, from the very beginning, the Marxist theory of class struggle as a motor of social development. A call to provide a new
theory no less, for without one, the revolution was merely fetichised. His challenge was precisely that they abandon the old Marxist-Leninist theory for the sake of the very working class they idealised in its name. The current theory, requiring withdrawal from the 'Union' condemned them all to yet another period of rightist government which was just as likely to ride out, or adapt to successive crises of capitalism in spite of its supposed mortal contradictions. Although at the risk of hackneying a phrase one could have defined Debray's analysis as a plea for a further 'Revolution in the Revolution'. A metaphorical cutting adrift from their traditional anchors being the only option because, 'un navire qui ne lève pas l'ancre n'apparaitira jamais. D'un côté les dévoilements du révisionisme. De l'autre, la certitude de rester à quai. Pas de risque, pas de chance. (60)

Once again, in attempting to dispel a belief that this apparent demolition of 'PCF' logic was but a disguised canvassing of support for the socialists, Debray accepted that there remained and would continue to be two broad ideologies of the Left in France, the proletarian-Marxist one and the secular, republican social-democratic one. In view of this, he believes that the political left would forever be more of a confederation than a true political 'patrie'. (61) an algebra, or simple overlapping of forces rather than a simple electoral arithmetic. But he stressed that this could not be an excuse for stagnation on either half of the equation.

Tongue in cheek, Debray concluded by stating that he was sure that the 'PCF' leaders would have no time to waste over the scruples of a petit bourgeois like himself. After all, they would retort, intellectual revisionism in itself was nothing new. But he was at pains to emphasise finally the fact that that whilst his support for the 'Union of the Left', had never entailed a conviction that it alone could solve the problem of socialism in France, it had nonetheless been the only method to realistically pose the question about how to begin it. Given that there was nothing inevitable about acceding to socialist society, he like millions of others were tired of waiting. (62)

Maurice Duverger in Le Nouvel Observateur, (63) was one who was greatly impressed by the acuity of Debray's intellectual investigation and his
exposure of 'PCF' structures and strategies, although like others before him he again questioned whether 'the Revolution', was not just as much a pious image for Debray as it was for the Communists, since Debray at no point stated exactly what it meant for him now. Unwittingly though Duverger's reaction to the word 'Revolution' in connection with the name Régis Debray could hardly have anticipated that very concept being duly explored by Debray in a sociological rather than a political manner in his first philosophical work which appeared some three years later, Critique de la Raison Politique. (64) The theories in that book in fact sought to show that political parties and their projects, of which of course 'the Revolution' was but one amongst many, are always subject to certain rules of human association, and upon whose rock they so frequently founder. A theory that the motor of social development is in fact located outside of our control, and forcibly outside the control of political parties too. Whilst Lettre aux Communistes, was primarily motivated by the contingency of 1977-8, and for this reason it is included in this political section of Debray's work, there are undeniably elements of 'Le Politique', or social theory which were bourgeoning here, particularly in his analysis of the way in which the Communist Party, in a hostile environment, could not help but become rigid, monolithic, and turn into something it had not been designed to be at all.

Debray's very last appeal to the whole of the left came some four months before the 1981 presidential elections, in an article 'Le Temps du Respect.' (65) This was to be a somewhat mawkish and grating article which, in unashamedly revering Mitterrand, is difficult to categorise, and in fact quite uncharacteristic in tone. Summarily a piece of blatant hagiography aimed cleverly at voters fearful of electing a socialist, Debray began by refusing to make excuses for the sentimental nature of the piece, and described the presidential candidate, as the man who could re-inject a respect, or even, self-respect, back into political life in France. Mitterrand's integrity, his conviction, his bearing, his fidelity, his tranquility, his absence of guile (on the contrary a characteristic for which President Mitterrand was in due course to become renowned), his
absence of self-satisfaction compelligly drew one's absolute esteem. Such a rare sentiment was the vital antidote to the excesses of both veneration and derision currently abounding in the political world. So wonderful were Mitterrand's qualities that comparisons to Romulus and Remus establishing civil law in ancient Rome were rather unconvincingly included.
Chapter 9. Notes


2 - Ibid., p.152.


5 - Debray, Régis, L'Espérance au Purgatoire, Alain Moreau, 1980. It was only by 1980, and after some hesitation, that Debray gave permission for some of his freelance journalism of this period to be published here. This collection with its title open to both positive and pessimistic interpretations, 'A Hope in Hell', was divided into two separate sections. Firstly 'Circonstances Françaises' comprising eight articles from 1973-78, followed by ten articles of 'Circonstances Latines', written between 1962-79. The Latin American pieces, with one exception, were published in France after his return, and are dealt with in the Latin American section of this study. They included themes still drawing his attention in the mid 1970's, and upon which he was unquestionably France's expert.

These half journalistic-style articles, half accounts of socialist struggle he likened in his Introduction to the work of a 'grand reporteur' or the 'historien du présent'. (p.10) An intrepid method and style of writing he believed to have now virtually disappeared, since with the advent of the television satellite, the broadcasting team was now live, simultaneous with the event, and on the spot.

Debray did however decline to make any apology for this eighteen year selective overview, and which he now candidly referred to as a 'pénible étalage de méconnaissances'. (p.9) This was because as items of pure reportage they remained valid as snapshots of his views, interpretations and concerns over the years. Journalism being, in view of the nature of its production, fundamentally 'L'Intelligence théorique à l'état sauvage'. (p.13). Debray considered Marx to have been in this light the greatest journalist of the nineteenth century because of his ability to interpret facts and situations so quickly.


8 - L'Espérance au Purgatoire, p.11.

9 - Les Masques, p.152. Debray and Gilles Ferraill had the project, at this time, of producing a monthly review, ça ira, but this was never to materialise.


11 - Debray, Régis, 'N'attendons pas la Révolution pour renverser le régime de bedaines', Le Nouvel Observateur, 18 juin 1973, (also published in L'Espérance au Purgatoire).

12 - Debray, Régis, Que Vive la République, Odile Jacob, 1989, p.143.


16 - Solfier, vol.1, p.249.


18 - Haon, Hervé and Rotman, Patrick, Génération. Les Années de poudre, Seuil, 1988, p.580. In 'La Famille Tonton', Les Dossiers du Canard, p.22, reference is made to the fact that between 1973 and 1981 Debray was a member of various 'PS' commissions, notably the 'Comité d'Etudes sur la liberté'.


20 - 'Régis Debray le Révolutionnaire repenti', Le Figaro, 18 nov, 1974, (Michel Gonod).

21 - 'La Famille Tonton'. The contributors here claimed in contrast that Debray never acceded to the rank of privileged advisor like Attali or Dayan.


23 - Lettre Ouverte aux Communistes et à Quelques Autres. Seuil's reflex was to publish it in the series 'Combats'.

24 - ibid., Back cover blurb.

25 - ibid., p.9.


27 - Lettre Ouverte aux Communistes, p.10.

28 - ibid., p.11.

29 - The Communists had of already walked out of the 'Programme Commun' with the Socialists in 1972.

30 - Lettre Ouverte aux Communistes, p.21.

31 - ibid., p.165.

32 - ibid., p.163

33 - ibid., p.165.

34 - ibid., p.95.
61 - ibid., p.157.
62 - ibid., p.73.
64 - Debray, Régis, Critique de la Raison Politique, Gallimard, 1981.
'La marginalité tenait trop du cirque à mon goût et pas assez de l'arène'.

Few could have been aware that between 1975 and 1980, Debray had accompanied the then First Secretary of the French Socialist Party in an advisory capacity to Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela, and Costa Rica, (2) and that also he had visited Nicaragua in 1980 with Danièle Mitterrand. (3) Undeniably, he was a fellow traveller of the French Socialists in both word and deed. But if Debray's published political support for the 'PS' in the late 1970's had only a marginal impact, he was nevertheless rewarded for both kinds of support when François Mitterrand became President of the Republic in 1981.

According to one source (4) François Mitterrand simply asked Debray, after the 1981 presidential election, which 'Elysée' post he wished to take on, and Debray had spontaneously replied 'The Third World'. He was duly appointed 'Chargé de mission auprès du Secrétariat Générale de la Présidence pour le Tiers-Monde'. This was not a ministerial post, but that of presidential advisor, (5) although in as much as foreign policy under the Fifth Republic is a reserved domain of the President, the relatively high profile of the diplomatic cell at the Elysée ought not to be underestimated. (6)

Predictably, comment and criticism over the uproar that Mitterrand's appointee provoked was not hard to locate. Le Canard Enchaîné viewed the nomination as an audacious provocation to all the 'bien pensants' in France. (7) Alain Krivine of the trotskyite 'LCR' (Ligue communiste Révolutionnaire) condemned Debray's collusion as a total capitulation. (8) The writer Guy Hocquenheim in his 'Lettre Ouverte à ceux qui sont passés du col Mao au Rotary', (9) derided Debray's new livery in no uncertain terms.
'Cher maître es rénégaq' began his message to the 'Théoricien-guérilla des beaux-quartiers'. Philippe Simonnot in L'Express also scorned what he saw as yet another change of uniform for Debray, 

'Maintenant qu'il a dépoillée successivement le treillis de l'apprenti maquisard et le velours négligé de l'Intellectuel Rive gauche pour revêtir la livrée grise du bureaucrate élyséen', (10)

Jean-Paul Enthoven in his allusively titled interview with the new counsellor, 'La longue marche de Régis Debray', (11) could not help but notice the now trimmed moustache, the tie, the secretaries, phones, and above all the incongruity of limousines in front of Debray's office. One Canadian newspaper at the time reassured its readers alarmed at the appointment of this 'Pink Peril' by printing Debray's affirmation that the socialism now underway in France would not be exported. (12) Debray has also recalled in Les Masques, that when he was sent to the 'United Nations' in New York at the end of September 1981, a clerk told him that his visa had been issued in error. (13) He was subsequently vetted by the National Security Council President Dick Allen. (14) It appears that even French Intelligence the 'DST' was unconvinced about Debray's credibility. Favier even suggests that a dossier about him was forwarded to Mitterrand. (15) Even as late as 1985, Le Monde, (16) reported Debray winning a slander case after a 'député' from Guadaloupe had claimed that he still had a close rapport with Cuba, which was incompatible with his position. Notwithstanding all of this Debray was quite obviously now in a position of some power in a country where the intellectual had traditionally been a figure of opposition, with symbolic power alone. As far as his actual contribution and activities were concerned. Cole (17) has claimed that Debray was effectively to become the Third World conscience in the Mitterrand entourage. Derbyshire too (18) believed that Debray had a significant influence upon a more southern and Mediterranean bias in French foreign policy in the first term, although arguably Mitterrand's choice of
a known figure like Debray in this domain points to an emphasis the President had wished to make there in any case. Debray has himself emphasised that one of his main objectives in his post was to see the new regime move away from an exclusively East/West view of international affairs towards a more North versus South, rich versus poor perspective, (19) Mitterrand's speech in Mexico in October 1981 which expounded the desirability of developing these North-South global relations was indeed written by Debray, (20) who by 1985 was to claim that there had duly been an expansion of French diplomatic and economic aid in Africa, the Far East and Central America, as well as the fact that France was pressing the 'IMF' at that time for this increased emphasis upon North/South unaligned cooperation. (21) Golfer's résumé and interpretation of Debray's activity (22) put forward the case that it was greatly motivated by a desire to reinforce a prestigious and international Francophone Community, which would add to France's prestige internationally, although crucially, this was to be without any imperialist overtones. It aimed at a quasi-Gaullist vision, which would focus upon France's universal mission, her heritage and her vocation. A 'volonté' in place of a mere 'gestion' as Debray was to clarify in Les Masques, (23)

However, whatever the grand design may have been, much of Debray's work seems to have been spent as a behind-the-scenes organiser, (24) dealing in the main with Latin America, but also involving visits to Viet Nam, Tchad, the South Pacific, (25) India, the USSR, Nicaragua and Costa Rica (26). Favier (27) has recorded his contact with Afghan resistants in 1982, along with his proposal that the French should support them.

For a period, between 1982 and 1983 Debray also headed the Secretariat's 'Cultural Affairs' section, but reverted to his original single post due to workload, and a conviction that culture was to be lived, not administered. (28) Nonetheless he was subsequently to be ascribed various other job descriptions, firstly as 'Chargé de mission auprès du Cabinet', followed by an attachment to the 'Centre D'Etudes des Relations Internationales'. Le Canard Enchainé (29) reported on a course he attended at the Pentagon, and that as a result Mitterrand allocated him a post in
the 'Strategic Questions' department. By 1985 (30) he had become the 'Secrétaire Générale du Conseil du Pacifique-Sud', about which Le Canard Enchaîné was to comment 'Un machin dont personne n'a jamais su à quoi il servait ni à quoi il pouvait bien servir' (31), and they maintained too that it was in fact Debray who had persuaded Mitterrand into setting up this diplomatic initiative.

In the autumn of the same year his professional preoccupation with foreign affairs was to be halted when he was appointed 'Maitre des Requêtes au Conseil d'Etat', the very prestigious French administrative Court of Appeal. A position, he has confessed, whose protocol and bureaucracy irritated him a good deal. (32) Le Monde (33), remarked that Debray had had to wait until he was forty five years old before he could take up this post, and that it was indeed unusual for someone without a legal background to be nominated to it. The satirical writer Jean-Edern Hallier (34) expressing his disgust at the decision, wrote 'Nous avons eu le privilège de faire entrer le bolivien, Debray au Conseil d'Etat. C'est la naturalisation par l'Institution'. Le Canard Enchaîné intimated however that Debray spent very little time anyway at the Palais-Royale, the court's headquarters. (35)

Initially, Debray seems to have thrown himself enthusiastically into his advisory positions, referring to himself as having been completely geo-politicised. (35). Estimating that his chief assets were in his mediating skills, (37) he has even written of having suffered from a 'prurit missionaire'. (38) Golfer however has maintained that Debray was eventually to prove ill at ease and less ambitious inside what were in essence very sober management posts. He has recorded Debray's own view that a career 'Enarque' (a graduate of the 'école Normale d'Administration') would have been more suited to their administrative nature, coping much better than he had done with the inertia of long, slow negotiations, and the complex decision-making structures which existed within the realm of foreign policy, particularly as Debray came to feel that the Left's margin for manoeuvre was restricted here anyway. (39) Sarazin has even mentioned the mundane task Debray had of organising working lunches for academics
invited to the Elysée (40), so it is perhaps not surprising that with some sense of irony Debray was to quite colourfully write of his Elyséen venture in Comète ma Comète, 'Tu as senti en toi la patrie t'appeler d'un doigt impérieux, tu t'engages volontaire pour le front, tu te retrouves à l'arrière coincé dans un bureau'. (41)

Whether Debray could be categorised therefore as a truly significant and consistent 'eminence grise' is questionable. Faligot and Kaufer (42) in their chapter upon those influencing Mitterand made but four small mentions of him. Indeed further references and details about his work at the Elysée are patchy, and the lack of photo opportunities too suggests that much of what he did was not newsworthy. Sarazin (43) has described Debray as being one of a group functionaries who would consult regularly with the President, but not amongst those who would deal with him daily, although he was apparently in close enough contact to pass on to Mitterrand the proofs of his autobiography Les Masques, which the President found time to scrutinise very closely. (41)

Most other citations which can be located concerning this period are little more than anecdotal and lack any helpful evaluation. With two other presidential advisors Orsenna and Arnoult, Debray was involved in the organisation of the Francophone summit in 1986 and the subsequent creation of the 'Agence de Coopération culturelle et technique'. (45) Also Le Monde (46) reported him as having been instrumental in obtaining the release of the Cuban poet Armando Valladares from jail in Havana, where he had been since 1960. Le Canard Enchaîné (47) maintained that several colleagues (outside his particular supporters Deferre, Badinter and Chevènement) saw Debray as incapable of working as part of a team.

During the period of cohabitation with Chirac's 'RPR' government, from 1986-88, Debray appears to have been less involved with affairs at the Elysée, although he did retain his office and staff. Most conveniently, claimed Le Canard Enchaîné for the pursuit of his career as a writer. (48) He did finally leave office though in June 1988, and has since stated that he no longer felt on the same wavelength with the free market social liberalism 'en vigueur' at that time under Rocard's administration. (49) In
fact he was to give a further clue to the reasons for his departure in *La Puissance et les Rêves*. In describing today's pressures in such posts he wrote that as soon as a minister, advisor, or director was appointed, then the time for reading a book, taking a walk, having an idle conversation, or even falling ill were snatched away, such that there was an 'Accélération de la vie, pulvérisation des jours, désintégration de la personne', and whereby 'l'aliénation n'est plus loin'. (50) These apparent constraints did though still allow him the time to publish two considerable works on diplomacy, two autobiographies, and a volume of art criticism between 1981 and 1988. (51) Self-demands it would appear, were extremely high.

Although Debray was placed in charge of the Elysée contribution to the French Revolution bi-centenary celebrations in 1989 he did give up his position at the 'Conseil d'État' early in the same year. This decision apparently entailed little regret. *Le Canard Enchaîné* quoted him as saying he should never have accepted its nomination since he saw in it a betrayal of his political 'lignée'. (52) In 1992, he was asked by President Mitterrand to take charge of the organisation and preparation of the French pavilion at the Universal Exhibition, at Seville, which he duly undertook.

When Debray was asked why he had kept an official **Élysée** position until June 1988, he replied that one of the reasons for doing this was to try to avoid becoming the kind of intellectual he had so castigated in *Le Pouvoir Intellectuel* in 1979, (53) the self-publicising writer who, to make a living, and more importantly a reputation, 'court après le cachet, la préface, la conférence ou l'avance de l'éditeur'. (54) But he referred also to what had become an essential boredom, and an uncertainty about the ends he was working towards. That original sense of anticipation he had had in participating in the great socialist adventure had by now gone. If at first he had been convinced that to get one's ideas across it needed to done by acquiring power, now he was convinced that one's ideals become swallowed up by the machinery of government itself. (55) A frustration he certainly had not anticipated when compared to the more positive reflection of his activities twenty years beforehand. He stated in an interview in 1987,
'J'aurais pu être révolutionnaire par temps de révolution. Je suis incapable d'être politicien par temps de politique'. (§§)

Looking back, Debray has confessed to having over-estimated his indispensibility as well, he has written, 'Je faisais l'important que je n'étais pas', (57) and has even admitted, figuratively speaking, to having become completely dried out from his former political intoxications. (§§) In either frustration or honesty, or both, he wrote even as early as 1986, and whilst still on the Elysée payroll of course, 'Projets de Société, ismes grandiloquents, bouches de chaleur - je vous dois la vérité: je me fiche du flacon'. (59)

These exasperations may well have come from a personal inaptitude for the positions Debray had undertaken, but one would be mistaken in imagining that events in Mitterrand's France were not also considerable contributing factors. After all, the Socialists had been forced into a series of economic u-turns. By 1982 salaries were frozen, state control over industry was put in reverse, and climbdowns over private education occurred. Far from becoming a champion of the Third World, France was to become a staunch US ally with her troops being eventually placed under American command in the Gulf. Prime Minister Michel Rocard's late 1980's plea for a broad and tolerant political consensus under the slogan 'société civile' would have meant for very many people nothing less than a ditching of socialism in order to cling on to power. We cannot exclude Debray from that very category of opinion.

It is indeed easier to understand the general sentiment of disillusion and inertia Debray was to experience under Mitterrand, when one has read the foreign policy books he wrote during the mid-1980's. La Puissance et Les Rêves (1984), Les Empires contre l'Europe (1985), and Tous Azimuts (1989), which are considered in following sections, but which were all essentially an attack upon an inert international order which the élan and optimism of 1981 did not influence significantly. He is in fact on record as concluding that at best France can only modify her foreign policy, and that realistically she would never have the influence in the Third World he had hoped for. (60) Debray conceded too in an interview with me in October
1989, that the Socialists in power had not been able to change many things after all.

In summary though it remains difficult to map out and evaluate the pressure he was able to exert, or to decide if Debray was able to work with any kind of consistent credo. He has defined himself as having been guided by a pragmatism, and also that he considered himself, in post, to have been fundamentally a 'realpoliticien des droits de l'Homme'. But if such were his operational guiding principles (implying that politics is to be judged by results, not by its intentions), then if there was any element of 'opportunism' or 'compromise' which could be judged to have been present in either his acceptance of these positions, or in the way he absolved himself of his duties, then this was, he argued, nothing new. It was moreover in keeping with several other taboos he had had the determination to transgress in his writings and activities of the 1960's. *(61)*

Whilst Keith Reader was to write in 1987 that the Socialist Party's most prominent intellectual was Régis Debray, *(62)* one could certainly have argued that if it were true, then Debray had not had to fend off much competition. Max Gallo, the chief spokesman, of Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy's first socialist government published a keynote article in *Le Monde*, in July 1983 *(63)* which bemoaned the absence of active support for the government from centrally-placed intellectuals, even though invitations to them to take on various posts had been made. Thus, figures like Gide, Malraux and Alain who in the past had provided intelligent reflection and commentary upon events and policies, as well as being an integral focus for the fermentation of ideas on the Left, were now conspicuous by their absence, and it was this decision to stay below the parapet, Gallo argued, which had, since 1981 considerably impeded the socialists' battle for the hearts of middle-strata electors. He went on to lament the High Intelligentsias' apparent aloofness, their incomprehension of the new political power, their reticence to speak up, and their haughty reaction that politics was nothing but a trap 'ou se laissent prendre les naïfs, les ambitieux ou les cyniques.'
Gallo's solicitation was followed two days later by Philip Baggio's examination and explanation of the same phenomenon, (64) and he saw additional concrete proof of the intelligentsia taking 'French leave' by virtue of the fact that all of the political best-sellers at that time were being written by the political right. He reminded his readers that French socialism had been largely the invention of France's intellectuals, and whilst he acknowledged that a significant number of the less well known had in fact left their academic posts to join the administration, the really big fish, Foucault was the example he cited, now chose regrettably to remain aloof and were even embarrassed to have any association with the new power at all. If for him, the explanation that a certain 'coup de fatigue', after years of intervention and commitment was now being compensated for by a return to study and humility, did hold some truth, others like Ross (65) saw the non-participation less an indication of fickleness than the fact that the former 'PS' intellectual champions had moved on. Thus by the time the victory of the Left occurred, intellectual predilections had become matters such as the examination of authority structures, media influence and the environment, (as to a significant extent Debray's had too, as ensuing chapters will reveal) rather than with a political issue which soon appeared to be dealing with economic management alone.

What this protracted debate serves to highlight in our context of course is that Debray certainly did not follow the intellectual crowd. For good or ill he was prepared to soil his hands again with some considerable patience, commitment and even vilification. One could argue that the decision of a man who was certainly not a career politician to join rank with the new regime was a decent and consistent piece of pragmatism. If Debray would admit to having stayed on a little too long, he had at least been ready to subordinate and accommodate his intellectual credibility to the importance of everyday politics, even if that was to prove to be an extremely watered-down socialism. After all France had waited a long time to have a man of the Left at the Elysée.

Having mapped out some of the landmarks pertinent to Debray's roles under president Mitterrand, it is perhaps useful to include finally a
humorous anecdote as related by a childhood neighbour Nicole de Buron. Her mocking cameo may still remain closest to the wider public perception of Debray when all is said and done. She wrote,

'Quand vous n'avez trouvé aucun filon à bifteck, vous regardez par la fenêtre, de l'autre côté de la cour, où - dans une salle à manger aux vitraux 1930 - un petit garçon dévore un délicieux déjeuner servi par une gouvernante empressée. Vous n'éprouvez aucune haine sociale (la lutte des classes vous est inconnu). Juste un peu d'envie. Vous ignorez que ce jeune prince choyé deviendra un révolutionnaire célèbre : R.D.. Cela vous fera beaucoup rire plus tard lorsqu'il battre les campagnes d'Amérique latine en prônant l'égalité des richesses. Son bifteck, il ne l'a jamais partagé avec vous, qui étiez affamée juste en face. Vous croyez savoir que, maintenant, il exerce de hautes fonctions politiques et déjeune dans les meilleurs restaurants - où il ne vous invite toujours pas à déguster un filet en croûte aux truffes'. (66)
Chapter 10. Notes

1 - Debray, Régis, Comté ma Comté, Gallimard, 1985, p.53.
5 - The Elysée staff was divided into two main sections, The 'Cabinet de President', and the 'Secrétariat Générale', which in turn was manned by some twelve 'Conseillers techniques', and seven 'Chargés de mission'.
6 - Debray, Régis, 'Quel rôle pour la France?' in Association for the Study of Modern and Contemporary France, 1985, ed. Peter Norris and Stuart Williams, pp.113-19, Debray reminded his English listeners to this lecture that France occupied the third largest economic zone in the world, with 13 states in the 'franc zone' and 34 defining themselves as francophone.
12 - 'De la jungle bolivienne à l'Elysée', Le Soleil, Québec, 14 août 1981, (Martine Verem).
14 - 'La Longue Marche de Régis Debray'.
17 - Cole, p.96.
18 - Derbyshire, Ian, Politics in France. From Giscard to Mitterrand, Chambers, 1988, p.103.
19 - 'Régis Debray's Buffalo Lectures', Contemporary French Civilisation, IX, Fall-Winter, 1985, pp.91-2.
20 - Schifres and Sarazin, p.113.
21 - 'Quel rôle pour la France?', p.116.
25 - ibid., p.344.
27 - Favier, p.397.
29 - 'Régis Debray: Marche à l'Hombre' in La Famille Tonton, p.23.
30 - Favier, p.414.
31 - 'Régis Debray: Marche à l'Hombre', p.23
35 - La Famille Tonton, p.23.
36 - Les Masques, p.196.
37 - ibid., p.200
38 - ibid., p.214.
40 - Schifres and Sarazin, p.275.
41 - Comète et Comète, p.53.
43 - Schifres and Sarazin, p.138.
44 - 'De la difficulté de "paraitre vrai",...et d'en parler juste' Télérama, no.2, mars 1968, (Debray interviewed by Jean-Claude Raspiengeas).
45 - Favier, p.235.
47 - *La Famille Tonton*, p.22.
48 - ibid., p.23.
49 - 'La République est menacé par l'argent et le spectacle', *Le Point*, no.850, 2-8 jan. 1989, (Debray interviewed by Jean Jeambar and Michel Richard).
54 - Golfier, vol. 2, p.A9. Of course several critics, notably Hoquenheim, (see note 9) claimed that if anyone was compromising intellectual credibility, then it was adviser Debray.
57 - *Les Masques*, p.201.
58 - ibid., p.222.
59 - *Coasée ou Comète*, p.59.
11 - Strategy re-visited

Reclaiming the Nation for the Left

"Ma seule passion, c'est la mission étrangère de la France, et sa place dans le monde. C'est pourquoi j'ai toujours été Gaulliste" (1)

Debray's first comments upon French sovereignty, had come as early as 1974. In his speech 'L'Illusion de Mort' at the 'Assises du Socialisme' in 1974 (2) he had harangued the Giscardian government for allowing France, in his opinion, to lose her independence in international affairs, and of having become the virtual 'vassals' of the USA in this domain.

Two further articles, dealing with what he saw as this unacceptable French collusion, appeared in 1978 and 1979 in Le Monde Diplomatique. (3) These contributions both sought to expose the very subtle and coherent way in which the West diffuses and justifies its political ideology, and they certainly prefigured questions Debray had hoped to influence in his presidential advisory capacity concerning France's participation in what he saw as this US-lead global system of domination. Indeed it was ultimately to be a considerable expansion of this same theme which occupied his writing during the mid 1980's.

The first of these press articles, "Il faut des Esclaves aux hommes libres" focussed upon the way in which the Liberal West invariably, and hypocritically presented injustice around the world as an attack upon human rights. Yet Debray contended that the reasoning behind this effective slogan neatly perpetuated the abjectness of the poor, and their chances of popular resistance. In essence, 'à la mesquinerie des états' it offered to them the alluring salvation of 'l'universalité sans rivage de la personne humaine', but which was nonetheless a pure diversion from the fact that those very states and regimes we readily condemn as 'mesquin', receive our money, and our arms to preserve this form of global slavery. Third World
workers under the yoke, producing cheap goods with cheap labour for the West made it a hypocrisy for us to preach to the world the benefits of our humanist traditions and ideals, but which by definition, according to Debray, we alone can enjoy.

The second text of solidarity with the non-West, 'Le Nouveau Radicalisme des Faibles' was a report from the congress of the then ninety five non-aligned countries, held in Havana, and here Debray argued that a more relevant way of looking politically, strategically and economically at international relations and their tensions would be to stop viewing them exclusively through the prism of 'the East' versus 'the West', but to consider instead the realities of a rich North against a poor South. Recognising that the wealthy were not about to give up any of their interests, Debray saw the most fruitful way to wrest some power away from them was for the poor to mutually help themselves, and set up a 'South to South' dialogue.

If at the Elysée Debray had been valiantly struggling against daily tedium, and is on record as stating that 'le pouvoir est, d'abord, une gestion de l'impuissance', (4) he did not appear at this time to have treated his own prescriptive model for French foreign policy with the same degree of resignation. And busy as he may have been in his job, he nevertheless managed to produce in 1984 and 1985 two considerable works examining French foreign policy, closely connected in content of certainly to his official post, but in line too with the concerns he had expressed some five years earlier in Le Monde Diplomatique. La Puissance et les Rêves, (5) and Les Empires contre L'Europe (6) together comprised some 730 pages. (7)

La Puissance et les Rêves was essentially an enquiry into socialism's ideals when they were confronted, as was the case in France at this time, with the harsh reality of the then bi-polar international relations, and it went on to include Debray's proposals as to how France could carve out for herself a significant and relevant role alongside the superpowers. He was in fact to candidly acknowledge in a lecture in 1985 (8) that any new government could neither change the state of forces in the world, nor their
own country's international capacities whatever its ideological preferences might be, and that its strategic imperatives, its very survival, would always restrict its room for manoeuvre, or in the final analysis override the handicap of any pleasure principle. Untranslatable with the same economy in English, it was a logic which exposed why, in the field of foreign policy 'Un ministre socialiste n'est pas un socialiste ministre' (9), or as André Fontaine reviewing the book in Le Monde was to conclude, here was a brutal iconoclastic message of realism telling the Left to stop believing in Father Christmas. (10) The time then, as far as Debray was concerned, was much overdue for the left to look in a more imaginative way at the outdated and simplistic bi-polar schemas in international relations. There was a requirement to stop taking 'East versus West' as read, a state of affairs from which the Superpowers profited, and in Debray's opinion, at Europe's, and therefore France's expense. (11) These were echoes indeed of similar exposures of the cant of the left in La Critique des Armes and particularly Lettre aux Communistes.

Although it may have been a hard piece of evidence for socialists to swallow, Debray's conclusion was that the international relations arena functions in a fashion much more akin to the law of the jungle, than to the rule of law, and that the physical law which is present there withdraws from small country citizens any equality optimistically prescribed for them in written law. Thereby, that original idea of progress aspiring to a federation of nations under a universal law of collective security, a fundamental tenet of socialist internationalism, was a pipedream. What intrinsic justice after all could be present he asked, in an international system trying to accommodate both democratic and totalitarian states?

Debray wrote at some considerable length upon this flaw in socialist thinking. He claimed that since its fundamental philosophical precepts were based upon a faith in rationalism, reason, and persuasion, which were fundamentally moral and even Christian aspirations (with salvation to be achieved at the end of the line), socialism saw its mission as one of extrapolating from the idea of social justice at home a supra-national law abiding by these same morals. (12) Consequently it implied that one could
reduce diplomacy to the art of oratory, elevate politics to the level of an ethics, (13) or subject the realm of negociation to a courtesy which would place natural rivalry and competition behind mutually accepted rules. (14) A chimera, said Debray, an illogical metamorphosis of international politics into some kind of scientific research for the common good (15), as if political diplomacy could be progressive in the same way as medicine or technology. In fact he considered this legacy of legalism to be in any case a Euro-centric reflex, with legality having become a kind of Western, social-democratic value, which was of course, in essence anti-revolutionary. (16)

Clearly, whilst socialism may be a personal conviction, the contingencies of individual states, even those aggregated under a federalism, were in Debray's order of things, motivated by older, more imperious impulses involving territory and ethnicity, than was any 'precocious' principled socialism (17), or indeed liberalism for that matter. It had to be recognised, he argued that because of the inevitable existence of the strong and the weak then the left's moral convictions merely ended up by handicapping it and placing it at a disadvantage to the traditional political Right in this whole area, whose economic taste for competition served it well in this particular jungle of natural selection. (18) An arena which was moreover a very inapt domain for socialist-style resolutions, projects, and declarations of principal.

Debray went on to demonstrate that the illusion of any possible international rationalist pacifism (19) was illustrated by recent history because governments had repeatedly failed to make international agreements take precedence over national interest. The 'League of Nations' foundered upon this very constant. Its supposed powers of policing and arbitration merely ended up accommodating the interests of the big powers, those most likely to trigger off a war. Justice invariably bowed to force. France in particular, between the wars, found to her cost that giving prestige to the mystique of 'droit' via her diplomacy, at the expense of her army was to be exposed as a disastrous error. Debray's exhaustive research was further backed up by his location of ninety four different international accords.
having been made in 1909 alone, but which of course failed to prevent the Great War, (20) and he contended that both then, as well as in 1939, these treaties had the very reverse of their desired effect by forcing countries into war when their national interests were not under threat at all.

The 'United Nations' subject to his analysis, now worked by a similar logic of force because it had existed for a sufficient length of time now for one hegemony to come to the surface within the very network itself. Here the USA quite naturally used the so called 'Security Council' to rubber-stamp decisions already taken back home to guarantee US security first and foremost. If proof were required to illustrate this fact, then why, asked Debray, did no international policing force appear after US intervention in Korea?

He affirmed furthermore that those same socialist ideals behind calls for disarmament were unattainable by virtue of the same deductions. If a state's security could not be guaranteed by treaty, as he insisted it couldnot, then it would inevitably arm and defend itself as it saw necessary. 'La survie ne se délègue pas' (21) was the simple message, a maxim proving once again that it was a false analogy to believe that internal 'legislative' democracy was extendable into an external, international democracy, and that if one made good laws one could thereby retain peace. Who, after all, mandated the superpowers into being responsible for the affairs of the world but they themselves and their interests.

Recognition then needed to be made by the left of the gap between the evident persistence of strong national sentiments in modern history, and the left's paucity of philosophical reflection upon that very phenomenon. (22) And he asked at last, with what could their unrealistic thinking and ineffective practice be replaced, but without either a total capitulation to the right, or the introduction of new sacred cows?

What Debray advocated was what he termed an 'operational patriotism', (23) which would mean working within existing conditions and available means but which was not obsessed with the idea of maintaining peace as an end in itself. The left's base-line ought not to be to set out upon a search for
the 'souverain bien' but the 'moindre mal'. (24) A politics of realism which could be put into practice, and which recognised that national self-interest should always operate on one's doorstep, even if a politics of principle could be operated further afield. A further key element for successful action would be to avoid succumbing to the public opinion of the moment, as concentrated through the TV screen, or the editorials of the influential press, those blackmailing 'simplissimes partisans du milieu nationale'. (25) Defending French sovereignty would imply working outside of this harmful 'dictature de la volonté générale'. (26) The new diplomacy of the left would similarly resist surrendering to the lure of a comfortable consensus as gauge of its success. A foreign policy articulated solely upon what appears momentarily palatable back home Debray described as conservative, asphyxiated, and even Pavlovian. (27)

Altwegg (28) has gone as far as suggesting that part of the motivation for this work in fact stemmed from Debray's desire to respond to the momentarily fashionable, but very influential 'Nouveaux Philosophes', who had renounced their socialism only shortly before 1981. Whilst Debray was saying that government would certainly be representing the will of the people, it would not be prey to its mood swings. (29) Nor the mood swings of its thinkers if Altwegg was to be believed.

Debray viewed this plea for diplomatic single-minded 'realpolitik' of the left, (30) as validated by the fact that accurate comprehension of many international relations could not be acquired overnight, (31) but that it was a result of the slow and circumspect interpretation of events and trends. By its very nature, diplomacy was, he argued, a sector clashing invariably with the ideals of representative government, performance and immediate accountability, and this factor had to be clearly understood. (32) However, if in one respect reflection and cool-headedness was a virtue, an additional particular handicap to the left in France in the early 1980's was the inertia of the existing diplomatic corps itself. In Debray's opinion it had come to represent a resistance to change. Its 'ENA' manufactured qualities of competence, conformism and tradition hampered innovation had become over-concerned with self-preservation. (33)
Most importantly though, a second, and even more urgent theme behind the necessity for this new diplomacy was not exclusively concerned with how the Left should react on the international scene, but moreover related to how Debray perceived relations in the world to be changing in themselves, and which demanded new and different responses. Namely, what was in his perception, in 1984, an important emerging 'background' to that 'foreground' confrontation of the superpowers. Indeed what he even considered as an antidote to it, was nothing less than a significant rise globally in cultural and religious nationalism. Those reaffirmations of social identity, which were older and more resilient than the ersatz twentieth century political ideologies of belonging were all around returning to the surface. Here was evidence of a dogged social-genetic desire for independence and difference kicking against an increasingly global system of economic, juridical, technological and ideological dependencies, all accumulated behind English-speaking America. If resurgent Islam could be interpreted as the most evident and compulsive rediscovery of origin in defiance of Western modernity, events in Russia, Yugoslavia, Pakistan, Ireland, even the rebirth of Christian faith in the USA could be cited as examples that Debray's reading of events has since this time come true, and that as he so epically forecast 'A l'horizon de la fin de l'agriculture, se profilera la naissance de toutes les cultures de la terre'.

Progress thus competing with a return to fundamentalism, something of a quite different order to the class struggle, was the fundamental dichotomy for the left which could not be ignored, and his concerns here were undoubtedly an illustration and a practical application of his theories from *Critique de la Raison Politique* which he had published three years beforehand, and which explored the psychology of adhesion to the collective. It was because he believed that an international strategic network unresponsive to cultural value would remain an artificial entity, that the challenge to France's diplomacy therefore was to try to respond effectively to these resurgent passions, and not the outdated State structures, or bi-polar international divisions imposed upon them by very
recent history. He even went as far as to suggest that the pan-American 'vision' would eventually disintegrate over the clash of Latin and Anglo culture on the American continent itself, just as he predicted 'for tomorrow' a breakdown of the Eastern Block over the clash between Central European and Russo-Byzantine culture (38).

Debray in fact took the USA to task in particular for its foreign policy reflexes. He suggested that since it had little historical experience in that area when compared to that of European nations, it considered matters, and applied its power only in a short-term way. Hence it was unable to avoid a lumping together of the psychic, cultural and ethnic impulses in others, treating them only as either spectators, consumers, or competitors. Furthermore, there was a requirement for decisions, in an age of lightening communication, to be taken immediately. With no time now for reflection, only reflex was possible in an epoch of jet diplomacy, which in itself had become subject to the requirements of a media intolerant of repetition and thriving upon variety. And the consequence of a concentration upon brevity and speed invariably risked superficiality. (39) In Washington's sacrifice of analysis to accountability, it had demonstrated a very puritan belief in the perversity of ideology foreign to it, unaware that a strategic system cannot in itself disaggregate the heredity, identity and patriotism in non-Americans. (40) The country whose national interest has never had any real possibility of being overthrown, the USA, had simply begun to confuse its own flag with the flag of humanity - a phenomenon in the very nature of all empires. (41)

France, like so many of her neighbours had meekly accommodated this US hegemony at the expense of her own sovereignty. Debray illustrated the nature of the acquiescence by the language she and her neighbours were frequently using in the field of international relations.

'Retablir (La parité des euromissiles); rééquilibrer (les arsenaux); desserrer (les contraintes extérieures), atténuer (les désordres monétaires; résister (à la concurrence), amortir (les chocs pétroliers); neutraliser (les effets de la crise), etc; ; ces verbes rituels disent assez qu'une action gouvernementale, par nature reactive, ne déploie nulle
intention souveraine, nulle positivité autonome devant un parterre d'acteurs respectueux'.
(42)

Whilst accepting that there was a fine line to be steered in retaining independence, whilst avoiding isolation, it was within this whole context of sovereignty that Debray made his first published comments about the European Community here, and the role he felt France should play within it. Reminiscent undoubtedly of many on the political right in subsequent years, and perhaps unexpectedly in opposition to Mitterrand's vision of a federal Europe, he suggested that France's own political decisions became all the more important in the light of the economic domain being shared with her partners. (43) Furthermore, locking herself politically into some supposed European priority would impinge upon France's vital relations with other areas in the world, in particular the francophone zones. (44) Europe might well facilitate prosperity but could not become a goal, in itself. Debray was confident that 'Europe' would remain an institution or construction alone, and never be able to behave like an organism in the way that a nation could because history teaches us that political unification is brought about only by the hegemony of one of the partners. Quite simply, in his estimation, 'economic' Europe could not create a European mystique, nor men willing to die for it. (45)

It was then beyond these constraints and yet within the parameters he had elucidated that Debray believed that a French 'realpolitik' of the left should have been situated, responding to the cultural values of others, and specifically working beyond the clichés about them propagated by our medias, who of course conveniently label as 'Totalitarian' anyone not inside the 'West'. (46) It would have at its foundation a taking into account of national interest from all sides. It would be a fully independent diplomacy, and would look at matters of strategy within a 'multi'-polar world. It would take account of the evident decline of the Eastern Block, and the simultaneous 'emancipation' by western Europe from the Atlantic Alliance. (47) Providing an operational counter-balance to the two superpowers in support of weaker nations would imply a France capable
of distinguishing between a crusade and a rescue. (48) A role which accepted that in terms of culture, religion and politics there was in fact no 'solution' to be sought.

Finally, Debray was to return in La Puissance et les Rêves to debunk the theme broached in his 1979 article on the notion of human rights. An ideology in itself elevated to a plane upon which a theory and practice of international relations aspired to be built. But it was, he contended, a cruel illusion, because our exhortations about morality in the Third World were not altruistic and morally grounded at all, but simply strategic. Preaching tolerance to others when one was not threatened by famine or war, those absolute conditions for the exercise of civil liberty, was to forget that our own societies took centuries to arrive at their current situation of wealth and stability. Exhorting the poor to copy us was therefore a hypocrisy called amnesia. (49) Choosing to ignore the fact that liberty is an economic rapport, not an entity in itself, and at the same time promoting the idolisation of individual rights was an act of bad faith, if not a new opium of the intellectuals who propagate that very message. (50) Even those like his friend Bernard Kouchner, one of the founders of 'Médecins sans Frontiers', and later on to become Minister for Human Rights was targeted here. Fighting for the rights of the citizen alone, and in this case his health, would not lead to an end to exploitation. Salvation, if at all, would come in Debray's schema only via the sovereign state, and he suggested that historically, there has never been a liberation of the individual without an affirmation of his country. (51)

If one could then summarise that La Puissance et les Rêves was Debray's rational conclusion that French national interest, translated as her independent political, economic and defensive sovereignty, needed to become her priority in the face of the evident demise of internationalist programmes, most critics were only too quick to deride it.

Guy Konopnicki in La Quinzaine Littéraire (52) was unimpressed by Debray's new look patriotism, born of a yet another farewell to Marx, which he saw as the central message of La Puissance et les Rêves. Discovering from the corridors of power that workers, classes, and the people were the
chimera of the past, and that what remained after their disappearance was the discovery of France and her precious sovereignty was simply unconvincing. Alain Dubamel in Le Monde (§3) was also uninspired. He read in the advocacy of these new enthusiasms a parallel in foreign affairs conveniently matching Mitterrand's reversal of the Socialist project into a very social democratic, mixed economy 'pragmatism' at home. André Fontaine also writing in Le Monde, (§4) whilst acknowledging that Debray had made a most erudite exposé of current international terrain, was impatiently awaiting the sequel to this work, where it was to be hoped that much more specific contours for this woolly 'realpolitik' for France could be mapped out. He pointed out too that Debray's own critique of the 'out-of-touch' diplomatic services echoed one Debray was himself guilty of. Namely that his own 'ENS' training had provided him with such a richness of vocabulary and complexity of syntax that the book's communicability was impaired, and that thereby his message and recommendations would not reach their desired destination.

Jurg Altwegg (§5) also was unwilling to mince words. Here, he concluded was something like classic Gaullist doctrine, paradoxically cobbled together as a compromise to try to save the Left's international credibility. Philippe Moreau-Deforges in Politique Étrangère (§6) questioned whether national interest could really always be the base line for foreign policy. He suggested that if one were to concede the same priorities to one's neighbour or competitor, then this would add to international tensions rather than diminish them. Furthermore he saw Debray's plea for a long-term diplomacy as poorly reasoned. Who was to measure what short and long-term actually meant? The same critic however believed that a further significant impetus lay behind the whole argument, that of reversing the decline of French influence in the world. Debray was in this sense expressing a nostalgia for a nineteenth century when French culture and language was the guardian of a universal humanism, unchallenged by Anglo-Saxon flexibility, efficiency, tolerance and eclecticism. In reality, Debray's 'realpolitick' would not change one iota the fact that France was a nation amongst other nations with no particular exemplarity to offer.
In 1984, then, Debray's writing was almost exclusively in the domain of policy. Whilst in an obvious respect this was infused with long-standing personal concern about how one can best help under-developed countries, it certainly introduced the notion of how France could benefit reciprocally from the way forward that he recommended. But in this sense the work appeared to fall between two stools, and explained a good deal the lack of sympathy and comprehension from his critics. Was it not essentially much more than his attempt to get to grips with socialism's sacred cows? For one could seriously question just where does the socialism end, and the inflated idea of France's 'difference' begin? A difference of course which had been the yardstick of Gaullism in foreign affairs. Since *La Puissance et les Rêves* comprised for the most part a critique of an existing set of circumstances, its practical recommendations seemed too vague and even idealistic in themselves.

One could construct an argument too to suggest that here are the seeds of Debray and Mitterrand moving for the first time in opposite directions. For if the book could be interpreted as a whine, (dressed up as an intellectual proposition), that socialism's 1981 appointee's were not having things their own way in the international field, then Debray's argument in this book, in retrospect has been certainly lost, and could suggest why in ensuing years he turned away from this kind of work. There has after all been little to indicate a rise in French international profile. Mitterrand was to focus his policies a good deal more towards Europe during the remainder of his leadership, and if elsewhere France was to gain a singularity, it certainly did not occur in the vacuum left by the USSR, but more probably in the realm of the human rights whose 'raison d'être' Debray had so castigated. After all Bernard Kouchner has acquired a fame, influence, and a credibility on a French, and even a world stage, which Debray has not.
Chapter 11 Notes


7 - In 1988, shortly after his departure from the 'Conseil d'Etat', *Tous Azisuts*, published by Odile Jacob, appeared. This book dealt specifically with French independence in the field of defence.


9 - *La Puissance et les Rêves*, p.207.


11 - This was to be the principal theme of *Les Empires contre l'Europe*.


13 - ibid., p.76.

14 - ibid., p.68.

15 - ibid., p.165.

16 - ibid., p.79.

17 - ibid., p.111.

18 - ibid., p.49.

19 - ibid., p.73.

