

Women of the Revolutionary Crowd

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From the earliest accounts by revolutionary journalists, memoirists, historians, and artists, down through succeeding centuries, women's public role during the Revolution has been a subject of considerable fascination and controversy.¹ Indeed, increasing numbers of historians have come to appreciate the value of visual documentation in supplementing, reinforcing, and sometimes challenging written records. With respect to women's role in the revolutionary crowd, considerable attention has focused on the popular uprisings in which they were most visibly involved: the October Days of 1789, the Sugar Crisis of 1792, the February Days of 1793, and the Germinal and Prairial uprisings of spring 1795.² The response of political men, irrespective of their party, was rarely enthusiastic, and often antagonistic to female activism.³ Although

¹ For an early exchange, see Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1961); Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the rights of men; with, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, and Hints, ed. Sylvia Tomaselli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

² Thanks to influential contributions by American and French feminist scholars, we now have a much better understanding of women's participation in the revolutionary movement, especially women of the popular classes. For essential reading, see Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Branson Applewhite, and Mary Durham Johnson, eds., Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1795: Selected Documents, Translated with Notes and Commentary (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979); Dominique Godineau, Women in Revolutionary Paris, trans. Katherine Streip (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline G. Levy, ed., Women and Politics in the Age of Democratic Revolution (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990).

³ In Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), I addressed the contradiction between the proclamation of universal law and the constitutional privileging of gender. Important exceptions to men's opposition to female activism, however, should be noted: the Enragés, who encouraged militant women's activism, and whose leaders were political allies and intimates of key women in the revolutionary women's club "Society of Revolutionary Republican Women"; members of the Girondin circle, particularly David Williams and Antoine-Nicolas de Condorcet, who argued on behalf of women's rights; and also the Jacobins, who, up to a point, encouraged politicized working class women's participation on their behalf. See my discussion, however, of the limits and contradictions of such support in Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), esp. pp. 128-134, 218-219. Besides the important contributions cited in note 2, see Darline Gay Levy and Harriet B. Applewhite, "Women and Militant Citizenship in Revolutionary Paris," in Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution, ed. Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Elisabeth Roudinesco, Theroigne de Mericourt: A Melancholic Woman during the French Revolution, trans. Martin Thom (London: Verso, 1991); Maité Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, Histoire du féminisme français

neither in law nor practice did women achieve real equality during the Revolution, their participation was of great symbolic importance in underscoring the universal claims of revolutionaries.⁴ This self-congratulatory outlook, characteristic also of the republican tradition of revolutionary historiography, has been challenged by recent feminist historiography on the gap between promise and reality in women's circumstances during the Revolution.⁵ Moreover, in their investigations of both representation and actual circumstances, feminists have benefited from the growing acceptance of visual sources in historical research.⁶

(Paris: des femmes, 1977); Suzanne Desan, "Constitutional Amazons': Jacobin Women's Clubs in the French Revolution" in Re-creating Authority in Revolutionary France, ed. Bryant T. Ragan, Jr. and Elizabeth A. Williams (Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Joan Wallach Scott, Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996). For recent contributions stressing the Revolution's positive results for women, see: Carla Hesse, The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); Suzanne Desan, The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); and Lynn Hunt, "Male Virtue and Republican Motherhood," in The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture, vol. 4, The Terror, ed. Keith M. Baker (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1994), pp. 195-208; Lynn Hunt, "Forgetting and Remembering: The French Revolution Now and Then," American Historical Review 100 (1995): 1119-1135, esp. 1130-1132.

⁴ But see Jules Michelet's observation: "La femme est née pour la souffrance. Chacun des grands pas dans la vie est pour elle une blessure. Elle croît pour le mariage; c'est son rêve légitime." (La Femme [Paris: Flammarion, 1981], p. 221).

⁵ On nineteenth-century historians see Linda Orr, Headless History: Nineteenth-Century French Historiography of the Revolution (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990). The historian of French republicanism, Maurice Agulhon has shown that the embodiment of republican values in anonymous females was intended to limit women's participation to a passive role associated best with republican motherhood. The power of these allegories has been explained in various ways: their resonance with Catholic iconography of Mary and female saints, and with stories of (real and fictive) heroines in the ancient republics; their contrast to the male faces of French monarchy; the grammatical gender of such words in Latin-derived languages. Maurice Agulhon and Marina Warner has compared their abstract and female character with women's failure to achieve full and equal freedom with men. For Lynn Hunt, a figure like La Nation is something of a disguise, in that "the nation as mother, La Nation, had no feminine qualities." And, she adds: "it was not a threatening feminizing force and hence not incompatible with republicanism. La Nation was, in effect, a masculine mother, or a father capable of giving birth." [Maurice Agulhon, Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Marina Warner, Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form (New York: Atheneum, 1985); Lynn Hunt, The Family Romance of the French Revolution (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 99]. In my view, put forward in Visualizing the Nation, the allegory of the nation's female body operated to consolidate the heterosexual investments of modern nationalism. See also Joan B. Landes, "Republican Citizenship and Heterosocial Desire: Concepts of Masculinity in Revolutionary France," in Masculinity in Politics and War: Rewritings of Modern History, eds. Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2003).

