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“Mais, le lendemain matin”. Residues of the Ephemeral in
Eighteenth-Century French Art

Abstract

This essay discusses how the Ephemeral was understood in eighteenth-century France, and asks how we can track what remains of ephemeral community and artistic experiences. With the help of some very suggestive remarks on ephemeral experience by historian Arlette Farge, the essay explores various ways the intensity and togetherness of ephemeral experience leaves its mark on visual art, by traces and various forms of accretion visible in artworks themselves. The essay draws on the work of Gabriel de Saint Aubin, Jean-Honoré Fragonard and Jacques-Louis David.

1. *Introduction*

This paper will dwell, somewhat speculatively, on what remains of ephemeral events and moments of togetherness in the visual record of artworks in eighteenth-century France. My title, *Mais, le lendemain matin*, though is an intertitle from a film that I consider one of the more brilliant if eccentric products of French New Wave cinema: *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* by Jacques Rivette, one of the more enigmatic and theatrically-oriented of French cineastes (Fig. 1). In this film, two women are pitched, Alice in Wonderland-like, into a series of fantastic encounters in and out of the mysterious address ‘7 Bis, Rue du Nadir aux Pommes’, from which they emerge dazed, confused and desperate to piece together what went on, by re-consuming in the tranquillity of their apartment the boiled sweets that are mysteriously stuck in their mouths as they emerge from the house. The women both know that their lives are changed, and the film demonstrates, in its own strange way, how their own relationships

and views of the world, are shifted as a consequence of an experience they can't quite fully comprehend (Morrey and Smith 2019; Levinson 1991).

At various points in the film, Rivette gives us this ironic throwback intertitle, '*Mais, le lendemain matin*'.

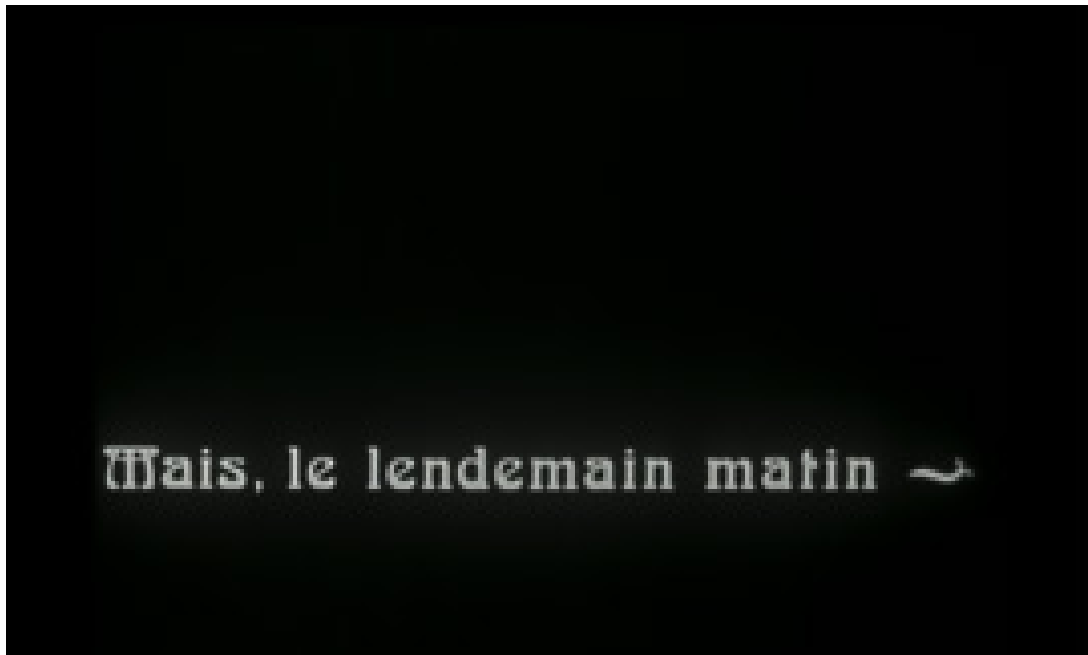


Figure 1. Intertitle from *Céline et Julie vont en bateau*.

Directed by Jacques Rivette, Action Films, Les Films 7, Les Films Christian Fechner, 1974.

I want to think about this '*Mais, le lendemain matin*' – about the morning after the night before, crudely put – as a prompt, to consider the relationship between intense, short-lived and complex ephemeral events and communities, (whether this be the span of a dramatic performance, the heat of an exhibition, a concert, a procession, or parade etc.) and their *Lendemains*. How can we seek the ricochets, and resonances of these intense but short duration events in what remains the day after? What are the impacts, on individuals, societies, cultures, and in particular in this essay, on objects and artworks (and on our historical understanding of them) that ephemeral moments of togetherness create? How can they be tracked and made sense of?