21 - Ibid., p.43.
22 - Ibid., p.235.
23 - Ibid., p.164.
24 - Ibid., p.246.
26 - Ibid., p.201.
27 - Ibid., p.203.
30 - Ibid., p.257. It may be relevant to point out here that to date there is no record of any Debray pronouncements upon the 'Rainbow Warrior' affair of 1985. A silence he probably kept because of his official position at that time, but an issue which certainly focusses the mind about the primacy of national interest as discussed in La Puissance et les Rêves, and upon which Debray ought eventually to have made some reference.
32 - Ibid., p.206.
33 - Ibid., p.208.
34 - Ibid., p.142.
35 - Ibid., p.162.
36 - Ibid., p.145.
37 - Debray, Régis, Critique de la Raison Politique, Gallimard, 1981.
38 - La Puissance et les Rêves, p.279.
39 - Ibid., p.238.
40 - Ibid., p.288.
41 - Ibid., p.125. One could argue nonetheless here that US experience in Vietnam placed a flaw in Debray's analysis, for American national interest had not in this instance proven to be impregnable. Looked at from another angle, the war had actually made Washington eventually re-assess what constituted its best interests.
42 - Ibid., p.134.
43 - ibid., p.166.
44 - ibid., p.180.
45 - ibid., p.172.
46 - ibid., p.276.
47 - 'Quel rôle pour la France?', p.118.
48 - ibid., p.117.
49 - La Puissance et les Rêves, p.253.
50 - ibid., p.254.
51 - ibid., p.254.
52 - 'Loin des rêves l'impuissance', La Quinzaine Littéraire, 16-30 avril 1984, p.27, (Guy Konopniki).
53 - 'Transhuances idéologiques' Le Monde, 12 juin 1984, (Alain Duhasse1).
54 - 'Un iconocaste à l'Elysée'.
55 - Altegg, p.197.
Having expounded the logic for a new diplomacy, Debray was to continue with work in the same field by engaging a 'non-ideological discussion', (2) of reliable density, upon what he believed was the 'epic hallucination' (3) of 'the East' versus 'the West'. It was again in no small part due his advisory missions around the world, and of thus having spoken with a great number of experts, (4) that he claimed to have some personal credibility to comment in this field. However, Les Empires contre l'Europe, published in 1985, (5) has certainly lost most of its short-lived relevance now that the Soviet block no longer exists. A mere five years after publication it read in many ways as just another political period piece, another stage (or source) on Debray's intellectual itinerary, or perhaps, in view of the collapse of the Soviet bloc, a piece of intellectual clairvoyance. In fact Debray claimed that this three hundred and sixty page 'dossier' was more akin to a piece of journalism than to a political essay since it involved an ongoing interpretation of events. (6)

Notwithstanding this, (or what Philippe Moreau-Desforges described as Debray's 'démarche du philosophe pédagogue'), (7) in repeating here several of the main arguments from La Puissance et les Rêves, Debray essentially set out to attack the a-priori, simplifying, and almost universal consensus (broadcast by 'Directors of the Public Conscience in France' (8) - the intellectuals), that there existed a clear global scenario of a 'Free World' opposing a subversive infiltrating Totalitarianism. An idea which had been exaggerated by the Parisian intellectual class, in conjunction
with the media, both of whom, since the appearance of the *Gulag Archipelago* of 1975, and followed by Afghanistan, and unrest in Poland, had increasingly favoured a rapprochement with the USA. A dominant, yet reductionist notion that if Europe failed to fall in behind America inside the Atlantic Alliance, then this would be at the cost of all of our perils. And Debray went on to argue the case that French reflexes about the USSR, still emotively conditioned by words like the 'Gulag', visions of the 'KGB' present on every street corner, or the supposition that the Russians would throw everything in some mad attack upon the West, (9) was in fact an obsession peculiar to France. (10). In an interview given at the time of publication of *Les Empires contre l'Europe* Debray stated further, 'La soviétologie française me semble un exercice philosophique franco-français et n'atteint pas à la cheville les travaux des Américains ou des Britanniques', (11) and in a subsequent discussion (12) he was even to suggest that the French press, much more ideologically motivated than its Anglo-Saxon equivalent, was a prime contributor to upholding the illusion. (13)

In essence though, *Les Emptre contre l'Europe* affirmed that France, and by extension, Europe, had a superpower ally in the USA, which was infinitely more hegemonic than they were all led to believe, and that they were similarly opposing an 'ogre' who was much less terrifying than portrayed. Debray's very different reading of this ideological conflict therefore sought to escape what he saw as a very blinkered attitude of unconditional US support. And he attempted to demonstrate the dangers run not only in accepting a linguistic glossing over of some hard evidence about decline in Soviet power, but also the refusal to recognise an insidious cultural and political American domination of Europe. For in his estimation, what had now changed was that the first ever global empire in history, the USA, had a record number of supposed sovereign States underneath it, whilst its purported main competitor, the USSR was in fact a backward and lethargic contrast to it. In a world where the Soviet Union was indeed militarised but not militarist at all, (14) the former 'balance' of power had become a myth.
He began his expose of how European thinking was out of touch with such realities by exploring the logic of the 'NATO' Atlantic alliance. He reminded his readers that whilst De Gaulle had taken France out of NATO's military section in 1965, she continued to contribute to its civil budget, and thereby remained part of a confederation of states, dating back to 1949, which had been originally set up to deal with regional security. But what had been born of a fear of Stalin after Berlin in 1948, had now become an undemocratic protectorate, (18) dressed up as an alliance, but which was controlled by one member. Quite simply, NATO was now a system on auto-pilot, (16) or literally a 'machine à englober' (17) for transmitting and validating the interests of US expansionism. (18)

The blame for veering away from an original explicit agreement about defence into this tacit 'arrangement', Debray agreed, could not to be laid at America's door alone. It had been moreover a simple social mechanism, rather than a machination, which had been at work here. This was quite simply because, out of any insecurity, there emerges a system of defence unifying the weak to the strong, be it called Seigneurie, Empire, Republic, Coalition, Alliance, or Bloc. (19) But, Europe ought not, he argued, be duped into ignoring the basic double-think at play here. For attempting to label leadership as partnership, institution as community, hegemony as solidarity, and subordination as co-ordination implied the contradiction of exalting sovereignty and yet praising loyalty at the same time. (20). If quite naturally French and European political leaders of the Right had over the years remained reluctant to draw attention to their continued financial, military and industrial dependance upon this 'Loi du Grand Frère', (21) they were nonetheless using the success of nuclear dissuasion to justify a particular politics, and thus dressing up their ideology as strategy. (22) It may well have been preferable to be led by a modern democracy rather than than a retrograde oligarchy like the USSR, but the USA too should be recognised precisely for what it was, a leader interested in status quo. (23) And a leader not so scrupulous about democracy as to exclude the Portugal of Salazar, or the Greece of the Generals from the fold.
Debray was to suggest that the very success of this one-way system, which tended to use fear as a means of control, (24) in fact resembled the Warsaw Pact in that it had engendered a dependency which excluded other potential systems of defence. Into the bargain of course the support of a faithful European 'valet' in arms made the whole enterprise for the US both more effective and less costly. (25)

Fundamentally, Debray's book was about how those states inside the NATO alliance could wrench themselves away from a peacetime 'suivisme malheureux' (26) in an important section of foreign policy no longer in existence for their very best interests. How could they get away from a system which applied national choices in one society to international security? The members of the Atlantic Alliance, he accepted, may well have had common ideals, but that did not imply that they necessarily had the same interests, at the same time. (27) For Debray, those facts in themselves called for a differentiated vision of international defence strategy, and one which could safeguard our singularities and our freedom to be different.

By withdrawing from NATO in 1965 Debray believed that France, with her own nuclear capacity, had to some extent exposed America, and begun to tackle this very question of dependency. Indeed, in one sense even this decision had been a belated one since with the development of intercontinental missiles in 1958, NATO had become obsolete in that America could no longer guarantee its own preservation and thus no responsive guarantee for Europe. (28) US strategic policy anyway, by 1967, had officially become one of 'flexible response' rather than massive automatic reprisal upon the USSR. So if even then the Americans were reserving themselves the right, or the refusal of a nuclear riposte upon Russia, by what logic was Europe still dependent upon them if manifestly 'flexibility' really meant that our securities were not indivisible? And if ultimately 'SDI', the American nuclear shield, was to make nuclear world war impossible, (whilst permitting the possibility of a limited nuclear war - limited to Europe of course), did not the credibility of clinging on to NATO become less and less comprehensible?
Whilst Debray was certainly not advocating a blanket neutrality for France or for Europe, it was his conviction that the urgent re-think of all of these strategic relations was overdue. Did it truly make sense, as Russia visibly declined (29) for France (and by extension) Europe to acquiesce as a political satellite in the US orbit when she was capable now of organising and taking responsibility for her own defence? After all, the by-passing of Europe in Washington's discussions with Moscow was a matter of fact. Equally, if the USA no longer had a monopoly of wealth and advanced technology in the modern world, (30) was it logical to accept being an eternally lesser member of that Western network of Atlantic Alliance, NATO, and G7, which all swayed reliably to the whims of the US electorate?

In a later article Debray even suggested that Europeans risked becoming the zombies of a sub-America (31) if they remained inside this strait-jacket dependency, which invariably frowned upon singularity, viewed divergence as dissidence, and considered submission to be a moral obligation. (32) A power which decided who our 'bêtes noirs' should be, which could veto trade, influence employment and budgets, (33) and who could, through the network of established diplomacy, demonstrate that 'the massage is the message'. (34) All the more vexing in that America's attention was now being drawn increasingly towards the Pacific economy, with the Atlantic Alliance but a sub-system to them, yet remaining the primary reference for us on this side of the ocean. (35)

These norms which Washington has been able to vehicle so effectively in the field of strategy had only been made possible in Debray's view because of the world-wide success of the American media. (36) Such had been the efficiency, omnipresence and seductive power of the 'American Dream', that even France's intellectual elites had had their critical faculties undermined and become ardent collaborators. They had even become part of an infatuated brain drain towards 'L'Amérique du Miracle', (37) and ultimately a phenomenon of conservation within the intellectual market whose logic Debray explored in both Le Pouvoir Intellectuel and Cours de Médiologie. (38) For it was in these two works that he argued that influential thinkers, as carriers of ideas, become carried along in turn by the audio-visual
medium, and thereby simply reinforce public opinion. (39) The illustration
of an economic law about gaining high profile, where allying oneself to the
strong is dressed up as proof of being right, (40) but which he also derided
as 'la servilité des allogènes'. (41) It was with perhaps a little false
modesty that Debray suggested, that his theories here would therefore stand
little chance of making any sort of impression in the conformism which
reigned inside the French media at this time, (42) and where ideologically
the roads were blocked off to dangerous men like himself. (43)

To return to French policy however, Debray asked just where was the
evidence in this state of affairs (44) of French defence interests focussing
first and foremost upon French priorities, much as Germany had done with
her own 'ostpolitik' rationale? Had not Europe's, and specifically
France's need for an independent 'self-defence' become a glaringly obvious
evidence? (45) Was there not the need now for France to pursue her own
dialogue with the Soviets towards whom she pointed her primary military
dissuasion? (46) He claimed that it would not compromise France's solidarity
at all to be single-minded, and that the overdue requirement for the
organisation of a strategic re-balancing should not be maliciously
interpreted by her partners as an organised unbalancing. (47)

Perhaps it was not surprising that one critic, Alain Besançon should
see that the malice, if it did exist, was coming from the direction of
Debray himself. He dismissed this whole exposé as an illustration of
Debray's long-standing and visceral hatred of the United States. (48) But
Debray countered the accusation in an interview (49) at the time, and was
quick to point out that his argument was not an anti-American argument at
all. It was simply the case that the logic of domination had neither colour
nor tradition, and had throughout history belonged to different and
disparate nations, empires or religions. His views were also, he
maintained, the very obverse of that traditional right-wing stance which
had allied anti-modernism with anti-Americanism.

The 'myth' of the Soviet superpower, and discussed in the longest
section in Les Empires contre l'Europe, persisted in Debray's opinion
simply because the West needed its bogeyman. This presence, or motif of the
'Other', which conveniently served to aggregate one's own side was a social phenomena that Debray had already considered in the theoretical Critique de la Raison Politique of 1981, and in its application here explained why there is a military duty everywhere to exaggerate the capacity and commitment of one's adversary. (§9) But if of course an ideologically motivated fear naturally works against change, then that very constant, in political terms, that was proving too to be a nourishment for a growing ultra-conservatism within Europe.

However, our approximations about USSR and her expansionism, simply did not stand up to close examination. By all evidence here was an empire in decline. This was even the case in terms of allies. NATO, which begun with eleven members now had sixteen, whilst the Eastern bloc had in 1985 two less than its original eight adherents. Furthermore, Russia was still being labelled by the West as the land of the 'Gulag' when the Gulag no longer existed. (§1) It was contested from within by dissidents, subject to inexorable national tensions arising within its frontiers, weighed down by ruinous satellite regimes, defeated by an assertive nationalism in Afghanistan, and at the same time struggling to maintain standards of living. Was this the progress of an international ideology whose last victory in Europe had occurred in the 1940's? The Communist parties in the West were now nothing more than very marginal and stigmatised pressure groups, with minimal media exposure, and they were in some cases little more than amical associations of veterans. (§2) Soviet Communism had quite obviously failed to reverse the integration of the proletariat into the social and political framework of Bourgeois Europe. Where it did appear to have had some successes in the Third World, manifestly the great period of wars of liberation was now over, and those same countries now wanted investment, economic stability, and industrial performance accessible only through their former colonisers. A thirst for enrichment which was infinitely more powerful than the acceptance of military protection provided by the Soviets, who offered only refuge, and zero inspiration. (§3) At home, the USSR was an inverted Marxism which had ended up preserving
oligarchies and bureaucracies, and providing nothing for its citizens but control. Elsewhere, where it needed the faithful, it had only clients. (54)

If, as Debray believed, the global issues of famine, population, the monetary system, technology, Far Eastern competition, and nationalist antagonisms, had become the most important issues for Europe to confront, he described in detail the futility therefore of obsessively divining the next moves of the Kremlin. A closer analysis of that particular threat to peace, whose exaggerated capabilities had stifled the self-confidence in a European independence, would indeed reveal that Soviet power was being defined in an obsolete way with concepts from the nineteenth century. (55) For where once, territory, population, steel production and soldiers had been the main indicators of power, they had now been replaced by the capacity to disseminate information: be it technical, political or cultural. However well-armed Russia may have been, and however capable of militarily overrunning a country, she had quite simply lost out in the realm of indirect opinion-making over the world's airwaves. The USSR in contrast to the USA had virtually no capability for disseminating 'their' message, and thus culturally influencing other societies from the inside. That crucial gravitational force, with its own strategic consequences (56) was self-evidently a revolution the soviets had missed out on. (57)

Because The Berlin wall had not been capable of stopping radio waves, those living in the Russian sphere of influence sought to rid themselves of Russian presence, and turned towards the 'drug' of US culture. There may have been a complex equation of arms between the superpowers, but their material imbalance in terms of mental imagery; TV, cinema, music, press, dreams, clothes, artefacts, or household goods was incalculable. (58) A demonstration, however insidious, that the most efficacious power of the modern state consists in making its socio-political system become the very 'will' of those it reaches. A point at which, being like the yankee becomes attractive, a promotion, and prestigious. (59) Ten years after 'defeat' in Vietnam, USA relations with the far East had reached a zenith, (60) and two thirds of the world's population were listening to and watching CNN, IBM.
AFP and Reuters for their reality and truth. An illustration that whilst 'L'Est énerve l'Ouest, L'Ouest innerve le monde, Sud compris', (61)

It was this indirect diffused cultural power of the USA, far outperforming any Russian military potential, which now best fitted the description of universal mission. Or if indeed there was a totalitarian expansionist vision in the world then that was the green flag of Islam, not the red one of Marx. In fact one critic, Claude Derrienic (62) believed that the hidden warning in *Les Empires contre l'Europe* was that we should all now be re-focussing upon the Islamic states who had most successfully managed to rid themselves of the United States without falling into the arms of Moscow, a feat which Europe had not managed to achieve at all.

Debray suggested too that even if the USSR's own media had been capable of competing in this particular domain, then it could no longer peddle the illusion that it was in the slightest way incarnating socialism, (63) or that the Soviets themselves still believed that history was on their side. Illustrating here the law he had expounded originally in *Critique de la Raison Politique*, (64) where he had contended that power is a function of belief, (65) and that ideology, as a process of collective organisation, withers the moment it no longer speaks to the imagination or the soul, the Soviet Union was undoubtedly losing ground in this respect too. Disney was drawing the crowds of course, and not Lenin's mausoleum. (66) Patriotic Russia in the war had had its comrades and heroes ready to die for the cause, but forty years on, totalitarian Russia had only soldiers and agents. (67) In the eyes of the world the Soviet Union now incarnated only itself, and in losing its transcendency so it lost its ascendancy. (68) Because its official ideology had become an impediment which subordinated prosperity to security, (69) stagnation was the inevitable outcome because change was not a value. (70) In a country where propaganda exalted only the collective, the consequence was a cynical individualist discontent amongst citizens, and a deep disorder beneath an apparent order. (71) Inside a regime which was entrenched, predictable and colourless, the taste for 'Soviet' patriotism, militancy or sacrifice had disappeared. Without the
facility for assimilation or readjustment, as in nature, forecast Debray, such an organism would be the least equipped to survive. (72)

Whilst Debray had first discussed the matter in *La Puissance et les Rêves*, he again returned in this strategic context to the importance of reading societies' battlefields in terms other than those of left and right (or wrong and right). For one had to recognise, in his opinion, that the strongest pulsions to be reckoned with today, and re-awakening underneath the superpower ideologies posturing at each other, were in fact nationalist and religious ones, and that looking at older maps would be our best references for understanding the tensions in the world. For having diagnosed and de-constructed the ideological reflexes of 'international' relations at one level, his argument would have been incomplete had it not taken into account what he was to term a global relational invariant between scientific and technical progress on the one hand, countered by identity and a return to source in the guise of religion, culture, and nationalism on the other. (73) A phenomenon précised in a complementary article's title as 'L'Universal explosion of particularismes'. (74) A further application of his theory that once the ethnic is seriously menaced by progress, homogenisation and atomisation, then it resurges with more regression, more demarcation and more tribalisation, (75) and accepts modernity only within the securing ballast of the archaic. Behaviour currently evident in the world proving that the supposed primacy of strategic confrontation, as orchestrated by two great planetary causes was but a pretence. (76)

Debray believed this ethnic renaissance to be evident within Europe itself. He suggested that as well as the most obvious cases in Ireland and Croatia, European Jews and Muslims were becoming more Zionist and fundamentalist, and that the British were now more full of 'orgueil'. In response to the very same promptings within himself, he too, as a French Socialist had become less socialist, once in power, and was more concerned with the status of his own culture, that of Republican France menaced by global standardisation. (77) Particularly relevant in this context, (and in the event particularly clairvoyant on Debray's behalf) was Russia itself,
with its own resurgence of separatist and sectarian cultures as part of an inexorable emancipation from a State without society. (78) There where communism had been specifically introduced as the saviour of the nation, it had proven incapable of transcending the nation. (79) Those who still believed Debray to be a 'dyed-in-the-wool' Marxist could hardly dismiss him as such now, for he was emphasising here a belief that its doctrine was quite simply not 'old' enough and therefore lacked the penetration and resistance of a culture, or a religion. Militants, theorists, and veterans of wars of Liberation throughout the world were seeing Das Kapital devoured by the Koran (60) by virtue of an older history burgeoning underneath modern ideology. (81) The peoples of the world might look westwards for their material help, but they still looked heavenward for their spiritual satisfaction. (82)

There was certainly no shortage of interpretation and criticism surrounding Les Empires contre l'Europe, although most strikingly, as far as the Soviet Union was concerned, very few commentators were gazing in the same crystal ball as Debray. Gerard Leclerc from the far right Royaliste (83) confidently asserted against Debray's analyses that nothing, be it in the short, medium or long term indicated the disappearance of the 'menace totalitaire', which 'pour n'être plus stalinienne n'en continue pas moins d'étouffer toutes les tentatives d'affranchissement'. Benoit Malon, on behalf of the 'Commission d'Etudes sur L'Imperialisme' (84) railed against this 'éminent spécialiste de l'Empérialisme' who had so under-estimated the advance of the despotic colonising power of the Soviets, with their continuing skill at patiently infiltrating small countries with military supplies, advice and propaganda. Just how, he asked, had Debray understood the mood of the people in Russia anyway when his only contacts with them had been on 'official' visits?

Liberation predictably targeted Debray himself rather than the book's content and accused him of a 'plaisir aristocratique de déplaire'. (85) The reviewer in Le Matin (85) could not accept that the 'tout-Paris de la politique et des lettres' had effectively sold out to the USA, and he concluded that Debray was being deliberately provocative to suggest this
was the case. In the same vein, André Fontaine from Le Monde in a review titled 'Le Dernier Gaullist' (87) believed that Debray was once again gaining a certain satisfaction by arguing against consensus ideas. But he did make the observation that whilst there was no doubt that at that time the balance of power appeared to be firmly tipped in the USA's favour, had it not been the case that a mere six or seven years before, under President Carter, America had appeared to be in irremediable decline. In that light could Debray's current theories be read as definitive diagnoses? After all it was Debray, he reminded his readers, who in 1967, had written in Révolution dans la Révolution, that 'Le dernier Empire du Monde a commencé son agonie' – ie; the USA.

Pierre Hassner, also from Le Monde, (88) doubted whether the implicit attack upon intellectual thinking in France, which he believed to be the prime motivation behind the book, was capable of producing a counterbalancing 'Debray effect' to the 'Solzhenitsyneffect ' of 1975. Alain Bensaïnon (89), read into this work what he termed the 'Maurrasien' error of irrationally choosing the wrong enemy, since he saw in it a fundamental plea that between the two superpowers France should most forcefully oppose the United States, and search for an 'understanding' with the weaker USSR. Claude Derriennic in Arguments (90) also believed Debray to be demonstrating a pro-Sovietism, and asked to what extent this 'fou du roi' was in fact articulating a foreign policy which Mitterrand simply could not voice so explicitly.

François Gorand in Commentaire (91) also pertinently asked just what was the relationship between Debray's ideas here and the practical advisory role he held during the writing of the book. He accused Debray of not making clear whether Mitterrand's solidarity with the Atlantic Alliance was due to purely conjunctural and electoral factors, or if indeed Les Empires contre l'Europe was Debray's own critique of official policy. He went on to suggest that the book was in essence guilty fanning the flames of French nationalism as way of compensating for the economic failures of the Socialists. He did finally come to the conclusion that despite the 'prose léchée et nerveuse qui s'enivre parfois de son propre brio' (92) advisor
Debray still remained a marginal within the French intellectual landscape, and could justifiably be accused of demonstrating a nostalgia for past French glories. Maurice Maschino in *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, (93) similarly regretted that the voice which had once spoken for all the 'wretched of the earth' was now looking at international matters with such a very nationalist bias.

Patrick McCarthy in *The Times Literary Supplement* (94) however suspected that there would have been a good deal of opposition to Debray's views amongst French Socialists, not least because Debray's emphasis that nothing counts for the nation state more than self-interest would have been interpreted by many as a cynical and proud position to take. It appeared to McCarthy as well that there was a certain advocacy of Gaullist foreign policy present here, because Debray was bullishly arguing for French manoeuvre, assertion and influence between the two blocs, whilst seeking to avoid the problems of isolation, and the inconveniencies of heavy alignment. (95) Debray has in interview partly accepted this Gaullist charge, with the proviso that it be labelled a 'neo-gaullism', part of the contemporary arena, and with a necessarily more European dimension than was contained within De Gaulle's vision of French 'grandeur'. (96) Nonetheless, and in connection with this very point, one of the flaws of *Les Empires contre l'Europe* was indeed some lack of clarity as to when and where Debray was referring to France alone, or to Europe as a whole. It frequently appeared to be taken as read that the interests of France were forcibly those to be prescribed for Europe. Whilst it may have been palatable to view this pursuit of independence as part of the combat for the nations of Europe (and even accept that a strong France is a prerequisite for a strong Europe), the desirability of a Paris-Bonn-Madrid axis which he proposed, (97) ironically omitted London. Yet it was from there that the strongest and most similar argument to Debray's, (unity, but with singularity), had prevailed. Pierre Hassner in particular (98) was to deride what he viewed as a naive unrealistic 'francophonie érigée en nouvel acteur international transidéologique et transgéographique', for here, in
his opinion, was a greater myth than the one Debray was trying to dismantle.

Is it not finally a tribute to Debray's acumen to recall that it was but four years after the publication of *Les Empires contre l'Europe* that the Berlin wall was to fall? The very fact that he had anticipated in the mid-1960's the decline, and eventual demise of the USSR makes the remarks of some of his critics of the time now look hopelessly wrong. One could assess the importance of this work by referring again to *Le Monde* critic Pierre Hassner who wrote that since between 1975 and 1980, seven countries in the world had, either with or without Soviet help, become Communist States, and asked,

'Où a-t-il (Debray) vu l'inverse? Où a-t-il vu un régime communiste devenir non communiste? Télévision et ordinateurs n'entament pas nécessairement et immédiatement le pouvoir et les ambitions de la Nomenklatura, L'auteur s'expose à retomber dans une série monotone d'erreurs contre laquelle, lui, qui a tant appris et si peu changé, aurait dû être vacciné par l'expérience du siècle'. (99)

Debray's case could well rest right there. Yet in several respects *Les Empires contre l'Europe* leaves the reader with a sense of Debray having skirted several issues at some length. Perhaps this was because, as in *La Puissance et les Rêves*, the project for France (or Europe) was too vague, idealistic and indeed too franco-centric. Whilst the book sold out in France in the first week of publication (100) no-one has ever seen fit to translate it. It resembled the long, if erudite analysis of *La Critique des Armes*, yet one finishes reading the book with the impression that France, like every country in the world would like the best of both worlds, and that Debray had not after all suggested a practical way in which a medium-sized power could really achieve an increased prestige, either against the USA, or even within Europe against the increasing power of Germany. In his contention that in the late twentieth century, 'Nous ne vivons pas l'ére des révolutions mais des restaurations' (101), one is bound to ask just what kind of French restauration he envisaged.
One realises too that Debray was soon to be a little less than convinced by the enthusiasm of his own message. Looking back to 1985, he was to rather sardonically, and perhaps too dismissively, write in Les Masques, in 1988, about La Puissance et les Rêves and Les Empires contre l'Europe, 'je pondai deux volumes'. (101) Les Empires contre l'Europe has been the last, to date, of his large-scale political volumes.
Chapter 12. Notes

1 - 'Les Empires contre l'Europe', Panorama, France-Culture, radio broadcast, 14 mai 1985, (Debray in debate with J. Duchateau, A. Spire et al), transcript available at the publishers Gallimard.


3 - ibid., back cover notes.

4 - ibid., p.23.

5 - Debray, Régis, Les Empires contre l'Europe, Gallimard, 1985, Collection 'Le Monde Actuel'.

6 - ibid., p.11.


8 - Les Empires contre l'Europe, p.15. In Tous Aziauts, Odile Jacob, 1985, p.67, Debray went as far as to name names; Besançon, Kriegel, Revel, and Glucksmann.

9 - ibid., p.228.

10 - From an arguably more objective standpoint, the English critic Patrick McCarthy too, in his review of Debray's book, 'Restoring the Republic', in The Times Literary Supplement, 13 dec, 1985, p.1418, stated his belief that fear of the Soviet threat had been a particularly French obsession.

11 - 'Debray Régis, Il ne faut pas avoir trop peur des Russes', Libération, 22 avril 1985, (Interview with Debray). Many, outside France, would have argued with Debray that by 1985, the Reagan/Thatcher-generated 'Russophobia' was very much at a peak, and just as virulent as in France.


13 - This is again a riposte, albeit somewhat belated, to the intellectual 'Nouvelle Philosophie' vogue of anti-totalitarianism in the late 1970's and early 1980's. A short-hand for anti-sovietism, and which in part accounted for some of the controversy surrounding Les Empires contre l'Europe, and the plethora of articles and interviews appearing alongside it.

14 - Les Empires contre l'Europe, p.263.

15 - ibid., p.45.

16 - ibid., p.53.

17 - ibid., p.87.

18 - ibid., p.41.
19 - ibid., p.54.
20 - ibid., p.55.
21 - ibid., p.55.
22 - ibid., p.152.
23 - ibid., p.57.
24 - ibid., p.51.
25 - ibid., p.104.
26 - ibid., p.141.
27 - ibid., p.81.
28 - ibid., p.88.
29 - ibid., p.163.
30 - ibid., p.93.
31 - 'Il ne faut pas avoir peur des Russes'.
32 - Les Empires contre l'Europe, p.93.
33 - ibid., p.80.
34 - ibid., p.71.
35 - ibid., p.109.
36 - ibid., p.126.
37 - ibid., p.129.
40 - ibid., p.128.
41 - ibid., p.132.
42 - ibid., p.342.
43 - ibid., p.344.
44 - ibid., p.21.
45 - ibid., p.151.
46 - ibid., p.332.
47 - ibid., p.68.
49 - Radio interview of Debray, *Agora*, with P. Gélinet
51 - ibid., p.15.
52 - ibid., p.303.
53 - ibid., p.230.
54 - ibid., p.234.
55 - ibid., p.170.
56 - ibid., p.135.
57 - 'Il ne faut pas avoir peur des Russes'.
59 - ibid., p.115.
60 - 'Il ne faut pas avoir peur de Russes'.
66 - ibid., p.250.
68 - ibid., p.204.
It could be re-stated here that Debray's analysis remained unconvincing to critics like Alain Besançon, who in 'Regis Debray's choice of Enemies' reminded Debray that the USSR had nonetheless been living with its mortal weaknesses for the preceding sixty nine years.
92 - ibid., p.94.
94 - 'Restoring the Republic'.
96 - Radio interview of Debray, Agora, with P. Gélineau.
98 - 'Sur la balançoire des mythes'.
99 - ibid.,
100 - 'Les Empires contre l'Europe', Orientations, no.15/16, 4 mai 1985.
Debray stated in an interview shortly after the publication of *Les Empires contre l'Europe* that it was to have been his last political book. This was because he was convinced that he had now said all he needed to on the questions of diplomacy and strategy, and that it would have been fruitless to 'ouvrir une boutique et vendre mes petites idées'. (1) But he reneged on his promise to himself three years on, with two works appearing in 1969. Firstly, *Que vive la République*, (2) which covered a new political, and home-front harangue, followed by *Tous Azimuts. L'Europe Stratégique*. (3) Logically the second of these, as a continuation and some repetition of the themes from *La Puissance et les Rêves*, and *Les Empires contre l'Europe* is dealt with here. Considerably shorter than its two precursors, *Tous Azimuts* was published by 'Odile Jacob' for the 'Fondation pour les Études de Défense Nationale', (4) and one could argue that this work too, appearing in the year before German reunification and the subsequent demise of the Soviet bloc, was most prophetic in its perception of the way in which European security was losing its former demarcation lines, and that consequently NATO's 'raison d'être' was almost moribund. (5) In fact Debray declared that one of the reasons for being tempted back into this field was because Europe had once again been excluded from the Gorbachev/Bush arms reduction agreements. (6)

But if *Tous Azimuts* fundamentally developed the logic for an independent European defence, to be directed, as Debray's title suggested, at no pre-conceived enemy but precisely 'in all directions', it was also an exposé marrying philosophy, history and strategy about why 'Notre Europe: une amnésie baptisée espérance' (7) would always be, in his view, a military pipedream. Whilst *Les Empires contre l'Europe* had mapped out the European dichotomy, of being, as he saw it, locked into an anachronistic strategic system, and illogically consigning our defences to a country which could by now be matched economically by Europe, (8) this book went on to explore the kind of European defence which could be rationally attempted against those realities of a new, and different world order.
In place of an apparent expanding economic and technical order on the surface, Debray's conviction was that there remained a strong undercurrent of disorder in Europe, both in minds and on maps. (9) In the face of this the continent urgently required a complete military re-think for a twenty-first century, (10) with different problems to confront. Problems whose sources, as he had already stated, lay in impending destabilisation behind the Iron Curtain with the rise in nationalist and religious fervour there. These were what Debray described as drives which would never be reined in by laws or directives. And those believing that the European continent's age-old antagonisms could ever be combatted with NATO tank divisions, which had been set up to deal with totally different matters, were quite simply misguided. In view of the rest of Europe's hesitant response to the Yugoslav problem of the 1990's one could suggest Debray to have been right.

It was his prediction that out of the evaporation of the ideological confrontation between liberalism and communism there would forebodingly come about the re-activation of the nation, the minority, the suppressed, the religious, and the ethnic. (11) Potential enmities of such complexity that we might even live to regret the orderliness of the Cold War whose equilibrium and dissuasion had kept minorities apart. Indeed the law of the jungle appeared in his estimation to be re-asserting itself, for as 'Les éléphants rentrent chez eux, les tigres peuvent s'entre-déchirer'. (12) Debray envisaged thus in 1989 a post-communist Europe which was likely to engender pan-Slavic aspirations, (13) a Russia susceptible to the return of a reactionary regime, (14) and a Western Europe no longer a haven in the comforting shadow of Washington's nuclear dissuasion.

It was the quasi religious and closed nature of national cultures which had ultimately led to the formation of states, that Debray had previously explored at length in Critique de la Raison Politique, and Les Empires contre l'Europe. Hence his conviction here that European history, a phenomenon of a different and more deep-rooted order than that of a modern day union of economic markets, (15) would implacably have the final word
over 'Europiste' ideology. And this would lead to a future he termed as techno-mystical, with the neo in society activating the arches. And modernity combined with a return to national sources would mean that the next century would resemble in this sense the nineteenth, much more than it would the twentieth century.

Debray's meditation on European defence effectively began though with the reminder that since the Common Market 'Treaty of Rome' in 1956, Nation States inside Europe had never sought a common defence policy. But why had this been avoided? Would it not have been a logical extension of that call for increased European cooperation in other fields like economics, science, technology, the judiciary, currency, and politics? Why had a federal defence not come anywhere near to fruition given that the idea of confluence elsewhere had almost become a modern invocation. Aside a handful of bilateral agreements amongst European states, military budgets remained national matters, and there was little other cooperation in this field other than an exchange of information.

This all begged the question then whether it made sense to exalt the idea of Europe if Europeans really did not know how their construction would be defended? Or from where the soldier/citizens willing to die for a Federal Europe would come. Heads of State may well have proclaimed the realities of a business-Europe, but a very obvious hiatus between the Europe of commodities, and the Europe of military strategy clearly existed. Traditional economic, political and territorial frontiers were all fading away, but not at all with the same consequences. Brussels was at the centre of industrial politics, but incompetent in the politics of armaments. Exactly where then, Debray asked, was a European response, beyond NATO, in a world where now an Islamic missile attack upon Toulon looked as credible as a Soviet attack upon Hamburg? And particularly as he deemed that the Europeans were currently locked into a Maginot mentality, totally unable to respond quickly and flexibly outside of and East/West missile scenario?

Appearing almost immediately to contradict his own warning however, Debray returned to his fundamental thesis that the idea of a durable
continent-wide military federation, which would inevitably imply an attack upon states' sovereignty and even their culture, (25) could not work. For whilst pluralism, within a loosely federated Europe were possible, and even desirable in other domains, he believed that it could never be transferred to the area of European defence quite simply because defence and national culture were bound up in the same kind of libido. (26) Since so many states were subject to age-old reflexes, (27) it was precisely the mosaic of deep history, language and religion forming their past which irrevocably divided them, or united them only temporarily and against their will, as the Iron Curtain had demonstrated. Ultimately if any enfeeblement of those states, brought about by the loss of defensive capabilities occurred, then this, he felt, would lead to a scenario like an Orwellian nightmare, where multinational communities, protestant, catholic, muslim, and atheist, each with their own laws and chiefs, would inexpiably affront each other 'à la Lebanon'. (28)

With such potentially drastic consequences, today's prophets of Europe, who like the Marxists before them were working in linear fashion towards a 'toujours mieux' (29) were in Debray's view profoundly wrong, in that neither anticipated the inevitable boomerang effect of a resurgence in national pride in their programmes. He even accused Jean Monnet of an infantile Marxism in believing that the economic domain could in itself engender a political unity. (30) Those advocates of a 'United States of Europe' were also targeted because they failed to recognise some very fundamental and very relevant differences between the American and European inheritance. Most importantly American consensus was built against colonial adversaries, and in the same way Europe could only attain a comparable and unquestioned unity in opposition to threat, as she had done in the past against the Mongol, the Barbarian, the Saracen, Bolchevik, or Jew. (31) But against what would a modern European consensus be constituted?

The further error in supporting the ubiquitous call for a fully federated Europe, where the only common language would be legal language, (32) was to forget that Europe was not a concern of peoples at all, but one of elites. Elites whom Debray compared to the thinkers of the
Enlightenment. It was they who had wrongly believed that knowledge would bring an end to religion and superstition, just as their 'enlightened' counterparts of today misguidedly believed that economics and communication technology would be capable of snuffing out the 'malédiction nationale'.

(33)

A further problem moreover which Debray saw in any grand defensive design would concern geography just as much as history. Not only had Europe never had a politically defined eastern limit anyway, (34) but the very idea of a locatable perimeter at all was no less complicated, and not reducable to the map alone. (35) For historical reasons Portugal has had closer ties with Brazil than with almost all of her European 'partners'. The same applied to the relationship between France and North Africa and Germany and Russia. In this respect one was forced to ask where European security had its limits. Would it show its collective mettle if Libya attacked Malta? Was the Argentinian attack upon the Falklands an implicit attack upon Europe? (36) Would Turkey's adherence to the EEC automatically produce a response from Brussels were she to be attacked from Iraq or Russia? Complicating matters further, Debray went on to question whether in fact Europe should even aspire to the status of nuclear super-state in an age when the notion of power was being re-defined. After all, Germany and Japan had arguably become economically strong as a consequence of their very military weakness. (37)

It was only after what appeared like some circumvention then that Debray focussed upon France herself within this defence question. A France which was of course the only continental nuclear power outside of NATO, but also a France, he acknowledged, which had frequently been viewed by others as pretentious, gallo-centric, and chauvinistic. (38) Nonetheless, he asked, was it not now the case that France's logic for remaining outside of NATO was a somewhat schizophrenic position to be in? (39) If the need for NATO no longer existed because the Russian threat had disappeared then why oppose it? If De Gaulle had after all based France's withdrawal from it upon the idea of a French policy independent of the two blocs, why should France now stay outside of that forum (now that only one of the blocs remained),
to be ignored, and neither consulted nor invited to contribute to the new contingencies?

Given that without an effective defence Europe would never compete in the World Order anyway, Debray's solution, as one could have guessed, was certainly not one envisaged under the wing of NATO. No more than it was the advocacy of a defence which locked in everyone's security, and which would have run the risk of the kind of conflict that the pre-1914 treaties ultimately led to. So just what was he hankering after, the reader by now impatiently asked? What defence strategy was going to meet the diverse aspirations and interests of the nations of Europe, harmonise their diverse policies of national defence, yet still crucially avoid mortgaging their sovereignties to 'Europe'. (40)

It was ironic that Debray should conclude more succinctly in a preceding interview rather than in his book, by stating, 'Je vois la défense européenne comme une imbrication d'espaces de sécurité de nature différente et qui n'ont pas besoin d'être homogènes'. (41) Because Europe remained a maximum of diversity in a minimum of space she should begin by weaning herself away from America in a defence 'Tous Azimuts' - where her weapons, and thereby her technology, her diplomacy, and her aid, would point in all directions. However, what was to underpin this confident, come of age strategy for a Europe fully determining her own dissuasion and thus her own destiny? (42). Quite simply, French nuclear capacity.

Such a suggestion would obviously have been unpopular with the British, particularly as Debray suggested that Paris could become the place where the American President would logically come for his strategic talks. (43) And it was surely here that the hidden ideological gallo-centism of this work (which was to appear much more overtly in Que vive la République of the same year), would really have duped no-one. Claiming that the continental nuclear preserve of the French could retain diversity, replace American security, and at the same time save ethnic Europe from herself looked like a convoluted argument for a very unoriginal French military hegenomy. Would those age-old antagonisms to which he attached such importance ever accept French pride of place here? In the real world, would
this argument really have wooed the British nuclear capability away from NATO? Debray never even mentioned a possible Anglo-French nuclear partnership. And was there any evidence at all for the rest of Europe being ready to swap traditional American overbearance for traditional French arrogance? Or even to exchange Cruise and Pershing for French warheads?

In many respects one is bound to ask whether the polemic in Tous Azimuts may well have been better sub-titled 'La France Stratégique' rather than 'L'Europe Stratégique', since it continued Debray's obsession with France retaining an international political and military influence outside of the 'Western' fold. As in his preceding two books he may have brilliantly analysed both the old and the new the forces at play, and the dangers to be avoided, but the practical and realistic way forward seemed to be lacking.

John Howarth (44) in fact situated the impetus for what turned out to be one of the most momentary of his works, as Debray's protest to a growing intellectual consensus in France, in the run up to 1992, which supported a new strategic concept, the 'European Pillar' of NATO. An idea for many which would have allowed France a respectable and orthodox escape route from the increasing isolation of Gaullist strategy. Of course, as those having read Debray's previous two volumes would have known, this was a consensus and a strategy Debray radically opposed.

Jean-Pierre Chevènement who was instrumental in persuading Debray to write this book, and who reviewed it as Socialist Minister of Defence, (45) probably realised that Debray was unlikely to respond with any kind of orthodoxy in these matters, and he summarised it as a catalogue of 'idées dérangeantes', with the obvious pun on deranged and disturbing. He claimed that Debray had been far too quick in anticipating the end of the Russian Empire (it did of however take little more than another year), and reminded readers that France's dissuasive nuclear force was independent anyway, and not under some kind of NATO trusteeship. (46) In agreeing with Debray that the World was becoming a multi-polar, rather than bi-polar place Chevènement believed however that this was a strong argument for retaining
the Atlantic Alliance, and thereby defending values shared by the US and Europe.

*Tous Azimuts*, like its two 'foreign policy' precursors has not been translated. Its influence in France was negligible, and elsewhere it appears to have been a non-event. No doubt many readers would have agreed that on this occasion Debray's heart was ruling his head somewhat, and that his Franco-centric analyses fell short of coinciding with International realities. It has to date been Debray's last contribution to the strategic debate.
Chapter 13. Notes


2 - Debray, Régis, Que vive la République, Odile Jacob, 1989.

3 - Debray, Régis Tous Azimuts, Odile Jacob, 1989.

4 - 'Tous Azimuts' was in fact published by the Odile Jacob publishing house in association with Seuil after a specific request to Debray from the FEDN for him to contribute to the strategic debate.

5 - Tous Azimuts, p.73.

6 - ibid., p.82.

7 - ibid., p.55.

8 - ibid., p.89.

9 - ibid., p.36.

10 - ibid., p.67.

11 - ibid., p.38.

12 - ibid., p.44.

13 - ibid., p.40.

14 - ibid., p.73.

15 - ibid., p.133.

16 - ibid., p.34.

17 - ibid., p.39.

18 - ibid., p.106.

19 - ibid., p.109.

20 - ibid., p.103.

21 - ibid., p.57.

22 - ibid., p.104.

23 - ibid., p.105.
24 - ibid., p.197.
25 - ibid., p.131.
26 - ibid., p.133.
28 - ibid., p.53.
29 - ibid., p.39.
30 - ibid., p.55.
31 - ibid., p.50.
32 - ibid., p.57.
33 - ibid., p.46.
34 - ibid., p.31.
35 - ibid., p.190.
36 - ibid., p.194.
37 - ibid., p.22.
38 - ibid., p.24.


42 - Tous Aziauts, p.215.
43 - ibid., p.82.


46 - France is in fact a member of NATO, but since 1966 has not been part of its military command structure.
In the later stages of the run up to the Presidential elections of 1974, and in an article expressing why he felt that François Mitterrand could effect true change in France, Debray made a first reference to some of the features of the Republican regime which at this time were, he believed, a betrayal of its origins. He indeed attempted a genealogical comparison to the Republic of 1792, to the one of 1974, whereby,

'La République de '92, princesse déchue, humiliait sa fierté sous les coups des promoteurs immobiliers, décorés ventripotents, députés marrons, avocats véreux, tribuns de quatre sous', (3)

Yet such was Debray's confidence in the socialist presidential candidate's ability to do something about this rottenness, and to return the French Republic to what he believed were its socialist principles, that in a pledge of commitment to Mitterrand written in 1981, Debray was to eulogise about this multi-faceted politician him as,

Le psychologue, le moraliste, l'historien, le philosophe, bref l'homme de la rue, s'honorera en saluant au passage ce paysan de Paris qui trace son sillon par tous les temps, bon ou mauvais, sans perdre son nord, ni prendre sa droite pour sa gauche. (4)

In a post-election interview too from October 1981, (5) Debray was to reiterate his conviction that Mitterrand would prevent France from dying as a nation, and that through the new president her pride would be regained.
However, by January 1989, Debray was openly addressing his latest and most caustic piece of political comment, *Que vive La République* (6) 'au Président respecté d'une République humiliée'. (7) This was perhaps perplexing given that the formerly revered President presumably had some hand in the process of that humiliation.

Alain Gagnon, in his work upon the role of intellectuals in modern democracies, (8) in a similar fashion to Max Gallo back in 1983, had questioned in 1987 why no thinkers of the Left in France had emerged to adapt socialist thinking into societies' radically changed power structures, and which in his view had become heavily influenced, even controlled, by the media. It was surely no accident though that following on from the overt display, as well as the collective introspection (9) of the bicentennial celebrations of the French Revolution of the same year, 1989, that Debray should publish just such a plea to inject Modern France with a civic renaissance. For *Que vive la République*, was to be both his version of socialist negligence at the helm, yet also an appeal for the restoration of Republican and thereby French difference. (10) An assertion of particularity which was above all directed against the invasion of an 'individualist' American culture. And whilst Debray's treatise here about the regime at home may well have appeared to have finally severed his ties with foreign diplomacy and strategy, *Que vive la République* was nonetheless a clear statement from him that the defence of France was a moral issue as much as it was a military one. (11) An impassioned reminder that France was not to be confused with the performance of the franc. (12)

If in Gagnon's estimation, (13) François Mitterrand's socialist project had begun to founder because inside advanced and wealthy technological society, socialist ideology had come to look archaic, slow moving, and hopelessly global, at least someone, Debray, appeared to be attempting to defend the only universal vision left to defend. He wrote,

*Feu ne chaut qu'on félicite la gauche d'avoir débarrassé la France du socialisme. Je voudrais seulement être sûr qu'on ne profite pas de l'opération pour nous débarrasser de la République.* (14)
The great flaw within the existing French Republic, as far as he was concerned, was that its fundamental tenets had been effectively usurped. For if original Republicanism had displaced the throne and the altar and sought to replace them with the ideals of unselfishness and anonymity, today, in socialist governed France, their legitimacy was in turn being massively undermined. And this was being done by money, commercialism, and above all the attraction of the 'spectacular' through television, a medium whose logic and values had acquired a universality of their own. The 'French' Dream, in Debray's value-system, was in desperate need of rediscovery, because it was under attack from the ubiquitous and competing concept of 'Democracy'. A concept which, in his view, was little more than a legal charter. An idea with neither an emblem, an obligation, a history, or story of stife. Hence it had no transcendent, unifying properties. Whilst Democracy was being celebrated everywhere as the supreme value, it was but the ideology of 'l'individu comme fin suprême. Narcissisme, Onanisme généralisé, Malsain'.

In sociological terms Debray contended that in any society, power resides with the class or the power which controls and regulates the idea of legitimacy to the members of that society. In a military regime of course it is the Generals who perform this function. In the Republic it was logically to be the teachers and 'savants' who were to be the guardians of values which would guarantee excellence, dignity and pride at that meeting point between party-political power and the functioning of the State. However, in an audio-visual society, which he believed France, like many others, to have become, the state had lost its own formerly integral mediating role, because there was now something which is more influential, and which appeared to carry more value than it, and at which point the State lost its universal function. In this light, the Socialists who were ecstatic and optimistic back in 1981, had committed their biggest error in failing to realise in the interval that the telegenic management of their affairs was an absolute necessity. That they now required very different strategies to those of the traditional combat of ideas, which of course had been the meeting, the speech, the pamphlet and the book.
It was Debray's conviction that the audio-visual medium had in fact, under their noses, become the sole medium through which the state itself was now represented. This was because it effectively hi-jacked state legitimacy by validating or disqualifying that legitimacy via the TV screen. A place where literally an 'image' is a prerequisite, where popularity is courted for its own sake, and where sound-bites become priorities for politicians. Consequently societies' values were now being governed and managed by new leaders of opinion; studio anchormen, reporters, and presenters. 'Seigneurs' who held the keys to credibility, convention and even fashion, yet who had no mandate, and acted only accordance with the dictates of prime time economics. (23) Without a 'Republican' channel to compete with, television could be described as the first ever power in society not required to compete with a counter power. (23) Henceforth the the Republic would be unworthy of its name because the political will bowed to the economic indicator alone. Quite simply today, he argued, those who control the spectacle, control the values. (24).

Debray continued with an examination the logic of this veritable 'Empire of the TV image' (25) in suggesting that it worked by virtue of a simplifying brevity. The citizen now received his daily helping of, 'La planète, déjà montée et verbalisée, mais servie dans son assiette avec ce qu'il convient d'en penser'. (26) All of which was invariably packaged as a confrontation between ourselves, the upholders of democracy and 'they' the tyrants. A codification of the balance of power in the world, served up by those with no interest in seeing it changed, was in his view a selective 'morality under influence'. (27) A suggestion that the mobilisation of our ethical sentiments depended upon the exchange value of images, which in itself could only ever be the collective compassion of the moment, (28). By way of illustration, the fact that one violent death in Paris would receive more television exposure than ten thousand deaths in India, (29) was evidence of a selective outrage which looked more like moralising than adhering to any moral or universal values.
Debray interpreted Jean-Paul Goude's bicentenary procession on Bastille Day 1989 as indeed the most perfect of illustrations revealing the Republic's slavery to the broadcast, because here was Republican history processed according to the laws of television. What Debray saw as a procession focussing only upon the present, the here and now, was thereby nothing but a procession of spectacular images without a message. These celebrations turned their back upon the grubbiness of history in favour of a smart apolitical model which would trouble no-one. An event Debray interpreted as symbolising exactly what the socialist government had itself done in abandoning its socialist heritage for a comfortable consensus. (30) And since the whole of the French political spectrum anyway claimed itself to be profoundly Republican, here on view was the French Revolution dissolved into a mere consensual digest of 'Grand Principles'. (31) To use Debray's own journalistic style here, this was a drowning of Republican culture in a sea of mass culture, (32) with style swallowing up substance. In short, it was a very non-revolutionary commemoration of the Revolution, (33) and a parade which was a falsification (34) in the sense that it celebrated a legacy actually under threat by this very spectacularism. (35) Furthermore, it was essentially a show celebrating the fact that there are no grand political designs left, (36) and that we are condemned to be onlookers and not participants.

