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Mettray revisited in Jean Genet's *Le Langage de la muraille*

Abstract

This article returns to carceral entrepreneur Frédéric-Auguste Demetz's model reformatory at Mettray by rereading its archive and existing historical scholarship in light of a little-known major work by its most famous inmate, gay novelist and playwright, thief and leftist agitator, Jean Genet (1910–86): *Le Langage de la muraille*. Genet was responding, with his own characteristically light-fingered form of autodidactic historical scholarship, to Michel Foucault's appropriation of Mettray in *Surveiller et punir* (1975). In my return to the archives of this model institution, I argue that Mettray was an exemplary exercise in liberal statecraft's mixture of coaxing and coercion; and that Demetz was an unrivalled master of 'the language of the wall'. This was a distinctly modern practice of administrative governance by partitioning, an art of containment continuous with harder forms of policing in tending towards the suppression of democratic politics.

I

The village of Mettray, some ten kilometres north-northwest of Tours, gives its name to the reformatory founded there in 1839 jointly by magistrate Frédéric-Auguste Demetz (1796–1873) and local landowning grandee Hermann Brétignières de Courteilles (1797–1852). Together they co-directed La Colonie Agricole et Pénitentiaire de Mettray on behalf of a profit-making private company set up by Demetz, La Société Paternelle. Mettray was not the

first farm-prison for delinquent boys in France but it was to become the most celebrated, the longest surviving and the most successful in securing funds from the state, thanks to Demetz's unrivalled talents as a carceral entrepreneur. He was a consummate bureaucrat, propagandist and media manager, a politically astute spokesman for the institution and its most talented Directeur, the first without equal of the century's 'techniciens du comportement'.¹ In its heyday under Demetz, Mettray was a 'Mecca' for philanthropists, as one devoted pilgrim, Matthew Davenport Hill, put it.² Long after the reformatory's closure, Michel Foucault – who had foregone a visit to the institution and its archive – would nevertheless reassert its preeminence: 'Dans la normalisation du pouvoir de normalisation, dans l'aménagement d'un pouvoir-savoir sur les individus, Mettray et son école font époque.'³ Over the ninety-eight years of Mettray's existence as a reformatory, the position which Demetz had carefully carved out for it at the heart of the French establishment secured its survival through numerous changes of government and regime. This article revisits Mettray and its archive, following as it does the thread laid in a late and little-known masterpiece by its most notorious inmate, Jean Genet. Demetz's beacon of philanthropy – which compelled its charges to work long days in its fields, quarries and workshops, as well as for local businessmen to whom this forced child labour was sold at a profit – was eventually closed down by the Conseil d'État under the Front Populaire government after a long-running campaign in the left-wing national press against the brutality of its regime. By then some 17,000 boys aged between six and twenty-one had passed through Mettray. Jean Genet (1910–1986) was imprisoned there over two and a half years from the age of sixteen. Arriving on 2 September 1926, Genet made one unsuccessful escape attempt before effecting an early exit in the only way permitted by the institution, by enlisting, in his case in the army, on 1 March 1929.⁴

Over the last two decades there has been a modest resurgence of interest in Mettray among scholars of literature, architectural history and queer theory based in British and American universities, who draw their account of the institution primarily from what Genet reveals of it in his novel from the 1940s, *Miracle de la rose*.⁵ The doctoral theses of French film scholars Mireille Henneton and Marguerite Vappereau have shed new light on Genet's unpublished body of writing for cinema, and especially on this script.⁶ Both are more concerned with Genet's scripts than with Mettray as an institution, but Vappereau's work sheds invaluable new light on the extraordinary story of Genet's researching and writing of the script in a series of interviews with key collaborators, included as appendices. The 2005 publication of *Éduquer et punir* commemorated the transfer of the archives of La Société Paternelle and L'Association Paternelle from an outbuilding at the Mettray site and its incorporation into the regional state archives in Tours, in 2001. Since then, historians have been content to let the dust settle on this impeccably catalogued but underused resource.⁷

Genet wrote about Mettray principally in three works: the semi-autobiographical novel *Miracle de la rose* (1946), the script for a radio programme deemed too controversial to be made, *L'Enfant criminel* (1949), and, some fifty years after he had been a prisoner there, in *Le Langage de la muraille, Cent ans jour après jour*, a typescript of some 450 pages for a historical documentary drama in three hour-long parts commissioned for national television in 1981.⁸ Bertrand Tavernier agreed to direct the film and was actively involved in the writing process.⁹ I believe Genet was still working on the script a year before his death in 1985, although by then his main focus was finishing his account of the time he spent alongside the PLO's *fedayeen*, published posthumously in 1986 as *Un Captif amoureux*.¹⁰ Versions of the script may be consulted by at the Institut mémoires de l'édition contemporaine near Caen and at the Archives départementales d'Indre-et-Loire in Tours.¹¹

Edmund White's generally reliable biography of Genet mentions the script only to dismiss it on grounds of aesthetic incoherence and historical inaccuracy, dismissing it as a repetitive rehearsal of Genet's 'cranky historical opinions' and 'full of hate', while also plundering it for his own account of Genet's time at Mettray.¹² The film's two 'conspiracy theories', according to White, were first that the institution was a lynchpin of the French establishment's colonialist project, training juvenile delinquents to be good colonial settlers by drilling them into military obedience and teaching them farming and other forms of skilled manual labour; second, that the script is obsessed with trying to prove that the institution made clandestine profits, hidden from all but the beneficiaries by way of an ingenious system of double accounting. White insinuates that these 'conspiracy theories' were both a reflection of Genet's longstanding character defects and a product of his state of mind in the 1980s, as he was being treated for throat cancer and taking ever larger quantities of sleeping tablets.¹³ However, historian of colonialism Ann Laura Stoler has argued that Mettray and other reformatories which imitated it across Europe did indeed play a vital role in the European colonialist project as feeder institutions for the armed forces of the colonizing powers: they equipped soldiers with a particular combination of skills, readying them to settle and cultivate the land they conquered.¹⁴ As for the egregious accounting irregularities, far from being the private delusion of an ailing, self-sedated mind, the allegation was commonplace in the critical left-wing press coverage of Mettray in the 1930s, and was already referenced in Genet's novel of the 1940s.¹⁵

Genet wanted to be the kind of proper historian who frequents archives; he wanted to write this script '*having been there* (the train to the distant city, the call number, the bundle opened, the dust...)', redoubling his subjected having-been-there as a prisoner of the reformatory in the 1920s with a historian's having-been-there, in the archive in the early 1980s.¹⁶ Yet Genet's approach to such research was highly unusual: Vappereau's

interviewees, Denis Melca and François About, who worked for Genet as his assistants, claimed that Genet sent Melca to the Mettray site, where the archive was housed in the 1980s, to steal documents from it for his research.¹⁷ The reformatory Genet had known from the inside had quietly transformed itself into an educational institution for disabled and troubled children in the 1950s and continues to operate in this capacity from the very same site today. At the same time, Demetz's Société Paternelle had morphed into L'Association Paternelle. But there was one former prisoner nobody working there wanted to see or hear from again. While filming for a video biopic, in 1981, Genet returned incognito to the site of the reformatory.¹⁸ Genet's team had stolen a sheaf of headed notepaper from the French Culture Ministry on which they composed fake letters of introduction making out that they were researching 'une archéologie de la morale', to be directed by one 'Monsieur Renaud', which Melca claims was his pseudonym for Genet.¹⁹ The extensive historical research conducted by Genet and his helpers suggests a desire to emulate Foucault by doing 'properly' what Foucault had done only gesturally with Mettray. Another of Genet's research assistants, Christine de Jekel, was sent to the Bibliothèque Nationale to make notes on background reading. The fact that the sister of one of the journalists depicted in the script campaigning to close the reformatory – also named Christine – is shown successfully infiltrating Mettray and stealing a key document indicates that Genet wanted it to be known to the institution that emissaries of his had exacted a kind of primitive archival revenge on it. While there is some evidence to suggest that Genet had first considered making a film about Mettray as early as 1947, a year after the first edition of *Miracle*, Vappereau's interviewees suggest very clearly that Genet had been shocked into retelling his story of Mettray by the realisation, on revisiting the site incognito for the biopic in 1981, that its apparent closure in 1937 had not been all that it seemed, that he had been taken in when he wrote, in the 40s, 'Mettray est désert, inoffensif enfin'.²⁰