I am given confidence that this is even an appropriate question by the recent words of one of the most important of French cultural historians of the

past decades: Arlette Farge, who spoke eloquently in an interview some years ago about precisely this question. In discussing the effects of the mass marches and protests in France of 11 January 2015, in response to the *Charlie Hebdo* murders and other incidents of religious terrorism, she dwelt on the after-life of the ephemeral moment of togetherness:

Il y a toujours un avant et un après, une discontinuité et aussi une inscription du souvenir, et pas seulement pour les grands événements. Je reste persuadée que, dans l'éphémère, quelque chose subsiste. Non pas en termes de permanence, mais comme une trace, griffure ou incrustation. Je ne sais quels mots employer, quelles métaphores pourraient faire comprendre [...], ces phénomènes sensibles et rationnels qui seraient à la fois individuels et sociaux (Farge 2016).

As an art historian I am drawn especially to Farge's three attempts in this passage at a metaphor to help explain the after effects of the ephemeral, to probe what lives on ("quelque chose subsiste" [Ibid.]) given that they all are about leaving a visible mark, trace or layer: I will take here three metaphorical terms: *Trace*, *Griffure*, and *Incrustation* as three categories we might explore and I want to come back to them later in this paper. We should also take heed of Farge's sense that this resonance or effect of the ephemeral is not just personal but social.

2. *From the intense to the superficial: Defining the ephemeral in the eighteenth century*

As this essay will focus on eighteenth-century French artistic products, I thought it important to first contextualise what 'ephemerality' might have meant in the cultural and linguistic *milieu* I am concerned with. We should remember that in eighteenth-century French culture, the use of the term *éphémère* was part of a cluster of other cognate words like, most usually, '*fugitive*', used to describe something fleeting. However, in this paper, I will stick with the developing sense of *éphémère*. This word is mostly used later in the century, often in a metaphorical sense and increasingly frequently has strong negative connotations implying short-lived, superficial and in some cases pernicious forms of creation, power, or lifestyle.

The increase in the frequency of the term '*éphémère*' can be judged from the statistical sources in 'Gallicagrams' using the dataset of books and journals digitized by Gallica.

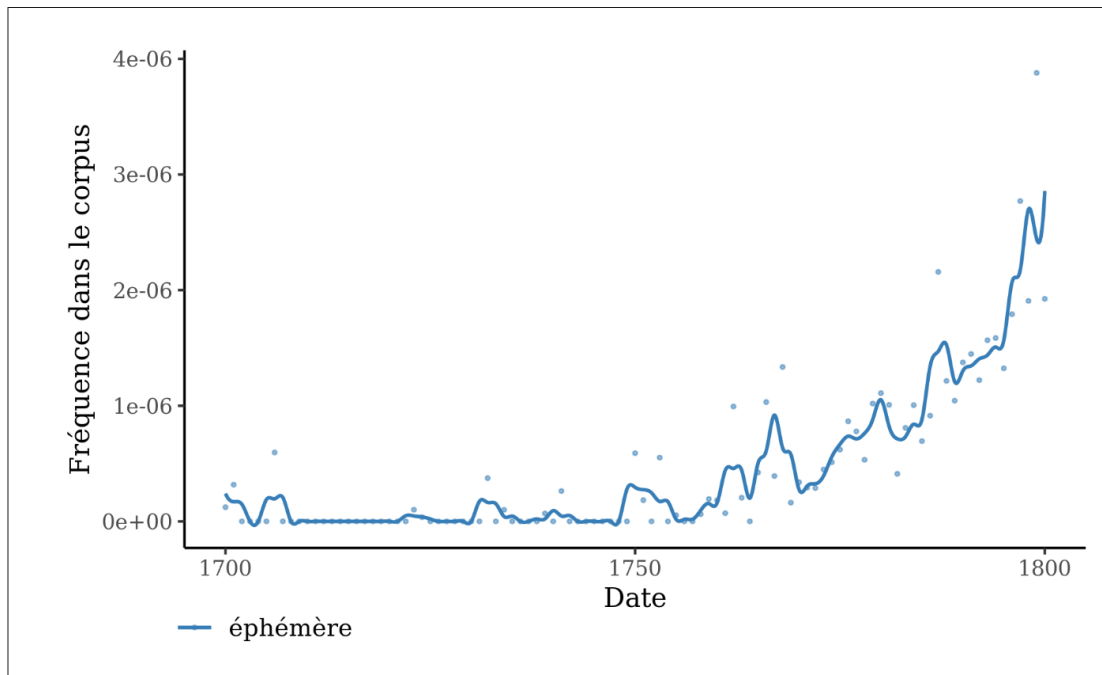


Figure 2. Graph of occurrence of the term *éphémère* in Gallica's corpus of French periodicals and books, 1700–1800.

Source Gallicagrams https://shiny.ens-paris-saclay.fr/app/gallicagram_en

As the graph shows nicely, the occurrence of the term *éphémère* in French language texts increases sharply after a consistent and fairly rare use in the early century.

