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Review Essay

Paradigms and Paranoia: How Modern Is the French Revolution?

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It is a truth, widely acknowledged, that the study of history has changed dramatically since the end of World War II. Cliometrics has come and gone; the new social history has become old hat; narrative has been revived. Structuralist approaches associated, at least in part, with the Annales school, have been superseded by the notionally poststructuralist turns of the linguistic screw; total history has yielded to micro history; we all recognize Eurocentrism when we see it. 1

How surprising it is, then, to note how remarkably constant textbooks have been in assessing the import of the French Revolution. From classics of Cold War "Western" historiography to recent efforts to write history within a global framework, the fundamental message remains the same: the Revolution of 1789 is the turning point of the modern world.¹ The wording may vary, but the substance does not. Said to mark "the beginning of modern history," the French Revolution is deemed "a decisive event in world history" that initiated a "century of rapid and tremendous change"; after the events of 1789–1815, "the clock could not really be set back."² Authors may emphasize different aspects of this modern period—political Liberalism, triumphant individualism, nationalistic militarism—but their accounts coincide in treating the revolution as an identifiable period of rapid, irreversible change. An evocative but, in this non-geological context, far from precise word—watershed—has provided one popular metaphor for conveying some sense of the revolution's relation to modernity.³ Pre-modern history, it is implied, flows away from the revolution to empty into some primordial sea of pre-history; modern history runs the opposite direction, to reach the shores of the present. 2

This underlying consistency contrasts sharply with the view, commonplace among specialists, that few fields have been as subject to revision and debate as has the study of the French Revolution. It is one contention of this essay that the considerable commotion over rival interpretations has obscured the extent to which the revolution in the study of the revolution has left a much grander historical narrative, about the characteristics and chronology of "modern" life, largely untouched. Repeated claims about methodological innovation and paradigm shifts have prevented us from seeing just how much our new interpretations owe to the old—and hence have condemned us to repeat what we do not fully understand. 3

If the past decade's review essays are to be believed, historians of the French Revolution are suffering badly from a disintegration of past certainties and a loss of intellectual direction. A senior scholar at a major research institution observes that "in the American academy . . . the present moment is not notably bright for the French Revolution."⁴ Even historians who have devoted their careers to the topic admit that 4

the field appears "in disarray" and that its sounds are those of "undeniable cacophony."⁵ The past "paradigm"—we are told—has collapsed and no new one has taken its place.⁶

Rumors of the past paradigm's death should lead us to ask: Was there a French Revolution?⁷ For if we take seriously the notion of "paradigm" developed in Thomas Kuhn's famous *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, then our answer to this question might well have to be "no." Or, rather, we might say that there had once been something we knew as the French Revolution, but there is no such object now. According to Kuhn, we could not merely say that we have changed our interpretation while the object remains the same. When we operate within a new paradigm, Kuhn claimed, we actually "work in a different world."⁸ The French chemist Antoine Lavoisier, for example, did not change the *interpretation* of "phlogiston"; he invalidated it as an object of study.⁹ We live in a world without phlogiston. If historians really have abandoned the past paradigm, then there may no longer be a "French Revolution" to analyze.

Most historians, however, do not grant Kuhn's account of paradigm shifts its full dizzying power.¹⁰ Moreover, I would argue that the old model—the "social interpretation" of the revolution most often associated with the name of Georges Lefebvre—has not been quite so fully eclipsed as some reviewers (or authors of books reviewed) might have us believe.¹¹ For even as that account of bourgeois/noble conflict and the transition to capitalism has been ostensibly rejected and largely repressed, it remains in some ways constitutive of the field. A paradigm, Kuhn stressed, was a teaching tool and a marker of group identity. And it has become an established convention for textbooks on the French Revolution to explain that the once-dominant Marxist "orthodoxy" has *now* been replaced by a "revisionist" approach.¹² Even though this epic struggle—the overthrow of social revolution (Marxists) by political revolution (Revisionists)—happened at least several decades ago (and, as Marx and Engels might say, "in the realm of pure thought"), it remains the standard point of entry into the field.¹³ It is old news, but its ritualistic retelling still frames many discussions.¹⁴ Scholars under the age of fifty are left to feel that the great battles were fought when they were schoolchildren; new graduate students, that the drama played itself out before they were toilet trained. Like Alexis de Tocqueville (born 1805) or Karl Marx (born 1818), looking back to the Revolution of 1789 from the vantage point of 1852, we may feel that our own generations' disputes have an ersatz or even comic-opera quality to them.¹⁵

In part, this is a story about the loss of faith. Like all such, it can easily be told as a tale of modern scientific progress—the overcoming of old superstitions and child-like beliefs. (Colin Lucas's oft-cited revisionist article, "Nobles, Bourgeois and the Origins of the French Revolution," opens with the words, "Once upon a time . . ."; both the Marxist outline of the revolution and its vanquishing by the Revisionists have been compared to fairy tales.¹⁶) However it is told, the insistent repetition of this narrative suggests that we have some unacknowledged investment in it, that the historiographical outline does some sort of necessary social or psychic work. It seems to me that it provides a sense of continuity and palliates the uncertainty of life outside the parameters of normal science. It prevents the loss of object, which would otherwise accompany the loss of paradigm.

An almost fetishistic invocation of the past fifty years' historiography—reduced to a straightforward fable of obdurate Marxists and perceptive Revisionists—has hence become a form (perhaps the key form) of self-definition for historians of the revolution. One of the angry young men who spearheaded the revisionist attack, George V. Taylor, confessed that, once the challenge had been successful, he and his colleagues faced "a somewhat painful void."¹⁷ Where once there had been class struggle, now there was a unified elite. Where once there had been the heroism of conflict, now there was the tedium of fiscality. Where once there had been the revolution, now there was an agrarian crisis compounded by an incompetent, atavistic "drift into bankruptcy."¹⁸

In the past decade, that "somewhat painful void" has begun to ache again. Many

worry that the seemingly miraculous effects of the linguistic turn have been merely analgesic; they prescribe a "return to the social" as a preventive against further pangs.¹⁹ I share much of this discomfort, especially the concern that we are again focusing overmuch on elites. William H. Sewell and Olwen Hufton have both written eloquently about the limitations of a cultural history that concentrates narrowly on those few whose engagements and attitudes can be so satisfyingly teased from readily available, richly evocative printed works. As Hufton stated ten years ago (when history as the study of representations was perhaps at its peak), the dangers of confusing "a dozen salonnières [and] a couple of courtesans" with the "actual experiences of real women" are considerable.²⁰ Empirically misleading, focus on such small numbers can also be politically worrying, since it intimates that most people's lives are uninteresting, insignificant, or irrelevant.

Nonetheless, I find the idea of a "return to the social" problematic. The void George Taylor confronted lay neither in the past nor in its residues and traces (which remained as multiple and opaque as ever) but in historians' strategies of understanding and appropriation.²¹ A category such as "class" (or, a decade later, "women") established contours of relevance and guided researchers' decisions about what material to reject and what to retain. In short, it told us what we were looking for and allowed us to conduct our search with a sense of purpose and energy. In a merely inverted form, it served this function for Taylor as well: his map of eighteenth-century French wealth was made significant precisely by its failure to coincide with the supposed social landscape of prerevolutionary France. To this day, historians have continued to skirt the conceptual void by treating the category "class" as something still in need of disproving. Sarah Maza, for example, has recently insisted on the importance of taking seriously "the Revolution's social vision of unanimity, predicated on the notion of an indivisible people"—thereby implying that there is a sort of "enormous condescension" in insisting that we, with the benefit of hindsight, can see the real social divisions to which the actors of the time were blind.²² According to the received version of historiographical wisdom, however, it has been at least twenty years since anyone seriously posited that the French Revolution was the work of a distinct and identifiable social class—against whom or what, then, is Maza arguing? Since, without a model to challenge, taking historical actors' own claims seriously can look and feel uncomfortably like naïve empiricism, Maza sets herself up to fight a battle that has already been won.

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The crucial point here is that the once-common social interpretation of the revolution and the now-dominant cultural one share many more features than are usually acknowledged. These features often appear in inverted, looking-glass form, but a "return to the social" would simply flip the structure over once again. Analysis would still remain within the same framework (much as the sand remains within an hourglass), and our preoccupation with certain categories, such as modernity and politics, would continue to subsist unchallenged.

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Take, for instance, the example of "politics," often said to be the distinctive contribution of the revisionist approach.²³ Such a claim misrepresents the place of politics in earlier scholarship, however. Even in Lefebvre's *Coming of the French Revolution* (that classic of the so-called "social" interpretation), the king's 1788 calling of the Estates-General and his later dismissal of Jacques Necker played major parts in mobilizing the "popular revolution."²⁴ Anglo-American scholarship of the 1950s and 1960s effectively attacked Lefebvre's identification of social class as the determinant of political action (hence Lefebvre's account of independent aristocratic, bourgeois, popular, and peasant revolutions), but it left politics as a defining characteristic of the revolution. Indeed, I would argue that *The Coming of the French Revolution* has become the current historiography's standard "Marxist" point of reference precisely because its version of Jacobino-Marxism gave such a central place to political life.²⁵ Nonetheless, it is usually François Furet's allusive, largely historiographical *Penser la Révolution française (Interpreting the French Revolution)*, published in French in 1978 and in English translation in 1981, that is usually congratulated for having put

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politics at the center of the revolution. What readers found in *Interpreting the French Revolution* can more accurately be described, however, as a new *definition* of politics (which was brought to bear on an already well-established narrative). Furet, as Claude Langlois has noted, recast "politics" to mean the vocabulary of political philosophy (rather than the expression of class interests, the rivalry of factions, or the micro-technologies of power). Hence, the revolution became a problem for intellectual history—a topic, as one reviewer enthusiastically endorsed, to be "grasped as thought."²⁶

Many of Furet's central assertions have entered into the broader disciplinary vernacular. Perhaps the most widely accepted of these is that "the void created by the rapid collapse of the monarchy's authority . . . opened a period when history was set adrift."²⁷ In a time when everything and anything seemed possible, Furet posited, France was gripped by a "frenzied collective preoccupation with power"²⁸—power that, fatally, under the influence of both absolutist doctrine and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "General Will," was understood as unitary and indivisible. For Furet, as for many historians writing today, the Bourbon monarchy simply withered away.²⁹ While conflict and the *necessity* of change drive both the social interpretation of the revolution and accounts of the shift from Marxist to revisionist analysis, conflict features in Furet's 1978 work only as an utterly paranoid obsession with plots.³⁰

According to Furet, the disintegration of the monarchy left power up for grabs. That power vacuum was filled by "the illusion of politics"—that is, by the illusion that everything in the world was amenable to political intervention. But if revolutionary consciousness trusted that all could be made anew through politics, it followed that everything could also be destroyed through politics. And so the belief in being able to change the world was born with an evil twin: the fear of counter-revolutionary conspiracy. "The idea of plot," Furet wrote, "was cut from the same cloth as revolutionary consciousness because it was an essential aspect of the basic nature of that consciousness: an imaginary discourse on power."³¹ From this point, Furet concluded that the Terror of the Year II (1793–1794) was already immanent in the optimism of 1789. Much about this analysis can be questioned: for instance, Furet's reference to a single revolutionary consciousness exemplified in Jacobinism, already potentially problematic in its Hegelianism, can allow only circular reasoning when it comes to the relation of that consciousness to the Jacobin Terror (which is said to typify it).

