

The
CALENDAR
in
**REVOLUTIONARY
FRANCE**

Perceptions of Time in Literature, Culture, Politics

SANJA PEROVIC



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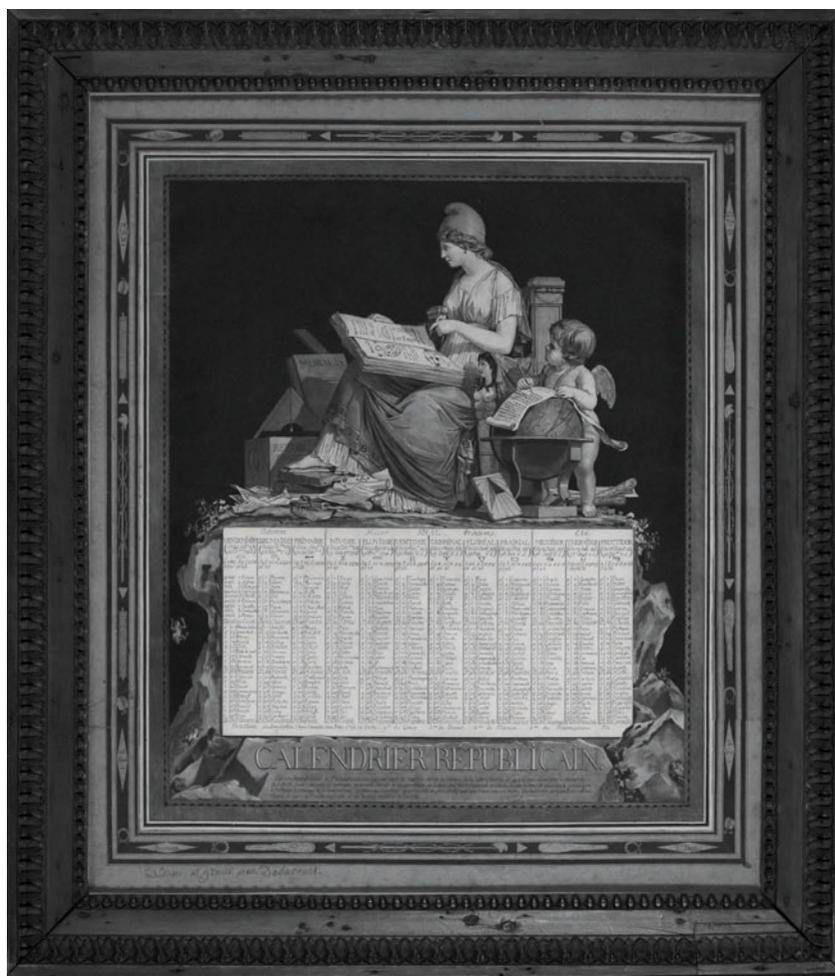
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THE CALENDAR IN REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE

One of the most unusual decisions of the leaders of the French Revolution – and one that had immense practical as well as symbolic impact – was to abandon customarily accepted ways of calculating date and time to create a revolutionary calendar. The experiment lasted from 1793 to 1805 and prompted all sorts of questions about the nature of time, ways of measuring it and its relationship to individual, community, communication and creative life. This study traces the course of the revolutionary calendar, from its cultural origins to its decline and fall. Tracing the parallel stories of the calendar and the literary genius of its creator, Sylvain Maréchal, from the Enlightenment to the Napoleonic era, Sanja Perovic reconsiders the status of the French Revolution as the purported ‘origin’ of modernity, the modern experience of time and the relationship between the imagination and political action.

SANJA PEROVIC is Lecturer in the French Department at King’s College London.



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Chronology of Gregorian and Republican Calendars

	1788
09-Jan	Sylvain Maréchal's <i>Almanach des honnêtes gens</i> burnt by the royal censor
08-Aug	The États-généraux are convoked for 1 May
	1789
	1789
05-May	Opening of the États-généraux
17-Jun	Le tiers état constitutes itself as a National Assembly
20-Jun	Serment du jeu de paume
14-Jul	Fall of the Bastille
04-Aug	Abolition of feudalism and of certain seigneurial rights
26-Aug	Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen
06-Oct	The king is taken back to Paris
	1790
21-May	Paris is divided into forty-eight sections
14-Jul	Fête de la Fédération
	1791
20-Jun	Flight of the king and his family
21-Jun	The king is arrested at Varennes
13-Sep	Louis XVI approves the revised Constitution
30-Sep	Constituent Assembly dissolved
01-Oct	First session of the Legislative Assembly

	1792
02-Jan	Legislative Assembly decides that 1 January 1792 is the beginning of Year IV of Liberty. This means that Year III only lasts from July 14 to December 31 1791
10-Aug	Constitution of the revolutionary Commune of Paris
18-Aug	Capture of the Tuileries
End of August	Abolition of the last religious orders
2/5-Sep	First mention of 10 August as the beginning of Year I of Equality
20-Sep	Massacres in the prisons of Paris
	French victory at Valmy. Civil registry established
	Law on divorce. End of the Legislative Assembly
21-Sep	First session of the National Convention.
	Abolition of the monarchy
22-Sep	Year I of the French Republic
10-Dec	Opening of Louis XVI's trial
December	Convention demands a report on calendar reform
	1793
21-Jan	Louis XVI is guillotined
31-May	Uprising against the Girondins
02-Jun	A second demonstration against the Convention
	Arrest of the Girondin deputies
13-Jul	Assassination of Marat
27-Jul	Robespierre elected to the Committee of Public Safety
01-Aug	Barère demands Marie-Antoinette's transfer to the Conciergerie and the destruction of the royal tombs at St. Denis
10-Aug	David's Festival features a bonfire destroying all the marks of feudalism
05-Sep	Barère demands the 'mise de la Terreur à l'ordre du jour', but this is not implemented

10-Sep	Romme's Report on the Republican Calendar
05-Oct	The Commune votes to publish 2,000 copies of Sylvain Maréchal's <i>Almanach des Républicains</i>. Reverses its decision after the Convention decides to adopt Romme's first five proposals for a Republican calendar the same day
	Year II
10-Oct/19 Vendémiaire	Constitution is suspended
16-Oct/25 Vendémiaire	Execution of Marie-Antoinette
18-Oct/27 Vendémiaire	First performance of Sylvain Maréchal's <i>Le jugement dernier des rois</i>
5-Nov/15 Brumaire	Marie-Joseph Chénier demands festivals for the new calendar
10-Nov/20 Brumaire	La Fête de la Raison in Notre-Dame
21-Nov/1 Frimaire	Robespierre attacks atheism in the Jacobin Club
24-Nov/4 Frimaire	Adoption of Fabre d'Eglantine's nomenclature for calendar
Brumaire/Frimaire	The first churches are closed in and around Paris
	1794
3-Jan/12 Nivôse	Sylvain Maréchal's <i>La Fête de la Rosière</i> slated for performance
13–14-Jan/23–24 Nivôse	Fabre d'Eglantine arrested for corruption
21-Jan/2 Pluviôse	<i>Le jugement dernier des rois</i> replaced at the Théâtre de la République
21-Mar/1 Germinal	Opening of the trial of the Hébertistes
24-Mar/4 Germinal	Execution of the Hébertistes, including Cloutz
2-Apr/13 Germinal	Trial of the Dantonists
5-Apr/16 Germinal	Death of Fabre d'Eglantine
13-Apr/24 Germinal	Death of Chaumette
16-Apr/27 Germinal	The Brutus section stops meeting
Germinal and Floréal	Waves of de-Christianization
7-May/18 Floréal	Decree of the Convention recognizing the Supreme Being

8-Jun/20 Prairial	Festival of the Supreme Being celebrated on the day of the Pentecost. In his plans, Robespierre includes Maréchal's 36 <i>Hymnes Décadaires</i>
27-July/9 Thermidor	Robespierre and his supporters arrested
28-July/10 Thermidor	Execution of Robespierre, Saint-Just, Couthon and nineteen other Robespierrists
23-Aug/6 Fructidor	Sylvain Maréchal's <i>Denys le tyran</i>, with music by Grétry, performed at the Théâtre des Arts (Opéra)
	Year III
Vendémiaire–Nivôse	Renewed discussion on the <i>fêtes décadaires</i>
	1795
4-Feb/19 Pluviôse	Arrest of Babeuf
7-Apr/18 Germinal	Introduction of metric system
20-May/1 Prairial	Convention invaded by delegation demanding bread and the Constitution of Year II
31-May/12 Prairial	Suppression of the Revolutionary Tribunal
8-June/20 Prairial	Death of Louis XVII in the Temple
17-June/29 Prairial	Suicide of Gilbert Romme
22-Aug/5 Fructidor	Constitution of Year III agreed, accompanied by the law of two-thirds
23-Aug/6 Fructidor	Closure of clubs and popular societies
	Year IV
5-Oct/13 Vendémiaire	Crushing of the royalist revolt
25-Oct/3 Brumaire IV	Law decreeing that all festivals henceforth take place on the <i>décadi</i>, except two: Foundation of the Republic on 1 vendémiaire and the fall of Robespierre on 9 and 10 thermidor
31 October/9 Brumaire	Election of the Directory

1796

30-Mar/10 Germinal Babeuf sets up the Insurrectionary
Committee for his 'Conspiracy of Equals'

10-May/21 Floréal Babeuf arrested

Year V

1797

January/Nivôse Establishment of the cult of
Theophilanthropy

27-May/8 Prairial Death of Babeuf and Darthé

4-Sep/18 Fructidor Coup d'état of 18 Fructidor

15-Sep/29 Fructidor **Councils no longer to meet on *décadis*
and will observe all national festivals**

Year VI

1798

3-Apr/14 Germinal **Decree insisting on the Republican
calendar**

4-Aug/17 Thermidor **Re-proclamation of the *décadi* as the
only official day of rest**

30-Aug/13 Fructidor **Organization of the *décadi* celebrations,
including law that marriage can only
be celebrated on the *décadi*
Neufchâteau organises a series of
national festivals for the year**

9-Sep/23 Fructidor **Decree that all public life (fairs, markets
etc) be celebrated on the Republican
calendar**

Year VIII

1799

9-Nov/18 Brumaire Napoléon becomes commander of the army
in Paris

Executive Directory is overthrown and
replaced by a 'Consulat'

21-Nov /30 Brumaire **Laplace decrees that Republican calendar
is maintained**

23-Dec/2 Nivôse	Laplace decrees that only two public festivals remain in the calendar: 14 July and 1 Vendémiaire
	1800
26-July/7 Thermidor	<i>Décadi</i> stipulated for civil use only
	Year IX
	1801
15-July/26 Messidor	Concordat is signed
	Year X
	1802
8-Apr/28 Germinal	Concordat made public in time for Easter Sunday re-established as the official day of rest for government employees
2-Aug/14 Thermidor	Napoléon named Consul for life
	Year XI
	1803
18-Jan/28 Nivôse 1803	Death of Sylvain Maréchal
	Year XII
	1804
18-May/28 Floréal	Napoléon declares himself emperor
	Year XIII
2-Dec/11 Frimaire	Coronation
	1805
2-Sep/15 Fructidor	Senate decides to reconsider the restoration of the Gregorian calendar
8-Sep/22 Fructidor	Laplace's report and the abolition of the Republican calendar
	1806
1-Jan/11 Nivôse	Gregorian calendar restored

Introduction

On 22 September 1793, the day of the autumn equinox, a new French Republican calendar was proclaimed. According to the gospel of the French Revolution, history began anew on the very day that a natural equality between day and night was observed. For Gilbert Romme, the calendar's chief architect, the calendar marked the epoch when the history of the French Revolution converged with nature itself, when natural equality and the power of human beings over their own history became one and the same. Thanks to the new calendar, the Revolution's rupture with the past was to be transformed into a wholly new experience of time, one made according to the joint dictates of nature and reason. Gone were the 'eighteen centuries' of despotism and tyranny. Sweeping away history in order to start time anew, the revolutionary calendar attempted to accomplish what had never been done before: make time express the *intentions* of history.