More qualitative analysis points to a shift in the use of the term, essentially one that moves the term from the medical and scientific literature to broader, often moral, ethical and literary ones. In the medical literature and in dictionary definitions the word is used from early in the century to describe a fever, agitation or discomfort that passes in a day. According to Littré (1873–1874, vol. II, 1458, column 1) Henri de Mondeville's fourteenth-century *Chirurgia* uses the older term *Effimere* in this way (ed. Du Bos 1898, vol II, 16, paragraph 1318), and then in medical definitions in the eighteenth century we get the more colourful definition of "*fièvre éphémère*": "Cette fièvre ne dure que vingt-quatre heures, & survient ordinairement à la suite de quelque exercice violent, de quelques débauches, ou d'un excès outré des choses non naturelles" (Anonymous 1752, 212). Or again: "La fièvre éphémère est ordinairement

occasionnée par des causes fort remarquables, comme un violent exercice, une grande application d'esprit, toutes sortes d'intempérances... des emportements violents, un chagrin subit" (Quesnay 1753, 5). Ephemeral fever described an experience that was not just short-lived, but violent, convulsive, the result of a deep and intense emotion or exertion, sometimes the result of excess, even of debauchery; a dangerous (if short-lived) takeover of the system.

The other way that the term *éphémère* found its way into eighteenth-century French discourse was via the life of insects. Botanists and their correspondents dwelt on the discovery and elucidation of the Mayfly (the 'Ephémère' of the order Ephemeroptera, the family Ephemeridae, and the genus Ephemera) – insects supposed only to live for a day (Flannagan and Marshall 2012).

In the eighteenth-century naturalists argued about precisely the lifestyle of the mayfly, but the essence of their focus on the insect was on the brevity and intensity of its life in its flying state after its long dormancy in other phases of its life: "La vie de ces mouches Ephémères en en tout de cinq ou six jours, pendant lesquels elles ne prennent aucune nourriture, & ne manquent nullement d'occupation. Vivent-elles moins pendant ce court intervalle qu'elles ne l'ont fait fous l'eau, pendant tout le reste de l'année? Une vie de quelques jours peut valoir une existence de plusieurs siècles".¹

These early uses in medico-scientific literature had the interesting feature in common that they pointed to the intensity of the ephemeral, its ability to (as Arlette Farge hints, too) concentrate and intensify experience, heightening and somehow, like a temporal *tardis*, apparently constrained and 'small', but packed with affective energy and even consequence. Later in the century, though, as the frequency of use of the term increased, so too did usage move significantly towards more metaphorical and moral uses of the term, broadly taken by mid-century to mean, in human terms, short lived and superficial, and opposed to the enduring, the solid and the worthwhile. To take some examples of this new and frequent usage we could refer to one poet, a candidate for the Académie Française's poetry prize in 1766, who warns young poets not to be "...content d'un succès éphémère",² and against:

1 *Bibliothèque raisonnée des ouvrages des savans de l'Europe*, vol. 39 (Amsterdam, 1748).

2 "Épître à un jeune homme qui veut embrasser la profession des Lettres", in *Extrait de quelques pièces présentées à l'Académie Française pour concourir au prix de poésie de l'année 1766* (Paris 1766, 25).

Traîner tes pas obscurs dans la route vulgaire
Te livrer aux écarts de la frivolité,

Et préférer ton siècle à la postérité (Ibid.).

The ephemeral belongs to the superficial, the frivolous and even the vulgar here, and is opposed to posterity, a key term in the enlightenment imaginary, a future full of “monuments of unageing intellect” in Yeats’ later terms (1961).³

Jean François de La Harpe’s poem *Épître à mon ami* (1766) also warns against “un succès éphémère” and contrasts this with “cet invincible amour de l’immortalité”, which should be the true inspiration of the poet (Ibid.: 9). If this is a truism of the literary sphere, it is also increasingly translated politically. The Baron d’Holbach’s *Système Social* (1773) thunders against courtiers and court structures thus: “En faisant des Tyrans, vous ne ferez que des instruments éphémères d’un pouvoir éphémère & chancelant lui-même. Vous ne jouirez que d’une existence précaire. L’intrigue, la bassesse, la calomnie peuvent à chaque instant vous ravir le crédit dont vous êtes si fiers” (Ibid.: 162).

For d’Holbach, the entire court system tended to produce only passing and superficial power structures. Across a wide range of ethical, philosophical, aesthetic and political critiques, the ephemeral became associated after the mid-century with negative or superficial or frivolous behaviours, structures and human actions. In these critiques of the ephemeral, the long shadow of Christian ethics of the ‘temporary’ nature of earthly existence met the enlightenment’s own horror of fickle, arbitrary, shifting forms of authority and power.