Nevertheless, in the years after its publication, *Penser la Révolution française* was taken up with huge enthusiasm, and its epigrammatic prose set the tone for much future scholarship. Two immensely influential North American historians, Keith Michael Baker and Lynn Hunt, contributed significantly to recasting the French Revolution in terms inspired by Furet.³² In prominent reviews of *Penser la Révolution française* and in the introductions to their own books, Hunt and Baker emphasized Furet's interpretation of the revolution as consciously willed political action directed at the complete transformation of society. If Hunt has been more ready than Baker to grant that something positive may have emerged from that attempt, they both have insisted on the French Revolution's decisive role in shaping modern political culture. If Baker and Hunt have elaborated their arguments within slightly different chronologies (Baker focusing on the disaggregation of absolutist discourse in the 1750s–1780s, Hunt exploring the ongoing transformations of the 1790s), they both have nonetheless accepted and popularized the idea of the monarchy's abrupt disintegration in the summer of 1789. If Baker's focus on printed, recognizably political or philosophical texts has generally made for more circumscribed discussion than that arising from Hunt's claim that revolutionary "politics did not take place in a defined sphere," they both have redirected historians' attention toward analyzing public rhetorics of change (and away from measuring its private realizations).³³

In the past fifteen years, historians of the revolution have brought these elements of Furet's analysis into a fruitful, if not always easy, conversation with Jürgen Habermas's conceptualization of the "public sphere."³⁴ Habermas, a German philosopher and student of the Frankfurt school, argued in his 1962 *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (published in English in 1989 and described by Keith Baker as "an indispensable work") that the transition to the modern period had been characterized

by the restructuring of public life.³⁵ The late seventeenth-century growth of a literate and autonomous bourgeoisie, Habermas contended, had led to the emergence of a form of public life distinct from the monarchical spectacle of court life: a "bourgeois public sphere" structured by discussion and debate among rational individuals. This public "sphere" was not necessarily localized in public spaces: it existed anywhere ideas might be exchanged among putatively equal individuals, from the columns of newspapers to the salons of aristocratic society hostesses. Combined with Furet's account of the revolution as a transformation of political discourse, Habermas's non-spatialized public encouraged historians to understand the "modern" world as one made primarily through language.

A number of recent books indicate that agendas derived from Furet and Habermas, Baker and Hunt, remain largely, though not exclusively, dominant.³⁶ From Sophia Rosenfeld's discussion of sign languages to Jon Cowans's dissection of public opinion and David A. Bell's analysis of emergent nationalism, the ostensible topics of recent monographs are as notably diverse as the underlying approach is uniform. Drawing on both canonical and obscure eighteenth-century texts, these authors attempt to demonstrate the emergence of revolutionary political culture (characterized by its intolerance of difference and intensified claims for power) from various strands of Late Enlightenment thought. If a few authors, such as Darrin McMahon and James Livesey, have attempted to break down the idea of a single, unitary revolutionary culture (either as reality or ideal), many others have been more inclined to extend the claims made for its impact. Carla Hesse hence argues that the revolution invented the modern writer; Joan Landes, that the encounter with nationalist iconography transformed individual subjectivity.³⁷ 17

It is worth remarking that another similarity, perhaps less immediately obvious, unites these books as well: routine, casual references to psychological factors such as obsession, desire, or fear. Landes and Hesse address these issues directly, but even those authors less committed to the idea that the revolution dramatically transformed human subjectivity make surprisingly frequent reference to emotional states. Cowans writes of pamphleteers' "manic-depressive outlook"; Rosenfeld finds revolutionaries betraying their "greatest fears."³⁸ This is not pure coincidence. Rather, assumptions about psychic states have served as unacknowledged props for many recent studies of the French Revolution. If a few books—most notably, Lynn Hunt's *Family Romance of the French Revolution* and William Reddy's very recent *The Navigation of Feeling*—have explicitly addressed the revolution in these terms, they have met with only ambivalent reactions.³⁹ Yet the pervasiveness of such tropes—and the accompanying tendency to personify abstractions (such as "culture" or "the revolution") and attribute feelings to them—suggests that we need to engage with this topic in a direct and sustained fashion. For such diagnoses have proven almost as common as politics in the revisionist version of the revolution. 18

"Grasped as thought," the revolution is shadowed by irrational impulses. The widespread perception that the French monarchy simply "shuffled toward collapse"⁴⁰ has made the violence of the 1790s increasingly inexplicable except by reference to "instincts," "obsessions," or other far from rational (probably far from conscious) factors. Even the most careful historians often allow the vocabulary of mental illness or animality to evoke the mood of France in this period.⁴¹ So pervasive has this schema become that Timothy Tackett has devoted a prominent article to arguing the proposition, formerly self-evident, that it probably isn't paranoia if there really are people out to get you.⁴² 19

François Furet's reference to a collective "frenzy" (*délire*, in French) comes close to 20 echoing the arch-Conservative (and largely discredited) nineteenth-century historian, Hippolyte Taine, who described the Paris crowds of summer 1789 as "like a tame elephant suddenly become wild again . . . [I]n future it will move along as it pleases, freed from control, and abandoned to its own feelings, instincts, and appetites."⁴³ Nonetheless, and under multiple influences, Furet's "imaginary discourse on

power" (and its necessarily accompanying paranoia) has been comfortably integrated within most analyses of "revolutionary political culture." As a culture and not as chaos, this mad illusion has had explanatory as well as descriptive force. Furet's emphasis on a *collective* frenzy has spared students any further effort to derive distinct political attitudes from particular social situations (welcome absolution in the face of the classic articles by Elizabeth Eisenstein, Colin Lucas, and George Taylor, all of which convincingly demonstrated the absence of any narrowly class-based revolutionary dynamic).⁴⁴ Moreover, the definition of the revolution as politics, and of politics as the attempt to speak from a position of sovereignty, freed historians of any need to think about all the people who never came near that position. In a stroke, Richard Cobb, whose detailed portrayals of colorful individuals made him the "Shakespeare" of the revolution, was deleted from the historiography.⁴⁵

In short, and with a few notable exceptions, the French Revolution has become about politics conceived primarily in terms of the 600–1,000 men who served at any one time in the national political body.⁴⁶ Tackett's 1996 *Becoming a Revolutionary* took a prosopographical approach to these men, but most other work has been notably unconcerned with them as individuals.⁴⁷ Instead, they figure as semi-delirious vehicles of internally coherent political discourses, spokesmen easily introduced with a single-word appositive (for example, Jacobin or Feuillant). If the caricatured social interpretation of the revolution left these men no option other than the mechanical expression of their class interests, the current mode of analysis allows them little more individual agency. Trapped within a peculiarly monolithic understanding of "political culture" as the product of a finite number of discourses, it compensates for its failures of explanation with the vocabulary of madness.⁴⁸

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Several recent studies focus on the ideals and expectations that revolutionary actors brought into political life from their broader cultural milieu. Combining Keith Baker's focus on the final decades of absolutism with Lynn Hunt's more broadly thematic research strategies, Sophia Rosenfeld and David A. Bell cast new light on how revolutionary culture's purported radical break with the past was itself a product of that past. Rosenfeld, in her meticulous *A Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France*, argues for tracing revolutionary culture's "linguistic paranoia" to its educated protagonists' basic epistemological assumptions.⁴⁹ Participants in a learned culture that idealized semiotic transparency, the men of the revolution's national assemblies treated language itself as both a cause of France's past problems and a tool for present regeneration.⁵⁰ Central to this perception, Rosenfeld explains, was their faith that current disputes were due only to the unnecessary imprecision of the French language. Words were used in ways they should not be: this constituted the "abuse of words" and was repeatedly deplored by philosophes and revolutionaries alike.⁵¹ "Luxury," for example, might refer both to an extensive retinue of servants and to a single clean pocket-handkerchief.⁵² An intolerable degree of ambiguity therefore attached to the word. For Rosenfeld's revolutionaries, resolving this uncertainty was a vital matter for a two-pronged pedagogical politics: language reform, such that all abused words would be replaced with a new sign that could not be misused (recently created sign languages for the deaf, the use of pantomime in theaters, and evidence from faraway cultures were all thought to provide examples of sign systems that could not be twisted) and education, such that people would be taught the true meaning of words.

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Rosenfeld has certainly identified a real preoccupation; one does not have to read very many volumes of the *Archives parlementaires* to notice the prevalent concern with the interpretation of language.⁵³ Her argument allows a nuanced understanding of the Jacobins' "terroristic" language policy: their desire to eradicate all local dialects derived not from a pathological rejection of difference per se but from a perception of *linguistic* difference (in particular) as the source of disagreement. As Rosenfeld highlights, this understanding also put actively political men in a paradoxical

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situation—the more they talked and wrote about implementing linguistic harmony, the more their own oratory was potentially guilty of violating it.

Like Rosenfeld's book, Bell's *Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680–1800* considers Jacobin language policy in order to discern its roots in events and ideas of earlier decades.⁵⁴ In this major work, Bell challenges the widespread belief that nationalism sprang from nothing in the course of the revolutionary wars. While insisting that modern nationalism did not exist before the French Revolution, he nonetheless argues that its constitutive elements emerged in the course of a series of eighteenth-century crises. For Bell, the revolutionaries both carried through a nationalist project begun by the absolutist state and completely transformed it.

Picking up Benedict Anderson's suggestion that nationalism only became thinkable with the decline of world religions and their sacred languages, Bell emphasizes the specifically "terrestrial" nature of the nation's claims.⁵⁵ Sometime in the late seventeenth century, according to Bell, God withdrew into His own sphere, leaving humans to work out their own affairs.⁵⁶ People did not necessarily become less religious, Bell intimates, but they neither wanted nor expected divine intervention on a regular basis. If they felt differently about God, their understanding of themselves changed as well: "the French increasingly defined themselves not as Catholics, or subjects, but as members of a *société, public, nation* or *patrie*."⁵⁷ Yet, and this is what makes Bell's argument so elegant, it was largely the monarchy itself, using means learned in the religious wars of the previous centuries, that taught the French people to define themselves as neither Catholics nor loyal subjects. What the monarchy produced above all, it would seem, was its own gravediggers.

For Bell, as for many other scholars working today, a series of mid-century crises provoked the monarchy into reforms and propaganda campaigns—in this case, actively soliciting the love (and financial support) of its subjects.⁵⁸ By encouraging the "cult" of great Frenchmen, for example, the monarchy became involved in the ongoing Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, trying to turn French readers from the faraway heroes of Rome and Athens toward the examples set by their own countrymen.⁵⁹ In multi-volume biographies of great Frenchmen, as in the pamphlets, plays, and poems produced during the Seven Years' War, writers used the words *nation* and *patrie* with increasing frequency. They did so, however, in far from uniform ways. Bell insists that the eighteenth century did not produce a single ideology of nationalism that then fed into, or caused, the revolution. Instead, many different ideas about the nation circulated in 1789 as state authority "disappear[ed] into a vacuum."⁶⁰ Facing this void, revolutionaries both feared that France was not currently a nation and believed they could make it one. It is this last notion (the possibility of building a nation through political will alone) that Bell sees as the revolution's signal contribution to modern nationalism.⁶¹

With their discussions of popular plays and ballet treatises, Bell and Rosenfeld have pushed the analysis of eighteenth-century culture far beyond any realm that might be narrowly delimited as political, only then to argue for their themes' eventual centrality to the Paris-based politics of 1789–1794. They bring new material to bear on old questions, without asking whether the questions remain valid in light of it. Despite their different emphases, these two talented historians have written strikingly similar books. Both begin by analyzing a text by the Protestant pastor turned revolutionary, Jean-Paul Rabaut de Saint Etienne. Both work largely with print materials, though not with canonical sources. Both look at institutions of eighteenth-century learned life. Both perceive revolutionary political culture as heavily pedagogical—best understood as an effort to "regenerate" the population.⁶² For their purposes, plans merely debated and those actually implemented are equally significant, since both reveal the attitudes of those who participated in public discussion.