The scope of the new calendar's ambition was stunning. Lifting the French Revolution from the existing historical time line, the calendar established 1792 as the beginning of Year I. Months were renamed after the seasons. Brumaire was reminiscent of November fog; Germinal recalled the fecundity of an April spring; Thermidor, the heat of the July sun. Mirroring the recently devised metric division of space, the seven-day week was replaced by a new ten-day week called the *décade*. Gone was the memory of the Sabbath, when God himself took a rest. Time rejoined the secular world. Human time and its agents became the material through which a break with the religious and political structures of the past was to be accomplished.

The goal of the new calendar was nothing less than to create a new collective memory for the nascent French Republic. Under the ancien régime, each social order (aristocratic, religious, plebeian) had claimed to derive from different temporal origins. The aristocrats derived their origins from the Frankish invaders; the clergy administered religious time; the

plebeians were believed to have descended from the original inhabitants. Together they affirmed a pyramidal hierarchy of social relations that reflected the divine order of the universe in which the master was lord and the vassal, God's willing subject. The religious rites of the calendar unified these collective identities into one temporal order and gave them the appearance of belonging to a timeless, unchanging social order ratified by nature. The Republican calendar, in contrast, aimed to create a new collective memory based on the idea of a natural equality. It was only once the collective memories of the different social classes could be conceived as belonging to one and the same time – a universal time that had now become the time of the French Republican state – that the birth of a new society could be established.

The need, as one can imagine, was urgent. Already by fall 1793, when the calendar was first established, the French Revolution had celebrated multiple beginnings and had declared numerous endings. Unless the various interpretations could converge into one collective memory – a shared vision of both the Revolution's past as well as its future – the Republic's legitimacy was not established. This need was even more pressing with the overthrow and execution of the king. For rupture to be acknowledged as a symbol of regeneration, the past had to be globally rejected. To allow a variety of different memories was to suggest a return to different origins and allow the continuing threat of counter-revolution.

By providing the dates, the holidays – the *shared* experience of time – a new calendar seemed an obvious solution. This was because a calendar, in the words of Émile Benveniste, allowed the revolutionaries to create the experience that all these times belonged to one time, the same time, which is the *sine qua non* of collective life.¹ If the old calendar was able to integrate celestial patterns, biological rhythms, the seasons and cycles of social life into *one* collective experience of time, why could a new calendar not do the same for the Revolution? In a feat of revolutionary magic, the calendar was to transform the ongoing power struggles that threatened to capsize the new republic into a *common experience of time itself*. A new calendar, or so the revolutionaries reasoned, could provide a total vision of revolutionary time, one that would replace the past with a new source of time grounded in the French Republic. The calendar thus marks a crucial moment in which the events of the French Revolution came to be seen as belonging to their own time. Its goal – which, as Reinhart Koselleck has argued, later became that of historical narrative

¹ Benveniste, *Problems in general linguistics*, 71.

more generally² – was to reduce the multiple and competing narratives of the Revolution into a reflection of one time, the time of History.

Out of this epic struggle between two calendars – the one religious, upholding tradition, and the other remaking time according to the ‘eternal present of nature and calculation’³ and therefore secular – a new political order was established. Every single revolutionary government, up to and including Napoléon, relied on this calendar to mark a new, shared time. The Republican calendar therefore articulates, as no other artifact does, how a new political order attempted to establish itself through a new division of time. On the most general level, it shows how calendar time regulates the political and social order by providing us both with the time lines to synchronize historical events and the recurring patterns with which we remember the past. More specifically, it shows how calendar time played a crucial role in transforming the French Revolution from an event within the history of the French nation into a world-historical dividing line, a threshold separating an ‘egalitarian’ and ‘secular’ experience of time from a ‘hierarchical’ and ‘religious’ past. Its effects can still be felt today whenever the French Revolution is hailed as the beginning of a new ‘world-historical epoch’; whenever rupture is defined as an essential feature of modernity; and whenever the French Revolution is said to have distinguished itself from all previous revolutions by adopting a new perspective on historical time. As Koselleck has so well articulated, part of what was new about the French Revolution was precisely this historically unprecedented determination to change calendar time.⁴

And yet despite its success in perpetuating the image of the Revolution as a unified historical event, the Republican calendar, as is well known, eventually failed to establish this new temporal order. This failure results in a somewhat contradictory situation: We have inherited the Revolution’s premise of rupture and its claim to have inaugurated a new secular politics associated with a ‘modern’ time without taking into sufficient account the eventual failure of the calendar to institute this very premise, at least

² See especially Koselleck, ‘Revolution, Rebellion, Aufruhr, Bürgerkrieg,’ whose main points are reprised in ‘Historical Criteria of the Modern Concept of Revolution’, 50: ‘The first point that must be noted is the novel manner in which, since 1789, “revolution” has effectively been condensed to a *collective singular*. ... As with the German concept of *Geschichte*, which is the form of ‘history pure and simple’ contained within itself the possibilities of all individual histories, Revolution congealed into a collective singular which appeared to unite within itself the course of all individual revolutions. Hence, revolution became a *metahistorical concept*, completely separated, however, from its naturalistic origin and henceforth charged with ordering recurrent convulsive experiences.’

³ Michelet, *Histoire de la Révolution française*, 624–5.

⁴ See Koselleck, ‘Remarks on the Revolutionary Calendar and *Neue Zeit*’, ‘Time and History’.

in the way it was understood in its own present. The alleged triumph of secularism, in other words, masks its origins in a failed rupture with the past; modern time emerges out of the very religious and political conceptions it claims to leave behind.⁵ Even less attention has been paid to the way that the calendar's failure exposes the many, and conflicting, ideas of revolutionary time that competed for historical prominence. After all, just because the revolutionaries invented a new calendar does not mean that the Revolution had in fact operated such a historical break with the past. The fact that the calendar was so successful in perpetuating the Revolution's self-image as a rupture with the past even as it failed foregrounds the difficulty of taking for granted any claims that the Revolution made about its historical origins. This book addresses this critical oversight by showing how the calendar can be used to undertake a task normally considered outside the purview of traditional historical narratives of the Revolution: the recovery of revolutionary time as it was experienced in its own present, in the absence of the historical narratives that would subsequently define its origins and outcomes and circumscribe the epoch to which it belonged.

This book's central claim is that the French Revolution, while often studied as a political, social, or cultural event, instead poses primarily a problem in the history of representations of time. Although a cliché, it is nonetheless true to claim that the French Revolution effectuated a rupture with the past and a new sense of time. From the informal and largely spontaneous proclamation of 14 July 1789 as the beginning of Year I to the institution of the actual Republican calendar in 1793, 'new time' was the order of the day. But while scholars have been sensitive to the symbolic aspect of new time – Lynn Hunt on revolutionary symbolism and Mona Ozouf on the Revolution's festivals are two prominent examples⁶ – there has been little extended treatment of how the revolutionary calendar functioned as an 'intended future' for the Revolution.⁷ This is all the more surprising given that the calendar, instituted by the Jacobin government in 1793 and revived by every revolutionary government for nearly thirteen years, remained a potent symbol of political, social and religious power for so long. Rather than take the failure of the Republican calendar for granted, this book argues that the calendar was abandoned not

⁵ See Milo, *Trahir le temps (Histoire)*, for the role of the Republican calendar in popularizing the new division of time by centuries, even if this was not its intent.

⁶ Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution*; Ozouf, *La fête révolutionnaire, 1789–1799*.

⁷ A notable exception is Baczko, *Lumières de l'utopie*, which I discuss later.

because it was bereft of meaning but because it had accumulated too many diverging interpretations of the Revolution. It thus turns the question of the revolutionary calendar on its head to ask: What would happen to our vision of revolutionary history if we took seriously the fact that the Republican calendar was in place for nearly thirteen years? And what does the calendar's relatively long decay tell us about the instability of the categories of 'past' and 'future' during this period?

The calendar's very failure to institute the premise of new time, I argue, transformed it into a living document that resonates with all the different struggles over the meaning of time that punctuated the Revolution's self-image. This monumental concentration of state energy over a calendar reveals the strength of the revolutionary belief in the symbolic power of time. To be sure, much of the support for the calendar derived from the elite and included some of the most prominent scientists, astronomers, artists, bankers, composers and writers of the late eighteenth century. While this might call for some more limited claims about the calendar's importance, I suggest on the contrary that this overwhelming support foregrounds precisely what is fascinating about this story: How could something as drastic as a change in calendar time come to reflect the cultural assumptions of an entire ruling elite? What did such a control over the experience of time mean for the revolutionaries? And what kind of power, symbolic and real, would a successful calendar have allowed them to establish? Galvanizing a flurry of speeches, pamphlets, decrees, and reforms the calendar served as a point of consensus as well as a heated source of dispute as each faction attempted to project its own concept of revolutionary change through it. And yet despite such emotional investment, the calendar was eventually discarded without so much as a whimper or sign of opposition. Nothing is more evocative of the extremely close relationship between the political elite and the changing ideology of the French Revolution than this calendar, which, as Michael Meinzer has observed, was instituted without opposition and abandoned without difficulty.⁸

By recovering the multiple and conflicting experiences of time during the revolutionary period, this book aims to go beyond conventional historiography to reconstruct what can be best described as a seismogram of revolutionary time. I do this by showing how the calendar carried the stain of events that were diversely perceived, embellished or repressed as they unfolded in time. The different dates that rose to prominence over

⁸ See Meinzer, 'Der Französische Revolutionskalender und die, Neue Zeit' 22–60.

the course of the calendar's many incarnations – some, like 9 Thermidor and 18 Brumaire, to remain; others to recede – appear as so many peaks or intensities of time. Moments that attract the most attention and amass the most interpretative energy stand as symptoms of the greatest divergence between the Revolution's ideal time and the lived experience of events.

But the Republican calendar is more than a simple testament to what Mona Ozouf has neatly characterized as the difference between 'temps voulu' and 'temps vécu'. For the calendar's metamorphoses also reveal how the temporal demarcations used in most conventional accounts of the French Revolution (Year II, 9 Thermidor as the 'end' of the Terror, 18 Brumaire as the 'end' of the Revolution and so forth) cannot be considered 'objective' because they originated as politically contested categories used by the various factions to distinguish themselves from each other. To give just one example, Françoise Brunel has shown how 9 Thermidor, conventionally understood to herald the 'end of the Terror', was only established as such after the fact, by revolutionaries seeking to disclaim responsibility for the events of the previous year.⁹ That 9 Thermidor was followed by a renewed commitment to the *fêtes décadaires* demonstrates the extent to which any such 'turning point' was established not just by appeal to the logic of events but also to a time of commitment. Over and over again, the various revolutionary factions sought to regain control over the Revolution by reiterating their commitment to a total revolution, represented by the new calendar. (Significantly, this commitment was expressed as a unity of time precisely in those moments when it failed to materialize as a functional political space).

Beyond establishing the sequence of events, therefore, recovering this time of commitment requires a deeper engagement with the importance of the new calendar for the revolutionaries. Ozouf has shown the extent to which the Revolution attempted to recreate a 'festive enlightenment' in which outside natural changes, nothing marked the hours. But it cannot be emphasized enough the extent to which the solar myth – the age-old association of terrestrial with celestial power – is essentially a myth about calendar time. The revolutionary desire to re-establish human society according to natural measures is thus inseparable from a more widespread belief, common in the radical intellectual spheres of the late Enlightenment, that the origins of all social and religious institutions can be traced to a time in which man lived in harmony with nature; in which

⁹ Brunel, *Thermidor ou la chute de Robespierre*, 41, 128.

life and death, work and rest, followed the natural rhythms of day and night, the changes of the seasons and the natural stages of human life from birth to death. Even as it embodied a natural, solar, cyclical time, however, the Republican calendar also transposed a Christ-like image onto the astronomical revolutions. The new time line marked the death of the old order and the birth of the new. In this sense, the Republican calendar was crucial in combining two aspects of revolutionary time that proved, in the end, to be at odds: the belief in history as linear progress and the desire for a collective moral and political regeneration that can only take place in a cyclical time. This double-sided aspect of calendar time thus raises further key questions addressed by this book: How did a Revolution that first staged itself as regeneration, that is, as a restoration of a better past, come to think of itself under the symbol of rupture? In other words, how did a Revolution that had turned to a new calendar in order to reintegrate history into the natural and cyclical time of planetary 'revolutions' come to define itself as an irreversible and linear change? And what was the process by which these many ostensibly 'natural revolutions' came to be reduced to the one Revolution that now moved in the linear and homogeneous time of History?