Perhaps we still live under this moral regime. Certainly, as art historians of eighteenth-century culture, we have on the whole, made tangible and analysable objects our mainstay, and felt much more secure when anchored to works that last; even when we are exploring the haptic issues and phenomenology of human activities, from processions to Salon exhibitions and Revolutionary festivals. An art history of the ephemeral has been much more challenging to make sticky, despite the abundance of interesting theory and practice that our colleagues in theatre and musicology and dance history, have for many years

3 On the idea of Posterity in late eighteenth-century French painting see for example Olander 1983. For the poem “Sailing to Byzantium” see Yeats 1961.

made their mainstay to explore what might be at the heart of truly gripping and life-changing performances.⁴

This recognition of the difference between the import of a live event, of being there, and the fixture of text and image is in fact acknowledged even in one of the more morally heated anti-ephemerality rants of the later eighteenth century, Simon-Nicolas Henri Linguet's preface to his strange drama, *Socrate* (1764). In this mini-treatise, after condemning various superficial and ephemeral effects in the theatre, Linguet goes on to admit, partially against his own argument: "Un seul jour au Théâtre procure plus de célébrité que trente ans d'impression. C'est de l'art des Acteurs qu'on peut espérer cet éclat qui en impose au Public (Ibid.: xvii, preface)"

Linguet, as much as he longed for the honours of posterity, demonstrated in this preface his understanding of the vital interest in 'being there' for that one performance, for the peculiar bond of actor, or musician, stage and public, that flash that hits the public and transforms it, and forever exceeds the printed text or even accounts of it. Inspired, unrepeatable acting has something both feverish and intense as well as necessarily short lived, but it is this, which, for Linguet, perhaps paradoxically, assures lasting fame for a play: its lasting *lendemain matin*.

3. *Moments of Communitas*

How can art historians seek to chart and understand the effects of intense moments or practices which aren't obviously fixed or made material? The evocation of moments of intense and short-lived togetherness in fevered actors, performers (or indeed protest crowds) provoke me to think of what Victor Turner famously called *Communitas* (1969): "A moment in and out of time, and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition, in symbol if not in language, of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties" (Ibid.: 94-113). And again: "An unstructured, or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community or even communion of equal individuals" (Ibid.).

4 Some of the thorny methodological issues of 'performance and reconstruction' are tackled in a recent collection of essays (Tessing Schneider and Wagner 2023).

Many might be cynical about whether such ideal state of anti-structure, such a communal identity can exist in theatrical performance, in social groups of a limited number or even in mass crowd events, such as the marches in which Arlette Farge took part. But Farge was surely trying to probe and understand precisely this intense momentary communion, in the same way that Linguet was trying to articulate it against his better judgement. Perhaps, I would argue that what we get when we probe certain evidence is the trail of a kind of ‘micro-dose’ of *communitas*, or a small-scale, a more circumscribed ‘being together’ that is, like the fever or the activity of the mayfly, as intense and consequential as it is brief and difficult to define.

But let us go back to Arlette Farge’s immensely productive metaphorical trio now, armed with the idea that the ephemeral is not ‘throwaway’ or superficial but instead an intense, profound if short-lived instance of human creative togetherness or achievement. My argument will be that there are circumstances in which art-making and art-viewing can create circuits of intense and complex fellow feeling and that as such scratch marks, incrustations and traces, might be left visible in visual and material culture that derive from it.

In what follows I am conscious of the dangers of ‘re-literalizing’ the metaphors that Farge uses but given their multiple material resonances I hope I may be forgiven for doing so and be given some poetic license.

4. *Griffure*

First, let’s probe what Farge called “la griffure” (Farge 2016) – the scratch mark, is probably the best way of translating this – but this doesn’t capture the other meaning of a slice mark on marble or canvas, or the burin scratch that *griffure* has in French.⁵ This is not equivalent to, perhaps it might even be the opposite of, what Charlotte Guichard (2018) memorably analysed as

5 “GRIFFURE”, n.f.: Égratignure faite par des griffes. *Il avait des griffures sur tout le visage. Il se dit aussi d’une Rayure faite sur un tableau, un parchemin, un marbre*” (Centre Nationale de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales). See also the *Dictionnaire de La Langue Française. Supplément* (Littré and Devic 1886, 181 *sub voce*), where the term is explained through an example of it used to describe burin engraving practice: “GRIFFURE (...): *Terme d’aqua-fortiste. Égratignure (...)*”.



Figure 4. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Sketches of portraits* [detail of illustration 1: M(me) Aubry, perhaps Catherine Thérèse Aubry (1733–1800)]



Figure 5. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Sketches of portraits* [detail of illustration 1: “Brillon”, perhaps Mme Anne-Louise Brillon de Jouy (1744–1824)].

While the attention has all recently been on the fact that we have a ‘key’ to identify the portraits, I want to note here the somewhat frenzied, sometimes confusing if energetic way the ‘key’ drawings are actually created.

I mean by this that if Fragonard really were just cueing his memory, the facture of these ‘thumbnails’ is, I would argue, excessive, scratchy, circular and flowing in ways not typical of his marvellous fluid drawing technique elsewhere, and not designed for easy identification except of the ‘mass’; rather they bear scratch marks and scrapes, lines in excess of and indeed unhelpful to the memory of a face or pose, but somehow indicating the energy, the flow of encounter. We might see this scratch-mark energy as in some ways evocative of some of the essential dynamic of the paintings in the series. Reputedly very rapidly created, they are not simply virtuoso performances but bear the traces, the irritations, the ‘swellings’, lumps and bumps of an intense, feverish process of performance in their creation. For me, the very material and compositional fabric of both this now famous sheet, and the paintings in the series witness through their facture to a short lived, but intense engagement between artist and sitter, and to their undoubtedly mobile, performative, ludic moment of fancy-dress *communitas* (Figs. 6 and 7).