In short, Bell and Rosenfeld have much to tell us about schemes to involve all French people in the revolution but far less to say about the actual execution or effect of those projects. Thus the French Revolution is grasped as mission statement. Rosenfeld seems uneasy at so delimiting it, and writes that "the revolutionary *querelle des mots* was, in large part, imposed by educated participants upon an underlying social, economic, and ideological struggle."⁶³ "The Revolution" is always somewhat

offstage in her book, which has thereby a vague Chekhovian quality: major events happen behind the scenes or in the wings, and the slightly cerebral drama is provided by chattering, albeit mildly mournful, elites. In contrast, Bell implies that the creation of modern nationalism *was* the revolution, but his focus on initiatives from above leaves that world-historical event strangely under-peopled. At points, this proves especially problematic for his analysis, since Bell makes numerous claims about what "the French" did, or did not, do. For example, based on his reading of the extensive propaganda produced during the Seven Years' War, Bell asserts, "the French had grown increasingly accustomed to seeing themselves as a nation."⁶⁴ Yet while he effectively demonstrates that these texts cast the war as one between nations (and not between dynasties), he also insists on the government's central role in sponsoring this literature. That these writings implied that "the French" *ought* to think of themselves as a nation is clear. That they allow us to draw the conclusion that "the French" actually did so is far less evident.⁶⁵

Preempting any similar criticisms, Jon Cowans opens his discussion of revolutionary "public opinion" by specifically stating that he is not concerned with what ordinary people thought. Cowans frames his book with reference to the methodological "linguistic turn," arguing that since "public opinion" was a rhetorical device used within "the arenas of political power," the historian is under no obligation to look for its referent outside those venues.⁶⁶ His focus in *To Speak for the People: Public Opinion and the Problem of Legitimacy in the French Revolution* is therefore on how political actors (narrowly defined) appealed to the *idea* of public opinion in order to legitimate their own actions. Based on extensive reading of printed political debates, he finds that speakers actually used the words "public" and "opinion" in myriad, largely contradictory, ways. Although his account lacks the rich detail of Bell's work, Cowans, too, is concerned to trace the eighteenth-century emergence of a new "vocabulary of human relations."⁶⁷ But whereas Bell treats the tensions and discrepancies within this novel language as effectively the motor of history itself, Cowans expresses concern (verging at times on dismay) as he discovers that revolutionaries mixed concepts and concocted a "hopelessly muddled lexicon."⁶⁸

In comparison with Bell's and Rosenfeld's carefully nuanced arguments, Cowans's thesis appears rather poorly conceived. Denouncing, in effect, a colossal "abuse of words," Cowans holds out the possibility that the revolution might have been very different had only the protagonists paid sufficient attention to defining their terms. "Unfortunately" (as Cowans very often writes), they did not.⁶⁹ Instead, they "failed to work out common definitions."⁷⁰ Cowans is certainly correct to stress the varied perspectives among members of the Constituent Assembly or National Convention. Yet he barely considers the possibility that the deputies' "failure" to develop a more precise vocabulary stemmed from (or, perhaps, constituted) very real disagreements among them. Cowans inventories a number of irreconcilable statements—about sovereignty, about public opinion, about the people—not to show their importance or effects but to dismiss them as poorly thought-out assertions deployed in the course of petty, but life-threatening, factional politics. There may be something to this; given the extraordinarily long hours that the members of France's national political bodies spent together in meetings, it would be difficult to imagine them animated solely by clear thought and generous fellow-feeling. But since Cowans gives us too little indication of what these men were endeavoring to do, we have no real sense of how or why the political elite was so deeply and bitterly divided. When he insists that barely concealed violence directed the revolution, we are left to wonder at the sources of this violence.

By his conclusion, therefore, Cowans has backed himself into a position where he is largely unable to explain the disagreements he has described. Alluding to "a clash of more or less class-based political cultures at the time," Cowans ends up turning the linguistic screw almost a full 360 degrees, returning us to revolutionary violence as the product of class conflict.⁷¹ He has to do this, I think, because his mode of analysis does not allow engagement with the questions of why people disagree or use terms differently. Much recent work of politico-cultural history stumbles on the same question: Why do particular discourses become especially meaningful to certain individuals? Though unsubstantiated, Cowans's concluding suggestion about class-based political cultures demonstrates a refreshing interest in causality coming at the

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end of a book in which the French "visceral fear of pluralism" otherwise has to carry most of the explanatory weight.⁷²

In contrast, Darrin McMahon's engaging *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* takes direct issue with arguments that privilege the revolutionaries' fears, instincts, or paranoia. For McMahon, historians' perspective on the revolution and the Enlightenment has been warped by their general distaste for opponents of both. McMahon argues emphatically that a notion of "the" Enlightenment, as a unified project or sect, first developed among those who dreaded the very possibility. By the 1770s, a specific worldview, an "anti-*philosophe* discourse," united the different individuals who opposed what we now know as "the Enlightenment." Opposition to the Enlightenment, McMahon writes, "was first and foremost French and first and foremost religious."⁷³ Like much recent work, McMahon's book proposes that Peter Gay's Enlightenment of "modern paganism" was much more a time of deeply felt religious anxiety than an era of inevitable, gradual secularization.⁷⁴ Mobilized by what they perceived to be a coherent *philosophe* mission to encourage greed, depravity, and religious dissent, clerics and others were already warning of disaster in the 1780s. According to McMahon, the outbreak of the revolution confirmed their two most cherished beliefs: that a philosophical conspiracy was intentionally undermining the regime and that this conspiracy's actions could only result in bloodshed and terror.

On first consideration, McMahon has cleverly reversed Furet's model: not the revolutionaries, but their opponents, are shown to be obsessed with plots. Yet McMahon has actually done more than simply flip Furet's account—and this is his book's real contribution. By showing that ideological opposition to the revolution really did exist within France from the beginning (if not before), he effectively challenges the notion of a cohesive "Old Regime" that simply collapsed sometime on or about 1788. By insisting on a much longer chronology of contestation, of which the 1790s are only one decade, he also undermines the thesis of a specifically revolutionary paranoia—no one in his book has a monopoly on imagining plots, or on denouncing them.

If McMahon has returned a welcome, if somewhat schematic, sense of conflict to our understanding of this period, James Livesey wants to restore human agency. Livesey introduces his bold book, *Making Democracy in the French Revolution*, as a deliberate move away from disembodied discourses and toward identifiable human actors. In tones of barely concealed exasperation, he argues for shifting our emphasis from analyzing discourses of sovereignty to understanding the institutionalization of new political principles.⁷⁵ According to Livesey, sovereignty may have been the crucial issue for absolutist politics, but it was not that for the revolution, which worked instead to elaborate legitimacy and democracy. For Livesey, that is, revolutionary political culture, at least as of the 1792 declaration of a republic, was fundamentally different from that which preceded it. Ideas from the past did not "rush in" to fill the vacuum left by the monarchy's disappearance precisely because the state did not collapse overnight (or, perhaps, ever).⁷⁶ Revolutionary republicanism was something new, he asserts, and we therefore cannot understand it by looking solely at pamphlets written in 1789 or speeches given in 1794. Since he sees republicanism continuing to develop and change even after the Ninth of Thermidor (a date that most other recent historians treat as signaling a retreat from "The Revolution"), Livesey demands that we make a chronological transposition, to the years of the Directory.⁷⁷ Moreover, and in the context of these particular books, especially strikingly, Livesey also effects a regional and social shift from the political culture of national elites to that of the peasantry.⁷⁸ His question is: how did the peasants get to be modern?

By defining peasant modernity as participation in "commercial republicanism," however, Livesey undermines his own methodological stance. Despite his repeated strictures on "discourse," Livesey understands republicanism as a language, a set of conceptual tools with which peasants reworked their relationships to each other and to the state. Directorial republicans are hence important chiefly for the vocabulary they "bequeathed" to nineteenth-century France. This may not be a bad way of thinking about republicanism—or, indeed, perhaps any other *ism*—but how does the diffusion of philosophies restore agency to ordinary individuals? Moreover, to prove his case,

Livesey would have to follow McMahan's lead and carry his analysis well into the nineteenth century, showing us peasants who wrote the language of commercial republicanism spontaneously and participated in modern democratic institutions as a result.⁷⁹

Livesey's book underscores just how difficult it is at this juncture for historians of 36 eighteenth-century France to both engage with recent scholarship and envision individual human agency, even when that is their avowed intent. Since the "demise" of the old paradigm, historians of the revolution (at least as much as French people of the 1790s) seem to lack the conceptual vocabulary to do what they want. Cowans wants to prove that divergent ideas about public opinion drove an ongoing legitimation crisis, but he ends up giving almost explanatory force to something very like class conflict. Bell wants to show how "the French began to think like nationalists," but largely recounts plans to persuade them to do so. And Livesey wants to demonstrate the revolution transforming ordinary people's daily lives, but he instead shows a limited number of men developing an ideology of commercial republicanism. In all cases, the absence of any way to explain *how* certain discourses, ideas, or texts become especially meaningful to particular individuals leaves us lurching from rational choice (Cowans hints that the revolutionaries could have opted for inclusive, English-style, parliamentary monarchy, if only they had so chosen) to irrational fears.

Like Livesey's book, Carla Hesse's *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women 37 Became Modern* manifests many historians' growing uneasiness with the study of representations and discourses alone. In her crucial second chapter, Hesse argues against those historians who have treated transformations in political language as the basis for, and evidence of, women's exclusion from modern public life.⁸⁰ Based on extensive bibliographical research, Hesse finds that the records for the 1790s show little sign of women being marginalized. Instead, there was a remarkable four-fold increase in the number of women who had at least one work in print.⁸¹ Women published in all major French cities and in all genres; their writings ranged fully across the social and political spectrum.

In the following chapters, Hesse moves quickly through nineteenth and twentieth-century 38 debates on intellectual property rights and deftly examines the careers of individual women, including Louise de Kéralio, Isabelle de Charrière, and Germaine de Staël. Upon first consideration, it may seem surprising that *The Other Enlightenment* actually traces a very long lineage of women writers that culminates with Simone de Beauvoir and Natalie Sarraute (whom Hesse interviewed). An Enlightenment that continued until sometime in the twentieth century initially seems a provocative challenge to periodization. Gone are the *Idéologues* as the "last generation" of the Enlightenment; gone, too, is the rarely helpful dichotomy between Enlightenment reason and Romantic sentiment. Yet, on further reflection, it becomes evident that "Enlightenment" has simply become a synonym for "modernity."

