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## The “floating asylum”, the *Armée du salut* and Le Corbusier: A Modernist Heterotopian/Utopian Project.

*Keywords:* Heterotopia/Utopia; Modernist architecture; Salvation Army, Le Corbusier, Foucault; Asylum.

*Subject Categories:* Architecture, Philosophy, Politics.

*Abstract:* This article examines the case of a neglected “heterotopian” space, Le Corbusier’s “floating asylum”, commissioned by the French Salvation Army. It uses archival material to explore the potentially far-reaching contribution “heterotopia” can make to a “utopian” project for social transformation, as well as indicating how “dystopian” aspects can infiltrate the same initiative. My analysis focuses on the different texts available in French of Foucault’s problematic ideas on “other spaces”. It also draws attention to a another occluded “debate”, one that did not take place as such, between Foucault, Gauchet and Swain as to what types of spaces asylums actually were and intended to be. It also reflects on the place of asylum today and how hospitality might be extended to those who are socially excluded.

“A boat is a floating piece of space, a place without place, which lives by itself, which is closed in on itself and that is at the same time exposed to the infinity of the sea...”

Michel Foucault “Of Other Spaces” (1967/1984/1986)<sup>1</sup>.

“Nowadays one cannot conceive a utopia that does not address itself to nomads, peoples and individuals, to the homeless, to the excluded.”

René Schérer (2009, 17)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In the earlier audio version of the text «Les hétérotopies» (1966/2009, 36), Foucault had said : «a boat is... *fatally* exposed [« *livré fatalement*», handed over to] the sea». The differential quality of finite lives is perhaps the main topic opened up by this exploration of the neglected «heterotopia » that was the «*asile flottant*». See Bauman (2004, 34) on «wasted lives»: « There are always too many of *them*. ‘Them’ are the fellows of whom there should be fewer- or better still none of all. And there are never enough of us. ‘Us’ are the folks of whom there should be more».

<sup>2</sup> All translations from the French are my own, unless otherwise stated.



Image 1. The “without slum-dwellers” [*les sans-taudis*] make their way towards “the floating asylum, the Louise Catherine” on the Seine, *En avant* (8/06/1926), drawing by André Labarthe<sup>3</sup>.

After the First World War a concrete barge made its way up and down the Seine between Rouen and Paris<sup>4</sup>. It was called the “Liège” and its mission was to supply the French capital

<sup>3</sup> The «sans-*taudis* » is an *Armée du salut* neologism, indicative of the poetics of their weekly newspaper *En avant!* The term draws attention not only to the plight of the homeless, «les sans logis» or «sans abri», but also to the generally low standard of housing for the poor as a social category. See *En avant* (27/09/30 : «the slums must be overcome; we must build salubrious dwellings». The quality of social housing was also of concern for Le Corbusier.

<sup>4</sup> I use «barge» to translate not only «péniche» but also «chaland», both terms are used by the *L'armée du salut*. However, the boat in question was technically a «chaland » which, according to *En avant* 15/6/1929, tends to be twice the size of a «péniche». This is no negligible difference if one's intention is to accommodate 150 people. «Péniche» could also designate a «house-boat». Indeed, on several occasions in *En avant* (e.g. 13/07/29 ; 22/07/1929), it is written : «everyone knows that «les péniches» are very fashionable... the «home» on the water so appreciated by the British». This remark is not only a wink in the direction of the British originators of the movement, but it is typical of the quite provocatively ironic reinscription of terms at play in their newspaper. It should always be borne in mind that this particular «house boat» was intended for society's most destitute, its debris. Also significant is the very material of the boat: building with concrete might strike one as most incompatible with buoyancy. However, given the penury of steel and wood at the end of the First World War, Eugène Freyssinet (who later became the pioneer of prestressed concrete shells), worked with the available concrete mix, seizing the opportunity for technological innovation. He oversaw the construction in Rouen of a fleet of barges, tugs and landing stages made of reinforced concrete. The boats were named after European cities and the tugs after

with English coal. When it was decommissioned in 1929, the *Armée du salut* (the French Salvation Army) bought it with the aid of a donation from Madeleine Zillhardt, the recently bereaved long-term companion of the painter Louise Catherine of Breslau. Thanks to a generous donation by the Princess Singer de Polignac and a sustained campaign for public subscriptions by the “Salutistes”, the boat (renamed “Louise Catherine”) was converted by Le Corbusier into a “floating asylum” for 150 unfortunates “without an address, without rest, without a hovel”. This, at first sight, rather improbable collaboration of two very different movements- Victorian Christianity and iconoclastic modernism- was the first stage of the larger “City of Refuge” project<sup>5</sup>.

The standard reading of this collaboration would probably be that it was made possible by both movements’ shared faith in the principles of “social engineering”; i.e. they both espoused the ultimately dystopian and/or reactionary values of discipline, minimalist austerity, mental and physical hygiene. It would be pointed out that the “floating asylum” was no neutral, ideologically-free world and that, whilst offering a temporary safe haven from the ravages of capitalism, its guests were objects of charity, to be retrained and wherever possible reinserted back in that same society as Christian soldiers with the aid of a doctrinaire modernist aesthetic<sup>6</sup>. However, my argument will be that this project is socially, and even politically, far more challenging than one might expect. As such it- both the boat and the wider City of Refuge project- is indeed a “heterotopia”, i.e. a space of “contestation” which can unexpectedly open up a plethora of pertinent matters (Foucault 1966/2009, 34).

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American cities, the latter’s nomenclature presumably symbolic of the USA’s contribution of financial aid, much needed to pull the defeated victors out of the post-war abyss.

<sup>5</sup> It needs to be noted that the barge formed the first stage of the programme for the City of Refuge as a whole. Accordingly Albin Peyron wrote in *En avant* (1/06/1929) that the « floating asylum»: «will be in constant contact with the city of refuge and it must be organised straightaway». Given its pivotal importance in the overall City of Refuge programme, it is remarkable that this project has been so little discussed. However, that being said, maybe we should not be surprised: as we know from their biological origins, heterotopias, which for society as a whole signal a troubling zone of «crisis» or a «deviation», can be reabsorbed by the overpowering body politic, thereby condemning them to oblivion (Foucault 1966/2009, 27).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Monnier (1992, 47) who describes the Cité of Refuge as a «war machine » that was probably incapable of addressing the needs of its residents for two reasons : the Salvation Army sought a «spatial and technical transcription » of their norms of discipline and order ; modernist architecture, being geared up for « progress », was intrinsically incompatible with any « charitable » engagement.



Image 2. The «Cité du refuge» and its various operations : 1. The Cité itself ; 2. the House of the Mother and Child ; 3. the House of the Young Man; 4. the «floating asylum»; 5. Paris by the sea ; 6. the Hostel for the Liberated Prisoner in the [Guyanan] Penal Colony, *En avant* (24/05/1930).<sup>7</sup>

The barge *Le Liège* started out as a non-space; a mere container whose purpose was to be a vast mobile, temporary storage space for a raw material. It was a means to an end. This purpose served, it was saved from destruction by being converted into a well-designed living space as *La Louise-Catherine* for the socially excluded. It became an end in itself. Quantity became quality as its sheer size became habitable. Now functioning as a safe and hospitable haven to urban marginals, it was transformed into completely different sort of space, an intrinsically vital one for those just managing to survive in the city. This radical change was itself enabled by a series of creative conversions and fortuitous encounters: the sum of money bestowed by Zillhardt, which put the barge-project into motion, had been acquired by profitably selling a drawing, which she had come across by chance, to an art dealer. When handing the windfall over to the *Armée du salut*, the grieving lesbian lover, herself no stranger to the difficulties and perils occasioned by social exclusion, explained that she was desirous of helping “those who live under the bridges at night”. Indeed, once they had left the bright lights of the boulevards, the destitute not only descended to the darkness of the river banks but often risked heading further, to the cold depths of the Seine itself, «never again to return to street level” (see Albert Flament in *En avant* 15/6/1929 and 8/3/1930).

<sup>7</sup> The Penal Colonies in French Guyana will be discussed later. They form an intrinsic part of the City of Refuge programme.



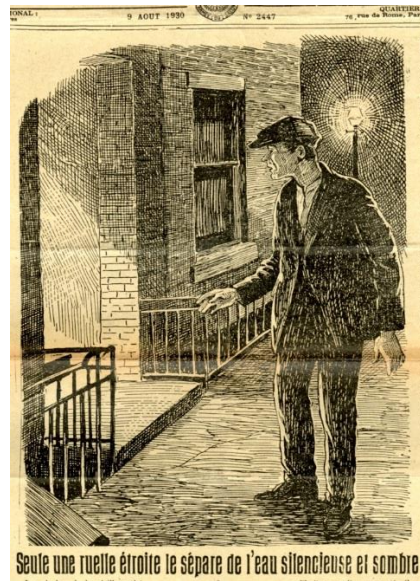


Image 3. Desperate, the social outcast is tempted to put at end to it all by drowning himself in the river. *En avant* (9/08/1930).

