

## Francis Gruber: espace politique, espace eschatologique. [English version]

'Francis Gruber: espace politique, espace eschatologique', *Francis Gruber, l'oeil à vif*,  
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nancy, 2009

'Every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably' said Walter Benjamin in his 'Theses on the philosophy of history.'<sup>1</sup> Francis Gruber's *Job*, 1944, depicts a naked man seated in a classic pose of melancholy. Behind him is a view of Paris, colourless windows and leaden roofs opposite a slice of red brick wall; the road is barred by a broken fence painted with the lush dark green of a Manet. Yet the bourgeois, impressionist world of Manet's *Le balcon* has long disappeared. This Paris is time-trapped, oppressed with the grey of the present.

*Job* sits at a strange juncture of the real and the Biblical, of realism and allegory; yet the questions provoked by this clash are profound. *Job*, a sacred subject then, was painted in 1944 and first exhibited at the Salon de la Libération.<sup>2</sup> His bowed posture signifies a moment of present privation and introspection - which nonetheless evokes his predicament: stripped naked and humiliated, his faith in God is constantly challenged, his revolt is suspended at a moment of self-reproach and repentance. The strange paper fragment with its citation makes this clear: *Maintenant encore, ma plainte est un révolte, et pourtant ma main supprime mes sanglots.*<sup>3</sup> *Job*, emaciated, physically too weak to stand and shake his fists against the sky, smothers a huge rage. He symbolises existential questions of life, death and belief: a world with or without God; he interrogates the long history of humanism. Yet this status is countered by an uncanny absurd: our simultaneous awareness of a passive male model in the studio. Gruber anticipates the self-reflexivity of later postwar practices: allegory is posited against an insistence upon the facticity of his art, the sensuality of his line, colour and transparent glazes, painting's long past: the premonition of its exhaustion.<sup>4</sup>

Historically, 1944 is a moment poised between past and future. Though the end of the war was in sight, deportations from France continued; there was yet no intimation of how the global drama would end, with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Louis Aragon – François la Colère – had published *Le Musée Grévin*, its title another allegory, with the Editions de Minuit in October 1943: Parisians knew ...

*'Auschwitz! Auschwitz! O Syllabes sanglants  
Ici l'on vit, ici on meurt à petit feu.  
On appelle cela l'exécution lente  
Une part de nos coeurs y pent peu à peu.*

*Limites de la faim! limites de la force!  
Ni le Christ n'a connu ce terrible chemin,  
Ni cet interminable et déchirant divorce  
De l'âme humaine avec l'univers inhumain.'*

Gruber was all too aware of the tribulations of his friends and fellow artists. Correspondence of April, 1942, exists between Gruber and the Russian emigré painter Grégoire Michonze, who was imprisoned in camp Stalag XC near Bremen before returning to Paris that year.<sup>5</sup> Boris Taslitzky, born in Paris, experienced cruelty, starvation and the death of comrades in a series of French prison camps. After seventeen months in Riom, eight in Mauzac, eight in Saint-Sulpice la Pointe, he was deported to Buchenwald, arriving in August 1944, the very month of Paris's liberation.

As a young boy Taslitzky had worked for Gruber's father and brother in the family stained-glass enterprise as a *dessinateur*: it was Jean-Jacques Gruber who first assessed his drawing skills, but Francis who filled him with delight and a certain envy of Gruber's culture, talent and artistic equipment: *A seize ans, sa culture artistique tenait du prodigue. L' étendue de ses connaissances poétiques me donnait la vertige. Je me crus en presence de Raphaël, jeune et déjà grand.*<sup>6</sup>

Gruber was sixteen in 1928: the following year he would frequent the Académie Scandinave...He seems always to have been a *fantaisiste*, his child prodigy status and lack of conventional schooling due to his asthma, inevitably affecting his curious relationship with the adult world. A voracious reader, well versed in the European tradition of fairy tales, he was surely acquainted with the *école fantaisiste* itself, its figures such as Tristan Derème, Tristan Klingsor and Francis Carco, their desire to return to a burlesque, tempered with sentimentality, humour and melancholy ....<sup>7</sup> Early paintings such as *Décor pour le bal de l'Académie scandinave*, 1932, and particularly *Le Triomphe des enfants*, 1933, adopt devices from illustrated childrens' books: figures jumping out of the overall perspective, disproportioned bodies with large heads and tiny legs, improbable postures that imply speed in running figures... flying figures, degenerate *putti*, masses smudged into visible graphic contours, a skirting with caricature... It is curious to compare these figures with Alberto Giacometti's little-known political caricatures of this time, which coincided with Louis Aragon's public adieu to surrealism and his increasingly prominent involvement with the French Communist Party from 1927 onwards.<sup>8</sup> Giacometti's studio in Alésia, was very near Gruber; they would become the closest of friends. Giacometti's drawings were an act of solidarity with Aragon: *quand la politique m'avait séparé de presque tous mes amis, [Giacometti] avait choisi de m'aider avec des dessins politiques...*