II

Cent ans jour après jour, the script's subtitle, marks its distance from Foucault's more flamboyant historiography by announcing a more sober chronological narrative mode. Mettray stands at the apex of *Surveiller et punir*, the date of its ceremonial opening on 22 January 1840 proffered by Foucault in an exemplifying final flourish: the reformatory is said to embody the convergence of five formerly distinct forms of 'dressage' in disciplinary power, and the date of its opening would mark the completion of the modern system of imprisonment.²¹ Wrestling Mettray back from Foucault, Genet began his script with the same date and worked his way steadily forward through the next hundred years.²² Throughout, events of national and international historical significance were intertwined with daily life at the reformatory in a concerted effort to show how Mettray was a lynchpin of the French establishment. Genet shows the opening ceremony, attended by Lamartine and celebrated prisons expert Alexis de Tocqueville, both members of the Société Paternelle, as well as ambassadors from Russia, Austria, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Prussia, Britain and The Holy See. Later we see Demetz announcing to the inmates in Chapel on Christmas Day 1847 the final capitulation of Abd El-Kader to the Duc d'Aumale in fighting in which 11 former inmates had died *au champ d'honneur*. We see Napoleon III visiting the prison, and the Emperor Maximilien chasing butterflies in Mexico, his regime defended by soldiers who recognise one another just before their death as former inmates of Mettray by their use of that institution's slang verb, 'bicher', meaning 'to escape'. In 1871 we see a Monsieur Darboy – Georges Darboy, Archbishop of Paris, identified in the script as a member of the Board of the Société Paternelle – executed by Communards in the courtyard of the Petite Roquette prison. Genet shows us the colonial powers discussing the fate of Africa at the Algeiras Conference

and Lyautey in full flow expounding his sexualised vision of colonial conquest. As the script advances the colonized are increasingly shown trying to take back their own, including in a 1936 scene in which five young Senegalese men are depicted at Douaumont exhuming by night their fathers' skulls from among Muslim graves, to return them to their native village. The largely linear chronological approach holds Genet's intertwining of 'notre monde souterrain' with the glittering governing world of kings and battles and suggests an ambition to write history from both above and below.²³ Interwoven with the national- and world-historical events referenced in the script, Genet gives us meetings of the Board of the Société Paternelle, lavish ceremonies from high points in the history of the reformatory and numerous scenes from daily life which, I shall argue, all reflect key elements of his analysis of the institution formed from a blend of his own experience there and his reading of its archive. As I review the most salient of these episodes I will overlay Genet's account with my own reading of the primary sources.

In Genet's script, Demetz (b. 1796) lives to be over 130 years old, ageing but never dying, surveying the ruins of his reformatory after its closure on the eve of the Second World War and still not admitting defeat. At first I assumed the reappearances of Demetz, after his death in 1873, were 'continuity mistakes', symptoms of Genet's own advanced age. Yet it is clear from the archive that Demetz's tutelary spirit was continually evoked in the life of the institution he founded, long after his death. The archive reveals an elaborate choreography of corpses and body-parts: Demetz's body was buried in his family tomb at Dourdan, near Paris, but his heart was removed for burial alongside the body of Courteilles 'dans une même enceinte et sous un monument simple et digne' in the reformatory's own cemetery, Courteilles's own heart having been removed twenty-one years earlier and bricked into a column next to the altar of the nuns' chapel in the infirmary.²⁴ In 1874 the President of the Société Paternelle enjoined the assembled inmates whenever they passed in front of the

monument to repeat to themselves the dying wishes of the two Founders: ‘redites ces admirables paroles: “*Ils ont voulu vivre, mourir et ressusciter avec nous.*” Prenez ici l’engagement solennel de consacrer votre vie à mériter cette gloire et à justifier cette espérance.’²⁵ In an invitation to psychosis, the passing inmate was invited to contemplate and thereby reanimate the marble busts of the two Founders: ‘Dans ces yeux de marbre, votre souvenir rallumera ce regard intelligent et affectueux qui pénétrait jusqu’au fond de vos consciences. De ces lèvres immobiles vous entendrez encore sortir cette voix qui imprimait à ces enseignements une irrésistible autorité et qui parlait une langue si bien approprié à vos esprits et à vos coeurs.’²⁶ The institution did not leave these scattered body-parts alone to rest in peace: the archive contains a parchment Procès-Verbal recounting a ceremony conducted on the sixtieth anniversary of the foundation, in 1900, in which the casket holding Courteilles’s embalmed heart was located, removed from its resting place and reburied along with that very Procès-Verbal.²⁷ Genet would have revelled in this material: it reveals a funeral pomp which was lavish even by the standards of its day, densely imbricated, highly choreographed and oppressively didactic in ways which all have very obvious thematic and stylistic correlations in Genet’s plays and especially novels, as though the narrator addressing the bourgeois reader were an inverted ventriloquistic reappropriation of this overbearing voice of authority.²⁸ Similarly, the motif of sainthood which was so prominent in *Miracle* – then derivatively in Sartre’s *Saint Genet*, as well as David Halperin’s core text of queer theory, *Saint Foucault* – overwrites the institutional beatification of the two Founders and especially Demetz, who was often portrayed as ‘un saint Vincent de Paul laïque’.²⁹ Demetz could be described as a living saint guided by God, as in Suringar’s particularly effusive ‘visit’ from 1845.³⁰

Genet tried hard in the script to drive a wedge between Demetz and Courteilles, the co-director of Mettray and schoolfriend of Demetz’s on whose ancestral land the reformatory

was built. He was aggressively sidelined by the script's Demetz: 'Le directeur, c'est moi. Je donne les ordres.' Courteilles was depicted as the bungling author of a bundle of fake letters of gratitude from former inmates turned soldiers in France's colonial forces, letters which all speak in the same tone and style. In a scene in Lamartine's office in April 1848 he remarked: 'Vous m'avez dit qu'ils étaient illétrés quand le tribunal les a placés chez vous. Or, aucune de ces lettres ne contient de fautes de français, ni même une faute d'orthographe. Et afin de nous combler, elles sont toutes du même style.' He emphasized Mettray's continuing usefulness to the new Second Republic: 'c'est à la fois troublant et rassurant sur l'amitié de votre entreprise'.³¹ Courteilles was also ridiculed by the Demetz character for his efforts to learn the highly sexualized slang of the inmates, and Demetz accused Courteilles of unwittingly passing this language on to the nuns of the infirmary. Demetz objected to overhearing them speaking 'entre elles de quéquettes, de branlettes, de tapettes, de lopettes', but also regretted that Courteilles had not put some of this slang into the fake letters.³² When Courteilles ventured that he had wanted to understand the prisoners ('qui ils étaient') by learning their language, Demetz responded categorically: 'Nous savons qui ils sont, qui vous êtes, qui je suis: la morale chrétienne nous a tous, une fois pour toutes, définis.'³³ In repudiating Courteilles's embrace of communicative language, Genet revealed Demetz as creator, or Logothete, of an administrative-technical language of coercive governance, the function of which, as the script's title suggests, was not to communicate across boundaries but rather to impose and consolidate fixed social roles and especially class identities by dividing up social space in order to forestall the possibility of politics.³⁴