⁶ In addition to works by Maurice Agulhon, Marina Warner, Lynn Hunt, and Joan B. Landes already cited, see: Lynn Hunt, "Hercules and the Radical Image in the French Revolution." Representations 1:2 (Spring

Historians are indeed fortunate to possess a rich visual archive from the revolutionary period, parts of which are now being made available in digital form for classroom use and scholarly research.⁷ Belonging to different genres, each with their own traditions, valences, and visual grammars, collections of revolutionary images run the gamut from caricatures, documentary prints, and allegories to printed ephemera. Alongside revolutionary ephemera (pottery, fabrics, stationary, school primers and alphabets), printed engravings could be seen in both the public and private, official and unsanctioned venues. Like words, images circulated among publics of like political persuasion.⁸ However, in contrast to the barriers posed by the act of reading, visual

1983): 95-117; idem., Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); idem., "Pourquoi la république est-elle une femme?: La Symbolique républicaine et l'opposition des genres, 1792-1799," in Michel Vovelle, ed., République et Révolution: L'Exception française (Paris: Kimé, 1994); Michel Vovelle, La Révolution Française: Images et récit, 5 vols. (Paris: Editions Messidor, Livre Club Diderot, 1986); Antoine de Baecque, La Caricature révolutionnaire (Paris: CNRS, 1988); Claude Langlois, La Caricature contre-révolutionnaire (Paris: CNRS, 1988); James A. Leith, The Idea of Art as Propaganda in France 1750-1799: A Study in the History of Ideas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965); idem., Media and Revolution: Moulding a New Citizen in France during the Terror (Toronto: CBC Publications, 1968); Philippe Bordes and Régis Michel, eds., Aux Armes et aux arts! Les Arts de la Révolution 1789-1799 (Paris, Adam Biro, 1988).

⁷ I refer to the archive in the larger sense, e.g., the important collections preserved and catalogued at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Musée Carnavalet, the Musée de la Révolution française and elsewhere, thanks to the efforts of earlier collectors and cataloguers, such as Boyer de Nîmes, M. Hennin, or Baron Eugène de Vinck. Regarding the matter of scholarly collaboration and using an electronic archive, I share the optimism of several of my colleagues about the enormous scholarly potential of digital technology, with the following caution: It seems to me that adoption of a model already in place in the sciences will demand an even more thorough-going reconsideration of existing protocols of humanistic scholarship than already required by the advent of electronic publishing. Also if "posting" amounts to a new kind of publication or pre-publication – by which others can view the changes to one's work resulting from external comments and before a work is "published" in the conventional sense – what impact will this have on the evaluation of individual creativity and merit? Will completion of a work continue to be prioritized? Can we find better mechanisms to appraise seriously a person's work in progress? How can we protect scholars from the risk of a public exposure of ignorance and error, or from an erroneous charge directed (publicly) against their work?

⁸ There is now a very large literature on the topic of the revolutionary press. For some important contributions, see Pierre Rézat, ed., La Révolution du journal, 1788-1794 (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1989); Jack R. Censer, The French Press in the Age of Enlightenment (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1994); idem., Prelude to power : The Parisian Radical Press, 1789-1791 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1976); Press and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary France, ed. Jack R. Censer and Jeremy D. Popkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Jeremy D. Popkin, Revolutionary News: The Press in France, 1789-1799 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990); idem., The Right-Wing Press in France, 1792-1800 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); idem., News and Politics in the Age of Revolution : Jean Luzac's Gazette de Leyde (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989); Roger Chartier,

spectatorship was in principle an experience that could be shared by rich and poor, educated and uneducated, literate and illiterate alike – even if the location, manner or extent of their appreciation differed in practice.⁹ As I hope to demonstrate, the visual archive is well suited to multiple tasks: first, that of determining or documenting the nature and extent of women’s participation in the revolutionary crowd; second, that of identifying the range of responses by contemporaries – positive, negative, or ambivalent – to women’s expanded public role; and third, images help scholars investigate the link, in the minds of eighteenth-century publics, between female enthusiasm and violence.

Women and the Crowd

The electronic archive prepared for this forum includes several French and one foreign print portraying two critical events where women played a central role: the journées of 5-6 October 1789 and 20 May 1795 (1 Prairial Year III in the revolutionary calendar). In addition, interesting perspectives on revolutionary women appear in two prints addressing the July 1789 events during which the Parisian crowd murdered the king’s official Joseph François Foulon. In what follows, I confine my discussion primarily to an analysis of some of the works on display in this archive. I also benefited from the insights of the other participants in determining how images embedded structures of meaning and served as principal communication vehicles for the period.