Throughout her concise book, Hesse develops an argument about the special form 39 of women's subjectivity in modern France. Inheritors of both Enlightenment ideals of individual moral autonomy and post-revolution constraints on their personal freedoms, French women had to be Kantian subjects. That is, they had to be subjects, like those so famously described in Immanuel Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" who would "argue about what you will, as much as you will. Only obey."⁸² This, Hesse insists, was as "modern" a form of selfhood as any man's, but it was a more complex process, one creating "a doubled form of self."⁸³ She is making big claims here, both about modernity and about French women. Hesse engages explicitly with the word "modern" and asserts, "Modernity, most fundamentally, is the consciousness of oneself as self-creating."⁸⁴ This consciousness, she argues, is neither immanent nor transhistorical. Instead, Hesse describes it emerging at a fairly specific time, in a fairly specific place, thanks to the honing of "very specific intellectual skills"—writing chief among them.⁸⁵ The late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century expansion of commercial print culture meant increasing opportunities for "private selves to transform

themselves into public ones" (thereby becoming modern).

Hesse's privileging of "commercial print culture" has well-established historiographical antecedents.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, her insistence on writing's role in defining modern—as opposed to traditional, ancient, or archaic—life uncomfortably reinscribes a whole series of dichotomies that have featured prominently in European projects of domination. As Walter Mignolo has recently shown, assertions about the primitive, pre-modern, quality of non-literate individuals (and non-alphabetic cultures) had been commonplaces of imperial expansion since the sixteenth century.⁸⁷ Although Rosenfeld shows us reformers reversing the value put on "primitive" and "modern" signs—praising the purity and simplicity of the first, for instance—she also notes that Thermidorean and Directorial leaders quickly rejected this reevaluation as fantastical. The postrevolutionary "political-linguistic imaginary," Rosenfeld argues, differentiated civilization from barbarism on the basis that the former required facility with an established system of signs and laws. *The Other Enlightenment* operates fully from within this imaginary.

Hesse's book might more aptly be subtitled "How French Women *Writers* Became Modern." Her "Other Enlightenment" is largely another High Enlightenment of successful intellectuals and noted literati, one made by women whose various social circles included Benjamin Constant, Immanuel Kant, and Jean-Paul Sartre. These well-documented writers make for engaging case studies, but were they really the only women to be consciously self-creating? Clare Crowston's work on seventeenth and eighteenth-century seamstresses indicates otherwise. She argues that mistress seamstresses—members of by far the largest and most important exclusively female trade guild—had considerable control over their own lives, and faced a legal "combination of privilege and constraint" very much comparable to the Kantian subject position of Hesse's writers.⁸⁸ Moreover, they did so throughout the eighteenth century—does this mean that dressmakers became "modern" before novelists?

The self-consciously self-aware individual as the hallmark of modernity is not, itself, a novel formulation—although it interestingly suggests that the "New Cultural History" may owe more to Jacob Burckhardt's *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860) than is usually allowed.⁸⁹ Hesse's use of this concept (like Livesey's claims about peasants, McMahan's about conservatives, and Bell's about nationalism) suggests more fundamentally that something like a real paradigm shift may be subtly at work. It seems that the analytic category "the French Revolution" has in some ways been supplanted by the coming of modernity: attention is now concentrated on some aspect of the eighteenth century (often identified in an Enlightenment text) that can be labeled modern.⁹⁰ This move is appealing—"modern" features in the subtitle of my own book as well—but we displace our frame of reference from the French Revolution to the modern eighteenth century at our own risk. The losses may be both empirical and conceptual.

The most obvious danger is that of overlooking, denying, or assimilating all those aspects of eighteenth-century history that are not easily recognized as modern. If we follow Hesse, should we simply ignore—or leave for old-fashioned demographic historians—the many women who were illiterate, or even those who read but did not write? Emphasizing eighteenth-century "modernity" makes cities more important than the countryside—even though France's population remained predominantly rural until the 1930s. It makes nationalism more vibrant than individuals' other concerns—even though Bell himself notes that many of the aims he attributes to the First Republic were only carried out by the Third. In short, looking for what is modern about the eighteenth century tends to privilege history's "winners"—ideas, names, institutions, or ideologies that are still familiar today. McMahan, to his credit, does not do this, but at the price of striking hollow notes in his repeated insistence on the modernity of his protagonists. By their "very fundamentalism—itsself a modern phenomenon," by their new-fangled defense of "tradition," by their use of modern media, and by their "bipolar, Right-Left model of politics"—in all these ways (and more!) the enemies of the Enlightenment were already modern, long before the outbreak of the revolution.⁹¹

What does "modern" mean here, though?⁹² Does it have any real analytic power, or does it simply insist on the relevance of one's scholarship to today's world (for the sake of students, publishers, and the job market)? If women, republicanism, and

Conservatives all became modern at the same time, do we now have a significant new way of thinking about the *relation* of politics to gender roles? That is, do these various analyses work together meaningfully; can they be brought together with reference to anything other than chronology? Or are they simply the traces of an older, undigested historiography that identified this period as modernity's watershed?⁹³ "Modernity" today—like "revolution" for earlier generations—is a theoretical, often implicitly political, construction that appeals to historians because it insists on diachrony. Arguments about the coming of modernity inevitably rely, however subtly, on some greater narrative of historical transformation—at the very least, they require a binary distinction of modern and non- (or "pre") modern. Bruno Latour has argued that the arbitrary making of that distinction (the categorizing of ancients and moderns) *is* what makes modernity. In other words, by continuing to identify certain features of the past as "modern," we may ensure or reinforce our own participation in what Latour calls "the Modern Constitution," but we learn precious little about the eighteenth century or the French Revolution.⁹⁴

Hesse's analysis characterizes modernity as a new sort of human subjectivity. Joan Landes, in *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France*, develops a similar perspective. For her, the revolutionary representation of France as a beautiful woman had consequences far beyond the simple reworking of a classical allegorical tradition.⁹⁵ By figuring the nation as a desirable young woman, Landes argues, artists working in both elite and popular traditions made it possible for men to fall in love with France, to form a connection to the new political culture that was more passionate than cerebral.⁹⁶ At the same time, this crucial aspect of revolutionary iconography disguised the brutal ways in which this same culture denied women access to political, public life. It was, in Landes's phrase, "a stunning masquerade."⁹⁷ 45

Landes (like Livesey and Hesse) frames her book as a response, and partial rebuttal, to the discursive emphasis in recent scholarship. Acknowledging that her first book shared this focus, she wants now to move beyond the textual to the visual. Yet this move, at least as she executes it, is not without its problems. For Landes treats prints, caricatures, and paintings as, in her words, "complex vehicles for the communication of critical ideas"⁹⁸—that is, as texts to be decoded. This book substitutes an "iconic" emphasis for the "discursive" found in many others, but the message (whether told in words or conveyed by pictures) is the same: a single overbearing "logic" governed the revolution and transformed individuals' senses of themselves. 46

Landes makes some suggestive points, and she is to be commended for trying to understand how a particular discourse might have become especially meaningful, even enjoyable, for ordinary French men. Edmund Burke, ranting against the revolution, declared, "To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely," and Landes proposes that this lesson was not lost on the French.⁹⁹ Yet, by leaving the familiar premise of a governing revolutionary "logic" largely unquestioned, she makes it very difficult to identify the dynamics at work among human beings. Throughout her slim book, we get no sense of individual historical actors (be they artists or engravers, print sellers or print buyers) and hence very little real sense of the hotly debated struggle over meanings that Landes asserts characterized the revolutionary era.¹⁰⁰ There may indeed have been different ways of responding to images (and, surely, to written works as well), but since Landes barely shows us anyone responding to anything whatsoever, the existence of competing interpretations is something we must take on faith. Landes does at least remind us that the French Revolution may well have had major consequences for people who never set foot in the National Convention's meeting halls, but her effort to link images and individuals remains purely speculative. Prescriptive literature, derived predictably enough from the works of Rousseau, said that men *ought* to love their country, but Landes gives us no indication of individual republicans actually doing so. If images of half-naked, buxom France had decorated 47

the bedrooms of adolescent boys (or, perhaps even more indicative, if such images had been hidden away in those bedrooms), then Landes would have an extraordinarily compelling case here. Instead, she has "wild" analysis.¹⁰¹

Landes borrows loosely from art history and psychoanalysis but in a largely indiscriminate fashion. She barely discusses her cover image's overwhelmingly Christian iconography and oddly finds it relevant to note, in commenting on a 1794 print (sold in Paris), that the turtle "in Nigeria . . . is an emblem of lubricity."¹⁰² Her weak—and actually disavowed—use of psychoanalysis is especially disappointing, as it might, in a more sophisticated form, offer ways of effectively linking desire and discourse, subjectivity and socialization. Moreover, sustained engagement with psychoanalysis would allow more direct confrontation with the recent historiography's recourse to languages of mental suffering in describing the revolution.¹⁰³

Such an engagement would not be without its own difficulties, of course. Like any explicitly formulated body of theoretical knowledge, psychoanalysis is prone to being devoured whole and somewhat unthinkingly. It can be used to deny historical specificity, and to restate the blindingly obvious in a jargon-heavy vocabulary. In making use of it, we would need to attend both to how an established body of theory may alter our readings of source materials and how the latter may call for a rewriting of the former. We would also need to be aware of the development of multiple, competing schools of psychoanalysis; perhaps, for example, considering whether sibling rivalry, at least as much as fraternal camaraderie, needs to enter into our thinking about the revolution.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, the great strength of psychoanalysis at this juncture is that it offers an interpretive strategy premised on being able to work with and through language—it is, after all, a *talking* cure—in order to gain access to, and have effects on, something extralinguistic (which can never be known directly). Moreover, Slavoj Žižek's discussion of ideological structures as the "obscene imposition of enjoyment" might allow us to think more fruitfully about how discourses are internalized and perpetuated.¹⁰⁵

Ewa Lajer-Burcharth's *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror* makes suggestive, if not always fully effective, use of psychoanalysis.¹⁰⁶ The centerpiece of this book—a remarkable extended analysis of David's *Sabine Women* (1799)—demonstrates just how much can be gained from considering cultural artifacts within the multiple contexts of their production, distribution, and exhibition (or consumption). With considerable sophistication, Lajer-Burcharth weaves together themes that run (singly) through Livesey's, Hesse's, and Landes's books. In exhibiting the painting alone and by charging an admission fee, David took up the ideals of commercial republicanism and used them to support his own claims about the dignity of art. At the same time, by insisting on the artist's autonomy—both stylistic and economic—David continued to distance himself from his earlier intimate involvement with republican politics. (During the Year II, he had served as a member of the Committee of General Security and was closely associated with Robespierre.) By placing a large, freestanding mirror (a *psyché* in French) opposite the painting, David invited viewers to compare themselves to the bodies depicted in the painting—a process made all the more visually compelling by the fashion for women's dresses modeled on those of Antiquity.¹⁰⁷

Lajer-Burcharth's analysis operates on numerous levels simultaneously, convincingly demonstrating transformations in David's artistic practice and sense of self as it argues for fashion (and mirrors) as central tools of psychic restructuring among French men and women in the second half of the 1790s. As a study of David, his colleagues, and his students, Lajer-Burcharth's book is difficult to fault. The discussion becomes more forced, however, when she turns to a more general discussion of Directorial elites (whose supposed fascination with their reflections she relates to Jacques Lacan's famous discussion of the mirror-stage formation of the Imaginary).¹⁰⁸ Psychoanalysis may provide tools for thinking about individuals, especially such comparatively well-documented ones as David, but can it inform our consideration of faceless, nameless groups? (Much of Lajer-Burcharth's evidence for post-Thermidorean narcissism comes from caricatures and fashion plates, and hence also tells us primarily about artists.) David's explicit and extensive political involvements make Lajer-Burcharth's focus on the shock of life post-Thermidor

legitimate—but how could we even begin to fathom whether the revolution had comparable effects on other subjectivities? Landes, of course, asserts that it did, but she neither substantiates her claims effectively nor distinguishes the consequences of various moments in the revolution.