If Courteilles was a bungler, Demetz was a consummate bureaucrat, a master strategist and propagandist as well as a gifted re-shaper of souls and bodies – a brilliant carceral entrepreneur. Genet was quite right to suggest Demetz was the real animating genius behind Mettray. Tocqueville, despite serving on the Board of the Société Paternelle and

furthering its cause whenever he could, privately disliked Demetz: this may be in part because Demetz, along with architect Abel Blouet, had been dispatched to America by the French government to finish off a job which Tocqueville and his friend Gustave de Beaumont had only started. The official government business of Tocqueville and Beaumont's American voyage in 1831–2 was to report on the prison system. Despite the profusion of statistical information in their report, it lacked other detail, particularly plans. In 1836 Demetz and Blouet were sent to America by Interior Minister Adrien de Gasparin with a series of technical follow-up questions on the prison system. Blouet was asked to draw plans of the prisons and detailed technical drawings, for example of a mechanism for locking shut a row of fifty cell doors at once at Sing-Sing. In its administrative and architectural detail, the precision and beauty of its tables and drawings, Demetz and Blouet's report was indeed, as Michelle Perrot asserts, 'superbe'.³⁵ In a private letter to Beaumont, Tocqueville complained tellingly of Demetz's visit to America: 'il a tout vu, tout apprécié, tout condamné en trois mois; il y a tout appris, excepté la langue, dont il n'a pas rapporté un seul mot'.³⁶ Personal rivalry though there clearly was, Demetz and Tocqueville were both on the same side in the heated debate about prison policy which gripped the governing classes in France in the 1820s and 30s: prison should dissuade from crime by creating fear of its consequences. If it could not bring every prisoner to sincere moral repentance it should at least strive to limit the risk prisoners posed to society and to each other, and to change their habits and dispositions by the force of its regimen and the weight of its architectural design. Both were firmly opposed to a more empathic approach that had prevailed in the 1820s and was known at the time as *la philanthropie*, believing instead, as Perrot puts it, that 'La prison n'est pas faite pour les prisonniers, mais pour la sécurité de la société.'³⁷

The main focus of the two American tours was on adult prisons and their prisoners, although Demetz and Blouet also visited the Farm School reformatory on Thompson Island

in Boston Harbour. On his return to Europe, Demetz travelled to Johann Wichern's Rauhe Haus near Hamburg, a village-style refuge for poor and neglected children founded in 1832.³⁸ Along with the brutal British reformatory at Parkhurst Prison, each of these three institutions was said by Demetz to offer 'd'utiles exemples' for Mettray in an 1839 brochure.³⁹ The brochure called for donations from the great and the good, who could become founding members of the Société Paternelle in exchange for a one-off payment of 100F. It presented Mettray as a synthesis of existing models and accurately predicted that Mettray would in turn become a model for other institutions.⁴⁰ Demetz the carceral entrepreneur was simultaneously selling the project for Mettray, his own expertise and even the future exemplarity of his institution. Pitched at the governing élite, the brochure first scared its readers by presenting them with recent crime figures that suggested impending social collapse, before presenting a practical expert solution to the problem which would secure their social position and flatter them as progressive do-gooders. The brochure layed out in full the 55 Articles of the Société Paternelle and all 247 of the prison's rules: before a stone of the reformatory had been laid, the boys were already entrapped in the detailed bureaucracy of Demetz's expert carceral intelligence.

III

Mettray was more than the modest proposal it sometimes appeared to be. Demetz often presented it as merely an attempt to fill a gap in the Criminal Code, which stated in Article 66 that children under 16 who were found by a court to have committed the offence they had been charged with, but who were deemed to have acted 'sans discernement', should either be returned to their parents or sent to a correctional facility.⁴¹ Both the *philanthropes* of the 1820s and the *anti-philanthropes* of the 1830s, Demetz among them, were scandalized that

this usually meant – owing to a lack of specialist child and youth institutions – that children in this category (including orphans, abandoned children and children being raised by single mothers) were routinely sent to adult prisons, even though they did not understand their conduct as criminal. Mettray sometimes sounded like a modest proposal to supply a suitable institution where one had been lacking, thus completing the intention of the legislator in the Criminal Code. Yet the 1839 brochure suggested a far grander design. It listed members of the Board of the Société Paternelle including Tocqueville, Beaumont, Lamartine, Blouet, hardline prisons inspector Moreau-Christophe and, as its Treasurer, François-Marie Delessert, brother of the founder of the Caisse d'Épargne and its future director.⁴² Among the founding members were four interior ministers, two agriculture ministers, two justice ministers and three Prime Ministers, confirming Genet's presentation of Mettray as an organ of the French establishment.⁴³ President of the Société Paternelle from its foundation until his death was Adrien de Gasparin, Préfet of the Rhône during the second *canut* revolt of 1834, a meticulous administrator of counter-revolution admired by Thiers.⁴⁴ When promoted to Interior Minister, Gasparin not only sent Demetz and Blouet, to America to find out how better to lock up prisoners but was also responsible for an 1836 circular which insisted that prison governors were responsible for censoring what prisoners wrote in their letters about the conditions of their confinement, and in 1839 for instituting a new disciplinary regime that included a reassertion of absolute silence, a ban on alcohol and tobacco and increased work quotas.⁴⁵ Elements deriving from these circulars would still be the target of protest in the early 1970s by the leftist campaign group around Michel Foucault, le Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons. Gasparin and Demetz were both visionary practitioners of the bureaucratic language of coercive governance, the language of the wall.

Genet had already observed, in *Miracle de la rose*, that the absence of a perimeter wall around Mettray was paradoxically a sign of its 'prodigieuse réussite' as a prison: 'il n'y

avait pas de murs, mais des lauriers et des bordures de fleurs; or personne, à ma connaissance, ne réussit à s'évader de la Colonie même', adding that 'ce sont les gosses eux-mêmes qui transportaient avec eux ces propriétés néfastes et en chargeaient les fourrés les plus éloignés', the magic spells ('sortilèges') that electrified the foliage.⁴⁶ Demetz the propagandist had claimed, in a lecture, that over the thirty-three years of Mettray's existence 'nous n'avons pas eu à signaler à M. le ministre de l'intérieur une seule évasion'.⁴⁷ This was misleading.⁴⁸ Demetz embellished: 'Nous avons dit à nos enfants qu'ils étaient chez nous comme des officiers prisonniers sur parole, qu'ils commettraient une lâcheté s'ils abusaient de la confiance que nous leur accordions, en franchissant les limites de la Colonie. On est toujours écouté et compris en France, n'importe à qui l'on s'adresse, quand on parle au nom de l'honneur.'⁴⁹ The inaccurate tagline of the Mettray brand, so to speak, was that Mettray was 'sans grilles ni murailles', a phrase which resounded unquestioned through the contemporaneous French press coverage, and also found its way into the British press, in a recognizable translation, as Felix Driver noted.⁵⁰ The tagline was also reflected in the many postcards and other visual images produced by the Société Paternelle. These were not just sold to raise money but more also to promote the brand, as in an 1844 album of engravings which emphasised the reformatory's harmonious continuity with the surrounding countryside, unbroken by perimeter walls.⁵¹ Little wonder that Genet's mediated encounter with Mettray's archive – which is very revealing on this point – led him to want, above all, to blow a hole in the carefully crafted myth of the non-existence of Mettray's walls.

The absence of high perimeter walls of the sort usually found around prisons was a striking feature of Mettray but it most certainly had prison cells, hidden from view in the punishment quarter. The most literal reading of the script's title points straight to the existence of these cells by way of the admonition painted in white on their black, tar-covered, walls: 'Dieu te voit'.⁵² A somewhat more spirited Courteilles, in the final version of the first

half of the script, hit back at his co-founder by asking him ironically whether, not content with having felled the seigneurial forest depicted on the family coat of arms to make way for the reformatory, he wanted to replace that image with one of a cell, with ‘votre inscription ridicule’ for the new ‘devise’.⁵³ Preparatory notes for the script indicate that Genet had read an 1848 account of Mettray by ‘un écrivain oublié’, Gustave Vapereau, and drawn inspiration from it for the script’s title.⁵⁴ However, neither Genet’s notes nor the script reveal that Vapereau, although largely sympathetic to Mettray, nevertheless expressed doubts about the wisdom of confining miscreants to a cell with nothing to do.⁵⁵ It is evident from the script’s title and from the very first scene, in which an inmate preparing for the ceremonial opening is sent to solitary confinement, that Genet wanted to overturn the widely-held belief that Mettray was ‘sans grilles ni murailles’. Cells there were, but ingeniously hidden from view beneath and behind the Chapel building, among other locations, as Blouet’s plans reveal in Figures 1 and 2, below.