Image 5. The Fourth Incident of October 5, 1789 [4^e Événement du 5 Octobre

ed., The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe, trans. Lydia G. Cochran (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Histoire de l’édition en France, 4. vols., ed. Henri-Jean Martin et Roger Chartier (Paris: Promodis; Fayard, 1983-1986); Carla Hesse, Publishing and Cultural Politics in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1810 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁹ There remains the important issue of what is now called “visual literacy,” which would certainly have influenced a person’s comprehension of an image. In this context, I discuss the debates over the allegorical image and other such concerns. See Visualizing the Nation, chapter 1. See also Antoine de Baecque, The Allegorical Image of France, 1750 – 1800: A Political Crisis of Representation, Representations 47 (Summer 1994): 11-43.

1789: Les Femmes Parisiennes siegeant à l'Assemblée Nationale parmi leur Députés] is a marvelous representation of the invasion of the National Assembly at Versailles by the market women of Paris. The print captures the stunning role reversals that occurred during this episode when common women usurped men's privileged place at the bar of the Assembly and crowded onto the floor of the hall. In the process, women upset the proper gender order whereby men take precedence over women. In addition, their actions challenged the newly won political contract, in which representatives took precedence over the governed. As the commotion on the floor of the Assembly demonstrates, for a brief moment the still entrenched class order of privilege, property, wealth, and education was unable to trump the rights of common laborers; masculinity does not outrank femininity. Thus, the print partakes of familiar representations of carnival, in which high and low, sacred and profane exchange positions, with the expectation that ultimately things will return to normal. But the image also communicates how much these circumstances deviate from tradition: This is a deadly serious matter, with enormous consequences for the political fate of the nation.

In numerous details, the political and social stakes of the women's actions are underscored. Leaning on weighty, official volumes, a male speaker at the bar of the Assembly, on the platform to the right, motions at a female orator. To his immediate right, and also before another weighty book signifying the law, his colleague scowls menacingly at the women, while other men at the central podium and in the hall engage in lively discussions with the market women. The female protagonists are distinguished by their dress from the female observers in the galleries, who wear more elaborate, brimmed hats rather than the bonnets of the common people. But even these spectators

are stirred by the upheaval on the floor. They are shown straining to see better what is occurring below, while also in debate with their male companions. On the floor, another contrast is emphasized between the law, possessed by men, and the (unauthorized) poissarde speech of the probably illiterate fishwives.¹⁰ The woman speaking to the crowd, at the far left of the image but actually located on the Assembly's central axis, is leaning on a large tome, either another law book or, possibly, the records of the Assembly's earlier sessions produced by the seated male secretary to her left. But this closed book has a different signification than the books under the male speaker's hand. Resting his left hand solemnly on a book while raising his right hand, the speaker's gesture recalls the oath-taking ceremony of the deputies of the new nation at the Tennis Courts of Versailles, just months earlier: the dramatic action that inaugurated the new National Assembly. In contrast, the woman speaker seems indifferent to the book, which serves only to prop her up as she leans forward, as if over the counter of a market stall where she regularly hawks her goods. As in the marketplace, her immediate audience is composed of women, the first row of the audience directly to her front. In the foreground, other women talk amongst themselves, and another implores the male speaker on the podium. A third takes on a group of men, one of whom seems almost chivalrously attentive, while her informally seated compatriote listens with interest.

While this scene spells the tumultuous impact of crowd action, there is no hint of the crowd's violent potential; nor does there seem to be a prescribed script. This image carries nothing of the nineteenth-century perspective on la foule or la canaille, nor does it ostensibly manipulate deep-seated suspicions about the violent, inconstant, seditious and

¹⁰ On poissarde speech as a literary and theatrical tradition, see Carla Hesse, The Other Enlightenment, ch. 1.

credulous nature of le peuple. The women are not portrayed as acting with one mind: contra nineteenth-century renderings, noted by Jack Censer and Lynn Hunt, they are not represented as composing one mythic, unified body.¹¹ Notwithstanding their troubling actions, the print portrays them in a quite sympathetic manner, as self-authorized and self-authorizing individuals, acting on behalf of their own interests, which are at once those of the nation as well. Thus, Image 5 is an excellent example of the manner in which women's protest during the October Days came to be embraced as part of a celebratory narrative of Revolution. The print's non-incendiary title supports this benign reading of the events depicted here. As the title so matter-of-factly states, this is the fourth episode of an unfolding plot, presumably the story of the French nation achieving its freedom. As with any of the prints collected here, additional research might reveal whether the image belonged originally to a bound series and when it was published. It would also be useful to compare this particular print to other representations of the same event in folio editions of "principaux événements" or "tableaux historiques" by known artists; and, to investigate whether other series similarly label this moment as the "fourth event." However, all of these questions are prompted by the visual evidence, which by itself points in the direction of a commemorative work produced to recuperate the crowd's action within an accepted, perhaps even official version of events.¹²

A different version of the events at Versailles, at once celebratory and menacing, is offered in Image 7. A Memorable Day at Versailles, October 5, 1789 [La Journée mémorable de Versailles, le lundi 5 Octobre 1789]. The print's caption reads: "Dans

¹¹ Jack Censer and Lynn Hunt, "Imaging the French Revolution: Depictions of the French Revolutionary Crowd," American Historical Review (Feb. 2005).

cette émeute générale plusieurs Gardes du Corps ont été Massacrés, deux d'entre eux furent Décollés et leurs têtes portées en Triomphe par ce même peuple ami de la liberté.”