Are we left, then, with a revolution (and a modernity) only of the few? Livesey's analysis of peasant petitions does suggest something like popular involvement, but all the other books reviewed here either deliberately focus on revolutionary elites or are unconcerned with documenting the wider reception of the representations they analyze. This is one consequence of the narrow—and, in many senses, quite sterile—way in which we have come to understand "the political" and how it has guided the reconfiguration of the field. If English social history was once, in G. M. Trevelyan's famous phrase, "history with the politics left out," French cultural history—at least of the revolutionary period—has become nearly the opposite. Even Landes and Lajer-Burcharth both privilege changes in political structures (the shift from subject to citizen, the imperative of ending the Terror), thereby implying that other dramatic transformations—such as the legalization of divorce or the disintegration of family fortunes—had no effects on how people felt about themselves and the world they inhabited.¹⁰⁹

Gwynne Lewis and Steven Kaplan, among others, have lamented that François Furet's focus on the political has led to a bracketing of "the social."¹¹⁰ This, it seems to me, is an inadequate way of describing what has happened. For, as Rosenfeld and Bell have commented, historians trained in the 1980s and 1990s found Furet's redefinition of the French Revolution (as a series of claims about power) especially appealing because it fit so snugly with the granting of autonomy to culture, with the realization that political beliefs could not be predictably derived from social positions.¹¹¹ Moreover, many historians in the past two decades have come to see "social position" as *itself* a series of claims enunciated (more or less intentionally) within various domains and discourses.

It is for the latter reason that I find calls for a "return to the social" simplistic. I fully share the sense that history should not consist of the writings of Rousseau, Robespierre, and Rabaut de Saint Etienne alone, but I wonder where we are going to find the long-lost "social." This ambition seems to rely on the premise that the so-called "linguistic turn" has merely distracted us from "the social," to which we will now make an unproblematic return. But if the works of Keith Baker, Joan Scott, Mary Poovey, Dror Wahrman, and others have had any sort of shared agenda, it has been to highlight the difficulty—nay, the outright impossibility—of knowing "the social" in any sort of unmediated fashion.¹¹² As William Sewell has written, the whole perception of our world as something made up of distinct realms (the economy, culture, politics, social relations), each to be studied by its own historians, is now untenable.¹¹³

Nonetheless, the stakes here are considerable. For, as Sewell has also movingly demonstrated, we are again on the verge of writing a history that omits the "poor and the powerless" (in this case, everyone from Richard Cobb's *marginiaux* to Albert Soboul's *sans-culottes* and Georges Lefebvre's peasants) completely.¹¹⁴ Is a history of philosophes, novelists, and discourses really any less elitist than one of kings, queens, and statesmen? Is there a way of bringing "the people" (as they once were known) back into the history of the revolution without collapsing them into static social categories and mechanistic explanations?¹¹⁵

Nearly all the books discussed here privilege printed texts—Hesse's intensive reading of novels and Bell's extensive reading of multiple tracts simply show two very different strategies for dealing with such works. No one dares say it (lest he or she be branded the most vulgar of positivists), but it may be that it is actually a return to the archives that is long overdue. Administrative and logistic difficulties may make an enthusiastic return to the Archives Nationales in Paris unlikely in the near future, but there could be no better time for a return to the departmental archives (by now largely

unused by an entire generation of revolutionary historians). This will not be a return to the social, however. Police reports, notaries' inventories, and apprenticeship contracts are also all representations, texts whose genre conventions and conditions of production we forget at our peril. Nonetheless, insofar as they are structured by different conventions, written by different authors, and conserved for different reasons, they may allow us to tell different stories.¹¹⁶ When we notice that even six months after the former king's execution (in January 1793), certain notarized documents bore a stamp reading "La Loi, Le Roi" ("The Law, the King"), we may want to rethink our assumptions about the "void" left by the monarchy's collapse in 1789.¹¹⁷

Objects, such as the stamp used by that notary's clerk, may not have yielded to change as quickly as our concentration on planners and pedagogues would have us believe.¹¹⁸ Understanding the revolution solely in terms of a triumphant and terrible discourse of political will—be that will expressed in coherent plans for nation-building (Bell), incoherent statements about public opinion (Cowans), or images of beautiful women (Landes)—has perhaps led us to overlook the limits of that will. I refer not to explicit projects of counter-revolution (which, as McMahon shows, also partook of this same discourse) but to the diffuse and perhaps unconscious resistances provided by personal habit and physical objects: the clerk's picking up of the stamp he had been routinely using for the past three years, the notary's reluctance to spend money on yet another stamp, the stamp manufacturers' inability to keep pace with political change. Of course, the notary and his clerk may also have been committed monarchists; they may have deliberately and consciously continued using their "La Loi, Le Roi" stamp throughout the summer of 1793; and there may be a very clear political meaning stamped at the top of that little blue piece of paper. Or there may not be. (In assuming that there must be a meaning, we show ourselves to be both clearly Freudian and possibly paranoid.)

How can we think about that stamp? Having fully learned the valuable lessons of intertextuality, historians of the French Revolution have largely shied away from questions about human motivations or desires. Having learned that the meaning of that stamp was culturally, discursively, constructed, we have generally ignored the people who made the stamp. In concentrating on the "discourse of revolution" as that which has shaped so much of modern political culture, we have effectively overlooked the question of how people's lives were changed by their experiences of the revolutionary period itself.¹¹⁹

Developing a new paradigm, a way of writing cultural history that takes account of, and allows for, both human agency and historical contingency, both meaning and that which resists inscription, will not be easy. Among other things, it will oblige us to take apart the narratives of historical and historiographical progress with which this essay began. Those uncritical stories—about the modernity of the revolution and the novelty of our understanding of it—support each other so well that they allow little else to be said.

Furet self-consciously took the phrase "illusion of politics" from Marx; we have taken much more, and far less consciously. If historians of the revolution have noisily renounced those bits of the Jacobino-Marxist narrative that were specifically attacked in the 1950s and 1960s (the existence of a clearly demarcated rising bourgeoisie, its role in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, etc.), we have left unremarked upon the many other habits of thought that were part and parcel of Marx's philosophy of history. Indeed, the very tendency to recast the eighteenth century as the birth of modernity—which I above suggested *might* delineate a new paradigm—can also, and perhaps more accurately, be seen as a return of the not-very-repressed Marxist concern with stages of history.

If it is largely true that a model of history as "stages of civilization" can be found in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Liberal histories, I think it is also generally the case that historians working today know this model because of the way it was used by Marx (and those who followed him).¹²⁰ For all the disavowals, our chronology of modernity is still very much Marx's story.¹²¹ Consider, for example, that participation in a public sphere of debate, and appeals to public opinion, have become, thanks to Habermas, the sine qua non of modern life. Yet Habermas's account of the

transformation of the public sphere depended on profound changes in material production and wealth accumulation. Like Benedict Anderson's imagined national communities, which built on the profit-seeking activities of print capitalists, Habermas's bourgeois public sphere was a cultural development arising in a particular social/economic conjuncture. So, too, let us remember, is the vision of modernity developed by Walter Benjamin.

Habermas, Anderson, and Benjamin all developed major theories of cultural transformation in dialogue with generations of Marxist scholarship. In our appropriation of their formulations, however, we usually omit these prior interlocutors, resulting in cultural formations to which we grant extraordinary independence. Moreover, by taking these particular phenomena—the public sphere, the nation, "modernity"—as the cornerstones of revisionist scholarship on the French Revolution, we inadvertently repeat many earlier commonplaces. By accepting Habermas as one guide away from Marx, we bring no small amount of Marx with us nonetheless—in our periodization, our preference for cities, even our interest in shared consciousness. Yet by getting our "Marx" via the philosopher of communicative action, we lose both the distinction of revolution from evolution and the sense of direct conflict. Of late, the history of all hitherto-existing society has been the history of conceptual voids.

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My intention is not to play "spot the crypto-Marxist." Rather, it is to suggest that repeated statements of revolutionary historiography's move beyond Marx are unhelpful precisely insofar as they fail to acknowledge and work through those elements of Marxist analysis that continue to guide our thinking—such as the tendency to think of history in stages (be it modernity or a new mode of production), such as the distinction between materiality and discursivity, such as the separation of production from consumption.¹²² Since current versions of the advent of modernity so closely parallel older stories of the rise of the bourgeoisie, it is hardly surprising that they are no more able to accommodate difference or fathom individual actions than Marxism was.

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The argument here is not that we should hunt down and destroy our inheritance from Marx. Rather, we must no longer reject it, no longer characterize it as belonging to somebody else. We need to address and engage with these contributions directly, rather than gesturing toward them as dusty old objects in the "museum of historiography."¹²³ In doing so, we will have to re-pose a whole series of very big questions: questions of periodization and of agency, even of what an individual or a discourse might be. It means we must be self-conscious in the way we pose these questions and in how we think about answering them, for example, finding ways of acknowledging both the discursivity of physical things and the physicality of discourse. We must, in the suggestive words of Slavoj Žižek, "persist in the impossible position" that both recognizes that reality is completely shot through with ideology/discourse and maintains the tension—that between ideology/discourse and "something else"—that makes critique possible.¹²⁴ This may be an impossible position, but it is the best we will achieve. For neither history nor the *writing* of history has ever really proceeded in a clear and unitary direction. We have learned from Furet (and others) not to believe grand claims about how much the revolution changed people's lives, yet we have persisted in saying that *that* lesson utterly transformed our own scholarship. It did not—but saying that it did comfortably shifted the mantle of revolutionary agency from the people of eighteenth-century France to the readers of this journal.

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studies, and it has recently appeared in Japanese translation. She is currently interested in money.

Notes

¹ "Europe and the world were never after it [the revolution] to be the same again," Carlton J. H. Hayes, Marshall Whithed Baldwin, and Charles Wolsey Cole, *History of Western Civilization since 1500* (New York, 1962), 166. Compare William Duiker and Jackson Spielvogel, *World History*, 2d edn. (Belmont, Calif., 1998), 719, which states that with the revolution, "A new era had begun and the world would never be the same again."

² Mark Kishlansky, Patrick Geary, and Patricia O'Brien, *The Unfinished Legacy: A Brief History of Western Civilization*, 2d edn. (New York, 1997), 459; Marvin Perry, with Daniel F. Davis, Jeannette Harris, Theodore H. Von Laue, and Donald Warren, Jr., *Unfinished Journey: A World History* (Boston, 1983), 349; Edward McNall Burns, *Western Civilisations: Their History and Their Culture* (London, 1957), 537; Mortimer Chambers, Raymond Grew, David Herlihy, Theodore K. Rabb, and Isser Woloch, *The Western Experience*, 4th edn., 2 vols. (New York, 1987), 779.

³ Franklin Ford, "The Revolutionary-Napoleonic Era: How Much of a Watershed?" *AHR* 69 (October 1963): 18–29; Richard E. Sullivan, Dennis Sherman, and John B. Harrison, *A Short History of Western Civilization*, 8th edn. (New York, 1994), 493; Thomas Greer and Gavin Lewis, *A Brief History of the Western World*, 6th edn. (Fort Worth, Tex., 1992), 455; Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, Calif., 1984), 3.