The front page of *La Lutte anti-religieuse et prolétarienne*, 59, April, 1932 is dominated by Giacometti's *Fête de charité*, where next to animal-headed bourgeois and a *flic*, a skinny Schiaparelli figure declares: *Cette belle fête, mon général, nous permettra de construire une basilique à Saint Chiappe, patron des chomeurs...* Below it is Aragon's poem 'Complainte des chomeurs' - ending 'Prolétaires de tous les pays, unissez-vous!'<sup>9</sup> Similar images, *Exploiteurs* with capitalist and cleric on a crazy human-drawn sled, *La Sale bête* with a winsome pig (crucifix in arse) or *Le nouveau-né*, where a crocodile dog guards the cradle of a baby pierced with crucifix and tricolour, have a similar semi-naivety.<sup>10</sup> The analogies with Gruber - a certain infantilism - are striking, though the parallels are so different from those that may be established between the two artists' later graphic work.

If *fantaisie* entered politics via caricature here, it was surely not long before the allegory and fairy tale of Guber's repertoire embraced more political paintings. Unlike the avant-garde of the 1930s, Gruber as a very young painter submitted works to themed exhibitions: in 1932, *Vénus et l'Amour rencontre une de leurs victimes* was created for 'La vie de Madame Vénus' (Galerie Carmine), while *Le Rêve de la Petite Ida*, 1932, (its theme taken directly from Hans Andersen) was for an exhibition on 'La Danse'; the figure is poised with a doll-like stiffness between life and death. *L'Arrivée des statues à Fontainebleau*, 1935, is a transitional work. Gruber is a master of bathos: the Renaissance statue with its plinth leaning on a young boy's shoulder punctures a scene that looks suspiciously like a fancy dress party; proletarians mingle and play in the background (even on a miniature scaffold); the boyish scowl and raised fist of the statue is humorous in its metamorphosis; the naked *banderole* bearers, too, are only semi-allegorical....

While it was not Gruber's *Hommage au travail*, 1936, that was shown in the militant exhibition 'Le Réalisme et la peinture', this key painting distinguished itself from its contemporaries with the same strategies of disjunction. France's heritage of political protest in art provided palimpsests for many young artists:

*L'ardeur d'une dizaine de jeunes artistes à vouloir intégrer la vie révolutionnaire dans l'art, à prendre pour guides le Daumier de La Rue Transnonain, le Delacroix de La Barricade, plutôt que Cézanne ou Chardin, leur volonté de servir leur classe seraient assez puériles si elle ne se manifestaient qu'en intentions.... La commémoration joyeuse si bien ordonnée de Taslitzky, la rue de Méranget, la vision tragique de Kuss, la figure de Gruber, etc..., sont plus que des promesses à une époque où la jeunesse manque, en general, si étonnamment de jeunesse.*<sup>11</sup>

Gruber himself, however, relates to the past with a conscious use of anachronism, not palimpsest. *Le travail* shows slightly sullen workers in the foreground, figures with placards crushed and spilling down the steps behind them, a minuscule procession diminishing towards the horizon. A half-built construction separates these two spaces (a favourite device) while semi-abandoned scaffolding structures the mid-ground. Strollers drag a toddler, in front of clusters of little truants engaged in 'children's games' (*pace* Breughel). The slightly mad flying figures are apparitions from an old master painting dragged into the present; they carry olive branch and laurel wreath, and straggling *banderoles*, declaring the day the *fête du travail*... Exquisite touches of red contrast with the workers' blue and a generally monochrome colour scheme, softening the spiky graphic style. The mood, however, is of disaffection rather than celebration, purposelessness rather than purpose, listless obsolescence rather a productive present in which aeroplanes dragging advertisements - rather than lost angels - were the harbingers of airborne capitalism. *Fête du travail* or strike? The whole paradox of the strike is intimated here: productivity crippled when 'all hands' come out of the factory into the political spaces of the city. Strikes rhymed both the making and the undoing of the French Popular Front.