["In this general riot several body guards were massacred, two among them were decapitated and their heads carved--triumphs by the people, who claim to be friends of liberty."] And thus, on their return to Paris in October 1789, referred to in the caption as a “general riot” where a “massacre” has occurred at their hands, the triumphant marchers are depicted as holding aloft on pikes the severed heads of two fallen members of the royal guard at Versailles. Like Image 5, this print offers viewers a report of the events. Its documentary value consists in the central representation, to which the title and caption also contribute. On the one hand, the print’s title is not particularly revealing: and, as we will see, “journées mémorables” were routine descriptors for events throughout the Revolution. On the other hand, adjoined to an image linking violence and triumph, massacre and liberty, the title also triggers memories in viewers of the awful stakes to be suffered by those who intercede against the people’s march toward liberty. While the image celebrates the triumph of the people, it thus invites a certain distance from the bloody acts executed by these friends of liberty. Heads on pikes do warn onlookers that the people’s justice is as awesome as the king’s. The people, too, will not hesitate to sacrifice life for a just cause.

Even before the increased use of the guillotine during the Terror, the severed head (depicted in Image 7) was a widely exploited synecdoche for the threatening possibilities of crowd justice. For example, through a vocabulary of severed body parts, Image 2.

Punishment of Foulon [Supplice de Foulon] records the chilling murders of the king’s

¹² I use the word “official” advisedly, given the rapidly changing, complex political alignments and circumstances during the revolutionary decades. What was “official” in 1792 was not the same as in 1798

ministers Foulon and his Bertier de Sauvigny.¹³ To return to Image 7, it is odd that this depiction of the celebrated actions at Versailles in October 1789 includes only one woman, even though women were widely acknowledged to have been the initiators and participants of these events. In place of a head atop a pike, this female figure carries a tree branch, evoking the traditional imagery of the maypole associated with riotous behavior. Significantly, too, she is at the front of the line of marchers, and her leadership works to confirm the crowd's wild nature as well as the topsy-turvy nature of crowd action, where even a woman can be "on top."¹⁴ Attesting to women's taste for violence, moreover, the woman swirls around, her back to the viewer, in order to look again at the men and their horrific trophies. The fact that the liberty tree imagery was not yet fully established at the time of these events, as well as the print's ambivalent attitude toward its subject, suggests that the print may well have been created after the events, perhaps near the time of the 1790 criminal investigation of the October violence by the government's Châtelet Commission.

In yet another representation of these events, Image 6. Memorable Day at Versailles, Monday, October 5, 1789 [Journée memorable de Versailles, le lundi 5 Octobre], the female marchers are referred to as modern-day Amazons. The caption reads: "Nos Modernes Amazones glorieuses de leurs Victoires revinrent à Cheval sur les Canons, avec plusieurs Messieurs de la Garde Nationale, tenant des branches de Peupliers au bruit des cris réitérés de Vive la Nation, Vive le Roi." [Our modern Amazons,

or 1812, the publication dates of some of the best known collections of "tableaux."

¹³ In my current studies of eighteenth-century French artificial life, I address further many issues concerning the body part. For a preview, see my unpublished "Presidential Lecture," American Society of Eighteenth-Century Studies, Boston, 2004. For an influential perspective on the body in French revolutionary studies, see Dorinda Outram, The Body in the French Revolution (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

glorying in their victories, return on horse and with cannons along with the gentleman of the National Guard, hold poplar branches to the sound of repeated cries of Vive la Nation, Vive le Roi.] Not looking anything like the bare-breasted female warriors of ancient lore, these modern Amazonians are depicted happily enjoying their victories, in the company of several National Guardsmen. Their support of the Revolution is evinced in the poplar branches, but any threat they might pose is recuperated in shouts linking the health of the nation with that of the king. In fact, both revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries exploited the Amazonian trope for their own purposes. Among the Revolution's opponents, women's martial actions were intimately connected to the crowd's cannibalism – its taste for violence and its revolting preference for the severed head. In contrast, by conferring honor on the Amazons, the caption embraces the market women's patriotism and applauds their victorious actions.¹⁵

As we have seen, Image 7, A Memorable Day at Versailles, is an ambivalent representation: While seeming to affirm the Revolution, especially at the level of the caption, Image 7 is haunted by the negative connection between cannibalism and amazonianism, and it taps into deep-seated fears of uncontrolled women. But the transgression of moral law and political authority unleashed by the Revolution is also presented visually in the more positive Image 6, where one of the glorious Amazons leans affectionately against a Guardsman, while another is depicted seated upon a cannon barrel. These compositional details appear as nothing more than an accidental association between sexual and political license, or, as Vivian Cameron suggested, “as a sexualization, and thereby trivialization, of the political actions of the women during the

¹⁴ For the classic statement of this aspect of carnival, see Natalie Zemon Davis, “Women on Top” in Society and Culture in Early Modern France (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975).