The additional and wonderful irony was that an even more pernicious process was at work under the surface. Namely that the French imagination on that symbolic night was sadly fired by caricatures and fanfares into something not demonstrating the one and indivisible French Republic at all, but rather an American version, celebrating the victory of the universality of the spectacular, 'flash', 'frime' and 'fric'. (37)

Debray depicted a further specific example of this perverted, sensationalising mass media logic at work with reference to the proliferation of televised, stadium-filling charity concerts. The fact that these exhibitions of collective solidarity did not solve problems of hunger had become an irrelevance. The 'télévision du coeur' simply got people to turn on their TV's and provided them with a vaccination against guilt. Such
was the success of this seductive economy of commiseration that it had become enough to 'feel' as if we could take on the task of human misery to the sound of rock bands. (38) Debray even asked Mitterrand here, at the very beginning of his second term of office if he had the courage to explain to the millions of 'fans' just what was immoral in this moralism, cynical in this generosity, and so conservative in this romanticism. (39)

Not only here, but in regular scheduled news and current affairs programmes, images effectively smothered out information as well. Or as Debray perceived matters, they showed the apple, and not the gravity. (40) This was because this particular medium projected only that which was projectable, and lacked the tenacity to illustrate the real reasons for misery in the world; unequal exchange rates, raw material speculation, corruption etc. The audio-visual message was in this way inextricably linked to what he called the Human Rights industry. An industry he defined as being involved in a hypocritical call for liberty on a planetary scale because it was primarily concerned with opening up the planet to Western money, laws, doctors and images. (41) It propagated a way of seeing which reassured us that the white man, a GI with neither gun nor napalm, (42) was good because he was never portrayed as creditor, coloniser or condition-setter of those to whom he appeared to give sustenance. (43) Debray believed this particular saviour to be the missionary of simple homogenisation and not a universalism at all. (44) Supporting an evangelism of tolerance which papered over a racism of abundance, ought to have been a major concern for all true Republicans. (45)

If then all manifestation of social debate was to be subordinated to money and media power, both of which respect neither rules of equality nor redistribution, then, he pointed out to the President, the Republican pact was a dead letter. If it became of prime importance to get exposure, then rights preceded duties, (46) principles fell behind individual interests, duties gave in to tastes, and imperatives succumbed to personal penchants. (47) The mechanisms whereby French 'citizens' were (notionally) able to focus with pride upon such concepts as freedom, equality, rights and obligations had broken down, in the face of an apparently rampant individualism. But
this was an individualism, in Debray's estimation, which was nonetheless a consumer conformism. (48) And these very different and pervasive values were a clear perversion of Republican ideals, for 'Ni la fortune ni la vedetariat ne confèrent de légitimité dans les affaires de la Cité et de l'Esprit'. (49) 'Ne Zappez pas' Debray entreated the President, 'Le combat pour l'homme c'est le vôtre'. (50)

This whole exhortation was certainly linked in Que vive la République to Prime Minister Michel Rocard's (1988-91) 'big idea', that of a tolerant, consensual 'Société Civile', which was to become the virtual byword of the first part of Mitterrand's second term of office. For this particular appeal was guilty, in Debray's eyes, of a complete contradiction, coming as it did (if indirectly) from a socialist Head of State. Consensus and legitimacy, he reminded the President, were not the same thing at all. Pétain for example had the first, but not the second. (51) Whilst consensus may in itself have been desirable, desirability did not validate it. (52) Not only was consensus a vague entity unworthy of the descendence of 1789, 1848, 1936, 1944, and 1968, (53) as well as all of those 'hommes semaphores' (54) of the left, it was quite simply an acceptance of an evaporation of the combative Revolutionary legacy. Pursuing consensus was little more than a conservative positivism, (55) for which a political programme was superfluous. It sought only to conserve an existing order by ignoring any dynamic opposition to that order, that very point at which socialists ought to be militating towards and enlarging, the very zones of 'dis-sensus'. (56) Mitterrand as much as anyone should have remembered that if the Republicanism of the French Revolution was to be anything more than a simple revolt then it needed to be interminable in its principles by guarding against the egoism of particular interests. (57) Or to quote Debray's résumé, 'Voir l'universalisme sans le militantisme, c'est vouloir la fleur sans le fruit' (58)

Government by consensus as far as Debray was concerned involved a further complicity with and 'sell-out' to the media men. Governing by cautiously following public opinion meant that the political project became subject to the scrutiny, or even the design, of communication experts who at
that point effectively became the principal political figures. The added perversity of seeking consensus as a value in itself lay in the fact that it had become a very profitable activity because traditional media of representation - parliament, parties, unions and the press - could no longer compete with TV's massive influence. For a media whose sole imperative is the search for audience, with the power to convert the survey into fact becomes the creates its own sociological data. (59) Indeed, asked Debray, is not the nature of a regime where opinion is always right simply a closed circuit, because consensus is an self-referential value? A system which is at best narcissistic, at worst totalitarian? (60) Cleverly parodying Giscard's famous justification, Debray suggested that now, truly 'Le fond de l'air est "2 français sur trois"'. (61)

The selling off State controlled services and industries was also part of what he believed was a this shameful 'mise à sac' of the Republic. (62) How could there be an official Elysée proclamation of faith in Republican ideals yet no attempt to reassert Republican education, politics, and laws in view of the attacks made upon these by TV, and its economic imperatives? If the political left, for the sake of popularity, had happily rallied to the market, with its the glorification of money-making as success, 'Excusez-moi, Monsieur le président', Debray questioned, but had its adherents at that point not become little more than critics of liberalism's excesses, and not testifiers to the critical spirit at all? (63) In failing to keep the laws of the market separate from the imperatives of the constitutional State, the nation itself had become a limited company. (64) At the expense of the school, the firm henceforth was society's centre of gravity. Citizens were treated as consumers, users, producers, drivers, viewers, shareholders, never as citizens of the Republic. (65) In the victory of information over instruction, of the image over the idea, and of the economic over the political, this was undeniably the establishment's symbiosis with the American vision. (66)

The divide between 'democratic' and 'republican' values was a concept which Debray had briefly analysed already in La Puissance et les Rêves, and which he was to expand in a succeeding series of articles. (67) He did here
however attempt a core categorisation of the man of the left as essentially a historically-oriented animal, and the man of the right as essentially a geographically-oriented animal. The geo-political person of the right having a tendency to looks at matters in the countable, arithmetical, territorial, and expansionist fashion competing with the ideo-political person of the left, who had a viewpoint based upon history, tradition and moral value, (the latter’s qualities being particularly suited to France, in Debray’s opinion the, ‘Patrie universelle et Littéraire de l'Histoire Ancienne et Nouvelle’). (68) Hence Mitterrand’s presiding over a socialism which had allowed a state of affairs to logically accommodate the mores of the right was in political, and even philosophical terms something much worse than an adaptation. His heresy was an alignment. Mitterrand and his ministers were entreated to ‘un peu d’insolence que diable’, along with a request for few less generals and a few more ‘hussars’ if you please. (69)

In fairness though, and in spite of what Le Canard Enchaîné was to wryly refer to as Debray’s ‘lèse-majesté’ towards François Mitterrand (70), Debray did at least grant that the President had grounds for some mitigating circumstances surrounding his politics. In case he had not yet rationalised his own dilemma, Debray pointed out that Mitterrand’s faintheartedness stemmed from the fact that he was, literally, a ‘man of letters’. Someone who had been educated in the Republican manner (just like Debray himself), in a period which had placed emphasis and integrity on the book, the printed word, and the discourse. But chance was such that he reached the political helm in an epoch when the image was in the ascendancy, and the former veneration of the printed word had descended into the category of something little more than a holiday read. (71) In this way Debray offered an explanation, if not an excuse for the President’s inability to adapt his Republicanism to the imperatives and customs of a new ‘mediological’ age.

In the face of that lesson, socialists would only maintain a meaningful role in society if they acquired an understanding of how mass media structures worked, and just how they had led the socialist project to veer rightwards. After all, he reminded the theorists of the Left, ‘C'est
ce que nous ne pensons pas qui nous pense, et nous brise.' (72) If indeed the management of the economy by the State were to be disposed of, then the digestion of the State by the economy Debray believed, would be a much more alarming epilogue. (73)

Debray's decision not to entitle this book 'In memoriam' but instead endow it with its more imperative title, did he suggested, demonstrate his own act of faith in this metaphorical call to arms. (74) In spite of an assertion that the destiny of socialism was no longer his main preoccupation, (although clearly his fervent Republican vision remained one heavily impregnated by the political left), his assertion, '"socialisme" me convainc', (75) was evidence of a belief that a socialism could still be preserved, and that capitalism was not the end of history.

It was surely the case however that those readers anxious to read about Debray's proposals for a 'cure' would have been disappointed with _Que vive la République_. His call at the end of the book appeared to be little more than a somewhat vague appeal for a rehabilitation of the political militant. There simply were no specific recommendations to engender a new civic Republican spirit. Many may well have come to the conclusion that whilst Debray was increasingly demonstrating his excellent critical capabilities, he appeared to be above soiling his intellectual hands with the praxis of reconstructing a new citizenship. Indeed, as his own argument went in any case, the published book was the wrong medium through which to attempt such a salvage.

In many respects _Que vive la République_ could even be said to have contained a plea for a kind of conservatism intricately connected to Debray's parallel theoretical research from _Critique de la Raison Politique_. (76) An application, to modern France, in what was an essentially political book nevertheless, of the theory that all communities are bound together by transcendent values or entities which are exterior to them, and which compensate for their inherent unfulfilment. Part of the human condition which Debray called their 'incompleteness'. These values, which might be religious, ideological, traditional or, in this case 'Republican', and were seen as permitting a reference to something higher than the
individual. And as far as France was concerned this manifestation of the 'sacré social' was still maintained by spiritual landmarks as deep-rooted and potent as its Bastille, its eleventh of November, or even its catechism/manuals such as *Le tour de France par deux enfants*. (77) Ultimately though, Debray appeared to be arguing that if Republican ideology (or for that matter socialist ideology) (78) were to lose this 'vertical' mystique then it could engender no self-esteem, incarnate nothing beyond its temporarily elected leaders, and ultimately fail to survive. The French Revolution no less, in order to preserve itself had had to become inviolate, and create thereby its own 'Republican' aura and cult. If today ideology was to be scorned, and politics truly secularised away from all forms of belief, Debray suggested that we would be forced to ask just which other retrograde nationalisms and religions would re-surface in their place, (79) the basic argument which of course had underpinned *Les Empires contre l'Europe*. The consequence of 'horizontally' opening France out either to Europe or indeed to American culture at the expense of her Republican inheritance would also he believed, eventually atomise rather than unite her.

Debray's essay, or what he has himself described as his 'impertinent objuration' towards Mitterrand (80), provoked neither public nor private response from the President, but the work nonetheless attracted its disputes. If Denis Jembar in *Le Point* praised Debray's lucidity, and vehemence without resorting to acrimony, (81) Dominique Wolton in *Le Monde* referred to the author as 'the Political Misanthropist', who disqualified everything he did not like as lacking legitimacy. (82) He dismissed *Que vive la République* as an ill-humoured litany, absurdly exaggerating the innocuous idea of a mere political rallying point into a sinister threat to the Republic. He felt the need too to remind Debray that the Republic did not belong exclusively to the political Left. At very least one could argue that in this book the distinction between socialism and republicanism was too frequently blurred and that the terms seemed frequently to be interchangeable.
Michel Winock in L'Evénement du Jeudi also disapproved of the style and content of this political essay as the typical and humourless knee-jerk reaction of the 'Normalien' ill at ease with modernity, who predictably viewed the loss of the civic domain as a regression. (83) One could even add Alain Gagnon's argument to this accusation of a nostalgia which over­credited a by­gone age with a value it never sustained. He has suggested that the connection between socialism and what could be interpreted as a wistful defence of the glorious Republic was after all a call for a return to a phenomenon which lasted just three decades anyway. The 1930's, when Fascism was seeking to destroy the Republic, and the 1940's and 1950's, when, with the discredit of the Right, legitimate social thought was passed temporarily to the political Left, awarding their influential thinkers the transient title of cultural militants in search of rationality, truth and justice. (84) Given this kind of interpretation Winock believed Debray to have betrayed himself in the very style and structure of the book as it was a genre, which like Republicanism itself, had had its heyday earlier in the century, and where typically,

On commence sur une petite (ou grande) colère, et puis on laisse filer sa plume au caprice de son inspiration, de ses souvenirs, on saute du coq à l'âne, on ouvre d'interminables parenthèses... (85)

It may make a temporary impression, he added, it may have many clever turns of phrase, but after a few years it becomes incomprehensible. Certainly this is an argument one could level against Debray's Latin American Essays, and only time will tell whether this book was just an ephemeral sequel to Lettre aux Communistes, and which could have been aptly titled 'Lettre aux Socialistes'. Winock believed too that Debray's conception of the Republic was in itself a myth. Abstract and pure, his dream was Sparta, not France at all.

Given that Debray had reiterated that the most fundamental and radical ideal enunciated by the Revolution was the State itself, (86) and that only through the State, and its creation of citizens could the struggle for
equality rights be propulsed, J-M Colombani in *Le Monde* (87) perhaps most perceptively summarised the tensions underpinning Debray's diatribe. He believed that 'notre philosophe officiel' was attempting to re-define a distinction between the decentralised autonomy of 'civil society', and his own instinctive leanings towards the more jacobin, combative will of the State. A will which since the government's u-turn of 1983 had disappeared. Nonetheless, in dusting the Republic down in the very caustic way he did in this work, one is bound to ask how on earth Debray had lived with its threadbare condition as an advisor to its President, particularly since between 1985 to 1989 he had been a member of the 'Conseil d'Etat', which as an administrative Court of Appeal has in fact a reputation for defending Republican traditions. (88) *Le Canard Enchaîné* was predictably less understanding. They wrote, 'A défaut d'être le conseiller du Prince, il rêve désormais d'être l'idéologue d'une gauche à reconstruire. Guille'. (89)

It appears finally that a feeling of being helpless to significantly affect an erosion of principles dear to his heart was a major reason why Debray decided to leave the political domain, and turn instead to a theory of the success of the 'Democratic' hegemony of the world. He had in fact begun this theme some ten years before with *Le Pouvoir intellectuel en France*, (90) and it was to be culminated as a piece of non-political scientific research in 1991 with *Cours de Médiation Générale*. (91) His decision to explore and illustrate the effects of modern communication technologies, upon the status of the French Republic was certainly the point at which these two aspects of his work, the political criticism, and the theoretical human science, began to overlap. Yet one cannot help but wonder at the atomising effects which 1990's technology in the shape of satellite TV and the 'Internet' may well have upon Debray's argument that we are all manipulated by being focussed infallibly into TF1 or Antenne 2. It may well become the case that the 'spectacular' will in its own turn, succumb to the march of technology.

*Que vive la République* has proven to date to be his last 'political book', although the debate over his notions of Anglo-Saxon Democracy, and
French Republicanism, were to be developed further in a series of articles in 1991 and 1992.
Chapter 14. Notes

1 - Debray, Régis, Comité na Coste, Gallimard, 1986, p. 53.
2 - Debray, Régis, Que vive la République, Odile Jacob, 1989, p. 27.
7 - Que vive la République, back cover notes.
10 - ibid., p. 13.
11 - ibid., p. 122.
12 - ibid., p. 156.
13 - Gagnon, p. 49.
14 - Que vive la République, p. 52.
16 - ibid., p. 27.
17 - ibid., p. 38.
18 - ibid., p. 84.
19 - ibid., p. 103.
21 - Que vive la République, p. 136.
22 - ibid., p. 106.
24 - *Que vive la République*, p.85.
26 - ibid., p.163.
27 - ibid., p.181.
28 - ibid., p.181.
29 - ibid., p.189.
31 - *Que vive la République*, p.63.
32 - ibid., p.72.
34 - *Que vive la République*, p.44.
36 - *Que vive la République*, p.85.
38- *Que vive la République*, p.186.
39 - ibid., p.170.
40 - ibid., p.174.
41 - ibid., p.170.
42 - ibid., p.185.
43 - ibid., p.194.
44 - ibid., p.197.
45 - ibid., p.200.
46 - ibid., p.187.
47 - ibid., p.27.
48 - ibid., p.74.
49 - ibid., p.27.
50 - ibid., p.177.
51 - ibid., p.98.
52 - ibid., p.103.
53 - ibid., p.18.
54 - ibid., p.20.
55 - ibid., p.107.
56 - ibid., p.110.
57 - ibid., p.55.
58 - ibid., p.62.
60 - Que vive la République, p.100.
61 - Les Empires contre l'Europe, p.121.
62 - Que vive la République, p.27.
63 - ibid., p.52.
64 - ibid., p.30.
65 - ibid., p.32.
66 - Les Empires contre l'Europe, p.120.
67 - Que vive la République, p.93. For a list of these articles, see notes to following chapter.
68 - Les Empires contre l'Europe, p.93.
69 - Que vive la République, p.212.
71 - Que vive la République, p.22.
72 - ibid., p.141.


74 - ibid., p.215.

75 - ibid., p.139.

76 - Debray, Régis, Critique de la Raison Politique, Gallimard, 1981.

77 - Que vive la République, p.120.

78 - ibid., p.136.

79 - ibid., p.126.

80 - 'À Deux At De Gaulle', Panorama, France-Culture, radio broadcast, 18 juin 1990, (Debray interviewed by J.M. de Montréty).

81 - 'La République est menacé par l'argent et le spectacle', Le Point, no.850, 2-8 jan. 1989, (Debray interviewed by Jean Jesabre and Michel Richard).


84 - Sagnon, p.45.

85 - 'Vive la République, à bas la Terreur'.

86 - Que vive la République, p.59.


88 - Darbyshire, Ian, Politics in France from Giscard to Mitterrand, Chambers, 1988, p.12.

89 - 'Régis Debray, Marche à l'honneur', p.23.


The debate about defending Republican principles, arguing that the Revolution was not over, and that it required daily vigilance was in fact extended by Debray in a series of articles written between 1989 and 1991. (1) Beginning with a piece entitled 'Vivement les Jacobins' (2) he attempted here to situate Republican values as historical legacies of the Enlightenment. He reasoned that if from that time onwards man could potentially organize himself without the help of a god or king, then he certainly could not organize without a secularized faith which would bind him to the new ideas and values of progress, equality, and critical reason. All of which Debray considered to be the promoters of freedoms inside the 'jungle' of interests. (3)

Whilst society's principle mediators today were no longer the priest or the teacher, but media professionals, with no metaphysical message to peddle at all, they were nonetheless key actors in a modern metamorphosis of the Nation. (4) This was because their new power represented a state of affairs which logically implied the decline of the Nation-State. And of course this change had significant consequences as far as France concerned, for she still purported to live by a paradoxical, if not now an anachronistic, one and indivisible credo. As Critique de la Raison Politique had already forecast, Debray believed that the religious sentiment would return to fill the vacuum left by the Nation. A phenomenon, which were it to continue, which would lead us to a 'post-national' Europe resembling a computerised Middle Ages. And this would, he suggested, produce an unanticipated boomerang effect upon the aspirations of the 'faceless' European Commission. For it would provide us not with a Europe of citizens, but one of believers. And those believers would have their first allegiances to their various leaders, their particular customs, and even to their fatwas. (5)

The 'Muslim scarf' debate of November 1989, to which Debray contributed in fact illustrated most succinctly the very point he had tried
to make. And here it was with specific regard to the erosion of secular Republican education at the expense of what he saw as a contaminating tolerance. In an open letter, this time to Socialist Education Minister Lionel Jospin, Debray, along with four other intellectuals, (Alain Finkielkraut, Elisabeth Badinter, Elisabeth de Fontenay and Catherine Kinzler) deplored the Minister's decision to allow a muslim girl to be re-admitted to school, after appeal, wearing her muslim veil. In their estimation, Jospin's Republican school had been wrong to give precedence to egalitarianism over principle. He had shown an appeasement which confused discrimination with discipline, since secularism, the very bedrock of Republican schooling was simply not negotiable. A Republican education system was not a mosaic of ethnic groups to be overrun ultimately by the law of the strongest or most numerous. It was meant to be a place where essentially one safeguarded the right to be 'différent de sa différence'.

(6) It could not therefore accept a symbol of a particular belief above the universal principle of freedom of thought. If school were not above religious, community or economic pressures, then it was, they declared, nothing more than a school of social predestination. (7)

Undoubtedly a subject close to his heart, Debray attempted two years later, in 1991, to illustrate this singular quality of a Republican education in an article which reminisced about his own schooling. He recalled here his philosophy teacher, who neutrally undertook his tasks without indoctrination, edification or prejudice towards his students, and who limited himself to teaching them two things of the greatest importance; manners and 'La République'. (8) Debray's argument was that the specific inclusion of philosophy in the school curriculum was the prerequisite to retaining a school of free thinking citizens. (9) It would only be possible to save school from churning out specialised slaves for industry, or becoming breeding grounds for religious creeds, if their students were exposed to a discipline of thought which was independent of religion or doctrine. If philosophy was not on the curriculum then they would never acquire a spirit of analysis resistant to fashion or novelty. This crucial instruction in reasoning would retain what he called a sanctuary of
humanity under pressure from different scales of value. Today, the seduction may well come from the journalist or media man rather than the priest, but it remained a most un-Republican state of affairs if it was at the expense of the teacher and his or her authority. However well-reasoned Debray's argument may have been here, one is hard pressed to imagine his own experience in 1957 at the 'Janson de Sailly' lycée as in any way typical or representative of the rest of the country's gratitude towards their education.

A key article which appeared in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in 1989, titled 'Êtes-vous Démocrate ou Républicain?' (10) sought essentially to draw up a taxonomy of what Debray perceived as two very different conceptions and organisations of society (although these Republican/Democrat labels were not to be confused with the two US parties with the same names). In fact the article fanned the flames of much debate since Debray, as indeed he had done in *Que vive la République*, was contending here that the Democratic, individualist tradition, fashioned above all by Anglo-Saxon history, had in fact gained the upper hand in Republican France, and was manifested without doubt by the advent of what he viewed was a virtual synonym to Democracy - 'la Société Civile'. Put in suitably provocative format it explained to the 'soft'-left readers of *Le Nouvel Observateur*, why the elaborate bicentennial procession down the Champs-Elysée on Bastille day, 1989 was a bizarre celebration of French ideals in American form and hence a Republican abomination. For the solidarity which should have existed within the Republican conception of things had been replaced by the individualism of the Democratic model, which incidentally, he added, had 'l'arôme spirituel du mouton'. (11)

Although it might be electorally democratic, the Republican culture, Debray argued, was singular in that it enshrined the ideas of tolerance, supplemented by liberty, plus collective purpose. Its rationale was the public good which made it the regime which divided citizens the least. (12) It served humanity, and not a God; the Nation and not a community. In the Republic the political had primacy over the economic, and the public had primacy over the private, even in industrial and commercial terms. The
Republic did not confuse instruction of its young people with giving them information. The Republic’s schools compulsorily taught philosophy which established an organic cultural link between its intellectuals and the people. A stark contrast to a Democratic culture where thinkers and teachers were held in suspicion, and where most prestige lay with the entertainer, the publicist, and the businessman.

This was because in a Democratic conception of society matters followed a different logic, and were intricately linked to the private and the charitable response to the social question. Whilst the Republic defined its citizens as essentially men of reason, the Democracy defined them as producers. The notion of success in the Republic was seen in terms of service, whilst it was a question of individual aspiration in a Democracy. Consequently, whereas in the Republic salary proportions were respected, personal wealth in the Democracy was congratulated. Republican National Service implied that all citizens take on a responsibility for the freedom of other citizens, but in a Democracy the soldier was a man with a career like everyone else. The Republic embodied the ‘rights of man’, not the local rights of Americans or Englishmen. It was driven by humanist concerns rather than humanitarian concerns. The Republic’s objective was to be above custom, as Democracy’s intention was to be pluri-cultural, and federal. The Republic applied the primacy of the law as Democrats accepted a puritan, pragmatic cooperation, akin to a contract. In the Republic the lawyer was a functionary, in the Democracy he was a jurist, who appealed to the Constitutional Council over parliament.

Debray did humbly accept that his depiction of what the French Republic should have been did after have its flaws. He was prepared to restore a little balance to what many would have interpreted as an ill-disguised anti-American diatribe by agreeing that the Republican model of rights did undoubtedly suffer from its very verticality, its authoritarianism, its overload of ‘notables’ and its rigidity and simplification of complex issues. He conceded too that it was no coincidence that, as a result, much of Europe viewed the French as
inflexible and arrogant. He even admitted that this kind of Republicanism contained the seeds of a certain coercion.

However, whatever its imperfections were, clearly Debray's argument here was that the Republican 'camp' in Modern France was now of a minority, and that the new state of affairs, which sociologists might neutrally term an 'acculturalisation', was in philosophical terms an alienation, whose impact was so great that Debray's description of what Republican France was meant to incarnate admittedly looked strange, and even folkloric.

Pierre Miquel in his reply to Debray's long article, and also writing in Le Nouvel Observateur (13) appeared to be the critic most in agreement. He felt that the matter of preserving the State's dignity and autonomy deserved to be taken seriously, especially as the incumbent 'monarch' was bowing with alarming frequency to both public opinion and public demonstration. (14) Laurent Joffrin (15) differed somewhat. He suggested that within this whole debate 'Alceste' had failed to see that the very Democracy he castigated had played no small part in sounding the death knell of totalitarian regimes throughout the world.

Whilst accepting that Debray had contributed a valid sketch of two psychologically different political tendencies, Jacques Julliard (16) read into the homily the swansong of an older and nostalgic conception of liberty which would not be capable of attracting the youth of today. But he also went on to accuse Debray of glorifying the teachers and intellectuals of the Third Republic, who in his view had been just as as self-interested as their modern counterparts. Debray, he argued, was inaccurately dressing up as altruists those Radicals who had hidden their true faces behind the universalism of 1789 as a way of keeping power, and retaining a social conservatism in a period when citizens' access to real political debate, as now via TV, was not available. Julliard suggested to Debray therefore that a little more hard-nosed Marxist-style analysis would not have gone amiss within this very emotive debate. He also reminded him that in the call for principled a Republicanism Debray appeared to have forgotten that men do not live by principles, and are infinitely more motivated by such things as love, anguish and memories.
Blandine Barrett-Kriegel summarised Debray's 'lament' as a picturesque plea to return to the 'République des Jules, moustaches en guidon de vélo'. (17) The real home truth to be elicited here, in her opinion, was that Debray was revealing his adherence to that political class which was still unresigned to seeing society emancipated from the vigilant protection of 'enlightened' elites, after Switzerland the last ones in the whole of Europe to have given the vote to the collective will of the female population. She even attempted to completely turn the tables upon Debray over this very point suggesting that the promotion of a virtuous citizenship, via education or civil instruction, had been founded in any case upon the idea of competence. Yet it was this obsession with competence which in turn had led to an elitism, an elitism of which Debray was a part, and which in itself had undermined the Republican spirit. Moreover, she questioned, was this edification of the Republican spirit not really little more than a palliative to the absence of Marxism, since it too was a model of society which aimed to conserve the will of the working class become 'citizens'?

Washington had seen fit to allow advisor Debray into the United States in 1981 only by issuing him with a diplomatic passport. Yet, if instinctively one could have read 'American' into all of the 'un-Frenchness' Debray had depicted in his mini-essay êtes-vous Démocrate ou Républicain?, he nonetheless claimed now to being no longer anti-American at all, even to the extent of admitting that were he ever to live in exile then the appeal of the US would be very strong one to resist. It was quite simply the case, he argued, that one's attitude towards the United States depended upon one's generation. Born too late to see the GI's and the 'Marshall Plan' as the saviour of France, he was to write that his original stances towards North America had been shaped by Viet Nam, Cambodia, B-52's and the 'CIA'. It was thus the analysis of a very different, and less culpable manifestation of US imperialism to the one of the 1960's and 1970's that Debray undertook in a speech he made at New York university in 1991. (18) For here we find Debray matter-of-factly stated that America's
where she now had a hegemony over the rich too, the French Republic included. For back in France, he reassured his American audience, being pro-American today was undeniably synonymous with being creative, open and liberated. And to be anti-American was viewed as being envious, authoritarian, xenophobic and passé. (20)

One could not thus justifiably moralise against America for the fact that her political, military, economic, cultural and technical hegemony flourished. It did so simply because it had no counter-balance. (21) It thrived by virtue of a social law, and not as the result of a conspiracy. Americans may quite naturally be infatuated with their own civilisation, but the rest of the world needed to be aware that the liberalism, equivalent to a privileged manichean view of the world by the rich (22) which it sent into our homes made our cultures into sub-cultures. (23) That it was in the nature of mass media to simplify messages, and reduce our judgement to sentiment (24) to the extent that this was a new 'colonisation douce' (25) whereby the spirit of Empire had become nowhere more ferocious than in the colonies themselves. In the colony called France for example, which experts were invariably interviewed on the televisions in our living rooms about the economy? Professors of liberal economics of course, (26) figures who become immediate leaders of opinion.

Whilst thinkers like Debray may be painfully aware of American images swamping their written tradition, he has of course pointed elsewhere to the potential crisis hidden in this blanket over-exposure, namely that unexpected re-awakening of older identity structures in society as a defence mechanism against homogeneity. A reaction which, in its extreme form would be a retrograde authoritarian fundamentalism, although in its more noble guise one could justifiably state that Debray was seeking to channel any resurgence of 'Frenchness' into a more reasonable, if very Republican consciousness.

Finally, one could not leave Debray's political journalism without some reference to his reaction the 'fall' of Communism. He stated in Liberté in 1991 (27) that he would have preferred to keep a silence about the demise of the Soviet bloc (which he had successfully predicted in Les
Empires contre l’Europe), and although he considered his personal link with Soviet Communism to be in any case an obscure one, he did reluctantly respond to the newspaper’s request to comment. He began by stating that as a Republican he could do little but applaud the fall of Bolchevism, yet that it was painful nonetheless to see a vision, for which so many had given their lives, end in disaster. He added that the ideals of communism had enabled him personally to live a common cause, with pride and gratitude, and in a dignified way, with the poor and under-privileged. Thus to see them now end in farce was doubly tormenting since he felt that nothing new would grow out of the ashes. (28)

However, in this context, to those who were now triumphantly predicting an end to History, (the banal homogenous extension of liberal capitalism from Vancouver to Vladivostock (29)) and who thought that the sole remaining political task was to get rid of those residual pockets of poverty and racism from a pre-democratic era, Debray wrote, again of his anticipated ‘return’ of History. (30) For the demise of ‘homo sovieticus’ more than anything demonstrated that viewing History in a progressive linear fashion had been wrong. If Communism had appeared to lead men away from their tribal identities, (31) this had been short-lived. In the light of re-born religions, cultures and nationalisms, totalitarianism now looked like a very ersatz way of creating solidarity. Even more significant was the fact that whilst liberalism now looked to have won the political and economic battle, Debray believed its very modernity, the impetus for a redoutable cultural renaissance, could not be ignored. The disappearance of the Soviet Commissar did not automatically imply the enthronement of the manager or the lawyer, (32) and he pointed out that a return to the Russia of the popes, mullahs, soufis, priests, and other such war-mongers was a spiritual scenario not to be dismissed. (33)

A little surprising then that Debray should look at the Gulf War of 1990 primarily through the prism of Mitterrand’s ‘appeasement’ of the US rather than as an example of regional cultural assertion in a post-communist, unipolar world. In an article titled ‘La Guerre en proces. Lettre ouverte aux socialistes’, (34) Debray revealed his disgust at France
having finally succumbed to US pressure to support a war against Iraq because according to him this was not a conflict about defending the freedom of Kuwait at all, let alone an 'Anschluss' part two. Indeed, he asked, by what logic other than the most base economic interest could the notion of civil liberties be upheld by supporting cynical and medieval theocracies like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia?

De Gaulle, Debray claimed, would have resisted this sorry state of affairs where international security happily coincided with Washington’s interests, and where one was forced to recognize now that the world had two classes of victims, ‘pétro-monarchies’ and the rest. (35) France’s entry into the conflict he believed, had everything to do with the success of pro-American propaganda, and Mitterrand’s disinclination to remain steadfast against the public opinion that it created. It was quite simply the case, in Debray’s view, that the Élysée had been swayed into an abject Atlanticism because the whole Arab world had been portrayed by an arrogant and short-sighted media (who were thirsting for visible action rather than an invisible economic blockade), as being ‘en proie à des passions sottes, des fantasmes et de bas instincts’. (36) Against such an enemy, ‘L’Occident, la croisade, cela s’exalte’. (37)
Chapter 15. Notes

1 - Several of these, referred to below, were collected in *Contretemps*, Gallimard, 1992, the third selection of Debray’s newspaper and periodical contributions to be published in book form. This particular selection comprised articles which were all of a political nature, and followed on from *L’Espérance au Purgatoire*, Alain Moreau, 1980, and *Eloge*, Gallimard, 1986. The latter contained only articles of literary and art criticism, and Debray has forecast in *Contretemps*, p.12, that should a fourth volume appear, then this would involve a return to the aesthetic domain.


4 - ‘Régis Debray est-il de Droite?’, *Globe*, juin 1990, (Debray interviewed by Kristina Larsen).

5 - ‘Le XXI siècle sera spirituel ou ne sera pas’.


9 - This discussion recalls Derrida’s involvement in 1975 with the GREPH (Groupe de Recherches sur l’Enseignement Philosophique). This was a collective set up to defend the teaching of philosophy in schools which at the time was under threat because of the French government’s proposals to eliminate it from the curriculum in the final year of the lycée. The project also set out to challenge the notion that there was an age barrier below which students could not think philosophically. (see Norris, Christopher, *Derrida*, Fontana, 1987, pp.13-14, 243-4).


11 - ibid., pp.44-5.


14 - One notable example was Mitterrand’s shelving of plans to make private education more accountable to the State in 1984. Many saw this as a retreat after a series of public demonstrations in Paris.


17 - 'Les deux, mon camarade', Le Nouvel Observateur, 4-10 jan. 1990, p.24, (Blandine Barret-Kriegel).

18 - Debray, Régis, 'Pour en finir avec l'antisémitisme', L'Événement du Jeudi, 4 juil. 1991. (From an address by Debray at New York University, 27 april, also published in Contretemps, p.82).

19 - ibid., p.97.

20 - ibid., p.83.

21 - ibid., p.96.

22 - ibid., p.99.

23 - ibid., p.103.

24 - ibid., p.104.

25 - ibid., p.108.

26 - ibid., p.110.


29 - ibid.,


33 - 'Le Rire et les Larmes 3'.


An 'Opportuniste à principes', (1) or an 'Inadapté du temps tel qu’il va'? (2)

Like so many others on the far Left, Debray turned his back on hard-nosed Marxist ideology in the early 1970's, with the realisation that the messianic dream of Revolution could only be a dream as long as it remained a voluntary one, and that holding people hostages to a utopia was a nothing less than a nightmare in itself. He has even described Revolutionary Socialism as having proven to have been a 'criminelle liberticide', (3) or at best an operational mode in certain conditions of extreme oppression. However, in an interview from 1988 he acknowledged that whilst he may well have lost those former political convictions, what he claimed to have retained were his fidelities to particular values; values he remained acutely aware of whilst undertaking his political duties. He stated,

'Je crois que je suis tout naturellement de gauche sans me demander pourquoi, en gros plutôt du côté des faibles et des gens qui n’ont pas le culte de l'argent. C’est vrai que je ne suis plus marxiste, je l’ai été, je reste un homme de gauche'. (4)

This statement, allied to the obvious fact that he did participate in a government of the left, at very least separates Debray from other intellectuals who, even in the late 1970's, were much more radically 'selling-out' by equating the label 'left' with a totalitarianism to be fought at every opportunity. (5)

In La Puissance et les Rêves (6), Debray mused that were he to be exiled from France for the rest of his life, then it would have been the political arena that he would have missed more than anything else. He has also said that it was his experience as an alien in Latin America which made him realise just how very French, and committed to his homeland that
that he really was. (7) His subsequent, almost exclusive preoccupation with French matters was certainly in contrast to the 'Internationalist' view of traditional Communism, and this could of course be viewed in itself as a kind of ideological marxian heresy on his behalf. It is nonetheless true that virtually nothing of what could be categorised as his political writing since 1975 has dealt with anything else but France, and her relations with other countries. Keith Reader has indeed categorised the post-Latin America work under the chapter title 'the French Debray', and one is tempted to ask whether there is 'politically', after 1974, much of any other Debray to examine. (8)

One could argue that the paths Debray has chosen to tread have in them a particular pattern of participation, followed by disillusion. Bursts of successive, and courageous enthusiasm in turn for Third World Revolution, French Socialism and realpolitik diplomacy, but which on each occasion have been followed by critical re-thinks, disappointment, and dejection, to arrive at a point now where his political contributions occur intermittently, and almost instinctively, against current orthodoxy. Debray is still a member of no political party, and he does not write a regular newspaper or periodical column. His TV or radio appearances are rare, and occur only when a new book appears. One could even state with some justification that the revolutionary theory he wrote between 1965 and 1967 had more direct influence, and gained him more followers than anything he has written since. For if the ideas and theories in his later books appear to have had no consistent 'best-seller' impact in France, then both their subject matter, and the dearth of translated material gives them even less international currency. One could cite by way of example what Keith Reader has called Debray's hawkishness concerning the way in which he sees military and cultural defence as part of the same problem. (9) Yet whether this has in any way modified government policy, or ethos even is most tenuous. Convincing as his arguments may be they certainly appear marginal to other headline-grabbing issues.

One could in fact accuse Debray of certain exaggerations concerning his contribution to the political debate. The quotation below certainly
contains at very least an impetuosity, if not a note of insincerity. Whilst still in his post at the Elysée, he wrote in Les Empires contre l'Europe,

'Moi qui tiens la politique, cet univers fait de choses qui nous paraissent chaque jour plus insignifiantes que la veille, pour l'attrappe-nigauds de l'ambition humaine'. (10)

He forecast in the same book that after three years of masochistic work on this and La Puissance et les Rêves that this was to be definitively his last political book, 'cochon qui s'en déduit'. (11) But of course this turned out to be untrue. Tous Azimuts and Que vive la République plus some 22 articles and 10 interviews (12) up to 1992 were back in this domain. Either he was totally drained, or simply misleading himself.

Similarly, assertions like 'Je suis ancré à gauche par filiation et espérance' (13), stand uneasily next to remarks such as that appearing in Libération in 1991, where he explained to his interviewer that France's position in the world remained a thousand times more important to him than the fate of the political left. (14) Was this not a penchant for hyperbole whereby Debray has added to his own somewhat unfathomable myth? He was even to declare in 1990 (15) that until this time he had in effect been gagged, 'muselé' by a centrist power, and that his most recent political commentaries had been a return to source for him and not at all a change of camp. One seems obliged to ask which source he means. Even if the logic of his resignation from an official position had its roots in the conviction that there had been an abdication from a true practical socialism in favour of a tempered compromising liberalism (what he has acidly termed an inability of both Mitterrand and his governments to articulate a Gaullean 'Non' where it was most crucially required, (16) one wonders why he allowed this apparent gagging to continue, or if it is not just too strong a word to use for the Elysée's natural desire to portray an internal harmony to the outside world.

In another sense too Debray's attempts to persuade readers that his preferences in life anyway are for music, film, and art, and that he
attaches true value only to emotion, 'Moi que les livres de sociologie, et d'économie, de théorie politique assomment...' (17) appear less than convincing. Some of his own readers would certainly accuse his work of having a comparable effect upon them.

By the late 1980's Debray had become an intellectual first and foremost, whose main concerns in the political domain were to restore the impetus for a Gaullean-type vision of French influence in the world, as well as a call for new Republican vitality. But they were certainly not being written by the energetic and optimistic realpolitician, the 'left-wing Gaullist' that he believed Mitterrand to have recruited him as, (18) for as part two of this study describes, his attention was being increasingly diverted elsewhere. However, he has argued, with some justification, that the 1980's were a difficult time for proud Republicans like himself, having been variously labelled as a nationalist, reactionary or has-been at a time when the buzz-words were Brussels, Disney and 'get rich'. (19) Labels which critics and commentators undoubtedly attached to him primarily as consequences of his political articles (and handful of radio and TV appearances) which he has claimed are forcibly the most superficial aspect of his work. (20) But of course they are more audience accessible than some of his dauntingly thick tomes.

For such reasons one has difficulty in imagining Debray being wooed again into another politically active role were even another socialist President to return. At the age of 50, it appeared that the direct participation, the honorable attempts to marry theory and practice were over. With material conditions everywhere reversing his ideas about what French Socialist, Republican, and diplomatic projects and ambitions should have been, it was finally Debray's prudent decision to act in the full recognition of this, rather than to bend his own principles to the contingencies of the moment. Although this decision forcibly begs the question as to what extent, if any, the intellectual today, outside power manages to significantly broaden areas of dissent as intellectuals in previous generations had certainly managed to do. Ironically, one of
Debray's arguments in part two of this study suggests that in the late twentieth century, publishing is in fact the wrong medium through which to exert much influence at all.

It was arguably with *Que vive la République* of 1989, that Debray really wrote his farewell to the political arena as far as specific works were concerned, but he did very contentiously claim there that his interest in ideologies had always been from a philosophical standpoint, as a researcher of them, and not an activist. Consequently he believed that he had avoided that dichotomy between the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility. (21) Many would certainly have viewed this statement with disbelief, and would have contended that his participation at the Elysée involved both conviction and responsibility and no little ideological commitment to the socialism of François Mitterrand. To claim otherwise surely has the scent of disingenuousness. Yet to those who would see his gradual withdrawal from the political battlefield as the proof of some kind of personal ill-tempered defeat, Debray claims to retain a serenity,

'On ne ne fera pas le coup du doctrinaire à bécimes grinçant les dents sous le grand vent de la vie-qui-bascule-les dogmes, Je ne renverrai pas celui de la belle âne ravagée par les turpitudes de la Raison d'Etat'. (22)

Debray also pretended in *Que vive la République* that he has never been an idealist (23), not even when a young man nor as a prisoner. The ideal however which he has claimed to have adhered to throughout has been the pursuit of practical means to political ends. If that practical method in Latin America was pursued through violence as the best way to try to achieve the revolution at that time, then the same logic, he argued, applied in his support for a practical reformism back in France. Hence he lays claim only to the status of being a 'principled opportunist'. (24)

Debray has also said that he believes current categorisations of political left and right to have become obsolete. (25) This was above all because the Socialist Party had become normalised, and had therefore lost its function of presenting a historic proposition to the electorate.
Reduced to discreetly putting a brake, where possible, on a universal mercantilism, the formerly radical socialist project could only now attempt a social justice proceeding from economic prudence. Consequently Debray's diagnosis for France's (indeed the world's) future, given the almost global demise of the credibility of the left is envisaged in two scenarios. Either she would be part of a unipolar world where all societies appear to be travelling in the same direction nuanced only by the difference between conservative liberalism and social liberalism, 'Durand versus Dupont'. A mass media dominated world, where the TV image broadcasts uniformisation. Or she would witness the countering menace to this homogenisation. And there would be a return to the local, the slow death of the nation, and its replacment by a resurgence of the ethnic and the racial. A pessimistic future where,

'Les Vendéens chassent les Jacobins, la coutume gagne sur la loi...Bonjour les animaux, bienvenue la horde, tous les Le Pen du vaste monde ont du juif et du cosmopolite sur la planche' (27)

To combat this second possibility Debray has called for a principled expansion of the State's presence, which will in turn require its own men of faith, but without a fanaticism. The greatest challenge for the next century therefore, he believes, will be to invent a spiritual intensity without a dogmatic exclusivity. (29)

Nonetheless, one is obliged to ask if this foreboding scenario has validity for former communist states now in relative turmoil, or indeed those elsewhere under the control of fundamentalist religious leaders, let alone the 'West'. Is the payment for plurality, tolerance and liberality necessarily so bleak, and requiring of the preoccupation with weaponry that Tous Azimuts implied? (30)

Two contributors to the letters page of Le Nouvel Observateur (31) in responding to an article written by Debray upon the Gulf War succinctly contrast the admiration for some, yet the tedium for others, associated with name Régis Debray. Whilst one was to praise Debray's courage in
writing the plain truth, the only person capable of looking both objectively and subjectively at France, yet remaining an ever loyal Frenchman, the other pleaded that *Le Nouvel Observateur* should set about finding someone else other than Régis Debray who once again seemed the only intellectual who could always be relied upon to oppose the editorial's line. Debray who had been wrong on Castro, De Gaulle, (32) and over the Pivot affair, (33) was wrong here again. Given that *Le Nouvel Observateur*, to which Debray has contributed many times throughout his intellectual career, is ostensibly a well-respected magazine of the political left, one cannot ignore in conclusion the fact that he raises such sympathy, or more frequently, such antipathy.

This is a matter which appears to worry Debray little however, and he has defined himself in contrast to, 'Un certain nombre d'intellectuels qui ont encore le vieux scrupule de vouloir se donner d'eux-mêmes une trajectoire et une cohérence'. (34) A arguably valid suggestion, that a political balance-sheet stretching almost thirty years will inevitably look imbalanced, and unjustly hide a flexibility, perhaps even a humility, even if there are inevitably moments of poor judgement, or rashness.

Michel Gorand, in discussing Debray's apparent 'conversion' to 'Realpolitick' in *La Puissance et les Rêves* and *Les Empires contre l'Europe* saw less a lack of coherence than a lack of contemporaneity. He perceived Debray to be like an intellectual from another age despite his relative youth, (forty four in 1985) whose writing was pervaded by 'une sorte d'obscur sentiment d'échec personnel, qui le fait paraître étrangement animé d'une perpetuelle rancœur contre ses congeneres'. (35) Of course whilst Gorand's description lacks specificity, and may be more than slightly tinged with a personal viewpoint, it complements Keith Reader's opinion that Debray's later work has within it the seam of a 'refusal to celebrate the new era of the visual and the image'. (36)

In this sense one cannot help but see something of the quality of Régis Debray in the final panegyric of Jean Dutourd from *Les Taxis de la Marne*. Here Dutourd openly admitted that he felt he was a man of another
age, but could not conceive of a future world without French civilisation as a foundation for it, because, 'Le monde présent dont visiblement la France a émigré nous donne chaque jour un avant-goût de l'avenir qui me soulève le coeur'. (37)

Debray has said that he has always experienced a kind of respite from political commitment by balancing it with work of a more personal nature. (38) Whilst there is in no sense a definitive end for the intellectual Régis Debray's political commitments and commentaries, as part two of this study seeks to show, a parallel body of work, beginning around 1978, and ongoing still, adds another most significant dimension to the study of him. A body of work which we state with some caution is outside the realm of the political in the most frequent use of that word, but which he has acknowledged is nonetheless informed by Marxism. Not the economist Marxism, nor the combative Marxism of a now defunct political ideology and means of action, but the intellectual instrument which remains of it; a materialist tool of sociological analysis. (39)
Chapter 16. Notes


5 - Notable vehement intellectual 'anti-totalitarians', according to Keith Reader in *Intellectuals and the Left in France since 1968*, Macaillan, 1987, p.108, were Bernard-Henri Lévy, Philippe Némo, Christian Jambat, Jean-Paul Dolidé, and André Glucksman.


9 - ibid., p.40.


11 - ibid., p.345.

12 - See Appendix to current study.


16 - Debray, Régis, *A Demain De Gaulle, Le Débat*, 1990, p.120.


19 - *Contretemps*, Préface, p.11.

20 - ibid., p.10.

21 - *Que vive la République*, p.131.
22 - Ibid., p.132.
23 - Ibid., p.133.
24 - Ibid., p.134
25 - 'A Domain De Gaulle', Panorama, France-Culture.
26 - Que vive la République, p.121.
27 - 'Le Rire et les Larmes 3'.
28 - Que vive la République, p.138.
29 - Ibid., p.138.
30 - Keith Reader has suggested in, Régis Debray, A Critical Introduction, p.42, that themes of Nationhood and Weaponary run through Debray's work. But if this is the case, the link between Modern Nuclear France and Bolivian rifles from the 1960's does seem tenuous.
32 - A reference to Debray's 1990 book A Domain De Gaulle where the General's vision of French 'Grandeur' is praised at the expense of Mitterrand's mediocre ambition. The issues this book raised are dealt with in part two of this study.
33 - A public argument between Bernard Pivot, the presenter of the literary television programmes Apostrophes, and Debray, who accused Pivot of having too much influence over the publishing world.
36 - Reader, p.48.
Part Two. 'Le' Politique.
George Ross has written that whilst the programme of the French Socialists had basically been an economic and centralising project, nonetheless much of the French avant-garde's thinking by the late 1970's had become concerned with such issues as authority structures, psychological manipulation in mass culture, and masculine domination. (2)

Debray had become originally known as a political theoretician who had contested, and claimed to re-actualise the revolutionary legacy of former generations. But he has also accepted that this global vision of challenging capitalist power even in the late 1960's and 1970's was being undermined in a radical way by his very own generation through 'hippy' culture, and the advance of women's liberation. In one interview in 1987 he confessed, looking back, that he felt more a man of the '60's rather than the '70's, where he had felt increasingly out of time, and 'retro'. (3)

In his collection of art criticism *Sloges* he in fact pinpointed the reading of Claude Simon's book *La Route de Flandres*, which he read and re-read in prison as having had a key effect upon his subsequent thinking because it revealed to him 'le noyau rationnel d'une fin de siècle où j'étais entré à reculons, les yeux tournés vers ses débuts, en m'ouvrant à l'univers qu'on a appelé depuis "post-moderne"', (4) After this apparent revelation, he wrote that he could no longer consider himself a Marxist since Marxism was a nineteenth century view about the organisation of the world. Given that this reading of Simon's book took place in 1969, one might lend some sympathy to Debray's own belief that his continuing notoriety has been maintained above all by newspaper critics, who have perpetuated a clichéd and reductionist misunderstanding about him being an exclusively political animal. (5) Even Roy Jenkins' pen-portrait of Debray as late as 1990 was to
represent him as 'a curious mixture of agitator and high functionary', by which date he was arguably neither. (6)

In direct contrast to these doubts it is of some surprise that Debray should reaffirm as late as 1975, in Les Rendez-vous manqués,

'Depuis que la philosophie s'est mise au service de l'histoire concrète, depuis que la simple interprétation du monde s'est doublée d'un capacité de le transformer, depuis octobre 1917 donc, ce qui se perd, et la manière dont cela se perd a beaucoup changé.' (7)

However, it was to become increasingly the case as far as some of Debray's writings were concerned, that this perceived possibility for a Marxist transformation of the world was indeed an illusion, and that exposing the 'nature' of man's political behaviour would reveal deeper truths, constraints and disappointments than the simple march of history had promised. More succinctly, his conviction was growing that the failure in the political domain was not the fault of the political domain per se. (8)

In Lettre aux Communistes Français et à quelques autres of 1978, Debray had in effect already challenged the Communist Party to propose a new political theory taking account of the fact that the motor of social development was 'not' born of the class struggle, and in many respects the second section of the current study is devoted to Debray's own attempt to produce such a theory. For behind his recognised political exterior there does indeed appear to have been a metamorphosis of the politically committed intellectual into someone we might accurately call the social theorist. The development, already underway in the 1970's, of a thinker who was beginning to examine the modalities whereby 'certain' ideas impose themselves into the social body. (9)

It appears that even in prison, Debray was beginning to wrestle with the problematic of intellectual militants by posing the question as to the form the literature of the elite needed to take on in order to make it accessible to the masses. (10) This represented an early acknowledgement that the means of communication would perhaps count for
more than the message itself. In the same article he also made reference to the ways in which existing communist regimes had been so preoccupied with their defence, that their own internal dialectic 'contradictions', which clearly existed, had never been analysed to the same extent that Marx had observed for capitalist societies. Such an overdue critique, he believed, would require not an economic study, but one involving such heterodox concepts as 'civilisation and culture'.