One of the principal aims of this book thus is to challenge the conventional periodization of the French Revolution by reintegrating the Revolution into its own intended time frame, which was cosmic and universal. Most studies of the revolutionary calendar have treated it as a historical object, whether narrowly attributing it to the historical moment of Year II or more broadly relating it to a cultural logic of rationalization, revolutionary regeneration or even the utopian Enlightenment.¹⁰ This book, however, adopts a different approach. Rather than assume our contemporary understanding of the Revolution as an event occurring exclusively in linear, chronological time, I use the calendar to reintegrate the Revolution in its *imagined* time frame, in which it projected itself as an

¹⁰ See Shaw, *Time and the French Revolution*; Shusterman, *Religion and the Politics of Time*; Meinzer, *Der französische Revolutionskalender (1792–1805)*, 'Der Französische Revolutionskalender und die, Neue Zeit'; Bianchi, 'La "Bataille du Calendrier" ou le décadi contre le dimanche: Nouvelles approches pour la réception du calendrier républicain en milieu rural'; Ozouf, 'Calendrier révolutionnaire'; Baczo, 'Le calendrier républicain'; Marie-Hélène and Michel Froeschlé-Chopard, 'Le calendrier républicain, une nécessité idéologique et/ou scientifique'; Brotherston, 'The Republican Calendar: A Diagnostic of the French Revolution'; Friguglietti, 'Gilbert Romme and the making of the French Republican calendar', 'The Social and Religious Consequences of the French Revolutionary Calendar' (Ph.D. diss); Zerubavel, 'The French Republican Calendar: A Case Study in the Sociology of Time'; Andrews, 'Making the Revolutionary Calendar'. For rationalization of the future see William Max Nelson, 'The Weapon of Time: *Constructing the Future in France, 1750 to Year 1*. (Ph.D. diss. UCLA).

axis of world history. In other words, I am suggesting that any analysis of revolutionary time has to take into account two different time frames: the global and cosmological calendar time that was the French Revolution's *imagined* time frame and the much shorter local time frame of revolutionary history itself, a period crowded with almost too many conflicting dates and events.

By accounting for these two time frames, this book shows how the calendar neatly distils a phenomenon common to all revolutions, which is to posit both rupture and continuity, or a return to origins. What might remain a general methodological challenge in studies of the French Revolution – how to understand time from the vantage point of those who lived it, as well as the modern vantage point of historical distance – becomes, in the case of the French revolutionary calendar, an empirical struggle. It is not surprising in this regard that the Terror, as Jean-Clément Martin has observed, remains a period without clearly defined historical dates.¹¹ There is no consensus on either the beginning or the end of the Terror because it is impossible to separate the meaning and significance of events from their 'projected future'. The analytical lens of the calendar thus enables the recovery of two time lines – the conventional chronological time line of events as derived from the historical record and the imagined time frame through which the different revolutionary factions reinterpreted and realigned events in light of future expectations. To help the reader navigate these two time frames, I have appended a double chronology to this book. Every event is represented as belonging to both time frames, that of the Republican calendar with its endlessly reiterated 'beginnings' and 'ends', and that of our own Gregorian calendar, the conventional way for representing revolutionary history.

CALENDAR TIME AND THE PROBLEM OF REVOLUTIONARY INTENTION

Calendars of course are about much more than history because they essentially concern the division and periodization of time itself. They oblige us to adopt a far longer timescale than the one normally associated with the French Revolution and to question the extent to which modern history presupposes, and indeed relies upon, a certain understanding of calendar time. In recent years, this increasing engagement with modernity as a historical construct has led a number of prominent scholars, in a

¹¹ Martin, *Violence et Révolution*, 189.

variety of fields, to criticize what they call ‘presentism’, the application of a contemporary perspective or time schema on events of the past.¹² Today this modern time schema is inseparable from a globalized Gregorian calendar. However, as the Republican calendar so well demonstrates, this was never the only candidate for ‘modern time’. To understand how the Revolution was constructed in its own present, therefore, also means taking seriously a competing understanding of modernity than the one that has prevailed.

Scholars as diverse as Anthony Grafton, Lynn Hunt and Penelope Corfield have all recently insisted that calendars are about much more than simply measuring time.¹³ It is because the calendar is both humanly constructed as well as dependent on forces of nature beyond human control that it defies the simple dualisms so often used to differentiate religion from history, history from nature, and linear from cyclical time. On the one hand, calendar time differs from historiography by relying on the recurrence of natural phenomena to measure what we experience in our lives as an unrepeatable flow of events. Throughout history there have been different calendars, but all of them rely on some form of cyclical time to provide standardized reference points: the solar cycle for the year, the lunar phases for the month or the alternation of shadow and light for night from day. These recurring rhythms not only regulate human life and social organization, but also guarantee the ‘objectivity’ and ‘universality’ of historical time.

On the other hand, the calendar does not just belong to the cyclical time of nature; it also belongs to human history. This is because all calendars presuppose a ground zero from which events are dated. All calendars, in other words, date their time line from a foundational event in human history, even though this theoretical starting point is usually

¹² A by no means exhaustive list includes Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*; Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité*; Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*; Gumbrecht, *In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time*; Sewell, *Logics of History*. Closer to the revolutionary period, Fritzsche has emphasized the emotional impact of revolutionary upheaval in European historical consciousness, *Stranded in the Present*; Hans Lüsebrink and Rolf Reichardt have reconstructed the multiplicity of symbolic meanings of rupture in *The Bastille*.

¹³ See Rosenberg and Grafton, *The Cartographies of Time*; Grafton, *What Was History*; Hunt *Measuring Time/Making History*; Corfield, *Time and the Shape of History*; see also Elias, *Time: An Essay*, Maiello *Storia del calendario*, the highly influential earlier work by Pomian, *L'ordre du temps* and the more recent collection *Les Calendriers: Leurs enjeux dans l'espace et dans le temps*. There is a much more extensive literature on time in anthropology and sociology than in historical science proper, which has only recently seen an upsurge of interest. See Munn, ‘The Cultural Anthropology of Time’. See also the discussion in Hunt, *Measuring Time/Making History*, 16–18.

only consecrated many years later.¹⁴ This is the case of the Christian calendar, which was instituted several centuries after Christ's birth when the emperor Constantine Christianized the Julian calendar established by Julius Caesar, itself originally imported from Egypt where the true length of the solar year had first been established in the Mediterranean world. As Denis Feeney has noted, the Julian calendar represented a 'watershed' in the organization of time, eventually extended to the modern world, because it was the first to associate the calendar 'exclusively with measuring time'.¹⁵ Whereas before calendars reflected the religious and civic festivals of cities and communities, all of which had their own separate calendars, after the Julian reform the calendar became what it is considered to be today: solely an instrument of measuring time.

Since this is the calendar that the revolutionaries tried to overturn, it is worth dwelling here a moment. In his bid to institute Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire, Constantine renamed the days of the week, fixed Easter, attributed saints to the days and established Sunday as the official day of rest (this last was a compromise between Christians and the worshippers of Mithra, whose day was Sunday, and had the advantage of being distinct from the Jewish Sabbath). Christianizing the Julian calendar enabled Constantine to ground the first Christian political state in a geographical and temporal unity. Historical chronology, however, was still marked according to the reigns of emperors, indicating the subordination of religion to the political time of the state. It was not until after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, when a thoroughly Christian society was established in Western Europe, that a new chronology counting the years from the birth of Christ finally came into official use.

Martin Malia is one historian who has recently argued for the importance of analyzing the Revolution by going backward and forward in time. Adopting a millennial time frame, Malia traces the revolutionary impulse back to the year 1000, when a distinctive European civilization emerged and any revolt was directed at the church, the 'all-embracing unit of European society'.¹⁶ Instead of remaining subordinated to the state, as it was under Constantine, Christianity came to replace the empire as the primary political and social force. As Malia notes, changes in the political order were marked by changes in calendar time. Years were now counted from the birth of Christ rather than using the regnal years of the

¹⁴ Couderc, *Le Calendrier*, 49. ¹⁵ Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 193–6.

¹⁶ Malia, *History's Locomotives*, 19.

Roman emperors¹⁷; pagan holidays were Christianized and the invention of automated church bells extended Benedict's monastic timetable, which had combined the Christian calendar with the divisions of the Roman army day, to all of society.¹⁸ The medieval Christian calendar thus played an essential role in consolidating this new political order not just by fusing together the secular sphere of feudalism with the sacred sphere of Roman Catholicism, but also by imposing a static vision of a timeless social order ratified by nature.

Whatever one may think of the merits of an approach that traces revolution to the social role of Christianity, it is clear that the medieval Christian calendar, which had slowly evolved between the fourth and ninth centuries, loomed large in the revolutionary imagination. It is this calendar that the French revolutionaries sought to strip of its religious symbolism in order to return to the astronomical layer of the Julian calendar that preceded it; and it is this calendar that they attacked in an attempt to pry apart the secular and sacred origins of the French nation. It is thus not simply the desire to return to a natural time that made the revolutionaries so backward oriented. Insofar as a *calendar* was used to wage a frontal assault on Europe's tri-partite social division, the French Revolution also derived its most distinctive characteristics from the representations of time that it defined itself *against*.

This is expressed most clearly in the Republican calendar's structural similarity with the very Christian calendar it aimed to overturn. Just as Christianity is a religion based on the event of Christ's birth, death and Resurrection – which forever changed the meaning of history – so too the Revolution understood itself as a rupture in time that forever changed the meaning of history. Moreover just as Christianity is a religion of both history and the calendar, so too the French Revolution understood itself as belonging to a new time that was historical as well as calendrical. Although Christianity may have been the first religion to be rooted in a concrete historical event dividing time into a *before* and *after*, it only became a universal religion once it mapped the story of Christ's birth, death and Resurrection onto the cosmic 'universal' time of the calendar. So too the French Revolution claimed to start time anew in the form of

¹⁷ The practice of dating from the year of the Incarnation was started by Dionysius Exiguus (Denis le Petit) in the first half of the sixth century but took several centuries to become established. In 957 the pontifical chancellery adopted it for official use, but widespread use in France did not occur until well after the millennium, when Western Christendom sought to distinguish itself from the Roman world. See Favreau, 'La datation dans les inscriptions médiévales françaises'.

¹⁸ See Landes, *A Revolution in Time*, 61–2, 68–70.

a new calendar that simultaneously vindicated secular time and affirmed the Revolution's structural affinity with Christianity.

But in trying to change in one instant a calendar that had taken centuries if not millennia to be established, the revolutionaries also revealed precisely what was new about their relation to time. After all, it is one thing for religion to give time an intentional structure in the form of a calendar, quite another for an event as national and circumscribed as the French Revolution to warrant a change in calendar time. How was a Revolution taking place in a purely secular time to pass itself off as a rupture belonging to the cosmic time of universal history?

The fact that the calendar was simultaneously used to project a utopian origin of new time as well as to commemorate the French Republic's historical birth underscores the problem of a Revolution that situated itself under the sign of rupture. It underscores, as François Furet reminds us, the importance of distinguishing the Revolution's self-image as a *representation* of rupture from the experience of the Revolution as a historical event.¹⁹ The inherence between the calendar and the Revolution's self-image as a rupture with the past cannot be overstated. In his perceptive comments on the role of calendar time in historical representation Paul Ricoeur insists on the calendar's function as an axial moment.²⁰ A calendar measures time insofar as the recurring intervals, signifying the days, months and years, themselves reflect a ground zero from which events, both of our own lives and those of history, can be defined.²¹ Although this axial moment is external to the physical and living time organized by the calendar, it cannot be experienced as foundational without being given a position *in time* provided by the calendar. As the example of the Christian calendar shows, a new phase of history can only be said to begin when the moment of rupture is located in a universal time grid that already accounts for this origin.

If all historical intentionality is a retroactive projection, then the paradox of the revolutionary calendar lies in its attempt to mark an absolute coincidence between its theoretical starting point and a real historical event. Here was a calendar that attributed historical intentionality to events whose meaning was still open to contestation, that still existed as a field of possibilities and not yet as the only future for the Revolution. The calendar, while consecrating 22 September 1792 as the Revolution's theoretical origin, also drew attention to other equally valid candidates

¹⁹ Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, 16.

²⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 106. ²¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

for the status of foundational event. If axiality could be attributed to this particular moment why not other equally symbolic dates, such as the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789, the Fête de la Fédération on 14 July 1790 or even 10 August 1792, which was immediately renamed Year I of Equality? The problem did not just concern the Revolution's own past. As the dates 9 Thermidor and 18 Brumaire and even the First Year of Empire would eventually make clear, the candidates for rupture could belong equally well to the future.

THE DOUBLE TIME OF HISTORY AND FICTION

More than any other artifact the French revolutionary calendar encapsulates the problem of revolutionary agency – the fact that a calendar can only validate the meaning of historical rupture after the fact. What should be equally apparent by now is the necessity of going beyond a conventional historiographical framework if one is to understand how this axial moment (and the understanding of historical agency it implies) came to be reflected and refracted through the years of the calendar's duration. For the conventional historian 'time' is the stable element of his or her discourse. Chronology allows events to be compared and contrasted, put in relation not just to one another but to a past and future more generally. But the calendar's failure to transform its postulate of a fundamental break with the past implies that such a unifying chronological framework is precisely up for grabs. After all, how does one address the failure to establish a new order of time from the perspective of a stable chronology?

Clearly the calendar's inability to fit neatly into a chronological interpretation of a Revolution divided into the perspectives of a 'before' and 'after', 'origins' and 'outcomes', accounts for its relative neglect in revolutionary historiography. Not only has the calendar, the most ambitious attempt to regenerate the life of the human species, been overlooked; this lack of interest is presumed to be self-evident. After all, the calendar *failed*. And this failure, according to the commonly held opinion, reflects the inability of Enlightenment ideas about time and politics to materialize as historical action. This is the point of view adopted by Mona Ozouf and Bronislaw Baczko, who represent the established consensus on the revolutionary calendar. Ozouf, whose landmark *Festivals of the French Revolution* (1976) did so much to highlight the importance of a festive culture in constructing the French Revolution as an event that existed en bloc, stops short of inquiring into the full range of significance associated

with the loss of a natural and cyclical regeneration of time represented by the calendar. Her book ends in 1799, with the demise of the Republican calendar's festive phase, even though the calendar continued to be in place for another six years, fully half of its life. Baczko's *Utopian Lights* (1978) was the first major study to put the Republican calendar at centre stage and to highlight the extent to which the French Revolution constructed the utopian Enlightenment whose image it claimed to fulfill (rather than, as it was commonly assumed, the other way around). But by emphasizing the importance of the Republican calendar as an ideological construction he mainly focuses on the calendar's intentions rather than analysing what the calendar's failure reveals. As two recent books make clear, which 'time frame' to choose as the context for analysis is far from evident: Do you discuss calendars in the context of changing conceptions of 'modern time' or in the context of changing conceptions of history?²²

This book differs from this established consensus insofar as it insists on treating side by side what are essentially two different origins of the revolutionary calendar: its literary or 'utopian' origin in the solar myth of a 'natural calendar,' which can be traced to the literary sphere of the late Enlightenment, and its historical origin as a tool for political control. In emphasizing this gap or non-synchronicity between the calendar as a genre of representation and the calendar as a tool of revolutionary action, my goal is to keep apart what are essentially two chronological frames of reference. The first refers to the multiple time frames established by a rapidly mutating genre, the second to the chronological order in which events actually occurred. Such a dual perspective allows me to steer clear of a common assumption of revolutionary historiography: that the events of this epoch were experienced as if they belonged to one and the same identical subject called the 'Revolution'.

By calling into question the very existence of a single time frame, the normal reference point of historical narration, the calendar reveals how *imaginary* or *fictional* constructions of time contribute to the experience of history. It exposes how, to cite Paul Ricoeur once again, historically significant dates are always assigned to 'potential presents, imagined presents'.²³ Precisely because historical dates incarnate values and aspirations, they

²² It is interesting to compare in this regard Shusterman, who analyses changes in time from the perspective of national history, and Shaw who integrates the Republican calendar within longer-term changes in time-keeping technology and developing modern conceptions of time.

²³ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 183. 'Dates are assigned to potential presents, to imagined presents. In this way, all the memories accumulated by a collective memory can become dated events, due to their inscription in calendar time.'

also reveal the multiple trajectories between past and future, not all of which materialize at any given time. Any analysis of the calendar's contribution to the experience of history, therefore, must also acknowledge its fictional life: the way in which events and feelings that, in retrospect and from the outside, reflect a poeticized or fictional idea of time were experienced from the inside in their celebratory, heroic aspect, as if a truly 'new time' had indeed arrived. Such a reframing requires us to consider not only how the calendar functions as a 'possible present' but also to put literary agency, with its focus on emotions, feelings and intentions, at the heart of historical accounts of agency, which normally focus on the effects of actions. This is not just a problem for us, as scholars of the French Revolution, but also for the revolutionaries themselves. After all, it is Robespierre who famously declared that 'our revolution has made me feel the full force of the axiom that history is fiction'²⁴ and Napoléon who equally famously announced the Consulate to be the end of the 'Romance of the Revolution' and the 'beginning of its history'.²⁵

In using this dual perspective of both historical as well as 'literary' or even 'celebratory' time, my study deliberately cuts across the methodological distinctions that separate the study of history from that of fiction. This choice is not assumed by author's fiat. Rather the nature of the calendar is such that it demands the simultaneous pursuit of these two parallel methods, each with its own time frame and chronological reference points. In its capacity as both historical document and genre destined, in part, to remain poetic or fictional, the calendar undermines the mutual exclusions assumed by both disciplines. As Hayden White has argued, historians typically present their work as objective by overlooking the genres that contribute to identifying the historical epochs and periods that organize historical narration in the first place.²⁶ Literature's sensitivity to genre, on the other hand, results all too often in studies that treat history as a derivative, something to turn towards when a theory of genre fails. Genres come and go in history contributing in constitutive ways to the *feel* of a period or epoch, but it is hard to give a satisfying historical explanation of the origin and success or failure of a genre. Rather, genres are said, typically, to derive from other genres in a way that gives literary

²⁴ 'Notre révolution m'a fait sentir tout le sens de l'axiome qui dit que l'histoire est un roman; et je suis convaincu que la fortune et l'intrigue ont fait plus de héros, que le génie et la vertu.' Robespierre, *Lettres à ses commettants, 1ère série, n°10 21 décembre 1792*.

²⁵ Cited by Furet, 'Napoléon' in *Critical Dictionary*, 279. See Chapter 7 for further discussion.

²⁶ See White's classic *Metahistory* and also especially his 'Anomalies of Genre: The Utility of Theory and History for the Study of Literary Genres'.

history a different temporality from that of history proper. The theoretical disagreements between literature and history appear most starkly in studies of the Revolution itself. In contrast to the ink spilled over the Revolution and its meaning in history books, the *genealogical* model of literary history, and the canon in particular, more or less ignores the revolutionary epoch tout court, jumping from the Enlightenment to Romanticism in a way that confirms the prejudice that the Revolution is of *mere* historical interest.

What makes a literary, as well as historical, study of the revolutionary calendar so appropriate is that the calendar attracted so much hope and attention (was so valued) while it failed to become, as calendars generally are, a tool of social practice. The question of the calendar's (changing) value thus requires us to address the celebratory, heroic aspect of revolutionary practice that contributed so much to the feel of the period even as the calendar failed to achieve what it was so valued for. Considering the success and failures of the various revolutionary genres that attempted to enforce the calendar's premise of a new time offers a way to recover the way in which the past was experienced as a potential future even if this future never historically materialized as such. The result is a revolutionary time that while being celebratory is also fictional (imposed from above) and *pseudophenomenal* insofar as it is incarnated in the various festivals, theatres, processions and songs that were supposed to make new time visible and tangible to the senses. In tracing this simultaneously imaginative and historical event of the calendar, this book concludes by arguing that the fragile and rapidly changing self-image of the French Revolution is an important aspect both of the escalating demands to make the Revolution 'real' rather than 'apparent' and of the general anxiety, across the political spectrum, to delimit historical reality from 'fiction'.

THE REVOLUTIONARY CALENDAR
AND SYLVAIN MARÉCHAL

How do we begin to reconstitute this dual temporality of the French Revolution? How can we understand the calendar as lived history? Local record offices and historical archives help us to reconstruct the lives of the revolutionaries during this period, as the work of Robert Darnton, Timothy Tackett and other cultural historians has established.²⁷ This book, however, takes a different approach. This study explores the

²⁷ Of Darnton's numerous works, see *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime*. For an archival approach to the study of revolutionary lives see Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*.

intersection of imagination and history, calendar and revolution, by tracking the point-by-point connection of the calendar to its inventor, a man every bit as capacious and forgotten as the calendar itself. For if, as I have been arguing, the calendar is at once omnipresent in our imaginings of the rupture of the French Revolution, evident in traces such as 18 Brumaire, and yet largely overlooked in our study of this period, so too with the calendar's inventor, Sylvain Maréchal, a prominent revolutionary figure, active in every phase of the period and critically acknowledged by most scholars of the Revolution itself. His play *Le jugement dernier des rois* is cited in most books on the Revolution, and his participation, alongside Babeuf, in the Conspiracy of Equals, is frequently addressed. At the same time, however, Maréchal's legacy is most often reduced to passing mentions and footnotes, and this despite Maurice Dommangeat's exhaustive intellectual biography, published in 1950, and despite the significance of Maréchal's own contributions to our understanding of the period.²⁸ Thus, just as this book reconstructs the meaning of the calendar itself, indeed telling the story of the calendar as biography, so too I will tell the story of Sylvain Maréchal, the calendar's inventor.

Surprisingly little known today, Maréchal – atheist, poet, newspaper editor, dramaturge and conspirator in Babeuf's insurrection against the Directory – was active in almost every phase of the Revolution. His eventual ascent from hack writer to professional journalist and revolutionary militant matches the paths of other revolutionaries, but he also differs from them in his lack of political opportunism and unwavering commitment to a radically atheist and egalitarian ideology. He is unique in being one of the last atheists in the erudite tradition and one of the very first 'professional' revolutionaries, an exemplar of a new social type: the militant atheist.²⁹

As the first inventor of a 'revolutionary calendar' Maréchal provides the crucial link connecting the erudite atheism of the radical Enlightenment to the subsequent popularization of these ideas by the revolutionary philosophers.³⁰ In other words, Maréchal takes us from the calendar's origin in a radical atheistic imagination, the point at which the Revolution

²⁸ Dommangeat, *Sylvain Maréchal*. See also Aubert, *Sylvain Maréchal: Passion et faillite d'un égalitaire*; Fusil, *Sylvain Maréchal: Ou, L'homme sans Dieu*, h. s. D.

²⁹ In addition to Dommangeat, who remains the standard reference on Maréchal, James Billington has devoted some interesting pages to Maréchal's role in the radicalization of the French Revolution, claiming that he is the first in a long line of professional revolutionaries that stretched from Maréchal to Lenin. See *Fire in the Minds of Men*.

³⁰ On atheism in the Enlightenment see Israel, *The Radical Enlightenment*; Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans*; Kors, *Atheism in France*.

proves to be most socially threatening, to its incorporation as political, and popular, practice. In so doing, he enables us to connect the erudite literary and historical practices of the radical Enlightenment to the still understudied revolutionary decade of the 1790s, in which the (failed) revolutionary implementation of Enlightenment models of communications also altered their message.

At the same time, Maréchal's canon of literary works amplifies his calendrical efforts: Many of his pamphlets and fictional works attempt to produce new biographical and literary models to reflect the life of the 'new man', establishing the kinship between the revolutionary calendar and other popular eighteenth-century genres. In addition to his roles as editor of the *Révolutions de Paris*, the Revolution's most radical newspaper, and, along with Jacques-Louis David, official propagandist for the Revolution, Maréchal wrote exemplary histories, biographical dictionaries, revolutionary catechisms, moral maxims, pastorals, fables as well as pieces of imaginary legislation. Such genres were used to articulate a radical concept of social change in which one set of values was substituted wholesale for another set of values, without altering the belief that the social order as a whole had meaning. By projecting a timeless, totalizing world, these genres, I suggest, exerted a major influence on the way in which historical agency was conceived and understood at the time. In particular, by enabling revolutionaries such as Maréchal to represent the religious and political orders as 'fictions', these genres also restricted their ability to imagine social change as anything other than an inversion of existing hierarchy. If, as this book maintains, literature needs to be reintegrated into our accounts of the French Revolution in order to uncover the limits of historical agency – what contemporaries imagined that history could or could not accomplish – the influence also runs in the reverse direction. Literature, I suggest, became resolutely 'literary' or 'fictional' after the fact, when it failed to mould historical reality after its own image.