October days ... as flirtatious dalliance in the rococo sense.”¹⁶ However, from another perspective, the connection is far less casual, given the frequent charge by the opposition that among the marchers were loose women, prostitutes.¹⁷ Also, the woman astride the cannon suggests the threatening usurpation of male power so routinely attributed to Amazonian femmes-hommes: monstrous, unnatural women who have stepped outside of their proper place. Viewed this way, the skirts and modest attire of these women only partially conceal their phallic threat.

In contrast, there is no question about the respectability of the well-dressed female figure standing on the left. An observer, not a direct participant, she is accompanied by a man of her own class. In fact, he seems to be pulling her backwards, away from too intimate an association with the parading women. This onlooker complements the modern Amazons. Whether supporter or just interested bystander, she bespeaks the reassuring possibility that Revolution and female virtue can coexist and female deference to male authority can be preserved. More ambivalent is the enthusiastic male sans-culotte, shown prancing happily alongside the central figures. Indeed, his exuberant gestures appear to block the woman’s view and her closer approach to the returning marchers.

A foreign print devoted to the October Days unabashedly points to the disturbing implications of women’s political action – not only for the French, but potentially for Germans as well. In Image 19, Parisian Fishwives [Pariser Poisarden sonst Fisch Weiber], the youthful figure of Liberty is grouped with her martial Others – an older woman, with hag-like features, dressed for combat like Minerva in a feathered helmet,

¹⁵ On the Amazon, see my Visualizing the Nation, pp. 91-98, 151.

¹⁶ Vivian Cameron, "Discussion," question 2 www.chnm.gmu.edu.

with pitch-fork, and a second market woman, carrying a pike, who helped bring the king and the government back to Paris.¹⁸ Both of these fishwives have rather stern, if not downright mean, expressions on their faces. Equally disturbing, their gaze is focused squarely on the innocent-appearing and beautiful young Liberty. In the background, old fishwives dance as if possessed, calling to mind not so remote ideas about women's diabolical nature.

Several of the print's features suggest that the dream of freedom is being held hostage to darker, unsettling forces: the menacing clouds, the over-looming size of the main figures against the diminished buildings, the contrast between Liberty's white dress and the darker garb of the two other central protagonists, as well as the disparity between youth and old age. What is worse, Liberty's hand is grasped firmly by her more martial companion, suggesting Liberty's captivity or domination by the old hag. In striking contrast to the French print, *Image 7. A Memorable Day at Versailles*, where women are surprisingly few in number, here it is the men that are altogether absent. No National Guardsmen accompany these women or interfere with the print's central message concerning the danger posed by women acting alone in public space. As Suzanne Zantop revealed, "A close reading of newspaper reports of both popular and 'high' literature indicates that many German intellectuals, irrespective of their political bent, feared that the bare-breasted [sic.] 'Liberty' – in whom the images of fury and antique goddesses are fused with that of the New World warrior woman – would not only walk over dead

¹⁷ And, indeed, much was made in the counterrevolutionary press of Théroigne de Méricourt's previous life as a courtesan. See the account of her life by Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Théroigne de Méricourt* (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

¹⁸ I agree with Vivian Cameron's suspicion that stylistically this anonymous German image is more reminiscent of nineteenth-century works, and may well have been produced in the 1830s. "Discussion," question 2 www.chnm.gmu.edu.

bodies, but cross the borders, literally and metaphorically.”¹⁹ Shrewdly, the printmaker appears to side with Liberty, and asks the viewer to do so as well, while simultaneously repudiating Liberty’s French translation. The figure Liberty’s innocence allows her to stand before the German public as a woman; but once the allegory of liberty is taken up and enacted by women of the popular classes, she is portrayed as a sinister, coarse-looking fishwife. For German onlookers, then, Liberty is both endangered and dangerous.

A post-Thermidorian French engraving also expresses ambivalence toward the crowd of women, workers, and unemployed men who stormed the National Convention in May 1795 (1 Prairial Year III), demanding bread and the return to the Constitution of 1793. Executed by the skilled engraver Isidore Helman after the accomplished artist Charles Monnet, Image 16. Day of 1 Prairial, Year III [Journée du 1er Prairial de l’an IIIe] captures the second and last of these events, during which time the Parisian poor – including very large numbers of women -- protested their loss of political power and demanded redress from market speculators, inadequate food supplies, and price controls, which together constituted the increasingly harsh economic circumstances of this period. Following the two insurrections of Germinal and Prairial, women’s political rights were further circumscribed by the authorities: women were now banned even from attending the galleries of political assemblies, thus compounding restrictions on their right to vote, stand for election, or participate in political clubs or societies, previously implemented during the constitutional monarchy and the early republic. Remonstrating alongside men of the popular classes for economic justice and political equality, this portrayal of Parisian women bears witness to the impact on popular consciousness of five years of

¹⁹ Suzanne Zantop, “Crossing the Border: The French Revolution in the German Literary Imagination,” in Representing the French Revolution: Literature, Historiography, and Art, ed. James A. W. Heffernan

Revolution, and commemorates what turned out to be perhaps the last intervention by women in national politics until the middle of the next century as well as a climactic moment for working class intervention during the Revolution. Through the raised hands of participants and the crush of countless bodies, the scene simultaneously evokes the people's jubilant spirit and its impending defeat.