Another illustration of Debray's bourgeoning concern with the hidden supports at play behind all political activity appeared in a quote concerning a libel action Debray won after Paris Match had reported him as saying that 200,000 Chilians would have to die before true Marxism could be achieved there. The press campaign surrounding the case merited in his view 'une analyse structurale et un livre sur les techniques d'information et la mythologie de droite'. (11) Debray incidentally sent his three thousand francs to the Chilean resistance.

A further early indication of this move in intellectual terms away from the exclusively political reading of events appeared in 1978 in a long article Modeste Contribution aux Discours et Cérémonies du Xe Anniversaire. (12) In comparing the protagonists of the Left during 'mai 68' to no lesser figure than Colombus, he suggested that they, like the explorer, had read the new terrain according to what they thought they should see, and were framing something which was totally new inside an old frame of reference. As Colombus comprehended the New World according to the values of Old, so those parading the portraits of Mao and his Little Red Book and believing they could discover China in Paris, failed to see that true modernity and change was coming from the West, in this case from the American west coast. And that phenomenon was a portent of a very different kind of revolution. One which replaced the 'historical will' by the fact that the very technology of the modern era was ushering in a totally new social geography, to be studied sociologically, rather than politically. (13) A theory which suggested that in effect our ideologies of both the past and the future are the
products of objective forces, which cannot be harnessed, rather than subjective and deliberate actions. (14)

Debray expanded further upon why he originally lost interest in progressive ideologies and their political systems, and had begun therefore to search for societies' systematic truths elsewhere, in an article about Sartre from 1991. (15) Sartre, he suggested, had had the privilege of writing and working 'before' the explosion in the Human Sciences. But today's intellectual was obliged to think 'after' them, and had to take account of the truths they revealed. Advances in the fields of sociology, economics, pure science, political science, technology, and ecology, even the study of religion and myth were in Debray's view the 'grosses bornes milliaires' of our period. And a rationalist, Cartesian arbiter and moralist like Sartre, whom Debray referred to as 'Notre Socrate national', could no longer expect his work to be immune to their influence. It was therefore, in acknowledging the constraints that these disciplines imposed upon the intellectual that Debray was openly admitting by 1987 that he would find it easy to completely abandon activist politics in favour of more aesthetic work. For he had come to realise that the political domain was not one which could fundamentally change the world. (16)

In a discussion in 1985 with the Swiss left-wing writer and sociologist Jean Ziegler, Debray attacked Ziegler's political idealism with his own view of the only plausible intellectual attitude to the world he could now take. He stated, 'La différence entre Jean Ziegler et moi c'est que lui reste à revendiquer cet Eden alors que j'essaie de comprendre pourquoi il n'est pas advenu.' (17)

A subsequent discussion with Ziegler also proved to define the new Debray standpoint most summarily. He chided Ziegler by suggesting to him,

'D'un côté vous êtes sociologue, donc on devrait parler rationellement des choses réelles. Puis, tout d'un coup - parce qu'il faut être également moral et militant, tenir un discours qui plaise à notre public-, vous tenez un discours de mobilisation, ou
espérance, de tribun, en quelque sorte. Alors on se sent toujours et trop savant et pas assez militant, ou trop militant et pas assez savant. Personnellement, la seule façon de se dépétrer de cette contradiction est d'avoir deux personnalités, deux existances. Celle du chercheur qui essaie de dégager des raisons objectives, et celle du militant, ça fait une vie un peu schizophrénique, j'en conviens. Mais si on parle en sociologues, parions sociologie, et si on parle en militants, parions militance, Le mélange des deux genres me gène'. (18)

This resumé is a distillation of the direction of second section of this study, and illustrates the contrast between 'La Politique' (politics), and what Debray chose to term originally in Critique de la Raison Politique, 'Le' politique, which, although difficult to render succinctly in English is an incorporation of political anthropology and cultural ecology. For if, as he clearly believed, militant politics appears to be at an impasse, and if the next historic moment therein may take another hundred years to reveal itself, then Debray's, and our own attention must turn to the search for truths which human science alone can reveal about authority, domination, the state and representation; namely the politico-cultural arena. (19) In essence one could say that Debray has undertaken a deliberate intellectual jettisoning of idealism (20) in order to reflect rationally upon societies' organisation, and the networks of power which lie within them. And he has attempted to ask neutrally, in as much as that is ever possible, what is immutable in human society, and precisely what behaviour is eternally outside of our collective control such that the most well-intentioned political projects fail.

This very inquiry has led Debray to look at three specific areas to date. Firstly the role of the intellectual in society as the repository of common values. Secondly the quasi-religious urge in all societies and its effects upon the collective. And thirdly the way in which the transmission of ideas and images is affected by the technology of the epoch, the neo-science of 'mediology'.

Debray has stated that rather than having made a specific break with Marx in terms of its political possibilities, he has in fact begun to integrate and indeed supercede that Marxism into something which would engulf it, and go deeper than it. (21) However, before we consider in more detail this whole extra-political enterprise we may take note of Golfer's conclusion, in 1987, that the orientation Debray's new inquiries were taking was really in essence an 'analyse du systèmes de perpetuation des valeurs de l'Etat bourgeois'. (22) And if Golfer proves to be correct, even in some small way, then we can be assured that many of Debray's critics will continue to accuse him of a politically motivated manoeuvre.

Wayne Northcutt, (23) commenting in 1985 upon Debray's ideas about French foreign policy wryly asked whether, as Debray was now apparently making his long march through the corridors of power, any one else was marching with him. It would appear that Northcutt was wrong not only about Debray's colleagues, but also about the direction in which Debray himself was planning to march. Only time will tell if his new theories will prove to be as leaky as those on revolution, or indeed have a resonance as short-lived as his Republicanism.
Chapter 17. Notes

1 - Debray, Régis, Critique de la Raison Politique, Gallimard, 1981, back cover notes.

2 - Ross, George, 'Fragmentation du marché intellectuel et disparition de l'Intellectuel de Gauche', in Idéologies, Partis Politiques et Groupes Sociaux, Ed. Yves Mény, Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, p.118. One should add that this kind of avant-garde thinking was not exclusive to 'French' intellectuals of the time, and that the same issues were central in the USA as well.


4 - Debray, Régis, Eloges, Gallimard, 1986, p.72.


6 - 'Rebel makes a Right turn', The European, 20-22 July, 1990, (Roy Jenkins). There does almost appear to be an element of political a persecution of Debray which he no longer wishes to be subjected to. He has commented, in Que vive la République, p.185, figuratively speaking, of his ability to 'chaque fois vider les salles sous les sifflets et les Iazzi' (mockery), adding that in terms of this perpetual criticism, he is no more thick-skinned than anyone else.


8 - 'Régis Debray est-il de Droite?', Globe, juin 1990, (Debray interviewed by Kristina Larsen).


12 - Debray, Régis, Modest Contribution aux Discours et Cérémonies du 1e Anniversaire, Maspéro, 1978, p.35.

13 - ibid., p.35-6.

14 - ibid., p.50.


17 - 'Morale ou Raison d'Etat', Le Matin de Paris, 9 déc. 1985, (Debray in transcripted discussion with Jean Ziegler and Alain Finkielkraut). Debray did in fact stress in Critique de la Raison Politique, p.105, that he recognised and accepted his own complicity, as a former Marxist, with the 'bourreaux' of Russia, China, Cuba, and Viet Nam, primarily because he had kept a silence about events he was aware of in those countries. He wished to make it clear however that in his later work that he was in no way attempting to
avoid that responsibility by now writing a theory which accredited an innocence to men because the 'nature' of their behaviour could be described and explained.


20 - This rejection of idealism, and its replacement with (historical) 'materialism' was at the heart of Marx and Engels criticism of Hegel, Debray's continuing 'materialism' has in turn jettisoned the idealism of the 'religion' of Marxism.


22 - ibid., vol.1, p.228.

23 - 'Régis Debray's Buffalo Lectures', Contemporary French Civilisation, IX, Fall-Winter, 1985, p.95. (Wayne Northcutt).
As early as 1970, in *Journal d'un petit bourgeois entre deux feux et quatre murs* the prisoner, from his cell in Camiri, was to express both his scorn and his pessimism about the probability of the then hard-line militants of the left being able to sustain the practice of what they were preaching. He wrote,

'Un "communiste" entier, d'un bloc, d'une pièce, le bolchevik à la Vaillant, le maiois sans failles ni reproches d'aujourd'hui, se font rire. Je leur donne rendez-vous dans dix ans. Je sais que je les retrouverai en libertins tristes dans une boîte de nuit, en éditorialistes du *Figaro* ou en rentière dans un mas de Provence, juste retour des choses; hier, les dévots de Moscou finissaient leur carrière à Monte Carlo. Demain les pèlerins de Pékin finiront à Katmandou ou sur le divan de l'"analyste". (1)

However, if prisoner Debray's contempt for revolutionary fickleness was credited to an ultimate penchant for life's little comforts, by 1978, he had determined that the political turncoats of his own generation were in fact being wooed by phenomena of a completely different order. That is to say by fundamental changes within society itself, which were rendering orthodox methods of militancy and contestation redundant.

If the processions, the sit-ins and the rioting which took place in Paris in May 1968 have so often been referred to as the 'events' ('les Evénements') then the very vagueness of the term also conveys the lack of consensus upon what was actually happening at the time. Debray had of course been in prison in the late 1960's, (2) but his analysis of the phenomenon, in an essay written to commemorate its tenth anniversary, *Modeste Contribution aux Discours et Cérémonies du Xe Anniversaire* (3) contained neither rueful tone nor list of lessons for the future, and in fact proved to be Debray's first attempt to examine French society in a more oblique manner, divorced from the directly political. Thus whilst
Modeste Contribution was an unprecedented interpretation of the May events, it was also was to prove the precursor to a whole body of social theory by Debray in the domain of media influence. Whilst the essay did not necessarily represent a specific break with Debray's political concerns, (he was even to reassert in it that the overthrow of the capitalist system remained the ultimate goal (4)), as the reviewer J-F. Kahn concluded, Debray's commentary was an inversion of accepted truths and values about 'mai '68', and in fact clashed head-on with the 'saintes écritures idéologiques' of 1978 as variously formulated by Pauwels, Clavel, Lévy and Julliard. (5)

Modeste Contribution then purported that the supposed 'near miss' revolution of 'mai '68' was nothing of the sort but in fact something in the nature of the safety valve of advanced Liberal society. A mechanism which forced the financial and middle classes, for their own good, to modernise, and reinvigorate themselves through crisis, into a competitive democracy. As such the upheaval was a re-synchronisation, and unexpected regeneration of bourgeois power, (6) an outcome clearly the very opposite of the intentions of the 'subversive' student and worker participants. Here was not a catastrophic situation on the scale of a civil war, but a brief spasm, which unwittingly ushered in the belated development of French Capitalism. (7) And it was doubly ironic in that it was a demonstration of Marx's very thesis that it is the economic domain which invariably holds sway - over both the romantics of the political right and the political left. (8) In this light then, the student occupations were little more, in Debray's estimation, than a theatrical and imaginary taking of power, an 'Image d'Epinal' of revolution no less, (9) which was improvised daily, and collided with, rather than confronted the police. (10)

Thus, rather than a situation demonstrating what Debray was now considering as the outdated myths of revolution, civil war, proletariat and avant-gardes, 1968 was in retrospect social activity taking place on a different level altogether. In reality the flashpoint point where accelerating industrial, technological and materialist France, clashed
with, and began to supercede an ossified traditional and institutional France. A backwardness which happened to be lodged both politically and symbolically in De Gaulle's conservatism. The 'events' thus were a crystallisation of the struggle between a Catholic, rural, entrenched, and value-ridden 'vieille France', (11) and the requirements of a modern economy needing to compete in an 'Americanised' modern world. (12) Debray believed that what really lay behind the missile-throwing and barricade-building was the logic of unconstrained consumerism attacking puritan financial accumulation. (13) And as such, the catalyst of 'mai '68' was more akin to a biological change in French society than it was a physical revolution. Something he was to label a 'cybernetic' rather than a 'political' crisis. (14) Or as Golfier was to wryly summarise, the superstructure of the country, albeit with a little turbulence, was destined to follow the emerging infrastructure. (15)

Even more significantly the upheaval revealed that the neo-capitalist machine was indeed able to regulate itself, and demonstrate that modern bourgeois society had arrived at a maturity whereby it could 'ad infinitum' integrate and accommodate the forces threatening it. It had acquired the capability of manufacturing an order out of political disorder, and of harnessing crises as springboards for its own progress. (16) This meant that now, if capitalist consumer society was regulating itself without a conscious will, at a social or pre or post political level, (17) then Leninism, historic materialism (18), and the idea of a contradiction between organised workers and production was superfluous. 'Mai '68' had been a crisis 'in the system', not a crisis 'of it'. It had been a rupture in capitalist logic not its death throes. And the bleak news for the left of course was that the virus of contestation had actually ended up by strengthening the anti-bodies of the system under challenge, (19) particularly as the hated authorities had been able to convert the biggest mass strike in French history into acquiescence via interim wage settlements. (20)

One could suggest of course that social changes in France following on from 1968 may have seemed more apparent anyway to someone like Debray
who had not even been in the country between 1965 and 1971, but by 1978, he argued that society and its orientations were indeed impregnated with the traits of May itself, (even though of the regime itself had not changed), and that it was curiously charged with those exaltations of liberty, or that communion of egos which had been experienced on the barricades. (21) For whilst it had been banner portraits of revolutionaries like Mao and Guevara which had appeared in the demonstrations, it was the existing state which, once enlightened, had absorbed the demands for reform, and increased its confidence in repression where it felt necessary. For what was indisputably in the ascendancy by the early 1970's, were the very 'soixante-huitard' themes of women's rights, education being reformed to fit the needs of industry, and decentralisation. Similarly, minorities, consumer rights, the freeing up of broadcasting laws, the shrinking the paternalist state, free competition, ecology, abortion, prison reform, immigrant rights, the judicial system, (22) all had now become part of the wider political debate.

Debray believed that by the mid-1970's Giscard had become a symbol of a financial resurgence and an international openness, whilst Marchais had taken up the old slogans of the 'Action Française', (23) The torch of classic French humanism was flickering before the systemisation and the computerisation of the 'MIT'. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). ' Françaises' were usurping 'Normaliens' (24). What further proof of assimilation was needed than the fact that many of the young protagonists of '68 were now in positions of social, economic and cultural power in the country, (25) whilst many other of the young bourgeois militants whom Gilles Anquetil referred to as the 'rescapés du goulag français', (26) had by 1978, joined in a very anti-Marxist, anti-Soviet intellectual combat quite simply because they had realised that imperialist Capitalism was the best rampart of their own liberty. (27)

All of these examples were for Debray clear indicators that the 'pendules rustiques' (28) of the class struggle and worker solidarity had quite simply stopped. Between 1968, when the public was psychologically
bound to a party and its ideology, and 1978, when this bond had been broken, the former dominant idea that 'all' was political, had succumbed to a shift in personal values of reference where now 'la politique ne vaut plus rien'. (29) The post-'68 period was one which catalysed, (albeit belatedly, in comparison to the USA) an expansion of individualism and the demise of outdated social constraints. It was a time when ossified political and social institutions became definitively swamped by materialism. (30)

What arguably remains of greatest significance concerning Modeste Contribution as far as the direction of Debray's work is concerned was his additional focus in this essay upon media involvement in the 'événements', and his conclusion that the medium for disseminating information affects and shapes the very events themselves. In this way he believed that television had actually 'made' 'mai '68'. That in the space of a few weeks in the spring, in Paris 1968, a specific and important moment occurred where there was for the first time an almost complete intrusion of the mass media into political life, and to the extent that henceforth, it would be the 'electronic' struggle of ideas which would prove to have the biggest impact of all. (31) Because television was a medium creating a visual narrative only in terms of the parts of it which could be readily transferred onto film, it naturally preferred effects to causes, (32) and favoured style over substance. But because of its ability to report live from the demonstrations, it succeeded in blurring the act and the symbolic act, and in its search for a sensationalism over truth it fed the egos of the participants who proclaimed, 'je dis tout haut la révolution alors je la fais'. (33) It was television alone which was able to portray the narcissistic stars of the events as heroes, and men of action (34) by appointing the 'grandes gueules' of 'mai' as its very spokesmen. In 1968, the 'société de spectacle' thereby found its apotheosis, (35) as the traditional unspectacular revolutionary virtues of patience and silence completed their demise. (36)
Jean-François Kahn of left-wing daily *Le Matin de Paris* (37) concluded that by virtue of its lucidity and its subversive brilliance the provocative *Modeste Contribution aux Discours et Cérémonies du Xe Anniversaire* was in fact the most important essay of political philosophy of the year. He believed that in its exposure of the impostures, the myths, and pomposities of the then contemporary political gurus of the Left it stood out even above the vociferous 'New Philosophy' of the time, although he feared that because of 'their' very deliberate media exposure, Debray's contribution would not receive the recognition it deserved. *Le Monde* too acknowledged that Debray was the only intellectual to have recognised that France's journey towards 'Americanisation' had been given great impetus by '1968', and as such had helped her to overcome her two greatest handicaps in the modern world, which were her obsessions with the revolution and the nation. (38)

In contrast, Henri Weber (39) was one critic who rejected Debray's thesis outright, and chose to look at the matter in traditional political terms. He believed that reducing 'mai '68' to a socio-political reconciliation which ultimately tailored societies' attitudes to the new demands of capital was a grotesque misunderstanding. (40) He also accused Debray of effectively suggesting that if had 'mai '68' had not occurred as it did, then French capitalism would have needed to invent it. He went on to ask why Debray had conveniently forgotten to discuss such crucial factors in the whole issue as the reformist capitulation from the leaders of the worker's movement, and the fact that for a short period the survival of the Fifth Republic itself was in danger. Additionally, how could the considerable repression of the left and the purging of left-wing journals and militants be categorised as anything but authoritarian and reactionary behaviour from the Gaullist State? Such actions, he affirmed, were not indications of an assimilation at all. Furthermore Weber asked, from where had Debray acquired his conviction that the capitalist world was now immune to stagnation, depression, and unemployment, situations which would always be ripe for social explosion?
Weber concluded that if the much more liberal, partly Americanised, France of 1978-9 was indeed directly descended from the convulsion of 1968, then it was as its negation, not its completion as Debray had tried to suggest. He argued that the impetus given by the student and worker’s movement to such issues as women’s liberation, sexual minorities, and the contesting associations of tenants, prisoners, soldiers, and teachers, were in fact subversive activities precisely because they flew in the face of raw consumerism. And that was an indication that the balance in society had tipped in favour of the proletariat. If anything the events gave an impetus to the Left to reorganise, and contributed significantly to Mitterrand’s very narrow failure to gain the presidency in 1974.

Debray appears to have had one final word upon the same debate in an article he wrote for Libération commemorating the twentieth anniversary of ‘mai ’68’ in 1988. (41) He insisted here with some justification that the ‘soft’ revolutions in values and attitudes had proven to be much more effective than had the violent ones. He argued too that in France at least the very notion of liberty had undergone a modification, and a shift away from that idea that the state could be the exclusive focus for its provision, although this was not to suggest that he gave these wholesale changes his wholehearted support, particularly as he perceived a damaging confusion to have arisen in society between freedom, and the freedom to make money.

Whilst many aspects of Modeste Contribution may appear to address political matters, its inclusion here in Debray’s ‘complementary’ itinerary lies in the fact that it begins a critique postulating that society moves on and behaves in ways which are frequently beyond our control, and whose vectors of influence are neither self-evident nor easy to describe. An area of study which is invariably bound up with the media we use and invent, which in turn affect the ways in which we see, interpret, and ultimately behave. Indeed it was to be the examination of these underlying operations, in a historical context, which began to compete with Debray’s ‘political’ pen from this time onwards, and his
next two books began to analyse one very apt sphere of influence at play here, that of the intellectual, his 'raison d'être', and the tools of his particular trade.
Chapter 18. Notes

1 - Debray, Régis, *Journal d'un Petit Bourgeois entre deux feux et quatre ours*, Seuil, 1976, p.135. Paul Vaillant-Couturier was the PCF's pre-war spokesman on Cultural Affairs, and is cited by Debray here as an archetypal Stalinist hard-liner.

2 - Hamon, Hervé et Rotman, Patrick, *Génération 2, Les Années de poudre*, Seuil, 1988, p.287. Quoted from a 1970 prison interview, Debray readily conceded that had he been in Paris in 1968, then he would have certainly participated in the movement. He added however that he would have done so with few illusions about its success.


4 - Ibid., p.89.


6 - Modeste Contribution, p.11.

7 - Ibid., p.17.

8 - Ibid., p.12.


11 - Ibid., p.11.

12 - Ibid., p.16.


14 - Modeste Contribution, p.22.

15 - Golfier, p.327.

16 - Modeste Contribution, p.23.


18 - Ibid., p.23.


20 - Modeste Contribution, p.42.

21 - Ibid., p.88.
22 - Les Rendez-vous manqués, p.139.
23 - Modeste Contribution, p.43.
24 - ibid., p.19.
25 - ibid., p.33.
26 - 'Cruel Anniversaire', Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 4 août 1978, (Gilles Anquetil).
27 - Modeste Contribution, p.58.
28 - ibid., p.48.
29 - ibid., p.56.
31 - Modeste Contribution, p.65.
32 - ibid., p.70.
33 - Gollier, p.333.
34 - Modeste Contribution, p.69.
36 - Modeste Contribution, p.69.
37 - 'Comme toujours Barabbas'.
40 - ibid., p.70.
Debray was to write a brief article in 1978, titled 'Sa Majesté la Télé', (2) which returned to the effect that he believed television was having upon political and intellectual debate. In the weeks preceding its appearance, the leader of the 'Mouvement des Radicaux de Gauche', Robert Fabre had made a live, and unexpected announcement on television that his party, which had a mere three per cent of the popular vote, was to withdraw from the 'Union de la Gauche'. In Debray's view this decision was quite insignificant in itself, yet had a great effect because of the nature of its announcement. Fabre had very astutely used television's penchant for the spectacular over the significant to publicise his own party. Debray's concern in all of this however was that what was really occurring here was that the medium had de-politicised politics, because by its nature television always preferred to personalise matters, focussing upon individuals, temperaments and characters, rather than issues. And this, in his view meant that the logic of political debate had now passed under the effective control of the television broadcast. He added in this article his opinion that the same shift had also already occurred in the sphere of cultural and intellectual matters too, to the extent that now, 'le philosophe doit devenir son propre publicitaire pour faire exister sa philosophie, du même les lois du journalisme et du sensationnel tendent à s'annexer du politique'. (3)

It would be difficult to imagine an English writer writing a book for the home market, corresponding to Debray's *Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France* published in 1979. (4) Indeed 'Verso's' English translation of it, *Teachers, Writes, Celebrities: the Intellectuals of modern France*, (5) showed a need to make the subject matter more explicit, whilst Zeldin too
had added weight to the argument about French particularity in this sphere by suggesting that they 'appeal to a certain temperament that delights in systemisation and theoretical speculation. A temperament which outside of France is seen as eccentric and found mainly among academics'. (6)

Debray has said however that the impetus for him to write Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France came about during a visit to Cuba in the late 1970's, from where he was able to look from afar at the functioning of a specific social grouping with immense symbolic power, the 'Parisian Intellectual Tribe', and indeed envisage with some sadness his own impending fate as one of them. (7) But what turned out to be arguably his most controversial book to date, did not define French intellectuals through their ideological conflicts at all. But sought to chronicle them 'mediologically' by studying their varying vectors of communication, those historically changing modalities upon which their political and moral power depends, and the reciprocal effects of these upon their behaviour and their teachings.

Here in fact too was the close rapport with the theories Debray was to expound in Critique de la Raison Politique, (8) (which he had worked on during the same period, but which was published 2 years later, in 1981), since he was attempting to detail how and why 'clercs', assure the closed nature of the social system in which they are located by their provision of transcendent truths, or accepted beliefs. Notions which for Debray are a community's very lifeblood. Michel Serres has called intellectuals the 'fonctionnaires du vrai', (9) and Debray's scrutiny of these figures, who are both part of society, yet at the same time 'access ramps' to a reference point which is external to it, was motivated significantly by his belief that their behaviour holds the key to explaining the conditions whereby ideas can become material forces. (10)

In this sense, whilst intellectuals in liberal societies might often be neglected, marginalised or randomly group themselves around schools of thought or academic reviews, Debray believed that they were nonetheless unlike other categories of worker or producers. For their work remained a
vital part of the make-up of those societies, because the social function they performed was indeed that of mediator between the dominators and the dominated. (11) Examining this function, he argued, with traditional historical or sociological tools of analysis would answer few questions about their nature, whereas his 'mediological', or lines-of-transmission approach would more effectively lay bare their function. (12) As such, the method he proposed was not only a new branch of combined sociological and documentary theory but something radically different to the sour debunking of intellectuals that several critics were nonetheless quick to perceive. (13)

Debray began his effective genealogical research of this very French repository of power, (which was of course the source of his own power too) by attempting an original classification of exactly what the intellectual corps actually was. Although the difficulty he encountered in doing so of which led him to the understand why the extent of their influence and authority was not easy to locate, and often under-estimated. (14) Whilst it was not hard to situate their territorial base as Paris, with its concentration of universities, 'Grandes écoles', libraries, publishers, and broadcasting centres, and from 'where' intellectual influence was concentrically disseminated, asking the question 'who' they were proved to be more elusive. Trying to define which categories of people those lofty French intellectual labels such as Lacanisme, structuralism, semiology, linguistics, and Marxism, those 'professionals of the intellect', actually represented, (15) was not be found in any reference work. Predictably, government census statistics proved to be of little help in tying them down either. There was no reference there to the profession of 'haute intelligentsia', the socio-professional category which Debray was clearly examining, merely the section 'cadres intellectuels' comprising all artists, teachers and researchers. (16)

Attempting to define this elusive group by comparison to intelligentsias in other countries was, he believed, a similarly fruitless task. One which appeared particularly problematic in those socialist societies where Intellectuals did indeed have (in 1979, at least) a defined
nomenclature, but no autonomous 'influence' since they were merely subalterns and messengers of political figures in societies where public opinion was not recognised.

As a result, Debray decided that the definition of 'high intellectual' was best described in terms of their ability to accede to a means of mass diffusion. (17) For without communication, he suggested, they had neither influence nor obligation in the domain of public affairs. And this notion certainly met the criteria for the main thrust of his argument, which was to analyse the worrying consequences of today's cultural elites allying themselves to the new 'mediacracy' of television controllers and presenters in an age of mass communication. For intellectuals to integrate themselves to those who had a virtual monopoly of production, circulation, and the consequent ability to disseminate values and norms in increasingly global proportions, was, Debray estimated, an act not without the risk of degrading the intellectual function itself. (18) A function which was further impaired because the reigning mediacracy constituted, within France, the main pillar of bourgeois domination. (19)

In that sense, whilst broadcast intellectual opinion, (now most often occurring in the form of television 'appearances') may have looked as if it was founded upon reason, justice, rights and liberties, this was manifestly not the reason why it gained its credence, and its ability to form public opinion. And Debray believed that for intellectuals to ignore, or resignedly concur with this logic was to accept that the new media context, and within which people certainly remained attentive to their supposed cultural leaders, implicitly reduced the independence of both partners. And He argued that it even risked impairing a people's sovereignty too if governments themselves could not afford to resist and ignore opinions manufactured via the small screen.

This was not to suggest that the high intelligentsia's investment in mechanisms of self-promotion (or self-corruption) were new to our audio-visual age. Debray estimated that they have invariably depended upon, and formed an alliance with the dominant classes, who have always controlled the best vectors of their messages. (20) However, he postulated, it was with
the advent of the Industrial age that the conditions of intellectuals' existence changed significantly, for with the nineteenth century growth in literacy and cheaper reading materials lay their acquisition henceforth of an unprecedented ideological and moral influence in terms of the quantity of people they reached. And it was from this point on, Debray believed, that there had been three distinguishing ages, or cycles of intellectual production and dissemination in France which could be separately located.

The first cycle, often referred to as the period of the 'République de Professeurs' from the 1880's onwards, was viewed by Debray as a period when there was annexation of the intellectuals by the State itself at a time when the fundamental social and political issues were Church versus State and Monarchy versus Republic. Because, by the late nineteenth century the universities had become the new seats of progress, knowledge, and positivism, what Debray referred to as 'the just fruit of that marriage between the Bourgeois State and Humanist enlightenment', the diffusion of knowledge and the political crusade became one and the same thing. (21) There was thus no divorce between the elaboration of instruction and the defence of Republican values.

With the Dreyfus affair strengthening an anti-clerical political alliance, and crystallising the struggle between the reactionary, aristocratic 'Academician' writers and journalists opposing those despicable 'parvenus boursiers-professeurs', (22) who were to be the ultimate victors, there occurred a period when the philosopher/teachers and the political personnel formed a relatively homogeneous class. Hence, there existed the happy situation when those most prestigious combattants for science and reason, who were the university professors at this time, were able to work without the need to court popularity and public opinion. (23)

However, as the universities themselves expanded, by the late 1920's this anti-clerical intellectual order, with its bishop/mandarins in university chairs, and it 'cures/instituteurs', out in the schools, was to lose its hegemony. In the presence of a market now relatively flooded with qualified people, yet devalued in prestige and social power by sheer weight of numbers, a reaction occurred amongst the true elites, which was to see
them in turn move onwards and upwards, into the 'Collège de France', the emerging media, high administration, or other exit doors to promotion within the State itself. More crucially though, many others were to become involved in the second intellectual cycle Debray depicted here, beginning around 1920, whose centre of gravity became literary publishing, and whose patrons were above all the publishing houses of Grasset (1907) and Gallimard (1910). And this cycle, he maintained, retained its cultural hegemony until around 1960.

One may have deduced that this new shift, away from Intellectuals' original logic of organisation and reproduction under the wing of the State, however imperfect that may have been, had now become worryingly subject to the laws of the capitalist market. (24) One could have argued too that thinkers would now be totally subject to validation by public opinion to keep subscribers subscribing and readers reading. (25) But Debray suggested that that point had not yet been reached. This was because in this new intellectual milieu, financial profit was not at all the ultimate goal. He contended that the writers, critics, and commentators who worked in this 'golden age' of French thought, were men from wealthy backgrounds anyway (eg; Mauriac, Gide, Giraudoux) and who were thus in the privileged position of being the milieu's animators as well as its promoters. The fact that they were led too by mentors like Rivière and Paulhan who defiantly resisted the spectre of increased profitability required by their publishers meant that these intellectuals were able to be the repositories of a cultural power wielded in everyone's interest precisely because they were guided neither by base politics nor commercialism. Debray even suggested that these men belonged to a kind of intellectual and 'amateur' aristocracy, (26) rather than an oligarchy.

Whilst he did acknowledge that they were to become too much like mutual admiration societies; which were invariably male dominated, European, bourgeois, and grouped around schools of ideas, or -isms, who had a crusading 'review' as their vector of diffusion, (27) those 'hebdos-politico-littéraires' of the time, he suggested, were still very
'artisanal' in comparison to their nearest counterparts today. Our contemporary glossy news magazines, (28) of necessity underpinned by financiers and tycoons, (29) being a stark contrast to a time when it was possible for thriving intellectual reviews like the Nouvelle Revue Française to vow to fight journalism, mercantilism and Americanism on all fronts. (30)

The third, and contemporary cycle, in which intellectuals work, and which Debray labelled the 'media cycle', was for a second time, and even more radically, to move the foundations of prestige and initiative of France's cultural elites. This time the reconfiguration amounted to an industrialisation of cultural production. In the new age of electronic mass media, (a technology which according to Debray had already shaped, created and resolved the disturbances in 1968) the intellectuals' former micro-climate of publishing and writing, essentially bound up with the virtues of patience, digestion, cogitation, and hard analysis, (31) could no longer thrive. When confronted by the pervasiveness of television, a medium which focussed by its very nature upon personality, style, scoop, charisma, spectacle, sensation and the ephemeral, (32) intellectuals became forced to re-think the effects of their personal cultural investment. With TV pivoting almost exclusively around entertainment and relaxation, it was to magnify many times the law whereby the technology of communication is not a neutral technology, but actually determines the content of what is to be broadcast. (33) With marketability coming before accessibility, Debray was arguing that in this new mass media cycle, former intellectual values were bound to be significantly impaired because it made sound economic sense for value, truth, depth, and duration to disappear behind the armchair viewer's imperative for turn over, spectacularity, immediacy, image, and topicality. A new, yet rarefied atmosphere indeed for the abstract, the theoretical, and the hard-working Marxist even, to thrive in. It was his belief too that in the new environment the first hasty judgement of any intellectual output, was inevitably to become the only judgement of it. (34)

The all-powerful mediators in this particular scenario, whose favour one had curry in order to avoid anonymity were the big circulation
newspaper editorialists, and TV presenter/personalities. Yet these new selectors of culture were also seen as its decimators, (35) for the distributors of intellectual culture were for the first time totally separated from the producers of it. These were figures Debray described as the transmitters of the thought and works of the high intelligentsia, yet who determined the volume and nature of it through 'their' vision of the world. A vision which started from the premise that the best 'performers' were the best thinkers. (36) Cultural creativity today was therefore quite simply subordinated to an economic hegemony. (37) A state of affairs to which many intellectuals, in Debray's view, had too eagerly adapted, (38) and this certainly included those 'Nouveaux Philosophes' who had hit the headlines because they fulfilled the media criteria for the sensational. (39) It was the case, he went on, that the logic of contemporary intellectual power was not to be found in qualifications, or in the quality of research done, but in competitively, even ruthlessly, pursuing the limelight of a media career.

Typically, this has lead to an intellectual career structure where today's leading-light university professor has become obliged to set about an accumulation of mandates; writer, academic advisor, 'collection' editor, journalist, editorialist, and TV guest. He or she has become above all a self-promoter, colluding with a publishing market which is dominated by four major houses only too eager to manufacture a media coup through him. (40) All of which, in Debray's estimation, has brought to an end the long held belief that the French mandarin was specifically a cultural militant of the left. (41) Something which could no longer be the case where the medium for the dissemination of ideas sought a maximum of viewers, and the politico-cultural TV programme necessarily required a comforting balance of opinion to be represented.

Debray's summary was that this particular mass media was 'une machine à produire du simple' (42), not a machine in search of masterpieces to undermine it. (43) Quite obviously, he argued, notions of political leaning lost relevance in a realm where prestige was an exclusively economic indicator, measured in audience response. (44) An area of debate where what
was said became of much less importance than who said it, (45) and where marketability and turnover superceded erudition. (46)

Debray was in fact willing to concede that there was an intellectual rationale in attempting to influence those with maximum influence upon public opinion, and that there was indeed a price of anonymity to pay in refusing to play the 'launching' and the 'celebrity' game. He accepted that intellectuals could not simply ignore the primary instrument of social domination, which was the province of the audio-visual, but that the consequences of this unrestrained intellectual 'professionalism' (47) meant that the cultural domain became a commissioned domain. And it was axiomatic that the commissioners would devastate that culture by buying only material which could be slotted into the bottleneck of precious air time, (48) or to quote a characteristic piece of Debray rhetoric, 'L'économie de la raison rend la raison antieconomique'. (49) The end result was an absurd competition to conform, but which was in essence an intellectual implosion. (50)

Furthermore, with intellectuals being almost literally 'programmed', and taking part in the cultural force-feeding logic which is in the nature of television (51), was this not all a very strange legacy for creators of an 'ouvrage d'esprit'? (52) Was it not a complete denial of the credo of the true 'clerc' which Benda had suggested should be truth, reason, and justice? (53) Was it not moreover an 'embourgeoisement' of the intellectual, entailing the movement away from the subversive and critical role to that of the 'decorative' one? (54) Could it not be described as an indulgent careerism pervaded with a certain immoralism, (55) where public credibility ironically grew with professional discredit. (56) Were intellectuals not now contributors to an omnipresent coercive atmosphere where the true militant suffocated because all debate was reduced to acceptable difference of opinion? (57)

Quite clearly, that fundamental intellectual 'raison d'être', the very project of influencing people, had become, in Debray's view, a vocation which in the new cycle was politically undermined. And this was in spite of the fact that a relatively small, but immensely influential number of
'personalities' within high intelligentsia wished to present themselves as non-political animals. But they were in fact quite the contrary, Debray argued. For their political effect was all the more strong in that it appeared to be benign, and not to attempt to inculcate at all. (58) At which point questions about the intellectual's role of servant to the established order had to be asked. (59) In describing this complicity of elites as a 'Bonapartisme intellectuel' which became ratified by the public opinion it helped to form (60), intellectuals were simply being dishonest in claiming to be above the political arena. (61)

Moreover those high status individuals, who in former generations may well have been left-wing militants, were proof of the fact that one cannot think in one mode, yet live one's life in another. They had quite materially come to think in tune with the free market which gave them their sustenance and their freedom. Debray concluded that they had therefore changed their way of thinking rather than their way of living. Left-wingers living a life of comfort had become right-wingers (62) not only because abstract concepts like as Marxism did not 'perform' within the constraints of the audio-visual universe, (63) where truth was a question of 'acoustics', (64) but also because the defence of one's own privileges became a necessity. In that way the label 'bourgeois intellectual' had become a tautology. (65). And if by extension, the truth clashed with the interests and the illusions in which we were all immersed, was not the famous intellectual, as mediator of that truth, now simply an ersatz figure who told us what we wanted to hear? (66) A figure sub-contracted into ratifying the power of the existing order.

Those in his sights may have become even more irked by Debray's reminder that high-profile writers had never been so flattered, supported and listened to than they had been under the Vichy regime. An overt suggestion that today's counterparts were going down the same path whereby, 'Une régime de domination qui marche à la communication marche à l'intelligensia'. (67) The fact too, that in a parallel interview he expressed a belief that a good dose of collective intellectual psychotherapy was overdue added weight to the argument that his motive for
Le Pouvoir Intellectual en France was rather more than an objective description of the systems of diffusion which intellectuals use. More than a hint of the Alceste in Debray appeared to be present in comments like, 'Tout ce que j'écris, aujourd'hui, vise à casser les privilèges de cette haute intelligentsia qui monopolise les systèmes de communication afin de s'entregloser (gossip) jusqu'au délire'. (68)

Debray's lesson to his famous co-intellectuals, informing them that their work amounted to a saleable commodification of knowledge, where value and price could not be distinguished, and that their impact on the cultural market was almost reduced to its scandal value, was understandably viewed by many as more of a sermon than a lesson. A sermon whose very hypocrisy stemmed from the fact that its accusations secured its very own, 'succès de scandale', with increased financial benefits reaching the author of course. (69) Le Pouvoir Intellectual in fact became a major cultural event in 1979, due in no small measure to the fact that the one 'name' Debray chose to mention in it was that of Bernard Pivot, the presenter of the popular Friday evening literary programme 'Apostrophes', (70) and whose broadcast was the main platform for intellectual appearances at that time. The issue became an even greater talking point when black sheep Debray disdainfully refused to appear on the programme to answer his critics.

Debray wrote in his Introduction to Le Pouvoir Intellectual en France (71) that this book been originally envisaged as the third volume of a much larger theoretical work to be titled 'Traité de Médiologie' which in its first two volumes was to attempt to draw the radii of symbolic function in its rapport with state power in Western countries, and to analyse at the same time the notion of a 'medium' of communication. By way of illustration of this concept Le Pouvoir Intellectual was to have been a resulting application of a specific field of the transmission of symbolic power; that of France's intelligentsia. But since it preceded Debray's Cours de Médiologie Générale (72) by some ten years, and Debray probably underestimated the controversy it caused, it may be be fair to state that it was read outside of its intended context, and that because of this his attempts to
defend it suffered, for the quantity and zeal of critics certainly proved plentiful.

Christopher Fynsk, (73) for example, believed that the greatest flaw in the book was the fact that Debray had indicated no realistic way out of this crisis of control over intellectual integrity which he had located. He came to the conclusion too that Debray had been blinded by the limelight of a small group of media individuals, and that if it was the case that one motivation behind the book's premature appearance was to counter the media-hyped succes of the 'La Nouvelle Philosophie', their fame, true to Debray's own forecast, was fading rapidly anyway. He challenged Debray also upon his portrayal of a 'golden age' of French publishing in the 1930's and the idea that it thrived outside of the economic and social conditions of the time. Were the publishers like Gallimard and Grasset, he asked, really more altruistic than their TV counterparts today? Was it not the case, as Francis Mulhern (74) has suggested, that the same intellectual power structures had always been at work, but that mass media society merely magnified their efficiency, especially in a country like France which in 1968, in Debray's own view, had been pulled violently into a consumer capitalist society which other countries had adapted to more gradually.

Mulhern also considered that Debray's book revealed his preoccupation with forms and manifestations of bourgeois power, but that it could equally be interpreted as a specific political intervention for 1979, and as a harangue to a less than supportive intelligentsia after the defeat of the 'Union de la Gauche' in the legislative elections of 1978. (75) He also tried to envisage the contrast between Debray's French scenario and the appearance of a university don on the venerable and 'steadying' BBC, a situation representing anything but a succumbing to mediatic barbarism. (76)

J-P. Enthoven (77) questioned whether success and audience were really symptoms of intellectual infamy, and hotly contested Debray's view that docility was a precondition of intellectual cudos in Modern France. Patrick McCarthy (78), also thought Debray's reasoning to be extraordinary. In his view, the supposed integrity of intellectuals in both cycles one and two had never existed anyway, and he accused Debray of simply making the mass
media a scapegoat in what was really a sarcastic and rhetorical lament about the demise of the committed left-wing intellectual. For McCarthy too the Third Republic 'professeur' was little more than a populariser of a dogmatic Cartesianism anyway, whilst the 'NRF' clique was undeniably steeped in bourgeois culture. His message to Debray was quite simply that novelists, philosophers and editorialists today were no longer the masters of advanced thought, and that it was practical thinkers like scientists, economists, businessmen, engineers and managers who were the most influential people in society. (79)

Whilst accepting that Debray's method of structural enquiry into the laws of cultural production was a useful and original tool for further research, Poirot-Delpech in Le Monde (80) accused him of producing a moralising 'pamphlet sombre', which disguised grievances about the glamourisation of culture as research. It was also clear in his view that Debray's Marxist background still underpinned the whole argument since the idea that today's intellectuals are servants of the bourgeoisie continued to situate technological and intellectual evolution wholly inside the framework of class struggle. Poirot-Delpech also reminded Debray that there was no shortage of modern thinkers like Althusser, Barthes, Beckett, Deleuze, Genet, Simon, and Sartre who had actually spurned the mass media, and yet had been respected all the more because of this.

Edith Kurzweil in The Partisan Review (81) similarly dismissed the book as a product of Debray's Althusserian hangover, mirroring Althusser's own schematisation of Marx's work into an 'early' and a 'late' period. Whilst she was willing to accept that the book served to illustrate that technology plus bigger audiences did not provide a marvellous instrument of democratisation, she believed that Debray's analysis would have been more enlightening had he focussed upon the advantages and disadvantages of a marketing culture, as opposed to a bureaucratic culture - such as existed in the Eastern bloc. As it stood, she summarised, Le Pouvoir Intellectuel contained too many simplifications papered over by an apparent scholarship.

Michel Deguy, (82) like most other contributors to the debate also concentrated upon the 'third cycle' Debray had depicted. He perceived there
a good deal of bitterness from someone who, having been vilified in the past, was now taking some revenge upon his Intellectual colleagues, without the courage to actually name names. He went as far as suggesting that Debray was simply too involved in Intellectual life to document and make judgements about them with much empiricism. He also made pointed reference to Debray's style of writing, which, with its complex sentences and its obscure references it made the work seem accessible for Debray's peers alone. (83) Deguy also believed that *Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France* suffered from Debray's manichean approach and thus failed to examine whether at least some benefit had come out of the confrontation between mass media and intellectuals. Finally he complained that what Debray really ought to have done was to suggest how French society could escape the inexorable 'américanthropomorphisme' (84) towards which it was being pulled, although in fairness, this had not in any case been Debray's stated aim.

Walter Schwarz (85), was one who was prepared to show some sympathy with Debray's argument about France's over-influential modern mass media. But he accredited this to the fact that French radio and TV in themselves were universally lamented as being more mediocre and subservient than elsewhere. He could not resist however reminding Debray that had it not been for Intellectual pressure via the very same mass media then he could have languished in jail in Bolivia for a good deal longer than he did.

In summary, given that so many critics had attacked Debray on a rather personal level, one could argue that they had missed the main point about *Le Pouvoir Intellectuel*, for in the book itself Debray had anticipated a good deal of wrath by reminding his readers that if the historic description of the technology of intellectual vectors of the past one hundred and thirty years revealed the infamy therein, then this was hardly his fault. (86) And rather than demonstrating an ingratitude after all the favours that milieu had to date willingly bestowed on him, (including literary prizes, interviews, media exposure) he freely admitted that *Le Pouvoir Intellectual* was also an expression of a personal shame he had himself experienced as a member of this highbrow set. (87) As such, the book
was an honest plea for a collective morality, rather than a declaration of personal virtue. (88)

In fact Debray was to reassess this theme of intellectual's relationship with the mass media in a lecture as much as ten years later in 1989. (89) By now he was to humbly accept that the Le Pouvoir Intellectuel had indeed been a book with a paucity of history, philosophy and sociology which had acquired the limelight above all because of the inclusion of three sentences about Bernard Pivot. He has also accepted that the work was in retrospect guilty of several 'moments polémiques' (90) which sadly drowned out the aim of a study about how symbolic activity affects social and political relationships. But in insisting that the saga of its publication in itself demonstrated that the long-winded, complex examination of the truth it had attempted was a luxury which was no longer tolerated, and that only its sensational value counted, the whole episode demonstrated the very tenet that the intellectual is much more a man of vectors than he is a man of values. (91) Debray added now his belief that the centre-ground consensus, and 'Société Civile' ideas of the late 1980's had been born of the hegemony of this mass media 'establishment' and its 'humanisme électronique'. (92) Indeed, in a discussion with Bernard Henri-Lévy, Debray now emphasised his conviction that the intellectual could not be a free-thinker at all, because there was inevitably a community behind him, be it university, review, or in fact the TV community. (93)

It would appear that, finally, Debray's own obituary to Sartre, a thinker faithful to, 'La polémique sans la bassesse, la tenacité sans le ressentiment, le changement sans le reniement, la dignité sans le drapé, l'intelligence sans l'habilité, et tout cela sans calculs', (94) was after all a catalogue of qualities reserved for only the very highest of the 'haute intelligentsia'.
Chapter 19. Notes


2 - Debray, Régis, 'Sa Majesté la Télé', Bazar, mars 1979, (also published in Debray, Régis, L'Espérance au Jugatoire, Alain Moreau, 1980).

3 - ibid., p.61.


7 - 'La Nouvelle Trahison des Clercs', p.109.

8 - Debray, Régis, Critique de la Raison Politique, Gallimard, 1981.


11 - ibid., p.54.

12 - 'Mediology' was a term which Debray introduced for the first time in Le Pouvoir Intellectuel, p.15.

13 - Debray suggested that a history of Literature itself could be written mediologically. Rather than as a history of types or movements, this method would be similar to establishing a political science of literature by examining the resonance of a particular genre, which would in turn be dependant upon existing forms of dissemination, Le Pouvoir Intellectuel, p.158.

14 - Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France, p.36.

15 - ibid., p.42.

16 - A number which in the 1951 census totalled some 100,000 workers, Le Pouvoir Intellectuel, p.44.

17 - Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France, p.56.


19 - ibid., p.15.

20 - ibid., p.25.

21 - ibid., p.69.
22 - ibid., p.118.
23 - 'La Nouvelle Trahison des Clercs', p.118.
25 - ibid., p.75.
26 - ibid., p.100.
27 - ibid., p.108.
28 - ibid., p.110.
29 - ibid., p.116.
30 - ibid., p.99.
33 - 'La Nouvelle Trahison des Clercs' p.110.
35 - ibid., p.176.
36 - ibid., p.232.
37 - ibid., p.224.
38 - ibid., p.150.
39 - ibid., p.123, Debray suggested here as well that the 'Nouveaux Philosophes', with only a review to publicise their work, would barely have been heard of.
40 - ibid., p.159.
42 - *Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France*, p.139.
43 - ibid., p.165.
44 - ibid., p.225.
45 - ibid., p.337.
46 - ibid., p.162.
47 - ibid., p.250.
48 - ibid., p.138.
49 - ibid., p.340.
50 - ibid., p.174.
51 - ibid., p.168.
52 - ibid., p.170.
56 - ibid., p.283.
57 - ibid., p.217.
58 - ibid., p.275.
59 - The reigning 'mediacracy' in 1979 of course were all men and women of the political Right.
61 - Debray even perceived a kind of class struggle to be evident within the intellectual classes themselves, with the mediatised high intelleigentsia disdainful of the party militants and trade unionists of the low intelleigentsia. The latter being viewed as backward and out of date in their pursuit of advancement in society through the democratic process. Le Pouvior IntelJeauel en France, p.271.
63 - ibid., p.149.
64 - 'La Nouvelle Trahison de Clercs', p.110.
66 - 'La Nouvelle Trahison des Clercs', p.141.
68 - 'La Nouvelle Trahison des Clercs', p.142.