At what moment had Taslitzky introduced Gruber - the *filz du patron*, his family used to servants, a large car and chauffeur - to the milieu of the Association des Ecrivains et des Artistes Révolutionnaires (A.E.A.R.) and the Maison de la Culture? Or taken him to the Galerie Billiet-Worms, heavily involved in the Communist and anti-fascist struggle? (Gruber surely found Pierre Worms from Alsace-Lorraine with his German artist connections particularly congenial). In painting terms, the post-crash push for realism - while corresponding with organisational changes and style dogmas in the Soviet Union - was echoed by exhibitions in Paris: in 1934, which opened with 'Le Retour au sujet' at the Galerie Billiet-Worms, Courbet's *Atelier* was installed in the Louvre, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts held exhibitions of David, Ingres and Géricault; *Maîtres de la Réalité au XVIIème siècle* moved from the Venice Biennale to the Orangeries, and *Les le Nain - Peintures et dessins* was held in the Petit Palais. By this time Gruber had found his painterly soulmates, Despierre, Ullmann and Tailleux with whom he exhibited at the Galerie Carmine; he probably visited Balthus's show at the Galerie Pierre, with its cruel, *Wuthering Heights*-inspired, realist themes.<sup>12</sup> Did he attend the June 1935 Congrès des Ecrivains pour la Défense de la Culture? He surely heard Louis Aragon's lecture series at the Maison de la Culture, published as *Pour un réalisme socialiste* at the end of 1935. He became close to the Forces Nouvelles group, with whom he exhibited at the Salon de la Nouvelle Génération at the Galerie Charpentier; the ambiguities of their neo-humanist traditionalism was spelt out by Jacques Lassaing, Gruber's lifelong advocate: *Ils nous présentent donc ce qui devrait être l'art académique de notre temps,*

*c'est-à-dire d'une époque qui a connu le cubisme, La Fresnaye et le machinisme (avec ses conséquences sociales).*<sup>13</sup> Far from academic, however, Gruber's guileful play with motifs from the past insists upon the contemporary; his painting would soon leave the space of the atelier and spill onto the street, following the strikers, as Taslitzky recalls :

*'Le musée, nous le portions dans la rue, et c'est nous qui, en reproduisant à des dimensions colossales La rue Transnonain ou Le Tres de Mayo, avons rendu au peuple la connaissance de ses images les plus hautes, dans le temps où Aragon et quelques écrivains lui restituaient Hugo et la France....Tous ces visages nous les retrouvions triomphants au défilé populaire du 14 juillet, coiffés de bonnets phrygiens en papier rouge à cocardes tricolores, fiers, disciplinés et chantant. Un million de personnes bras-dessus bras-dessous menait la grande farandole du pain, de la paix et de la liberté. La place de la Bastille nous avait servi de motif de décoration. S'appuyant sur la colonne de Juillet, les portraits gigantesques de Robespierre, Marat, Saint-Just, Mirabeau avaient été brossés par nous; chacun d'eux était encadré de motifs décoratifs et emblématiques dont Lurçat avait fourni la maquette et, du haut en bas de la colonne servant de mât, s'envolaient dans un ciel d'un bleu éclatant les oriflammes des provinces françaises. Dans le cortège nous avançons acclamés par tout un peuple en fête, à notre tête Aragon, Gromaire, Lurçat, Moussinac, Lipchitz, J. Richard Bloch, Sauveplane, des centaines d'écrivains, de musiciens, de peintres, de savants, de chanteurs, de scientifiques, d'acteurs... Nous les jeunes, nous portions les portraits des plus grands penseurs ou artistes de notre histoire. Je portais Jacques Callot peint en camayeu par Gruber et lui un Daumier de ma main.'*<sup>14</sup>

The festivities for July 14th, 1936 marked a high point in Front Populaire mythology. Four days after 'Le Réalisme et la peinture' closed – the culmination with a new generation of the huge *querelle du réalisme* – Gruber found himself exhibiting with Picasso and Léger in the foyer of the Alhambra theatre, renamed the 'Théâtre Populaire'. Romain Rolland's play *Le Quatorze juillet*, written in 1902 as a revolutionary drama with 'the people' as hero, commemorating the 1789 revolution, involved over 150 actors and audience participation. Yet its conclusion: *Forces obscures du monde, nous vous avons domptées*, coincided with the outbreak of the Spanish civil war...<sup>15</sup>