⁴ Jan Goldstein, "The Future of French History in the United States: Unapocalyptic Thoughts for the New Millennium," *French Historical Studies* 24 (Winter 2001): 4.

⁵ Suzanne Desan, "What's after Political Culture? Recent French Revolutionary Historiography," *French Historical Studies* 23 (Winter 2000): 163–96, quotation at 164; Jack R. Censer, "Social Twists and Linguistic Turns: Revolutionary Historiography a Decade after the Bicentennial," *French Historical Studies* 22 (Winter 1999): 139–67, quotation at 167.

⁶ For consideration of "paradigms" in the study of the revolution, see Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990), 2, 18; and Sarah Maza, "Politics, Culture, and the Origins of the French Revolution," *Journal of Modern History* 61 (December 1989), 704–23; see also a much earlier article, cited by Maza, Gerald Cavanaugh, "The Present State of French Revolutionary Historiography: Alfred Cobban and Beyond," *French Historical Studies* 7 (Fall 1972): 587–606. Other commentators use the word "paradigm" but do not remark on its significance, see Desan, "What's after Political Culture?" 164; Gary Kates, "The Revisionists Come of Age," *French Historical Studies* 16 (Spring 1990): 614; Donald Sutherland, "Introduction," *French Historical Studies* 16 (Fall 1989): 259. Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt have recently suggested that "the failure of Marxism has signaled a more general failure of all paradigms"; see their "Introduction," to Bonnell and Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley, Calif., 1999), 4.

⁷ Nearly fifty years ago, Alfred Cobban toyed with the idea of entitling his Inaugural Lecture (1954), "Was There a French Revolution?" Worried that this might seem rude "to our French friends" and "awkward" for his incipient professorial career, Cobban instead posed an apparently more empirical question: "What Was the French Revolution?" Famously, he answered that the revolution was a myth. Alfred Cobban, "The Myth of the French Revolution," in Cobban, *Aspects of the French Revolution* (London, 1968), 93.

⁸ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d edn. (Chicago, 1970), 135.

⁹ Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 53–59, 118–30. Bruno Latour goes so far as to suggest that the entire idea of political revolution may have been modeled on Lavoisier's new science; see Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Catherine Porter, trans. (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 70–71.

¹⁰ For discussion of the applicability of Kuhn's account to fields outside the physical sciences, see Gary Gutting, ed., *Paradigms and Revolutions* (South Bend, Ind., 1979); Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York, 1994), 163–66. See also the fascinating discussion in Steve Fuller, *Thomas Kuhn: A Philosophical History for Our Times* (Chicago, 2000).

¹¹ Georges Lefebvre, *The Coming of the French Revolution*, R. R. Palmer, trans. (1939; rpt. edn., Princeton, N.J., 1989). Alfred Cobban, *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1964), and François Furet, "Le catéchisme révolutionnaire," *Annales: E.S.C.* 26 (March 1971): 255–89, offered the fundamental criticisms of Lefebvre's analysis. An astute set of responses to these critiques is collected in

Michel Vovelle, *Combats pour la Révolution française* (Paris, 1993).

¹² This may be true for the study of other revolutions, as well; see Alan Knight, "Revisionism and Revolution: Mexico Compared to England and France," *Past and Present*, no. 134 (February 1992): 159–99.

¹³ The *locus classicus* for this account is William Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1980), part 1. The second edition (1988) makes no change to this section. The third edition (1999) distinguishes "Revisionists" from "Post-Revisionists" on the grounds that the first are those who proved the social interpretation wrong, while the latter are those who replaced it with politics. This seems a tenuous distinction, since a revisionist broadside of 1967 had already proposed that the revolution was not "a social revolution with political consequences . . . but a political revolution with social consequences." See George V. Taylor, "Noncapitalist Wealth and the Origins of the French Revolution," *AHR* 72 (January 1967): 469–96. For other instances of Marxists-versus-Revisionists as initiation to the study of the revolution, see Alan Forrest, *The French Revolution* (Oxford, 1995), 2–12; T. C. W. Blanning, *The French Revolution: Class War or Culture Clash?* (Basingstoke, 1998), 1–6; Gary Kates, ed., *The French Revolution: Recent Debates and New Controversies* (London and New York, 1998), Part 1, "The Overthrow of the Marxist Paradigm." Several Western Civ textbooks also introduce students to the French Revolution by a brief schematic account of the two schools; see Chambers, *et al.*, *Western Experience*, 731; and Lynn Hunt, Thomas R. Martin, Barbara Rosenwein, R. Po-chia Hsia, and Bonnie Smith, *The Challenge of the West: Peoples and Cultures from the Stone Age to the Global Age* (Lexington, Mass., 1995), 681–82.

¹⁴ However, see Ron Schechter, ed., *The French Revolution: The Essential Readings* (Oxford, 2001), for a recent anthology, intended for teaching purposes, that completely omits reference to the Jacobino-Marxist tradition.

¹⁵ As has often been noted, both Alexis de Tocqueville's *Souvenirs of the Revolution of 1848* and Karl Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* are shot through with wistful comparisons to the "great" revolution of 1789.

¹⁶ Colin Lucas, "Nobles, Bourgeois and the Origins of the French Revolution," *Past and Present*, no. 60 (August 1973): 84–126. Compare: "there was once a social order called feudalism. This was a terrible ogre and lived in a castle; but for centuries a bourgeois Jack the Giant-killer climbed the beanstalk of economic progress, until finally in the French Revolution he liquidated the old order" and "a pantomime in which a succession of Revisionist Prince Charmings rescue Marianne from the clutches of a wicked, mean-spirited old Stalinist Baron—a part reserved in most scripts for the late Albert Soboul." The first is from Cobban, "Myth of the French Revolution," 95; the second, from Colin Jones, "Bourgeois Revolution Revivified: 1789 and Social Change," in Colin Lucas, ed., *Rewriting the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1991), 69–118, quotation at 78.

¹⁷ Taylor, "Noncapitalist Wealth," 490.

¹⁸ Taylor, "Noncapitalist Wealth," 481.

¹⁹ Recent articles urging a "return to the social" include Desan, "What's after Political Culture?"; and Vivian Gruder, "Whither Revisionism? Political Perspectives on the Ancien Régime," *French Historical Studies* 20 (Spring 1997): 245–85. A related preoccupation drives Jay M. Smith, "No More Language Games: Words, Beliefs, and the Political Culture of Early Modern France," *AHR* 102 (December 1997): 1413–40. William H. Sewell, Jr., has contributed thoughtfully to this call; see "Whatever Happened to the 'Social' in Social History?" in Joan W. Scott and Debra Keates, eds., *Schools of Thought: Twenty-five Years of Interpretive Social Science* (Princeton, N.J., 2001), 209–16; and the introduction to Sewell, *A Rhetoric of Bourgeois Revolution: The Abbé Sieyès and "What Is the Third Estate?"* (Durham, N.C., 1994), esp. 29–40. Censer, "Social Twists and Linguistic Turns," 162, asserts that "the social has returned."

²⁰ Sewell, "Whatever Happened to the 'Social' in Social History?"; Olwen Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto, 1992), xviii.

²¹ For an especially evocative account of historians' working relations with the materials of the past, see Carolyn Steedman, "Something She Called a Fever: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust," *AHR* 106 (October 2001): 1159–80, also available in her *Dust* (Manchester, 2002), chap. 2.

²² Sarah Maza, "The Social Imaginary of the French Revolution: The Third Estate, the National Guard, and the Absent Bourgeoisie," in Colin Jones and Dror Wahrman, eds., *The Age of Cultural Revolutions: Britain and France, 1750–1820* (Berkeley, Calif., 2001), 106–23, quote from 122; "enormous condescension" is of course what E. P. Thompson rescued the poor stockings from by accepting that "their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience." See *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963; New York,

1966), 12.

²³ In offering yet another historiographical overview, the following paragraphs run the risk of simply acting out, or blindly repeating, the quest for disciplinary identity and origins that I have just described. In doing so self-consciously, however, I hope to begin reworking these questions and, hence, propose different responses. My thinking about a review essay as an opportunity to repeat *differently* owes much to Dominick LaCapra. See most recently *History and Reading: Tocqueville, Foucault, French Studies* (Toronto, 2000).

²⁴ Lefebvre, *Coming of the French Revolution*, 100, 110.

²⁵ Lefebvre's status as the canonical "Marxist" owes much to the starring role he plays in William Doyle's oft-cited historiographical essay; see also Jack Censer, "The Coming of a New Interpretation of the French Revolution?" *Journal of Social History* 21 (1987): 295–309. My thinking on this particular point has been especially sharpened by discussion with Ralph Kingston and David Feldman. See Feldman, "Class," in Peter Burke, ed., *History and Historians in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2002).

²⁶ Claude Langlois, "François Furet's Interpretation of the French Revolution," Timothy Tackett, trans., *French Historical Studies* 16 (Fall 1990): 766–76; Keith Michael Baker, "Enlightenment and Revolution in France: Old Problems, Renewed Approaches," *Journal of Modern History* 53 (June 1981): 281–303, quotation at 284.

²⁷ François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, Elborg Forster, trans. (Cambridge, 1981), 44, 46. Compare "The Old Regime collapsed so quickly and completely in the summer of 1789 that the opportunity arose to remodel society from top to bottom," in T. C. W. Blanning, "Introduction: The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution," Blanning, ed., *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution* (Chicago, 1996), 12.

²⁸ Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, 48.

²⁹ In Furet's words, "the Ancien Régime died before it was struck down"; *Interpreting the French Revolution*, 114.

³⁰ Colin Jones has also noted the tendency of recent accounts to minimize the role of conflict; for instance, treating the decrees of the night of August 4, 1789, which formally abolished feudalism, as a spasm of altruism, rather than a response to peasant violence. See Jones, "Bourgeois Revolution Revivified," 76–77.

³¹ Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, 54.

³² In addition to Baker's review in the *Journal of Modern History* 53 (June 1981), see Hunt's review in *History and Theory* 20 (October 1981): 313–23; and the introduction to Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*. On a sociological note, it is worth observing that both Baker and Hunt have trained numerous graduate students and edited widely used anthologies. Moreover, both have occupied major administrative roles within both their own universities and larger professional organizations (Baker as president of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies and Hunt as that of the American Historical Association).

³³ Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class*, 56.

³⁴ For a highly readable introduction to the differences between Furet and Habermas, see Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, Lydia Cochrane, trans. (Durham, N.C., 1991), chaps. 1–2.

³⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence, trans. (1962; Cambridge, Mass., 1989); Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution*, 171.

³⁶ Both the focus on political culture and the concern to identify the revolution's contributions to modern life owe much to the four large volumes of *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture* (Oxford, 1987–94). Some British historians of France operate with a very different understanding of politics; see the useful and detailed review essay, Dale Van Kley, "Pure Politics in Absolute Space: The English Angle on the Political History of Pre-Revolutionary France," *Journal of Modern History* 69 (December 1997): 754–84. In France, several prominent, though far from all, recent works share the focus on political culture. See especially Patrice Gueniffey, *La politique de la Terreur: Essai sur la violence révolutionnaire, 1789–1794* (Paris, 2000); and the work of Antoine de Baecque, translated as *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770–1800*, Charlotte Mandell, trans. (Stanford, Calif., 1997); and de Baecque, *Glory and Terror: Seven Deaths under the French Revolution*, Charlotte Mandell, trans. (London, 2001). For a recent effort to apply this "political culture" framework to another

revolution, see Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven, Conn., 1999).