74 - 'Introduction. Preliminaries and Two Contrasts' in *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities*, p.xvi, (Francis Mulhern).

75 - ibid., p.vii.

76 - ibid., p.xviii.

77 - 'La Nouvelle Trahison des Clercs', p.112.


79 - To be fair to Debray, this estimation that the future 'belonged' to the economists, and that their emergence had pushed intellectuals into a secondary role in society, was something he had already written of in *Les Rendez-vous manqués*, p.144. Yet it does indicate an inconsistency on his behalf in crediting the intellectual with so much influence in *Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France*.


83 - ibid., p.1034.

84 - ibid., p.1038.


87 - 'La Nouvelle Trahison des Clercs', p.108.

88 - ibid., p.141.


90 - *Critique de la Raison Politique*, p.45.
91 - 'Les Intellectuels et les Média', p.312.
92 - ibid., p.318.
93 - 'Débat....,BHL.....,Debray', Gêloé, no.55, mars 1991, p.78.
94 - 'Et si nous redevenions sartriens'.

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The book, which one year later, in 1980, followed *Le Pouvair Intellectual en France* was titled *Le Scribe*. (1) Whilst there is a tendency to pair these two works together since they both attempt to locate and describe intellectual power, they were different most obviously in the time-scales with which they dealt. *Le Scribe*, (the term Debray used throughout as a synonym for 'intellectual' to best capture his various guises throughout the centuries) in fact looked at what he called the 'genealogy' (2) of the intellectual/scribe over a much longer period of time. Rather than a study confined to their activities and conditions in nineteenth and twentieth-century France, here was a broader, synchronic and somewhat less provocative sequel, about the very 'work value' of thought. (3) For Debray was undertaking in *Le Scribe* an inquiry into the fundamental purpose that this 'man of ideas' has served in society, given that historically he has been much more the 'bâquille du Prince', (4) an integral part of official authority, rather than the contestor, dissident or specialist that he is frequently believed to be today.

In this respect *Le Scribe* was more a precursor or appendage to Debray's ensuing philosophical work, *Critique de la Raison Politique*. For it was there that he examined the pre-requisite for all organised society to have a transcendant and spiritual aspect. An authority which was external to it, but one which, he believed, is always served and guaranteed by its collaborating philosopher-scribes. Whether they were men of the sacred or the profane world made little difference. For in Debray's theory there was an inherent relationship between the mystical and the political. (5) Hence both priests and advisors were, and are still, important actors in our attempts to understand the very nature of the communication of all government, all domination, and thereby what is essentially political, and at the heart of 'Le' politique. To use Debray's own contrast between his two 'intellectual' studies, (6) whilst *Le Pouvair Intellectual* examined...
intellectuals from below by looking at their methods of communication, Le Scribe's aim was to study, from above, their organic yet very prominent liaison with political power, which he believed to be part of the syntax of all groups.

In that all societies in the world have hierarchies, Le Scribe was thus an enquiry into the behaviour, the status and the logic of these human vehicles of domination. It was less a history, or sociology of clerics and intellectuals, than a geography of authority plotted through whom he calls this 'commis aux écritures' or 'artisan de la puissance'. (7) He who has variously been called scribe, sophist, 'clerc', man of letters, intellectual, and 'eminence grise', (8) examined in terms of the exploitative function of what he writes over and above its illuminatory function. (9)

Debray's entrance point for studying 'clerical' emergence in the West started ironically with the scribe's temporary redundancy after the decline of Rome. (10) In a period when proclamations of authority and universality were supplanted by the very local customs of isolated communities, and their own particular gods, the fact that there was no longer any temporal authority led to the temporary superfluity of its organic intermediary. Only with the later reappearance of community, enclosure, and aggregation for security's sake, followed by post-subsistence accumulation and confiscation, was the sacred 'interior' of the community created, in which political sovereignty could grow as the proof and guarantee of the group's identity. (11) Debray believed that this collective negotiation of security in itself engendered an authority, and hence a domination. The consequence being that the new power required an administration as an investiture of its values, and at which point it employed specialised functionaries to draw up inventories, levy tax, and write laws, etc.

This meant that the technique of the very first scribes comprised the power as well as the prestige to make abstract, conceptualise, and interpret what was secret and mystery to others. Debray deduced that it was from this quality that the Scribe not only derived his original reverence and his consecration, but he thereby embodied that universal pre-eminence
of verbal over manual activity, (12) and ultimately the cost of his upkeep, his patronage, his favours, and his attachment to the Court. As the transmitter of commandments or commands, (13) and the obedient servant of God or of the primitive State, his ability to 'scribe' in an illiterate eighth-century Europe became synonymous with the capacity to 'prescribe', and his ability to instruct became his potential to conduct. (14) Debray saw further in this ability to administrate that which was the sacred to the community, (albeit inside the profane world) the germ of the political animal par excellence. (15) For a member of a society who was the organ of the referential function required for domination, be that in the name of god, law, race, nation, class, progress, ancestry, or humanity itself, sees him thus occupying and influencing, from the Dark Ages themselves, all of the ministries. (16)

Debray believed that first real intellectual corps were the early universities. Institutions which sought to concentrate, filter, control and legitimise the flux of symbolic textual production, for the benefit and hegemony of the church. (17) Thus the very first organised ideologues were theologians, and the first thought police were in fact the faith police. (18) However as the church's authority was eventually to become contested by monarchical authority, the new kings were also to be served in turn by their own allegiant 'ouvriers du concept', (19) and who illustrated by their move from the company of bishops to the entourage of the Court, that there is no antimony between knowledge and power. Debray's reasoning here, that the political struggle is an essentially 'clerical' struggle therefore rendered Julien Benda's (20) notion of intellectual betrayal illogical. And this was because history shows us that the genes of the scribe are not impartial at all, but designed to intercept, interfere, and intercede wherever power is to be located. (21) Betrayal, as Debray concluded, was in the intellectuals' blood from the start, (22) although that was in itself a statement which appeared to reveal that his criticism of their modern day counterparts in Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France had been, after all, a fruitless exercise).
Nonetheless, Debray was anxious to avoid suggesting that the scribe was little more than the 'greffier du despotisme'. (23) An unlikely conclusion of course given that he was soon to be playing the role of 'Conseiller du Prince' Mitterrand? himself. The scribe's relationship with power on the contrary was seen as one of reciprocity. (24) An important invariant of his power, as far as Debray was concerned, comprised authentifying whether those in authority had correctly interpreted and applied their mandate. (25) The very fact that the religious or secular intelligentsia were fêted in periods of transition or weak authority, revealed that social cohesion was reliant upon them at such times, and for a period it was in the authority vacuum that the scribe became the privileged symbolic repository of values, projects, models of behaviour, utopias even. (26) Debray illustrated this constant, yet inverse rapport between the rise of the strong state, and the corresponding lack of autonomy, marginalisation or indeed annexation of the intellectual, (and vice versa) with reference to French history.

In sixteenth-century France the lack of a strong centralising authority saw the intellectual-scribe's influence successful in dislodging theology as the symbolic foundation of the monarchy. (27) It was in the seventeenth century that the 'Sun King' reversed the process, re-allying state and religion to the person of the king. A symbolically auto-sufficient Louis XIV, converted his legitimisers into men who wrote 'Belles Lettres', and who served only to 'chanter la gloire du prince'. (28) A period when philosophy, bannished from the profane, turned to metaphysics, (29) and when it became impossible to talk of religion 'or' politics, just as it is in those modern socialist states where there is an indefatigable and tautological celebration of the State's essential virtue. (30)

However, by the eighteenth century the initiative of symbolic power was wrested back into a veneration of the philosopher, who ultimately engendered the French Revolution. Only for the pendulum to swing back once more to the state as Bonaparte made the intelligentsia fully accountable. Firstly by censoring and sequestrating their means of diffusing their ideas, and secondly by means of the 'Concordat', (Napoleon's political
agreement with Rome), a network of social control achieved via the pulpit. (31) It was to be the upheavals and unrest surrounding the 'Bourgeois Monarchy' of the early nineteenth century that invested Hugo, the 'pontifiat romantique et humanitaire', (32) as the people's guide, and which in turn created a space for those secular churches; socialism, positivism, and Saint-Simonism to develop and pave the way later in the century for the installation of that corps of professeur/clercs in the service of Third Republic.

Debray went on to explain how this flux continued in the Fourth Republic whose institutional weakness was balanced by the moral magistrature of those 'maîtres à penser' and 'maîtres à vivre' (33) like Sartre, Camus and Malraux. Although matters were to be re-configured again as the growth of the symbolic power of the Fifth Republic diverted their intellectual successors into the realm of specialist research. He did however suggest that today, and in spite of his own disapproval about their behaviour, France's intellectuals were once more in a period of plenty, if not one of the best they had ever enjoyed. This was because they were conserved in spite of their criticisms, and could express their dissidence with no real price to pay personally for it. (34) Indeed in an interview at the time of publication of Le Scribe Debray suggested that in societies with no possibility of the advent of a political alternative, then their credo ought first and foremost to be that of the 'emmeroeur'. (35)

The very topical subject of the demise of Marxism in France at this time (1980), and as already examined in Lettre aux Communistes, was also considered here in the light the vital function of the intellectual. Debray stressed his belief that a most important gap remained in Marx's thinking (and indeed his commentators as well), and that this had been their failure to look more rigourously at the way in which the intellectual served the existence of the state, and precisely 'how' he had emerged as an indispensable intermediary for the vulgarisation of any potential new power. (36) Marx of course believed that he had discovered objective, scientific laws about a process in society which would arise with spontaneity from industrial expansion. A process which in one broad sweep
dispensed with the question of an organising party and its intellectuals. Traditional Marxists though had been wrong, as far as Debray was concerned, to dismiss intellectuals as bourgeois appendages, 'baudruches' (windbags) (37) or parasites. They had been misguided too in claiming that whilst thinkers may have had a deep understanding of Marxist theory, this did not single them out for a special role or political function at all behind the real subjects of history, the working class. For whilst of course thousands of intellectuals had rallied to the communist cause, Debray believed that it was specifically because their role and their potential had never been seriously examined and understood in historical and symbolic terms that they failed miserably to pass down the message from above to the underprivileged below. They wrote and worked in an ignorance of that necessary and dynamic structure for the diffusion of the message between the repositories and the beneficiaries of the message. (38) Their theory of history did not incorporate a theory of those who incorporated theory into history, the intellectuals. (39)

Marx's contention that the social movement of emancipation could be its own motor, its own medium, and dispense with its intellectuals, was a fascinating invention, Debray conceded, but it had never and could never work. (40) Rather than 'oiseaux de malheur' subalterns, and symbols of the privileged 'division' of work in society as Marx had categorised them, the intellectuals were for Debray, symbols of the eternal 'heterodox' nature of society, as opposed to the communist aim of homogenisation. For where communism had come to power, as all organisers and founders of revolutionary parties had discovered, it had involved rehabilitating the political intellectual, (41) and proceeding, 'top down', through reference, hierarchy, discipline and guidance from professional leaders, or 'new evangelists'. It had only succeeded by virtue of indulging in the 'art' of politics, and not the science of economics. It was no accident, he maintained, that Marxism's impact had been least significant in countries like Britain, the United States, Sweden or Belgium where the intelligentsia have had little status or impact. (42)
Marxism, according to Debray's interpretation, was soon to become something which was not scientific at all, and eventually proved to be something more akin to a religion, with its various disciples, its factions, and its own mythology. The great irony was that where there was no strongly-organised communist Party, the Marxist intellectuals actually hi-jacked 'the cause' in their creation of a sophisticated and complex circle of debate, which was divorced from militants and activists, and had no realistic action plan. (43) Rather like the 'ENS'-Althusser circle of the early 1960's one is bound to add.

Debray in fact contends that one very undesirable consequence of failing to concede intellectuals their place and function in society has been at the expense of a resurgence, in the political and cultural arena, of those irrational, and fascist-like properties such as instinct, sentiment, nature, tradition and soul. It was indeed an irony, he suggested, that in that particular kind of political climate, the thinker has often come to be considered as an agent of decadence, a conspirator, and 'juif par essence'. (44) One could not escape the fact that a widespread denial of the thinker's qualities of reflection, circumspection, analysis, reason, and compromise, (often also interpreted as evidence of his integration into the bourgeois state) frequently resulted in an exaltation of very opposite characteristics, such as action, involvement, intransigeance, and irrationality. Features held most often in esteem on the extremes of both the political Left and political Right. (45)

A further social law about symbolic power which Debray described supported Marx's own theory of history that those with the means of material production have simultaneous jurisdiction over spiritual production. This concerned the scribe's consistent role alongside the 'princes' as recorders and selectors of official memory. Our own Eurocentric scribe, he argued, egocentrically ordered, recorded, and sifted events in the world in terms of the values of the civilised 'West', (in itself an explanation of why for example Greek Art was in the Louvre, but African Art in the Museum of Mankind (46)). In doing so, he has excluded that other half of the world we have variously come to label as slave,
immigrant, woman, foreigner or 'le barbare'. (47) In fact Debray made a
telling comparison between three separate French intellectual manifestos
from 1919, 1935, and 1978 (48), which all, in a very similar manner focussed
upon the preservation of culture as 'la haute humanité', which they
believed to be under threat. But what they really feared to be under
threat, in his view, was their modernist liberal consensus, dressed up as
inviolable freedoms.

It was this allegiance to the scribe/intellectual's own culture which
Debray strongly believed ought not to be underestimated. Whilst for a
thousand years Latin had been the language of learning in a Europe of small
states, the subsequent rise of French thought, language, and intellectual
prestige, was of course closely bound up with France's ability to
materially export the language of her thinkers, both financially and
militarily. And this was a cultural expansion from Paris of such
proportions that the scribe of smaller cultures became reduced to being
little more than a 'veilleur aux remparts'. (9) To illustrate this same
reasoning with a pertinent example, one can understand why, in an age when
America has become the major exporter of culture in the world, a thinker
like Debray has not had all of his work translated into English, and is in
many instances confined to the French-reading world. Indeed, by extension,
one is even tempted to ask in this context, about the extent to which the
'Republican' Debray, is not himself one of those very defenders of 'French'
fortifications under siege.

It was invariably in ignoring the periphery then, that the thinker,
who was guilty of an age-old cultural apartheid, implied that liberty and
civilisation were essentially his preserve. His idealisation of his own
culture's values, (50) automatically permitted him to define himself as a
cultivated philanthropist. Debray however reminded him that his time and
his luxury to sing of these virtues was a luxury deprived of others, who
had neither his judicial nor his social freedoms. (51) He believed that it
was therefore with a smug self-contentedness that the Western intellectual
of today interpreted slavery as a necessity of civilisation, famine as a
consequence of uncontrolled demography, and exploitation as a provider of
employment. (52) It was consequently no little surprise then that his solidarity with the developing countries waned the moment that oil prices went up. (52)

According the argument in Le Scribe, it has always been the case that it is the Scribe's omissions from his interpretation of the world which make his disciples gather around, (54) and Debray suggested that nothing was more useful to the gods and the chiefs than this production of symbols permitting us to misunderstand the history of man, (55) For this prevented us from seeing that the blood of others flowed 'chez les non-scribes' (55) because of our actions. Certainly Debray's main point here was to emphasise that any objective representation of humanity and its history is impossible, because it must invariably be constructed in relation to others. (57) Even the purportedly apolitical thinker deluded himself if he believed he could remain outside this definitively political system. (58)

It was in these respects however that Le Scribe arguably departed from its aim of revealing universal laws about the symbolic intermediary, and acquired an uncomfortably close affinity with the more overtly political work Debray was writing at this time. Connected to articles like 'Il faut des esclaves aux hommes libres', (59) and the fundamental idea that bourgeois idealism (60) thrived upon, and profited by the economic under-development of others, many would have contended that his intended theoretical enterprise here had drifted quite plainly into the ideological domain. The theoretician was evidently not quite the neutral enquirer he had purported to be. In fact Debray's language betrayed his parallel intention to some degree. He began by neutrally labelling his subject matter the Scribe, yet came to refer disparagingly to him as 'Monsieur Esprit'. (61)

Whilst one could make a strong case that a continuation of the harangue of Le Pouvoir Intellectual was most evident in this book, one could suggest too this still untranslated work might more accurately have been titled, 'Le Scribe en France', since almost all of Debray's examples in support of his theory of intellectuals are drawn from French history. He did attempt to justify this by claiming that France's very historical
specificity lay in the fact that she has been the homeland par excellence of the political, (in contrast to 'philosophical' Germany and 'economic' Britain, (62)) and that as the native-land of the 'Rights of Man' this made her the most appropriate place to study this whole phenomenon. Thus the existence for example of France's 'Ministry of Culture' in itself, he argued, illustrated the importance of state power being fundamentally exercised in the name of a particular set of values and ideas, both of which were symbolised further by the 'French Institute', and the 'French Academy'. These were institutions, he claimed, which represented the very complicity between the prince (The State), and his scribe (63). In spite of this however, one could argue with some justification that this plea for French difference, which occurs repeatedly in Debray, does in itself appear to contain a significant element of Franco-centism, and seems in some senses to reduce Debray to an extremely defensive 'veilleur aux remparts'. At very least Le Scribe lacks a comparative angle to the development, or under-development of symbolic power elsewhere in the world.

Indeed a further criticism to be levelled at this book is the one whereby a clear distinction is not made between the intellectual, the scribe, the dissident, the man of letters, theorist, expert, academic, theologian, critic, or indeed the journalist who can all undeniably be integral parts of the politico-symbolic domain. The fact that these merge under the generic, if intentionally overarching, heading 'the Scribe', when one could argue that beyond that factor they all convey influence in varying degrees and for varying reasons, remains less than satisfactory. As Debray himself wrote, it was not only the princes who needed their interpreter/translators, of values and issues, so did the 'démunis'. (64)

Predictably, unreserved praise in the press for Le Scribe was hard to find, as was any hard-nosed appraisal of Debray's theory of intellectuals. Gérard Slama in Le Point (65), declining to look beyond Debray's criticism of today's champions of human rights wrote of the reappearance of Debray's same old ego, his same old rhetoric, and his tiresome sectarianism. He went as far as accusing Debray of a Maurrassien fanaticism.
J-P Enthoven in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (65), accepted that *Le Scribe* contained elements of both sincerity and guilt, but that the message in it which superceded everything else was that of Debray's hatred for his class and his milieu. He pointedly asked too whether Debray himself was now going to become an 'éminence grise', or whether he would be content to remain just another touchy and obscure 'clerc', a virtuous but powerless, 'rejeton exemplaire'. As far as the theoretical construction of intellectual mediation was concerned, Enthoven rejected it because he saw its author as a kind of docile Hegel, unable to prevent himself from searching for a sense to absolutely everything.

Poirot-Delpech in *Le Monde* (67) grudgingly accepted that the book could be interpreted as being in the margins of Debray's promised mediological project. He also applauded the fact that he was practically the only contemporary intellectual to question the vexed and unresolved relationship between Western wealth and Southern poverty. But what he read above all into *Le Scribe* was 'Alceste's' humourless, moralising in a text which was often nothing more than a long-winded complaint. A piece of writing induced by a 'post-Gauchisme' depression which was much closer to polemic sniping than serious philosophy, and in most respects a re-run of the same tirade begun in *Le Pouvoir Intellectuel*. (68) Gilles Anquetil was another critic who in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* (69) summarised the book as a sour and trenchant project written against the 'air du temps', and that an intellectual solitude was likely to be the price that Debray would end up paying.

Blandine Barret-Kriegel, by contrast, in *Libération* (70) did begin with a little more tolerance. She conceded an admiration for the brio and the originality of analysis from this very talented 'Marxist' writer, who had argued persuasively that today's intellectual was the most recent incarnation of an ancient social function. But having said so much she too felt no compunction to hold back on the criticism of certain elements of *Le Scribe*. Fundamentally, she concluded, this was a stigmatising 'prêchi-prêcha' of a pamphlet, from a censuring, obsessed, and reprobatory moraliser. She suggested to Debray that at a time when socialism was losing
its force, it was not by demoralising the people’s mediators that one served the people.

Fernando Arrabal in *L’Express* (71) categorised *Le Scribe* as an enigmatic work. With particular reference to Debray’s contention that intellectuals have betrayal in their blood, he asked to what extent Debray was indulging in the same activity? Arrabal however did at least ask the kind of question many non-intellectual readers might have validly asked. He felt that Debray’s use of scientific terms like ‘physique de la pensée’, ‘logiques sociales’, and ‘lois découvertes par Marx’, as if they were self-evident truths, were little more than a baroque use of language which confused rather than signified. If anything they revealed Debray to be a man of chimera rather than a true philosopher. Arrabal decided that ultimately Debray was someone vainly trying to cling on to a materialist theory of history, whose ideas would have been more convincing were it not for the fact that behind all his work lurked the shadow of the ‘Cuban Goulag’.

It is perhaps appropriate here, given this accusation of obscurantism, to include an example of Debray’s style of writing, (which is of course exclusive to *Le Scribe*) but which in this respect hardly helps his own cause. The very dense paragraph below, admittedly almost meaningless out of context serves only to illustrate the way in which the complex style sometimes overwhelms an already weighty substance. It could even support the charge of an occasional pomposity at the expense of clarity.

‘Voltaire règne à Paris, mais de Ferney; on l’adore, mais on l’exile, Révéral réduit, le shaman aux cent masques suscite des réactions tribales, donc tripales. Par un étrange paradoxe, celui qu’on a tardivement baptisé "intellectuel" ne rentre pas dans une grille "cérébrale" ou logique, mais se présente obstinément comme une catégorie de la sensibilité. Aussitôt né, le détenteur du savoir glisse dans le champ sémantique du pouvoir, dont nous savons à présent que le lexique est profane mais la syntaxe religieuse’. (72)

Finally, some unreserved credit for *Le Scribe* did come from two notable sources. Cathérine Clément in *Le Matin* (73) accepted whole-heartedly
what she saw as this combative search for a noble function for today's scribe, confronted as he was by the mass media and its prevailing ideology. One can imagine Debray himself gaining however most satisfaction in reading the highly respected sociologist Michel Serres' conclusions. In looking exclusively at the book's social scientific aspect Serres (74) summarised that whilst it has been known for a long time that the 'scribe' is a kind of pastor to society, he believed that Debray had shed valuable light upon his role which our forefathers had labelled as obscurantism or faith.

Before the appearance in 1981 of Debray's first truly theoretical work, Critique de la Raison Politique, one could have summarised that his foray into the realm of theory, or 'le' politique as he of course termed it, had received a very mixed reception. It appears too that he had no little difficulty in keeping some shameless polemic aside from his projects to conduct investigations rather than seek to influence and persuade. A question Blandine Barret-Kriegel expressed acidly in her review of Le Scribe titled 'Plus d'enquête et moins de requête'. (75)
Chapter 20. Notes

1 - Debray, Régis, Le Scribe, Gendre du politique, Grasset/Livre de Poche 1980.

2 - ibid., p.9.
3 - ibid., p.238.
4 - ibid., p.6
5 - ibid., p.80.
7 - Le Scribe, p.8.
8 - ibid., p.9.
9 - ibid., p.23.
10 - ibid., p.17
11 - ibid., p.11. These notions are all integral to the theory of the politico-religious behaviour of the community as expounded in Debray’s Critique de la Raison Politique of 1981. See chapter 22.
12 - ibid., p.32.
13 - ibid., p.32.
14 - ibid., p.22.
15 - ibid., p.78.
16 - ibid., p.82.
17 - ibid., p.47.
18 - ibid., p.51.
19 - ibid., p.52.
20 - Julien Benda’s best known work was La Trahison des clercs. (1927) He argued in it for an intellectual return to the noble and abstract principles of justice, truth, and humanity, and opposed thus what he saw as an intellectual descent into the political arena.
21 - Le Scribe, p.310.
22 - ibid., p.90.
23 - ibid., p.27.
24 - ibid., p.27.
25 - ibid., p.106.
26 - ibid., p.120.
27 - ibid., p.123.
28 - ibid., p.126.
29 - ibid., p.127.
30 - ibid., p.127.
31 - ibid., p.134.
32 - ibid., p.135.
33 - ibid., p.139.
34 - ibid., p.122.


36 - Arguably Debay was not doing justice to Lenin here. He had after all railed in *What is to be Done?* about placing too much faith in unguided and spontaneous working class activity, and had thus propounded the idea of the indispensable importance of intellectuals in evaluating conditions, and raising consciousness. (Lenin, *What is to be Done?* Penguin, 1988, pp.49, 98.)

37 - Le Scribe, p.165.
38 - ibid., p.181.
39 - ibid., p.192.
40 - ibid., p.184.
41 - ibid., p.189.
42 - ibid., p.190.
43 - ibid., p.190.
44 - ibid., p.300.
45 - ibid., p.195.
46 - ibid., p.245.
47 - ibid. p.214.
48 - ibid. pp.277-84.
49 - ibid. p.60.
50 - ibid. p.245.
51 - ibid. p.252.
52 - ibid. p.233.
54 - ibid. p.236.
55 - ibid. p.236.
56 - ibid. p.272.


60 - Le Scribe, p.211.

61 - ibid., p.252. 'Monsieur Esprit' here was almost certainly a calque on Paul Valéry's ascetic of intellectuality Monsieur Teste of 1896. Harvey and Hestekine refer in The Oxford Companion to French Literature, (1953) to Valéry's character as 'the incarnation of the universal brain, (who) existed in a realm of abstract, sterile contemplation of his own potentialities; to condescend to translate any one of these into action would have been to mar his perfection'. (p.731).

62 - ibid., p.147.
63 - ibid., p.154.
64 - ibid., p.313.
68 - ibid., Given Debray's ill-disguised attack upon them, Poirot-Delpch also expressed his surprise that Grasset, the publishers of the 'Nouveaux Philosophes' had issued Le Scribe.
69 - 'Le Dernier Régis Debray. L'Idéologie, cette pourvoyeuse de sécurité', (Debray interviewed by Gilles Anquetil).

70 - 'Plus d'enquête et moins de requête', Libération, 18 mars 1980, (Blandine Barret-Kriegel).

71 - 'Parlons clerc', L'Express, 29 mars-4 avril 1980, pp.56-9, (Fernando Arrabal).

72 - Le Scribe, p.78.


75 - 'Plus d'enquête et moins de requête', (Blandine Barret-Kriegel).
As early as 1975, a review in *Le Monde* (2) of Debray's *Les Rendez-vous manqués* made reference to his ill-humour about appearing on television; 'il y lève les yeux au ciel, mais enfin on l'y voit'. In the same year Debray had written an article (3) remarking on the way in which Emmanuel Ajar's refusal of the Goncourt prize actually led to him acquiring more sales than he would have had he accepted it, and Debray clearly expressed his opinion that to combat the logic of this kind of inverted attraction then writers ought indeed to appear on TV, but in their very role of 'écrivains contestataires'. However, Debray's dilemma about 'appearances' was to be severely put to the test in 1982, by an episode which stemmed not from the theories in *Le Pouvoir Intellectuel*, but from a very public argument with the presenter of France's top literary TV programme, Bernard Pivot.

Ross (4), has written at length about today's guardians of high culture in the French media, who have acquired very significant followings. In citing Poirot-Delpech (*Le Monde*), Nourissier (*Le Figaro*), and Julliard (*Le Nouvel Observateur*), he has suggested however that the most prestigious contact, upon which the whole system of promoting literature has depended, has been the long-standing and uniquely influential Bernard Pivot. For it was Pivot, through his widely watched literary TV programme of the late 1970's and 1980's, 'Apostrophes', (latterly called 'Brouillon de Culture') who more than anyone else could have been accused (or credited) of being the most dominant commercialiser and celebrity-maker in the realm of 'belles
lettres'. Indeed Pivot's weekly programme, his selections, and his choice of guests, was a cultural filter which was so powerful in Debray's estimation, that he had been prepared to label it in *Le Pouvoir Intellectuel*, 'le point d'unification du champ symbolique français', (5) and on a par only with the President of the Republic in its ability to assemble both ministers of state and the contemporary intellectual 'directeurs de l'esprit'. (6)

As such, Debray believed that Pivot occupied a very privileged position which was about much more than neutrally facilitating the promotion of recent publications. (7) For whilst the actual content of a book was perhaps no longer a main intellectual vector of influence, (even in a country like France where writers are accorded a higher status than in Britain), as *Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France* had argued at length, the business of reviewing them on television certainly was. A logic which meant that writers were proclaimed as being good because they were charismatic, competitive, aggressive even, and, as Gagnon has argued, they made for good television. (8) In addition, Pivot, according to Debray, had even acquired the power to actually reverse the traditional law of intellectual value, since for the commercial sake of retaining viewers he could, for example, launch to stardom a debutant novelist, or project almost anyone famous as having literary talent. And by the same token he could also ignore a valuable theoretical work which would have taken years of research. (9) This was a deplorable situation which Debray had pessimistically, and provocatively termed in *Le Pouvoir Intellectuel* a cultural fascism, whereby, 'La culture à visage humain partage avec le fascisme politique la réduction naturaliste: elle réduit l'intellectuel au physique, la personne à sa contingence, une conscience à un corps'. (10)

Debray's complaint of course in *Le Pouvoir Intellectual* had been that too many 'high' intellectuals had opportunistically accepted this constraining, if not rotten state of affairs, where image consciousness had overtaken intellectual conscientiousness. Where the value of a
cultural product had become confused with the image (and the imaging) of its producer. (11) An opportunism, which was practised openly by figures like the telegenic Bernard-Henri Lévy, who in this respect contrasted significantly with Debray himself, who has been described as 'facilement râleur' (moaning) and, 'plutôt rébarbatif'. (12)

Debray had even added in 1979, after the publication of Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France, that he had hoped that his book would permit a number of high intellectuals to realise that they were 'encodés par une grille exhibitonniste qui, les convertit en bouchons ou en propagandistes', (13) and logically, he had at that time flatly turned down Pivot's invitation to him to appear on 'Apostrophes' to face his critics. (14) So it was with best-seller Debray's argument about intellectual desertion of duty, and the implied incompatibility of high culture and mass culture still fresh in memory, that a most ironic and highly publicised argument between Debray and Pivot occurred. And one would have some justification in saying that the resulting outcry in public opinion, against Debray, neatly turned the tables, and via 'Apostrophes' itself, turned Debray himself into the buffoon.

In late September 1982, Debray had been appointed 'Chargé de Mission' for 'Cultural Affairs' at the Elysée. Shortly afterwards, on the eighth of October he was invited to address the 'Union des écrivains québécois' in Montreal, on the theme 'Literature and Cultural identity'. In outlining to them the intentions of the new Socialist government concerning the diffusion of French culture, he stated that one of the projects in hand was to, 'enlever à une émission le monopole à la fois du choix des titres et du choix des auteurs, accordé finalement à l'arbitraire d'un seul homme, et qui exerce une véritable dictature sur le marché du livre.' (15) The figure to whom Debray was obviously referring was Bernard Pivot.

The journalist from 'Agence-France-Presse' who, unknown to Debray, was present at the address duly reported the statement. Just before Debray's imminent, and untimely departure from Canada to Cuba, (16) he
was therefore questioned upon his reported use of the word 'dictatorship', and it was two days later that Le Monde quoted him denying using the word, and qualifying that what he had said was that far from getting rid of Pivot's programme, there ought to be other tribunes competing with him. He even added that 'Apostrophes' was in his opinion, a remarkable programme, although he could not resist the observation that, 'Certains ont intérêt à exploiter cette affaire, afin de démontrer que le régime devient tutélaire et qu'il veut contrôler la télévision. Cela s'appelle une manipulation de l'information'. (17)

However, Debray was to be caught out. Also, unknown to him, his lecture had been videoed, and on October twelfth, the proof, on cassette, arrived at the Antenne 2 studios. Debray had used 'the word', and he had said, 'Nous avons un projet qui est d'enlever à une émission...'(18) The evidence automatically begged the question now as to who was the true manipulator of information. Pivot was in no doubt. He took the opportunity at the end of his programme for the same week, the fifteenth of October, aptly titled 'Culture et Politique', to broadcast the incriminating video and he followed it with a vehement ripost to Debray.

Firstly he denied that he had a monopoly over the choice of books on TV, and reminded viewers that as many a five different literary programmes had appeared on French television since 'Apostrophes' debut in 1974. Secondly he dismissed Debray's charge of arbitrary selection, claiming that his only criteria was the justifiable and unprejudiced choice of curiosity. And thirdly, he rejected the allegation of a 'dictatorship', adding that it was most dangerous for a philosopher, intellectual and Cultural Advisor like Debray to consider the viewing public as being so malleable. He ended by saying that what was most disturbing about the whole matter was to imagine that broadcasting's next literary project would be concocted under the protective and interested scrutiny of the current political power. The programme returned viewing figures in the top six of Apostrophes' audiences for 1982. (19)
In pursuing his revenge a little further, Pivot followed his screen exposé with an article (20) mischievously suggesting that Debray's invention of a 'dictatorship' of the book market coincided suspiciously with the PCF's recent abandonment of the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and Pivot wondered whether Debray was seeking to fill that gap. He went on to state that Debray could not be ignorant of the real meaning of the word dictatorship, which was nothing to do with talking about a handful of books on TV each week. His critic was undoubtedly a brilliant panoramic theorist, but by putting his nose into everyday events he more resembled an 'idéologue méchant'.

It mattered little that Régis Debray, 'intellectual', had referred to the existence of a 'cultural fascism' at work within France (21) in a book, published in Giscardian France. But it certainly did matter that Socialist Presidential Cultural Advisor M. Debray should accuse a popular television programme of a dictatorship of culture. And so soon after his arrival in post at that. Furthermore, for many people, what the advisor was doing by holding the non-Parisian vulgariser Bernard Pivot in contempt, was also making his viewers appear contemptible. (22) As Brasey was to sum up, 'Or, lorsqu'un intellectuel de gauche tel que Debray méprise le peuple dont par ailleurs il se réclame, c'est très grave. (23)

Virtually all of the press came down against the 'Apostrophobe' (24) and onto Pivot's side. Brasey has maintained that the press response to the whole Debray-Pivot issue almost took on the allure of a new Dreyfus affair, (25) what Debray himself was to refer to as the fabrication of a 'psychodrame national'. (26) Le Quotidien de Paris (27) suggested that Debray had unwittingly let slip something no less serious than the imminent installation of a 'Goulag' of State propaganda, and Olivier Todd in Le Matin (28) reminded Debray that whenever revolutionnaires meddled in cultural questions they always destroyed more than they created. Le Figaro (29) referred to Debray as 'L'Esprit-Saint des rouges' with his 'rude langage de militant sans nuance'. They scorned the idea that someone on the Elysée staff could ever speak in a purely personal
capacity, as Debray had claimed to have done, and fearing an imminent
government offensive on the media's independence, went on to ask who now
would be choosing which books to review on prime-time Friday evenings.
Jean-Edern Hallier in Paris-Match, asked why Debray, 'ce petit Napoléon
des Lettres Françaises' was so obsessed with squeezing Pivot's influence
when he had neither done nor said a thing about Cambodia, the Boat
people, or Poland? And why had this organiser of festivities at the
Elysée never invited there any dissidents currently under the socialist
jackboot in Eastern Europe, where censorship and dictatorship was a real
issue. (30)

Le Point (31) contrasted Pivot's programme, which had done so much
for French culture with the audacity of this upstart 'Apparatchik du
pouvoir rose', whilst Nicole Zand in Le Monde (32) observed that Debray's
accusation of Pivot's arbitrariness completely missed the point that
Pivot was so popular simply because he was an excellent professional.
Enthoven, in Le Nouvel Observateur, who had clearly read and remembered
Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France (33) believed that Bernard Pivot had at
least wrested cultural and literary matters away from an intellectual
protectionism, and he went on to talk of the sensitive and puritan
Debray who had acquired a paranoia that all messages were 'messages
trahis'.

Jannick Jossin in L'Express, (34) began his article on the affair
with a heavily ironic criticism of poor old presidential advisor Debray
who was finding his Elysée role so very difficult because at heart his
ture vocation was that of political commissar. In his opinion, Debray's
fatal slip proved demonstrably that the man who had been in post as
Cultural Advisor for a matter of days was little but a taciturn,
censuring, intellectual snob. He suggested too that Debray was one of a
number amongst the Socialist elites who had not yet managed to move on
from a haughty and paternalist mistrust of the people who needed
instruction and guidance to overcome their cultural blindness. Jossin
was not only pleased to see that the 'Pivot effect' Debray had so
castigated had delightfully boomeranged right back in his face, but also
somewhat content that the President's controversial choice for the
Culture post was proving to be a liability much sooner than he might
have anticipated.

The Right-wing Minute (35) predictably had a field day. They accused
Debray of acting like some High Commissioner of Culture and Information,
and made snide, irrelevant remarks that on his mother's side he belonged
to the 'grande bourgeoisie israélite et à la droite modérée'. Even the
socialist Globe, (36) was to refer to Debray as 'L'Ayatollah Debray', and
the episode was even raised in the National Assembly where M. Vivien
(R.P.R) declared that Debray had behaved like a 'führer', and he was
publicly reminded there that no Left-wing writer had ever been excluded
from appearing on the 'Apostrophes'.

The government response through Communications Minister M. Fillioud
was to reassure the Assembly that the independence of the public
television service remained guaranteed, and that in any event such
matters were not within the brief of any Elysée councillors. (37) With
rumours of 'nous avons un projet' in the air President Mitterrand was
even consulted, although he astutely stated that everyone's opinions
should be respected in the matter, not least those of Bernard Pivot.
Mitterrand, equally aware that Debray had written on the same subject
several years before, stressed too that whilst Debray's views deserved
the same respect, there was after all nothing new now in what he was
saying. (38) He ended with the confession that he too liked 'Apostrophes'
a lot.

At least Braisey, (39) in retrospect, was to see that the
sensationalism and in some cases the maliciousness of the whole affair
had not only left Debray isolated, but that the accusation of some
machination on his part was quite wrong. In that he had been ultimately
a victim much more than any kind of inquisitor, he had at least raised
some relevant questions (40) about the monopoly that a single presenter
like Pivot could acquire, even were it to be quite unintentional. If
Pivot had in fact had a moral victory because of Debray's subsequent
apology, this did not mean that he was right. And if that victory was,
as Brasey perceived, the logical and all-powerful media-influenced victory of decent, polite, civil, good-humoured, and professional Pivot over the griping, jealous, disdainful and lying Debray, then the real issue was lost beneath this personalising tele-visual veneer. And that in turn demonstrated that at least Debray had been right about that particular media's inability to focus upon substance rather than style. At the time the only critic with any measure of sympathy with him was Bernard Alliot, (41) who agreed that if TV was a public service, it should address itself to several publics, and diversify.

Whether Debray's offence was but a slip of the tongue, lack of judgement, prudence, or simply a naive gaff, there were in fact no consequences to the project he had intimated at in Quebec. His own response, or excuses, if that is what they were, appeared in an article he wrote in Le Monde on the twenty third of October 1982. (42) He said here that he had spoken in Quebec immediately following on from three other such speeches at Harvard, MIT, and New York, and was suffering from some jet-lag. He explained too that he had made it clear beforehand to his hosts that he would speak only in the role of private writer and not as Presidential Advisor, a condition that all but one of the journalists present had respected. In the relative informality of questions following his speech, he referred to having quite naturally repeated terms his questioners were using, which were often less circumspect than those he would have personally chosen. He could not recall at all using the term 'dictature' no more than could any of the others present. But with the recorded proof he could not deny, he expressed his regret at having used the term, saying that he, as much as anyone, was aware of what true dictatorship was, since in the past it had cost him his freedom. But he did stress once again that he was not retracting from his views about a cultural system which supported the 'Apostrophes' monopoly. Debray ended his public apology to Pivot, with the comment that he too was glued to the screen on Friday evenings.

Patrick Harnham (43) has since written that if Debray had really ever wanted to see Pivot taken off air he was most unsuccessful. He
believed that the altercation with Debray galvanised Pivot into soldiering on with his show for another seven years, and just at a point when he had been considering giving it all up. In fact looking back on the whole affair from 1990, the aspect which Debray chose to highlight was the deliberate distortion that the media had placed upon his comments, and their success in convincing everyone that 'ce malheureux avait vraiment choisi d'engager ses armes, son âme, le sens de sa vie et ses œuvres complètes dans une croisade contre Apostrophes'. Something which he stressed now, was not the case at all. (44)

One other great irony of the business was that it involved Debray in an abundance of image and sound-bites with which he was not best equipped to deal. Debray, 'the man of letters' could always of course carefully choose and change his vocabulary before it was printed, but he could not take the same care in the spontaneous arena of interviews and questionings, and he could not compete either against a master of that art like Pivot.

It was in an interview in 1988, by which time he had in fact agreed to appear on the programme, (45) that Debray argued that his attack upon 'Apostrophes' had not been a personal attack upon Bernard Pivot at all, whose professional capabilities were never being questioned. Yet if back in 1979, Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France had pleaded for a competing broadcast of intellectual and literary ideas outside of the audio-visual domain, he was now frankly accepting that its magnetism was so powerful, that he was in fact suffering the consequences of remaining aloof from it, not least in running the risk of his main publishers directing him elsewhere because he was selling only a small number of his books, (between two thousand and six thousand). Simply remaining in an ivory tower, Debray was now saying, would have led him to be resentful, poverty-stricken, and being obsessively labelled M. anti-Pivot. Nonetheless one could perhaps agree that this 'capitulation' in re-appearing in the media did not in itself invalidate his original critique.
Whilst one might put the case that this short-lived episode in Debray's itinerary belongs in certain respects to the political rather than to the theoretical section of the current study, the logic of its inclusion here is based upon it undoubtedly informing Debray's future thinking about the transmission of messages and ideas as a phenomena to be scientifically studied, much more than it did his political thinking. After all, he did not stay in the role of advisor after 1986, and of course, far from the trend in France being towards more state interference in television, movement has been in the opposite direction.

What one could say with some certainty about the 'Pivot-Debray affair' is that it illustrated a course of events which was taking its course in modern society irrespective of any political will or design. And here, most ironically, Debray himself was that chief illustration of the kind of messages that the audio-visual medium is constrained to project. For Debray's own message from *Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France* was now in the limelight only because of its acquired sensation value. The link between a slip of the tongue at a lecture in Montreal, and the exposes of that particular book and *Que Vive la République*, was namely that modern mass media have become such an exclusive point of reference that they have become the primary arbiters in society. They are both makers of the event and the commentary upon it, and hence exploitors of communicability rather than evaluators of messages by any other criteria.

It had been Debray's contention all along that it is in the very nature of this audio-visual system to be an unwitting support to the political Right. In an age where the non-visual, the abstract and the reflective are suppressed, and given his belief that throughout history, the image, so much more than the printed word, has been a better carrier of the irrational and the emotive, one finally has to make a value judgement about whether Debray's role in the whole of this issue is underpinned more by the motivations of the political man, or the researcher-decipherer of political behaviour. It seems that the latter may well finally be much nearer to the truth.
On a US lecture tour in 1989 'Conseiller d'Etat' Debray was to express some concluding thoughts upon his misadventure of 1982. (48) He had realised now, he said, that criticising the mass media merely meant that one fell into their clutches. One's criticism of sensationalism became itself a sensation. Those books Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France, and Le Scribe which he was suggesting now had been written to support the intelligentsia in understanding its own position, had become, through the media, simply the works of an anti-intellectual, and in short anti-media polemic written by Monsieur anti-Pivot, public enemy number one.
Chapter 21. Notes

1 - The title of an article in Le Nouvel Observateur, 8 sept. 1975, p.52, by Vivienne Forestier, it anticipated Bernard Pivot’s next Literary TV programme 'Apostrophes' called 'Les Révolutionnaires', and on which Debray was scheduled to appear to discuss his novel L'Indésirable.


6 - ibid., p.237, Debray did take some care to stress here that this whole question of 'exposure' was peculiar to the French Intellectual arena, and that in other countries the literary and the political operated on totally separate stages.

7 - ibid., p.207.


10 - ibid., p.302.

11 - ibid., p.11.


13 - 'La Nouvelle Trahison des Clercs; Un entretien avec Régis Debray', Le Nouvel Observateur, 30 avril-6 mai 1979, p.142, (Debray interviewed by Jean-Paul Enthoven).

14 - Debray eventually re-appeared on 'Apostrophes' in 1986, to discuss Comète ma Comète.

15 - Debray's quote is taken from Brasey, p.188.

16 - Debray went to Cuba to speak to Castro about the possible release from jail in Havana of the Cuban poet Armando Vallsdares. One could of course have advanced the argument that Debray was incapable of distinguishing which of the two, Castro, or Pivot, was the real dictator.

17 - 'M. Régis Debray dement avoir employé le terme "dictature" qu'un enregistrement confirme', Le Monde, 12 oct. 1982.

18 - Brasey, p.188.
19 - ibid. p.189.


22 - Brasey, pp. 175-6. Brasey added here that Pivot was not one of the intellectual 'serail' at all. He had not been to the 'École Normale Supérieure', and he had never written a thesis.

23 - ibid., p.187.


25 - Brasey, p.187.


28 - Brasey, p.190.

29 - ibid.,

30 - ibid.,


33 - 'Debray-Pivot: Le Faux pas'.


39 - Brasey, pp.192-3.

40 - *Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France* could be said to have provoked the appearance of books like Brasey's *L'Effet Pivot*.

42 - 'La polémique à propos d’Apostrophes, Histoire d’un crime ou pour en finir avec une mauvaise querelle'.


48 - ibid., p.313.
Whoever asked Debray in 1978 to write a preface to the book *Les Guerilllos à l’assaut du pouvoir*, (1) probably never expected him to look at the phenomenon of the Latin American Guerilla in the way that he did. For he wrote his critique of the guerillas here as men who were subconsciously seeking a salvation in something which was mythical, 'beyond', and messiah-like, as the heroic deaths of Marti, Guevara, or Sandino served to illustrate. Given the continent’s Catholic influence, Debray perceived that there was an almost Christ-like passion inherent in the sacrifices of so many young men, who, along with their heroes were motivated infinitely more by values like dignity, loyalty, honour, and crusade, than any adherence to Marxist science. Because the combattants appeared to have followed the example of figures like Garibaldi, Mazzini, and Bolivar rather than Lenin or Léon Blum, he considered that their motivations were closely tied to a nationalistic sentiment in a continent where the individual power of the figure of conquistador/libertador was embedded in the popular psyche.

It had been in an interview from 1977, a year beforehand, given the title 'Le marxisme et la question nationale' (3) that Debray had first spoken at length of Marxism's repeated failures when confronting that structure called 'the Nation', and which appeared, by all evidence, so resistant to the voluntarism of International Communism. He went on to state that it had been this very resilience of the 'national' sentiment which had first led him to a realisation that Marxist theory remained inadequate for our understanding of history, precisely because it had never turned its attention to this question. Communism's
anticipated universality, which had envisaged the withering away of national and cultural particularity, had neither overcome nor integrated into this seemingly sacred make-up, and this led Debray to pose the question as to whether there existed a social law which guaranteed the nation's survival. He came to the conclusion in this article that this was indeed the case, and that it appeared to be something of an anthropological order. Such a law, he proposed, if it could be formulated, would be independent of economic and political gravitation, but closely linked to the human desire to survive and combat the chaos and uncertainty of the world. It would be a natural constant, but with a spiritual aspect, which could therefore neither be dissolved nor historicised by the traditional Marxist yardstick.

The evidence of this national permanence could be illustrated by the fact that whilst undeniably nations did have a growing economic interdependence, this was being permanently combatted by the urge for cultural diversity, and increasing state and regional claims. A kind of trigger asserting difference in the face of globalisation and atomisation. The history of our own century, Debray argued here, demonstrated that this notion of belonging and identity was a fundamental determinant, and had refused to be subordinated or sacrificed to the supra-national interests of communism, which itself had only ever taken root when part of a liberation struggle or defence of national identity. Something which explained why Stalin's 'national' communism had defeated Trotsky's 'international' version. And Debray saw the same logic at work in that instinctive willingness of Europe's workers to defend an existing social order in 1914, with behaviour demonstrating that the oldest, more instinctive strata of adherence would always prevail.

However deplorable the outcomes of these two instances may have been, Debray believed that because they were of the order of a genetic social code to be understood, this called for a theory of political organisation around the nation. (4) Although it is relevant at this point to note that he specifically stated back in 1977 that his ideas here
were not the basis of a theory which would override or destroy Marxism, but something which would to add to, and fortify it. (5) One could nonetheless state with some conviction that here indeed was Debray's philosophical break with that doctrine, and even argue that Marxism from here on appears to have been but a very provisional credo for him, pending the fuller development of this new piece of theory.

Attempting to define laws whereby man in the collective succumbs compulsively to a religious sentiment, an outwardly irrational phenomenon which has been acted out throughout history in so many contexts throughout the world, was in essence to be the politico-anthropological study of human belief which constituted Critique de la Raison Politique of 1981. (6) Debray said in interview in the same year that he had in fact been working for some ten years on this complex, erudite book. (7) He stated in his Introduction to it as well that this, as his first real 'ouvrage', was a contrast to all of his previous writings, which he now described as but a few 'hors d'oeuvre variés'. (8)

The four hundred and eighty page tome, published by Gallimard in its prestigious 'Bibliothèque des idées' series appeared only a few months after Debray's appointment at the Elysée.