Gruber's identification with Jacques Callot, then, dates from this time; his brother, Jean-Jacques Gruber, a student of Henri Focillon (recently appointed at the Sorbonne), was his art historical mentor.<sup>16</sup> Jean-Jacques' involvement with historical maps surely impacted upon Gruber's commission for a *carte du monde historiée* for the Ministère de la Marine Marchande.<sup>17</sup> The landscapes and the religious or allegorical paintings and graphics of a Dürer, Altdorfer, Grunewald, or a Martin Schöngauer evidently fascinated Gruber more than the *reprises* of French art by contemporary French artists. Contrasting with his condemnation of the international Surrealist exhibition of 1938 for the *Journal des Peintres et Sculpteurs de la Maison de la Culture*, his praise for Max Ernst and Salvador Dali demonstrated oblique affinities: *Cependant un Max Ernst et un Dali sortent victorieux de ces inutiles épreuves. Possédant une culture de l'atroce et un goût aussi délicat que celui des modistes, ils arrivent à être les parfaits décorateurs de l'absurde...*<sup>18</sup>

Compare Gruber's *L'Or ou la Preuve solitaire*, 1936, dominated by fiend-suspended moneybags with Ernst's *L'Ange du foyer*, 1937 – the 'spectre haunting Europe', whose reptilian monster is a magisterial allegory of fascism. This doubled beast emerged from the preying mantis-like creatures trapped and camouflaged in Ernst's jungle paintings of 1936-7 which had personal and erotic undercurrents. How much more disturbing, was Gruber's *Les*

*Malheurs d'amour*, 1937. His series of humourously thick-set women, from *Venus* (1934) to the grumpy *Printemps* or *L'Automne* of 1937, and *La Grande Mia* - evidently a case of love-melancholy - gives way to an imagery of violation: the agressed female figure is shockingly confrontational. The raped female as allegory of Spain became current at this time (see works by S.W. Hayter, Edouard Goerg or André Fougeron's *Espagne Martyre*...). In *Les Malheurs d'amour*, the woman, legs akimbo on a rock, lies exhausted after the event... The pedestal table from Gruber's studio has been whisked to a new and desolate outside space: it lurches, about to crash; hobgoblins raise their arms; improbable fetish-parts are pierced with nails, their very illegibility part of the horror. Spied upon by *garçon-voyeurs*, the same woman appeared, discarded in a ditch, in Gruber's otherwise reassuring, masterly self-portrait of 1935. Woman unmasters - as, indeed, does melancholy in the trope of woman....

Again it is the half-real sense of woman's violation in *La Noyée*, 1941, or even in the *Hommage à Jacques Callot*, 1942 that disturbs. Gruber's quasi-sadistic self-inscription in these rape scenes, suggests a sense of complicity with death itself.<sup>19</sup> It is perhaps the moment to revive Giacometti's vision of Jacques Callot, published in *Labyrinthe*, Geneva, in 1945: *Ce ne sont que des scènes de destruction, de torture, de viol, incendie et naufrage... l'élément sexuel ou érotique n'est présenté chez Callot que par des viols, des martyres et par des allusions obscènes chez les bouffons. Le seule élément permanent et positif chez Callot c'est le vide, le grand vide béant dans lesquels ses personnages gesticulants s'exterminent et s'abolissent...*<sup>20</sup>

Images of ruin and decrepitude anticipate *le vide*: a repertoire of motifs, which pass from painting to painting. The swinging wooden door, opening onto nothing, is repeated with female figure juxtaposed in *La Mélancolie*, 1941; it becomes centre stage with *La Poète*, *Hommage à Rimbaud*, 1942; in a more realist setting it is substituted by the broken fence of *La barricade* with its prostrate women, now clothed, in the miserable area of *la zone* - a pendant to *Job*. Always these 'realistic' barriers act both as structural and compositional elements and as signifiers of thresholds: epistemological thresholds between real and artificial, present and imaginary, the model and the violated woman. Moreover, these binaries themselves imply the ultimate eschatological threshold, that between life and death. (Gruber's use of stuffed birds and reptiles in his last still lives play with these ambiguities in a minor key).