Figure 1 (below): Abel Blouet, Maison Paternelle et Chapelle plan en coupe (Archives départementales d’Indre-et-Loire, 114J174)

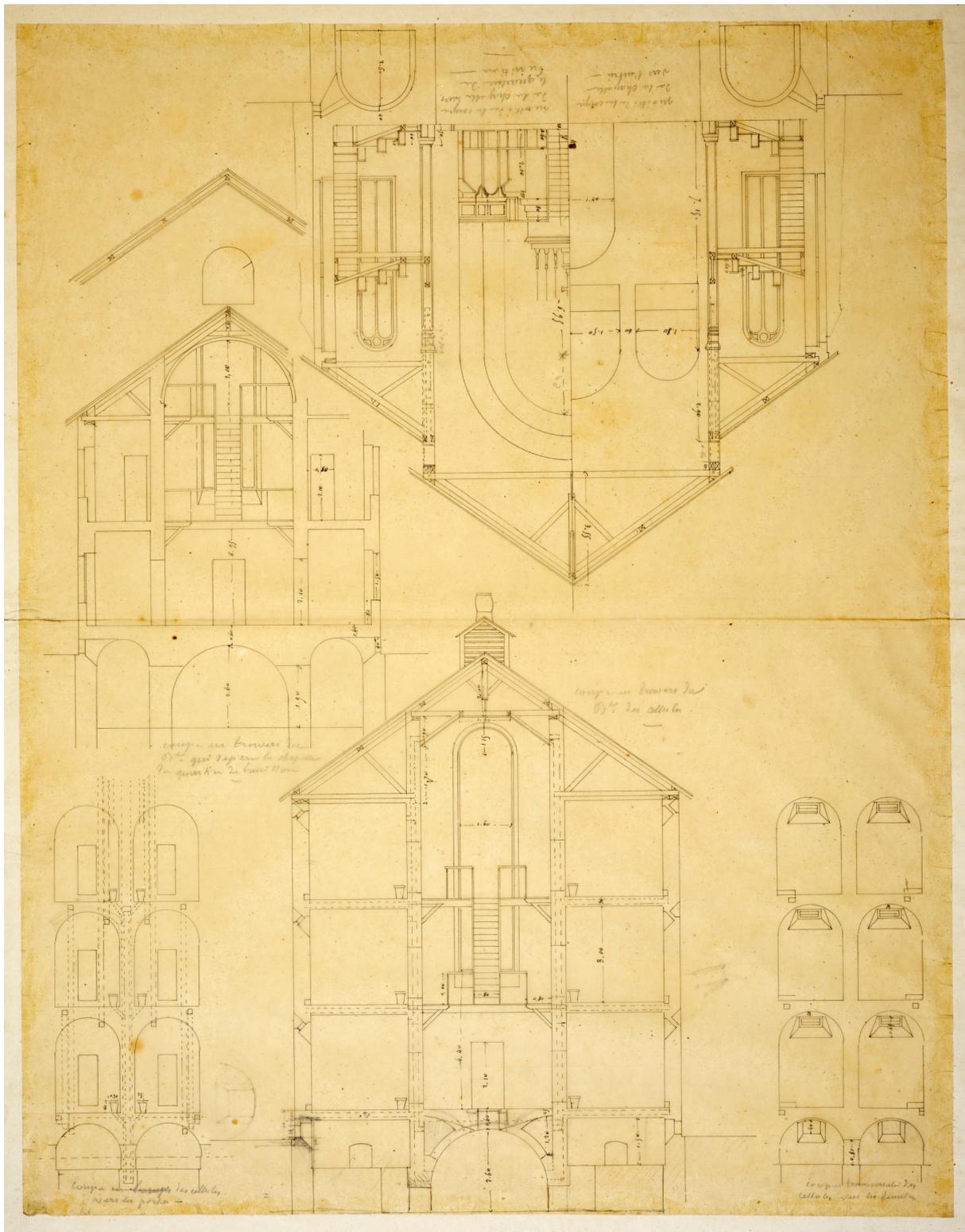


Figure 2 (above): Abel Blouet, Maison Paternelle et Chapelle de la Colonie plan élévation (Archives départementales d'Indre-et-Loire 114J173)

Instead of the usual perimeter wall, the archive reveals that Demetz conceived a far more ingenious system to ensure the return of escapees:

lorsqu'un colon se sera évadé, nous ferons sonner le clairon tous les quart d'heures du haut de notre clocher auquel nous attacherons un drapeau rouge le jour et les feux de même couleur la nuit jusqu'à ce que l'enfant soit repris. Nous vous prions aussi de prévenir qu'une somme de 30 francs à titre de récompense sera délivrée à celui qui ramènerait un enfant évadé.⁵⁶

Such rewards were paid throughout the life of the reformatory, whether the escapee was returned alive or dead and the script shows both.⁵⁷ Genet even suggests that Demetz handed out rifles to local inhabitants and stages a discussion between one and a group of *gendarmes* in the café of the Hôtel de la Colonie, in which it is said that there are as many as two or three escape attempts every day. During Genet's time at Mettray there were some 180 escape attempts in 1927 and 159 in 1928 but all escapees were recaptured.⁵⁸ In a conversation imagined with Courteilles, Genet has Demetz say of the local inhabitants, duly armed and alerted, 'Voilà un barrage plus efficace qu'un mur' and refers to them as 'la haie paysanne'.⁵⁹ A letter from the archive tells of a further embellishment to Demetz's system: the installation in 1929 of a special line to connect the reformatory to the Gendarmerie of a neighbouring village, 'dans le but de pouvoir faire arrêter le plus vite possible les pupilles qui s'évadent de la Colonie'. Instead of a high perimeter wall, Demetz established a successful security system around Mettray made up of diverse techniques of coercive governance. That system exploited and channelled the fears of the local population, pitting them against the inmates and inducing them economically to become, in effect, auxiliary prison guards, binding them into Mettray's carceral system as its organs or technical instruments. By conjuring such a barrage from the local population, Demetz also governed them, dividing social space the better to conquer with his highly inventive 'language of the wall'. The instrumentalisation of the local

populace, combined with the intimidation of the inmates, served in lieu of a wall in the ordinary sense.

The instrumentalisation of the local population, as ‘haie paysanne’ to encircle Mettray, ironically prefigured the role envisaged for the inmates once they had been reformed into soldiers serving the French establishment. Demetz took some of the most troublesome elements – delinquent children – and reshaped them to become the unquestioningly loyal footsoldiers of the governing elite, ready to protect its interests at home and further colonial enterprise abroad. The large proportion of Mettray’s inmates who went on to enlist would become the technical equivalent of the ‘haie paysanne’ around Mettray. Genet’s incisive structural analysis of the reformatory – as an exercise in national and international securitarian statecraft – is condensed into the narrative of a dream attributed to Madame Boucicaut, co-founder of the Bon Marché department store:

Faut que ça serve! Ne penser qu’à ça: faut que ça serve. Avoir tiré de la Cour des Miracles, une force disciplinée capable de ramer sur nos galères; capables de ramer jusqu’en Louisiane, au Mississipi; transformer nos voyous des rues en conquérants glorieux d’Algérie et du Tonkin! Faut que ça serve. Ce mal hideux comme un figuier de Barbarie, même s’il ne donnait que des haies protégeant nos bestiaux, faut que ça serve! Eclopés, borgnes, unijambistes, cul de jatte, décapités, tuberculeux, cancéreux, que ça rampe et que ça envoie au ciel des prières! faut que ça serve!⁶⁰

The future role of the inmates was figured here as a hedgerow of prickly pear protecting the property of their paymasters.⁶¹ The image recalls Genet’s striking suggestion, in *Prisoner of Love* and noted by White, that Mettray had made him ‘the coloniser’s Janissary’.⁶² Mettray’s colonial troops resembled the Janissaries – a corps of the Ottoman army formed from kidnapped Christian children raised Muslim and to have political loyalty only to the Sultan – in having been forcibly converted into the unwitting militarized instruments of an imperialist

state. Mettray's inmates were to serve as the limbs, the organs or technical instruments of a body politic ruled as though from its head by members of a governing class who had financed the reformatory primarily because it served the maintenance of a profoundly unjust social order and the expansion of client markets through colonisation.⁶³ From this perspective the inmates were the instruments, the security assets, of the ruling class: one scene in the script shows a recruiting officer's visit to Mettray in which he inspects the naked merchandise, counting the teeth of the would-be soldiers about to leave and even squeezing their testicles to check for venereal disease. In Genet's analysis, the 'haie paysanne', the human wall Demetz established around Mettray, ironically prefigured the role intended for former inmates as the spiny hedge, dreamt by Madame Boucicaut, erected by the rich to safeguard their accumulated wealth.