The floating asylum was thus a beacon of hope, offering a space of hospitality and giving time to those who had felt that their time was up<sup>8</sup>. Zillhardt's vision of a floating asylum thereby attempted to reterritorialise the city by reinscribing what was once a zone of condemnation as a hospitable space, however temporary that might be. Evoking her own suffering, both verbally and apparently physically (she is described "prematurely aged, dressed in black..."), Zillhardt expressed her wish to alleviate that of others. Her own personal loss was to become someone else's gain<sup>9</sup>. Her initiative then evolved into the Princess Singer de Polignac's gift, which was also a conversion of sorts: the Princess, heiress of the Singer sewing machine fortune, redirected some of the profits extracted from presumably exploitative factory work back towards the socially disadvantaged<sup>10</sup>. Additionally, the "Salutistes" themselves, when soliciting donations, also aimed to bring about change: they interpellated busy and preoccupied passers-by, stopping them in their track, distracting them from their intended purpose and prompting a contribution towards the caring for the destitute, those shadowy figures who hover in the other spaces of the city (*En avant* 17/05/30).

The barge "Louise Catherine" presents us with a constellation of topics and attendant issues that are "heterotopian": water and floating vessels *per se* destabilize the habitual perceptions of the terrestrially-bound. Both remind us of the artificiality and temporariness of definite and

<sup>8</sup> Thanks to this localised service, which reached out to the homeless there were they were to be found, «maybe [the destitute] will try to wait until tomorrow... ». For analyses of the spatial and temporal dimensions of hospitality, see Dikec, Clarke & Barnett ed. 2009.

<sup>9</sup> See *En avant* 15/06/29 : « What is the story of the floating asylum? It is a beautiful and moving one, infused with the perfume of the flower of renunciation».

<sup>10</sup> The Princesse de Polignac was already known as a patroness of the arts, in particular of musicians. Nowadays Constance de Polignac continues this particular family tradition at Kerbastic: this estate hosts a classical music festival and provides useful work for nine socially excluded people on her ecologically sustainable estate, fruit of her collaboration with Pierre Rabhi.

fixed demarcations; they remove the ground from under our feet<sup>11</sup>. The barge was intended to act as a mirror, reflecting back to a hardened city what it did not want to see, forcing a focus on the excluded and abandoned, obliging the unfeeling to face up to their social responsibilities<sup>12</sup>. It drew attention to the “geographically uneven development” produced by capitalist economics. Presenting itself as a Noah’s Ark, it offered a means of survival to those otherwise exposed to the hostile elements (e.g. *En avant* 8/03/1930). It was certainly unlike one of those unseaworthy vessels, owned by unscrupulous and exploitative human traffickers, which regularly plunge desperate asylum seekers to their death.

“Asylum” is itself a floating signifier, easily swept off course by the discourses of hypocrisy, indifference, prejudice, exploitation and protectionism. The focal places for those seeking this elusive “asylum” are often islands of exception, symbols both of hope and scenes of appalling tragedy<sup>13</sup>. These pressing issues haunt this case study of the “Louise Catherine” barge. Since its closure in 1994, the barge for a long time faced an uncertain future but it will apparently now be used as an “events” venue, whilst, maybe rather contradictorily, having been “saved” as a historical monument. But what does it memorialize exactly? To what extent did it succeed or ultimately fail as a heterotopian/utopian project that attempted to integrate those who are traditionally marginalized into society?<sup>14</sup> By drawing on this historical “other space”, a neglected historical case in its own right despite being one of the earliest projects of Le Corbusier, I also wish to encourage reflection on what that particular space represents to us now and where it might be located tomorrow<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> These factual, poetical and metaphorical topics will be explored in section one.

<sup>12</sup> See *En avant* 30/11/1929 : «The *Armée du salut* wants to injure the eyes of the French people with the Truth ; it wants to thrust fists-full of light at them » [*L’armée du salut veut blesser les yeux du peuple de France par le vrai, elle veut lui jeter la lumière à poignées terribles*]. The *Armée du salut*’s activities between 1927-31, i.e. leading up to the barge/refuge project and their initial years are the subject of section two.

<sup>13</sup> At the moment of writing the death toll of the latest refugee tragedy on the shores of Lampedusa on 3rd October 2013 is 364 people. The Guardian (8/10/2013) reported : «Divers searching for victims... entered the hold of the vessel for the first time yesterday to find dozens of corpses packed so tightly they were still on the feet... One diver [said] : « The image that I cannot shake from my mind is of those bodies packed into the wreck, almost all with staring eyes and their arms raised, as if they were calling for help. »... a fire service spokesman [said] : «I have seen everything but the fact the migrants in the hold had absolutely no chance to escape is what makes this so shocking ». In stark contrast, the « floating asylum » was a project whose challenge lay in « transforming a vehicule conceived for transportation [of non-human materials] by making it comfortable », see *En avant* 27/09/1930. See also *En avant* 1/11/1930 for details of the conversion process of the space into one suitable for a «human cargo».

<sup>14</sup> The relationship between heterotopias and utopias will be explored below.

<sup>15</sup> Le Corbusier’s contribution to this *L’armée du salut* project will be discussed in section three.

### 1. *Water, boats and «fluid geography».*

Seamen are traditionally “masters of storytelling” as their medium of activity, water, is a reservoir of historical memory; it conserves the traces of deeply lived experience (Benjamin 2002 144). Whilst setting the scene for Marlow’s haunting tale about one of the “dark places of the earth”, a harrowing story nevertheless told quite naturally whilst obliged to await the turning of the tide, Conrad writes:

... nothing is easier for a man who has, as the phrase goes, “followed the sea” with reverence and affection, than to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower reaches of [a river]. The tidal current runs to and fro in its unceasing service crowded with memories of men and ships it has borne to the rest of home or to the battles of the sea (Conrad 2006, 4).

Not all sea-stories have to be steeped in the “mournful gloom” that “broods motionless” over Marlow’s tale. Bringing us back from the “heart of darkness”, Le Corbusier restores our sense of temporal fluidity when he associates boats with the future and the past:

Ports are beautiful because boats, announced by the heavy sound of sirens, arrive and depart from them. The song of the siren either signals a set of men who are going far afield, seeking an adventure, or who are just arriving, bringing memories from afar (Le Corbusier 1970, 120).

Bright, spring-like waters can inspire beautifully flighty and fresh daydreams (Bachelard 1997, 29-62). Here too the relation to the past is not heavy; it is an enlivening historicity that stems from the wish to capture something like « ...the eternal poetry of boats on the ocean» and the elusively transitory «sensation of space and fluid matter» (Le Corbusier 1970, 119)<sup>16</sup>. The source of water’s forever ongoing fascination is maybe the fact that it flows across, through and around the planet with the potential of, in time, undermining all that is fixed, predetermined, finite and sedentary. Seamen know this ultimate truth intimately, hence their disdainful detachment from all that is terrestrially bound<sup>17</sup>. Conrad explains this fundamental

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<sup>16</sup> See also Le Corbusier’s association of the birth of « new machinist civilisation » with an urban planning that can learn the lessons of the watery city of Venice with its « harmonious intimacy» (1970, 214-230).

<sup>17</sup> In «Fluid Geography», Buckminster Fuller explains how sailors, unlike landlubbers, necessarily deal “directly and daily with the mechanics of the stars” as they circumnavigate the globe. He evocatively states that: “without thinking of themselves as cosmogonists, sailors naturally develop a spontaneous cosmic viewpoint. They view the world from outside; they ‘come upon’ the land” (ibid 133). For Fuller, terrestrially-bounded inhabitants carve the surface of the earth up into immobilised places located in the East or West, North or South. By contrast, sailors have a more dynamic sensibility of space. Riding the waves, negotiating the currents, they “see everything in motion” (ibid 134). They keenly experience the interconnectedness and variability of the globe’s earthy-watery surface. For sailors directionality is paramount; their experience of the earth’s sphericity is continually informed by the direction they set out from and where they head to. For them all placing is transitional, temporary, temporalised and relative. See Morgan (2013, 2014) for more on “fluid geography” and its relation to cosmopolitics and human rights



difference between those associated with the sea and full-time landlubbers in the following fashion:

In the immutability of their surroundings the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life glide past, veiled not by a sense of mystery but by a slightly disdainful ignorance, for there is nothing mysterious to a seamen unless it be the sea itself which is the mistress of his existence, and is as inscrutable as destiny itself (Conrad 2006, 5).

Water has so many guises and qualities but it somehow also always becomes the same medium, one that possesses a powerfully mysterious identity that even sailors cannot quite grasp, but instead greatly respect as an ongoing communication with itself. For the human whose life is a «flight without end», boats necessarily invite one on a long journey out of oneself, towards unknown «exterior space» with all its excitements, but also, most possibly, with attendant dangers<sup>18</sup>. Joseph Roth evokes the inexorable drift or current that pulls one out to sea, even if one is observing the water from the tranquil haven of a port:

Boats are the only means of transport that one always associates with adventure. They don't have to be steam-boats. Any old boat, the most basic raft, the poorest fishing boat, could have tasted the water of high seas. For those on shore, all water is the same. Even the smallest wave is a sister of the biggest and more dangerous ones (Roth 1994, 40; 1977, 38 *translation modified*).

Boats engage directly with the ambivalence of water and hence also with fundamental truths about the flows, ebbs, storms, droughts of our finite lives, as Bachelard reminds us:

One does not bathe twice in the same river because the depths of the human being already has the destiny of flowing water. Water is really the transitory element... the being dedicated to water is a vertiginous being [*un être en vertige*]. Every minute he dies, his substance incessantly crumbles away ... water always flows, always falls, it always finishes in its horizontal death (Bachelard 1997, 8-9).