Figure 6. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Warrior*, c.1769, oil on canvas, 81.5×64.5 cm.
Williamstown, MA: The Clark Art Institute.



Figure 7. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Actor*, c.1769, oil on canvas, 81x63 cm. Private collection.

If I see this as a ‘*griffure*’ moment, in other words I believe that the group of paintings, now of course dispersed, are inscribed with the scratch marks of a somewhat mysterious original togetherness, a moment of sociability we still do not fully understand.

5. *Incrustation*

Another of Arlette Farge’s metaphorical categories of aftereffects of ephemeral moments in social, cultural and personal life is the “incrustation” (Farge 2016), which we might see, perhaps both in the sense of marble incrustation, i.e, as decorative insertions or fillings of a surface – or, especially, perhaps as a mineral deposit, a barnacle-like layering of experience and memory that somehow transfers, in complex ways, the affective or physical cumulation of intense experiences.⁷

⁷ See the term “INCRUSTATION” in the current *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (9^e éd. 1935–2024, *sub voce*).

An example of this kind of ‘evidence’ of incrustation might be best seen in the work of Gabriel de Saint Aubin, one of the great artists of the ephemeral (Dacier 1929; Bailey et al. 2007). Scholars are often perplexed and mystified by Gabriel de Saint Aubin’s often inscribed and reinscribed, overdrawn and complex multi-part drawings, such as this one (Fig. 8) from the Bibliothèque Municipale in Nantes (and not well known to scholarship), in which multiple fleeting experiences of events and images encrust in various details and inscriptions and overwritings and blow ups. In this particular sheet, we are dealing with Saint-Aubin’s multiple and complex recollections of the portrait of Madame de Pompadour at the Salon of 1757, for example, the Salon exhibition as a site provided the intense moments of communal togetherness and profound feelings of alienation that compelled Saint-Aubin, and results in some of his most hallucinatory incrustations-attempts to recall and capture the modes and gestures of fleetingly felt experiences, both personal and social inscribed not just in subject matter but in the very material and compositional make up of these strange drawings.



Figure 8. Gabriel de Saint Aubin, *Untitled [Allegory of the Portrait of Mme de Pompadour]*, pen, ink wash on paper. Nantes, Médiathèque, Labouchère collection, MS821/10.

Another example which builds up layers to create a strange, ludic accretion is the drawing now in the National Gallery of Art (Fig. 9). Here the composite of ink, pencil and wash in patterns that have their own decorative effect is reinforced by actual collaging of the paper, an accretion or layering, an incrustation, in fact, that adds to the composite sense of a scene built up from multiple grafts of ideas and moments linked by some complex internal logic around moments of particular significance for the artist.



Figure 9. Gabriel de Saint Aubin, *Figure Sketches*, c.1760, pen and brown ink and red and black chalk with gray and brown wash on two overlapping sheets of laid paper, 16.2x22.5 cm. Washington, National Gallery of Art (1963.15.30).

Here the composite of ink, pencil and wash in patterns that have their own decorative effect is reinforced by actual collaging of the paper, an accretion or layering, an incrustation, in fact, that adds to the composite sense of a scene built up from multiple grafts of ideas and moments linked by some complex internal logic around moments of particular significance for the artist.

Another of the more hallucinatory incrustations of Gabriel de Saint-Aubin is the sheet now in the Louvre (Fig. 10) about whose attribution to Saint Aubin the Louvre catalogue now manifests doubt (surely given

the unique and eccentric nature of this artist's work, there is no 'École de Gabriel de Saint Aubin!') ⁸.

If we accept it as authentic it is in its accretions and incrustations, its allegorical 'growths' emerging from the scene, and heaped up sense of his wonder at this short-lived festive gathering of painting as well as his exclusion from it. The Salon in this painting/drawing is a hallucinatory, oneiric widescreen vision, emerging from a kind of shell or frame formed by the dabbed in crowd running along the bottom and the vapid and complex allegorical 'growth' at the top. The fact that Saint Aubin created this 'painting' on paper stuck onto a canvas gives further material layering and incrustation, as if his usual medium was striving by accretion for the effect and status of painting.



Figure 10. Gabriel-Jacques de Saint-Aubin, *Vue du Salon du Louvre en 1779*, oil on paper glued to canvas, 19.5×44. Paris: Louvre.