To give some context to the scope and indeed ambitiousness of the project he wished to undertake in Critique de la Raison Politique Debray explained that whilst Darwin had studied man as animal, Marx : man as worker, Saussure : man as speaker, and Freud : man as desire, Debray's field of 'l'homme obligeant', which may be most accurately rendered as 'man as servant' had never received a parity of study at all. (9) Indeed he added somewhat provocatively, that in any case, religious affairs were far too serious to be left in the hands of professionals, mystics and preachers. (10) Unsurprisingly, the whole project from the outset was far too pretentious for some. For example Le Figaro magazine (11) was most unimpressed that 'M. Le Conseiller élyséen' should be seeking to elevate himself, by virtue of the book's title into the same philosophical sphere as Sartre, (Critique de la Raison Dialectique,
1960), and Kant (*A Critique of Pure Reason* 1781). 'Nouveau riche' was their disdainful dismissal.

Debray began *Critique de la Raison Politique* by recalling that he had first reflected upon what could be termed the 'nature' of the political when in prison he had been deprived of taking part in it, (12) and he had been able to look at his own ideological adhesion with a more objective eye. (13) This rumination in fact began after the army chaplain at Camiri, an Italian Franciscan monk, gave Debray an old biography of Pope Gregory VII, and subsequently some other uncensored volumes on the histories of various religions. (14) From reading these texts Debray arrived at the conclusion that there existed a religious logic running through the profane contemporary history of nationalist and socialist struggles (as well as their established regimes), not least in the way in which National Liberation had invariably involved the notion of the redemption of the oppressed. (15) His consequent study and note-taking around this matter did mean he agreed, that there was to be an ongoing parallel between the emerging theoretical and methodological Debray and the public and political Debray. (16)

In fact, evidence of the genesis of this sphere of thought is to be found in Debray's prison writings of 1970, *Journal d'un petit bourgeois entre quatre feux et deux murs*, where he pondered the process of how he had personally, if unwittingly, become 'the' expert on revolutionary theory in Latin America. Just how and why 'he' was now read as kind of spiritual guide in the same way he had considered other omniscient figures when he was a younger man. And he came to the conclusion that not only had 'Debrayisme' become a phenomenon which had become independent of him, (17) but also, and even more intriguing, was his realisation that once one is acclaimed an authority, then belief, submission and projection appear to follow suit automatically. He went on to argue that the advent of one's 'followers' was a phenomenon which was quasi-religious in nature, (18) all the more ironic in that his work had been based exclusively upon rationalism and materialism.
If up until the early 1970's Debray had seen the march of socialism as the promise of a better future for mankind, the fact that its essential project for a world-wide, cosmopolitan and voluntarist revolution (19) had never been sustained at all, undoubtedly led him to re-think its basic tenets. He began thus to realise that one would perhaps most fruitfully look at history as an explanation of the phenomena of Marxism, rather than at Marxism as an explanation of history. For he had to admit to himself now that the political world appeared to be impregnated with an underlying syntax, (20) thus far unrecognised, which regulated collective behaviour, and prevented men from changing the world, even in the face of obvious industrial and technological progress. (21)

Certainly Debray's search for coherent rules about an involuntary social biology (22) concerning the conditions of organisation for the function of stable human groups, and hence their political existence, was on a personal level, a very sobering thing for him to discover. (23) For it potentially placed the idea of political progress, or errors of strategy, (as for example Marxists would argue) in the realm of illusion. (24) His attempt to locate what could, and what could not be realisable within the political domain in Critique de la Raison Politique could thus be interpreted as a theory of powerlessness, and as such it was as divorced from a project for society as one could conceivably get. With characteristic panache he précised, 'Du jeu politique nous ne sommes pas maîtres, et d'autant plus les jouets que nous nous révons joueurs'. (25) A viewpoint further promoting the argument that a historical scrutiny of ideology, analogous to the history of mentalities and social bonds, rather than that of doctrines themselves, was the most logical way of investigating those ideologies. (26)

His first postulated ground rule in the demarcation of the collective's journey from disorder to organisation (27) indeed concerned the notion of ideology. He suggested that to talk about the impending
death of ideology, to make it a scapegoat for the abominable, or to suggest that one was somehow 'guilty' of being a Marxist, (28) (all of which were in Debray's estimation were the bases of the arguments of the 'New Philosophers'), really made no sense. He believed that all one was doing in denouncing one society's, or nation's credo was describing one's own ideology, and making a claim for one's own credibility. (29) This process he argued, ought to be recognised for what it was: an archaic and inherent desire to blame others, and thereby reinforce one's own viewpoint. It was nothing less than a dogmatic denunciation of dogma, which misguided placed ideology inside the realm of causality and responsibility. (30) Whereas ideology, Debray believed, was of a different nature, and something which man could not rid himself of. After all, he reasoned, religions could not be eliminated by eliminating theologians, they existed because the faithful required them. (31)

Again one can locate the seeds of Debray's interpretation of ideology in much earlier writings. He had in fact indeed expressed his thoughts about its pervasiveness, and our attempts to deny that we are victims of it as long ago as 1970, where he had reasoned, 'L'Ideologie, c'est toujours celle dont on est sorti, celle du passé. Au présent, l'ideologie est un gaz incolore, inodore et sans saveur... comme l'oxygène. C'est notre air pur, on créverait sans'. (32) A statement equating to a conviction that no society, or voluntary collective, has ever existed without a cementing ideology, or dogma. (33) However, since by 1981 he was now of the opinion that this unifying function in the past had been almost exclusively served by the 'meta-politics' (34) of religion, then it followed that the structure of the politico-ideological order could be located within the religious order. (35) And what was more important was that the intelligibility of both of these lay in the subconscious human need to make sense of the world through reference, security, value, and family. Thus there could simply be no theory of ideology without a theory of belonging. (35) One considerable section of Critique de la Raison Politique did indeed retrace at length this genesis of belief. For if, originally, the religious field and the
political field were super-imposed, an examination of religious communities would reveal knowledge applicable to the profane domain.

Debray arrived at the conclusion that man's primordial and universal isolation, his incompleteness, his fear of death, or even his search for the lost keys of the kingdom of heaven (37) in the world, were in themselves bio-physical motors for organisation. And the human collective was simply unsustainable without a compensating guarantee or salvation exterior to it. That had most often of course been a belief in a divine or supreme authority, (38) through which self-identity was crystallised and asserted. He went on to infer that if religion had been the first appeaser of man's anguish, then constructing a wall, (against the infidel, or even eventually the Communist Bloc) was his first religious act, (39) and Debray even sought to include death itself as an integral part of this structure in helping the collective pass from the precarious to the durable. For those rites and ceremonies which surrounded death, (our only certainty), in themselves agglomerated, and identified the survivors. (40)

Because man is born (41) as the most neurologically retarded mammal at birth, Debray believed that he was anatomically, rather than cognitively programmed to seek protection against his anguish, (42) from whence came his eternal desire for social enclosure. Yet crucially, his awareness and fear of dislocation on a spacial and temporal horizontal plane, countered by the building of a wall, was in itself inadequate to combat his malaise, and his sense of incompleteness. And it was this very sentiment which induced the invariant appearance of a leader, a god, or a totem, as a way of managing man's need for a faith. Something which represented the group to itself on a corresponding vertical and spiritual plain. (43) An invention which converted simple defence into an essentially theological activity, and where demarcation reinforced the sacredness of what was to be defended. (44) The resulting ideological edifice or the dogma, which Debray has labelled 'the child of fear', (45) therefore defined the community by defining the 'other' as the enemy. A primary law of political obligation which was purely strategic, (46) and
which has always overridden the desire for peace, or pacts. At the very source of what is the domain of Debray's 'le politique', political indetermination lead inexorably to theological determination. Belief then was, and is, an a priori medium of sociability before it is any kind of specific message. (47)

This innate 'grammar of the collective', (48) as far as Debray was concerned, converted the political history of humanity into something which was no longer value-laden, but merely something which one could decipher. For he was arguing fundamentally that man's relationship to other men has a zoological status (49) which constrains all social rapports, and that only his relationship with objects has an open status. As such, he agreed, this theory was not a study of comparative group dynamics, but something similar to Chomsky's idea of a universal grammar, a property capable of generating not an infinite number of languages, but in this case, the faculty for and disposition towards faith. Something which permitted on a morphological level (50) an infinite number of beliefs, within an infinite number of congregations, and which viewed our gods not as phenomena of belief, but as phenomena of logistics. They were not fantasies at all, but social operations, (51) And it was integral to the sobering theory that in the eternal struggle between the powerful and the powerless, not only had all possibilities already been tried, but that man remained enclosed within his 'enveloppe politique'. (52) He was slave to an endless circle from the God that failed to the birth of a nation. (53) As Jürg Altwegg has pointed out, here were the laws of nature overriding any laws of history, and revealing that an opium for the people is inherent in all groups, not just the alienated ones. (54)

Debray illustrated the potential of this politico-religious amalgam through what turned out to be Emperor Constantine's very astute conversion to Christianity. By his decree that there should be but one God in his Empire, the figure of Christ, incarnated as direct intermediary with God, converted Constantine's role from one of simple geographical and 'horizontal' ruler to that of the repository of a holy,
vertical, transcendent, and infinitely more coercive power. And this was achieved by virtue of a most significant bargain, 'J'étatise votre sacré, vous sacrailisez mon état. (55) As a result of this mediation whereby the Roman Empire unified theology, sovereignty and the military, it retained its longevity and hegemony.

By extension Debray saw that the 'miracle' of Christian incarnation was at the source of all our political faiths. Since Christ's death, and his ascension to heaven made profane history sacred, it provided the history of man with a sense and a direction. (56) Where Marx had seen exchange value as the motor of activity in society between men and objects, Debray perceived that the most influential factor here was the bestowal, by virtue of the mediation of a human Christ, (or prophet, or saviour), of a quality which gave man his value. (57) And this process was an elementary invariant of human hierarchical assembly, for he believed that the same programmes are at work, even though we deny their religious bases, in the ideological and political grand design. Furthermore, its influence remains so considerable, that whilst any power likely to arise in the collective is initially arbitrary, it becomes legitimised and institutionalised by the ingredients of this religious alchemy. (58)

Debray went on therefore to reinforce the case in Critique de la Raison Politique, and in interview, that both the philosophical foundations of idealism, and the social foundations of religion are the same symbolic attempts to annul the intolerable contingency of being. (59) In an article from 1991, (60) he suggested that, to date, human society has known two great imaginary collective convocations, the idealistic and the religious, and that the very philosophical and utopian idea of a classless society actually stemmed from the great Mediterranc/Christian myths of redemption. For throughout history, man's attempts to overcome what is given by what can be planned and sought after, revealed his fascination with the ideas of metamorphosis, incarnation, resurrection, progress, and paradise. (61) Man was thus in Debray's view of things, essentially an 'Animal religieux, animal
raisonnable'. (62) With characteristic slogan-like style, we were reminded that if magic was our first religion, politics is our most recent magic. (63)

Once again the source of this thinking can be found in earlier work. Debray had already described an integral link between religious and political conviction in Lettre aux Communistes of 1978, where he wrote; 'Les hommes ont froid. Immensément, irrémédiablement froid. À quoi sert un parti, en dernier instance? À se tenir chaud.' (64) The French Communist Party, he reasoned, would never have survived if it hadn't assured so many men and women a kind of 'sur-vie', and 's'il ne garantissait cette complicité, cette folie partagé qui permet à ses membres à un moment donné de leur vie, de vaincre la mort et la solitude'. (65) Clearly, here already was the radical disagreement with the Marxian declaration that the religious sentiment was but an infantile illness of consolation to be treated with the medicine of Revolution? For Communism, in his estimation, had become a religion in itself, with Lenin as its St. Paul. (66)

As far as Marxism was concerned Debray went on to reveal at some length just what the reasons had been for this degradation in communist practice that the theory had forbidden? No one could deny that communism, like a religion, had its doctrines, its founding fathers, its martyrs, mausoleums and pilgrims as well as its censors and its cruelly punished heretics. There where scientific atheism was the state doctrine the sacredness of socialism had been repeatedly expressed through parades, processions exhibitions, and festivals. (67) How could one ignore the religious sub-text to a radically atheist movement when for a third of humanity it had metamorphosed into a creed to be worshipped, and to die fighting for? In this respect, Debray believed Marxism to have acquired an irrational quality, (68) forging an affinity between the 'homme politique' and the 'homme magique', and who both claimed to combat evil. (69) But it meant too that Marxist dogma dressed up as a scientific theory of history could not produce a purely scientific historic practice, (70) for it would inevitably take on a religious
format. (71) Was it not then the case that the original demystifying crusade of Marxism has perhaps been the biggest mystification of all? (72) The search for Utopia being fated to end up as an orthodoxy, with frontiers, and an army. (73)

In this whole light too, any acceptance of the Hegelian view of Marxism's determinist dialectic as a potential enlightener of consciences (which would develop gradually in the vessel of man's receptive brain until he could fully reappropriate his nature), was in Debray's view a naive and conservative position towards the political phenomenon. Considering social behaviour as a malleable and potentially welcoming material in such a way in fact now looked like a legacy from the thinkers of a period of 'mechanical' thinking, (primarily the nineteenth century), who thought in terms of linear physical forces and vectors with a defined before and after. But for Debray these were obsolete modes, which in this particular context could now be shown to be inappropriate and even obstacles, (74) as today different, more refined angles of research were applied. (75) Although needless to say, the nature of Marxism is such that it cannot simply change its terrain to suit such developments.

Debray's long, and arguably obsessive critique of Marxism certainly appears to have reached its zenith in Critique de la Raison Politique. He went on to put the case that Marxists, just like other Utopians; Fourier, St-Simon, Owen, Proudhon, and today Illich, Marcuse and Touraine, (76) always refuted their own ideological make up, and in doing so failed to realise that the very same ideological label which they had pinned upon others was in fact crucial to their own material process of the organisation. Furthermore, in denying the possibility of the group's subconscious as a motor of activity, Marxists could never incorporate and recognise the power of the ethnic factor, (77) the status of Nations, languages, religions and communities as being the 'most' powerful and ingrained structures of social identity. Something that they dismissed as 'fausses consciences' but which simply would not disappear. (78)
Ignoring the idea of 'Les Drapeaux contre la Science' (79) he concluded, was their most fatal error.

If it was an irony indeed that Marxism had never focussed upon the force and the efficiency of its own ideology, and its ability to promote belief, or faith, (80) it was, as a consequence, theoretically incomplete because it lacked vital thinking on 'La constitution belliqueuse', 'Le territoire de Sécurité' or 'Le drapeau'. (81) What greater argument for Debray's theory could be made than to point out the fact that a utopian idea should have been the chief cause of wars in the twentieth century? Being handicapped by this theoretical lacuna, it was inevitable that Communism, whilst universal in intention, would became localised, nationalised, and channelled by the constraints of the political subconscious at work below the surface. (82) Whilst its homogenising dynamic design for progress appeared to have been hi-jacked, its downfall, as far as Debray was concerned, came in the face of an unavoidable, yet invigourated clamour for difference and identity. Even the relations between Communist China and Soviet Russia succumbed to the re-surfacing of respective national egotism. (83)

Debray went on to stress, as he was to do at length in Les Empires contre l'Europe, that those archaic urges in society were stirred up in direct proportion to such a perceived loss of difference, and that the cultural territory of sects, communities, religious crusades, gurus, mystics, and minorities, would forever come back to the fore. Again, what better illustration could there be of this latent force than the fact that 'Le folk investit L'urbain' (84), in technologically advanced America, where the assertion of minorities was a bigger issue than anywhere else on earth? (85)

Debray's contention that ideology is simply recurrent, and his reduction of any grand political design to evidence of the fact that a group serves only to reproduce itself was undeniably a radical proposition. The former Marxist was in no uncertain terms suggesting that societies obey laws of development and survival which are independent of the consciousness of their members, or the concepts of
their 'scribes'. His plea that we should accept ideology as a process with varying outcomes, and not as a procedure, (85) meant too that the appearance of tyrants like Hitler, Stalin or Khomeny was circular and repetitive, as was that of apostles like Guevara, or Trotsky. The theory implied too that today's political leaders were no more than the equal of those of two thousand years ago. (87) It included as well an overriding fatalism that whilst we are free to invent new ideas and beliefs, (88) we are not free to invent, or harness the organic process through which those ideas become material forces. (89) The mould, whose patent was that 'La raison politique n'a rien de raisonnable' (90) remained a mechanism as fertile as ever, yet which could formally admit both the most appalling as well as the most admirable of acts in the name of the group. Given this integrally physical view of the logic of the group, one could advance the argument that Debray's materialism attacked the very materialism of Marxism itself.

His critique meant too that political science, the larger part of his own former preoccupations, could only ever be the science of an art. (91) As one critic has said, Debray was now effectively declaring that being a Marxist, for example, was more akin to being a Baptist than to being a physicist, (92) and that political efficacy had less to do with logic or common sense than with 'lyrical potential'. (93) An explanation in itself of why there have been infinitely more Marxists than there have been readers of the distinctly unlyrical Das Kapital. (94)

It was in postulating a theory of the state via an examination of politico-ideological groups that Debray contended that we still lack an accurate examination of the strong affective power of all ideology, and that until this is explored, political science, pervaded as at present by 'reason' and 'intellectualism', would remain in its infancy. (95) Many regimes have clearly thrived upon an emotive, and hence irrational element to constitute the group, for manifestly one was neither a Christian, Marxist, nor liberal by deduction, (96) but by virtue of what Debray suggested was a 'satisfaction anticipée' (97) A yearning, a devotion, or pursuit of an ideal, which ought not to be underestimated.
since, as he had argued, without a dream, there was no organisation. A state of affairs he captured most economically by writing, 'Le rêve est à la fois le pain quotidien des communions, et la finalité suprême des conduites collectives. (98)

Debray went on to show as well how this strong grouping-instinct was clearly visible outside the Marxist sphere, and evident in other communities where it was not meant to occur. The Protestant Church, for example, which by its own logic should not have needed institutions, temples, rituals and monuments was unable to deny their resurgence. He was even to make reference to the same phenomenon in Le Puissance et Reves (99) where he examined what he believed were the fundamental flaws in institutions of international sovereignty like the 'UN' or 'League of Nations'. Because these were simply associations, and not communities or collectives, they were never formed in relation to something exterior to them. Thus they lacked an enclosure, and engendered no integral desire for adhesion and belonging. Their weakness was inherent in that they were aggregations relative only to themselves. In this light, one could strongly argue the case in fact that Debray's near obsession with French national interest in foreign affairs, evident in both Les Empires contre l'Europe, and Le Puissance et les Rêves which were published in the mid-1980's, was significantly informed by the theories of Critique de la Raison Politique.

Debray even accounted for the ultimate failure of the ultra-Left 'gauchiste' movement in France between 1965-75 as a result of it lacking the 'moyens ethniques de son projet politique'. He believed that it descended into a purely cultural, rather than a political movement because it had no leader, no coat of arms, no liturgy, and thus a feeble emotive appeal. Sardonically piercing the heart of their particular dilemma, he wrote 'Faute de faire une tribu peau rouge, on s'intitule "indiens", on se met des plumes de Sioux, et on se peint le visage en rouge'. (100)

The reader was obliged to patiently approach the end of Debray's 'oeuvre' to arrive at his explanation of how he personally reconciled
what resembled a theory containing a massive dose of cynicism in the political field, with his parallel commitment to an operational socialism. His justification being that after all, the nature of the group was not the sum total of man's make-up, and that therefore it did not impede him completely. Conflicts still had to be lived out and the truth sought, even if he knew now that his own engagements in the political field would be significantly more measured, (101) and similar to that 'Realpolitik' he was to advocate in *La Puissance et les Réves* and *Les Empires contre l'Europe*.

Reading many of his critics however, this final declaration appears to have passed over their heads. Many of them could certainly not have read the interview (102) where he stated that whilst he had considered calling the book 'Critique de la Déraison Politique' he had decided that this was too negative a title for a book which in essence had sought to move in a constructive way away from the comfortable rationalism of Aron and Popper, preachers of a sermon that under their 'reasonable' Liberal system man would never be the victim of any 'croyances maladies'.

In terms of the intellectual scene of 1981, *Critique de la Raison Politique* can also undoubtedly be looked upon as Debray's second riposte to the ideas Bernard-Henri Lévy had expounded in his well-publicised and controversial work *La Barbarie à Visage Humaine*, (1977) (103) (the first had been through *Le Pouvoir Intellectual en France*), where Lévy had argued that communism, something to be equated with totalitarianism, was simply another form of domination in a system of human behaviour where the simple desire for power is the generator of society. Marx, whom Lévy called therefore 'le Machiavel du siècle' (104) had merely sought to place one particular philosophy into power. Debray in complete contrast to Lévy, threw out wholesale the idea of humanity as the collective subject of history, and argued that the label 'totalitarian' actually hid from us what was innate in all of our communities. Incompleteness, rather than the urge for power per se was of course his interpretation of the fundamental impetus for the collective will. With
that explanation, he could imply that Lévy was merely looking for scapegoats.

However beyond any perceived internal quarrel within the Parisian intellectual circle, Critique de la Raison Politique also provoked a great deal of serious discussion. One of its most controversial elements being that Debray, at that time in the political mainstream, but indisputably an intellectual thorn in the flesh, appeared to want the luxury of participating in government, yet to reserve himself the right to describe its projects as being ultimately futile. Bernard-Henri Lévy certainly thought that that was the case. He called Debray's position at the Élysée, in view of the publication of this work, a 'voeu pieux'. (105) Hervé Chaigne in Témoignage Chrétien was even less circumspect, he called Debray 'schizo'. (106) Poirot-Delpech too was quick to point out in Le Monde (107) that there simply was no precedent for a presidential advisor publishing a work about his politico-philosophical doubts, and which would, for credibility's sake need to be kept in abeyance. He did however think it relevant to add that at very least the work would dispel anyone's illusion that the President's new counsellor was trying to rehabilitate French Marxism as a political programme.

Sandra Salomon, in Le Franc-Tireur (108) titled her review of the book, 'Critique d'un Philosophe rangé, and poured scorn on the idea that this outrageously simplistic work, with its grandiose title, would ever place Debray in the Pantheon alongside the great men of science and theory. However seductive Debray's argument may have been, the idea, for her, that the long history of domination in the world could be reduced to a historic identification of its primal sources, remained very tenuous.

Joachim Quartim, a former commentator and critic of Debry's Latin American writings, (109) accepted that his theories about interpreting the world had to be taken seriously, even if they were disconcerting. He declared that he had read this book with the same avidity that he had read Révolution dans la Révolution and La Critique des Armées, even though this new phase of work appeared unrecognisable as being from the
pen of the same writer. It appeared to Quartim that the only thread running through the two separate periods appeared to be Debray's faith in a harsh materialism. However, he pointed out too that Debray's current political activity seemed contradictory. How could one take the author seriously as a presidential advisor if he appeared to be saying that the only lucid philosophical position to take now was one of despair, and that the history of faith was filled with sound and fury signifying nothing but organisation?

Philippe Simonnot's judgement in L'Express (110) was that Critique de la Raison Politique was pervaded by a very aristocratic vision of matters because Debray was saying that society could not function without the distribution, downwards, of an opium. And American critic Eugene Holland in the Minnesota Review (111) questioned whether political enmity engendered by scarcity and insecurity was really as irreversible as Debray had determined it to be. He suggested that it might well be reversed by changing modes of production, particularly as Debray's law accepted the idea of economic progress even if political progress 'in isolation' was not possible. Pierre Manent took issue in Critique Communiste (112) with Debray's conclusion that Marxism was merely another conveyor of religion and tribalisation. He argued that even if to some degree this were the case, one could not dismiss as mere totem, a body of theory which had made such a valuable analysis of capitalist society.

Jacques Rollet in Esprit (113) raised some particularly pertinent issues. His summary suggested that Debray's study was too exclusively materialist, and that it ought to have included some reference and acknowledgement to the study of political anthropology under the developing discipline of psychoanalysis. He claimed also that Debray had too readily glossed over the diversity of social or religious formations. Was not the reduction of Christian ideology to a process of hierarchisation by the consecration of leader, an insufficient recognition of the different political choices motivating Christians anyway? And was it really feasible to place societies separated by two thousand years in the same conceptual frame? Or indeed meaningfully
compare the motivations of fascist regimes with those of democratic ones as Debray had done here? Rollet suspected that Debray's 'mono-idéiste' conception of ideology prevented him from recognising the crucial difference between a totalitarian society, and a democratic one, the latter of which accepted social division and was constituted upon a separation between elected governers and the governed, who could affirm themselves ethically through elections. If, as Rollet believed, Debray had after all done little more than present a schema explaining why Marxism had descended into a religion, he had no real justification for dragging political democracies into the same equation.

However, not all critics were as sceptical, or as preoccupied with accusations of a hypocrisy on Debray's part. Although unimpressed by Debray's temerity in plagiarising book titles by Kant and Sartre, Poirot-Delpech (114) did in fact welcome this post-Marxist thinking. He credited citizen Debray's exposure of our inability to overcome our inveterate utopianism as something which breathed life into intellectual debate, and he eagerly awaited further examination of this physics of belief. Philippe Muray (115) also expressed a delight in this solitary, unexpected, and staggering break form the 'Silence des Intellectuels de Gauche'. He declared that this was 'New Philosophy' easily matching any other recent claims to that same label.

Yolande Sénécal in La Revue Politique (116) believed that Critique de la Raison Politique was a work of theory of considerable importance. In praising this multi-disciplinary, if essentially philosophical piece of work, he focussed upon Debray's radical disagreement with Marx, and the valid case for reasoning outside of a 'prejudiced' economic theory of the State. A movement away from what Rollet (117) has described as a unidimensional theory of the foundations of political commitment. Sénécal added his opinion that being conscious of a problem in society does go some way towards finding a solution to it, and that Debray's work could not just help us to avoid some disillusion in advance, but as a consequence help us prepare for a better future. This would be particularly true if, as Rollet has suggested, political science could
provide itself with a deeper knowledge of the emotion-charged 'physics of belief'. (118)

Michel Serres (119) gave some prestigious support to Debray's view that societies only organise around something other than themselves, and that it was indeed saints, geniuses, models and heroes, which make institutions possible. He believed there was a scientific justification for Debray's new schema, which in applying Gödel's (120) logic theory to society put forward the notion of a transcendent quality acting in the way that a catalyst behaves in chemical reactions. Something which did not belong to the reaction, yet whose development depended upon it. The grounds for this extrapolation in Serres' view appeared to be valid because there is no functional or structural difference separating the faith in a transcendent God from the belief in a science, which we also acknowledge as existing independently of ourselves, and which also is able to express a universal truth. In both cases, as far as Serres was concerned, the religious, and the scientific, their respective functionaries performed the same task.

Finally, it is perhaps the greatest irony that in an interview ten years after the publication of Critique de la Raison Politique, in 1991 (121), Debray should state his opinion that the work itself had been a failure in terms of influence, precisely because it contained no message of salvation. However, this was a failure which certainly contributed to Debray's subsequent examination of why certain messages succeed, and why others, like this one, appeared to be stopped in their tracks. And it was to this apparently amorphous historico-theoretical area that Debray's analytical mind turned in his next work on 'Le' Politique, Cours de Médiologie Générale of 1991.
Chapter 22. Notes


4 - ibid., p.31.

5 - ibid., pp.40-1.

6 - Debray, Régis, Critique de la Raison Politique, Gallimard, 1981, Collection 'Bibliothèque des Idées'.

7 - La Longue Marche de Régis Debray', Le Nouvel Observateur, 10 oct. 1981, p.62, (Debray interviewed by J-P, Enthoven), Debray did also write in some contradiction that the book had been written between 1974 and 1978, see Critique de la Raison Politique, p.39

8 - Critique de la Raison Politique, p.11.

9 - ibid., p.112.

10 - ibid., p.310.


12 - Critique de la Raison Politique, p.11.

13 - 'La Longue Marche de Régis Debray', pp.64-5.

14 - Critique de la Raison Politique, p.13.

15 - ibid., p.15.

16 - ibid., p.34.


18 - ibid., p.157. In fact photographs of the dead Guevara revealed a distinctly Christ-like mien.


20 - Critique de la Raison Politique, p.15.

21 - ibid., p.34.
Debray’s research into the introduction of the word ‘ideology’ into the French language in 1879 revealed that it was originally understood as the scientific study of how ideas were generated. Only later did it acquire the politically charged meaning. See p.125.

This viewpoint revealed an obvious affinity with Althusser as expressed in his former teacher’s essay ‘Idéologie et appareils idéologiques’ (La Pensée, juin 1970). For it was here that Althusser first postulated the project of a general theory of ideology. Such a theory, he maintained, would need to be based upon the premise that ideology had an immutable, semi-historical structure within it. And he went on to suggest that Freud’s theory of the eternity of the unconscious would not only provide a method of study for ideology, but that this same ‘eternity’ was not unrelated to the eternity of ideology – something which was at the very heart of Debray’s investigation here. (Althusser’s essay was also published in English by NLB in 1971 in the volume Lenin and Philosophy, and the pages relevant to this particular discussion are on pp.150-2).

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43 - ibid., p.259.
44 - ibid., p.432.
45 - ibid., p.390.
46 - ibid., p.395.
47 - ibid., p.178.
48 - ibid., p.51.
49 - ibid., p.52.
50 - ibid., p.230.
52 - Critique de la Raison Politique, p.331.
53 - ibid., p.341.
55 - Critique de la Raison Politique, p.409.
56 - ibid., p.413.
57 - ibid., p.308.
58 - ibid., p.264.
59 - ibid., p.256.
61 - Critique de la Raison Politique, p.303.
62 - ibid., p.302.
63 - ibid., p.91.
65 - ibid.,
67 - Critique de la Raison Politique, p.21.
68 - ibid., p.92.
69 - ibid., p.111.
70 - ibid., p.321.
71 - ibid., p.323.
72 - ibid., p.320.

73 - Rollet, Jacques, 'Critique de la Raison Politique', p.147.
74 - Critique de la Raison Politique, p.330.
75 - ibid., p.154.
76 - ibid., p.420.
77 - ibid., p.139.
78 - ibid., p.152.
79 - ibid., p.428.
80 - ibid., p.138.
81 - ibid., p.429.
82 - ibid., p.421.
83 - ibid., p.462.
84 - ibid., p.448.
85 - ibid., p.456.
86 - ibid., p.239.

87 - 'La Longue Marche de Régis Debray', p.64.
88 - Critique de la Raison Politique, p.282.
89 - ibid., p.239.
90 - ibid., p.248.
91 - ibid., p.339.


94 - 'La Longue Marche de Régis Debray', p.63.

95 - *Critique de la Raison Politique*, p.186.

96 - ibid., p.192.

97 - ibid., p.194.

98 - ibid., p.195.


100 - *Critique de la Raison Politique*, p.225.

101 - ibid., p.349.


104 - ibid., p.169.


107 - Poirot-Delpech, Bertrand, 'Critique de la Raison Politique: Régis Debray et les mystères de la foi'.


114 - Poirot-Delpech, Bertrand, ‘Régis Debray et les mystères de la foi’, p.17, 23.


116 - Sénécal, Yoland, 'Critique de la Raison Politique', Revue Politique, Université de Montréal, mars 1983, pp.153, 155, 156.


118 - Ibid., p.146.


120 - The Princeton mathematician Kurt Godel's incompleteness theory in the realm of logic demonstrated that, 'the consistency of a formal system of arithmetic cannot be proved by means formalizable within that system', (Quoted from Flew, A Dictionary of Philosophy, Macmillan, 1979, p.124).

121 - 'Cours de Médiologie Générale', Panorama, France-Culture, radio broadcast, 16 avril 1991, (Debray interviewed by P. Casanova, Transcript available at 'Editions Gallimard').
If Critique de la Raison Politique had succeeded in revealing how the religious and the ideological were fundamentally processes of organisation. And if Le Pouvoir Intellectual, ('a localised sociological study'), and Le Scribe ('the history of a corporation'), (1) could be considered as analyses of intellectuals as 'one' necessary medium for ideas acquiring a social influence, then Debray's next theoretical work, to which all of these were in his own words 'foretastes', (2) appeared to be even more ambitious in its scope. For it sought to examine on a meta-historic level how all faiths, opinions, certitudes, doctrines, and other 'isms' are effectively propagated into human minds.

Although almost all of Debray's mid 1980s publications had been devoted to works of a strategic and diplomatic nature, (subjects which he was now prepared now to label the 'mythologies publiques du moment', (3)) the project of Cours de Médiologie Générale, (4) a work examining the actual transmission of symbolic influence was in fact envisaged as nothing less than the proposition for a new formal scientific discipline. With some modesty Debray did state at the outset that whilst his method of enquiry, and the terminology he had invented for it, were still of the order of a speculation, and in any case not a proposition he expected to take centre stage amongst the human sciences, (5) he believed that the subject matter bore validity by virtue of the fact that the current sciences of communication were inorganic and diffuse. (6)

There are in fact several references to this bourgeoning concern with the fabric of communication in earlier works. As far back as 1970, from Debray's prison writings, the following relevant prelude can be
located under the subtitle 'Nous, les fossiles'. Here Debray asked himself whether those 'docteurs marxistes', like himself, who lived their lives with their heads immersed in outdated texts, and who were locked into a sterile theoretical debate called the 'Revolutionary Tradition', had not after all become little more than curators of a museum.

A force de méditer la lettre de ces textes, ne sommes-nous pas devenus aveugles à ce qui se passe aujourd'hui d'important - qui nous semble suspect, déroutant, vulgaire? Et si la vraie culture de l'époque se développait en marge de tout ce que nous tenons pour culture? Ce décalage entre le monde lettré et l'esprit véritable du temps est de toujours, mais les techniques et le débordement des signes par l'image l'ont sans doute détupé'.

A reiteration of the same conviction was to appear in Les Empires contre l'Europe of 1986, where Debray affirmed that television series, from 'Dallas' to 'Colombo' had become indisputably better carriers of ideas, conduct, and models of identification than any amount of erudite volumes or colloquia describing the principles of dialectical materialism. It was self-evident, he wrote, that the millions of televisions and video-recorders to be found now throughout the world were a clear indication that people were now voting with with their eyes rather than with their feet. (8)

In an article written in Le Monde in 1977 (9) Debray expressed for the first time his concerns that the televisual media were having an increasingly intrusive political impact in society. He believed that in the space of a mere twenty years, people's perceptions had shifted from, 'its true because I read about it', to 'its true because I saw it on television'. In view of the power to effect such a radical change in our conceptions, he suggested that the audio-visual domain should no longer be considered as a technology alone, but also as form of ideology in itself. The political right, he believed, had already understood this phenomenon, and was using the television in particular.
to its own advantage, whilst the left stubbornly continued to believe that it could use the modern media without in turn being used by them.

Debray attempted to illustrate the way in which this mass media ideology worked in an article from 1978 called 'Sa majesté la télé'. (10) Here, he referred to recent and spectacular announcement in a television debate, where Robert Fabre, leader of the 'Mouvement des Radicaux de Gauche' had announced his Party's decision to withdraw from the electoral 'Union de la Gauche'. Fabre, whose Party held a negligible three per cent of the vote had most effectively made a sensation out of this decision, because the unexpectedness and the shock of the announcement was exactly the kind of information that this medium thrived upon. This was because television, by its very visual nature found it much simpler and more productive to oppose individuals and temperaments, rather than to put on the screen such concepts as the class struggle, or other such relevant, but essentially abstract ideas. Debray concluded, therefore, that with people like Fabre's collusion, television was actually annexing, trivialising and de-politicising politics itself because via the small screen the importance of an event had become indexed upon its improbability.

The main subject matter of La Puissance et les Rêves, international relations, was briefly to be applied to this growing concern as well. Debray put the case that whilst foreign policy had been radically altered by the advent of the atom bomb, it had been infinitely more affected by tele-communications. (11) For if politics was fundamentally about making someone do something by either of two possible ways, by force, or by reason, then it followed that those mastering the most advanced bridgeheads of the technology of communication would achieve the most cost effective method of coercion. He duly argued that studying the 'means' of this kind of powerful communication would therefore become the study of modern political science 'par excellence'. (12)

One particular indication of the long gestation of Debray's project appeared in Le Scribe (13) in 1980, where he wrote that his neologism 'médiologie' was something he envisaged as being situated at the
intersection of the three poles of man's domination of other men: the State, the intelligentsia, and the media. Thus the study of the act of politicisation of thought would be seen through its mode of inscription and its transportation. (14) He also outlined in interview in the same year (15) that his main project henceforth would be that of founding 'mediology', and that whilst at this time he had produced neither firm principles, nor method for it, he defined its object as the 'practice of thought'.

In fact, tying down the object of mediology with a hard-nosed definition appears to have been one of its early problems. In the same interview he described it variously, at this genesis stage, as the study of how a 'dire', (an utterence), can transform itself into a 'faire', (material action). In another definition it was to be how 'faits de pensée' can be considered as 'faits de communication'. Alternatively he suggested it would be an exploration of the efficacity of the symbolic, and yet again he proposed that it could be envisaged as the explanation of the ecology of thought, which would study ideas as if they were biological beings in rapport with a given eco-system. (16)

Rather than being presented in the traditional 'treatise' format, Cours de Médiologie Générale was collated from a series of twelve seminars, which were given alternately by Debray and Daniel Bougnoux (17) of Grenoble University at the 'Collège Internationale de Philosophie' in Paris between November 1989 and January 1990, and Debray logically undertook, in the first comprehensive sections of the book a now more precise explanation of what the object of his strand of human science was to be. He began by asking; if are many thousands of noble ideas just why are the successful ones successful? For it could not be the case that all of those falling into obscurity were inept, or bad messages. If one looked for example at the very successful and seductive vision of the world as peddled by 'The American Dream', one could argue that that particular aspiration was not in itself more utopic than the one envisaged by Marx, or Christ, or August Comte, (whose project for a
religion of humanity had manifestly failed). Mediology would seek therefore to look much less at the messages themselves, which after all do not contain any natural intelligence, and be rather a scrutiny of their pragmaticality. (18)

Hence it would concern itself with a message’s logistic supports, those facilitators which, below the surface, prop it up and vehicle it. (19) Mediology would magnify an idea’s motors, its amplifiers, and its organisers. This would range from examining simple writing implements, through to paper and press. Debray in fact established early on that the field of circulation in itself frequently proceeded from the invention of small simple tools like the pen which could have massive and unexpected macro-effects. He provided by way of a modern example the way in which the invention of the contraceptive pill provoked an upheaval in the theological domain. (20)

With the same neutral eye though, mediology would look at institutions; churches, schools of thought, and political parties, and would be thus a study comparable to locating the ballistics of the history of mentalities. (21) By way of a rather apt medical simile about the plague he suggested that it would seek to chart the movement the of rats and fleas rather than attempt to isolate the bacillus. (22) Such an analysis would show, he confidently forecast, that the history of technical mediation was an integral part of social, economic and political history. (23)

With an early reference to the spread of Marxism looked at from this standpoint, Debray argued that communism’s growth had had much more to do with the international communist system, as synthesiser and solidifier of the doctrine, than did the opus itself. Thus the most relevant questions to be asked in understanding the propagation of Marxism were; who printed Das Kapital and its commentaries? Where did the reviews appear? Who read them? How many remained unsold? Who translated and published them? (24) A perspective concerning dissemination, propagation, polarisation, orthodoxy, and bureaucracy which in themselves engendered ideocracies. (25)
Debray was certainly most anxious to stress that mediology was not to be confused with the study of modern 'mass' media. This was because it was a study of modern 'and' historical forms of transmission, including those to which the adjective 'mass' could not always be applied. (26) He believed that it has only been possible to formulate mediological laws in recent times because the recent multiplication of mass and immediate dissemination techniques had put into relief the seemingly static techniques which, in the past, had appeared to be in the nature of things. (27) However, our current awareness of this differentiation and acceleration had introduced a further and crucial aspect to media study. For it was now possible to demonstrate that the technical milieu itself had become appropriate for 'certain' political and cultural messages, and engendered a particularly conducive environment for them. (28) This was where the elaboration and transmission of a system of belief was an integral part of that environment, or where the thus far neglected 'transport' completely conditioned the 'cargo'. A situation for example in the West today where the propagation of the 'liberal' message becomes so blindingly successful, and so economical, that its prestige is unquestioned. (29) By the same method of course, the mediologist could demonstrate or anticipate an ideology's demise. (30)

One topical, although localised example through which Debray chose to illustrate this process at work was the rise, in the late 1970's, of the French Intellectual anti-totalitarian phenomenon referred to as 'La Nouvelle Philosophie', of which he had certainly been an opponent. What in his view was 'new' about this philosophy and its adherents was not the message they were propagating, (and to which in any case the mediologist is indifferent), but their method of disseminating it. For, in broadcasting their theories the 'New Philosophers' had completely departed from the moribund medium of the university as conductor of their ideas, into a much more expedient and efficient one, the sensationalist sphere of television. (31) And the consequence of doing this, in Debray's opinion, was that the instrument of their publicity
had begun in turn to instrumentalise its supposed users and masters. (32) Through its own logic, television, the main tool of the modern mediological videosphere had ended up by re-structuring, and digesting the message it was transmitting, and had turned a serious intellectual debate into a short-hand anti-Soviet sound and image bite. A state of affairs which was all the more difficult to recognise as technology's very acceleration dupes us into thinking that an independent intellectual spirit on the TV channel can still prevail. (33)

Debray also suggested that the examination of channels, objects and technologies would not be the only point of entry for mediological research. An equally important and complementary approach would involve looking at the hugely successful performance of messages themselves, such as Islam, Christianity, or Marxism, through their 'internal coding'. (34) His conviction was that certain elements in the architecture of such messages, and which assisted their propagation, was relevant material for the mediologist to turn his attention to. Thus the mediological study of the principles of adhesion from both within and outside the message itself (35) were seen as joint contributors to the conversion of an idea into an 'ism', and these would be thus jointly encompassed within the discipline.

Hence, tracing for example the progress of 'the Word' through to the final edification of the Christian church, was in Debray's view neither one of immanence, will, oratory skill nor magical appeal (36) - as traditional political science would have argued. The mediological quest for the 'scientific' incarnation of the word (37) would on the contrary need to be pursued by an investigation into the way in which God's word, (almost literally made flesh through Christ's body), made its way 'unmiraculously' amongst men. For if the Christian word has indeed been history's most effectively propagated message, (38) exactly why was it that the crucifixion of a brigand, with no imperial recording of the matter, was to become, three centuries later, the basis for the organisation of the Roman Empire? (39) Or with regards to another successfully propagated doctrine, just how did it come to pass that
Marx, whose funeral was attended by a mere eight people, was also to become a someone whose 'word' was to change the world? (40)

It was by means of a very brilliant and original analysis that Debray suggested how Christianity, initially a heresy and a scandal, was to become nothing less than the 'detonation' of modernity. (41) Until the invention of the Christian 'incarnation' he argued, heaven and earth had been totally separated. But this very new element in religious doctrine was to permit an optimum propagation of the Christian message. (42) For in order for there to be a forward moving, linear progression of humanity, then the antithesis between heaven and earth had to be abolished. Christ's descent to earth duly did serve this function, and his consequent redemption of man authorised the belief that there was a sense and an order to be sought in the disorder of the world. It was to be this mediatisation of the word of God, by his own human son no less, which overcame man's separation from his maker. And Debray believed that through this singular factor, a dialectical tension and a dynamism was introduced into the Western world through the 'human' Christ and his direct rapport with heaven. A process which was subsequently to be reinforced by His resurrection and ascension, as well as the cortege of other dynamic intermediary/mediators - virgin, apostles, and martyrs, who had also been 'ordinary people'. Christianity's impetus then was pre-programmed for success because it involved a familiarisation, or a personal touch which made the sacred 'sympa', with the possibility of almost anyone becoming a saint. (43)

Debray was convinced that the Christian word was a radical innovation and a contrast to the intellectualist, monotheist, patriarchal, and 'static' position of Islam and other Judaic religions, (44) because it propagated above all Christ's love for the common man, and the uninitiated, and accessed him through the victory of sentiment over reason, the subjective over the objective, (45) and the emotive over the esoteric. (46) Unlike Hellenic 'philosophical' religions, Christianity was an empathetic 'story' of a man with the same temptations as ourselves, and whose legend persisted through letters,
and scriptures, a collection of 'on dit', (47) which were neither treatises, nor theories, nor texts to decipher. As such, Debray categorised Christ as an illustration of a 'mediological' law that a myth strikes home much better than a concept does.

Ultimately few other myths could ever hope to match the appeal of the vulgate of Christianity, the very personal promise of survival, with the act of Resurrection, symbol of the democratisation of eternal life, ritualised by the intimate interaction of body, message, and believer in the ceremony of the mass. (48) He came to the conclusion that it was this sacramental propagation of the word that one will not die which contained its own exquisite propulsion, especially among the poor, the hungry, and the exploited, (49) and it elevated Christ to the position of the very first mass medium of our history. (50) A 'message for everyone' (51) of such universality would thereafter have few restraints on its goal towards the total politicisation of the world, albeit in divine and missionary guise.

Placing in this way the original messiah-message's capabilities under the mediological microscope, revealed a formula for successive successful mediations throughout history. A coding about access and revelation which worked wherever all widely propagated faiths, dogmas, doctrines and ideologies had thrived. As for communism, Western history's second great faith, Debray interpreted its the divinisation of humanity itself as but a repeat of the same democratic deliverance mediation, another 'discours du Salut'. (52)

Albeit of less global significance Debray demonstrated how the Latin American Revolution had been driven by the same pulsions. He believed that Bolivian authorities had been mistaken (even though they had applied Bolivian law correctly), to attribute so much blame to him for incitement to insurrection when the members of the 'foco' had clearly not read Révolution dans la Révolution. For the real motor of the Latin American Revolution, and which bred the convictions in the fighters (53), was a much more complex matter than one which could be triggered off by the publication of one book. He suggested that in
reality the Revolution was the convergence of three mediological reservoirs, all promising their version of a better life. Christian culture; implying the acceptance of salvation. Latino-Marxist ideology; promising the end of US domination. And 'Caudillism' as a specific local cultural proposition. (§4) The greatest irony about Révolution dans la Révolution was that it was transformed temporarily into a 'sésame ouvre-toi idéologico-militaire' (§5) for many young people outside of Latin America, who were avid for simple solutions. Yet its performance out of context was almost zero. After all there were never any Marxist 'maquis' in the Auvergne in the early 1970's.

It was only in fact some halfway through Cours de Médiologie Générale that Debray finally began to analyse in some detail material supports, tools, or 'traces' as he preferred to call them, and their effects upon their users. In his pursuit of what happens inside the black box converting the 'dire' at its receiving end, and turning out the 'faire' at the other, (§6) he established that it was no coincidence that the three great modern revolutions in Britain, France and Russia had coincided with the respective growth of literacy there. (§7) He believed that it was the ability of increasing numbers of people to read in those countries which in turn gave an impetus to printing, and the establishment of post offices and other items of infrastructure there. And literacy also set up for the first time the potential for a mass reciprocity between writers and readers. Readers who duly become part of public opinion. He went on to argue that it was these material developments which engendered the demise of erudition for its own sake, and converted the propagation of discordant ideas from a betrayal into a duty. (§8) Wrestling power away from a clerical regime had only therefore become possible through the innovation of circulating printed instruction, guidance and even entertainment.

Debray proceeded to look at the 'mediological' sources the French Revolution in a more detailed way. Here he re-stressed the idea that it was the readers, and not the writers of revolutionary ideas who merited most attention. For it was the ability to read which led to the
development of the literary salon, a phenomenon he considered to have been the first medium of new ideological and cultural communication, and which necessarily preceded the sociétés, milieux, and cafés as places for the fermentation of ideas. It was moreover the Salon's very formality and étiquette, which shaped the subsequent dissemination and speed of protest. (§3) The French Revolution in this sense would need to be interpreted less as a coup involving the intrigues of various political groups, but the story of a philosophy's socialisation, and its dependence upon a functional network. A journey of early French Republicanism which began ideologically in the Salons, progressed politically in the Sociétés, and only then reached a Revolutionary stage.

Because mediology recognised that 'l'outil d'inscription modifie l'esprit du tracé mais aussi les traits de l'esprit d'un temps, le style d'un Zeitgeist', (60) Debray believed that one could not therefore separate an operation of thought from its techniques of inscription in a given mediasphere. (61) Man's very adaptability to his milieu making him a product of his tools as much as of his genes. (62) Further material for mediological research in this area he suggested would be the effect of the telephone upon personal relationships, or the consequences of photography of our notions of what is art. (63)

The example he chose to discuss however in most detail was the rise, and demise, of paper. Its availability through manufacture, more relevant, in his view, than the invention of printing, was an important example of this 'matter over mind' process, and he concluded that paper permitted for the first time an acceleration of the memory industry because it was an economically viable means of transporting ideas. Indeed not without significance, he added, was the advent of paper money as the prime motor for early capitalist accumulation. (64) If however the invention of paper permitted a quicker, more supple system of notation, as opposed to the labourious angular one required to carve in stone, then the invention of audio and video magnetic tape in our own century, for the purposes of notation and recording was undoubtedly an
inappropriate support for conveying the long-winded authoritative tract, or manifesto which the paper medium had readily tolerated. One could therefore have mediologically predicted that socialism, with the demise of the 'print' mediasphere which vehicled it, would duly disappear. For today's abundance of immediate, low cost and short-lived electronic messages, serving 'homo videus', have created in turn another revolution in the 'éthique de l'imaginaire'. This time inducing a radical shift away from the prudence, rigour, coherence, and firmness of principle, which had not only been the hallmarks of our predecessor 'homo typographicus', (65) but also important characteristics of socialist thinking.