In the *Armée du salut's* weekly newspaper, *En avant*, the pool of associations that colour our relationship to water and to the vehicle humans have invented to communicate with and across it, the boat, is extensively drawn on whilst highlighting the singularity of the "floating asylum" project:

It is a beautiful thing to see a boat moored in a big port. It speaks to you of long journeys, of distant and mysterious places and adventures. But if we often pass close by it and it is still in the same place, we start to find it a bit ridiculous and absurd, like

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<sup>18</sup> For Conrad, the particularity of Marlow is that he is not just a sailor, but also a wanderer. This is not the case of all sailors who, when they are not at sea, can lead quite sedentary lives (Conrad 2006, 5). Marlow's journeyings take him far «out of himself » ; the space he experiences, so different from the spaces we emotionally and symbolically manage to invest with phenomenological meanings, «gnaws away at» and «gullies» him, see Foucault (2001, 1574 ; 1986, 23). I note that «to gully » («raviner») means « to make deep channels in, by the action of water ». This connection with the action of water is lost in Miskowiec's translation («claws and knaws »). Those who frequented the *l'Armée du salut's* boat had also been weathered in these ravaging ways by the spaces they had traversed, especially by water (rain, frost, snow).

a boastful person who is always talking about Africa without having left his native village. Near to the *Ponts des Arts*, a large barge is to be found, immobile throughout the winter. This barge is neither ridiculous, nor absurd. It knows more stories than if it had frequented all the ports of the world (*En avant* 25/01/1930)<sup>19</sup>.

The “floating asylum” together with the other refuges of the *Armée du salut*, brought together wanderers with rich stories to tell, stories that were no doubt often painful and tragic, but also fascinatingly exotic for those living comparatively “normal”, conventional, sedentary lives.



Image 4. *En avant* (07/01/1928) «The banquet of 800 seatings offered to those «without a slum» [«les sans-taudis »] of Paris. The photograph bottom right featured in an earlier article announcing the opening of a women’s refuge in the rue du Saint Sauveur, Paris 2<sup>e</sup>, with the caption «this poor creature has not slept in a bed for the past fifteen years».(*En avant* 11/06/1927).

That lives can take such different forms, be lived out in such radically different sorts of spaces! The very act of telling these stories is a challenging questioning of any complacent assumption that one can know people’s place(s) in this world, or one’s own entirely.

Indeed, whilst the floating asylum functions as a reassuring “lighthouse” or “haven” for those otherwise at risk of being lost in “the immense ocean of misery and despair”, it also created destabilizing effects on the city as a whole (*En avant* 5/07/1930, 26/07/1930, 10/08/1930),<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> During the summer time the boat moved upstream to Pecq where it «metamorphosed» into a «pleasure yacht» for young men who wouldn’t otherwise be able to afford a holiday break (see *En avant* 13/07/1929).

<sup>20</sup> *En avant* (10/08/1929) is drawing on Victor Hugo’s *Les misérables*: «Man overboard! So what? The ship won’t stop. The wind is blowing, the dark vessel has to continue with its itinerary. It carries on... The sea is society’s inexorable night into which the penal system throws the condemned. *The sea is the immensity of misery*. The lost soul, dragged along by the current, can become a corpse, who will resuscitate him?» (Hugo 1998, 145 & 147). Evidently, half a century after Hugo’s classic indictment of social injustice, the *Armée du*

Or rather, it is precisely because it ascribed a homely place to those who don't usually have the "right" to one, that the barge obliged the more official and established city to rethink itself. At least that was the Salutistes' intention: the «tramp's barge» that was moored during the winter months «in the very heart of Paris», is presented as a poke in the eye of well-dressed and comfortably housed Parisians (*En avant* 11/01/1930 & 25/01/1930)<sup>21</sup>. The Salutistes take pleasure in describing the scene:

For a few days now, those strolling along the quayside of the Louvre when it is time for Paris be lit up, look at the Seine to see it become iridescent and spangly. To their surprise, these *flâneurs*, for the *bouquinistes* are still open, notice downstream from *le pont des Arts*, that a renovated barge is also brightly illuminated.... (*En avant* 25/01/1930).

With its attractive modernist glass roof, the boat is easily mistaken by the *mondaines* for a fashionable party venue. They are therefore «stupified» to see that, instead of «ornamental



*Salut* keenly felt that the same desperation was at large in their world. Almost one century later maybe the global situation is still not that much better today in ours.

<sup>21</sup> A provocative attitude is also detectable in the article «A new type of boat» (*Un bateau nouveau genre*) where Pecz, the summer location of the boat, is proposed as a possible new destination for relatively privileged Parisians in search of a pleasant weekend excursion (see footnote 19 above). These citizen «innocents», who are unacquainted with the lives of others, lose their bearings when encountering the «floating asylum». The Salutistes come to their rescue : « ...no, it isn't a transport boat, nor a fishing boat, neither a pleasure boat belonging to some rich millionaire, even less a war boat. It is quite simply a boat of charity [*c'est tout simplement un bateau de bienfaisance*] ».

Image 5. *En avant* 8/03/1930. The Louise-Catherine at night. Photograph by André Kertész<sup>22</sup>.

ladies and men in smoking jackets» making their way to towards its beacon, there are «poor wretches, ragged, chilled to the bone, tousled and dirty, bent-backed, who, dragging their shoddily-shoed feet towards the river, look as if they want to drown themselves»<sup>23</sup>. The Salutistes vividly situate their particular clientèle right in the midst of the city:

After all the tiring efforts and sufferings of a winter's day, these pickers-up of cigarette butts, these openers of doors, these sandwich-men, these load carriers at *les Halles* market, will ask for a shower, a bed, a meal, and above all for moral support from this hospitable barge that the Salvation Army has specially fitted out for them instead of spending the night stretched out under a bridge, or huddled up in a recess or doorway (*En avant* 25/01/1930)<sup>24</sup>.

Once welcomed on board the Louise-Catherine and comfortably settled down : «[the] water that gently laps against the sides of the barge, will rock them in their sleep, murmuring to them that everything has its end, even misery» (ibid).<sup>25</sup>

However, water does not always comfort the poor. The destabilising properties of water are also a recurrent trope in *En avant*. The real, but nevertheless differential, impact of its capacity to flood our lives, thereby damaging or even washing away the things «we» hold most dear, provides the Salutistes with an opportunity to hammer home their message about the destitute<sup>26</sup>:

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<sup>22</sup> Flament's article «A Portrait of Paris and elsewhere» begins by describing the hostile characteristics of water : «It rains on the Seine, with such violent intensity, the foreground is so striated with thick and heavy drops of rain that they make you think of those downpours created for films, compared to which the Flood is trivial. End of February. 7pm. The riverbank ». The writings of *En avant* are keenly aware of just exactly how much the homeless are at the mercy of the elements.

<sup>23</sup> The poetic quality of many of the articles of *En avant* merits being better translated and better known. Here is the original text: «Ce sont de pauvres hères, loqueteux et transis, la face hirsute et sale, le dos courbé, traînant la savate, qui, tout en allant péniblement vers le fleuve, ont l'air de vouloir s'y noyer».

<sup>24</sup> The original text reads : «Après les fatigues et les souffrances d'un jour d'hiver, ces ramasseurs de mégots, ces ouvriers de portières, ces hommes-sandwichs, ces coltineurs aux Halles, au lieu de passer la nuit, étendus sous les ponts, ou recroquevillés dans des renforcements, de porte cochères vont demander une douche, un lit, un repas, et surtout un réconfort moral à ce chaland hospitalier, que l'Armée du Salut a spécialement aménagé pour eux ».

<sup>25</sup> The original reads: « L'eau qui clapote doucement sur les flancs du chaland, bercera leur sommeil, en leur murmurant que tout passe, même la misère». The recurrent boat and water imagery again appeared in *En avant* 16/11/1929 where it is also used metaphorically: « Sleep you courageous ones. You can sleep and dream like everyone else. Good night ! You are on a real barge (*chaland*) but also on The Barge which is heading up The River ».

<sup>26</sup> Flooding also features in *En avant* 5/04/1939 & 29/03/1930. The article «Sowers of Catastrophe » not only reports on the flood damage in the Midi, clearly explaining how short-

When the Seine floods, well-lodged residents have to hoist their furniture up to the first floor and sometimes leave the building in a boat. Those who sleep under the bridges [*les couche-sous-les-ponts*] don't have so much bother with their things. They put everything back in a handkerchief, leave the river and look for lodgings elsewhere. It's like an expulsion. The bailiff-river rises up towards them. Murmuringly it repeats the old curse: «you will be a vagabond and a fugitive on this earth» (*En avant* 25/05/1929)<sup>27</sup>.

However, the floating asylum again glides into sight, hopefully providing a timely solution to what would otherwise be an eternal fatality:

In the future these misfortunates will only have only have to make a few steps in order to move from the inhospitable quayside to the safety of the asylum (ibid).

Before being properly received and treated as a respect-able human beings, the ragged, tramps and beggars (*les loqueteux, les clochards et les gueux*) resemble a cloyingly aqueous substance on their move towards the asylums. Describing their arrival for the Christmas dinner in 1928, the Salutistes wrote :

The pavement was greasy. They arrived in formless, black lumps as if the shadows were breaking up. One heard amongst these thousands of devastated beings the gruntings of bone gnawers. One saw the eddies of nocturnal water. Sometimes jostlings (*En avant* 7/01/1928)<sup>28</sup>.