6. *Trace*

The third and most capacious of Farge's metaphors for the afterlives of ephemeral intensity in the historical process, is the "trace" (Farge 2016). This we might understand as the '*trace*' as in the footprint, sign or marker left by an animal or a human,

⁸ See the Louvre's entry <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/clo10066125>. Cfr. also Bailey et al. 2007.

but the term, of course, has a wide range of metaphorical implications that have long been understood in French as well as in other languages, pointing already to a mental leftover as well as a physical index or sign of presence.⁹ When seeking the aftermath, the '*lendemain*' of certain key moments, we can and do use the sense of a footprint or a marker of a presence, the indent in a life or a mind or a physical location of something haven taken place, one that indicates by absence or negative space the sense of there once having been something. The mental trace or marker of an event or person is mixed up with wider concepts, (memory, of course chief among them) but again I would like to focus on how actual artworks might bear traces of particular kinds of intense aesthetic, affective or social experience.

This is perhaps even more speculative than my previous examples, in the sense that I am now literalizing a more expansive metaphor, but again I want to focus on the idea that a *trace* might be seen as an occluded or even unconscious residue of a particularly intense encounter or event or moment in art or an artist's life.

Art History has developed its own very complex and subtle series of vocabularies to describe formal borrowings or influences, and in the eighteenth century, the adoption of deliberate echoes of a repertoire of previous monumental, 'eternal' practice was one clear signal of striving for the honours of posterity rather than a legacy of the ephemeral.¹⁰

But here again, I think we might at least imaginatively and with some profit imagine that *traces* in the sense that Farge encourages us to think of them are not formal borrowings but complex, shadow forms, or seepages – more like traces of alcohol in the blood, detectable the next day with difficulty and sometimes with pain, but hinting at the ecstatic communions or feverish violence of the night before.

To try to make this idea more precise, I will switch from exploring drawing, a practice whose scratchings, rapidity and erasures are perhaps more prone to understanding in terms of their traces of ephemeral intensity, to the seemingly more fixed, less mobile sphere of painting. No example is less seemingly ephemeral than Jacques-Louis David, and indeed Baudelaire made David's 'Antique Garb' the opposite of his understanding of ephemeral modernity

9 As eloquently demonstrated in the entry for the word "TRACE" in Littré (1873–1874, *sub voce*), perhaps the most attentive French language dictionary to histories of usage. See also Bailey et. al. 2007.

10 On the particular complexity of Neo-Classical borrowings and engagements of this kind, see for example Michel 1989.

(Baudelaire 1965, 12–13). Many scholars have discussed the various deliberate choices of formal sources of David's large-scale paintings of the 1780s, and many of these borrowings were highly conscious and designed to convey both knowledge of and homage to the aesthetic modes of antiquity.¹¹

Perhaps the crudest example of such a willed antiquising mode would be the *Andromache Mourning Hector* (Fig. 11) which as a reception piece had to perform demonstrably, the kinds of knowledge required of a painter at this stage. These expectations included deliberate 'citation' of frieze sculpture, almost over-crude references from Greek and Roman texts, and a bodily and gestural language designed to demonstrate fluency in the new rhetoric of the body.



Figure 11. Jacques-Louis David, *La douleur et les regrets d'Andromaque sur le corps d'Hector*, 1783, oil on canvas, 275x203 cm. Paris: Louvre.

11 See the very detailed discussions of borrowings and influences in the catalogue entries for Antoine Schnapper 1989. See also Crow 2006.

This kind of knowing citation is too deliberate, too scholarly, too visible to be understood as a ‘*trace*’. But in other moments of the same artist’s work we can see, I think, something more akin to a ‘*trace*’ – the legacy, perhaps in shadow form, the imprint or a residue of intense *communitas* in the structure of a work.



Figure 12. Jacques-Louis David, *Belisarius Begging for Alms*, 1781, oil on canvas, 288x312 cm. Lille: Musée des Beaux Arts.

David’s 1781 *Belisarius Recognized by a Soldier* (Fig. 12) bears the trace of the intense conversation among talented practitioners across theatre, architecture and visual art in Sedaine’s lodgings in the early 1780s, and in particular of Sedaine’s close friend and Shakespeare re-interpreter Jean-François Ducis. David’s *Bélisaire* was created in Paris at the time of the staging and rethinking of Ducis’ *Oedipe chez Admete* and more crucially, the early evolution of *le Roi Lear*, (whose manuscript version Ducis read to the committee of the Comédie

Française and to friends in 1780, and in his version Ducis emphasized Lear as a wandering old man, and a “Pauvre et foible veillard, chassé de sa maison” [Ducis 1783, 56]).

The ideas for how to get striking and difficult stage moments translated into visual form, via new kinds of stage direction, acting and gestural vocabulary, as encapsulated by the work of the actor Jean-Baptiste Britard, known as Brizard (Fig. 13) in his incarnations of Voltaire’s heroes (including Brutus), of Sedaine’s noble father Vanderk in *Le Philosophe sans le Savoir*, and of Ducis’ visions of Greek and British tragedy, were a feature of the theatrical circles in which David found himself.