Just as the script suggested that the brand image of Mettray as 'sans grilles ni murailles' obscured a more repressive style of prison government, it also revealed another key mechanism integral to the institution's self-presentation: the quite deliberate cultivation and management of a potent sub-genre of travel writing, the 'philanthropic visit'. There are dozens of glowing nineteenth-century accounts of Mettray, which include the narration of a visit to the institution; like the rhetorical authority of the historian from having been there in the archive, contemporaneous commentators made much of the fact that they had inspected the establishment with their own eyes. Genet's script implies – and the archive confirms – that what they saw and the way they saw it was stage-managed by Demetz. Visits to Mettray were normally only allowed on Sundays. Throughout the ninety-eight years of Mettray's existence as a functioning reformatory, Sunday meant a break from the gruelling ten-hour working day. Sundays meant better food and even some leisure time but were mainly given over to a series of highly choreographed ceremonies, some elements of which were mentioned in the visit narratives, consolidating a remarkably stable public image of the

institution. Foremost among these were first the award, by the Directeur, of Mettray's flag for the week ahead to the winning Family, the one that had been most productive in its work and punished the least in the preceding week.⁶⁴ Second came Mass in the Chapel, which was usually watched from the balconies by any visitors; and third, the military parade to music known as the 'Revue du Dimanche'. Sunday was also a day on which inmates who had been placed in outlying farms or with local employers as a prelude to their release were obliged to return to Mettray. The return of former pupils on Sundays – of their own free will – to Wichern's Rauhe Haus was a custom which had so moved Demetz when he visited, for the love and loyalty it displayed towards that institution, that he decided to make it obligatory at Mettray; his visitors would accordingly be assured an opportunity to be similarly moved.⁶⁵ The spectacle of martial order in the Revue evoked wonder in many visitors, who saw the transformation of delinquent children into a new model army as something of a miracle. They could send postcards of the Revue home to spread the good news. Demetz had even thought to lay on a convenient place to stay, the Hôtel de la Colonie, which served the needs of philanthropic tourists and those of respectable families visiting the sons they had had sequestered in the Maison Paternelle, as well as permitting a certain standard of hospitality to be offered to any official inspectors. The first two objectives, though not the third, are mentioned in the lease of this property, as is a stipulation to avoid accommodating 'persons of dubious morality' and an outright ban on holding a *bal public*.⁶⁶ Demetz had thought of everything: no wonder the vast majority of visitors came away enchanted by the spectacle of good order offered every Sunday, underpinned as it was by a bureaucratic system of inspection-management.

The characters Mignon and Divine in Genet's first novel, *Notre-Dame-Des-Fleurs* (1943), both did time at Mettray and it is in this novel that he first spoke of the unpleasant underside to the Sunday pageant. Fresh clothing for the week was dispensed on Sunday

mornings but not before the shirttails from the previous week had been inspected by one particularly sadistic guard:

Il cinglait du mince de sa cravache le visage déjà torturé par l'humiliation du colon dont le pan de chemise était douteux. Nous n'osions plus aller aux cabinets, mais, quand nous y étions poussés par des coliques trop vives, comme il n'y avait pas de papier, après que notre doigt s'était torché au mur chaulé, déjà jaune de pisse, nous prenions bien soin de relever le pan de notre chemise (je dis "nous" maintenant, mais alors chaque colon se croyait seul à le faire) et c'est le fond du pantalon blanc qui était taché. Le dimanche matin, nous nous sentions la pureté hypocrite des vierges.⁶⁷

This humiliating little ritual accompanied, as it lived underside for some of those inside this institution at a particular moment, the public display of Mettray's order and cleanliness so vaunted by its many visitors. By its very nature this is not an anecdote it would be easy to corroborate and none of the very few other testimonies by former inmates mention this routine but we do know from the archive about collective toileting practices at the institution and outbreaks of severe mass food poisoning a few years after Genet's stay – blamed by administrators on inadequate facilities for the storage of meat.⁶⁸ In the script Genet offered a different perspective on Mettray's management of its own visibility, this time to state officials at a difficult time in the history of the institution, in the late 1880s: the Préfet called off his inspection of the infirmary, telling the nuns, whom we have just seen trying to get their patients to look happy, that he will return, 'comme dit Jésus "je viendrai comme un voleur". Votre mise en scène est généralement mauvaise, mes services de police m'en apprennent plus que vous ne pensez.' Peter Kropotkin's *In Russian and French Prisons*, one of only a handful of nineteenth-century accounts of prison life by inmates, was similarly scathing about the way in which Russian authorities stage-managed prison visits and also about the witlessness of visitors who were taken in by the spectacle.⁶⁹

IV

Looking back at the educational opportunities typically afforded a boy of his class and parentage, Genet later reflected: ‘tout jeune, j’ai compris très vite que dans la vie tout était bouché pour moi. J’étais à l’école jusqu’à treize ans, une école communale. Je pouvais être au mieux un comptable ou un petit fonctionnaire.’⁷⁰ While he resisted attempts to slot him neatly into place in the social order, ironically it was accountancy which came to obsess him in his research for *Le Langage de la muraille*: were members of the Société Paternelle turning a substantial secret profit from the labour of their young charges? This seemed unlikely, given the financial problems of similar *colonies agricoles* in France and abroad. At any rate, it would appear that documents comprising the archive under 114J in Tours were pre-vetted and that the accounts were incomplete; there is no realistic prospect of historians being able to get the bottom of the matter with those documents alone.⁷¹ Yet the fact that Mettray exploited forced child labour to break even is well established; even if no significant profits were made, surely all of the stone-breaking and the six days of forced labour a week were a sufficient indictment of its system, even though such practices were not unique to Mettray? In Genet’s script one of the guards threatened the children digging the beetroot field with a stark choice typical of the institution’s approach: ‘Travaillez, ou je cogne!’⁷² All labour at Mettray was forced in the sense that the workshy were either dealt with summarily in such fashion or sent to the punishment block. The suspiciously small surviving sample of the block’s logbook (mainly for 1860 and 1912–14) includes several entries for ‘paresse’.⁷³ Work at Mettray included hard agricultural labour, stone-breaking in the quarries and more coveted positions in the workshops making simple household objects from tin and rough sweeping brushes. Forced labour kept Mettray afloat financially: surveying the gap between income and

outgoings in 1853, Demetz expressed confidence that ‘le travail de nos Colons’ would balance the books and the productivity of inmates was measured by a system of strict daily quotas.

The script’s opening scene foregrounded the theme of counting and spelling, numeracy and literacy, as two inmates arrange chairs in the field in readiness for the opening ceremony of 22 January 1840:

LEQUEUE (un jeune colon de 16 ans, compte ainsi)

Il y en a deux fois nos deux mains,
plus une main et quatre doigts. [...]

TILLEUX

Comment tu écris doitgt? [*sic*]

LEQUEUE

D.O.I.T.

TILLEUX

Comme doigt?

LEQUEUE

Oui.

TILLEUX

Tu as dit deux fois nos deux mains, pourquoi nos? Tu mets mes mains avec tes sales pognes?

LEQUEUE

Pour compter plus vite.