But if Maréchal's literary career peaked with the Revolution's radical phase, it is also true that its downward trajectory reflects – and in a sense serves as an allegory for – the transformations undergone by the calendar itself. The story of how Sylvain Maréchal – inventor of the first revolutionary calendar and most popular playwright of Year II – was subsequently rejected by the literary and political establishment and practically forgotten by his death in 1803, parallels in almost point-by-point convergence the various changes undergone by the calendar itself. Drawing on the contrapuntal relation between the eventual failure of Maréchal's literary career and the calendar's long demise, I trace the emergence and

fate of the mental universe in which the representations of new time first emerged. Implicit thus in my account of the calendar's failure is another equally fascinating tale. This is the story of how Sylvain Maréchal, anonymous *littérateur* steeped in the erudite tradition, became the radical revolutionary par excellence: not just as atheist and proponent of regicide but as harbinger and ideologue of the social revolution whose effects were later felt in the anarchist and communist movements of the nineteenth century.

Sylvain Maréchal, thus, plays the role of a 'fixed point' in a story about a calendar that failed to establish a fixed point of view. The initial successes and subsequent failures of his own literary career serve as a mirror for a Revolution that failed to establish rupture as the basis of a new totality, a new transcendental horizon in which history itself would be immune from the constantly shifting perspectives on its own origins. As the story of how history gets reflected, and refracted, through a distinctly literary sensibility of time, it can only be made visible as a panorama of revolutionary representation. With no closure, no totality, no fixed horizon, in short no 'calendar' to transform the enlightened model of sociability into action, this project of 'new time' reveals a different Revolution from that derived from the chronology of events alone. This is a Revolution fractured by a shifting typology of representations of time, a panorama in place of a unified thesis on either the 'history' or the 'meaning' of the experience of revolutionary time.

Each of this book's seven chapters represents some aspect of this panorama. The primary aims of the first two chapters is to push the origins of the revolutionary calendar back to the pre-revolutionary period, showing how a revolutionary concept of total rupture that attacked all three pillars of ancien régime authority (monarchy, aristocracy and the church) first emerged in the radical literary sphere of the late eighteenth century. **Chapter 1** recovers the full range of significance associated with calendar time. It situates Maréchal's invention of a revolutionary calendar with respect to two different understandings of 'new time' operant in the eighteenth century: In erudite circles the almanac was hailed as the most archaic or primitive of historical artifacts, capable of recalling the mythic origin of human civilization, while for the wider reading public the popular almanac encapsulated whatever was 'new'.

Chapter 2 contextualizes Sylvain Maréchal socially and intellectually in the radical literary sphere, showing how he combined a mode of critique based on satire with a preference for didactic genres capable of communicating the moral teachings of atheism to a wide, semi-literate audience.

It positions Maréchal's pre-revolutionary writings within three fields of tension: reason and mythology (how the limits of reason entailed the transfer of a religious concept of totality to the social sphere); the volcano and the sun (how images of antiquity derived from Pompeii and Herculaneum were used to displace the solar myths of absolutism) and historical and literary agency (how the intensification of genres depicting a timeless world resulted in a conception of historical agency privileging rupture and inversion of hierarchy over progress and incremental change).

Chapter 3 jumps forward to 1792 by recounting the events of August–September 1792 that led to the deposition of the king, the establishment of the French Republic and, a year later, the imposition of the official Republican calendar. This chapter's central claim is that the lag time between the end of the old world (toppled on 10 August 1792) and the institution of a new time (beginning on 22 September 1792 but not instituted in the form of a new calendar until 1793) is symptomatic of a deeper discrepancy between the narrative of Revolution and the chronology of events, a discrepancy that resulted in the creation of a calendar privileging a timeless nature over history.

Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to analyzing the impossible rupture of Year II. Chapter 4 begins by comparing two related, but very different events that characterize the beginning of Year II: the execution of Marie-Antoinette on 16 October 1793 and the performance of Maréchal's hit play, *Le jugement dernier des rois*, which staged the death of all of Europe's monarchs by an exploding volcano. Both are linked by a concept of rupture in which the historical breach with the past, associated with the death of the king, was to have established a new temporal relation between events. This chapter contends that the continued existence of the queen, *after* the symbolic act of regicide and the official beginning of new time, reflects a profound crisis in the revolutionary self-image. For the volcano makes clear that the institution of new time requires a symbolic terror, a way of achieving through fear what cannot be achieved through reason or historical violence alone.

Chapter 5 focuses on the festivals of reason, the first festivals that attempt to embody the new calendar. Both the living goddesses and the new ten-day week were attempts to secularize the experience of time. The living image, however, was almost immediately suppressed while the ten-day week continued to be enforced to become one of the most powerful tools wielded by the state against Catholicism. But what does it mean to have secular time in the absence of the atheist and materialist imagination? I show how by abandoning the aim of a total revolution that

would transform the hearts and minds of man, the calendar reproduced a distinction between public reason and the private time of religion inherited from absolutism. The chapter ends by contrasting Robespierre's Festival of the Supreme Being, the first festival of the new decadal 'religion', whose hymns were composed by Maréchal, with Maréchal's 1793 opera *La Fête de la Raison*, a last-ditch effort to represent an embodied reason as an emblem of 'lived' as well as rational time.

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on the calendar's piecemeal decline. Chapter 6 contrasts the government's insistence on maintaining the calendar as a legitimating norm for the Revolution with Maréchal's critiques of the 'unfinished' Revolution, emphasizing the widening gulf between utopian expectations and actual experiences of the Revolution. Chapter 7 reverses the perspective, beginning with Maréchal's major works of his late period, the most prolific of his career. It traces the shift from a Republican calendar whose original function was to serve as a lyric framework through which revolutionary time could be experienced as an emotional reality in the 'here and now' to the loss of this cyclical framework of time and its replacement with an increasing narrative account of the past. This chapter ends with Napoléon and the restoration of the Gregorian calendar, and by extension the return of the French Revolution to a European framework of history and time.

In telling the parallel stories of both the revolutionary calendar and Sylvain Maréchal, this study contributes to a resurgence of interest in historical time and calendars, while also insisting on the challenge posed by revolutionary time to our common constructions of historical narrative. This challenge forces us to rethink the crucial role that the French Revolution, with its premise of rupture, played in the notion that modern time has an abrupt beginning. At the same time it also forces us to acknowledge the ways in which the French Revolution, although it heralded a new sense of history as something actively made in human time and by human agents, also differs from our modern experiences of history. As I show in the following chapters, the continuity between revolutionary history and the so-called modern experience of time also breaks down precisely around this promise of a 'total rupture', which transformed the French Revolution's failure to break with the past into a longing for a future total Great Revolution. Insofar as both the historical and political implications of revolutionary time are still with us, whether implicitly, in our persistent appeal to 'thresholds' and 'epistemic ruptures' in order to describe modern experience, or explicitly, in our claims to live in and promote a universal and democratic 'modernity', the story of the Republican

calendar is also our story. In this sense, the story of the Republican calendar contains – in almost conceptually distilled form – the history of our own modern time schema, restoring to life the assumptions, hopes and blind spots about the human construction of value and meaning that remain with us today.

CHAPTER I

From Myth to Lived Experience The Literary and Cultural Origins of the Revolutionary Calendar

We cannot understand the real magnitude of change attempted by the French Revolution without understanding the deep fixity of the concepts they tried to abolish. These concepts have to do with how people experience time and how they organize their life. In the most general sense, they have to do with how humans orient themselves in both the natural, physical world and the metaphysical world, the different ways that human cultures have inhabited and interpreted the world given to their senses. With the institution of the French Republican calendar, every aspect of people's relation to time – religious, astronomical, political and social – was to be overturned. The fact that the revolutionaries chose to represent their ambition for fundamental change in the form of a new calendar should come as no surprise. The calendar after all is an artifact that has synthesized scientific knowledge, religious belief and political will for millennia in almost all cultures and civilizations around the world. What is surprising, however, is that the revolutionaries thought they could substitute a calendar that had incrementally evolved over centuries, if not millennia, with a new calendar representing a new time. How can a calendar, one of the artifacts of human history that is least subject to change, be used to demarcate a new beginning of history? And where did this idea of restructuring authoritative time frames emerge?

It is customary for historians to associate the invention of the new calendar with the specific political and historical events of the French Revolution, notably with the year 1793, when the calendar was first established and the Jacobin phase of the government began. Because the calendar itself was rather short-lived – in place for twelve years, two months and seventeen days – it has been assumed that it reflected a passing phase, a historical moment that itself was quickly superseded. That the Christian calendar the revolutionaries tried to replace proved so difficult to overturn, however, demonstrates just how far reaching any calendar actually is and how it subtends every aspect of life. In order to understand, therefore, the

origins and ambitions of the new calendar we must begin by rethinking the relation between nature and history not just as the revolutionaries understood it themselves but also as it is reflected in calendars more generally. In other words, I am suggesting that we begin not with the events of revolutionary history but with the far longer world history of calendar time. This is especially important given that calendars, although they are socially and historically constructed, also reflect natural parameters that remain constant, influencing the shape of time across many civilizations.

These parameters are well known and form the basis of the units of time associated with the day, month and year. The rotation of the earth around its axis gives us day and night; the orbit of the moon around the earth marks the changing of the months and the rotation of the earth around the sun determines the length of the year. Since the beginning of human civilization, synchronizing these three cycles has always been a challenge. Some cultures have opted for the lunar calendar, probably mankind's oldest calendar. Prehistoric man, relying on the ten fingers of the human hand for calculations, counted time by the phases of the moon. In many languages, the words for 'month' and 'moon' are closely related. In addition to English, the German *der Mond* (moon) is related to *der Monat* (month); the French *mois* (month) is derived from the Latin *mensurem* (to measure), an etymology still found in the English words 'meter', 'menstruation' and 'measure', all of which derive from the prefix *me-* or *men-* meaning 'moon'.¹ Mesopotamian and early Roman calendars were also lunar. We derive the word 'calendar' from the Latin *calendes* (from *calare*, to proclaim), which refers to the beginning of the month when important dates for the upcoming months were proclaimed. Because interest on loans was also due on the first of the month, the original meaning of the Latin *calendarium* is accounting book. *Almanach*, a far more ancient word for calendar with uncertain Middle Eastern origins, derives from *manah*, to count, whose root 'man' may refer to the moon.

Since the yearly cycle and lunar months cannot be perfectly synchronized (each year includes twelve lunar months plus 10. 875 days), over time most civilizations have opted for either a lunar or solar calendar.² The most widely used lunar calendar today is the Muslim calendar, which divides the year in alternating months of twenty-nine and thirty days. But while a lunar calendar is adequate for nomadic and seafaring cultures, it is unable to synchronize the months with the seasons, essential for any civilization based on agriculture. The Mayan and Egyptian calendars, in

¹ Duncan, *The Calendar*, 13. ² See Couderc, *Le Calendrier*, 19.

contrast, represent some of the world's oldest solar calendars. Their big innovation was to specify the length of the solar year, thus ensuring that the calendar aligned with the seasons. This enabled the prediction of rain and knowledge of when to sow essential to all agricultural societies. The Christian calendar that has been exported around the world as a near universal time schema is also a solar calendar. Its origins are multiple. The twenty-four-hour day and the planetary gods associated with the days of the week are Mesopotamian; the solar year was imported by Caesar from Egypt; the celebration of Sabbath on the seventh day is Jewish.