Debray was equally convinced that the velocity of supports in themselves were socially determinant, (66) and that man's perception of the world was intricately connected to his locomotion possibilities. Thus thinking about the notion of 'France' was not the same today as it was when it used to take thirty days to cross her territory. For the mediologist, a change in percepts would invariably bring about a change in concepts, ideals, dreams and ambitions. (67)

A further mediological truth, again beyond our control, concerned new techniques of transmission being initially based upon those preceding them. This demonstrated why early photography copied painting, early cinema derived from theatre, and television mimicked cinema. (68) A pattern where the perpetrators of, and participants in a new medium at first fail to recognise its power and consequence. As Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France sought to reveal, the influence of television mediacrats upon intellectual activity was under-estimated and not considered harmful until it was too late. There could be little surprise therefore that many intellectuals (like Debray himself), educated primarily in a system founded in the graphosphere, should become frustrated at what they read as a hi-jacking of their former undisputed powers of moral mediation. One could have argued in consequence that mediology demonstrates that a critical exposition like that of Le
Pouvoir Intellectuel en France was inevitable, but several decades too late.

What was additionally enlightening on a historical level was the mediological perception that this whole issue of innovation was in fact the repetition of the same process that had confronted the Catholic church some five hundred years before. The fifteenth-century church leaders had believed that Gutenberg would simply spread the Gospel. But within fifty years protestantism had compromised their vision. The printing of the Bible had facilitated alongside it a new intellectual activity, not one of mere annotation, but that of critique. (69)

Debray's analysis also established a law about material support which always changes from the 'heavy' towards the 'light', and from the cumbersome to the miniature, both of which both favour reproductivity. The development from parchment to paper, from printing to computerisation, or from coins to 'plastic money' is therefore an inexorable process in spite of our tendency to dismiss the new as having the status of gadget. (70) Parallel to this effective industrialisation and scale reduction of supports comes the increasing sedentarisation of the user. A user whose telephone, television, computer and video provide him with the potential to escape the constraints of his immediate milieu, but whose added effect is to make him the victim of a 'chronodynamics' of representation where quicker always means better. (71)

It was upon this particular question that Debray expressed his view that McLuhan's idea of the 'Global Village', when examined under the mediological microscope, would look very different. For one would not have seen there the access of the village to the globe, but rather an exposure of the village to the productions of the dominant nation of the globe. (72) Today our nationalities may remain different, but Debray professed that as television viewers we are conceivably all Americans. (73) McLuhan's 'democratisation' meant in Debray's schema the globalisation of the American model of democracy. (74) The electronic, nuclear and cybernetic revolution which had created the material
conditions for US hegemony demonstrated that the audio-visual electronic medium was in essence a technical progress with a price to be paid. Namely aligning one's culture to machine-made mass culture producing 'ad infinitum', American-inspired videos, serials, series and films. (75)

Even the French Republican school, the institution Debray had wished to maintain in Que vive la République as the bedrock of Republican values, was seen here as a victim of this same mediological law of velocity. Any school, after all, implies slow and gradual instruction. But it has today come into direct competition with technical acceleration elsewhere in society. Hence it struggles to transmit a complex heritage, and loses credence before the simple but pervasive ambience of instant reception in so many other domains. (76)

In a similarly schematic analogy to Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France, whose three intellectual ages spanned a mere one hundred and fifty years, Debray's study here was also divided into three mediological spheres, but which spanned the whole history of modern civilisation. (77) Firstly he postulated that there existed the 'logosphere', when for many centuries the transmission of ideas was oral, or at best handwritten. Secondly there was the 'graphosphere', the age of print and electricity as primary supports. And thirdly, there appeared the 'videosphere', the age of the electronic image. Three ecosystems which have superceded each other, although the preceding ones have not been completely annulled, since we still have our bicycles and our pens alongside our computers and our aeroplanes.

It was because socialism had finally become a mediasphere anachronism, and that society's transition from the 'written' sphere to the 'image' sphere had not in Debray's opinion been studied as a factor in its decline, that a long section of Cours de Médiologie examined the roots of the 'chêne abattu' (78) of the traditional Left. An autopsy which revealed socialist and communist philosophy as belonging 'au pied de la lettre', (79) in the Gutenberg graphosphere. Originally Gutenberg had opened up a revolution in modern ideas due to what Debray referred to as a 'sanctification' (80) of the written, over the spoken, preached
or lectured word. An elevation which was to facilitate that passage from a written commentary upon religious matters to a commentary upon the laws of history. Chapter one leading to reform, chapter two to revolution, and chapter three leading belatedly, almost as the last act of the graphosphere, to socialism. An ideology which was to become particularly potent in the gaps left by Protestantism; Portugal, Italy, Spain, and France. Catholic countries where a centralised, clericalised, and idolised socialist model mirrored the proletariat's former religion, Catholicism. (S1)

Debray went on to argue that the whole eco-system of socialism, with its militants, theoreticians, institutions, journals, and texts, (S2) had all prospered via print. He put the case that, in an almost genetic way, the socialist journal, and its varying 'schools of thought' had been the organising schemas of the worker’s movement. Thus one's apprenticeship to socialism was indissociable from one's reading. The 'docteur' sread the 'doctrine'. (S3) The faith, like Debray's own early faith in revolution, lay in conceptual analysis, interpretation, and text digestion. The synthesis of the two perhaps best illustrated ultimately by the propagation of Mao's 'Little Red Book' as an integral part of the Third World literacy campaign after 1945, (S4) and this was an 'affranchissement par l'Alphabet' (S5) which had in due course impressed the young Marxist Régis Debray back in Cuba in 1962. (S6) Debray added here too the fact that many of the leading lights of socialism and communism, like Gramsci, Guesde, Trotsky, Lenin Luxemburg, Blum, and even Debray himself, had had the privilege of being jailed, and were hence given the time to read and write so exhaustively. A contributing factor to their influence which would have been irrelevant in the modern videosphere. (S7)

The conclusion was thus that it was in the very nature of things that communism's eventual rout would occur not through the poverty of its message, but by its failure to compete in an emerging sphere of technical support. A sphere where America's portrayal of deliverance was to win the day because of her use of the most powerful contemporary
techniques of diffusion, ie; the ability to cover walls and screens with images, rather than slogans or the printed word. In contrast, communism withered away through its ignorance of the mediological truism that both a voice and an image perform better than a sign. 'Coca Cola', 'Marlborough' and rock music having done much more to de-stabilise Eastern Europe than did Solzhenitsyn or Havel. (88)

Like other ancient cultures, communism degenerated under the impedimentia of its method, (89) and by the subversion of its message by the media. (90) Russia and Eastern Europe, countries frozen in the graphosphere (91) (where the newspaper was publicly devoured, and where writers and poets were the stars rather than film or pop celebrities), were in Debray's terminology regimes with 'typographical souls', (92) who atrophied the sound and image at the cost of a hypertrophy of writing. Everything appeared to be in order there because the texts, (which had actually become pretexts) said it was so. (93) However ironic it may now appear, mediology could in fact have forecast that the printers, publishers and distributors of 'written' propaganda, who had given such impetus to the Russian Revolution of 1917, would not have been able in due course to resist the invasion, via the airwaves, of a new, and very different mass culture from across the Atlantic ocean. (94)

Illustrating this argument with another example dear to his heart, Debray showed that the founding principles of the French Republic (with its emphasis upon free education, teacher prestige, books for all, and cheap newspapers as primary vehicles of emancipation), were also to be located in the graphosphere. But both the ascent of the 'République des Professeurs' and its subsequent decline demonstrated that a political praxis called the Left was a transmission of ideas which was impossible without a supporting intellectual praxis in print. And when this support was superceded and disappeared, the left was Left with little but an empiricism, or simply Mitterrand-like 'management' of affairs. (95) Technology was thereby revealed as responsible for a phenomenon Debray had criticised as long ago as 1975, when he had written, 'En Europe le système d'explication a disparu avec la volonté d'expliquer', (96) leading to what he rather
unscientifically could not then resist calling a 'décervellage' of our contemporary political animals. (97)

It was undeniably the case, he argued, that those social ideologies of the graphosphere, which had been spawned and propagated by the book, the newspaper and railway, were anything but the products of the simultaneity that the television, the computer, and the aeroplane now make available. (98) Our videosphere, contrasts markedly with the slow capillary-like action of a former age where the battle to change the contours of the political world, via a Renaissance and a Reformation, took many years to come to fruition. Similarly it was as much as twenty five years after Das Kapital was written that it was translated into French. (99) And today, where the cultural marketplace is infinitely more competitive, Debray believed that a work like Marx’s would remain an erudite extravagance for bibliophiles alone. Whilst he and Engels could flourish at the junction of the manual/electric age, they foundered when confronted with Bell and Herz.

If this criticism of regimes attempting to function in a realm now out of date seemed a little one-sided, Debray was however no less unforgiving of the 'new media' world. For if political parties everywhere were no longer bound together by printed matter, the original logistic behind their formation, (101) this meant that theory and practice in the political sphere had in fact become dislocated by the way that the audio-visual arena functioned. For it was now an area of influence which was not intellectually, but economically influenced. An environment naturally devoid of true contestation and tension because financial profit was at the nerve centre of its diffusion of sounds and images. (102) Ideas about party-building, class solidarity, and subversion in the videosphere had thus become non-issues as everyone tuned into that 'homogénéisation of symbolic flux', (103) the nightly news. For television beamed in 'chez soi' equated to a 'chacun pour soi', (104) and worked at the level of disorganiser of former organisations and their fertility. (105)

In his critique of modern media, Debray was also to go as far as putting the case that the audio-visual era is ideally suited to the modern liberal capitalist political right, (106) although it is at such places in
his theorising that he could be accused of beginning to put forward his own political preferences in the guise of a purportedly scientific argument. (107) Nonetheless, he insisted that the videosphere was for the first time in history a medium of purely 'economic' regulation, because the transmission and exposure of all discourse within it was dictated by the laws of the market. A reality which made it therefore incompatible with the transmission of the primarily eighteenth and nineteenth-century notions of civic virtue, general interest, or public service. Consequently, that invasion of the world by audio-visual 'traces', which Debray estimated was equal to an economic conquest of the world by liberalism, became a world where nothing was forbidden because everything was saleable. (108) And also a world which was implicitly programmed to promote individualism, sensationalism, hedonism and consumerism. (109)

In view of the truths he believed to be revealed by this whole analysis he suggested furthermore that we were misguided in neutrally accepting television in particular as a neutral conductor of ideas. And this was because it is first and foremost an economic machine mitigating against certain kinds of ideas, (such as solidarity, adhesion, and projects for society), (110) whilst at the same time favouring notions like individual rights, and the private and the subjective conscience. With the televisual media as nothing less than the engenderer of disconcentration, (111) Debray believed it to have been no accident that our societies have undergone a curious turn around to where we now legally prioritise the individual's liberties over the moral order and consent of the community. This had of course been an agenda he had argued against politically in Que vive la République, since in his view it had begun to make integral French Republican values descend into a flabby liberal abstentionism. (112)

Indeed a most comprehensive rationalisation of the way in which the audio-visual medium by its very nature selected and re-configured the form and content of what it transmitted was included in Cours de Médiologie Générale. And on occasion one is hard pressed to accept that the critique is anything more than a caustic lament for a by-gone age, rather than valid objective description of the way we are forced lead our lives.
However, in Debray's evaluation of tele-visual matters, he continued to emphasise the way in which such a society invariably required the short term, and the short speech and the short sentence. How it preferred the anecdote to the exposé, and the non-significant to the significant. He argued too that it presented neither perspective nor coherence, and favoured voyeurism, the homogenisation of the diverse, the fictionalisation of the real, and simplified and sensationalised. He interpreted its output as flux rather than sequence, juxtaposition without syntax, and perceived a medium with neither the will to distinguish nor to accumulate.

Within one 'fast' gear the videosphere was repetitive, selective, and 'oniric'. (113) There was no place within the tactics of prime time television for the qualities of abstraction, deliberation, inference, synthesis or criticism, those formerly esteemed guardians of the authority of the written word. (114) As victims of image multiplication, (115) we had become viewers released from the political issue by virtue of the same mediological law whereby the printed word freed our forbears from faith in favour of intelligence. The consumption of images had simply become our new religion, (116) by means of the displacement of ideology by iconology. (117) As a trend that Debray perceived as bearing a very Catholic imprint (he even punned on the word 'Cathodic' (118)), television today was like an enunciation for viewers to witness, where emotion banished exactitude. (119)

The small screen was even deemed responsible for a second feudalisation of Europe, where the new 'media seigneurs' were presiding over the break-up of community. (120)

The videosphere, it appeared, had furthermore occasioned a most ironic about turn, taking us back to the icons of the logosphere. For in the late twentieth century the 'text', the notions of author, œuvre, or literary genius retained little status. The video-shop had replaced the library. Inside the era of primarily visual communication we have undergone a regression, away from the symbol (the written word) back to the realm of the sign. For now the world was no longer 'represented', but became, through the electronic image, a presence, whose pulse and vibrations we feel. (121)

If that was a natural consequence of the triumph of sensation over
signification, Debray suggested nonetheless that our age, whose figurative heart ruled its head, was indeed the converse of the 'Enlightenment', or 'Age of Reason', which had literally been 'read' as the emancipation of the abstract from the affective. (122) He believed therefore that we are as a result living out a de-idolisation of text at the expense of a re-idolisation of 'contact'. And we should not forget that the immediate emotion that the videosphere was able to diffuse in the form of directness, experience, authenticity, brevity, and spontaneity, attributed to these modes a political quality.

Debray admitted that that flux of instantaneity feeding our psyche with satisfaction and pleasure may not be completely undesirable. But as hostages to an eternal present, saturated by 'les détritus instantanées de la communication d'infos' (123), it did deny us the habit, as well as the desire, for perspective and objectivity, and as a result compromised our anticipation of the future. (124) Especially as means of transmission which demoted or rejected deliberation and concentration thrived upon the delivery of a stream of events whose explanation or de-coding was already incorporated in a commentary.

Debray believed that the political philosopher and mediologist would look with interest at humanity's two primary means of attempting to escape from history, (125) which were either through religion, or through the news. They would see that both the 'good news' (the Scriptures) and the 'latest news' were both an attempt to make that escape, by means of an idealisation of the immediate. It was curious to observe that television's nightly news had the repetitiveness of the eternal Communion. One would do well, he suggested, to remember that whilst one has to learn to think and read, one does not have to learn to look or believe, (126) for if it was the text which founded history as a science, (127) he was convinced that we are now seeing everywhere the ephemeral 'tale' replacing the historical 'chronicle'. (128) An impact he termed an 'événementialisation' of time, equating to a 'deshistorisation' of time. (129)

In spite of this apparent modern abdication before advancing technology Debray was nonetheless anxious to dismiss the suggestion that
censorship was a dead letter in our modern Western societies. There certainly was no case, in his opinion, of a complete absence of the State exercising its interests in broadcasting (in the broadest sense) whether that was, for example, to retain the transcendant quality of 'The Constitution' in America, 'The Republic' in France, or 'The Koran' in Muslim States. But as Que vive la République had persuasively argued, those former parameters of authority in the West have now shrunk, and whilst we may happily have left the Inquisition behind, we either court the danger of an indifference towards public authority (130), or risk that return to a nationalism and ethnicism as a reaction to the homogenisation that modern technology forces upon us. It certainly appeared to be the case that our own governments, in a relatively short space of time, had begun to pass on to the market a power they simply could not harness. A situation where economic logic was defying political control contained a further mediological truism; that the engineer and the merchant always run faster than the policeman. (131)

In fact Debray perceived another mediological parallel to be present in satellite television's intrusion into the domain of State controlled television. The situation in some developing countries in particular was reminiscent of our own former situations, when earlier in the century Western governments transiently domesticated television and radio, whilst it still had the capability of being a medium for regulating public order. A phenomena particularly evident in the temporary rise of that group of mid-century leaders with their specific 'vocation radiophonique', (132) De Gaulle, Churchill, and Hitler, who preceded Gandhi, Nasser, Peron, Castro, and Khomeny.

There were certainly some sobering consequences tied to a theory that it is the dominant medium of any epoch which is both culturally and socially the sculptor of its 'pensée hégémonique', (133) and that by transforming our ways of seeing, judging, and reasoning it begins to think for us. In Debray's opinion, theorists and commentators of the Left in particular had been obstinately trying for too long to discover the mechanisms and evils of hegemony, domination and ideology, just as Marx had
done, that they remained blind to the fact that technical transmission was an integral part of any theory of public authority. Accepting the evidence that mediological study provided quite simply meant that any enquiry into how power and belief function in society, implied the premise that a mediological revolution was in essence a political revolution too. For if the media are the masters of the State, an authority's survival means negotiating with them, as the ruling parties in Eastern Europe were to find out to their cost in 1990.

Pages 388-9 of *Cours de Médiologie* included a synopsis, in table form, comparing how Debray's three historical mediaspheres have given birth to their respective rationales of custom, identity, influence, authority, reference, aspiration and doctrine (please refer to the end of the current chapter). However it has been suggested by the French critic Jean-Louis Missika (134) that this systemisation, with its heavy dose of generalisation reveals a typically French desire to rationalise an issue of much greater complexity, and it does indeed recall rather more than coincidentally Debray's 'three' intellectual 'ages' from *Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France*. Whether Missika's accusation was justified or not, almost all reviewers and commentators of *Cours de Médiologie Générale* at the time of publication were so concerned to describe its tenets to their readers that an early hard-nosed evaluation, or disagreement with it was somewhat hard to locate. Notably though, Michel Serres, arguably France's most respected historian of science, (135) was prepared to bestow some unreserved praise. He believed that Debray had made some most perceptive insights, particularly concerning the analysis of the mediations behind the success of Christianity.

One other particularly challenging observation though, came again from Missika in *Le Monde*, (136) where he pointed out that Debray was not the first to map out this method of study, and that it was McLuhan who had been the true and original theorist behind the idea that 'the medium is the message'. Such was the message, after all, he believed, that was behind Debray's supposedly brand new elaboration. Yet Debray is on record as stating that the genealogical relationship between social history and
technology he sought to map out, was actually directed against those, McLuhan included, who mistakenly believed that mass communication was born yesterday with the advent of television and radio. (137)

Stimulating, (138) ill-humoured, (139) peculiar, bombastic, seeking some personal vengeance over the media, or handling the history of ideas like a film editor with a liking for juxtaposing the wrong sequences. (140) These were some of the initial reactions towards Cours de Médiation Générale. Robert Maggiori in Libération (141) was particularly unimpressed. He accepted that whilst Debray was still in the act of constructing a status for mediology he was arguably going about the task in a contradictory way. This was because the presentation of the theory as a series of lectures or lessons was inconsistent with Debray's views about performance in today's videosphere. For presumably, if the author wished his ideas to gain maximum diffusion, was it not he after all who was claiming that the television studio would give a greater return than the long-winded sermon such as this, targeted at the academic world and its limited networks. Debray did counter Libération's argument though, (142) by saying that he saw no reason at all for mediology to be presented in an accessible 'bande dessinée' or animated format, although he added the realistic rider that it would be most unrealistic to expect the very predatory audio-visual sphere to so radically criticise and expose itself through its own organs of diffusion. On another occasion he pointedly asked whether can one really film the law of gravity, implying of course that the gravity of technology could not easily be illustrated in images. (143)

Maggiori also suggested that the very length of the book itself would deter many people from reading Cours de Médiation Générale, and that it would be dismissed, either upon hearsay, as just another obscure book on media studies, or indeed be discarded because of Debray's own notoriety. (144) Debray was certainly aware of such a possibility, but suggested that a more fundamental reason for the book being unlikely to become a best-seller was that just like Critique de la a Raison Politique, it offered no message of salvation. (145)
Missika (146) did further express a relief that Debray had at last abandoned a sterile denunciation of the media in favour of seeking an intelligibility to social mediations. He believed that the future for mediology looked promising, even if at this stage the procedure appeared to lump together apparently disparate phenomena. More intriguingly he went on to suggest that only in some twenty years time would it be possible to determine mediology's chances of survival, with its inclusion on university courses as being an appropriate yardstick for measuring its success. He was however to be proven rather conservative in his estimate. By the beginning of 1994, Debray had successfully presented his mediological theories to the six-member jury at the Sorbonne in the form of a 'viva voce', for a 'Thèse d'Etat', and subsequently mediology was accepted as a valid higher education and research discipline. (147) By 1995, Debray and Daniel Bougnoux were to become the joint editors of Gallimard's 'Cahiers de Médiologie'.

In conclusion one could perhaps muse over the future direction that our videosphere is likely to take, much as Keith Reader (148) was to do in his 1995 study of Debray. For if the twenty years of disciplinary foundation for mediology forecast by Le Monde has already been cut by some 15 years, we could also pertinently ask just what kind of information technology will be arriving in our homes in the year 2012? Reader did suggest that the growth of personal computers, inter-active, and multi-media CD-ROM, and the Internet might well allow a significant re-inscription of the grapbo back into our videosphere. Yet this may perhaps prove to be a rather generous or optimistic forecast if only because of the foreseeable unrestrained expansion of visual media in the form of videos, satellite and cable television, and virtual reality simulators. Less pessimistically however, one could suggest that the virtue in such a diversity of new visual 'traces' may well lead to a good deal fewer citizens being glued simultaneously to the same terrestrial channel, and to the same old 'invités' as they had invariably done in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.
MEDIOLGICAL TABLE

Excerpt from *Cours de M Médiologie Générale* pp.388-9.

(Writer's translation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing (Logosphere)</th>
<th>Printing (Graphosphere)</th>
<th>Audiovisual (Videosphere)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STRATEGIC MILIEU</td>
<td>THE EARTH</td>
<td>SPACE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Projection of Power)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GROUP IDEAL</td>
<td>THE ONE (City, Empire,</td>
<td>EVERYBODY (Nation,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(And Political Gravitation)</td>
<td>Kingdom)</td>
<td>People, State)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>absolutism</td>
<td>nationalism and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>totalitarianism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHAPE OF TIME</td>
<td>CIRCLE ( Eternal,</td>
<td>LINE (history,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>repeated) Archeocentric</td>
<td>Progress)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Futurcentric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CANONICAL AGE</td>
<td>THE ELDER</td>
<td>THE ADULT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THE YOUNG PERSON</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARADIGM OF ATTRACTION</td>
<td>MYTHOS (mysteries,</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dogmas, epics)</td>
<td>systems, programmes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIME SYMBOLIC MODE</td>
<td>RELIGIONS (theology)</td>
<td>SYSTEMS (ideologies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MODELS (iconology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPIRITUAL CLASS</td>
<td>CHURCH (prophets and</td>
<td>laic INTELLIGENTSIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Holder of Sacred Power</td>
<td>clerics)</td>
<td>(teachers and doctors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DOGMA is Sacrosanct</td>
<td>KNOWLEDGE is Sacrosanct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>INFORMATION is Sacrosanct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCE OF LEGITIMACY</td>
<td>THE DIVINE (we must,</td>
<td>THE IDEAL (we must, it is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>it is sacred)</td>
<td>true)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOTOR OF OBEDIENCE</td>
<td>FAITH (fanaticism)</td>
<td>THE LAW (dogmatism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PUBLIC OPINION (relativism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USUAL MEANS OF INFLUENCE</td>
<td>PREACHING</td>
<td>PUBLISHING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTROL OF INFORMATION</td>
<td>ECCLESIASTICAL, DIRECT</td>
<td>POLITICAL, INDIRECT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(over the transmitters)</td>
<td>(over the means of</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>transmission)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATUS OF THE INDIVIDUAL</td>
<td>SUBJECT (to be</td>
<td>CITIZEN (to be convinced)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>commanded)</td>
<td>CONSUMER (to be seduced)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYTH OF IDENTIFICATION</td>
<td>THE SAINT</td>
<td>THE STAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DICTUM OF PERSONAL AUTHORITY</td>
<td>GOD TOLD ME (true as the gospel)</td>
<td>I READ IT IN A BOOK (true as the printed word)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REGIME OF SYMBOLIC AUTHORITY</td>
<td>THE INVISIBLE (the Origin) or the unverifiable</td>
<td>THE READABLE (the foundation) or true logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT OF SOCIAL DIRECTION</td>
<td>THE SYMBOLIC ONE; the King (dynastic principle)</td>
<td>THE THEORETICAL ONE the Head (ideological principle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBJECTIVE CENTRE OF GRAVITY</td>
<td>THE SOUL (Anima)</td>
<td>THE CONSCIENCE (Animus)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 23. Notes


3 - Ibid., p.9.

4 - Debray, Régis, *Cours de Médiation Générale*, Gallimard, 1991, Collection 'Bibliothèque des Idées'.

5 - Ibid., p.15.

6 - 'La Médiation, une nouvelle discipline?', *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 18 juin 1991, (Debray interviewed by Bruno Gossel).

7 - Debray, Régis, *Journal d'un Petit Bourgeois entre deux feux et quatre murs*, Seuil, 1976, p.120.


12 - Ibid., p.147.


14 - Ibid., p.349.


16 - Ibid., p.21. Keith Reader has referred to the influence which J.L.Austin's essay of 1962, 'How to do thing with words' had when it was first published in France, (Régis Debray, *A Critical Introduction*, Pluto, 1995, p.55). It was here that Austin discussed the notion of the perforative utterance, one category of which he deemed to contain a 'percutory' force, defined by the effect it has upon others' behaviour.

17 - Daniel Bougnoux was professor of 'Sciences de la Communication' at the university of Grenoble - 3. He published *La Communication par la bande. Introduction aux sciences de l'information et de la communication* *La Découverte*, 1991, shortly after *Cours de Médiation Générale*.

18 - *Cours de Médiation*, p.10.

19 - Ibid., back cover notes.
By extension Gerey went on to ask if we can separate the domination, via American English, the world's *lingua franca* of business and technology, from the widely held European conception of a techno-economic world being the norm. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

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29 - By extension Gerey went on to ask if we can separate the domination, via American English, the world's *lingua franca* of business and technology, from the widely held European conception of a techno-economic world being the norm. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
45 - ibid., p.128.
46 - ibid., p.134.
47 - ibid., p.128.
48 - ibid., p.130.
49 - ibid., p.136.
50 - ibid., p.133.
51 - ibid., p.132.
52 - ibid., p.135.
53 - ibid., p.186.
54 - ibid., p.187.
55 - ibid., p.183.
56 - ibid., p.164.
57 - ibid., p.175.
58 - ibid., p.178.
59 - ibid., p.169.
60 - ibid., p.196.
61 - ibid., p.229.
62 - ibid., p.229.
63 - 'Séminaire de Médiologie', p.2.
64 - Cours de Médiologie Générale, p.220.
65 - ibid., p.197.
66 - ibid., p.238.
67 - ibid., p.238.
68 - ibid., p.201.
69 - ibid., p.205.
70 - ibid., p.213.
71 - ibid., p.242.
72 - ibid., p.220.
73 - ibid., p.220.
74 - ibid., p.221.
75 - ibid., p.214.
76 - ibid., p.243.
77 - ibid., p.238.
78 - ibid., p.257.
79 - ibid., p.257.
80 - ibid., p.259.
81 - ibid., p.260.
82 - ibid., p.265.
83 - ibid., p.263, 'Docte' in french means 'learned'.
84 - ibid., p.268.
85 - ibid., p.270.
87 - Cours de Médiologie Générale, p.295.
88 - ibid., p.192.
89 - ibid., p.277.
90 - ibid., p.278.
91 - ibid., p.271.
92 - ibid., p.271.
93 - ibid., p.277.
94 - ibid., p.273.

97 - ibid., p.295.

98 - ibid., p.287.

99 - ibid., p.278.

100 - ibid., p.291.

101 - ibid., p.284.

102 - ibid., p.284.

103 - ibid., p.293.

104 - ibid., p.288.

105 - ibid., p.293.

106 - ibid., p.315.

107 - ibid., p.315.

108 - ibid., p.318.

109 - ibid., p.320.

110 - ibid., p.325.

111 - ibid., p.322.

112 - ibid., p.256.

113 - ibid., p.320.

114 - ibid., p.320.

115 - ibid., p.367

116 - ibid., p.364.

117 - ibid., p.365.

118 - ibid., p.366.

119 - ibid., p.372.

120 - ibid., p.372.

121 - ibid., p.375.
122 - Ibid., p.375.
123 - ibid., p.384.
124 - ibid., p.383.
125 - ibid., p.386.
126 - ibid., p.385.
127 - ibid., p.381.
128 - ibid., p.384.
129 - ibid., p.384.
130 - ibid., p.354.
131 - ibid., p.340.
132 - ibid., p.361.
133 - ibid., p.302.


142 - 'Nouvelle Médiosphere', p.6.
143 - 'La Médiologie, une nouvelle discipline?', Le Quotidien de Paris, 18 juin 1991, (Debray interviewed by Bruno Gosset).

146 - 'Régis Debray maîtris par McLuhan'.

147 - 'Régis Debray, Médiateur habilité'.

Given Debray's fascination with French foreign policy, and her status in the world, perhaps it was not so very surprising that he was persuaded to publish *A Demain De Gaulle* in 1990, (1) one of a number of publications to appear that year commemorating the centenary of De Gaulle's birth. Yet this slim (by Debray's standards) one hundred and forty page volume, his first publication after he had declared he had given up political writing contained several different, and even disparate facets. Since in certain respects it could be considered a literary study it does not fit neatly into either of the two Debray's upon which this study has focussed, although, it was at the same time a rather hybrid combination of an examination of conscience over the De Gaulle legacy, (2) and a convenient vehicle for reiterating some of Debray's own recent thinking about Republicanism and national sentiment. It was also without doubt a pretext for a comparative appraisal of the Mitterrand presidency, particularly since Debray believed that the General had always demonstrated an admirable steadfastness in his convictions, a quality which Debray hoped might serve as a lesson to the socialist administration of the time. (3)

Most significantly as far as Debray's studies of 'Le Politique' were concerned, *A Demain De Gaulle* harked back to the discussion on the community's need to believe in a mythical guarantor of its essence from *Critique de la Raison Politique*, and it also anticipated *Cours de Médiologie* of the following year because of its analysis of the way in which De Gaulle skilfully profited politically from the early years of the 'videosphere'.

Whilst Debray and General De Gaulle, were clearly from opposite ends of the political spectrum, and a figure towards whom Debray certainly retained an ambivalent stance, (4) *A Demain De Gaulle* set out to examine the pertinence and the sagacity of De Gaulle behind the 'grandeur'. What Debray termed an attempt to 'replace the censer with the telescope', (5) which would look behind the personal panache of the General, as well as the
devotion and veneration that this particular 'saviour' of France popularly inspired. Although Debray did freely acknowledge to his Anglo-Saxon readers in the book's translation (6) that De Gaulle's very contrasting legacy outside of France might well be more accurately summarised as containing heavy doses of xenophobia, authoritarianism, and even a vague fascism. (7)

However, many readers would have been immediately perturbed in reading at the beginning of the book Debray's declaration that in a sense he had become a Gaullist around 1968, (8) a statement he clarified in interview at the time by saying that his Gaullist leanings were grounded specifically in his 'only passion', France's foreign mission and her place in the world. (9) But this was not to be interpreted, he was at pains to add, as an affirmation of sympathy for the Gaullist 'RPR' party who, in his view, abandoned their specific heritage for every available liberalist tendency of the moment. (10)

In order to clarify his statement further, Debray explained that his period of imprisonment had in fact opened his eyes to the fact that the true 'patrie' of the Latin American Indians for whom the Revolution had been kick-started, was not internationalism at all, but a simple nationalism. A personal realisation which made the pomp and posturing of a certain General back in Europe about France acquiring a serious role alongside the superpowers seem increasingly logical, and commendable even. (11)

Those same readers though may have been even more shocked at some aspects of Debray's subsequent enthusiastic, and on occasion plainly gushing assessment of De Gaulle. Notably he considered the General to have been a man of great imagination, which, combined with his great will, allowed him to convey so effectively something which had been initially a personal vision for the French nation. (12) If Napoleon was to be considered the great French political myth of the nineteenth-century, then De Gaulle, for Debray, was undoubtedly his twentieth-century counterpart. (13) He even chided here those on the left who had so vehemently opposed De Gaulle's individual and authoritarian style, (reminiscent in their view of 'Boulangism' or 'The Second Empire'), and reminded them that they had not
refuted the very same characteristics in their own idols like Mao or Lenin. (14)

To his additional credit De Gaulle had pursued a significant and determined, yet very pragmatic, role for France in the world, which was guided by her needs and not by the requirements of political programmes. An additional aspect of his helmsmanship which, in Debray's opinion, ought to have served as a lesson to the political left who had been handicapped for so long by attempting to match international realities to their predetermined manifestos.

Bordering on panegyric, Debray went on to write of De Gaulle's lucidity and patience, (15) his ability to marrying instinct to reason, as well as his 'heroic' judgement. (16) A leader, incidentally, whose qualities rather happily coincided with Debray's own political prognostics for the end of the century. De Gaulle, like Debray, had seen Europe's dynamism as stemming from her very diversity, and had defended the idea of a 'Europe of Nations'. He had rejected consumerism as the prime driving force in society, (17) and of course had been a champion of French cooperation with the Third World, the originator of French absence from NATO, as well as a defender of her independent nuclear dissuasion. Here was the 'realpoliticien' seemingly personified. A man for tomorrow who was a complete contrast now to the 'Grand Autre' (18) De Gaulle had symbolised for the young Debray.

Indeed this idea of De Gaulle's renewed relevance for today was an integral aspect of A Demain De Gaulle. The General, Debray believed, had in his own day anticipated those unforeseen elements of modernity, namely the return to, and a reinforcement of the older structures; borders, customs, nationalities, and religions, (19) which neither Marx nor Adam Smith had thought out. He had somehow realised that technology and modernity could never escape age-old mental imprints, (20) but this clairvoyance had not turned him into the Le Pen of the 1960's. Indeed, it was arguably De Gaulle's opposition to a blatant nationalism which rehabilitated him most of all in Debray's estimation. (21)
In both *Les Empires contre l'Europe* and *Critique de la Raison Politique*, Debray had written at length about his fears of a global resurgence of ethnic disputes, and here was the man with the apparent method of avoiding them. For whilst Debray credited the General with having understood French pride, the desire for identity, and the urge to be different, he skillfully channelled it in a positive and fertile way. (22) With an imagination-stretching hint of the superhuman, De Gaulle, having been the nation's psycho-therapist, was credited here with having achieved a vital and operational psychological shift in the French vision, away from an inward looking 'mémoire morte' to a dynamic 'mémoire vivante'. From the 'Nation stockage' towards the 'Nation message'. And from an inward-looking obsession, to a more panoramic and confident view of France's role in the world. (23) Debray suggested that it was ironic that the realist Mitterrand, embedded in his 'sagacité paysanne', (21) risked not recognising the resurgent 'délibre objectif' as it passed him by, and destroyed that economically driven construction called Federal Europe, struggling already to come to terms with the rising hegemony of Germany.

Debray believed that whilst De Gaulle's calling had been integrally bound up with France's culture, history, difference, and will, (25) it was never chauvinistic because it never sought to give France a doctrine or an ascendancy over others. It avoided in Debray's opinion any romantic appeal, and never approached any notions of a pan-Gallicism. De Gaulle was thus the ideal 'patriote à sang froid', 'his' sense of the nation radically opposing Le Pen's sense of the tribe, or the fortress. (26) In fact he believed that the latter were sentiments which duly flourished when state authority was hesitant. (27) It was very much in this sense too that the Gaullist foresight of 1940 remained applicable to 1990. (28)

Even if one could categorise De Gaulle as belonging to a rather long French heritage of authoritarian populism (and which remained nonetheless for Debray as 'a scar on French Democracy' (23)), the General still remained respectable and acceptable. And this was not only by virtue of his modernity, but in fact owed also a great deal to his style. For in doing something comparable to what Churchill had done for Britain, Debray
believed that De Gaulle's genius lay in transforming temperament into a factor of power. (30) He was clearly fascinated by this 'hobereau vieille France', (31) who had looked like yesterday's man but now suddenly looked like the visionary man of the day after tomorrow. (32) De Gaulle, when all was said and done, had forecast collapse of the Soviet Union, the return of Russian nationalism, the extension of a Europe from the Atlantic to the Ural mountains, as well as the reunification of Germany. (33) The Gaullist quality of being somewhat 'passéiste' appeared now to be ironically innovative. In laconic 'Debray-speak', 'A la place du vieux sorcier nationaliste, le sorcier des surprises de demain'. (34)

Debray frankly accepted that both his personal and of course the nation's continuing esteem of the 'Great Man' came within the parameters of that anthropological phenomenon described in Critique de la Raison Politique as an inevitable channel for collective ambition. Part of Debray's conviction that there are no societies without images, references or even effigies, and an illustration of the immanent belief in the 'magie' of kings which Marxism certainly had not taken account of. (35) In this sense, Debray argued, the 'great man' (or woman) would be ever present, even if idolatry of them was the ultimate danger. He suggested thus in this particular context, that it had been to their great cost that the French left had not possessed an inspirational and founding father. (35) Although to suggest that they simply had no one with a comparable political pedigree to the one that De Gaulle had through the Gaullist movement, was to be perhaps the biggest snub to Mitterrand of all, and was arguably untrue.

This was certainly one of the reasons why Keith Reader (37) suggested that this quasi-mythical elevation of De Gaulle was above all a polemical statement, and many other critics of A Demain de Gaulle were even to seize exclusively upon the parallels the book made both explicitly and implicitly between De Gaulle and Debray's former employer President Mitterrand, of whom Debray had undoubtedly been a loyal devotee in his first term of office. In fact their accusations of treachery appear to bear some justification when one re-locates Debray's comments of a decade beforehand.
In comparing then Mitterrand's conception of France to De Gaulle's, Debray said in interview that he preferred Mitterrand to De Gaulle because allegiance to De Gaulle came from a kind of mystical veneration, whilst fidelity to Mitterrand came from a sentiment of respect! (38)

Quite simply though, there are numerous negative comparisons (for Mitterrand) to be found in A Demain De Gaulle. In the visionary scheme of things, Mitterrand, (the fox), (39) Debray now concluded, was a man of nuance and tenacity, and a reactor to events. De Gaulle however, (the lion), was audacious, passionate and pre-emptive. (40) With a rather grating poetic comparison, De Gaulle was compared to a 'storm', whilst Mitterrand was as the regulated passing of the seasons. (41) Noble De Gaulle was depicted as 'L'intransigueance pour sauver l'âme', with Mitterrand's accommodation of the grande bourgeoisie interpreted as 'L'habilité pour sauver les meubles'. (42)

Whilst it would be misguided to suggest that this work was an outright rejection of Mitterrand, its message, involving an apparent desertion of him, was one reason for the book's sustained appearance in the non-fiction best seller list of 1990. (43) If Pierre De Boisdeffre in La Revue des Deux Mondes (44) referred to a 'parricide' (with Debray killing Mitterrand) which had required an audacity and no little dexterity, and Le Nouvel Observateur (45) believed the message of A Demain De Gaulle to have struck a chord because it fell into the mediocre silence of the late eighties shallow, 'consensus' politics, few others were as generous. Globe (46) wryly announced that Debray had found a new 'Tonton'. Le Figaro (47) believed that he had schematised De Gaulle's politics into a ridiculous series of prophesies, and the critic in Le Revue Politique et Parlementaire (48) astutely concluded that the book was a banal continuation of the mourning of French Socialism begun in Que vive la République. Le Monde, (49) suggested that within Debray's 'personified' theory here that a country's vitality will resurge from nostalgia, there was hidden little more than Debray's own refutation of the modern world. They added too that focussing upon the national theme was scarcely the best way for democracy to advance.
One English commentator (50) criticised what he called Debray's 'discovery' of the Nation, and seriously questioned his supposed insights in *A Demain De Gaulle*, especially as Debray had claimed to be above all else a realist in International politics. Yet perhaps this accusation of a sudden discovery, or enlightenment was a criticism hardest to justify. If it was a discovery of the 'national question' at all it was a discovery which was at very least thirteen years old, for Debray had looked at that very question in an article from as early as 1977. (§)

Other critics were more irked by the language as much as the content of *A Demain De Gaulle*. The reviewer in *Le Quotidien de Paris* (52) was exasperated by 'dissertatoire et professorale' tone, and in *The Independent*, (§3) upon the book's translation into English, Andrew Marr was struck by this 'fizzing, multi-headed display of verbal virtuosity, which served to confirm our Anglo-Saxon suspicion of theorising'. He consequently dismissed the book as being but a negligible contribution to the De Gaulle phenomenon.

One would finally have to agree to some extent with Debray's own defence however over the accusations that this work exposed him as a political traitor. (§4) In an interview (§5) at the time of publication he complained at those now calling him a reactionary, for in doing so for they revealed that they had simply not read his previous works, which in a nutshell had been about unsuccessful socialist orthodoxy in international affairs, the dangers of resurgent nationalism, independent European defence, and a warning to K. 'le Président Mitterrand' that the Republic was under threat. Yet given this tacit admission that Debray's controversial book on De Gaulle was a re-package of things he had already said, and apart from the elevation of De Gaulle into the unlikely position of modern-day guardian 'and' resistor, this book had arguably only one other innovative aspect; that of illustrating De Gaulle's mediological 'state of grace'. (§§)

Examining De Gaulle through the system of transmission at his disposal was probably the most revealing, original and compelling facet of *A Demain De Gaulle*. For in asking why the General had been so successful in his
unique way of doing things, and indeed had remained unchallenged for so long, Debray suggested that one would have to take account of the technological context supporting De Gaulle's manoeuvres.

Firstly he believed that De Gaulle benefitted from a great deal of intellectual and literary support from the likes of respected figures like Malraux, Bernanos and Mauriac at a time when the dialogue between the intelligentsia and the political leaders still existed. A state of affairs given impetus not least by the fact that De Gaulle himself was a man of letters and memoirs. Debray believed that this mutual regard between symbolic and official authority was of crucial importance when it was still possible and credible to legitimise and promote the idea of De Gaulle's historic mission. Particularly as the whole nation had the privileged access to De Gaulle's past, that evidence of his journey towards destiny through what 'he' had published up to his return to the presidency in 1958. (57) Crucially though these sets of circumstances, as far as Debray was concerned, could never hope to be repeated. This was because today, the influential journalist or anchorman of the videosphere has usurped the place of the writers and savants at the right hand of the 'Prince', and also since, in contemporary society, so much material is recorded electronically that writing one's own history has become infinitely less significant.

Secondly, Debray contended that in De Gaulle's period as French President from 1958 to 1969, he profitted, almost fortuitously, from the advantage of being in power between two overlapping periods of information communication. When the 'electric' era of the late 'graphosphere' was being superseded by the introduction of the 'electronic' videosphere. (68) This was a privileged niche of time when De Gaulle could represent both the legacy of 'La France patriarchale et vieille bourgeoise' and as well as the emerging modern world of social change, regionalism, and minorities. (59) An intermediary decade when figuratively the pen still had a prestige over the transistor, and the economy and finance took a back seat behind the state and its diplomacy. (60) Even a time when the artist could still resist the market, and the minister could resist the journalists who were still
unaware of the communication imperatives of the bourgeoning video age that Debray was to describe in *Cours de Médiation Générale*.

Debray thus believed that De Gaulle retained his credibility, his appeal and his success by combining in his very persona these old and new technological periods, with the value of his anachronistic grapho-laden message indexed for a short time upon a new unquestioning audio-visual carrier of that message, and shortly before 'it' enclosed everyone in its new prerogatives. Choosing for example his ministers in function of their vision of the world, and not the world's vision of them was one of the privileges De Gaulle had which he would not have today at all (61), as was his need for one solitary press attaché at the Elysee. (62)

Debray suggested that it would be difficult indeed to imagine De Gaulle at election time rubbing shoulders with the stars, or being cut off by advertisements for 'Pepsi' and 'Lustucru'. (63) Through the medium of his speeches to the nation, De Gaulle's unique capturing, orchestration and manipulation the power of television with what Keith Reader has called 'a shameless Bonapartist straight-forwardness', (64) had only a temporary indemnity though. Unlike his successors he was never subjected to the very manipulation that that medium was soon to learn to wield. (65) And in mediological terms he benefitted from a fortunate indulgence, even if the purely political legacy as far as Debray was concerned, was that he was indeed a 'great' statesman.
Chapter 24. Notes


2 - 'A Demain De Gaulle' Panorama, France-Culture, radio broadcast, 18 juin 1990, (Debray interviewed by J.M. de Montrémy). De Montrémy made the point here that perhaps Debray owed his life to De Gaulle after the President sent a plea for clemency to the Bolivian President Barrientos.

3 - *A Demain De Gaulle*, cover notes.

4 - ibid., p.12. Debray maintained here that one reason for his departure for Latin America stemmed from an exasperation back in France with this 'fichu général-président'.

5 - ibid., cover notes.

6 - *A Demain De Gaulle* was translated into English in 1994 by John Howe, and published by Verso under the title *Charles De Gaulle, Futurist of the Nation*.


9 - 'A Demain De Gaulle', (Debray interviewed by J.M. De Montrémy).


11 - *A Demain De Gaulle*, p.15.

12 - ibid., p.104.

13 - ibid., p.23.

14 - ibid., p.64. Debray admitted here too that he had been no less guilty of completely idolising charismatic and manipulative Third World leaders, and seeing a kind of messianism in figures like Castro and Nasser.

15 - ibid., p.85.

16 - ibid., p.84.

17 - ibid., p.114.

18 - ibid., p.13.

19 - ibid., p.115.

21 - *A Deux De Gaulle*, p.96.


24 - ibid., p.107.

25 - ibid., p.95.

26 - ibid., p.99.


28 - "A Deux De Gaulle", *Agora, France-Culture*, (interview).


31 - ibid., p.115.

32 - ibid., p.115.

33 - "La Sagesse du Rebelle", p.27.

34 - *A Deux De Gaulle*, cover notes.

35 - ibid., p.65.

36 - ibid., p.70.


40 - ibid., p.106.

41 - ibid., p.106.

42 - ibid., p.107.

43 - There are twice the number of press cuttings in Debray's press dossier at the publishers Gallimard concerning *A Deux De Gaulle*, than there are for any other of his post 1980 works.

46 - 'Régis Debray est-il de Droite?' (interview).
47 - 'A Demain De Gaulle', Le Figaro, 26 juin 1990.
52 - 'Sobriété et Originalité', Le Quotidien de Paris, 3 juin 1990.
54 - 'Le Dernier des Capétiens',
55 - 'A Demain De Gaulle', (Debray interviewed by J.M. De Montréay).
56 - A Demain De Gaulle, p.44.
57 - ibid., p.38.
58 - ibid., p.44.
59 - ibid., p.110.
60 - ibid., p.44.
61 - ibid., p.50.
62 - ibid., p.50.
63 - ibid., p.56.
64 - Reader, p.52.
Revolution in the Revelation

Whilst *Cours de Médiologie Générale* had concentrated upon the efficiency of the propagation of thought and belief, essentially 'le verbe', Debray's next, and in many respects complementary work, was an attempt to look at the production of images in the same way. *Vie et mort de l'image*, (2) of 1992, subtitled *Une histoire du regard en Occident* was certainly no less ambitious in scope than his preceding study, and his fundamental contention in it was that the status of all images depended, as did ideas, upon both technical revolution and collective belief. Thus this new volume was not to be confused with a history of art, an activity which in Debray's opinion was but the tip of an iceberg following some thirty thousand years of human-image making. (3) Nor was it reducible to being another criticism of the logic behind the images produced by modern mass media. It was, he claimed, an original study in two specific ways. Firstly because he believed that the study of man-made images, which was inextricably bound up with the way we look at them, had been thus far neglected, and was in effect a late developer behind the study of language. (4) And secondly because *Vie et mort de l'image* attempted to trace 'Une histoire des usages et des sociabilités du regard', (5) a project seeking to describe what he termed the invisible codes of the visible. (6) As Debray's second mediological work, the book's main intention therefore could be distilled as, 'Après les idées-forces, les images forces'. (7)

One of his fundamental arguments from the outset was that not only did all images gain their sense from their onlooker, (8) but that in contrast to language, the simultaneity of appearance and meaning in the image, (9) bestowed it with a power connected directly to the subconscious and to emotion. As the first pre-conceptual, and pre-
linguistic occupant of man's brain he believed therefore that an image's impact was integrally bound up with sensation, the psyche, the dream, the libido, and the religious sentiment. (10) In our minds, the 'glyph' (the mark, or groove) had after all, he contended, many thousands of years start over the 'graph'. (11) Recalling his analyses from Critique de la Raison Politique, he suggested that his study of the image at this primal level could even be considered as a 'Critique de la Raison Iconique'. (12)

If the function of any image, (from primitive cave painting to live television) is of course to be a representation, it was precisely the image's power to immediately thrill, spellbind, or disgust, yet whose impact changed with time and culture, which Debray sought, in an anthropological fashion, to locate. And it would be a history which would essentially track the circumstances which made Art possible. For if the analysis of belief in Critique de la Raison Politique could be described as a history of those who believe without reasoning, then this essay complemented it through study of just how the world is portrayed to those who look without thinking. (13) Similarly, the historical/mediological study of images here would logically match the enquiry into the material propagation of thought outlined in Cours de Médiologie, particularly as Debray continued here with the premise that the human subject has always been as much the product of what he produces and manufactures than the reverse. (14)

He suggested therefore that there would be three primary mediological angles with which to approach a history of the image. Firstly an analysis tracking their technical production; how they are made, in what quantity, and where they are to be located. Secondly, what sense was transmitted by them. And thirdly what their destination was and who overlooked their distribution. (15) He added that that if any one of these conditions were altered, then this would have a radical effect upon the other two aspects.