The conclusion drawn from the serving of eight hundred meals to these sorts of people, these *misérables*, was that it is exactly *this* experience that gives a noble idea of what society both is and should become: «*c'est ça qui donne une fière idée de la société*» (ibid). The heterotopian City of Refuge is to become a project for a society as a whole. As such, the heterotopia it

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sighted deforestation carried out for material profits, leads to such ecological devastation. This green consciousness-raising also provides the basis for a parallel analysis of how the lesson that «we harvest what we sow» also applies to human relations: «Natural catastrophes are the result of egotism, lack of foresight on the part of men, and also of their desire for the lucrative. Moral catastrophes have the same causes...». The edition culminates in a solicitation for donations to the Salvation army, as «sowers of good seed»: «if you cannot give your life, give some money».

<sup>27</sup> This citation in *En avant* is an extract from Pierre Hamp's «The Famine of Lodgings for the Single Woman», that publicised the work done at *L'armée du salut's* «Palais de la femme». Hamp wrote the preface for Péan *Terre de baigne* (1930) about the Guyanan penal colonies (discussed below).

<sup>28</sup> The original reads : «Le trottoir était gras. Ils arrivaient par parquets informes et noirs, comme si l'ombre se morcelait. On entendait dans ce millier d'êtres désastreux des grognements de rongeurs d'os. On voyait des remous d'eau nocturne. Parfois de bourrades ». See image 4 (especially the photograph top left) which documents the occasion. The passage cited resonates with Foucault's (1970, xviii) discussion of heterotopias in relation to the linguistic spaces of aphasiacs wherein are created «a multiplicity of tiny, fragmented regions in which nameless resemblances agglutinate things into unconnected ideas». See below for how this spatiality, relieved of its misery, should also find its place in the society to come and further discussion about this linguistic use of «heterotopia».



creates are also utopian : rather than just «suspending, neutralising and inverting» other actually existing places, their intention is to « efface, neutralise and purify » current societal emplacements (Foucault 1966, 24 ; 1967/1984, 1574 ; 1986, 23). Boats invariably invite one on a long journey out of oneself, towards unknown «exterior space[s]» (1967/1984 1573 ; 1986, 23)<sup>29</sup>. What needs to be flushed out of («purified» from) society is injustice, and this is to be achieved by injecting into the main body of society, those- barely known, hardly encountered- who have been up to now social outcasts. *L'Armée du salut* considers that the most destitute, including, or *especially*, criminals, have something positive to offer society<sup>30</sup>. They therefore in effect, advocated and even practiced, what Nietzsche called, societal « ennoblement through degeneration»<sup>31</sup>.



Image 5. Those who were invited to the Christmas meal (*En avant* 7/01/1928).

## 2. *En avant!* : « *L'armée du salut* », more than evangelicising tambourine-bashing.

« The Salvation Army », these three words used to unleash gibes. A red jersey or a Miss Heylett hat with Salutiste coloured ribbon sufficed for laughter to explode and cooked apples to fly. The times have changed. The Salvation Army now acts as a password and introduction into the most diverse milieu, ranging from the narrow attic room to the sumptuous hotel of rich bankers, of powerful industrialists or of the old families of the wealthy *faubourgs*.

<sup>29</sup> Foucault's later, version of the « heterotopia » piece (i.e. « Des espaces autres» 1967/1984 ; 1986) scales down the potential of utopian thinking and practice for bringing about radical societal change. The implications of, and maybe reasons for, this shift will be revisited in my conclusion.

<sup>30</sup> See the discussion of the penal colonies (*les bagnes*) below.

<sup>31</sup> See Nietzsche 1993 §224 : « Every progress of the whole has to be preceded by a partial weakening. The strongest nature *preserve* the type, the weaker help it to *evolve*.- Something similar occurs in the case of the individual human being ; rarely is a degeneration, a mutilation, even a vice and physical or moral damage in general without an advantage in some other direction». Nietzsche might have found it « challenging » to be thus used in favour of the Salvation Army given his numerous criticisms of them (e.g. Nietzsche 1990 §252, 184 ; 1988 26 [380] ; 251. *My thanks to Duncan Large for these references*). However Nietzsche is discussing the English Salvation Army and reacting strongly to the claim to « heal » or « cure » the « sick » suggested by the German term « Heilsarmee ». My understanding of the French Armée du Salut, at least during Peyron's period, is radically different, especially when it comes to identifying « sickness » and its implications for society.



*En avant* 2/08/1930.

The Salvation army revives the propaganda of early Christianity, appeals to the poor as the elect, fights capitalism in a religious way, and thus fosters an element of early Christian class antagonism, which one day may become troublesome to the well-to-do people who now find the ready money for it.

Friedrich Engels « Socialism : Utopian and Scientific ».

The Salvation Army is a hierarchically ordered organisation, with its General based at the London H.Q., its officers and soldiers in the field equipped with their missions, guided by traditional doctrines and rules<sup>32</sup>. Often such charitable organisations are criticised as in effect serving, even being complicit with, the very system whose victims they draw attention to and try to help as their stop-gap measures assuage a situation that might otherwise lead to social revolt<sup>33</sup>. Additionally their moralising is seen as placing the onus on the individuals concerned, instead of firmly on the capitalist system itself. However, a focus on the « heterotopian » aspects of this most unfashionable movement, at least on the form it took in France during its years under Albin Peyron's command (1917-35) can yield a different reading<sup>34</sup>. The movement could be regarded, not only as less traditional than one might have supposed<sup>35</sup>, not only as reacting to the negative social conditions brought about by urbanisation, but also as militating for controversial causes and embracing the potentially utopian aspects of modernity and modernism. Indeed, as the very title of « *En avant !* » suggests, the organisation aimed to lead the way for social change in several ways<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> It is also an organisation that believes that homosexuality is a transgression of divine law, insamuch as damages the family, considered to be the basis of society. However, apparently homosexuals who do not practice their sexuality are not to be blamed and social and medical help can be offered for «their psychological sexual deviation» (Delcourt 1989, 105). Given this reactionary stance as regards homosexuality, it is quite ironic that our intriguing story of the barge starts with Zillhardt, the mourning lesbian lover.

<sup>33</sup> See below for a discussion of the Salvation Army's own critique of such stop-gap measures.

<sup>34</sup> I have concentrated on the period 1928-31. The first mention of *l'asile flottant* in *En avant* was on 1/06/1929. The boat was inaugurated on 1/01/1930. *En avant* reports on this event that : « Long before the official opening of the floating asylum on the 1st January, a large number of those seeking shelter were stationed at the entry to the Louise-Catherine». A couple of weeks after opened its doors, the Salutistes wrote : « It is already too small ! We had to turn 40 or 50 away. Lieutenant Berruex is overwhelmed. They receive bread for the body. Bread for the soul is also put at their disposal » (*En avant* 18/01/1930).

<sup>35</sup> For example, the Salvation Army criticises sacramental rituals that are just carried out « sterilely », hence their refusal of baptism and communion, see Delcourt (1989, 39-40).

<sup>36</sup> The «utopian socialist» Saint-Simon appropriated and converted the military term « avant-garde » in the name of the radical societal transformation and eventual universal peace. The Salvation Army presents itself as operating in a similar demilitarising way. For example, the « floating asylum » is described as a boat «built during the war to take supplies to Paris [that will] soon serve the cause for peace» (*En avant* (1/06/29). Also, their quasi-military uniform is intended make them clearly visible and identifiable as believers in Jesus, thus sparing them the need to preach lessons and proselytise, and thereby permitting them to devote themselves

Paris was the first port of call on continental Europe for the three young English female missionaries dispatched from the Head Quarters in London in February 1881 to set up a sister organisation<sup>37</sup>. However, by 1917 Albin Peyron was the head of the French office and under his- together with Blanche, his wife's- leadership, it developed its own distinctive style and specific social missions<sup>38</sup>.

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fully, in a « disinterested » way, to socially positive action (*En avant* 2/08/1930). Implicit in this conspicuous activity was a critique of the Church as a established institution; it was considered by the Salvation Army to indulge in too much ritualistic evangelising from high pulpits, thereby reneging on its originary Christian mission (Delcourt 1989, 45). See *En avant* (2/04/1927) for a comparison between the Salvation army's attire and that of Francis of Assisi and his disciples (who wore the same tunics as street-sweepers). Like the latter, the Salvation Army consider that their uniform is the best sermon possible, a portable testimony to a life of dedicated to serving those in need.

<sup>37</sup> The Salvation Army was founded by William Booth in the East End of London in 1878, in Scotland in 1879, in the USA and in Australia in 1880. Preparations were begun for setting up an organisation in Argentina and Uruguay in 1890 ; the Salvation Army arrived in Antigua and St. Vincent in 1903. The three women sent to Paris in 1881 were: Catherine, the eldest daughter of Booth, Florence Soper and Adelaïde Cox. Allegedly they were heckled and mocked by the ungrateful locals of l'impasse d'Angoulême, rue Pierre Timbaud Paris 11<sup>e</sup> as they held forth in broken French about the attendant dangers of poverty (Delcourt PUF 1988, 21). Undaunted the women soldiered on, not only giving speeches in the poor areas of Paris but also addressing «high society » apparently at 22 boulevard des capucines, which earlier, 1848-51 had been part of the H.Q of Victor Hugo's newspaper, « L'événement », until its closure by the authorities. After the transplantation in France, the Salvation Army's next European outlet was, maybe rather surprisingly, Latvia, in 1923. By 1927 the salvation Army was active in 82 countries, having set up 13 ,747 organisations or centres of activity.