Evidently, the turn from plump, voluptuous and brooding women to the small-breasted, half-starved figures of the 1940 is significant. The fact that Cézanne's *Garçon au gilet rouge* haunts Gruber's model Etienne, gives her an even more sexually ambiguous allure. The *Nu au tricot rouge*, back in the bare studio, in 1944 has lost many allegorical attributes; a sense of erotic loss is still signalled by the Cupid with Venus effaced in the half-blank drawing behind her (compare the loose plaster arm suspended above in the *Femme au gilet rouge avec chaise*, 1948, a strange sign of mutilated masculinity). Yet, I would argue, woman was still too connoted; even the wilful anti-eroticism of the clothed and listless model in *Le Lit rouge* implies a violent sexuality transposed to the magnificent carmine folds of the bed cover; Gruber's *Judith*, 1946, with its murdered male figure in the background, is too overtly an image in which decapitation signifies castration. To return, then, to *Job*: a female figure could never function as a larger symbol of the human condition, or signal the fusion between a political and an eschatological space.

It is the male nude who becomes the bearer of meaning in Gruber's most concentrated images of the Occupation and immediate postwar period. While Gruber's own wild hair, *un boisson ardent* - signifies his romantic disposition in both self-portraits, *Job* and *L'homme nu*, 1945 (transposed to Gruber's characteristic landscape) is older, balding; he is the focus for a

concentrated field of humanist associations - and significantly, figures as *L'étranger*, the stranger, the immigrant, in Gruber's illustrations to Baudelaire's *Spleen*, made at this time.<sup>21</sup>

Gruber's allegorical impulse, now trapped in the coordinates of a cruel history, starts to signify dimensions where human behaviour itself becomes unimaginable: crimes of torture, murder, mass extermination, exercised largely by men upon men as signifiers of their race or as political prisoners. Having shown *Les cadavres* in the exhibition *Art et Résistance*, in February, 1946, which was dominated by Picasso's *Le Charnier*, Gruber referred to the camp as the very measure for the moral seriousness of contemporary art:

*'Si au temps de Cézanne, peindre une pomme était une position intellectuelle très avancée, faire de la peinture d'histoire au temps de Guernica et des camps d'extermination, est aussi une position intellectuelle et morale progressive... les magnifiques études de Giacometti pour le portrait du Colonel Rol-Tanguy, les nombreux dessins de Boris Taslitzky faits à Buchenwald sont à peu près les seules témoignages de qualité des années que nous venons de vivre...'*<sup>22</sup>

Taslitzky's *La Pesée mensuel au prison de Riom* – an indictment of the starvation of political prisoners in Vichy France, which raised disturbing parallels with the nazis, was almost concealed - along with Gruber's contribution - at the back of the 'Exposition de l'Art Français', held at the Musée de Luxembourg, in September, 1946...<sup>23</sup>

Like Antonin Artaud, Gruber would surely have made the effort, despite his illness, to visit the major Van Gogh retrospective, held at the Orangerie des Tuileries in January 1947. Gruber's last works are contemporaries of Artaud, the emaciated and magnificent *revenant*, whose *Van Gogh, le suicidé de la société* dressed an inquisition. Artaud's accusation was of crime, committed not only in Vichy France and Occupied Paris, but in the contemporary political spaces of towns and cities where cruelty, sadism and murder were rife. Contemporary research corroborates his disgust and virulent protest: the starvation of mental patients, sexual violence towards the *tondues* (around 20,000 women humiliated across France) the atrocities of the *épuration*... (as early as November 1944, the Minister of the Interior had allowed the figure of 100,000 purge victims to circulate) - and shadowing these the horror of concentration camp read in the face of every returned *déporté*.<sup>24</sup> What, indeed, happened one evening in Paris in 1946 - an apocalyptic moment that Artaud recalled in the 'postscript to the postscript' of his text on Van Gogh? *Et n'y eut-il pas un certain soir ou l'atmosphère de l'air et les rues devint comme liquide, gélatineuse, instable, et ou la lumière des étoiles et de la voute celeste disparut.? ...* A 'massive unfurling of hatred' he says, by people with 'swinish souls'...<sup>25</sup>

Giorgio Agamben's *Bare Life, Homo Sacer*, 1997, defines bare life, as 'the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man) who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*... the figure which elucidates not only 'the sacred texts of sovereignty but also the very codes of political power... the realm of bare life... gradually begins to coincide with the political realm...' Moving eloquently from Aristotle's *Politics* to Michel Foucault's *biopolitics*, he proceeds via a discussion of eugenics and their consequences to idea of the 'The Camp as the 'Nomos' of the Modern' ...in some ways, he says, 'as the hidden matrix and *nomos* of the political space in which we are still living.' His touchstone is Robert Antelme's camp memoir, *L'Espèce humaine*, first published in 1947. Agamben explains how, through historical and etymological progressions, *homo sacer* becomes one with 'an outcast, a banned man, tabooed, dangerous... ... accursed'<sup>26</sup> Accursed – and we may argue, cursing. *Job's* cry, his suppressed curses, are those of the

paradigmatic citizen-subject reduced to a state of 'bare life'. Agamben's crucial definition of sovereignty in its relationship to 'bare life' stems from the early writings of Carl Schmitt - the German political theorist.<sup>27</sup> Schmitt visited Occupied Paris, publishing alongside Otmar von Verschuer, whose eugenicist blueprint, *Etat et santé*, appeared in 1942.<sup>28</sup>