After the ensuing fight Lequeue, the victim, was sentenced by warder Juigne to ten days in solitary confinement, eight of them on bread and water: ‘Motif: il s’est couché sur l’herbe quand son frère aîné l’interrogeait sur l’orthographe. Debout et au cachot.’⁷⁴ By the following

scene, when he arrived at the punishment quarter, Lequeue announced: ‘J’ai un mois par JUIGNE’. The opening was littered with similar numerical contradictions and uncertainties. These cannot all be dismissed as errors or accidents due to the unfinished state of the text (one of the directions indicates ‘24 ou 25 colons’), but rather constitute attempts to foreground the script’s overall preoccupation with counting and accounting, as well as with the institutional limits deliberately placed on literacy. Inmates at Mettray were restricted in their learning according to a preconceived notion of their rightful place within the existing social order. The detail Genet provided about this deliberate restriction to the teaching of literacy and numeracy at Mettray suggests that Foucault was insufficiently curious about the way in which this institution and others like it sought to reproduce social stratification by imposing internal limits on learning.

In his recent invitation to the critical left to renew a critique of ‘bureaucracy’ broken off in the late 1960s, David Graeber suggests that one of the lessons of the ‘Occupy’ movement in twenty-first century cities is that ‘police are bureaucrats with weapons’.⁷⁵ This remark implies a continuum of policing-carceral-security practices running from the ‘soft’ to ‘harder’ forms of coercive power that together constitute the technical art of managing democracy. I have suggested that Mettray and its archive – read through the lens of Genet’s script, which encoded his own experience as a prisoner of the institution – reveal how highly inventive technical practices of population management were conceived by Demetz and his colleagues, and these practices consolidated a new governing class by dividing it from the governed. Revisiting the archive of Mettray, guided by Genet’s account of it in *Le Langage de la muraille*, reveals in Blouet’s design for the Chapel–Prison a building which carefully

conceals its disciplinary dimension just as today's neoliberal bureaucratic language of 'governance' seeks, as Wendy Brown and Graeber both note, to obscure its coercive and punitive edges beneath anodine 'officialese'.⁷⁶ Demetz developed a set of coercive-bureaucratic practices which involved both the governing of the inmates and the population. He gave form, efficacy and even enchantment to a reactionary national consensus on crime and punishment through the Société Paternelle, and he managed the visibility of the institution in a way that decisively influenced the way contemporaries reported it in the press. Extinguishing the flames of Revolution and damping down its egalitarian afterechoes, he made an inequitable social hierarchy function more efficiently by seizing the offspring of its dispossessed and re-forming them into a technical instrument to secure stratification and further forestall democratic politics. As Demetz put it candidly in a private letter: 'Le pompier ne doit-il pas diriger sa lance vers le point d'où jaillit la première lueur de l'incendie s'il veut sauver l'édifice?'⁷⁷

¹ From the foundation of the Société Paternelle in 1839 until the inauguration of the Third Republic in 1870 Mettray attracted 75 per cent of all state subsidies for privately owned

colonies agricoles: E. Pierre, ‘F.-A. Demetz et la colonie agricole de Mettray. Entre réformisme “romantique” et injonctions administratives’, *Paedagogica Historica* 38, 2–3 (2002): 451–466, 456. M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (Paris, 1975), 344.

² Matthew Davenport Hill, *Mettray* (London, 1855), 8.

³ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, 347. The ‘archive’ of Mettray refers to written records of the Société Paternelle and Association Paternelle, housed until 2001 in an outbuilding at the Mettray site, at which point they were incorporated into the Archives départementales d’Indre-et-Loire in Tours at 114J.

⁴ G.-F. Pottier, ‘La colonie agricole et pénitentiaire de Mettray pendant le séjour de Jean Genet de septembre 1926 à mars 1929’, in *Éduquer et punir: la Colonie agricole et pénitentiaire de Mettray (1839-1937)*, ed. L. Forlivesi, G.-F. Pottier and S. Chassat (Rennes, 2005), 197; E. White, *Genet* (London, 1994), 97.

⁵ M. Hardt, ‘Prison time’, *Yale French Studies* 91 (1997): 64–79; C. Ripley, ‘Safe as houses: the Mettray Colony as seen by Jean Genet’, *Space and Culture* 9, 4 (2006): 400–17; K. Amin, ‘Spectral mourning and carceral masculinities: Jean Genet’s *Miracle de la rose*’, *French Studies* 65, 2 (2011), 200–211 and ‘Anachronizing the penitentiary, queering the history of sexuality’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 19, 3 (2013), 301–40.

⁶ M. Henneton, *Le Cinéma de Jean Genet: pour une réflexion sur la participation du scénario à la mise en scène* (PhD diss., Paris 4, 2000). M. Vappereau, *Jean Genet, la tentation du cinéma. Une œuvre filmique et scénaristique: genèse, poétique, comparaison* (PhD diss., Paris 4, 2013), <http://www.scribd.com/doc/223384940/These-et-annexes-de-Marguerite-Vappereau#scribd>. Both engage with historical scholarship on the institution but not with its archive. Kadji Amin’s doctoral thesis does most to navigate between the two parallel universes: *Agencies of Abjection: Jean Genet and Subaltern Socialities* (PhD diss.,

Duke University, 2009), <http://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/handle/10161/1604>. Amin argues that the vision of Mettray in *Le Langage de la muraille* reflects Genet's involvement with the Black Panther Party. Amin, however, has based his work on the version of the script held at [L']I[nstitut] m[émoires de l']é[dition] c[ontemporaine], which probably accounts for why the thesis also echoes White's dim view of its aesthetic value. Amin's later articles on Mettray (n.5, above) have little to say about the different Mettray of *Langage* and focus on the familiar Mettray of *Miracle*.

⁷ For historical accounts of Mettray: H. Gaillac, *Les Maisons de correction 1830–1945* (Paris, 1971); C. Carlier, *La Prison aux champs: les colonies d'enfants délinquants du nord de la France au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1994); J. Ramsland, 'Mettray: a corrective institution for delinquent youth in France, 1840–1937', *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 22, 1 (1990): 30–46; F. Driver, 'Discipline without frontiers? Representations of the Mettray reformatory Colony in Britain, 1840–1880', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 3, 3 (1990): 272–293; J. Dekker, *The Will to Change the Child: Re-Education Homes for Children at Risk in Nineteenth-Century Western Europe* (Frankfurt, 2001); E. Pierre, 'F.-A. Demetz et la colonie agricole de Mettray', and L. Forlivesi, G.-F. Pottier and S. Chassat (eds.), *Éduquer et punir: La colonie agricole et pénitentiaire de Mettray (1839-1937)* (Rennes, 2005).

⁸ Commissioned from Danièle Delorme's production company by Antenne 2. Henneton, *Le Cinéma de Jean Genet*, 83; White, *Genet*, 697.

⁹ Henneton, *Le Cinéma de Jean Genet*, 48. Parts of the script were annotated by Tavernier, to which Genet sometimes responded robustly with annotations of his own.

¹⁰ The first box of notes for the script held in Tours contains a number of Genet's A4 Clairefontaine notebooks with pages numbered sequentially in Genet's hand (1J1082/1). One notebook contains a page of Genet's own domestic accounting with yearly entries of amounts against the names of three members of his adoptive family – Mohamed, Jacky and Ahmed –

running from 1983 to 1985. In the box on the front of this school notebook Genet has entitled it: ‘Intérêts Mohamed, Jacky, Ahmed’ then ruled a line and written underneath ‘Scènes à écrire film Mettray’.

¹¹ There are three distinguishable versions of the script, as well as numerous preparatory notes for the project. IMEC holds a 452pp version of the script bound in two volumes but paginated continuously (Fonds Jean Genet), as well as photocopies of preparatory notes for the project taken from the originals held at the Archives départementales in Tours and purchased at auction by that institution in 2001. They also hold the most advanced iteration of the script, which is filming-ready, a revised and retyped first half of the 452pp typescript (1840–1868) (1J1082/1). The archive in Tours also holds Clairefontaine work-in-progress notebooks (1J1082/1). When he stopped working on this project Genet had finished approximately the first half of the script covering the first fifty or so years of the institution. The second half of the script is patchier and unfinished but the narrative arc of the film is clearly apparent. It is unclear why the unfinished state of the second half on Genet’s death is considered an obstacle to publication. In this article I treat the script as though it were the finished object it is not – quite.