<sup>38</sup> However, it should be pointed out that, in spite of being the highly successful Head of the French wing of the Salvation Army from 1917-35, Peyron was ultimately obliged to retire from this post and become a simple soldier (not even a ranked officer) by General Higgins, who was in overall command at the London-based H.Q. at the time The reason was Peyron's liaison, following Blanche's death in 1933, with a woman more than 15 years younger than him. His request to remarry, for he apparently had to ask, was disapprovingly turned down by Higgins! (see Aubin 2000, 45).



Image 6. *En avant* 16/11/1929 : Title of article is : « A city where the poor will find his way».<sup>39</sup>  
Caption reads « God has prepared a City for them ».

One of the earliest projects of the *Armée du salut* was the People's Palace (*Palais du peuple*), for young men opened in 1912, and extended with an annexe, (plans drawn by Le Corbusier), in 1926. Together with Women's Palace (*Palais de la Femme*) opened in 1926, this foyer was incorporated into the larger City of Refuge project. The larger complex was conceived of as a dynamic and efficient «sorting station or to be more precise, a turntable» ( a «*gare de triage, ou mieux une plaque tournante* ») of the socially disadvantaged and excluded. This very modern «organ of distribution» was to be continuously communicating with the various social services of the *Armée du salut* and public services, aided by the use of the telephone (*En avant* 1/06/1929 and 20/07/1929)<sup>40</sup>. These concerted and coordinated forces are what produce effective action<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Labarthe's work neatly capture the complexity and sophistication of the French movement under Peyron: whilst finding its place within the great nineteenth century tradition of drawing embodied by Daumier and Doré, it also incorporates conspicuously modernistic imagery, in this case the tower blocks of the City of Refuge. Peyron's *L'Armée du salut* also stems from the Victorian era whilst embracing the promising aspects of the new twentieth century. In the case of image 6, their modernist credentials include an art deco heading.

<sup>40</sup> Compared to Germany and Great Britain, France was slow to adopt the telephone as a modern means of communication, which is maybe why Peyron mentions it specifically in this weekly chronicle for *En avant*.

<sup>41</sup> See *En avant* 16/11/1929 : « This gigantic City will prolong its action and no « hospitalisé » will stay for long. He has to climb back up the slope and if he needs long term help, he will go to other operations, official and private, which will be in liaison with the City. This social centre will be the only one working in this way in France and this particularity will increase its effectiveness tenfold». « Hospitalisé » poses me with a translation problem. The city of Refuge was no hospital, although –another instance of l'*Armée du salut* explicitly reinflecting military terminology (see footnote 36 above)- the expression «an evacuation hospital» is

The City of Refuge presents itself as the multi-sited place where «the wheels of the human machine» that have been «worn out by life » will be serviced (*En avant* 16/11/ 1929).

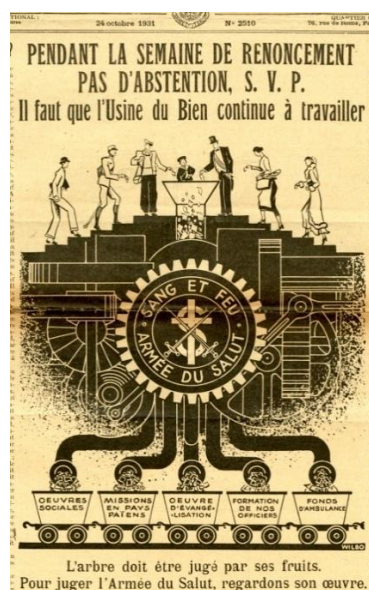


Image 7. *En avant* 24/10/1931 « During the week of renunciation, please no abstention. The Factory of Good must continue its work».

However, the *L'Armée du salut's* operations were not just about fixing the human spare parts of the societal machine with the result that those « saved » were fed back as fodder fit for consumption by labour market<sup>42</sup>. Indeed this type of «charitable» injection, that can not swing society into a different transformative mode of operation, was precisely the approach that they criticised<sup>43</sup>:

This is no generous and utopian dream to be realised any old how [*au petit bonheur*], in little doses, following the charitable fancies of a few devoted hearts. The precise duty of town councils and the State is to do exactly what the Salvation army does, but more extensively and on a bigger scale [*plus vaste encore et plus grand*].<sup>44</sup>

employed in *En avant* (8/03,1930 ; 12/07/1930). Given their playful prose, I imagine that « hospitalisé » is also meant to evoke those to whom « hospitality» has been offered.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Monier cited in footnote 5.

<sup>43</sup> The *Armée du salut* identify the very « multiplicity » of good works available at large in society as *the* problem inasmuch as these various initiatives do not amount to a coordinated effort and therefore lack the momentum needed to bring about large scale, long-term change (see *En avant* 20/07/1929). Given that lack of communication between various social services is often given today as the reason why action was not taken to prevent tragic cases of abuse, there appears to be a lot that can still be learnt from the City of Refuge's vision.

<sup>44</sup> The denigration of utopianism is typical of many utopians, see e.g. Fourier : « What is utopia ? It is the dream of goodness without the means of execution, without an effective method... » (Fourier 1967, 356). However, despite often being disparaged as ineffectual dreaming, utopianism can produce powerful visions (see Morris 2004, 228). It can stem from principles, not just from well-meaningness; the peace it strives for is polyphonic, even

The *Armée du Salut* aimed much higher than solving a social problem. Its grander vision could strike those fatalistically resigned to a supposedly « natural » state of affairs as ‘mad’. However, despite his apparent dismissal of « utopian dream[s] » (expressed above), Peyron fully recognised the powerful potential of utopian « craziness ». He proclaimed that:

the nomad, the vagabond, he who is tired, he who is desperate, he who is dying of hunger, he who is without a slum, he who is without a faith, he who is place-less... all of them will be able to come at any hour with the certitude of being welcomed, fed, given a bed, clothed, comforted, advised, cared for. This *mad dream* will cost 10 million francs and it begins to be translated into reality» (*En avant* 2/08/1930 *my italics*).<sup>45</sup>

Once realised the City of Refuge was in turn to become a model for society as a whole to emulate with a view to changing its internal composition and organisation. Using language worthy of Charles Fourier, they describe how:

[this] city will get built, the movement imposes itself as it offers a final synthesis of all the tendencies of goodness, of all the good works, that were to this day not concentrated and that will now find in this liberating formulation their rallying point [*qui trouveront dans cette formule libératrice, leur point de ralliement*] (*En avant* 16/11/1929).<sup>46</sup>

*En avant* does employ the language of recuperation and recycling to depict how the Salutistes convert individuals into valuable substances (e.g. 29/03/1930). However, just as much onus is placed on social critique and societal transformation. The concentrated energy and « irresistibl[y] » dynamic « movement » of the evolving multi-sited project takes society with it, radiantly inspiring « ever growing interest » in its projection of a better future (*En avant* 15/02/1930<sup>47</sup>). The public’s enthusiasm for the project is augmented by the force of the Salutistes’ own example of « disinterested » commitment to a good cause (*En avant*

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discordant; it does not hark back to a lost golden age, but rather struggles to realise a project for a future society.

<sup>45</sup> Once again the original text is poetically written : « le nomade, le chemineau, le fatigué, le désespéré, le meurt-de-faim, le sans-taudis, le sans-foi, le sans-lieu, pourront y venir à toute heure avec la certitude d’être accueillis, nourris, couchés, vêtus, consolés, conseillés et soignés. Ce rêve fou qui coûtera 10 millions de francs commence à se traduire dans la réalité ».

<sup>46</sup> This vocabulary is evocative of the work of Charles Fourier, for whom hospitality was of prime importance.

<sup>47</sup> See *En avant* 15/02/1930 : «The City of Refuge seems to be creating a growing interest in administrative circles and in the press». This public attraction can be compared to that expected by Fourier for his phalanstery. See Benjamin (1982, 770 W3a,4) on Fourier and the « explosive » propagation of the utopian project as well as Schérer (1993 118-120).

2/8/1930)<sup>48</sup>. This exemplary behaviour is then emulated by the public, who in turn are increasingly enthused by their own generous mobilisation.<sup>49</sup>



Image 8. *En avant* 6/07/1929. The radiating City of Refuge complex.

The project becomes more and more realisable as people, each according to his or her means, send in contributions:

Everyday numerous letters arrive containing donations. These contributions are frequently accompanied by a few touching words. Vast waves spend themselves against dykes made up of grains of sand; similarly, the numerous donations, whether they be small or big, will permit the construction of the City, a dyke which will cause the waves of misery to be transformed into elements of life (*En avant* 3/05/1930).

Drawing its metaphorical energy from the hostile side of water's nature evoked earlier, *En avant* describes the cumulative resistance, akin to a dyke, to the current state of affairs, whereby the destitute are just abandoned to their misery. However, the public is not just expected to delve into their pockets to alleviate social ills. Venturing beyond a reactive stance, they are also expected to open their minds to a conception of a future society that hospitably includes the social marginalised as different types of people whose condition is to be improved, most certainly, but who will be also allowed to be as different as they want to be. *En avant* gives the public a foretaste of this community to come, a society whose spaces will henceforth include this eclectic multitude, that will incorporate those who were previously

<sup>48</sup> Despite Engels' identification of the Salvation Army's almost subversive potential, akin to « early Christianity » cited at the beginning of this section, here their model of societal transformation by example is what he expressly criticised in « Socialism : Utopian and Scientific when discussing the theory and practice of Robert Owen (1880).