Why this diversion? Because of what happened in the political spaces of Paris itself – the 'realist' background for 'allegorical' *Job*. Let us note that racial inflections extended to almost every contemporary analysis of the work of Frantz Joseph Albert Gruber who called himself the 'last German painter of the Renaissance', and whose alsacian father was protestant, his mother of Polish descent.<sup>29</sup> The ultimate *Montparnassien*, he experienced the rise antisemitism affecting his closest friends and mentors– Lipchitz at the Maison de la Culture, Michonze, Taslitzky.<sup>30</sup> At the height of the *rafles* in a Paris where thousands had flocked to the exhibition *Le juif et la France*, 1941, he married Georges Bernstein in 1942, the daughter of the Henri Bernstein, whose play *Elvire* had brought the issue of concentration camps onto the Parisian stage in 1939.<sup>31</sup> In the 1960s Jacques Bazaine, Gruber's friend and dealer, recalled: '*Par provocation, Gruber...se proclamait juif, narguait l'occupant et receuillait chez lui Boris Taslitzky evadé...*'<sup>32</sup>

Paris, once the space of an exalted political hope – Gruber's *Jacques Callot* borne by Taslitzky in the street –had become a place of absences, of survivors, fraught with the terrible silences, the vision of the cadaver – himself – that Elie Wiesel brought back from Buchenwald. The suppressed sobs that Wiesel describes, repeat the paradigmatic situation of *Job*: *Aujourd'hui je n'implorais plus, Je n'étais plus capable de gémir. Je me sentais au contraire tres fort. J'étais l'accusateur. Et l'accusé: Dieu'.....*  
*...Assassins de mon pere! Mais le cri me restait dans la gorge....'*<sup>33</sup>

Just as a topological reading of the Book of Job may herald the promise of the New Testament, one may read the 'release' of female figures back into the delicate landscapes of *féerie* at the end of Gruber's life as a new spring – poignant with the promise that the painter died too young to enjoy. Alberto Giacometti – so close to Gruber in his last moments–never betrayed the message of the war years in the terrifyingly thin bronzes that he repeated throughout his subsequent career. Postwar Paris flourished again by the later 1950s. Wiesel's *La Nuit*, was published in 1958 at first – utterly out of its time. With the years it has become increasingly the concern of the present, a witness for millions. Gruber was, is, his contemporary, a prophet of painting's ruin and of the museum's ruin. For the image of *Job* configures the image itself as 'an object of desire, the desire for the signification that is known to be absent': a defining trait of postmodernism.<sup>34</sup> To see Gruber's painting now is to enter his times again, via allegory, via conscious anachronism, and for a moment to question ourselves upon the thresholds of meaning, which, with such courage, with such empathy, he proposed.

*L'œuvre de Francis Gruber, même lorsqu'elle est malade, surtout lorsqu'elle est blessée, et lorsque enfin, elle triomphe dans cet éclat de joie que fut son dernier souffle, elle est nôtre...*<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, spring 1940, quoted significantly by Craig Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse, Toward a Theory of Postmodernism', *October*, 12, spring 1980, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> The work was purchase by the Tate Gallery in 1958; see Ronald Alley's extended notes on Tate Modern website.

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<sup>3</sup> *Job*, Chapter 23 verse 2; several different versions exist.

<sup>4</sup> Gruber: ‘*Nous assistons à notre époque à un manque de la peinture, causé par la fin de deux grands styles...*’, ‘Interviews et Opinions, Francis Gruber’, interview with Madeleine Riffaud, *Arts de France* 5, 1946, p. 29; he calls modern painting ‘*dégénérée*’ in René Guilly, ‘Francis Gruber cherche la liberté de la vision’, *Combat*, 15 September 1948. Compare Pierre Schneider: ‘*le travail de Gruber – qui n’est au fond qu’honnêteté – est de rester fidèle à la tradition sans en nier le déclin*’, *L’Express*, 22 February, 1962.