But the fact that all these different calendars can be converted into one another implies a measure of time common to them all. This suggests a 'structural' pattern to history and a singular process by which time is shaped in all cultures even as they differ.³ For thinkers in the eighteenth century, to posit a common measure was to posit a universal standard that allowed the different cultures and civilizations of human history to be compared. This suggested, firstly, that social organization derived from different ways of measuring astronomical time; secondly, that religious interpretations were derivative expressions of this original measure; thirdly, that by undoing the religious symbolism associated with different calendars, one could return to this original time. This had already happened once, when Julius Caesar established the Julian calendar, the first calendar to institute a universal, civic time, independent of priests and kings, in the Mediterranean world. For proponents of calendar reform, it could happen again, if the Christian symbolism of the Gregorian calendar were to be stripped back to reveal the natural, astronomical layer of time that lay beneath it.

The calendar thus stands for much more than a simple technology for measuring time. For it allowed eighteenth-century thinkers to reflect on how and where the ability to conceive something new, specifically a new society, emerged. In particular, it allowed them to formulate a concept of rupture that contradicted the existing framework of time by recovering a far deeper structure of history, a time immemorial that functioned as a framing device for many cultures. This, in turn, enabled them to speculate about the original time of state formation, the conditions under which literate and calendar-based civilizations first emerged.

At the same time by using science and reason to go 'beyond' the historical record, the natural or astronomical calendar also forced enlightenment thinkers to come face to face with their own mythological thought. This

³ See Corfield, *Time and the Shape of History*, xix.

is because a natural calendar represents both the attempt to demarcate a new boundary between reason and religion and the ambition to go beyond it, to recreate the mythological foundations of society through an act of reason alone. This raises the inevitable question: can enlightened reason sustain its own injunction never to go beyond the 'limits' of reason when it seeks to go back in time and uncover the original time of social institution? This question is as much about the limits of reason as it is about the ability to construct a new society based on rational assent. If, in the first instance, enlightenment reason is about using reason to criticize everything that goes outside its limits, including especially religion, then this also implies a new ground for society. What kind of society is one in which we could give our rational assent?

To answer these questions we need to situate the origins of the Republican calendar within two understandings of 'new time' operant in the eighteenth century. First, 'new time' understood as 'une ère nouvelle', the fixed point from which a new chronology commences, analogous to the originary or 'first' time of a new civilization (*ère chrétienne, musulmane*).⁴ Second, newness in the more colloquial sense of 'une nouvelle', designating whatever was newest and most up-to-date.⁵ Both of these stem from an eighteenth-century understanding of calendar time. In erudite circles, the calendar was hailed as the most archaic historical artifact, capable of going 'beyond' history to the original time of human civilizations, while for the wider reading public, the popular almanac became a privileged vehicle to communicate not just whatever was 'new' but also to challenge the political and cultural construction of time. In what follows, I will show how the idea of restructuring authoritative time frames emerged in the context of a more general reflection on the union of religious and political power through calendar time, among radical eighteenth-century writers and activists.

ENLIGHTENMENT ARCHEO-ASTRONOMY AND CALENDAR TIME

It is hard to imagine today just how heated the debate over calendar time was during the eighteenth century. Ever since the discovery of the

⁴ The modern sense of 'ère' as the beginning of a new chronology dates from 1678–80. See *Le Robert: Dictionnaire historique de la langue française, sous la direction de Alain Rey* (Paris: Robert, 1998).

⁵ *Le Robert* claims that in its earliest formulation 'une nouvelle' designated a public rumour (1549). In the eighteenth century, it signified general information or 'news' communicated to the public via diverse media, including *les nouvelles à la main* (1751) and *les journaux* (1759).

New World, and with it new calendars some of which, like the Chinese calendar, had time lines longer than the Christian chronology, there was an increasing awareness of the coexistence of what Reinhart Koselleck, echoing Herder, has called 'many different times in one time.'⁶ The ability to compare different calendrical systems, and their different historical time lines, not only cast doubt on biblical chronology; it also necessitated a universal frame of reference that encompassed all civilizations and all histories. As is well known, the invention of the modern time line became one such 'universal' frame of reference. Previously historical events had been dated according to the genealogies of kings (a natural because biological time) or according to the presumed origin of earth's creation (a religious and natural time). By the end of the seventeenth century, however, a chronology that had at first been used for dating events from the Birth of Christ was now able to run backwards as well as forwards in time.⁷ This enabled historical events to be measured relative to one another by being placed on a linear time line. But while scholars have paid considerable attention to the emergence of a modern linear understanding of time, less attention has been paid to how cyclical time remained an equally viable, if not more vital, candidate for establishing a 'universal' framework for history. Calendars in particular became central sources for the speculative histories and comparative studies of religion in which new, 'rational' interpretations of religion emerged. As a source document, the astronomical calendar had a twofold advantage: it enabled the comparative ethnology of different religions by allowing them to be placed side by side in the same, homogeneous, empty time and it satisfied the desire to go 'beyond' the historical record, to the mythic origins of human civilization itself.⁸

Erudite thinkers such as Antoine Court de Gébelin popularized the notion that the astronomical calendar was one such frame for universal history. In his best-selling *Histoire du monde primitif*, he argued that the almanac was the original allegory of all civilization because it joined together astronomy and agriculture. Claiming that 'a complete history

⁶ Koselleck, 'Time and History', 106.

⁷ The invention of the modern time line can be traced to the French Calvinist Joseph Justus Scaliger, who first separated chronology from religion, thus creating the space for 'prehistory' ad infinitum. See Borst, *The Ordering of Time*, 103–6; Rosenberg, 'Joseph Priestley and the Graphic Invention of Modern Time'; Rosenberg and Grafton, *The Cartographies of Time*.

⁸ This reference to 'empty, homogenous time', originally from Walter Benjamin, was taken up by Benedict Anderson to describe the modern experience of time, in which 'simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar'. *Imagined Communities*, 24.

of the Almanac would be, therefore, a precious canvas for the History of the human race', Court de G ebelin traced the calendar's origins to the original time of state formation, which he associated with the development of agrarian societies in the ancient Near East.⁹ From festive cycles to mythology, from religion to labour, all aspects of social organization were synchronized by calendar time. He even derived the political organization of ancient societies from the astronomical revolutions of the planets, arguing that in ancient societies kings considered themselves children of the sun, inscribing their names onto the twelve months of the year.¹⁰

He was not the only one privileging calendar time as the key to unlocking a lost, historical past. Struck by the concordances between the ancient calendars of peoples who otherwise had little historical contact, the astronomer and future mayor of revolutionary Paris, Jean-Sylvain Bailly, speculated that the first astronomical calculations derived from India.¹¹ Like many thinkers, he was fascinated with the centrality of the zodiac in different religions and cultures of the ancient world. Whereas Bailly wanted to find a single historical origin for the zodiac dating from a specific time and place, other thinkers, such as Rabaut de Saint-Etienne, insisted upon an allegorical understanding of the zodiac and other mythologies from the ancient world. As Rabaut de Saint-Etienne made clear in his exchange with Bailly, while the historical record might be full of gaps, the ubiquity of astronomical symbols across cultures and historical periods suggested a far deeper 'allegorical' time common to all civilizations.¹²

This interest in astronomy extended beyond speculations about the original time of civilizations lost to history. Constantin-Fran ois Volney was one thinker who attempted to translate astrological signs into empirical data in order to account for the transition from subsistence labour to agriculture. In his *Les ruines, ou m editation sur les r evolutions des empires*, Volney argued that the synchronization of the solar year with the lunar months was a key technology that enabled the emergence of large-scale agriculture and centralized state organization in the ancient world.¹³ Complex solar calendars enabled control over the harvest – that is, over

⁹ 'Une histoire complete de l'Almanach seroit donc un pr ecieux canevas pour l'Histoire du genre humain'. Court de G ebelin, *Histoire du monde primitif*, vol. IV, ij. For a comprehensive study of Court de G ebelin's life and works see Mercier-Faivre, *Un suppl ement   L'Encyclop edie*; as well as Grell, *L'histoire entre  rudition et philosophie*, 118.

¹⁰ Court de G ebelin, *Histoire du monde primitif*, vol. IV, vij.

¹¹ Bailly, *L'histoire de l'astronomie ancienne depuis son origine jusqu'  l' tablissement de l' cole d'Alexandre*.

¹² Rabaut de Saint-Etienne, *Lettres   M. Bailly sur l'histoire primitive de la Gr ce*, 11–14; also Grell, *L'histoire entre  rudition et philosophie*, 117–18.

¹³ Volney, *Les ruines, ou m editation sur les r evolutions des empires*, 3rd ed., 222–50.

cycles of abundance and famine – which, in turn, led to the emergence of a central authority and an ‘official’ great religion that ensured that astronomer-priests also controlled the economic means of production.¹⁴ He located the beginnings of civilization more than 15,000 years ago in ancient Egypt, one of the earliest literate societies. This is where the world’s first solar calendar emerged when early Egyptian farmers managed to correlate the annual flooding of the Nile with the appearance of Sirius, the Dog Star, the brightest star in the sky, which led to the realization that the solar year was a quarter of a day longer than 365 days.¹⁵

That the Egyptian priests chose to keep the true length of the solar year a secret, relying on a different ‘religious’ calendar for civil use, was one more proof, for Volney and other like-minded thinkers, that control over time was essential for the emergence of a transcendental religion. It was not just in Egypt that priests abused the astronomical calendar. A particularly egregious abuse took place in ancient Rome where the pontifices, the body of priests who controlled when the extra twenty-seven-day month was added, also controlled when assemblies were met, wars were fought, taxes paid and officers elected.¹⁶ Such abuse of priestly power led to the institution of the Julian calendar, the first calendar to construct time as a linear, homogeneous continuum to be measured and that allowed people to organize their lives in a similarly linear progression.¹⁷

This scandal of the two calendars – a solar, natural one that was kept secret and a religious calendar that was used for civic time – was a recurring trope in the eighteenth century. It occurred not just in the mystical and illuminist pretensions of the various Masonic organizations, which counted their chronology from the year of Creation (so that 1789 was 4789 Anno Lucis, or Year of Light) and claimed to be direct descendants of the Egyptian cult of Osiris, which had remained hidden all these years. It also, and more importantly, was integral to the master narrative of Enlightenment in which religious phenomena were unmasked as projections of political power, in particular the coercive authority wielded by

¹⁴ ‘En effet, lorsque les peuples commencèrent de se livrer à l’agriculture, la formation du calendrier rural exigeant des observations astronomiques continues, il fut nécessaire d’y préposer quelques individus chargé de veiller à l’apparition et au coucher de certaines étoiles; d’avertir du retour de l’inondation, de certains vents, de l’époque des pluies, du temps propre à semer chaque espèce de grain: ces hommes, à raison de leur service, furent dispensés des travaux vulgaires, et la société pourvut à leur entretien. [...] Voyons des mortels produire certains phénomènes, annoncer, comme à volonté, des éclipses et des comètes ... il les prit pour ses médiateurs et ses interprètes; et il s’établit au sein des états des corporations sacrilèges d’hommes hypocrites et trompeurs, qui attirèrent à eux tous les pouvoirs’. Ibid., 246–8.

¹⁵ Ibid., 230–3 ¹⁶ Holford-Strevens, *The History of Time*, 28–30.

¹⁷ Feeney, *Caesar’s Calendar*, 193–6.

priests. As Volney noted, by monopolizing knowledge of the stars, this literate caste of astronomer-priests was able to gain power over the economic means of production as well as the hearts and minds of the people. Knowledge of the solar calendar was thus one of the great hidden sources of power that at once made possible transcendental religion and the subjugation of the people. This priestly deception was predicated on two things: the assumption that all religion was rational because it was the projection of political power whose 'source' remained secret, only available for the privileged few who themselves remained undeceived, and that this religious deception presupposed a forgetting of the prior association of the zodiac with human labour.

The same logic that hailed the calendar as the original time of state formation led to the proposition that all monotheistic religions originated in worship of the sun. Venerated as Brahma by the Hindus, Osiris by the Egyptians, Adonai by the Phoenicians and Apollo by the Greeks, the sun was a ubiquitous master symbol. This suggested astronomical rotations, rather than the transcendental time of the gods, were the original source of religious belief. Court de Gébelin postulated the solar myth as a universal code, a key to unlocking the basic structure of all religions because it reflected constraints on the human imagination that were pre-given in nature. Radical writers such as Charles-François Dupuis and the Baron d'Holbach took the implications of the solar myth a step further, using it to cast doubt on all religions, particularly Christianity.¹⁸ In their versions of the solar myth, all monotheistic religions were considered so many variants on the original, and immanent, source of religious belief in a natural time. Implicit in this radicalization of the solar myth was an anthropocentric conception of the universe. If humans created religion to reflect the social order to which they belonged, then they could also intervene and change it.