¹² White, *Genet*, 82, 697–8. 12 of the 108 notes to Chapter 3 of the biography quietly mark borrowings from the script as ‘LM’.

¹³ Henneton asserts (92–3) that White was misinformed by Delorme about the reason why work on the script was abandoned: Delorme told White this was because Genet was daunted by the scale of the work and because of the Sabra and Chatila massacres. In fact, Delorme felt the project was too substantial for her modest production company. White’s damning verdict on the aesthetic qualities of *Langage* shows he had not read the last iteration of the script’s first half now held in Tours (but inaccessible in private hands while White was researching his *Genet*), in which much of the earlier roughness has been smoothed.

¹⁴ A. L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, 2009), 110.

¹⁵ Genet's earlier reference is a touch allusive: 'On ne vit pas quarante ans de sa vie, ou sa vie entière parmi les enfants et les anges sans se tromper dans ses comptes', Genet, *Miracle de la rose*, in Vol 2: *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1951), 430. Journalist Alexis Danan, at the forefront of the campaign to close Mettray, referred to this allegation in his front-page article for *Paris-Soir* (23 Nov 1934) and again in his memoir *L'Épée du scandale* (Paris, 1961), 220. Danan's allegation was the object of legal action for defamation by La Société Paternelle after the closure of the prison: P. Quincy-Lefebvre, 'Les campagnes de presse: un creuset militant pour l'enfance. L'engagement d'Alexis Danan, reporter à *Paris-Soir* dans les années trente', *Revue d'histoire de l'enfance "irrégulière"* 13 (2011): 25–43.

¹⁶ C. Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (Manchester, 2001), 145.

¹⁷ Vappereau, *Tentation*, 399–409; see also 339–45.

¹⁸ The 1986 biopic produced by Danièle Delorme for her *Témoins* series consisted of a relaxed interview by Antoine Bourseiller shot at Delphi, followed by a more confrontational one with Bertrand Poirot-Delpech shot at Delorme's home at Rambouillet. The footage of Mettray is intercalated with the Bourseiller interview.

¹⁹ Vappereau, *Tentation*, 344, 403. 'Renaud' sounds like a proletarianised 'Foucault', a blend of the car company with the proverbially cunning *renard* and the title of the project in the fake letters of introduction. Furthermore, in Mettray slang, "'Renauder" voulait dire rouspéter.', *Miracle*, 268. Genet also sent his research assistants to the archives in Tours to make photocopies of local records, as well as to the Bibliothèque nationale to research the wider historical background.

²⁰ Genet, *Miracle*, 422. Genet was certain in *Miracle* that Mettray had closed for good: ‘Mettray, maintenant détruit’ (*Miracle*, 39); see also 230. In the 1960s Danan declared triumphally, ‘C’est pourtant Mettray qui creva.’ (Danan, *L’Épée du scandale*, 223).

²¹ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, 343–5.

²² Vappereau provides (349–54) an invaluable table of the scenes in the bound 452pp version of the script. Only two short fragments of the flashback are preserved in the final version: a discussion between Charles X and his advisors, Demetz among them, on prison design and the departure of that monarch from the Tuileries Palace.

²³ Genet wrote to Tavernier: ‘En faisant ce film, où notre monde souterrain et celui, étincelant, des monarques, s’entortillaient ensemble, l’un et l’autre nourrissant l’autre et l’un, j’ai voulu dire, à ma façon, l’histoire des cent dernières années.’ Henneson, *Le Cinéma de Jean Genet*, 83.

²⁴ Société Paternelle, *Inauguration des bustes de MM. de Courteilles et De Metz, fondateurs de la colonie* (Tours, 1874), 18.

²⁵ Société Paternelle, *Inauguration*, 6.

²⁶ Société Paternelle, *Inauguration*, 6.

²⁷ 114J145. ‘Le 23 Janvier 1900, je soussigné Ph. Cluze, capitaine de frégate en retraite, Directeur de la Colonie de Mettray, ai fait procéder à des recherches pour retrouver l’emplacement du dépôt, et il a été trouvé sous le panneau en bois qui recouvre la face du pilier de gauche du côté du chœur de la Chapelle... un sondage du mur par l’intérieur avait déjà fait reconnaître un coffret en bois. On se trouvait donc en présence du coffret contenant le cœur du regretté M. de Courteilles.’

²⁸ In the last version of the first half in Tours, there is a not entirely accurate reference under 1850 to the burial arrangements of the two Founders in a line of Demetz’s on Courteilles: ‘Une urne de cristal contiendra son cœur en attendant le mien.’ IJ1082/1, p.107.

²⁹ Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, *La France vraie* (Paris, 1887), 53. Saint-Yves d'Alveydre was a mystic and a former inmate in the posh part of Mettray, La Maison Paternelle. He claimed a spiritual affinity with Demetz.

³⁰ W. H. Suringar, *Une Visite à Mettray en 1845* (Leeuwarde, 1846), 2. Pierre argues that Suringar's presentation of Demetz's resignation from the magistracy as a saintly act obscures his reliance on professional networks in the establishment. E. Pierre, 'F.-A. Demetz et la colonie agricole de Mettray', 456.

³¹ 1J1082/1. Among a set of eight loose-leaf pages in Genet's hand entitled 'Interview du Directeur'. Also in this box is Genet's sketch of a different kind of television programme on Mettray, much more like *L'Enfant criminel* in its adversarial approach, in which he would have interviewed the Director of Mettray in the 1980s. They suggest Genet was preoccupied by the implausible consistency of tone and style between the letters he had managed to purloin from Mettray, or read in the nineteenth-century press, and by their accuracy as written French. Given that a lot of correspondence and hundreds of press articles are copied out into ledgers in the archive – evidence of the reformatory's highly developed bureaucratic practices – it may very well be that there was a smoothing of stylistic and orthographic idiosyncracies in the copying or reporting process. Genet was to have asked 'Les lettres d'anciens colons qui se félicitent d'être venus à Mettray ont le même style, la même syntaxe – plusieurs spécialistes en analyse lecturielle sont de cet avis, pourquoi?', with a follow-up question planned: 'Peut-on examiner ces lettres et faire une ou plusieurs analyses graphologiques?' I found no evidence of Genet's having consulted handwriting experts, or even of his having seen original letters.

³² 1J1082/1, one of several scenes for 1850.

³³ 1J1082/1, one of several scenes for 1850.

³⁴ R. Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Paris, 1971), 7.

³⁵ Frédéric-Auguste Demetz & Abel Blouet, *Rapports à M. le comte de Montalivet pair de France ministre secrétaire d'État au département de l'intérieur sur les pénitenciers des États-Unis* (Paris, 1837); M. Perrot, 'Tocqueville méconnu', Editor's Introduction to Tocqueville, *Oeuvres complètes*. Vol. 4: *Écrits sur le système pénitenciaire en France et à l'étranger* (Paris, 1984), Part 1, 26.

³⁶ Tocqueville cited in Perrot, 'Tocqueville méconnu', 26.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 12. Although Demetz was often referred to as a 'philanthropist' by foreign visitors to Mettray, when writing for a domestic audience both he and Tocqueville explicitly distanced themselves from 'la philanthropie'. J.-G. Petit, 'L'amendement ou l'entreprise de réforme morale des prisonniers en France au XIXe siècle', *Déviance et société* 6, 4 (1982): 331–51. This explains Suringar's remark: 'M. Demetz n'est pas philanthrope [*sic*] dans l'acception commune de ce mot.', Suringar, *Une Visite à Mettray*, 12.

³⁸ E. Pierre, 'La Colonie de Mettray: exemplaire, mais unique', in Forlivesi et al, *Éduquer et punir*, 41–52; J. Bourquin, 'Mettray et le réseau des membres fondateurs', in Forlivesi et al, *Éduquer et punir*, 53–61.