<sup>5</sup> Grégoire Michonze (Michonzie) born in Kichnineff, (Bessarabia) Russia, trained in Bucarest and was close to the Romanian surrealists in 1930s Paris as well as Gruber and his circle. Parallels between their work are striking; see *Grégoire Michonze*, Paris, Galerie Francis Barlier, 1997

<sup>6</sup> Boris Taslitzky, *Tu parles*, Chapter XXV, Paris, Les Editeurs Français Réunis, 1959, p. 131 (Boris features as ‘Igor’, Gruber as ‘François Leber’).

<sup>7</sup> See [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/École\\_fantaisiste](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/École_fantaisiste)

<sup>8</sup> The debate on a proletarian art and literature dominated the pages of *Monde* from December 1930; Association des Ecrivains Révolutionnaires in Paris in 1931 was founded in response to the Kharkov congress of Soviet writers in 1930; its resolutions were not published until the October and November 1931 in the new four-language Soviet publication, *Littérature de la Révolution Mondiale*.

<sup>9</sup> This page of *La Lutte...* no 59, is reproduced and discussed in Leslie Rubin, *The Lost Years, Alberto Giacometti’s Return to Figuration 1932-1937*, MA thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, 1990.

<sup>10</sup> See Rubin, op. cit., and Louis Aragon’s obituary for Giacometti, ‘Grandeur nature’, *Les Lettres Françaises*, 1, 115, 20 January, 1966, pp. 1, 16-17, in Jean Ristat ed., Aragon, *Ecrits sur l’art moderne*, Paris, Flammarion, 1981, p. 217-218.

11. See Georges Besson: ‘Les Expositions: La Querelle du Réalisme’ *L’Humanité*, July 19th, 1936; the third debate with young artists is not discussed by Serge Fauchereau in his re-edition of Aragon’s *La Querelle du réalisme* [1935], Paris, Cercle d’Art, 1987.

<sup>12</sup> See Antonin Artaud, ‘Exposition Balthus à la Galerie Pierre’, *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, 248, 1 Mai, 1934; Artaud’s undated caricature, ‘Gruber, Louis XI’ is possibly a little later.

13. Jacques Lassaigne, *Almanach des Arts, Calendrier*, October, 1937, in *Forces Nouvelles*, Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1980, np.

14. Boris Taslitzky: ‘Le Front Populaire et les intellectuels’ in *La Nouvelle Critique*, December, 1955, p. 15.

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15. See Romain Rolland. *Théâtre de la Révolution. Le Quatorze Juillet*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1936, first performed, 1902; set in the Palais Royal, the Faubourg St Antoine and the Bastille, between July 12-14th, 1789.

<sup>16</sup> Jean-Jacques Gruber's *dévouement éclairé, son zèle infatigable* are acknowledged in the preface to Joseph Calmette, *Atlas historique*, 1I, *Le moyen age*, Paris, PUF, 1936, p. 10 (the 1951 reedition notes his *talent de dessinateur*); his *souriante obligeance* and *inépuisable érudition* are thanked in Louis Delaporte, Etienne Drioton, André Piganiol, Robert Cohen, *Atlas historique*, 1, *L'Antiquité*, Paris, PUF, 1937, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> The second edition of *Atlas historique*, 1I, *Le moyen age*, (PUF, 1951) salutes Jean-Jacques Gruber's 'talent de dessinateur' (p. 8).

18. Francis Gruber, 'Le Surréalisme' in *Peintres et Sculpteurs de la Maison de la Culture*, 4, March 1938, p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> See Denys Chevalier, 'François Gruber reste le précurseur inégale de la jeune peinture néo-figurative', *Arts*, 741, 23 September, 1959. Hee notes *une sorte de délétation presque sadique dans l'exposé de ses visions morbides, cruelles ou amer...une complaisance envers la mort transparaît en filigrane dans chacune de ses oeuvres comme un accord depuis longtemps signé.*

<sup>20</sup> Alberto Giacometti, A propos de Jacques Callot, *Labyrinthe*, 7, 15 April, 1945, p.3.

<sup>21</sup> See *L'Etranger*, and the Job-like *Saltimbanque* in Baudelaire, *Spleen, quinze petits poèmes en prose*, Paris, Editions du Grenier à Sel, 1954, shown at the Librairie M. Sautier, 1954 and with drawings including for Aragon's *Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale*, 1946, at the Galerie du Passeur, 1962.