These discussions, I argue, might have left their trace in some of the peculiar and striking features of David’s outsized version of the painting, which along with the hefty emotional charge of its ostensible subject carries traces of a kind of syncretic tragic thinking that Ducis’ fertile and original mind was capable of (Ledbury 2004; Golder 1992). In the fabric of David’s *Belisarius* (Fig. 14), we find the trace not only of the wild and maddened Léar in Ducis’ drama but also the repentant and world-weary Oedipus (of Ducis’ 1778 version). Even the straining in scale and expression for a gestural drama to convey a key moment of recognition in David’s painting feels as if it bears an imprint or a trace of the drama of recognition across the ancient and Shakespearian tradition, which makes it more resonant, even if more awkward and outsized.



Figure 13. Jacques Avril after Adelaide Labille-Guiard, M. Brizard, c. 1776.
Private Collection.

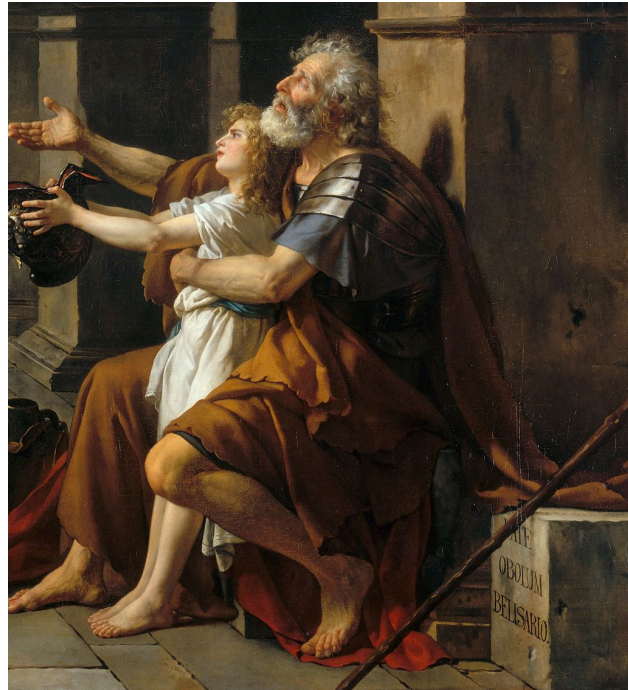


Figure 14. Detail of *Belisarius and Amanuensis*

It is perhaps easier to see how traces of an intellectual and affective community might be seen in works produced in the very moment of its existence (so, Sedaine's circle in 1780–1781, or Fragonard's friendship/client group). However, we might see such imprints or traces in unexpected places and I would also be tempted to see this 'trace', this residue, of intense *communitas* and deep feeling, at longer removes from an originary moment of togetherness or trauma. An example of this 'imprint' might again be drawn from David's career. The young (ish) David's feverish experience of academic failure in the prix de Rome early 1772, when this painting, the *Apollo and Diana Attacking the Children of Niobe* (Fig. 15) was the object (once again) of his misplaced optimism, deep disappointment and near suicidal despair as he himself recounted it later.¹²

12 For David's account of this prize 'drama', see his autobiographical fragment, written probably c.1800 (Wildenstein 1973, 156–157).



Figure 15. Jacques-Louis David, *Apollo and Diana attacking the children of Niobe* (1772, oil on canvas, Dallas Museum of Art)

In his account of his misfortunes and injustices surrounding the prize, David is careful to re-iterate something we don't hear much of in his future encounters with fellow students – a trace of real friendship and intensity in his relationship with one, at least, of his rivals, the eventual prize winner, Pierre-Charles Jombert. He explains that Jombert, while waiting for judgement to be pronounced approached the judges, and knowing there might be a second prize on offer, spoke about: “[...] des avis que je lui [David] avez donnés pour son tableau, et qu’il serait charmé que, s’il ne devait pas avoir le premier prix, que ce fut enfin son ami qui fut préféré. On rappela cette amitié trop rare entre rivaux de gloire, on décida donc qu’il y aurait un second premier prix” (Wildenstein 1973, 156).

David recalls Jombert as having shown a rare and precious magnanimity and friendship, and although eventually David was also denied the second prize, clearly with many years hindsight Jombert's gesture and intervention resonated with David as much as the decision of the judges provoked deep despair.

Jombert's own composition, and indeed his sketch for it, have survived (Figs. 16 and 17) and the sketch especially shows a certain clarity and conceptual richness especially in the defiance and the shock of Niobe, in the desperate

and futile attempts to shelter offspring, and in the sculptural monumentality which hints both at Niobe's arrogant defiance and by contrast at the horror of the corpses now lying all around her.



Figure 16. Pierre-Charles Jombert, *The Punishment of the Arrogant Niobe by Diana and Apollo*, 1772, oil on canvas, 145x101 cm. Paris: École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts.