<sup>49</sup> Henri Dartigue considers that the initiatives of the *Armée du Salut* work well as people see that the Salutistes are « unegotistical, dedicated to their social vision and not intent on religious conversion » (cited in *En avant* 26/07/1930).



conceived of as being just one (undesirable) homogenous mass. Describing the clientèle who frequent the People's Palace, they write:

[There are firstly] the workers, a fair number foreigners, on casual contracts, or paid parmoniously by some thrifty business. These come back home, harrassed, beaten down. They eat a bowl of soup and vegetables and then go to sleep. All for 5fr 25. They pay from one day to the next, or for the week ; they are regular customers but as soon as their situation improves, they go a hotel closer to their workplace.

The second category consists of employees, representatives, professors and *déclassés*. There are some who stay for a night and then disappear, and those who have been here [rue des Cordeliers] for some time and consider themselves to be part of the fabric of the place.

Those who were once rich, now poor ; ruined gamblers ; the unhealthy ; the sickly ; retired people on small pensions ; inconsolable widowers ; serfs; eccentrics ; misers ; as well as prodigies who stay a week or two as they cannot maintain their lifestyle until the end of the month. Foreignors, well, foreignors without papers ; professors in their language; globe-trotters on foot, on bicycles, on scooters, on their hands, or going backwards; fakirs; students ; clergyman ; slavic popes ; journalists from all the Near Easts and engineers from all the centres of Europe ; sons of families and those without families ; communists ; fascists ; anarchists etc. but all with papers, felt hats, beautiful conversation, polished manners and a genuine smile.

And in the evening gathering in the large reading room, all these people talk, smoke, read, dream or doze in the heavy atmosphere created by two hundred breaths infused with the incense of tobacco, without angry outbursts, without a discussion or a argument that transgressses the limits of puerile and honest civility (*En avant* 16/02/1929)<sup>50</sup>.

These passages gives us a description of the heterotopian community that existed at the People's Palace and indeed probably still exists there and in other refuges today. They also give us a vision, one we could call « utopian », of what society as a whole might become. The community is characterised by a manifold of personalities, as such it is far from grounded in any homogenisingly identitarian doctrine. It is also at least partially modelled on self-government as we are told that in this hospitable house «a sort of democracy» is at play : «those who arrive wretched [*misérables*] come under the influence of those who have picked

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<sup>50</sup> Again the French original displays a delightful enjoyment of its own poetics of which here is only a mere taster : «Anciens riches, nouveaux pauvres, joueurs décavés, maladifs, souffreteux, petits retraités, veufs inconsolables, ilotes, originaux, avarés, prodigues aussi, qui séjournent une semaine ou deux, faute de pouvoir continuer la grande vie jusqu'à la fin du mois. Etrangers, enfin, mais étrangers sans papiers; professeurs de leur langue, globe-trotters à pied, à bicyclette, en patinette, sur les mains ou à reculons, fakirs, étudiants, clergymans, popes slaves, journalistes de tous les Proche-Orients et ingénieurs de tous les centre-Europe, fils de famille et sans famille, communistes, fascistes, anarchistes etc..., mais tous avec des papiers, un chapeau de feutre, une belle conversation, des manières polies et un sourire de bon aloi ».

themselves up [*qui se sont relevés*] » (*En avant* 16/02/1929). Also to be noted is that the very language of this colourful taxonomy of the community's components is «heterotopian» inasmuch as it : [breaks up] all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things and threaten[s] with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and other» (Foucault 1970 xv). The categorisation between the groups consists of shaded differentiation (e.g. « globe-trotters on foot, on bicycles, on scooters, on their hands, or going backwards », «the unhealthy, the sickly » ) and juxtaposed extremes (« communists, fascists, anarchists »); the overall picture is a medley of different, yet associated, personalities and groupings<sup>51</sup>. This community poses us a challenge : it is a heterotopian community that we are being asked to accommodate in the future «order of things » (Foucault *ibid*).

The ongoing march towards the realisation of more of the City of Refuge project will take the Salutistes not only higher and higher towards their goal, but also further afield, taking the



Image 10. *En avant* 11/04/1931 : « Our pupil officers contribute to the victory. Step after step the troops attack the mountain peak»<sup>52</sup>.

public with them. Soon the force of its example will propagate itself beyond the capital outwards across the whole nation : « the whole country will be renewed, renovated, put into action... » (*En avant* 28/01/1929)<sup>53</sup>. Ever true to the nature of the water that irresistibly draws us outwards, towards the wide oceans, the *Armée du salut* then push the boat out yet further, beyond the French mainland :

<sup>51</sup> The proliferation of differences is a key feature of Fourier's phalanstery (see e.g. Fourier 2001, 111)

<sup>52</sup> We note the strange surreality of this 1931 image. The number at the top of the mountain is the amount of money still required to attain the sum needed for the City of Refuge.

<sup>53</sup> Le Corbusier uses exactly the same words in *Sur les quatre routes* (1941), see below.

The City will radiate in the provinces and even further, across the ocean, towards those far shores where the wretched [*les malheureux*] wait for a little pity, a little justice, a little love (*En avant* 3/08/1929).

The City of Refuge, that was initiated with the « floating asylum », stretched right out to the penal colonies [*les bagnes*] of French Guyana.<sup>54</sup> This outreach project was a distinctive sign of the *Armée du salut*'s commitment to a controversial, or at least not evidently populist cause. In one of his weekly « Chronicles » entitled « They are waiting for a homeland [*une patrie*] », Peyron himself stated : « The City of Refuge and the penal colonies will never leave my thoughts » (*En avant* 20/07/1929).

The French Guyanan penal colonies [*les bagnes*] were originally invented in 1795 as a dumping-ground for political prisoners during the French revolution. Thereafter, as from 1854, they were used for criminals. Charles Péan undertook a mission for the *L'armée du salut* to investigate these hellish places in 1928<sup>55</sup>. He published his findings in *Terre de bagne* (1933) and the *Armée du salut* used the book to bolster its already intensive campaign wherein the fate of such prisoners was accorded the same importance within the City of Refuge project as the plight of the destitute in France itself<sup>56</sup>. Legally the transportation of deportees to penal colonies was ended on 17th June, 1938<sup>57</sup>; nevertheless, a final convoy of prisoners left France for Guyana on 22nd November 1938. Whilst these last batches of unfortunates were still arriving on the Guyanan shores, the *Armée du Salut* had already taken the initiative of helping, both logistically and financially, 800 ex-prisoners return home to France and North Africa, as no-one other operation was in place.<sup>58</sup> After the Second World War, the *Armée du salut* was officially requested by the French government to assist the remaining 3,000 ex-prisoners and detainees return « home ». This mission they carried out,

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<sup>54</sup> See image 2, illustration 6 and footnote 5 above.

<sup>55</sup> In 1923 Albert Londres (1884-1932) had already visited these penal colonies and published damning reports about what went on there. See also Henri Charrière's novel *Papillon* (1969) and the Shaffner film with Steve Mc Queen (1973). Charrière responded to detractors in his sequel *Banco* (1976). See *En avant* (17/09/1929) for an image of a former convict turned butterfly-hunter.

<sup>56</sup> *Terre de bagne* has a preface by Pierre Hamp, an introduction by Albin Peyron and illustrations by Labarthe. Pierre Hamp (1876-1962), who wrote several wonderful articles in *En avant* (cited in this chapter), sounds like a fascinating character : his real name was Henri Bourillon and he was a trilingual autodidate. He started work as an apprentice cake-maker in Paris, was then a cook in England and in Spain. He was employed on the railways in the north of France, as well as being a journalist. He studied at the Popular (People's) University of Belleville and wrote around forty works on the plight of the working class. Péan (1901-1991) was leader of the *L'armée du salut* from 1957-66 ; he started working for the organisation at the age of eighteen as a driver in the Franche-Comté and, as is already apparent, committed himself to the plight of the *bagnards*.

<sup>57</sup> Guantanamo Bay bears comparison to such places as French Guyana, except that there one does not even have a fictional « liberation » and the place itself is a (dystopian) non-place, not even officially an extension of national territory, unlike French Guyana which was under French jurisdiction even if there too its existence violated the very idea of Justice.

<sup>58</sup> In an interview, Péan points out that this repatriation was a success with only 37 ex-prisoners recommitting criminal offenses (see Radio interview with Dominique Fabre 23/11/1953 Archives de la radio suisse).

accompanying the former criminals all the way from Guyana to their final destination and yet further, into the social fabric itself (Péan 23/11/1953).

What was especially shocking about these penal colonies was that « liberation » turned out to be even worse than imprisonment (see e.g. Hamp in Péan 1933, 11)<sup>59</sup>. When incarcerated and subjected to forced (and ‘Sisyphean’) labour, one at least was given some degree of food and lodging (ibid 8-9). Once the prison sentence had been served, prisoners were just turfed out, with no means of survival at all. In effect they had been condemned to a slow death. By not protesting against this practice, the public was in effect committing a « social crime ». Hamp bluntly makes his point: « When it comes to an individual crime there is a guilty person. When it is a question of a social crime no-one is innocent » (ibid 7). Not only that, Hamp accuses the public of actively parasiting and profiting from this criminality. True to their practice of rewriting the spaces « we » often take for granted (as discussed earlier), the *Armée du Salut* again « injure the eyes of the French people » by forcing them to see just how their beautiful sites of « culture » are constructed on the back of the « barbarism » that is the penal colonies (*En avant* 30/11/1929)<sup>60</sup> : « Nice would never have become such a popular city of pleasure [*plaisance*] had the penal colony had not been transported to Guyana... » (ibid 13).