Debray's chronological examination of the nature of our 'gaze' (16) was begun by locating the genesis of all images at a particular point in
time, and with his contention that the birth of the image was 'funéraire'. (17) He argued that man's traumatic witnessing of death, with the corpse signifying both a presence and an absence, provided him with the idea and the hope for an after life. From this was born the urge for a counter-measure to the finitude of death which in Debray's estimation was to become a visual re-composition of life in the face of decomposition. (18) Thus the human desire to carve, or draw figures and representations upon hard surfaces was connected to man's desire to refute mortality, and prolong life. (19) An act which resembled an instinctive defensive reaction against inevitability. (20)

Thus early images were inspired by a religious sentiment and the search for what Debray described as a kind of 'lever of exchange' between what could be seen, (life), and what could not be seen, (a potential after-life). (21) It was logical therefore that the very first works of what we now call art - vases, statues and masks, should be placed into tombs, since their function was to help the deceased to carry on as normal. And it was from this point onwards that the representation of the dead was to become no longer a metaphor of the deceased, but a metonymy of the prolongation of their flesh, with 'figure' equating to 'transfigure'. (22)

Debray went on to describe the subsequent movement of this death-cheating impulse on to the body of the deceased itself. The advent of mummification, ('cadavre fait oeuvre'), (23) shrouds, urns, and relics placed inside frescoed sanctuaries and places of pilgrimage were all considered to be examples of an early passage from the 'amour des os, à l'amour de l'art, (24) where the image was to eventually acquire an almost magical aspect in its complementary role as a guarantee, or reassurance, whereby one pleased the gods. (25) Although at this stage, Debray asserted that the image was still largely infused with a mental, rather than an aesthetic quality, this elementary coding, he argued, was to persist in later centuries when it was to be attributed with characteristics of 'taste' and art. For what image, Debray asked,
ancient or modern, was not essentially an SOS? Where there is fantasy, he declared, there lies the source of anguish too. (26) In this respect, he suggested that one would have to dismiss the high ground taken by artists throughout the ages claiming their hostility to any ideology, for their very profession, in his opinion, was indeed born of the religious urge. (27)

One significant section of *Vie et mort de l'image* continued to trace this progression of the image through the specifically Christian religious message. This was in fact a mediological parallel to the trajectory he had described 'verbally' in *Cours de Médiascopie*, where the internally coded message of the Christian word had been viewed as enabling its propagation. And indeed a similar pattern of propagation was described here in the light of the early Christian church's change in stance towards images, which, in turn, was to immeasurably assist its priests and its missionaries.

Originally, Debray explained, monotheic religions had been iconophobic. The truth, passed down by prophets was the 'word', the 'cold' text, and anything but the 'emotive' image. (28) He illustrated this principle by reference to the fact that in the Old Testament the idea of the visible was connected to sin, greed, impulse, Babylon, and the creation of false gods. (29) However through Christianitv, and by virtue of Christ's 'dual' nature, whereby his image could be deduced from his very humanity, that power of the word over the image was to be ultimately reversed at a specific historical date, which Debray located as the 'Concil e de Nicas' in 787. (30) For it was at this historic meeting that the Christian declaration was finally made that the creation of the icon or image did not automatically indicate idolatry on behalf of the believer. (31) If Debray wryly added that it was after all much easier to make statues in the image of man than to re-form man in the image of God, (32) he viewed this important decision as an essentially political one, for henceforth the image one made or portrayed could not only be used to inculcate and seduce competing believers, but it could 'replace' the idol of the infidel as well. (33)
In fact Debray believed that there existed a social law about doctrinal transmission that in order for a text to move beyond its circle of initiates, it required a material propaganda for its faith, and a visual support was almost essential for this because, 'Le passage à la praxis obligent les tenants de la doctrine à satisfaire le libido optique du vulgum'. (34) This was a conviction illustrating essentially that even, 'Dieu aussi commence en mystique et finit en politique, c'est-à-dire en image'. (35)

By this christian acceptance of the image, in the middle of the Dark Ages, churches of both East and West escaped henceforth what Debray referred to as the islamic 'ressassment de la célébration calligraphique de Dieu'. (36) The Nativity, the miracles, the parables, and the Crucifixion were all to be exposed, after 787, to the magic of 'imagery', (37) for the coloured canvas, and the stained-glass window were to come to signify much more than the images they portrayed, in the same way that the sacraments signified much more than bread and wine. (38) Images now meant that christians could be involved in a pleonasmic relationship with their God without degrading him. (39)

Debray believed that Christ himself, from this point onwards, was not only the impetus for the mediation of the sacred word, as Debray had contended in Cours de Médiologie Générale, but that his portrayal or figuration made him into the first mediator of the invisible into the visible. The promotor of nothing less than a 'Révolution dans la Révélation', (40) because he was the original demonstration of the deliverance of the soul through the rehabilitated body, and his image effectively bestowed a spiritual property upon painting. (41) Crucially, it was his dual quality of representation, material 'and' spiritual which as far as Debray was concerned, distilled the history of the whole of Western Art. For images of Christ authorised 'le voyeur' to compete forthwith with 'le voyant'. (42)

Having established the nature of his object, the image, Debray was to consider next its most ubiquitous manifestation, that of the notion of 'art'. Of course, by mediological analysis one inevitably moved away
from the idea that it was the artist who subjectively created his art and towards the notion of what allows art to be produced, or what creates the 'artist' out of the skilled craftsman. (43) He began by stating that one important pre-condition for making a mediological analysis of the world of art would be to avoid the traditional duality within it between arbitrary explanatory 'comment' about pictures and sculptures, and their aesthetic 'commentary'. (44) This was because mediology began from the premise that the idea of aesthetic quality could only be vehicled by material processes of creation, (45) which in turn were dependant upon time, space and culture. After all, he reminded his readers, every new technique created a new perception.

Whilst it was obvious that the African or Islamic tradition of the image symbolised or represented in a different way to European art, the fact that for centuries, our judges of what is good and bad have remained singularly content with their own definitions of art, effectively proved Debray's theory. For aesthetic arbiters, he observed, have always been, and remain only too willing to categorise the images of other cultures as 'Primitive Art', to be placed into museums rather than galleries. (46) Given this irrefutable constant, it would have to be through the mechanisms for the market for art that the mediologist would seek out the its logic and intelligence, rather than in the corridors of academia. (47)

Debray continued this particular discussion by stating that in terms of the timescale of humans creating images, the notion of art was but an extremely recent phenomenon. (48) Both in Byzantium and in Ancient China, for example, he observed that there had never been the desire to conserve works of art, and nor was there any evidence that producing it was a differentiated social activity. (49) Consequently, he argued that the tendency to suppose that our own ideas about taste, beauty and style had their equivalents in Classical culture, or that we could refer back to the Hellenistic world as art's effective birthplace, was a mistake. (50) The fact that the Ancient Greeks bequeathed to us a multitude of painted objects did not mean that they had a belief in art at all, or
that they had any independent commentary to make upon the image. (51) Whilst certainly the intellectual domains of logic, rhetoric and theatre, were attributed with such a quality by them, Debray maintained that their production of images was concerned only with technique, and again some evidence for that argument could be forwarded by the fact that there are, according to his research, no Ancient Greek words for 'creator', 'genius', 'taste', or 'style'. (52) Virtuosity, he argued, simply had no credence in a society where the image's seductive quality was a detractor from truth, and where by implication it threatened the 'natural' world. (53) If the Gods were the only artists (of creation), man could therefore only ever be but a conforming artisan, (54) and the images he made were mere analogies. (55) Any possible style was inevitably subordinated to the skill of execution of the artisan, the specialist, or the engineer. (56)

Debray also contended that both the Roman and the Judéo-Christian view of representation stemmed from a similar visual conception of painting and sculpture, and that even in medieval Europe too the idea of beauty in images continued to be judged as a capricious domain of individual fantasy. (57) Under early Christianity, for example, calling a painting of a landscape beautiful or sublime would have been incongruous because it would have confused such value-laden representation with the sublimity of relics, or the utility of churches. (58) Similarly the existence of allegorical or morality painting did not serve the secular-aesthetic pleasure of the looker, but a different purpose altogether. (59)

It was only much later, in Debray's conception of matters, in the period following the Renaissance that there did eventually occur the idea that art could provide man with something more than could the 'original' world about him. And it was to be, in his estimation, with the gradual ascent of early Humanist philosophy, that the possibility of 'representation' competing with divine 'presence', or 'existence' (and thus rivalling religious 'essence' (60)), could be countenanced. At which point the notion of a work of art became viable, and quite simply
because human liberation from adoration could convert aesthetic pleasure into something which was no longer an exclusive consequence of the religious command. (61) Debray went on to make the point that the appearance of scenery and non-divine faces appeared in Western painting at around the same time, when man, figuratively speaking, first turned his gaze away from the heavens. (62) Hence his first 'look' at nature was in effect a cultural act, (63) which bestowed beauty upon the spectacle before him. This debut of an aesthetic 'gaze' at man's own natural and cultural milieu was however only made possible through his personal and mental 'framing' of it, his consideration of it from a given point. And it was, Debray contended, this quality of 'observation' which was given particular impetus by the invention of perspective in painting.

Until this discovery, he argued, the flat, unique plain of the canvas or fresco had favoured an intellectual and distant vision of the divine. (64) However, representing dimension created a distance between the icon and the looker, and introduced a spacial quality which opened man's look outwards towards physical nature and away from pure mythology. Furthermore this skilful construction of perspective was to help make a hero of the constructor himself, who could now visually organise the laws of space. (65) It was thus through this particular innovation that the spectator would be no longer possessed by the painted icon, but would become the possessor of a 'work'. His 'new' gaze did not simply see the crucifixion or the nativity, but the genius of Raphael, carrying out the commission of his sponsor. (66)

Debray suggestion was that these two events, the introduction of perspective and the rise of secular philosophy, were in conjunction the prime reasons for causing a revolution in the 'regard'. Developments which allowed an aesthetic human style to develop, (67) and where man himself was to ultimately become the principal actor on the scene. But there were other reasons too. One was that man, having achieved a post-subsistence stage of living had arrived at a climate of cordiality with his milieu, a fundamental requirement for the 'pleasure' of seeing. (68) Another was the growth of commerce and navigation in northern Europe
which helped to expand his aspirations beyond his immediate environment. (69) Non-religious painting also received its acceleration from Protestantism. For in frowning anew upon religious depiction, Luther, by default, gave an impetus to the representative function of painting in lieu of the charismatic one. (70) Debray also believed that the increasing availability of the book provided a justification for illustration to match the non-religious subject matter of the print. (71)

In a very broad sense then, the rise of art, viewed under the mediological microscope, was essentially a victory of the concrete over the abstract, (72) where man's growing enquiry into himself progressed with his visual investigation of the exterior world. (73) Summarily, Debray was saying that when men began to realise that there was no salvation beyond the world, then the 'premier plan', (the foreground) engaged his gaze in all its secularity. And there was a moment in time when man, created in God's image, started to re-create nature in man's image. (74)

If one could say fundamentally that sacred painting declined with the temporal power of the church, Debray did see the same pattern of representational decline occuring in later centuries as well. According to the law that it is the promoter of the aesthetic (secular or religious) in any epoch who regulates the nature of representation, (75) he saw it as axiomatic that historical and mythological painting would decline with the decline of absolute monarchy, and that portrait and genre painting would almost disappear with the decline of the 'Haute Bourgeoisie'. (76)

It was for all of these reasons, Debray suggested, that the art historian and the art critic ought now to accept that it will be the ethnologists of the image who will be the true interpreters of them. For the principal problem as far as 'art' was concerned was that the concept had become a 'fourre-tout', (77) and an obstacle to elucidating the true influences upon the production of plastic images. 'Art' was not an invariant of the human condition at all, but a modern Western, and ethno-centric notion, whose survival could not be guaranteed. (78) He
considered that those successive, and supposedly 'progressive' artistic categories within the history of painting (religious, classical, romantic, and modern) which, as he had tried to prove could not be traced back further than the Renaissance, were misleading. And it was no accident that judging art mirrored the christian doctrine of arriving at the definitive last judgement, for an equally judgemental aesthetic tyranny had now taken hold, and this was the reverence of all that was 'new'. (79)

This idea that newness in art is synonymous with superiority, and maturity, (80) or that 'avant-gardisme' could offer some kind of route towards salvation, (81) was viewed as a misconception by Debray, above all because he read it as part of a programmed anthropological cycle of representation. To help illustrate his point he discussed the work of the ethnologist Leroi-Gourhan. (82) His studies of ancient painting had established that different image styles had been discernable as long ago as 30,000 B.C. These had started with totally abstract painting, which was then followed by symbolic or pre-figurative work, and only by 20,000 B.C. had figuration begun to appear. However, by 15,000 B.C there had been a distinct return to geometric abstraction. By inference Debray argued that a similar undercurrent of representation was continually at work, since this had been the very same route taken by images in the West for the past one thousand years. (83) One began with the magical signifying symbol, one then moved on to the ethical portrayal, but one arrived ultimately at a sanctification of the sculptor or painter over the object produced. This was a pattern he even perceived as being evident within the brief history of cinema. The moving image had begun as an anonymous documentary, it had then moved on to acquire a signature and an autonomy as well as its own icons, but had now arrived at a stage where the creativity of the film-maker supplanted all else. (84)

Having taken up half of Vie et mort de l'image in defining the notion of an ecosphere in which pictorial or sculptural representation could exist, Debray finally, and perhaps belatedly, brought his reader back to the theory for a mediological 'Trois Ages du Regard', (refer to
the end of the current chapter for a translation of Debray's
Mediologial Tables concerning the image) the counterparts to the oral,
printing, and audio-visuel transportation of 'le verbe' already defined
in Cours de Médiolgie Génèræle. Thus he schematised his history of
visual expectancy (85) by claiming that it began with a theological age,
roughly parallel to the 'logosphere'. This was then succeeded by the age
of art and aesthetics - parallel to the 'graphosphere'. And we had now
arrived at the age of the 'visuel' and the economic - parallel to the
'videosphere'. Within each of these periods, Debray believed of course
that the role of the image-maker been fundamentally different. In the
logosphere he had produced work to celebrate, deify and express faith.
In the graphosphere, his task had been to observe, create and express
inspiration. Whilst in the videosphere the object of image production
was to demystify, entertain and express initiative. (86)

In view of hiss record for criticising modern mass media, a medium
which almost exclusively involved the dissemination of images, one could
have predicted that Debray would devote considerable space in Vie et
Mort de l'Image to modern image-making machines, and the effect that
they have upon the way we look at the world. In focussing for example
upon one specific technology and its ultimate consequences upon our ways
of seeing, he suggested that the camera soon after its invention, had
contributed to a re-organisation of visual art. (87) Kodak, he suggested,
considered in mediologilical terms, did to the traditional painting what
Gutenberg had done (via print) to the hand-written letter. (88)

As a prelude to a discussion of the plethora of images with which
we are confronted daily in the videosphere, Debray began by asking
whether we were not in fact today suffering from an image asphyxiation,
(89) where our powers of discrimination about the discernible quality of
a picture have diminished as a result of their inflation. For what was
truly different nowadays was that the flux of electronic images we are
exposed to 'sans enjeu, ni conséquence' (90) have in fact made our 'look'
become less urgent. (91) Whilst the financing of so much electronic
visual material had not actually destroyed art, (92) it had nonetheless
given it a new 'quality'. This was because as soon as, in society,
desire supplants need, then all forms of merchandise acquire an
aesthetic quality, and art and advertising become one and the same
thing. (93) A point at which everything and anything gets to be labelled
as art, from packaging to animation, coiffure to perfume, and carnaval
to cuisine. (94) It was the actual promotion of an object, he argued,
that had become more important than the object itself. If, historically,
the idol had helped man in his struggle for survival, and the great work
of art had helped him in his quest to take possession of the world, then
representation today, which we obstinately continue to label art, now
merely served his appetite for 'le look', (95) or the desire for the
personal cudos of possession. A painting's former value, considered in
terms of admiration or delectation, had disappeared, because worth now
meant price. (96)

Debray forwarded the laconic observation that throughout history,
speculation, for man, had been of both a spiritual and temporal nature.
It was ironic therefore to perceive an affinity between the 'affaire des
cultes' of the high priests of religion and the 'culte des affaires' of
the high priests of the world of art. (97) He remarked that one other
specific consequence of this whole videosphere process had been to
demote the traditional artist's work. For a painting, when multiplied so
easily and so frequently lost its effect, and became simply a sign. (98)
By losing its authentic quality he believed it also lost any of
transcendent or magical quality. (99)

However, in spite of this disadvantageous effect upon the
'artist's work, Debray observed that after the golden age of the book
in the Middle Ages, (100) the image was in fact re-discovering its lost
primacy over the letter in the videosphere via the television screen.
And even if a large proportion of the countless images being broadcast
throughout the world were American images, (because the United States
they had in place the technology to vehicle their particular faiths;
religious, aesthetic, or otherwise), this was nonetheless an indication of
what Debray read as a democratised 'visualisme' (as opposed to a literacy).
(101) A situation where we have acquired a new visual global culture which
has successfully unified our collective gaze for the first time. If,
resulting from the first Renaissance there was to be a dictionary for
everyone, in the second Renaissance, he believed, there had occurred a new
visual 'lingua franca'. (102)

There were, as one may well have suspected, numerous disadvantages to
this new democratic 'look'. For what, in Debray's view, the tele-visual
medium had done to its viewers was in fact to protect their gaze, and
anaesthetise their senses. For the consequence of being bombarded with
images was to leave us staring at 'le mème moutonnement du visuel, c'est
peut-être ce qui reste au regard trop protégé, quand le squelette et le
putride, le le fétide et l'ombreux disparaissent du salubre horizon
quotidien'. (103) This was a technical panoply of pictures which had not
only cushioned our instinctive panic, and counter-balanced our distress,
but had also primed us for an endless narcissism. (104) However sobering or
distasteful that might be, our 'visuel' age remained part of the dictum,
'chaque espace-temps a le visible qu'il peu, non celui qu'il veut'. (105)

The final third of Vie et mort de l'image in fact developed almost
exclusively this contention that the televisual image was having a harmful
impact upon its viewers. It was a medium which he considered to be
infinitely more influential already than the symbolic cinematic, or
monochrome televisual image. (106) For now that the satellite had replaced
the bobbin, (107) and colour television had effectively become the emanation
of reality in itself, where 'Le véhicule et le véhiculé sont homogènes'.
(108) Our perception of space and time had been modified in an unprecedented
way. Debray thus argued how 'La logistique du visible commande la logique
du vécu', (109) through a saturation transmission of 'real time'. And this
has had an effect which diminishes our freedom for critical appreciation,
stopping back or gaining some perspective towards the material we receive.
And such conditions, he believed, were bound to engender the rise of the
individual over the collective by overshadowing anything outside of in our immediate interest or our private equilibrium. (110) In vehicling nothing less, in his opinion, than credulousness, docility, passivity, and loss of memory, television had fostered a conservatism where one was less inclined to want to change the world, 'que de s'y faire une place (111).

Consequently the immense modern-day promotion of the 'immediate' in visual form had signalled, as the title of the book suggested, the death of the image. A demise which was a result of that homogenised stream of clips, cuts, and flashes which one flicked through, and which were produced and regulated according to consumer demand and attention span. (112) Television's hegemony viewed in this light was nominalist, ideo-visual, (113) and as dogmatic and prejudiced the printed text had been in the graphosphere. (114) And it was this kind of passive 'looking' in Debray's estimation, which was totally divorced from creativity, because above all else it was a technological narcissism which stated that, 'le monde est en effet devenu ma représentation'. (115) Yet it was of course still a 'selection' of images chosen solely upon a pleasure principle, (116) and served the whims and comforts of the individual in his living room rather than the needs the citizen. (117) As Le Pouvoir Intellectuel en France had suggested 'le visuel' logically encouraged the rise of the star over the moral guide, or the 'prise de pose' over the 'prise de position'. (118)

In fact Debray even saw an unlikely analogy between the television and the village priest since both spoke to us about the morality we should maintain, yet at the same time they reassured us. (119) But he saw too a further comparison to be made between our current obsession with the 'immaterial' digital image and the distant era of idols. Because he considered that an image without a creator-reference potentially placed that image directly in the position of an idol, then that image became 'worshipped' directly. (120) In such a way the television set, via its very frontal address, appeared to be imitating the posture of an object to be revered. Whilst the ancient christian icon had said 'votre Dieu est présent', this post-christian icon said, 'que le présent soit votre Dieu'. (121)
Within this apparently hostile criticism of a new visual age, one could have readily accused Debray himself of a conservatism, and of tacitly stating that all images in the videosphere were by definition inferior to those of former times. He did concede though that there would always be two contrasting views about the television age. Many would consider it as being inventive, poetic, abundant, and rich in emotion and participation. They would argue that it not only gave us a more comprehensive vision of the world but that it was an egalitarian medium giving an access to everyone. It did indeed appear to have made the political domain less elitist, and had replaced the diatribe by dialogue. (122) One could also have said that 'le visuel' was a victory for transparency in that it made elected representatives appear and explain. (123) Television, the medium 'programmed' for individual liberty had perhaps even accelerated the end of Communism. (124)

However, the antithesis to such an argument, in his view, was that television created a faith in itself, and had therefore a kind of a plebiscitary quality. (125) Consequently it reduced the chances of a true political pluralism. And whilst it was accountable to nothing but the economic indicator it nonetheless determined popularity, governments and hierarchies. (126) He went on to suggest that the TV had been responsible for de-vitalising the French Republic's regulatory bodies; parliament, court and school, (127) to such an extent that now the political milieu had become 'une colonie de showbiz', and 'La chose publique...une variété des variétés'. (128) The small screen had also been a main contributor to the rise in civic indifference (129) because in its search for audience it had engendered the harnessing of the civic arena by the economic arena. For the art of persuasion via the TV channel, he felt, had become little more than a buying operation. (130) 'Le visuel' was invariably 'fliqué par la statistique'. (131)

Debray believed fundamentally though that the greatest ruse of the videosphere was to be found in its ability to make us think that 'voir' means 'savoir'. (132) If, in the graphosphere, one had at least been able to contest 'ideas', how could one now begin to contest images? (133) It was a
sad yet true state of affairs, that whilst the audio-visual era may well
have offered us many more wonderful images than had the icons of the
'politburo' it hardly offered its viewers any more social imagination. (134)
After all, in an environment where man's system of representation enslaved
him because the provision of it was totally dictated by market forces, did
we not encounter a classic Marxist definition of alienation? (135) And was
not a society functioning solely upon a 'what you see is what you get'
principle the least spiritual or utopia-seeking society there has ever
been. (136)

Debray ended his long meditation upon our modern gaze with the
conclusion that the very oscillation between the video age as 'a window on
the world' and yet at the same time 'a wall of images' was no doubt its
ultimate truth. (137) One would have to accept that 'le visuel' was by
nature a medium to inform and yet at the same time one to dis-inform. That
it was simultaneously 'iconodule' and 'iconoclast' (138)

Yves Mamou in Le Monde (139) was one critic who enthused over Debray's
book. He praised its panoramic content as a breath of air and a contrast to
so much other intellectual production of the time, which had in his view
been preoccupied by the stifling political 'air du temps'. He also
genemously credited it as being easy to read, and well presented,
particularly as Debray had included introductory résumés to each chapter,
as well as a helpful synopsis of the three ages of the 'regard' in table
form. Mamou was clearly tolerant too of a certain eclecticism that
characterised the work, and poetically summarised it as a 'vagabondage
temporel, bourré de coups de projecteur saisissants, de cacophonies
eclairantes et d'anachronismes qui laissent songeur'. Similarly Gilles
Anquetil in Le Nouvel Observateur was full of praise for the essay's
virtuosity. He referred to Debray as the,

'Champion toute catégories des antinonies, des thèses et des antithèses, des
propositions réversibles, il nous raconte dans un style éblouissante une histoire qui nous
pête littéralement aux yeux'. (140)
Pierre Billard in *Le Point* (141) was also most impressed. He believed that this difficult, yet fertile and absorbing essay would be indispensable to anyone wishing to truly understand our epoch. He focussed particularly upon the way in which Debray, in pure Kantien fashion, had enlightened us about the dialectic tension inherent in all images by virtue of the fact that they have always been both a remedy for our anxieties, but at the same time a kind of poison. He equally praised the originality of the mediological approach for its persistence in examining the 'fabric' of so many accepted ideas.

Billard did nonetheless make three critical observations. He felt that Debray's long section on the notion of 'art' risked turning a book about the history of the gaze into a history of art itself. He also posed the question as to whether, at heart, Debray himself was not really a 'graphosphériste attardé', and to what extent the purportedly 'scientific' writing was coloured by Debray's own ideological leanings. Finally he questioned the durability of Debray's analysis of our current videosphere. Because it was such a relatively recent and contemporary phenomena he warned against the danger of believing that one could be as objective about it as Debray had implied.

Louis Seguin in *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, completely opposed the preceding commentators. His unreserved rejection and disdain for the theories in *Vie et Mort de l’Image*, are perhaps best and most forcefully put by their direct inclusion here. He stated;

'Réglis Debray fabrique avec talent des formules qui devraient intriguer mais dont le système et la répétition finissent par ne provoquer que la lassitude. Son livre est un interminable recueil de sujets pour baccalauréat. Au choix; "Les bons poètes nous exercent à mieux voir, et pourtant poutant leurs mots sont aveugles"; "Voir c’est abréger"; "Transcendance veut simplement dire; extériorité", (142)

Seguin stated furthermore that Debray was simply making the point in this book that representation is just another form of symbolic power. And in that sense he was doing little more than ressurrecting a debate about
ideology which had had its heyday in the 1970's. He suggested as well that
mediology's materialist ambition was a deception because it was clearly
much more an attempt to be the arbiter, rather than the enlightener, of
Debray's converging fields of religion, art and techniques. In addition he
accused Debray of writing with a

'souci permanent d'aller vite et au plus court, de négliger tout ce qui pourrait
embarrasser les projets de la médiologie en s'attardant sur les objets et les œuvres. Là
encore il s'agit moins de découvrir un nouveau savoir que de se faire une situation'.

Seguin was also irritated by the fact that Debray appeared to be an
expert in so many domains, and articulated a vague unease about being taken
in and wooed by his skill which many readers may well have felt. He wrote,

'Il est modeste mais il sait tout. Ici et là on a beaucoup vanté son "érudition" et
rien ne lui est apparemment étranger, ni l'Occident, ni l'Egypte ni la Chine. Il a appris le
grec, le latin et l'anglais, ce qui lui permet à l'occasion de citer sans traduire, bonne
méthode pour en imposer au lecteur......L'érudition, lorsque'elle s'abandonne aux plaisirs de
l'excès, se prend à son propre piège'.

Finally, Gilles Anquetil in his interview (143) with Debray following
the publication of Vie et Mort de l'Image quoted him as affirming that this
would definitely be his last philosophical essay. But Anquetil had probably
heard similar promises before, and he ended his article, 'A la prochaine,
Régis'. 
**MEDIOLOGICAL TABLE**

Excerpt from *Vie et Mort de l’Image*, pp.226-7


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Image Has As Its...</th>
<th>In the Logosphere (writing era)</th>
<th>In the Graphosphere (printing era)</th>
<th>In the Vidsphere (audiovisual era)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Representation (illusory)</td>
<td>Simulation (digital)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Virtual (the image is a perception)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OBJECT OF WORSHIP</strong></td>
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<td><strong>THE NEW (I surprise you)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1) MONARCHIC = ACADEMIC (1500-1750)</td>
<td>MEDIA/MUSEUM/MARKET (plastic arts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) ECCLESIASTICAL =</td>
<td>2) BOURGEOIS = SALON + CRITICS + GALLERY, until 1968</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 25. Notes


2 - ibid., Collection 'Bibliothèque des Idées'.

3 - ibid., p. 273.

4 - ibid., p. 135.

5 - ibid., p. 41.

6 - ibid., p. 11.

7 - ibid., p. 115.

8 - ibid., p. 41.

9 - ibid., p. 51.

10 - ibid., p. 125.

11 - ibid., p. 123.

12 - ibid., p. 123.

13 - ibid., p. 11.

14 - ibid., p. 136.

15 - ibid., p. 111.

16 - Keith Reader's translation of 'le regard' as 'the gaze' is probably the most accurate rendition in English. Reader, Keith, *Régis Debray, A Critical Introduction*, Pluto, 1995, p. 52.

17 - *Vie et Mort de l'Image*, p. 17.


19 - ibid., p. 16.

20 - ibid., p. 28.


22 - ibid., p. 22.

23 - ibid., p. 25.
24 - ibid., p.25.
25 - ibid., p.30.
26 - ibid., p.33.
27 - ibid., p.39.
28 - ibid., p.78.
29 - ibid., p.80.
30 - ibid., p.82.
31 - ibid., p.82.
32 - ibid., p.92.
33 - ibid., p.92.
34 - ibid., p.94.
35 - ibid., p.94.
36 - ibid., p.81.
37 - ibid., p.88.
38 - ibid., p.84.
39 - ibid., p.84.
40 - ibid., p.84.
41 - ibid., p.87.
42 - ibid., p.88.
43 - ibid., p.159.
44 - ibid., p.132.
45 - ibid., p.134.
46 - ibid., p.146.
47 - ibid., p.149.
48 - ibid., p.200.
49 - ibid., p.160.
50 - ibid., p.178.
51 - ibid., p.187.
52 - ibid., p.184.
53 - ibid., p.186.
54 - ibid., p.193.
55 - ibid., p.189.
56 - ibid., p.197.
57 - ibid., p.199.
58 - ibid., p.205.
59 - ibid., p.206.
60 - ibid., p.194.
61 - ibid., p.242.
63 - ibid., p.204.
64 - ibid., p.249.
65 - ibid., p.251.

66 - ibid., p.252, Keith Reader (Régis Debray, A Critical Introduction, p. 61) has made reference to the
semiotic work of C.S. Peirce as a pre-text to Debray’s analysis of images, although Debray has not
acknowledged this in his own bibliography of Vie et Mort de l’image. Pierce in fact distinguished between
three basic kinds of sign, the ‘iconic’, the ‘indexical’ and the ‘symbolic’. The movement in painting which
Debray described here from adorationist representation towards realistic/artistic representation does appear
to have a precedent in Peirce nonetheless, who wrote of the pre-Renaissance painter,

‘Nothing is more striking in either of the great intellectual products of that age, than the complete
absence of self-conceit on the part of the artist or philosopher. That anything of value can be added to
his sacred and catholic work by its having the smack of individuality about it, is what he has never
conceived. His work is not designed to embody his ideas, but the universal truth...’ (Charles S. Peirce,
S. Peirce, Stanford, 1958, p.78).

67 - ibid., p.250.
68 - ibid., p.208.
69 - ibid., p.209.
70 - ibid., p.246.
86 - ibid., pp. 228-9. Debray did agree that these epochs were broad definitions which could undoubtedly overlap. For example, Italy had been under the influence of 'art' many centuries before the Slavs, who for a long time remained in the 'iconic' era.
56 - ibid., p.264. Walter Benjamin's 1936 essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (in Benjamin, Walter, Illuminations, Fontana, 1973, pp.211-35), was duly acknowledged as a source by Debray for this particular chapter of Vie et Mort de l'Image. Benjamin had already studied the way in which the mass reproduction of a painting not only jeopardised its authenticity, but its authority as well, through the changes in social perception which mass production introduced. He suggested further that when the criterion of authenticity ceased to be applicable to artistic production, then the traditional function of art was reversed. Art then lost its 'cult' quality, and became pervaded by the political - or in Debray's estimation, by the economic, namely art's commodification.

97 - ibid., p.265.

98 - ibid., p.55.

99 - ibid., p.73.

100 - ibid., p.105.

101 - ibid., p.107.

102 - ibid., p.107.

103 - ibid., p.33.

104 - ibid., p.33.

105 - ibid., p.217.

106 - ibid., p.343. Debray argued that even within the space of some twenty years between 1960 and 1980, the influence of 'le visual' had made the cinema film appear old-fashioned when it was compared to the images which television could offer. He wrote 'le chic du cinémaïque paraît toc au téléphage' (the couch-potato).

107 - ibid., p.294.

108 - ibid., p.298.

109 - ibid., p.295.

110 - ibid., p.349.

111 - ibid., p.349.

112 - ibid., p.329.

113 - ibid., p.347.

114 - ibid., p.348.

115 - ibid., p.326.

116 - ibid., p.324.
117 - ibid., p.345.
118 - ibid., p.346.
119 - ibid., p.340.
120 - ibid., p.322.
121 - ibid., p.324.
122 - ibid., p.358.
123 - ibid., p.364.
124 - ibid., p.364.
125 - ibid., p.363.
126 - ibid., p.359.
127 - ibid., p.362.
128 - ibid., p.359.
129 - ibid., p.360.
130 - ibid., p.361.


132 - Vie et Mort de l'Image, p.396.
133 - ibid., p.365.
134 - ibid., p.392.
135 - ibid., p.390.
136 - ibid., p.392.
137 - ibid., p.380.
138 - ibid., p.381.


143 - 'Régis Debray: Suivez son regard'.
Conclusions

"j'ai partie liée avec les indiens et ne passerai jamais aux cowboys". (1)

Le Canard Enchaîné, (1) reporting upon a lecture that Debray had given in New York in 1991, concerning his mediology theories, claimed that his English accent was so bad that many of his listeners left the room. Whatever the justification for their typically derisive remark, it does nonetheless appear to express a mediological truth about Régis Debray himself. For if McLuhan, (as far as mass media are concerned) and Debray (as far as all media in history are concerned), have both effectively said that the 'the medium is the message', then Debray's own message remains largely unknown outside of the French-speaking world because it has not been fully translated. He has himself in fact written that today, a European intellectual has at his or her disposal far inferior means of communication than do his US counterparts, who have therefore a much chance of attaining global credibility. (1) This significant contextualisation of Debray's work ought to be of primary consideration as one attempts to come to some conclusions about such a complex and often controversial thinker and writer. Particularly as Debray has always deliberately attempted to avoid media 'exposure' for its own sake.

Over and above the content of his books, one could warrant here some reference to Debray's style of writing which in itself can make his work daunting, and it has, in fact, over the years provoked varying degrees of exasperation (as well as some praise). In a review of Critique de la Raison Politique, one commentator was to accuse him of mixing philosophical rigour with an ostentatious use of 'des bonheurs de la plume', and complained that Debray ought to have used a more simple
language to make his books more palatable. (4) Another critic complained, over the same book, that Debray was using a language accessible only to a certain circle of elite thinkers, (5) whilst Bernard Pivot has charged him with using a petulant tone cluttered with the 'varnish' of paradoxes and approximations. (6) Interestingly Michel Deguy has remarked upon Debray's frequent use of 'paronomases' which are employed to give his prose the poetical and rhetorical function of the political slogan. Deguy cited by way of example, 'philosophie de la misère - misère de la philosophie'. (7)

The English critic Patrick McCarthy (8) also has described Debray's writing as 'flowery, prone to rhetoric and cluttered with antitheses'. An example chosen amongst many, below, and irrespective here of subject matter, may serve to best illustrate these critics' irritation.

'Cela m'évitera de repasser sur le veberien pont-aux-ânes des essayistes en perdition, éthique de conviction, ou bien éthique de responsabilité prophète ou bureaucrate, etc; - antithèses spéculatives qui n'ont jamais servi qu'à réussir à un oral à Sciences po. La pose justicier et fulminante n'est pas ma préférée. Ces fier-à-bras, ces gueuleurs d'absolu qui jettent tous le matin Vérité et Justice à la tête des malheureux en charge, ont le jeu facile, trop gagnant à l'avance pour amuser vraiment quiconque à l'esprit sportif'. (9)

If in such passages Debray could be accused of a kind of literary 'showiness', one could perhaps redress the balance somewhat by his evident capacity for self-irony. Summarising his work prior to the appearance of Les Masques, in 1988 he wrote of his,

'ivresse de plans gigognes en trois parties, des intitulés prétentieusement académiques, comme La Critique des Armes, (en deux volumes et demi), un Traité de médecologie en trois tomes, opus magnum laissé en plan, Le Scribe ou la Critique de la Raison Politique, dont le titre-épouvantail n'était pas pour attirer le chaland'. (10)
Many critics, content to list Debray's numerous activities and subject matters, have avoided an attempt at a synthesis of his output. Pierre De Boisdeffre, (11) writing as late as 1990, felt that Debray still remained to a greater extent part of the 1960s and 1970s mythology of revolution, and that as a symbol of resistance he could be compared to other prisoners like Koestler, Gramsci or Mandel. Jacques de Decker, in the foreword to his interview with Debray was prepared to broaden this legacy however. He catalogued his guest as; adventurer, prisoner, confidante, novelist, prototype intellectual of the Left, advisor, functionary, 'Conseiller d'Etat', theoretician, human scientist, intellectual 'enfant terrible', and finally 'star', (an epithet Debray chose in the same interview to reduce to 'starlette'). (12)

Indeed those figures who have influenced or been close to Debray over the past thirty years comprise no less a disparate nor less impressive list, and Debray has even admitted that he has frequently felt the need for a guiding figure to look up to and follow. (13) On the political side his 'associates' have been Castro, Guevara, Allende and Mitterrand. In terms of intellectual influence, there has been Althusser and Michel Serres in particular, whom Debray has described as a 'vrai maitre et ami'. (14) In his private life he has in the past been close friends of Simone Signoret and and Yves Montand. It appears, in reading his work, that Debray's own heroes, whose names recur most frequently in his work are August Comte, and Orson Welles, although he has also suggested that the two writers to have made a particular impression upon him have been Sartre and Dos Passos. (15)

The Swiss writer and sociologist, Jean Ziegler, although certainly an intellectual of the Left himself, has been one of the few who has been prepared to evaluate, rather than simply describe Debray's career. Writing when Debray was only 44 years old he estimated Debray as belonging to a small group of truly great political philosophers of our time, alongside Habermas and Buchanan. He acclaimed his independence, his lucidity, his coherence, and his intransigence - to the point of solitude. Ziegler also considered that two other intellectual qualities
worthy of mention were; firstly, the fact that Debray had always remained aloof from sterile polemic, and secondly, that he had maintained an admirable indifference to the 'tintamarre' of the media, and the literary critics who had vainly tried to expose the contradictions in his life and work. (16)

To date, there does appear to be lacking a contrasting critical resumé, however brief, about Debray, from a figure on the political Right, although Debray's political trajectory has certainly invited some bitter and even frenzied invective from the far Left. Guy Hocquenheim, for whom Debray was little but a 'docteur en reconversion' and an 'agrégé de retournements' expressed his disgust in no uncertain terms that this 'ex-Tiers-Mondiste à revolver à bouchons' should now, in Tous Azimuts, have become the apostle of European re-armement. But he went much further still in comparing Debray's political 'integration' in the 1980s to 'Aids'. Hocquenheim, who has since died of that illness, wrote to Debray in 1986, claiming, 'Ce virus rénégat, que vous avez dû attraper dans les bordels de la Havane, vous l'avez transmis à ma génération; vous êtes notre aîné, mais votre maladie, hélas, est la notre'. (17)

Such bizarre and preposterous comments no doubt help to confirm Debray's own belief that he has been, 'L'un des meilleurs insultés de France', (18) and he has recalled the numerous occasions when his young daughter Céline asked him for the meanings of words she's heard in connection with her father, 'terroriste, provocateur, mouchard, courtisan, taré, abominable, individu suspect, totalitaire, tiers-mondiste, archéo, idéologue...'.(19)

Debray has written of an almost fatal moment in his past from when on he felt that his political convictions would forever be on the side of the poor and underprivileged. Travelling in Ecuador in 1964 with his girlfriend, the two hitched a ride with an affluent American couple. Stopping at a local market Mr and Mrs Bennett relieved their boredom by throwing coins into the air and photographing the ensuing 'mèlée' as the locals fought for the spoils. Debray recalled a personal disgust at
witnessing the scene along with a strong desire to expiate his inability to have done anything about it. But perhaps more importantly he went on to suggest that it was this very episode which prevented him from very 'sensibly' going back to France and returning to the 'rue d'Ulm', and the 'ENS' intellectual circle. Had he done so, then his career, he suggested, would have been mapped out in advance. A doctorat would soon have been acquired, and he would duly have become a visiting professor at Princeton university. Flying back home for '1968' he would have had his flirtation with Maoisme, as well as his photo opportunities with Sartre. By today, he wryly added, he would have had a regular column at L'Express. (20)

The fact that these events did not occur though still begs the question as to why, by the age of fifty, Debray had decided to give up his more overt political commitment in favour of a social theory whose basis involved the very the re-orientation of the materialist theory of thought. He has given some indication of the logic behind this personal re-orientation however. He said of himself in 1990 (21) that his greatest failing had been to want to, 'me joindre à des collectifs, des élans, des effervescences dont j'espère qu'ils m'apporteront au-delà de mon individualité'. He has also described himself somewhat enigmatically as a 'Républicain Libre Penseur', (22) working within 'le vide de l'Utopie Républicaine'. (23) And by 1993 Debray was again to categorise himself as an 'utterly incorrigible socialist'. (24) Hence the idea that he had somehow become a totally uncommitted writer by virtue of his concentration upon political anthropology in the early 1990' would be a misunderstanding of his long-standing and continuing political position.

In A Demain De Gaulle of 1990 too, a work which contained a significant mediological bias, Debray was at pains to re-affirm that he was politically and morally a man who instinctively wanted to, 'soumettre la nature aux contrats, les forêts à la loi, et rendre l'histoire civilisée. (25) He added, in the same rather epic vein, 'Faire l'histoire est notre utopie; la subir, notre défaite; l'infléchir, notre tâche'. (26) he has also said that apart from
having more knowledge and more experience, he is essentially the same man who languished in jail in 1970, yet who had discovered that whilst the revolution was not his 'patrie', France certainly was. (27)

In attempting to draw up a balance sheet of Régis Debray's intellectual life, one must justifiably re-state that his literary output has not been examined in this study. Whilst it is an aspect worthy of attention in itself, it is nonetheless almost entirely separable from the focus attempted here. (28) Such grounds for its exclusion would probably be endorsed by Debray too, for he has stated, in interview, that not only are his literary and artistic tastes to be considered independently of his political and theoretical convictions, but that his search for the precision, which theory requires, had in fact forced a long creative self-abnegation upon him. (29) The benefit, at least, in retaining other personal centres of interest beyond those of the political or theoretical have, he has suggested, permitted him to, 'brûler les idôles que j'avais adorées, car mon adoration n'était pas aussi abyssale que l'est celle des maos ou même celles des trotskistes'. (30) Politics, he went on to state in the same interview had therefore never been any kind of moral quest for the absolute on his behalf. (31)

Jean Daniel's (32) perceptive analysis of Debray's intellectual and political production certainly merits some attention here if only because of its originality. He chose to portray Debray as a man who had spontaneously imposed upon himself the two main intellectual precepts of a generation which had actually preceded his own. The first one involved the notion of the intellectual as hero and adventurer like Malraux. (33) And the second one involved a Camus-like desire for self-flagellation. This latter evaluation would certainly gain some credence as one considers several of the titles Debray has chosen for his books. L'Espérance au Purgatoire and Contretemps both convey this notion of failure and exclusion, as do the somewhat self-depreciatory Journal d'un petit bourgeois entre dux feux et quatre murs, and the novel, L'Indésirable.
One critic (34) has gone as far as to suggest that Debray remains haunted by a desire to escape his own privileged heritage of 'grand bourgeois normalien', and it is certainly true that Debray has never been content to accede to simply 'teaching' philosophy, or following the 'chemin de velours' towards the French Academy, as others with a comparable 'pedigree' to him have done.

In the final analysis it is probably inevitable that one will come to conclusions about Régis Debray in terms of this inexorable auto-critique, of a man Enthoven described as someone who fundamentally 'a pensé contre le militant qu'il fût'. (35) It is perhaps not so very surprising that Debray should have said in 1987, that if he were given the opportunity to re-cast his whole career, then he would have worked in the cinema, the means of expression best suited to our age. Whilst he was to suggest of course, by the early-1990s, that that particular medium had been superceded by television, (36) the sentiment may well still apply that by using the written medium today he feels even more like, 'un copiste au seizième siècle, qui copie les manuscrits d'Aristote, et qui ne sait pas qu'il y a l'imprimerie'. (37) There is in such a statement some indication that Debray would not totally dismiss his critics who have accused him of a nostalgia for a 'pre-videosphere' age, for he has also intimated, 'Mon regret précisément, est d'avoir vécu décalé par rapport à mon temps et à moi-même et de n'avoir jamais liquidé ces 20 ans de retard que j'ai sur le moment actuel à chaque fois'... (38)

Illustrating this lament further he has also cited his decision to go to the politics-oriented 'école Normale Supérieure' in 1960 as a mistake. Whilst it had certainly been 'the' place to be in 1950, a decade later, the economics-oriented 'Ecole Normale d'Administration' he believed, would have been of much more relevance for the predilections of the new mediological age. (39) Gilles Anquetil has astutely captured the connection between these sentiments and Debray's scrutiny of how both accepted ideas and images acquire and retain their potency today.
He has said of Debray, 'Si la modernité n’est pas sa passion, elle est indiscutablement son problème. Son problème de médiologue'. (40)

Debray has agreed as well, that his work could, in another sense, be interpreted as involving a recurring and intuitive mistrust for majority, consensus ideas. (41) As if he were successively taking up the position of a 'franc-tireur' against Guevarisme, 'Gauchisme', Marxism, Mitterrand, intellectuals, national defence, and mass media precisely when all of these 'phenomena' have been at their zenith of credibility. Whilst Golfier has recorded Debray's own comment 'Moi je tiens à ne pas être là où il faut être', (42) it is certainly true that the negative aspect of having such a credo has meant that Debray, for much of his life, has been impatiently dismissed as the 'ronchonneur de service' and, l'intellectuel du ressentiment'. (43)

It is certainly the case too that in tracing, and evaluating the writings of Debray one has often the impression of attempting to locate several successive Régis Debrays. Whilst in the eyes of many people outside France he will forever be thought of in the same militant, if eclectic, category of figures from the late 1960s such as Baader-Meinhof, Rudi Dutschke, Cohn-Bendit, George Jackson, and Angela Davis, the young marxist was very soon to became the fellow-travelling socialist. The 'PS' supporter became the participant in government. And the Third World advisor then turned his attention to a commentary and proposal for a 'realpolitik' in international relations, before declaring his allegiance to a very patriotic, and even nostalgic French Republicanism. Of course, all of this 'political' work has since been attacked by Debray the 'scientific' de-coder of behaviour and power in society.

What does finally appear most unreconcilable with the later Debray is that very tension between the technical globalisation of 'his' videosphere on the one hand, and the combat to preserve a specific French Republicanism on the other. It is of interest to note that Bernard-Henri Lévy, has in fact suggested to Debray, that in his work on 'le' politique, he has over-compensated for his apparent political
'weaknesses'. Lévy believed that theorist Debray's very erudite,
detailed, concrete and materialist approach, full of 'sacro-sainte
observation', (44) is an inappropriate method of investigation with which
to approach certain phenomena such as suffering, creation and death.
With some justification we could add to this list the notions of
'Republicanism', and indeed 'nationalism' which Debray perceives to be
resurgent in many parts of the globe. Lévy finally attempted to persuade
Debray that the notion of human progress was incomparably more the fruit
of imagination than it was of 'rigueur'.

This study has sought to chart Régis Debray's movement from the
role of committed intellectual towards that of political anthropologist.
It has undeniably been a long and sometimes convoluted journey. One may
finally however choose to contest his own dispirited comments about his
trajectory as being too negative and defeatist. He said to Gilles
Anquetil in 1992, 'Je n'ai pas eu la vertu de creuser mon sillon. J'ai
perdu trop de temps dans les allées du pouvoir. Découvrir à 52 ans
l'inanité de la politique, c'est un peu drésoire'. (45) Time alone will
tell whether the 'sillon' of the mediologist will remain as durable as
that of the intellectual.
Conclusion. Notes

1 - Debray, Régis, Comédie na Comédie, Gallimard, 1986, p.69.
4 - 'Critique de la Raison Politique; Régis Debray et les mystères de la foi', Le Monde des livres, 9 oct, 1981, p.17, (Bertrand Poiret-Delpach).
8 - 'Restoring the Republic', The Times Literary Supplement, 13 déc, 1985, (Patrick McCarthy). Admittedly, one could argue that McCarthy's criticism says as much about English culture as it does about Debray.
13 - Comédie na Comédie, p.55.
16 - 'Faut-il avoir peur de l'Union Soviétique?', Tribune de Genève, 28 juin 1985, (Jean Zeigler).
18 - Comédie na Comédie, p.111.
19 - ibid., p.111.
20 - ibid., pp.66-8.
22 - 'A Demain De Gaulle', Agora, France-Culture, radio broadcast, 19 juin 1990, (Debray interviewed by Olivier Germain-Thomas).

23 - Que vive la République, p.143.


26 - ibid., pp.119-20.


30 - ibid., p.A10.

31 - ibid., p.47.


33 - This is a comparison which Debray refuted in an article 'Le siècle ou sa légende?' which he wrote in Le Monde, (22 nov. 1976, p.28). Shortly after Malraux's death, Debray suggested here that Malraux had not been a militant at all, but a man of image and effect, who had promoted and imposed himself through his literary 'lémocignages'.


38 - ibid., p.A12.


41 - Goffier, p.A17.


43 - 'Régis Debray: Suivez son regard'.


45 - 'Régis Debray: Suivez son regard'. 
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by

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Appendix
Appendix

This Appendix comprises a listing of material relating to the work of Régis Debray up to 1993, and also a less comprehensive listing from 1993-95. Much of its collation has been made possible thanks to the assistance of the Services de Presse at the Publishers Gallimard, Seuil, and La Différence, (who now hold the Press Dossiers from Debray's first publisher François Maspero).
A Bibliography of the Writings of Régis Debray

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