³⁹ Frédéric-Auguste Demetz, *Fondation d'une colonie agricole de jeunes détenus à Mettray* (Paris, 1839), 15.

⁴⁰ Demetz, *Fondation*, 21.

⁴¹ Also Gaillac's view of the institution in *Les Maisons de correction*, 26–7.

⁴² The accounts of the Société Paternelle for 1847 record a 8000F legacy from Benjamin Delessert (114J253-5).

⁴³ Pierre, 'F.-A. Demetz et la colonie agricole de Mettray', 456.

⁴⁴ R. Bezucha, *The Lyon Uprising of 1834: Social and Political Conflict in the Early July Monarchy* (Cambridge MA, 1974), 182.

⁴⁵ Perrot, ‘Tocqueville méconnu’, 27; Perrot, ‘1848 Révolution et prisons’, in Perrot (ed.), *L’Impossible prison* (Paris, 1980), 281.

⁴⁶ Genet, *Miracle*, 318.

⁴⁷ Frédéric-Auguste Demetz, *Exposé du système d’éducation employé à la Colonie agricole et pénitentiaire de Mettray et à la Maison Paternelle* (Paris, 1873), 8.

⁴⁸ P. Berlier de Vauplane, *Le Cinquantenaire de Mettray. La Colonie agricole – la Maison Paternelle* (Paris, 1890), 16.

⁴⁹ Demetz, *Exposé*, 9.

⁵⁰ Mettray was ‘the “colony without walls” (a phrase used by many of Mettray’s admirers)’. F. Driver, ‘Discipline Without Frontiers? Representations of the Mettray Reformatory Colony in Britain, 1840–1880’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 3, 3 (1990): 272–293, 273.

⁵¹ J. Bourquin & E. Pierre, ‘Une visite à Mettray par l’image: l’album de gravures de 1844’, *Sociétés & Représentations* 2, 18 (2004): 207–216.

⁵² In line with some nineteenth-century accounts Foucault gives this as ‘Dieu vous voit’ in *Surveiller et punir*, 344, but mistakenly asserts that the lettering was black. Gaillac, who saw the cells before the punishment block was converted into a cafeteria, reported: ‘On voyait encore en 1958, avant leur démolition, les “cellules obscures”, basses, non éclairées, aérées par une cheminée, entièrement peintes en noir avec au-dessus d’une porte basse en arcade cette seule inscription en lettres blanches: DIEU TE VOIT’. Gaillac, *Les Maisons de correction*, 81. There is variation in the nineteenth-century accounts between ‘te’ and ‘vous’ which can only plausibly be explained by the fact that some of the cells were intended for multiple occupancy. Genet suggests this in a modified scene: Courteilles and Demetz visited the ‘mitard’ where there were four cells with slightly different writing in each: ‘Courage, mon enfant, Dieu te voit’, ‘Attention, Dieu te voit’, ‘Dieu te voit’ and ‘Dieu nous voit tous’ (151). The difference of opinion about the colour of the writing is significant because the

walls of at least some of these cells were, it seems, painted with tar (*goudron*), a practice also attested in some other French prisons, particularly military prisons.

⁵³ One of several new scenes for 1845 in this final version.

⁵⁴ IMEC Fonds Jean Genet; Archives départementales, Tours, 1J1082/1. G. Vapereau, 'De la Colonie agricole et pénitentiaire de Mettray', *La Liberté de penser* 4 (15 Mar. 1848), also reprinted as a book later in 1848.

⁵⁵ Vapereau, 'De la Colonie', 388.

⁵⁶ 114J218, Demetz and Courteilles to the Mayor of a neighbouring village, Saint-Symphorien, 25 Nov 1849.

⁵⁷ During Genet's time at Mettray, in 1927, one escaped inmate was killed by a local.

Contrary to earlier custom, he was prosecuted, but received only a three-month suspended sentence. Pottier, 'La Colonie de Mettray', 204. Danan noted the attraction of this financial reward ('l'appât de la prime'), *L'Épée du scandale*, 155.

⁵⁸ G.-F. Pottier, 'La Colonie de Mettray', 204, 209.

⁵⁹ IJ1082/1

⁶⁰ In the 452pp version, 308.

⁶¹ Following Derrida's approach in *Glas* we could further note that the Hebrew for prickly pear is (transliterated as) *sabra*, a term also used figuratively to denote, for their resilience, Israeli Jews born in Palestine, as well as being the name of one of the two Palestinian refugee camps to which Genet travelled in September 1982.

⁶² Genet, *Un Captif amoureux*, 449. White, *Genet*, 102.

⁶³ See also Demetz, *Fondation*, 9.

⁶⁴ As at Horn, the population was subdivided into units known as 'Families', each of which inhabited one of the houses.

⁶⁵ Demetz, *Fondation*, 10.

⁶⁶ 114J76, lease (4 March 1896).

⁶⁷ Genet, *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, Vol 2: *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1951), 161.

⁶⁸ 114J218, Directeur of Mettray to the President of the Société Paternelle, 7 Feb. 1933.

⁶⁹ P. Kropotkin, *In Russian and French Prisons* (London, 1887), ch. 2. Of the several hundred works published in France on prisons during the nineteenth century barely ten are by prisoners. M. Perrot, 'Délinquance et système pénitentiaire en France au XIXe siècle', *Annales* 30, 1 (1975): 67–91, 68.

⁷⁰ Genet, *L'Ennemi déclaré. Textes et entretiens 1970–1983*, ed. A. Dichy (Paris, 2010), 221.

⁷¹ There are some folders at 114J8 with 'OK' marked in the top left-hand corner, suggesting a process of scrutiny prior to release of the documents to the Archives départementales.

However, one of the folders at 114J8 is anything but OK: on the reverse is the name and date of birth of someone born in 1981, presumably a student at the educational institution on the same site, which suggests that this vetting was carried out by officials of that institution.

Despite the change of image when this successor institution opened on the same site in the 1950s, one which developed into the school for students with learning and behavioural difficulties which operates there today, it is evident that the staff and the Association Paternelle have remained fiercely loyal to and defensive of the memory of the institution Demetz and Courteilles founded in the preceding century. There is correspondence at 114J749 regarding a programme in the 'Objectifs' current affairs series, aired on 6 November 1970, to mark the launch of Gaillac's book, and which apparently made a number of unfounded allegations about the site. I can find no record of the footage of this programme in any of the obvious places, so, ironically, it may now exist only in these documents, which include a transcript commissioned at the expense of the Association Paternelle in the context of threatened legal proceedings. A letter (3 March 1971) to the Director of the ORTF, Pierre de Leusse, complained that the programme revived the closure campaign of the 1930s. On

the accounts, G.-F. Pottier asserts in his meticulous ‘Présentation du fonds’ (114J) that ‘Les dossiers comptables sont loin d’être complets’ (85). This frustrates the task of anyone trying to confirm Genet’s belief in private profiteering by the Société Paternelle.

⁷² 114J 253-5, Demetz’s 1853 report to the Société Paternelle. Demetz noted that the Second Republic’s shortlived decree of 24 March 1848 preventing the sale of goods manufactured in the prison system – intended to prevent the undercutting of waged by forced labour – would barely affect Mettray because he could still sell the labour of his inmates to local businesses, for example loaning twenty boys to a local marbleworks for 3000F a year. This practice was already envisaged in Demetz’s sales pitch to potential Founders: F.-A. Demetz, *Fondation*, 21. On prison work: J.-G. Petit, *Ces Peines obscures: la prison pénale en France 1780-1875* (Paris, 1990), 349–417 and 405–7 for the 1848 decree.

⁷³ 114J 276

⁷⁴ I. Ardouin, ‘Des familles au services de la colonie’, in Forlivesi et al, *Éduquer et punir*, 97–100.

⁷⁵ D. Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (London, 2015), 73.

⁷⁶ W. Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (New York, 2015), 122.

⁷⁷ 114J218, Demetz to ‘Mon cher ami’ William Gladstone (cousin of the Liberal Prime Minister and Treasurer of the Royal Philanthropic School at Redhill, a reformatory modelled on Mettray), 22 Apr. 1856.