The *Armée du salut* unequivocally condemned the fully legalised practice of the penal colonies, as well as challenging the very idea of The Criminal. They pointedly interrogated their readers’ assumptions about this « type » of person: « What is a criminal ? Is it a man within whom everything is criminal? Or is it a man who at one moment or another committed crimes? » (ibid 16). The message is clear: it is society’s duty to save what remains of the human in these (often dangerous) people, despite- or rather *precisely because*- they are « those who have fallen lowest », because their « faces have been eaten away by the cankers of their hearts », because they are « disgusting » like « purulent sores » (Peyron citing Péan ibid 28, & 30)<sup>61</sup>. Acts of charity are to be carried out in the face of such ugliness and of such wickedness, without the expectation of recognition and gratitude<sup>62</sup>. It is precisely the exposing of oneself selflessly (« disinterestedly ») to such a « heterotopian » situation, by embracing the rubbish (*déchets*) of society, that society can be radically transformed (Peyron in Péan 1933, 31). Instead of entrenching those who had themselves violated the law further into their asociality by in turn committing an injustice against them, the *Armée du Salut* advocated that society should reconceive itself as an « ally » of such miscreants, just as it had, closer to home, espoused the cause of those who are « a bit frightened, dirty, sometimes pitiful [*lamentables*], others [who are] magnificent in their beggarliness [*magnifiques dans leur gueuserie*] » (*En avant* 11/01/1930 ; Hamp in Péan ibid 15)<sup>63</sup>. By so doing, society could find itself capable of performing « miracles » ; it could find itself facilitating that which it

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<sup>59</sup> This sort of « liberation » puts me again in mind of *Heart of Darkness*, where Marlow describes “emancipated” slaves left to die by the roadside “whose moribund shapes were as free as air- and nearly as thin” (Conrad 2006 17).

<sup>60</sup> « There is no document of culture which is not at the same a document of barbarism » (Benjamin 2003, 392).

<sup>61</sup> See Derrida (1997) on how unconditional (« disinterested ») hospitality involves exposure and risk.

<sup>62</sup> See also *En avant* 26/07/1930 for an vivid image of a wicked person tormented by nocturnal demons.

<sup>63</sup> « Gueuserie » is another *Armée du salut* neologism.

previously would have dismissed as « utopian »<sup>64</sup>. Indeed, « great transformations» can take place in these people if they are given refuge (Hamp & Peyron in Péan ibid 15, 32)<sup>65</sup>. These criminals, some of them murderers, can in turn become life-savers, « snatching back from the abyss and from death, other shipwrecked persons who were about to be swallowed up by the storms of life » (Peyron in Péan ibid, 31).<sup>66</sup> Cities of refuges, as described in the Bible, protect murderers against revengers, providing them with spaces for atonement. (*En avant* 29/3/1930 ; 12/7/1930 ; Joshua xx, 1-9 ; Revelations xxi, 10- 27 As part of a project for society as a whole, they are seen as working towards the materialisation here on earth of the future City of God.<sup>67</sup>

### 3. *Le Corbusier and the Radiant Future.*

« ...the earth is not a prize to be won in a race... there is a place for everyone under the sun » .

« The end of the old civilisation has come ; the face of the earth will be renewed under a new sun ».

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon *What is Property? 1840* (2007, 69, 216)<sup>68</sup>.

« The whole country will be renewed, renovated, put into action : a place not only decent but radiant for everyone under the sun ».

*En avant* 28/12/1929.

« The whole country will be renewed, renovated, put into action. It will reach that « why » for which one makes revolutions. A place that is not just decent but radiant for everyone under the sun ».

Le Corbusier *Sur les quatre routes* (1941/1971, 15).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> The example is given of ex-convicts in Australia whose descendants have become sources of inspiration for legislators (Peyron in Péan 1933, 31-32).

<sup>65</sup> See the images of the mother and child transformed from wretchedness into joyfulness by the City of Refuge in *En avant* 29/03/1930.

<sup>66</sup> As it is by now to be expected, the metaphor of the sea is again used in this passage.

<sup>67</sup> As described in the book of Revelation (21, 10-27), the City of God evokes Expressionist and Modernist architecture with its precious stones and clear glass. The city has no need of exterior illuminations as light emanates from it. Its gates are always open, and those who arrive are all pure of heart and mind. See also Psalms 46,4: « *There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High* ».

<sup>68</sup> Proudhon features in Le Corbusier's *Trois établissements humains* (first published 1945). In the interesting section « Conditions morales » written by Hyacinthe Dubreuil, a former worker and foreman in the car industry, there is an allusion to « proudhonian philosophy » in relation to useful work and the joy of living (Le Corbusier 1997, 59-61). For a more sinister « proudhonian » association, see below for references to Georges Valois, member of the extreme right-wing *Action Française* and the *Cercle Proudhon*. My thanks go to Tim Benton for a discussion about the ambiguity of Le Corbusier's personality.

<sup>69</sup> «Le pays entier sera reconduit, rénové, mis dans l'action. Il obtiendra ce pourquoi on fait des révolutions: une place, non seulement décente mais radieuse, pour chacun, au soleil » (Le Corbusier 1970, 15).

As has been already stated, Le Corbusier's « floating asylum » is rarely discussed even if boats generally feature explicitly not only in his architectural projects, but also in his writings<sup>70</sup>. Indeed, he esteemed that landlubbers [« *les terriens* »], who are far too set in their traditional ways of living, had a lot to learn from the « pure, precise, clear, clean, healthy » architecture of ocean liners (Le Corbusier 1977, 70, 78)<sup>71</sup>. The neglect of his connection with *l'Armée du Salut* is even more remarkable given his continued collaboration with them, after the Louise-Catherine barge conversion, on the bigger *Cité du refuge* project. He also makes explicit, positive references to them. For example, in *Sur les quatre routes* (cited earlier) Le Corbusier goes so far as to present *L'armée du salut* as the organisation that can teach the public how to live in the future. Such a recommendation is negligible affair coming from someone who so often presented himself as representing the future. According to Le Corbusier:

Loucheur's law will only work if it asks for help from the Salvation Army. The Salvation Army knows how to detect the poverty-stricken (*les misères*) and identify decent people (*les braves gens*). It will deal with these cases. Then, being an attentive sister, it will teach them how to live in their houses, as *knowing how to live* is a technique, and how to live in the lodgings of the new spirit- *that can only be industrially reproduced as a series*- requires education (Le Corbusier 1970, 256)<sup>72</sup>.

The *Armée du Salut* is here presented as an organisation that can keep pace with the spirit of modernism, ensuring that it settles down into the very fabric of everyday life. This charitable organisation can carry out their mediating work effectively as it is in close contact with, and has the confidence of, ordinary people. In the earlier book, *The Radiant City* (1933), Le Corbusier also refers to the *Armée du Salut*'s community work, praising its ability to make a «direct public appeal» in contrast to other, more official and therefore ostensibly more powerful, institutions :

While diplomats and international experts are grinding to a halt in conferences that fail (the London Economic Conference), the rest of the world, ready to try something new, is reaching out for basic pleasures. These should be defined. The civilisation of money is dying. An appeal to the conscience of humanity. We are close to a simple word that could give us a line of conduct which would be like a trajectory through, above, every obstacle. Ignoring the ruins of our decaying world, it point up the solution with simplicity, sureness and clarity. Instead of cling desperately and fearfully to a drifting bark, the world will move into action, cooperating, taking initiatives, building, knowing the joys of creativity.

We need builders and we need a strong and simple doctrine.

And we must make up our minds to get rid of the rubbish.

The Salvation Army, having used money for necessities and not for appearances, found in the country a belief in simple happiness. These people who act in order to be part of a generous cause- and thereby discover one of the most precious values of the soul- succeeded in the end in touching people's hearts.... They were respected even loved. They opened the door to personal action, personal intervention and participation. They don't watch life go by ; they're out seeking their true fortune; the

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<sup>70</sup> Evidently the City of Refuge and the *Unités d'habitation* resemble ocean liners.

<sup>71</sup> See my reference above to Buckminster Fuller on seamen as « fluid geographers » compared to « landlubbers ». See also *L'esprit nouveau* no. 8 « Des yeux qui ne voient pas... Les paquebots ». Also Serenyi (1967, 284).

<sup>72</sup> The law Loucheur (13/07/1928) involved the state bank for the first time in loans at low interest rates for individuals to purchase plots of land for building their own home on.



power of understanding. Pushing aside the display of riches which is measured by the disgusting piling of one franc on top of another, they take their chances on finding a varied and sometimes vast fortune: potentials of kindness, action or loyalty. That is the explanation, the Salvation Army has rediscovered an old currency that still works: spiritual values. And people thrive on it: the market has no power over it (Le Corbusier 1967, 14).