³⁷ The following books are discussed more extensively below: David A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); Jon Cowans, *To Speak for the People: Public Opinion and the Problem of Legitimacy in the French Revolution* (New York, 2001); Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton, N.J., 2001); Joan Landes, *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2001); James Livesey, *Making Democracy in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); Darrin M. McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford, 2001); Sophia Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France* (Stanford, Calif., 2001).

³⁸ Cowans, *To Speak for the People*, 167; Rosenfeld, *Revolution in Language*, 179; compare "general fear of conspiracy," in Bell, *Cult of the Nation*, 186.

³⁹ Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992); William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001). For reviews of these works, see Colin Jones, "A Fine 'Romance' with No Sisters," *French Historical Studies* 19 (Fall 1995): 277–88; and Jeremy Popkin, available on the World Wide Web at <http://www3.uakron.edu/hfrance/reviews/popkin4.html> (November 2002). For other works that directly engage with revolutionary psychology, see Marie-Hélène Huet, *Mourning Glory: The Will of the French Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1997); and Jacques André, *La révolution fratricide: Essai de psychanalyse du lien social* (Paris, 1993). In his introduction to *The French Revolution: The Essential Readings*, Ron Schechter suggests that psychology should be the next field to be fully incorporated into the interdisciplinary study of the revolution.

⁴⁰ Bell, *Cult of the Nation*, 199.

⁴¹ One very striking example of this is Patrice Higonnet's repeated reference to Jacobin "instinct." See *Goodness beyond Virtue: Jacobins during the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 3, 4, 5, 10, 18, 26, 31, 70, 104, 114, 151, 181, 203. De Baecque, *Glory and Terror*, is more overblown, stating, for instance, that during the revolution, "The corpse, then, is the measure of everything, to the point of obsession, to the point of madness of a universe wholly ruled by the constraints that the corpse imposes" (p. 9). I cannot help wondering when humans have occupied a universe that was *not* governed by the constraints of death.

⁴² Timothy Tackett, "Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution: French Elites and the Origins of the Terror, 1789–1792," *AHR* 105 (June 2000): 691–713.

⁴³ Hippolyte Taine, *The Origins of Contemporary France*, Edward Gagan, ed. (Chicago, 1974), 112. We might note in passing that the *Encyclopédie* defined *délire* (of which "frenzy" is a variety) as *straying from the path of reason*; it is hence, as a diagnosis, not so far from Furet and Denis Richet's 1965 description of the revolution's *dérapiage*, or skidding out of control, as some might have us think (*La Révolution* [Paris, 1965]). It is definitely gendered differently, however, with *dérapiage* belonging to the highly masculine automobile culture of 1950s and 1960s France; see Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995).

⁴⁴ In addition to Lucas, "Nobles, Bourgeois and the Origins of the French Revolution," and Taylor, "Noncapitalist Wealth," see Elizabeth Eisenstein, "Who Intervened in 1788? A Commentary on *The Coming of the French Revolution*," *AHR* 71 (October 1965): 77–103.

⁴⁵ Cobb is arguably the greatest historian of the revolutionary period to be almost never mentioned in the historiography; see especially *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest, 1789–1820* (Oxford, 1970). For one of the rare efforts to position Cobb's work, see Martyn Lyons, "Cobb and the Historians," in Gwynne Lewis and Colin Lucas, eds., *Beyond the Terror: Essays in French Regional and Social History, 1794–1815* (Cambridge, 1983), 1–20; the reference to him as the "Shakespeare of the profession" is from Langlois, "François Furet's Interpretation of the French Revolution," 770.

⁴⁶ Higonnet, *Goodness beyond Virtue*, in its focus on Jacobins rather than Jacobinism, is one such exception.

⁴⁷ Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789–1790)* (Princeton, N.J., 1996).

⁴⁸ "Any revolution allows what can only be called psychopaths to emerge from their dark private world and turn their fantasies into reality"; Blanning, "Introduction: The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution," 14.

⁴⁹ Rosenfeld, *Revolution in Language*, esp. chap. 4. David W. Bates, *Enlightenment Aberrations: Error and Revolution in France* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2002), also focuses on Enlightenment epistemology in order to explore revolutionary political culture.

⁵⁰ Rosenfeld gives little attention to how various sign systems were gendered, although this would seem to be an important question in light of Dena Goodman, "L'ortographe des dames: Gender and Language in the Old Regime," *French Historical Studies* 25 (Spring 2002): 191–224; and Hesse, *Other Enlightenment*, chap. 1. Concern with reforming and improving sign systems was not an exclusively French preoccupation; see Jonathan Sheehan, "Enlightenment Details: Theology, Natural History, and the Letter *h*," *Representations* 61 (Winter 1998): 29–56. John Barrell's quite remarkable *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793–1796* (Oxford, 2000) is, among other things, a 600-page discussion of efforts to fix the meaning of the word "imagine" (in the context of British treason trials).

⁵¹ Rosenfeld, *Revolution in Language*, 19, 44–45, 121, 169.

⁵² In defining the purpose of the *Encyclopédie*, Denis Diderot chose "luxury" as his example of a word that was abused on a daily basis; see the article "Encyclopédie," cited in Keith Michael Baker, *Condorcet: From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (Chicago, 1975), 19. Several historians have recently directed their attentions toward this poor abused word; see Sarah Maza, "Luxury, Morality, and Social Change: Why There Was No Middle-Class Consciousness in Pre-revolutionary France," *Journal of Modern History* 69 (June 1997): 200–29; Colin Jones and Rebecca Spang, "Sans-culottes, sans café, sans tabac: Shifting Realms of Necessity and Luxury in Eighteenth-Century France," in Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, eds., *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650–1850* (Manchester, 1999), 37–62.

⁵³ See, for example, *Archives parlementaires* 34: 414 (October 24, 1791).

⁵⁴ Bell, *Cult of the Nation*, chap. 6.

⁵⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn. (London, 1991), 12–19.

⁵⁶ This chronology received its classic treatment in Paul Hazard, *La crise de la conscience européenne* (Paris, 1935). Bell also frames his discussion in terms of the "disenchantment of the world," a thesis famously associated with Max Weber but also developed very differently in Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, Oscar Burge, trans. (Princeton, N.J., 1998).

⁵⁷ Bell, *Cult of the Nation*, 53.

⁵⁸ Key works on mid-century political crises include David A. Bell, *Lawyers and Citizens: The Making of a Political Elite in Old Regime France* (Princeton, N.J., 1994); Durand Echeverria, *The Maupeou Revolution* (Baton Rouge, La., 1985); Michael Kwass, *Privilege and the Politics of Taxation in Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 2000); Steven Kaplan, *Bread, Politics, and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis XV* (The Hague, 1976); Julian Swann, *Politics and the Parlement of Paris under Louis XV, 1754–1774* (Cambridge, 1995); Dale Van Kley, *The Damiens Affair and the Unraveling of the Ancien Régime, 1750–1770* (Princeton, 1984); Van Kley, *The Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits from France, 1757–1765* (New Haven, Conn., 1975). See also Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993).

⁵⁹ Bell, *Cult of the Nation*, chap. 4. The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, known to literature scholars as a dispute between Nicolas Boileau and Charles Perrault, has lately been rediscovered in nearly every conceivable area of eighteenth-century culture. On the literary context, see Annie Becq, *Genèse de l'esthétique française moderne* (Pisa, 1984); and, on England, Joseph M. Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991). Otherwise, for ancient and modern artillery, see Ken Alder, *Engineering the Revolution* (Princeton, N.J., 1997); for architecture, Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981); and, on eighteenth-century nouvelle cuisine, Rebecca L. Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), chap. 2.

⁶⁰ Bell, *Cult of the Nation*, 75–77.

⁶¹ In many ways, this argument parallels that of Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution*.

⁶² Accounts of the revolution as a project in remaking the population owe much to Mona Ozouf's early work on festivals (1976), translated as *Festivals and the French Revolution*, Alan Sheridan, trans. (Cambridge, Mass., 1988); and her article "La Révolution française et l'idée de l'homme nouveau," in Colin Lucas, ed., *The Political Culture of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1988), 213–32.

⁶³ Rosenfeld, *Revolution in Language*, 126.

⁶⁴ Bell, *Cult of the Nation*, 91.

⁶⁵ Bell admits as much; see *Cult of the Nation*, 97. His argument is largely sophisticated, but his use of prescriptive literature as evidence of reality strangely recalls the early tendency to write women's history on the basis of etiquette books, household manuals, or other forms of advice literature. Or, perhaps, attempts to write the history of eating habits on the basis of cookbooks. For a helpful review of the former, focused largely on English examples, see Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History," *Historical Journal* 36 (June 1993): 383–414.

⁶⁶ Cowans, *To Speak for the People*, 3.

⁶⁷ Bell, *Cult of the Nation*, 26.

⁶⁸ Cowans, *To Speak for the People*, 33.

⁶⁹ Cowans apparently finds a great deal about the revolution "unfortunate"; see *To Speak for the People*, 1, 15, 33, 39, 41, 51, 73, 75, 76, 83, and following.

⁷⁰ Cowans, *To Speak for the People*, 27.

⁷¹ Cowans, *To Speak for the People*, 194.

⁷² Cowans, *To Speak for the People*, 104, 161.

⁷³ McMahon, *Enemies*, 9. McMahon is largely to be commended for ambitiously framing his argument with reference to all of Europe, but on occasions he falls into Francocentrism. Compare Jonathan Israel, *The Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001), which both argues that the Enlightenment actually *was* an intellectually coherent movement and identifies opposition to it coming from Spain and the Dutch Republic already in the 1680s.

⁷⁴ Peter Gay, *The Rise of Modern Paganism* (Vol. 1 of *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*) (New York, 1966); Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560–1791* (New Haven, Conn., 1996).

⁷⁵ Livesey, *Making Democracy in the French Revolution*, 10.

⁷⁶ This is also the argument of Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*.

⁷⁷ The tendency to treat Thermidor as the end of the revolution has been most recently reinforced by Bronislaw Baczko, *Ending the Terror: The French Revolution after Robespierre*, Michel Petheram, trans. (Cambridge, 1994). Livesey is not the Directory's only historian; other major studies include Isser Woloch, *Jacobin Legacy: The Democratic Movement under the Directory* (Princeton, N.J., 1970); Howard G. Brown, *War, Revolution, and the Bureaucratic State* (Oxford, 1995); Brown and Judith A. Miller, eds., *Taking Liberties: Problems of a New Order from the French Revolution to Napoleon* (Manchester, 2002); Suzanne Desan, "Reconstituting the Social after the Terror: Family, Law, and Property in Popular Politics," *Past and Present*, no. 164 (August 1999): 81–121.

⁷⁸ The historiography on peasants in the revolution is considerable; it is hence all the more surprising that they have largely dropped out of North American scholarship. Among recent works, see Anatoli Ado, *Paysans en Révolution: Terre, pouvoir, et jacquerie* (Paris, 1996); Peter M. Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1988); Peter McPhee, *Revolution and Environment in Southern France, 1780–1830: Peasants, Lords, and Murder in the Corbières* (Oxford, 1999). See also two immense works of recent synthesis: John Markoff, *The Abolition of Feudalism: Peasants, Lords, and Legislators in the French Revolution* (University Park, Pa., 1996); and Bernard Bodinier and Eric Teyssier, *L'événement le plus important de la Révolution: La vente des biens nationaux (1789–1867)* (Paris, 2000).