But how can these two visions of historical agency – the one that nature shapes man, the other that man creates history – coexist in one and the same myth? The natural or astronomical calendar was such a privileged document because it allowed eighteenth-century thinkers to postulate an 'original' time that was also a 'new time', a time of rupture insofar as it contradicted the prevailing religious order of time. By the same token, because this 'new time' was imagined as a rational measure, it only existed as a divided part of a previous whole. Rupture, in other

¹⁸ See Dupuis: 'Que la passion et la résurrection de Christ célébrées à Pâques, font partie de mystères de l'ancienne religion solaire ou du culte de la nature universelle'. *Abrégé de l'origine de tous les cultes*, 336.

words, was imagined as a return to a universal measure of time, which, because it was astronomical, also implied the reinsertion of history into nature.

More recently, Ernest Gellner, a twentieth-century philosopher of history, has elaborated a concept of world history that sheds interesting light on the eighteenth-century fascination with calendrical time.¹⁹ Gellner has suggested that the ability to predict seasons and harvest cycles – and more generally the kind of long-term commitment that made agrarian civilization possible – presupposed a concept of delayed return that resulted in the creation of surplus food stores. This in turn facilitated the emergence of both a specialized ruling class that would defend the food stores (a military caste) and a priestly caste that would legitimate the monopoly that the military had on coercive power. Within such an order, surplus value was always translated into more power for the already powerful – whether the acquisition of more land by the military caste, or more authority by the priestly caste. For Gellner, control over cosmological time enabled the astonishing historical breakthrough that was agrarian civilization because it allowed for the emergence of a tri-partite division of labour (between those who fought, those who prayed and those who worked) that has characterized most of human history. It is also true, however, that this cosmological understanding of time hindered any further historical development of the agrarian world, by creating a closed world, ‘an interlocking system of social roles and natural concepts’²⁰ in which authority and the means of coercion were always monopolized by a small group.

Although radical thinkers of the eighteenth century may not have had all these factors in mind or even at their disposal, Gellner’s view accords well with the eighteenth-century belief that the tri-partite social structure of the feudal regime had perpetuated itself, at least in part, through an intellectual monopoly over the means of telling time. By criticizing church control over calendar time, radical thinkers sought to undo the feudal hierarchy, which had, in part, legitimated itself through the religious and political authority of the calendar. At the same time, that they imagined a natural calendar would be enough to recalibrate society with both nature and reason indicates to what extent the rationalized calendar still presupposed what Gellner calls the ‘same unquestionable luminous authority which had surrounded the old hierarchical, revealed Cosmos’.²¹

¹⁹ Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 136. Gellner differentiates agrarian society from modern society, ‘the only society to live by and for, sustained, continuous, cognitive and economic growth’, 117.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

Indeed a natural calendar enabled Enlightenment reformers to have it both ways – to overturn the feudal hierarchy by eliminating the church's control over time and to maintain that a natural order still organized social relations.

Of course, calendars are never just about the past but also about the present, or more accurately, the representation of the past in the present. The Western calendar that is in use almost universally today is the Gregorian calendar, whose origins are more than 2,000 years old. Indeed for the eighteenth century, it was not just in the far-flung corners of the world or in the distant past that various calendars were used. In 1582 the Gregorian reform was instituted in Catholic countries in an attempt to correct the fact that the Julian year was eleven minutes too long for the solar year, an error that, by the sixteenth century, had accumulated to ten extra days. As is well known, Protestant countries initially rejected Gregory's proposal to cut the extra days and add a day every four years, as an unacceptable intrusion of papal power on civil time. The question thus of who had authority over the calendar remained active throughout the century. The Protestant states of Germany and the Netherlands and the Protestant cantons of Switzerland did not accept Gregorian reform until 1701, England and Wales until 1752 and Sweden until 1753. When the Quakers adopted the Gregorian calendar along with the rest of England, they replaced the months named after the pagan gods with numbers.

If the resistance to papacy meant that Protestant countries such as England floated schemes for a radically reformed calendar almost a century before the French Republican reform, it was mainly in order to keep civic time independent of spiritual authority.²² France, however, still adhered to the Roman Catholic concept of a unified liturgical and civil calendar under ecclesiastical authority. What Protestant countries experienced as a discontinuity between civic time and religious authority, France experienced as continuity. In France, and despite the scientific improvements introduced by Pope Gregory XIII, the calendar still retained a symbolic function as a framing power that represented the union of political or 'civic' and religious time.²³

Thus even if collectively, all of Western Europe adopted an increasingly chronometric attitude towards calendar time at roughly the same time, an attitude moreover that assumed that time was a homogeneous

²² For a comprehensive survey of these various changes, see Poole, "'Give us our eleven days!': Calendar Reform in Eighteenth-Century England", especially 106–9.

²³ For the role of the Catholic Church in temporal regulation and control see Maiello *Storia del calendario*.

continuum to be measured, in France the Christian calendar continued to be associated with an unbroken cultural memory that stretched back to the origins of feudal Europe. It is this collective memory and this link between religious and political authority that eventually came under attack. If the French Revolution came to pit scientific authority against the Christian calendar it is not because the two were incompatible (they were not and in fact the revolutionaries would seek from scientific time the same authority that the cyclical structure of the religious calendar provided) but because it aimed, above all, to destroy a structure of social memory, and a form of political representation, that was still intact. But how does one turn against and contradict cultural memory and from what position in time?

THE MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN CALENDAR AND THE ALMANAC

To get a feel for the kind of spiritual and political authority expressed by the calendar, let us dwell a moment on the medieval Christian calendar, developed in Western Europe, which was the first calendar to exteriorize the Christian faith into all aspects of social life. The medieval calendar is important not just because this is the calendar that the revolutionaries tried to replace, but also because, in opposing it, they sought to reproduce a very similar cultural experience: of unity, of harmony with natural and agricultural cycles, and of an emotional attachment to a totalizing lifeworld. The fact that this calendar, which was instituted between the fourth and ninth centuries, has remained virtually unchanged even today reveals much about the historical immobility of calendar time, the way in which it functions as an authoritative structure by setting itself against history, against the passage of time even as it glorifies what are essentially the historical experiences of a specific group.²⁴ As Maurice Halbwachs has shown, it is precisely by separating its collective memory from other groups and 'preventing other memories from forming and developing in its midst' that the Christian religion established itself as an eternal truth even though its dogmas were entirely oriented towards the historical

²⁴ Mircea Eliade notes that 'the New Year scenarios in which the Creation is repeated are particularly explicit among the historical peoples, those with whom history, properly speaking begins – that is, the Babylonians, Egyptians, Hebrews, Iranians. It almost seems that these peoples, conscious that they were the first to build "history," recorded their own acts for the use of their successors. ... These same peoples also appear to have a deeper need to regenerate themselves periodically by abolishing past time and reactualizing the cosmogony'. *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 74.

past.²⁵ Keeping this notion of collective memory in mind, a minimal description of a religious calendar could be this: the synchronization of calendrical time (which is cyclical) with historical time (which is linear) so that the historical memory of a specific social group (here Christians) can be experienced as eternally repeating and thereby opposing, through its fixed character, the memory of other groups.

The medieval calendar codifies dogmas that were established in the first centuries of the Christian era, when Christianity was one religion amongst many and had not yet acquired the status of an official state religion. It was instituted at the Council of Nicea in 325 when Constantine proclaimed Christianity the official state religion of the Roman Empire. The institution of a new calendar – which transformed the events and decisions of a limited historical period into an eternally repeating structure – enabled the union of sacred and secular powers. But if Constantine Christianized the Julian calendar in order to create a new state religion, Christianity was still subordinated to the state. It was not until the medieval period that the calendar was used to actively forge a new cultural and political identity for Western Europe in contradistinction to the rest of the Roman Empire. Years were now counted from the Birth of Christ rather than using the regnal years of the Roman emperors²⁶; the Benedictine timetable, with its strict scheduling of time for work, rest, meals and prayers, was extended to all aspects of social life.²⁷

But it is above all the way in which the medieval calendar encapsulated the collective memory not just of Christians but also of the hierarchical world of feudal Europe, in which even God was called by the feudal title 'Lord', that made it such a target for enlightened social reformers. To an important extent this hierarchical social order was able to represent itself as static and unchanging through a temporal organization that made this order appear as if ratified by nature itself. One of the Christian calendar's biggest innovations was to combine the concrete activities of agrarian life with the temporal divisions of Christian time while keeping the two rhythms of natural and 'sacred' time apart. For the Christian believer, daily rhythms reflected the presence of the divine in the everyday. Harvests, festivals, days of work and days of rest, all reflected the

²⁵ See Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 93. Halbwachs' account of religious memory also emphasizes cyclical time and the liturgical year as central aspects of the transformation of the historical into the eternal; see 88–91.

²⁶ See Favreau, 'La datation dans les inscriptions médiévales françaises'.

²⁷ As Landes notes: 'Time ... was of the essence because it belonged to the community and to God; and the bells saw to it that this precious, inextensible resource was not wasted'. *A Revolution in Time*, 69.



Figure 1. Ms 340/603 f.93 'Calendar: 12 Scenes of the Labours of the Year,' from *Le Rustican* by Pietro de Crescenzi (1230–1320/1) c. 1460 (vellum) (see 155574) by French School, (15th century), Musée Condé, Chantilly, France/Giraudon/The Bridgeman Art Library.

Christian framework of time. Months were typically represented, often with striking visual images, according to the different tasks of sowing, reaping and harvesting (see Figure 1).²⁸ Days of the week were not numbered; time was measured according to saints' days or liturgical feasts (see Figure 2).²⁹ The Christian liturgical calendar even worked in tandem with the agrarian year. The greatest festivals were preserved for the dead season and winter, culminating with the celebration of Easter, the Resurrection of Christ, in the spring, the beginning of the agricultural season.

²⁸ For an excellent discussion and rich selection of images see de Bourgoing, *The Calendar*, 57 and 40.

²⁹ As Francesco Maiello observes, even as late as the eighteenth century some rural almanacs still had to explain the numerical understanding of months, days and years. See *Storio del calendario*.