Here Le Corbusier presents himself as someone who is keenly aware of society's injustices. Highly critical of those in power, he explicitly takes the side of the *Armée du Salut* as the effective representative of ordinary people against the dominant order. However, it is not only sympathy for the plight of those less fortunate that motivates his analysis; the combined forces of the *Armée du Salut* and ordinary people, including the destitute, are also presented as embodying the vital values of the (utopian) future.

However, elsewhere in *The Radiant City*, we encounter a different side to Le Corbusier, one that can easily strike us as far less « socialist », as far less concerned with the details of ordinary lives, as far less sympathetic, indeed as downright sinister and, one could say, « dystopian »<sup>73</sup>. In the above quotation, his analysis of the disease afflicting contemporary society of « moral corruption, embezzlement, betrayal of trust » complemented well the *Armée du Salut*'s active investment in heterotopian spaces for the poor in the name of a utopian future for all. However, Le Corbusier's critique of materialist society then associates itself with anti-Semitism, the extreme right and Pétainism<sup>74</sup>. His declaration that « we must pull things down... And throw the corpses onto the garbage heap » strikes a dissonant chord with the *Armée du Salut*'s investment in « refuse » (Le Corbusier 1967, 96). He appears out of tune

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<sup>73</sup> More dystopian effects permeate the City of Refuge project when one delves into some of the detail of the construction sites themselves. The « floating asylum » had serious problems with the toilets, which resulted in the barge being flooded several times with faeces. There are several distressed letters from the Salvation Army to the architects begging for the sewerage system to be adapted to something « more suitable » to the residents of the barge (see the letter from Major Vanderkam 2/06/1930, and 27/07/1930 to Peyron about the septic tanks of the Maison Stupffel in FLC). This presumably means that the homeless, not usually able to relieve their bowels easily, did so to a greater extent than is usual once safely and comfortably accommodated on the barge. As for the City of Refuge building itself, the exchanges about the supposedly « exact ventilation » (« respiration exacte ») of the modernist building and its incompatibility with in particular infantile life, are shocking : Le Corbusier reveals himself to be not only intransigent but complete disdainful of the Salvation Army, (including its doctors) who are seriously concerned for well-being of the babies and the other refugees. They apparently could not breathe sufficiently well in such a hermetically sealed and hence overheated and underventilated environment (e.g letter to to Gustave Lyon 20/09/1934 ; Dr Renaud 15/10/1934 spelt Renault 22/10/1934) ; to M. Isely 23/10/1934 & 9/11/1934 ; to Peyron 13/11/1934 ; see also Isely to Le Corbusier 9/11/1934 ; Isely to Le Corbusier 12/01/1935 in FLC); Le Corbusier writes to the Princess of Polignac deploring such responses as being those of reactionary traditionalists, who are incapable of understanding that modernism is the future (Letter dated 4/12/1934).

<sup>74</sup> See the image- with its caption « awakening of cleanliness »- of the riots on 6th February 1934 in Paris by the combined forces of the extreme right which resulted in three hundred injured and fifteen deaths (Le Corbusier 1967, 23). See Richards (2003, 41-45), for an explanation of its anti-semitic motivation and of l'Action Française. For the complimentary reference to Pétain see Le Corbusier (op cit 154).

with the social commitment to, and creative revalorisation of « beggarliness » (« *gueuserie* ») as documented in *En Avant* (e.g. 11/1/1930 *cited above*). However, such discordance should not really be of surprise to us given the speech Le Corbusier gave at a meeting of « Le Faisceau », the first French fascist group, on 20th May 1927 when they were inaugurating their new headquarters in the rue du faubourg poissonnière, Paris 10e<sup>75</sup>. In his article « The new Stage of Fascism. The Way to Success through Poverty : Three Symbolic Days charged with Meaning and Hope » for their newspaper «The New Century », Georges Valois, explains how Le Corbusier's speech about the modern city expressed « the profound thoughts of fascism, of the fascist revolution » (Valois *Le nouveau siècle* 23/05 1927). Just like the « genial » Le Corbusier who paid them a « great honour » by attending their meeting, fascism also values urbanism; it recognises the need to conceive the city as whole and to « coordinate forces » within an overall plan. This urban planning breaks with the haphazard constructions of the past. It is to be carried out in the name of the poor who have for far too long been subjected to the consequences of shoddy housing. Valois instrumentalises the slum-dwellers, using them to support the fascist cause, when he proclaims that:

[w]e can no longer accept that anyone should live in extreme poverty [*la misère*]. This engagement presupposes a new political, economical and social organisation. Such associations rock the boat ; it is as if our floating asylum for the poor is being hijacked by the wrong sort of people...

### *Conclusion : Heterotopia, Utopia and Dystopia.*

In this chapter I have analysed the « asile flottant » not only as a heterotopian space within the city of Paris, but also, as a component of the extensive and dynamic City of Refuge project. This second aspect of the barge's function meant that it was contributing to a wider vision for social transformation, one that could be called global utopianism, intent on changing the shape and quality of all society « under the sun ». However, I also considered how this project was haunted by ugly dystopian features, in the form of the far right.<sup>76</sup> To conclude I wish to consider how Foucault's idea of heterotopia strangely replays many of these issues, albeit in a lighter mode.

Earlier I made the point that, in the « Of Other Spaces » essay, Foucault seems to detach « heterotopia » from utopian thinking, whilst also enigmatically suggesting that, at least in the form of a mirror, they could have a « mixed joint experience » (Foucault 1967/1984, 1575 ; 1986, 24). He limits the role heterotopia play to just «suspending, neutralising and inversing» other actually existing places, instead of having the potential to « efface, neutralise and purify » current societal emplacements (Foucault 1966/2009, 24 ; 1967/1984, 1574 ; 1986, 24). He restricts utopias to « unreal spaces » (ibid). The repercussions for our analysis of the *Armée du Salut*'s social initiatives would be that they are simplistically reduced to mere reactions to the negative living conditions brought about by urbanisation. Their various refuges are no longer appreciated as meaningful attempts to bring about effective change for the future. Indeed, one of the « tribulations » of Foucault's idea of « heterotopia » was its identification with a negation of history and thereby of the very possibility of radical change ever taking place (Defert in Foucault 2009, 45).

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<sup>75</sup> « Le faisceau » can be translated as « The Bundle » or « The Cluster », or even « The Network ».

<sup>76</sup> Of course with utopias one should always ask the question : «whose utopia ? ». Fascists would not consider their worldview to be « dystopian » at all ...

The proposition that the utopian potentiality of « heterotopia » is scaled down by Foucault between the two versions of the text resonates with another shady story : I am referring to the occluded «debate» between Foucault, Marcel Gauchet and Gladys Swain on the subject of madness. Looking back after Swain's death at their research on the history of psychiatry, work that in effect dismissed Foucault's theory of « the great confinement » of the « mad » as a « myth », Gauchet questions why the philosopher never responded to their serious allegations against him of oversimplification and academic lack of rigour. Gauchet and Swain had painstakingly documented how inaccurate it was just to present asylums as repressive heterotopias, even though their dystopian features were undeniable. They insisted on how asylums were also part of a movement that paradoxically could be considered committed to « utopia as praxis». Gauchet explains :

[Asylums] embodied a moment of belief in the possibility of creating *ex nihilo* in a vacant space outside of society, another social microcosm, that is at once wholly specific (i.e. that only responds to its own rules), and yet fully social (Gauchet and Swain 2007, 202).

Gauchet and Swain make it clear that the segregation of the « mad » in asylums went hand in hand with a belief that those who had previously been locked into individual isolation within the «community», were capable of socialisation. Asylums therefore constituted a recognition that these otherwise excluded people could be integrated into a collective body. Foucault's silence on this well-documented issue is taken as a sign of his will to institutional power. His reputation and authority is constructed on the back of the «myth» of the silencing of other voices in those other places (1982, 38).

However, the intrigue surrounding the question of heterotopia and its relation to utopianism continues further. Gauchet has since announced his return to «normal politics» and criticised Miguel Abensour's unrealistic utopianism. Gauchet's dismissive categorisation of Abensour as a left-wing « revoltist » has been taken by the latter as a confirmation of a «veering towards the right ». In his open « Letter of a « revoltist » to Marcel Gauchet, who has converted to « normal politics », Abensour counter-attacked as follows:

«Normal politics» is the other name of the hatred for alterity, of all social others. In a word, it is the contemporary face of the hatred of utopia. Once one is resigned to «normal politics», a world establishes itself where all utopian divergence [*l'écart utopique*] has disappeared forever (Abensour 2008, 18)<sup>77</sup>.

For Abensour, the anti-utopian stance of Gauchet prepares the way for a «dystopian» future :

This closing of society in on itself, this «soft» form of [La Boétie's] voluntary servitude, besides ignoring the persistence of utopia throughout history, condemns human society to the repetition of the same (ibid 19).

Such a closed society, with its assumption of homogeneity, normality and conformity leads directly to totalitarianism (ibid 18). It can therefore be seen that documenting the «persistence of utopia throughout history », for instance in the form of the complex heterotopian space that was the « floating asylum» with its heterogeneous, nonconformist and transient population, can have far-reaching political consequences for the future.

*My warm thanks to Roger Palmer for embarking me on this voyage of discovery with « l'asile flottant ». I am also indebted to the librarians of the Société de 'Histoire du Protestantisme en*

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<sup>77</sup>This expression evokes the utopian thinking of Charles Fourier and his « l'écart absolu ».

*France who even restored issues of « En avant » for me so that I could consult them. The images are reproduced with the kind permission of the SHPF, Paris.*

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