⁷⁹ Richard Whatmore, *Republicanism and the French Revolution: An Intellectual History of Jean-Baptiste Say's Political Economy* (Oxford, 2000), traces the theory of commercial republicanism through the Restoration but says nothing of the practice.

⁸⁰ This argument was made most pointedly in Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988).

⁸¹ From seventy-eight in the eleven years from 1777 to 1788 to 329 in the period from 1789 to 1800; Hesse, *Other Enlightenment*, 37. Impressive though these figures initially seem, they would be much more meaningful if they were expressed as percentages of the total number of published authors in these two periods. Similarly, when Bell counts a comparable increase in the use of the words *patriote* and *patriotique* (*Cult of the Nation*, 12), it would be important to know the total number of words printed and to consider how his sample (the ARTFL electronic database) may have affected his results. In other words, if we want to interpret something other than texts, we had best make certain we have the necessary skills to do so. The increasing availability of electronic texts makes counting—and hence giving an air of quantitative science to the history of the book—easy but not necessarily meaningful.

⁸² James Schmidt, ed., *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Berkeley, Calif., 1996), helpfully prints Kant's essay along with other responses to the question, making a very useful teaching resource.

⁸³ Hesse, *Other Enlightenment*, 140–45. Recent work on nineteenth-century masculinity would challenge the idea that men's self-realization was more straightforward than women's; see especially John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, Conn., 1999).

⁸⁴ Hesse, *Other Enlightenment*, xii.

⁸⁵ Hesse, *Other Enlightenment*, xii.

⁸⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, and Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, have probably done the most to emphasize the *commercial* aspects of print culture. A much longer historiography considers the general impact of print; for a recent statement of views, see the *AHR Forum*: "How Revolutionary Was the Print Revolution?" (contributions by Anthony Grafton, Elizabeth Eisenstein, and Adrian Johns), *AHR* 107 (February 2002): 84–128.

⁸⁷ Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1995); see also the qualification of Mignolo's argument in Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford, Calif., 2001), chap. 2. In addition, see Maurice Olender, *The Language of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, Arthur Goldhammer, trans. (Cambridge, Mass., 1992).

⁸⁸ Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675–1791* (Durham, N.C., 2001), 411. In some respects, however, married seamstresses, who (prior to the revolution) could sign business-related contracts *without* their husbands' authorizations (pp. 302–03), experienced more freedom than nineteenth-century women writers. Furthermore, even the Napoleonic Civil Code granted *marchandes publiques* (market women, identified in Hesse's first chapter with orality and pre-modern culture) similar autonomy in relation to their business. See the Code Civil ("Des Biens"), article 220. I thank Ralph Kingston for bringing this point to my attention.

⁸⁹ Peter Burke distinguishes "classical" cultural history (exemplified by Jacob Burckhardt's discussion of the Renaissance discovery of individualism) from newer forms in Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1997), 183–212. Roughly the same chronology of modern individuality is to be found in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), and in Dror Wahrman's forthcoming work, tentatively titled *A Cultural History of the Modern Self*.

⁹⁰ In addition to the works discussed here and the volumes of *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, see Ferenc Fehér, ed., *The French Revolution and the Birth of Modernity* (Berkeley, Calif., 1990).

⁹¹ McMahon, *Enemies*, 15, 53, 63. The modern nature of opposition to modernity has been stressed by cultural historians working in other national contexts as well. See Anne Harrington, *Reenchanted Science: Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler* (Princeton, N.J., 1996); or T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York, 1981).

⁹² For similar reservations about arguments that stress the "modern" qualities of eighteenth-century North America, see Thomas Bender, "Strategies of Narrative Synthesis in American History," *AHR* 107 (February 2002): 135–36.

⁹³ As, for example, that outlined in Ford, "Revolutionary-Napoleonic Era," 18–29. That modern means "Enlightenment" has been central to many influential twentieth-century theorists, both those who value it, such as Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (trans., 1987), and those who critique it,

such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1972).

⁹⁴ "We have never moved either forward or backward. We have always actively sorted out elements belonging to different times. We can still sort. *It is the sorting that makes the times, not the times that make the sorting.*" Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 76 (emphasis in original).

⁹⁵ On the embodiment of France as "Marianne," see Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class*, 89–95; and Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au combat* (Paris, 1979).

⁹⁶ Landes's connection of national sentiment with passionate life owes much to Doris Sommer, *The Foundational Fictions of Latin America* (Berkeley, Calif., 1991), a book that deserves to be more widely read among Europeanists.

⁹⁷ Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 82.

⁹⁸ Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 17.

⁹⁹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, L. G. Mitchell, ed. (1790; Oxford, 1993), 78.

¹⁰⁰ Landes asserts that the difficult-to-determine "empirical fact" of how these images were produced, purchased, and used is less important than the "conventions surrounding the representation of the body in Western art"; *Visualizing the Nation*, 16. Two notes are in order. First, this is exactly the methodological position that Hesse effectively challenges. Second, something like viewer response to images is *not* impossible to recover; for especially relevant examples, see Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven, Conn., 1985).

¹⁰¹ Sigmund Freud, "Considerations on 'Wild' Psychoanalysis" (1910).

¹⁰² Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 43, 105–06, 212.

¹⁰³ For especially interesting considerations of the relation of history to psychoanalysis, see Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians* (Oxford, 1985); Michael S. Roth, *Psycho-analysis as History: Negation and Freedom in Freud* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1987); Dominick LaCapra, "History and Psychoanalysis," in LaCapra, *Soundings in Critical Theory* (Ithaca, 1989), 30–66; Barbara Taylor, "Religion, Radicalism, and Fantasy," *History Workshop Journal* 39 (Spring 1995): 102–12; several issues of *History Workshop Journal* are devoted to this theme: *HWJ* 26 (Autumn 1988), *HWJ* 45 (Spring 1998); Lynn Hunt, "Psychoanalysis, the Self, and Historical Interpretation," *Common Knowledge* 6 (Fall 1997): 10–19; Joan W. Scott, "Some More Reflections on Gender and Politics," in Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, rev. edn. (New York, 1999); and in *Revisioning Gender*, Myra Marx Ferree, Judith Lorber, and Beth Hess, eds. (Thousand Oaks, Calif., 1999). See also the carefully historical treatment of paranoia as investiture crisis offered by Eric Santner, *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber's Secret History of Modernity* (Princeton, N.J., 1996).

¹⁰⁴ For a provocative, if in many ways highly troubling, attempt to put sibling relationships at the center of psychoanalysis, see Juliet Mitchell, *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria and the Effect of Sibling Relationships on the Human Condition* (London, 2000).

¹⁰⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London, 1991); *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London, 1989).

¹⁰⁶ Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror* (New Haven, Conn., 1999).

¹⁰⁷ Lajer-Burcharth's chapter on *The Sabine Women* covers more than a hundred pages; I have necessarily omitted great intricacies of detail and analysis in this summary.

¹⁰⁸ In brief, Lacan argued that one's sense of oneself as a unified whole is based on one's babyhood experience of a mirror reflection, a reflection that was not, and could not be, identical with the "self" reflected. Self-recognition is therefore always misrecognition. Carolyn J. Dean, *The Self and Its Pleasures: Bataille, Lacan, and the History of the Decentered Subject* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1992), 48–57, shows how central paranoia was to Lacan's development of this concept.

¹⁰⁹ Suzanne Desan's work suggests just how traumatic these changes were for many individuals. See "Reconstituting the Social"; and "'War between Brothers and Sisters': Inheritance Law and Gender Politics

in Revolutionary France," *French Historical Studies* 20 (Fall 1997): 597–634.

¹¹⁰ Gwynne Lewis, *The French Revolution: Rethinking the Debate* (London, 1993), 112–13; Steven L. Kaplan, *Farewell, Revolution: The Historians' Feud, France 1789–1989* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1995), 100–05.

¹¹¹ Rosenfeld, *Revolution in Language*, 3–4; Bell makes a similar point in his review of Rosenfeld's book, "Words and Tumbrels," *New Republic*, November 26, 2001.

¹¹² In addition to works already mentioned, see Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago, 1995); Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," in *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion across the Disciplines*, James Chandler, Arnold Davidson, and Harry Harootunian, eds. (Chicago, 1994); Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class* (Cambridge, 1995).

¹¹³ William H. Sewell, Jr., "Toward a Post-Materialist Rhetoric for Labor History," in Lenard Berlanstein, ed., *Rethinking Labor History* (Urbana, Ill., 1993), 15–38.

¹¹⁴ David Andress, *Massacre at the Champs de Mars* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000), is one recent effort to rewrite the history of the revolution "from below."

¹¹⁵ Bodinier and Teyssier, *L'événement le plus important*, is a classic example of social history's reliance on Balzacian caricature as a strategy for putting faces onto numbers.

¹¹⁶ For example, Jean-Pierre Gross, *Fair Shares for All: Jacobin Egalitarianism in Practice* (Cambridge, 1997), one of the comparatively few recent studies to be based largely on departmental archives, gives an account of Jacobinism that diverges dramatically from the usual themes of Terror, paranoia, and the rejection of pluralism.

¹¹⁷ Archives Nationales, Paris, Minutier Central XIII–477 (July 28, 1793).

¹¹⁸ See Alder, *Engineering the Revolution*, for an excellent discussion of how thinking about objects might affect historiography.

¹¹⁹ Philip T. Hoffman, Gilles Postel-Vinay, and Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, *Priceless Markets: The Political Economy of Credit in Paris, 1660–1870* (Chicago, 2000), very clearly indicates considerable change in how Parisians lent and borrowed money, for example, although their game-theoretical model of the reasons for this change is unfortunately abstract.

¹²⁰ George Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution: Marxism and the Revisionist Challenge* (London, 1987), chap. 3. Comninel asserts that Marx's originality lay not as a historian but as a critic of liberal economies; in contrast, Michael Löwy emphasizes Marx's combining of this largely Liberal legacy with Babeuf's recognition that progress did not benefit all equally. See Michael Löwy, "La 'poésie du passé': Marx et la Révolution française," in Etienne Balibar, Daniel Bensaïd, et al., *Permanences de la Révolution: Pour un autre bicentenaire* (Montreuil, 1989), 233–51.

¹²¹ Colin Jones and Dror Wahrman, "Introduction: An Age of Cultural Revolutions?" in Jones and Wahrman, *Age of Cultural Revolutions*, have attributed historians' continued circling around this same "Age of Cultural Revolutions" to the influence of three other historiographies: those inspired by Foucault, by women's and gender history, and by "linguistic studies of class and politics." These have all clearly made important contributions, but to posit them as having focused on the late eighteenth century independent of their heritage from Marx is decidedly disingenuous. After all, as Gareth Stedman Jones has argued, Foucault's own historical work owed much to the structural Marxism of 1960s France; see "The Determinist Fix: Some Obstacles to the Further Development of the Linguistic Approach to History in the 1990s," *History Workshop Journal* 42 (Autumn 1996): 19–35.

¹²² See Sewell, "Toward a Post-Materialist Rhetoric for Labor History," on many of these points.

¹²³ Donald Sutherland, "An Assessment of the Writings of François Furet," *French Historical Studies* 16 (Fall 1990): 784, suggests that this is, appropriately, what Marxist theory has become.

¹²⁴ Slavoj Žižek, "The Spectre of Ideology," in Žižek, ed., *Mapping Ideology* (London, 1994), 17; though couched in very different language, much of this analysis bears comparison with Sewell, "Whatever Happened to the 'Social' in Social History?"

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