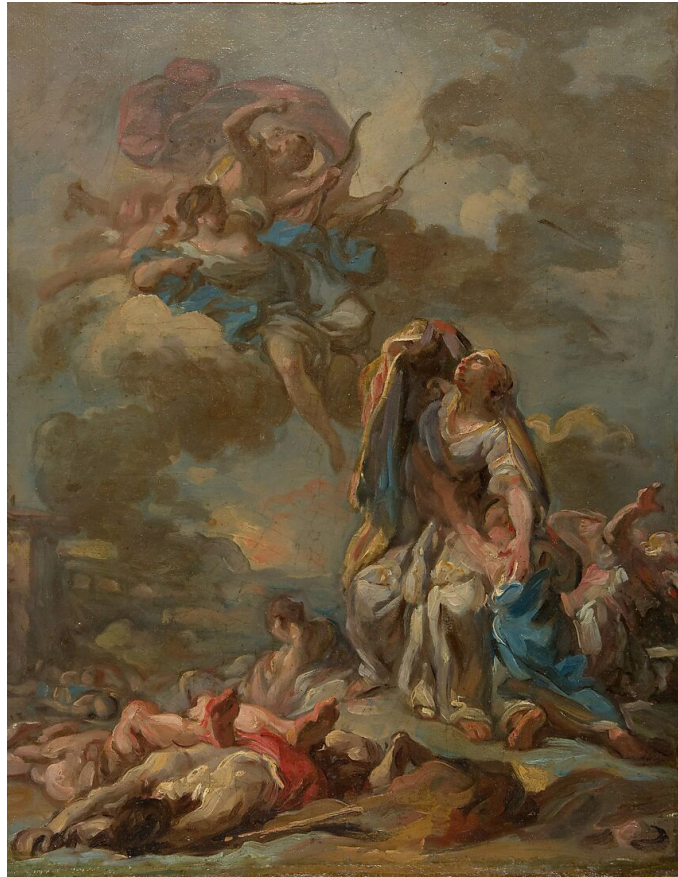


Figure 17. Pierre-Charles Jombert, *The Punishment of the Arrogant Niobe by Diana and Apollo*, 1772, oil on canvas mounted on board, 35,7x28,1 cm.
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

I have always wondered whether this might explain what I can't see as a formal borrowing but more in terms of a 'trace', of Jombert's own successful and well-articulated figure of the despairing but monumental Niobe as one element in the centrality of the detail of Brutus' wife Vitella, who famously dominates a painting while his 'central' character, Brutus, sits tense in the shadow of Rome. Might the configuration of the sheltering, defiant, but despairing Vitella, staring death in the face as she views the lictors bringing her dead sons back to the household, be related to Jombert's Niobe, a trace therefore of the continuing and surprising afterlife of the intensity and violence of David and

his fellow students' experience as competitors, friends and rivals at the hands of academic judges 16 years earlier. Certainly, David's figure of Brutus' wife, in her monumentality, her despair, defiance, sheltering and yet helpless in the face of death, seems to bear the trace and echo of Niobe, the proud, and uselessly defiant victim of Apollo and Diana (Fig. 18). For me, this might signal in a complex way the continuing psychic presence, at the moment of David's greatest success and public recognition, of the moment of intensity and even failure that left such a trace in his own life and work.



Figure 18. *Jacques-Louis David, The Lictors Bringing home to Brutus the bodies of his dead sons*, 1788–1789, oil on canvas, 323×422 cm. Paris: Louvre.

To argue for these kinds of 'traces' and their impact does of course depend on how much attention a historian is willing to ascribe to networks of biographical relationships, and how much we emphasize them in our analyses of works.

In all my examples, I am positing a kind of affective bind, a *communitas*, which however temporary is real and potent, which leaves its mark to a greater extent than we might suspect on works of art. The scratches and *incrustations* and traces I have been interested in are those that testify to significant human creative togetherness, whether joyous or tense, but also to psychic and affective intensity, not always of a positive kind and certainly never simple. Such an approach, I recognize, needs a psychoanalytic understanding of the life of communities, to the extent that we have to accept a psychic as well as material leftover of the contingent, ephemeral and temporary in the lives of artists (and of all humans).

Of course, Arlette Farge will probably not be happy that I've purloined her metaphors for art history, or that I have adapted her thoughtful discussion of a true social community for a much more circumscribed one of artists – or that I'm somewhat selectively only pointing to the material afterlives of intense ephemeral moments in well-known artists' works – this simply reflects my training and interests. I think that her remarks on the inscription of the emotional and communal heat of an event onto later social and cultural configuration has much wider application to an understanding of the formation of social groups, to knowledge and innovation transfer, to Revolution, and other larger concerns in the social sphere, and her work testifies to how subtle our understandings can be from fragmentary evidence of what constitutes a community, acts of insurrection, violence and solidarity (Farge 2017; Farge and Gutermann-Jacquet 2018).

In a special issue that evokes again and again a temporary, ephemeral intensity I have imaginatively explored how the bright, feverish and short-lived instants, these fevers, these moths-lives, might leave their trace not only in the archives that other scholars contributing to this volume have so brilliantly explored, but in unexpected traces in the permanent visual record. We need to use our imaginations and not just our archival skills, we need the kinds of collaborations that other colleagues' papers call for – and perhaps too, we need the spirit of Rivette's *Céline et Julie*, emerging dazed and confused from our encounter with a complex, temporary but heightened experience, but determined not only to go back again and again but to intervene, to resolve as well as to understand.

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