The Monnet/Helman print walks a fine line between, on the one hand, reporting on women's prominence in this explosive journée, and, on the other hand, underscoring the disturbing consequences of their actions. The engraving describes the day in an almost journalistic manner. By use of architectural elements and a wide perspective, the print succeeds in impressing viewers with the vast size of the crowd. Necessarily a snapshot view of just one moment within one episode, the image nonetheless conveys a sense of movement: Beginning from the right side of the print where the crowd is immense, but its members indistinguishable, the people flood into the foreground and left side of the print, where a host of identifiable subjects emerge. There is no mistaking the fact that the crowd that captured the Convention on 1 Prairial was exceedingly large and extremely forceful. Also, even at its least intelligible, the crowd is presented as being less inchoate than articulated – moving as a body to produce the individual actors who command center-stage at the Convention.

The print's caption directs the viewer's attention to the violent side of popular action, specifically, the crowd's assassination of the deputy Ferraud who had opposed their invasion of the Convention. In fact, the caption functions to draw the viewer into the game of closer examination to find evidence in the print of the assassination; thereby skillfully orienting the viewer's attention to the issue of violence rather than politics. But

what viewer is implied by this game? The relative expense of this fine engraving by established artists, as well as the caption's address to a literate audience, suggests a great deal about the people for whom it was intended. A collectible print designed for moderate republicans of some means, this representation could then serve the collector as a commemoration within a larger story.

Thus, in this retrospective image from a published series, a raucous moment of popular insurrection is tamed: framed as one of many historical episodes in the emerging narrative of an achieved Revolution. The print's perspective distances the viewer from the scene. The setting of political upheaval and violence, and the link between women and the crowd, reinforces inherited notions of unruliness attributed to the people and women. While documenting a chaotic moment of democratic upheaval, during which the people briefly took back the assembly from their representatives, the print strikes a discordant note: In the right foreground, a woman (her back to the viewer) bends forward, straining to see or hear the commotion in the distance (center image), where one man holds upside down by a foot what appears to be the dead body of Ferraud. In the left foreground, a distraught couple makes its way out of the Convention, the man's head bowed and eyes covered at the horrible scene he has apparently just witnessed. There are multiple points of view within the image, just as the print affords the viewer numerous points of identification. Even so, the print effectively invites a sense of quiet to silence the noisy madness, a desire to restore what has been disrupted, to remember without moving backward, to honor the Revolution without embracing too closely its least defensible acts. And to the extent that pandemonium is associated with women's

presence in the crowd, then perhaps it is not too far-fetched to conclude that a more rational, calm, and measured revolution might exclude women from such a central role.

On Gender, Class and Violence

A comparison of two prints depicting the violence exhibited by the crowd on a royal official in July 1789 offers a closer look at how themes of crowd violence, popular justice, and gender were differently represented. The previously mentioned anonymous print Image 2. Punishment of Foulon [Supplice de Foulon] and Image 25. Punishment of Foulon at the Place de Grève [Supplice de Foulon à la Place de Grève, le 23 Juillet 1789], a 1792 print by Jean-Louis Prieur, both associate the actions of a mixed crowd with the hanging, decapitation, and mutilation of the body of Foulon. Yet there are considerable differences in how these prints portray women's role in and responsibility for the violence. In the anonymous print, the head of Foulon is carried on a pike; while in the foreground, one man points a musket into the chest of the dead man's headless corpse, which is being dragged along the road by members of the crowd. Simultaneously, two other crowd members -- one male, one female -- are shown raising paving stones above their heads, aimed at the corpse. Yet only the woman is posed frontally, facing toward the print's viewer; in contrast, the male figure is seen entirely from the rear, his facial expressions hidden. This staging calls attention to the woman's overly enthusiastic gestures and grimace: She, rather than the man, represents the crowd at its most irrational. Even the man with the musket seems tame in comparison: he could be interpreted as simply holding down the lifeless body, whereas she threatens to violate further an already torn corpse; to smash it into an indecipherable mess. To an important

degree, then, the anonymous artist succeeds in personalizing the crowd's action, attributing individual responsibility where there would otherwise be only collective unreason. Even though the artist portrays more intimately several male figures and at least one other woman in the crowd surrounding the impending stoning of the corpse, the centrality of the stone-lifting woman associates female fanaticism with the most irrational and violent dimension of crowd action. If this is popular justice, the print asks, what are its costs? Does the presence of women contribute to – perhaps, even necessitate – the occurrence of an extra-legal form of justice?