<sup>22</sup> Gruber, *Arts de France* 5, 1946, op. cit., p.28 (the article begins with a full-page reproduction of *Job*, p. 26. 'Témoignage par Boris Taslitzky,' was held at La Gentilhommière, June 1st-25th, 1946 see also his *Cent-onze Dessins faits à Buchenwald*, Paris, La Bibliothèque Française, 1946.

<sup>23</sup> Giacometti wrote in protest to Aragon; the photocopy of his undated letter is in Boris Taslitzky's archives.

<sup>24</sup> See Annette Wieviorka, 'Témoignages et ouvrages parus avant 1948', *Déportation et genocide. Entre la mémoire et l'oubli*, Paris, Plon, 1992, pp. 446-475; Max Lafont, *L'extermination douce. La cause des fous. 40,000 Malades Mentaux morts de faim dans les hôpitaux sous Vichy*, Latresne, Le Bord de l'Eau, 2000 (revised figure 76, 327 deaths, p. 205); Fabrice Virgili, *La France "virile". Des femmes tondues à la libération*, Paris, Payot, 2000; The most recent estimates of *épuration* deaths are of 10-11,000; see for the statistical debate and most up-to-date bibliographies, [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/É\\_puration\\_à\\_la\\_Libération\\_en\\_France](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/É_puration_à_la_Libération_en_France).

<sup>25</sup> *...l'un de ces déferlements massifs de la haine...leurs âmes de bas porceaux...*' Artaud, 'Postscriptum' to 'Van Gogh, le suicidé de la société', K, éditeur, 1947, p. 70.

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<sup>26</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer, Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, (1995), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998, he discusses Antelme, p. 10 etc.; *homo sacer* (Pompeius Festus); pp. 8-9, 71; suicide p. 136; the camp as the 'nomos' of the modern where '*homo sacer* is virtually confused with the citizen...'. 166-171 ff.

<sup>27</sup> For Schmitt in France see *Considérations politiques*, Paris, R. Pichon and R. Durand Auzias, 1942; *Cahiers de l'Art allemand*, 6, *Quelques aspects du droit allemand*, Paris, 1943.

<sup>28</sup> Agamben, op.cit., p. 53; see Otmar von Verschuer ed., *Etat et santé, Cahiers de l'Institut allemand*, Paris, F. Sorlot, 1942 (see also his *Manuel d'eugénique et hérédité humaine*, Paris, Masson, 1943); he later experimented in Auschwitz.

<sup>29</sup> See Catherine Bernard-Gruber, Armelle Vanazzi, *Francis Gruber*, Neuchâtel, Ides et Calendes, 1989, pp. 27, 152.

<sup>30</sup> See Sylvie Buisson ed., *Montparnasse déporté, Artistes d'Europe*, Musée de Montparnasse, 2005.

<sup>31</sup> See Georges Bernstein Gruber et Gilbert Maurin, *Bernstein le magnifique*, Paris, Lattès, 1988; Chantal Meyer Plantureux, *Les enfants de Shylock ou l'antisémitisme sur scène*, Paris, Editions complexe 2005, notamment "L'affaire Bernstein, "le traite de théâtre" pp. 29ff.

<sup>32</sup> See Armelle Vanazzi, *François Gruber et la critique*, Mémoire de maîtrise, dir, Bruno Foucart, Paris-Sorbonne IV, 1987, p. 15, quoting Georges Charensol, *Les grands maîtres de la peinture moderne* (Lausanne, 1967) - claims evidently unsubstantiated.

<sup>33</sup> Elie Wiesel, *La nuit*, preface by François Mauriac, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, p. 109-110; 170. The first instance evokes the celebration of Jewish New Year in Auschwitz; the second the slow death of his father from dysentery in Buchenwald (compare the death of Maurice Halbwachs, professor at the Collège de France, witnessed by Taslitzky and Jorge Semprun in Buchenwald at the same moment).

<sup>34</sup> Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1993, p. 183, quoted significantly by Nicolas Bourriaud, 'Altermodern', *Altermodern, Tate Triennial*, 2009, np.

<sup>35</sup> Boris Taslitzky, 'Mon ami Francis Gruber', *L'Humanité*, 3 novembre 1949, p. 3. He recalls that Gruber, was '*assisté tout le temps que précéda et que dura son agonie par le sculpteur Giacometti*'. Gruber joined the French Communist Party in the euphoria of Paris's Liberation, preceding the debates on socialist realism which would subsequently involve his friend. At the Salon de la Jeune Peinture, 6-25 février, 1954, Gruber's work was heralded as crucial for a new generation of realist painters.