In contrast, Prieur stages the event from a distance (aesthetically and politically), emphasizing the size of the crowd filling the imposing Place de Grève. Carefully recording the architectural aspects of the scene, Prieur chooses not to focus in closely on any particular participants. He resists the temptation to fictionalize for the sake of narrative, the very liberty taken perhaps by the anonymous printmaker. Prieur's decision, however, raises the question of whether he was consciously trying, as Warren Roberts suggests, to legitimize the people's role in the Revolution? In other words, what work is done by his apparent decision to distance the observer from a closer look at the awful actions of the crowd, and, again, does the gender composition of the crowd matter?

Indeed, Prieur's print portrays the revolutionary crowd as overwhelmingly male, though generational differences among the men are noted; there are youths, for example, in the two groups of three in the foreground. Women are not altogether absent, however: A few caps demarcate their scattered presence among the crowd, and they are included among the spectators peering out from the buildings surrounding the square. Given what is known about Prieur's politics and the strong republican political landscape of 1792,

Cameron is not at all surprised to find him including women within a representation of the people. Yet she reads the women as complicit in the surrounding scene of violence. Here, I believe, a comparison of Images 2 and 25 is helpful. Whereas the anonymous artist made a woman out to be the central actor in the troubling episode, Prieur's attitude is more difficult to discern; suggesting perhaps greater ambivalence on his part about the very act of representation in the manner proposed by Lynn Hunt. In her words, "the very fact of sketching and engraving images [of violence] that have some kind of status as art entails a certain minimization of these violent qualities that threaten to dissolve all forms of order. So what is truly wonderful about the images is that they often capture, if only inadvertently, the fundamental ambivalence that many people must have felt about the crowd as something not entirely rational, bent on a form of justice that was not particularly attractive, and yet a fact of revolutionary politics that simply could not be wished away."²⁰

I would add, however, that the women in Prieur's print occupy a congruent structural position to the print's implied viewers: Interested but not directly involved in the act of violence. Furthermore, this position is itself one of ambivalence: It returns us to Cameron's question, e.g., how implicated is the spectator? In the anonymous print, Image 2, there is also a female spectator on an adjacent building's balcony: a considerably more respectable and sedate woman than her stone-throwing counterpart. But this onlooker's proximity to the lamppost, where Foulon was hung, underscores two of the print's central motifs, the disturbing association between enthusiasm and

²⁰ Lynn Hunt, "Discussion," question 4 www.chnm.gmu.edu.

fanaticism, and between female enthusiasm and violence or madness.²¹ Thus, the visual provocation is more direct in the anonymous work than in Prieur's image: If the female bystander's ostensibly dispassionate gaze merely disguises her interested, possibly even sadistic, pleasure in the scene of violence, does that mean that the print's viewers are implicated as well?

The barking dog in the foreground of the anonymous print echoes the woman's fanatic behavior. Her dress, gestures, behavior and location underscore her place among the common people. So if both artists suggest a class division between those directly at the scene and the more respectable onlookers, the anonymous printmaker emphatically captures the ambivalence that arises when women – and especially women of the popular classes – are directly involved in politics. By following Hunt's point that this print captures much of the ambivalence suppressed in George Rudé's and other historical studies of the crowd, then we need to go further to ask, whose ambivalence is being expressed? Perhaps what seems to be the more direct, spontaneous, and immediate representation of the events is also coded, like Prieur's, with gender as well as class assumptions. To interpret these conventions, we need recourse to recent scholarship on revolutionary women in addition to nineteenth-century arguments about the crowd and their reinterpretation by George Rudé, Albert Soboul, or Charles Tilly, Hunt reminds us.²² Finally, we might ask whether Prieur was trying -- in response to what appear to be

²¹ On the theme of enthusiasm in philosophy, culture and the visual arts, see Mary Sheriff's important new work, *Moved by Love: Inspired Artists and Deviant Women in Eighteenth-Century France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

²² In addition to sources earlier cited, see Albert Soboul, *The Sans-Culottes: The Popular Movement and Revolutionary Government, 1793-1794*, trans. Rémy Inglis Hall (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972); George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959); Harriet B. Applewhite and Darlene Levy, "Women, Radicalization, and the Fall of the French Monarchy" in their edited collection *Women and Politics in the Age of the Democratic Revolution* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990).

eighteenth-century versions of Le Bon or Taine's animosity toward popular action -- to legitimate the people's role in the Revolution by distancing the viewer from a more direct view of/confrontation with the crowd's actions and excising simultaneously any traces of the crowd's female members and emphasizing its masculine character?

The Image as Source

Historians have most often used images as simple illustrations. However, as I have argued here and elsewhere, there is much to be gained by the use of visual sources as a mode of understanding.²³ Certainly, the image provides useful documentary information about physical surroundings, costumes, social interactions and customs. In a sense, images bring to life what can only otherwise be imagined from a descriptive passage. Yet, to restrict the image to its documentary aspect is to miss the ways in which the image comments upon, interprets, and represents a particular topic or person. We may despair of ever knowing to our satisfaction how a particular image was viewed in the past, but is this problem any more intractable than that of determining the reader's response? Knowing what reading materials were published, and even who sold them or bought them, still does not answer the questions of how they were read: intensively or extensively, privately or collectively, in conventional or unconventional ways?

Although image-makers certainly attempted to shape meanings and influence opinions, their efforts could not preclude the possibility of a resistant reading by a viewer or group of viewers. And, in contrast to printed matter, images invite, sometimes entice, and are often available for repeated re-viewing. We might venture to say that the

²³ See Antoine de Baecque, "The Allegorical Image of France, 1750 – 1800: A Political Crisis of Representation," cited in Landes, Visualizing the Nation, p. 7, and see also *Ibid.*, pp. 1-56.

“habitus” of an image as compared to a text nearly guarantees that its meaning will vary from moment to moment, age to age. Jack Censer is correct to protest “The simple fact of knowing the author, as opposed to knowing the date the image was created, can make little or no difference in certain circumstances. If one is interested in the meaning of an image for the public view of an event, the main point at issue, it seems to me, is how that image interrelates with other pictorial, textual, and verbal descriptions of the same thing.” Unquestionably, we need to know more about the context in which prints were made, sold, collected, and seen; to broaden, that is, our “vision of intertextuality.”²⁴

Moreover, each image belongs to a wider field, about which much more needs to be studied. Images establish their own traditions, just as they draw upon and rework older ones. For example, there are allusions to the stoning of St. Stephen in the anonymous Image 2. Punishment of Foulon; and, as Cameron pointed out, this suggests an artist with knowledge of artistic conventions, and a desire to encourage the viewer’s sympathy for Foulon.²⁵ Thus, even works that appear to be “popular” or “naïve” can be rooted in the surrounding artistic environment and in pictorial traditions, often better acknowledged in elite genres. This dimension of art does not point in only one direction. In a bicentennial exhibition in 1989, the American artist Zuka replays the iconography of revolution in the 1790s, paying homage to her predecessors and to the contribution they made to a now 200-year-old pictorial tradition of modern revolution <http://www.feministstudies.org/153.jpg>. Yet, this is not an example of uninspired mimicry. As Linda Nochlin grasped, “At last -- a woman artist to take possession of

²⁴ Jack Censer, "Discussion," question 6 www.chnm.gmu.edu.

²⁵ Vivian P. Cameron, "Reflections on Violence and the Crowd in the Images of the French Revolution," in this website; and "Discussion," question 6 www.chnm.gmu.edu.

history and to position women as active participants within the historical process itself!"²⁶

We could say that by locating women so centrally in the revolutionary process, Zuka is also engaging in an act of revision; but, at the same time, she is honoring the roles women actually played. Her vision is not a fiction, but another kind of invention, a “what if?” Like recent historians, Zuka uncovered a buried female contribution, and she is faithful to the facts unearthed in recent feminist scholarship. Still her vision of art as performance, as a series of tableaux vivants, is central to her representation of revolutionary action, as consisting of order and chaos, of joyful acts and sober realities.

Similarly, no study of context or production can relieve the historian of the obligation to interpret the visual evidence. This requires abandoning the entrenched attitude that such interpretation is necessarily more suspect – and more “presentist” -- than the interpretations we make of written evidence. While respecting the interpenetration of visual and verbal conventions, much more needs to be appreciated about the ability of images – and, not just “high art” – to solicit, persuade, and provoke meanings among their viewers. Finally, all of the images I have commented on present female bodies in public spaces. It is for this reason that I have elsewhere addressed the image in revolutionary culture as a variety of political argument.²⁷ Consequently, we

²⁶ Linda Nochlin, “Zuka’s French Revolution: A Woman’s Place is Public Space,” in Zuka: The French Revolution Through American Eyes: Paintings, Collages, Painted Cutouts (Paris: Mona Bismark Foundation; Washington, D.C.: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1988), p. 3. As Nochlin also says, “the representation of major political events in the visual arts is generally thought of as pompous, solemn, and frozen: conservative in the worst sense of the word ... There were never any pratfalls on the high road to destiny according to the average machine de salon. Nothing could be further from Zuka’s spirited take on the French Revolution. Like all good historians – and all original artists – she knows that the past can only come to life in terms of the present. Although she has looked long and hard at the documents of the French Revolution and appropriated a wide cross-section of its visual imagery, she has brought the revolution to life in terms of her own experience of it in the 20th century, and through a language in which wit, playfulness, modernist irreverence, and awareness of the deflationary possibilities inherent in the formal means of art itself are fused by pictorial energy to create a vision of history that is at once idiosyncratically contemporary yet historically accurate.” *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

²⁷ See Landes, Visualizing the Nation, chapter 1.

need to ask how they “constitute and transgress the gendered boundaries between the material and immaterial, the conscious and the unconscious, the personal and the political, the individual and the collective.”²⁸ For, as Anne Norton has astutely observed, “in politics the body changes,” and nowhere is this more evident than in the case of women’s presence in male-authorized public domains.²⁹

²⁸ Landes, Visualizing the Nation, p. 1.

²⁹ Anne Norton, Reflections on Political Identity (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins Press, 1988), cited in Landes, Visualizing the Nation, p. 2.