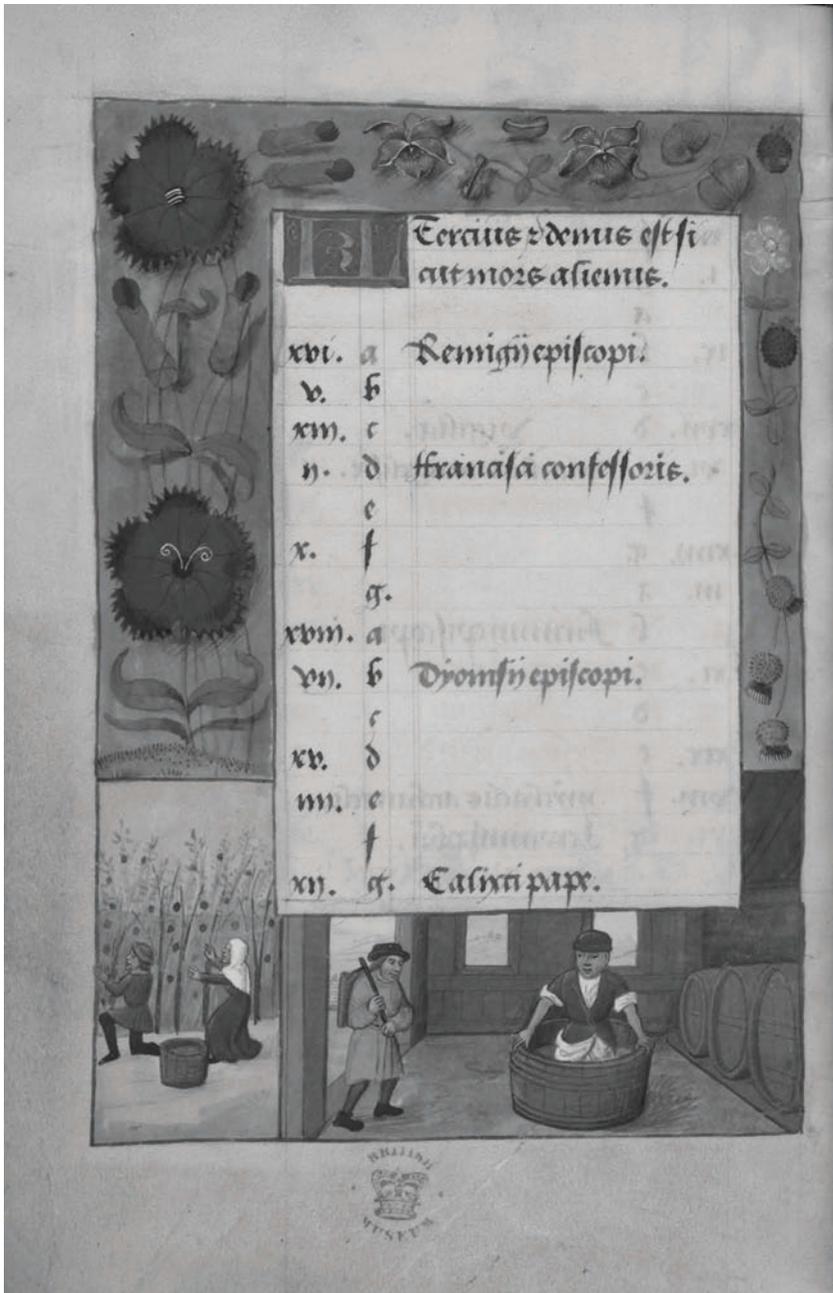


Figure 2. *Book of Hours, Use of Sarum* ff.IV-1. Late 15th Century. © The British Library Board King's 9 MS.

As is the case with all other calendars, authority was wielded by appropriating natural referents (the seasons, the sun and the moon) in service of non-natural or socially constructed units of time. Chief among the latter were the liturgical cycle, based on Christ's life and passion, and the Judeo-Christian seven-day week, the one unit of time in the calendar that, as Eviatar Zerubavel has noted, has no natural correlate.³⁰ At least three different periodicities combine to perpetuate the collective memory of the Christian religious group.³¹ The Christian year, as we have already seen, reproduces the order and succession of Christ's life, death and Resurrection. The weekly cycle celebrates Mass or the Eucharist each Sunday, commemorating Christ's last supper. Finally, by consecrating each day to a saint, the liturgical calendar reminds its followers of all those who contributed to the founding of the church and the dissemination of the Christian faith.

Within this totalizing conception of time came a distinct notion of authority as vertical rather than horizontal. Habermas notes that in feudal Europe, the exercise of the lord's authority did not take place in what we today would recognize as a definable space such as a 'public sphere', but through a kind of noble behaviour or even lifestyle.³² This behaviour was publicly displayed in festivals that replicated the divisions of time itself. The courtly-lord presented himself in church at certain high points on the liturgical calendar – feast days, Easter and so forth – the orchestration of which was presided over by the ecclesiastical lord. Liturgy, mass, processions, coronations, all these represented a division of power wielded through a Christian division of time. Together church and calendar made up the spatio-temporal coordinates of 'representation' that would remain in force until the French Revolution.

Up until the French Revolution, then, and regardless of the immense changes both in experiences of time and the social structure, the Christian calendar subtended a vertical hierarchy consisting of three distinct social classes (those who toiled, those who prayed and those who fought). At least as far as the church calendar was concerned, there was as little acknowledgement of a 'private' or 'subjective' experience of time as there was of a public sphere, even though both these categories were central to the self-understanding of the eighteenth century. Thus despite the proliferation of memoirs, epistolary novels, first-person narratives and diaries,

³⁰ Zerubavel, *The Seven Day Circle*, 4; *Hidden Rhythms: Schedules and Calendars in Social Life*, 94.

³¹ For the importance of cyclical time to Christianity, see Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 93.

³² Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, 8.

and despite the prominence of a well-established public sphere or republic of letters that consisted of private individuals, the dominant temporal representation remained that of sacred versus everyday or profane time.

But if the medieval calendar fixed the collective memory of Christians once and for all, it is also true that a more popular conception of time had always existed alongside the liturgical calendar. This was the time of the almanac, the first secular 'book' to be widely published and read alongside religious literature.³³ Readily available and consulted by all, the almanac was one of the first genres to express the temporality of everyday life. It is here, in an increasingly polemical almanac culture that the organization of the year came to be understood as something socially constructed and hence open to contestation.

In the beginning, the almanac was not much more than a simple calendar, marking the months, the days and the festivals of the church. Over the course of several centuries, however, and especially with the invention of the printing press, it developed into an independent genre in its own right. Unlike the liturgical calendar, which was primarily concerned with rendering visible and palpable a religious belief that had found its form in the narrative of Christ's life, death and Resurrection, the almanac focused on imparting important or essential knowledge about life as it was lived. Designed for people who read little or not at all, the almanac associated time with concrete activities, with the 'popular' reason of those who could barely read but could nonetheless reason and think.³⁴ In the almanac the primary temporal unit was not Christ's life and death nor the linear conception of history that it implied, but quite simply the calendar year. By offering predictions, advice and everyday hints about what to do in each month of the year, the almanac provided some semblance of control over time. In such a way, as Geneviève Bollème has noted, an unpredictable future was rendered less terrifying.³⁵

By the eighteenth century, the calendar structure of the almanac was used to communicate all sorts of 'news' about the preceding year, often taking the form of gossip, stories, satires and songs. Overlapping with both the journal and the pamphlet – both novel kinds of print media – the almanac stood out for its ability to register changing attitudes to time. That the reading sphere of the almanac – the sphere of 'popular' or 'people's reason' – was wider than that of the bourgeois public sphere, made almanacs the ideal vehicles for communicating new political and

³³ See Bollème, *Les Almanachs populaires aux XVII et XVIII siècles*, II. ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 16

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

social ideas. In this regard, the *Encyclopédie* notes two major changes to the almanac, both of which concern us here. The first is the invention of the *Almanac Royal*, a large, poster-sized wall hanging calendar that is the ancestor of our wall-hanging calendars today (see [Figure 3](#)). These poster-sized calendars were *the* most popular means of disseminating the king's image throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³⁶ Varying from year to year they depicted the king engaged in various notable events of the recent years such as signing treaties, receiving foreign ambassadors, waging battles or attending births and marriages of the royal family. One need only consider one or two examples to see how the almanac structure became a highly effective tool of political propaganda, consolidating the mythological representation of the French king as a type of Apollo or sun god: he who rules over his kingdom as the sun rules over the world. Recourse to the sun image was, of course, an ancient one, as we have discussed previously. What these *Almanacs Royaux* demonstrate, however, is how this solar myth was also presented as an absolute control over calendar time. These calendars foreground not just the temporal authority of the king, whose divine will was inviolable; they also reflect a long tradition of Christian and Catholic imagery in which, as Rolf Reichart has shown, the battle of lightness over the forces of dark featured prominently.³⁷ In this example from 1716, Louis XIV is shown as the centre of both sacred and secular history. The great deeds of his reign, featured in the six vignettes, illuminate not just the earthly realm but also unite earthly and heavenly powers in the very image of divine enlightenment, depicted here as his ascension toward the gods.

As preferred vehicles for official representations of the French state, almanacs were more heavily censored than other print literature. However, this did not prevent them from also communicating a far more personal understanding of time. Indeed the second major change noted by the *Encyclopédie* is the transformation of the almanac into a type of personal agenda.³⁸ Smaller and cheaper, they began to resemble something more like our pocket calendars today. Ever since Henri III forbade astrological predictions in almanacs, telling time had become a scientific endeavour.

³⁶ According to the article 'Almanach' in the *Encyclopédie*, the publication of the first *Almanac Royal* in 1679 was one of the biggest changes to occur in the almanac tradition.

³⁷ See Rolf Reichart, 'Light against Darkness: The Visual Representations of a Central Enlightenment Concept', 95–148.

³⁸ 'La plupart de nos *almanachs* d'aujourd'hui contiennent non-seulement les jours & les fêtes de l'année, mais encore un très grand nombre d'autres choses. Ce sont des espèces d'*agenda*, où l'on peut s'instruire de détails souvent nécessaires dans la vie civile, & qu'on auroit peine quelquefois à trouver ailleurs.' Article 'Almanach' in the *Encyclopédie*.

Whereas previously almanacs advertised themselves as containing the predictions of Nostradamus, medical doctor to the king, or other famous astrologers, now they prided themselves on following the calculations of Tycho Brahe or Johannes Kepler. As the *Encyclopédie* proclaimed, perhaps too optimistically, ‘although we still see many almanacs filled with these sorts of predictions, even the simplest people scarcely believe them anymore.’³⁹ It was not just calendars; chronometry also changed people’s attitudes towards time.⁴⁰ Precision clocks, invented in France and England towards the end of the seventeenth century, told time to the second, enabling ever more personal control over time.

By the eighteenth century then two quite opposing attitudes to time had developed. The *Almanac Royal* maintained the seventeenth-century tradition of insisting on an ever more tight fusion of earthly and divine power, reflected in the divine authority of the king. The proliferation of personal almanacs, on the other hand, indicated increasing freedom from political or religious dictates over time. Above all, the vibrant culture of almanacs enabled the enormous changes to the measurement and experience of time that were established slowly and unevenly over the course of several centuries,⁴¹ to appear as new social values. Already before the Revolution, the wide variety of almanacs indicated the extent to which the organization of time had become something of an individual choice, a trend especially pronounced in libertine almanacs that prided themselves on a frivolous, even subversive, attitude to authority.⁴² With the Revolution, almanacs quickly became associated with the rival opinions of various political groups all of which claimed to represent the ‘true’ meaning of current events.⁴³ Indeed one important reason why the Republican calendar would eventually have such problems in projecting itself as an ‘official’ and ‘universal’ representation of time, is that it too was the offspring of this polemical almanac tradition.

To understand how these different understandings of ‘new time’ gave birth to the concept of a revolutionary calendar, let us now turn to consider how a particular almanac, published in 1788, by a then little-known

³⁹ Ibid.: ‘quoique nous voyions encore plusieurs almanachs remplis de ces sortes de prédictions, à peine le plus bas peuple y ajoute-t-il quelque foi’.

⁴⁰ Borst, *The Ordering of Time*, 113–14.

⁴¹ Regarding clock time, evidence suggests a gradual process of change in an urbanising and commercialising society. See Glennie and Thrift, *Shaping the Day*.

⁴² An example is the rise of the *étrennes érotiques*, often designed to take the form of a prayer book to be read secretly during service.

⁴³ On revolutionary almanacs see Welschinger, *Les almanachs de la Révolution*; Andriès, ‘Almanacs: Revolutionizing a Traditional Genre’, 202–22. For a general bibliography see Grand-Carteret, *Les Almanachs Français*.

writer by the name of Sylvain Maréchal, became the prototype of the actual Republican calendar.

SYLVAIN MARÉCHAL'S *L'ALMANACH DES HONNÊTES GENS*

On 9 January 1788, Sylvain Maréchal's *Almanach des honnêtes gens* was torn up and burnt by the royal censor. Decried as 'impious' and 'blasphemous', this almanac was accused of attempting to destroy the very foundations of Christianity. What was Maréchal's crime? To have dared meddle with the Christian calendar. To have, with a cavalier hand, replaced the martyrs and apostles of the Gregorian calendar with secular and non-Christian figures in an attempt to revise the foundations of Christian time. For the censor, the almanac was nothing less than an atheistic machine de guerre. The venerable saints were replaced by a panoply of figures that ranged from materialist philosophers (Helvétius, Toland) to avowed or suspected atheists (Fréret, Bayle, Spinoza) to courtesans (Ninon de Lenclos) to revered kings (Henri IV, Louis IX) (see [Figure 4](#)). Moses featured alongside Mahomet, Diogenes shared a day with Rousseau, and Agnès Sorel, the mistress of Charles VII, found a place alongside Brutus, slayer of Julius Caesar. Jesus Christ was even made to share his birthday, 25 December, with Newton, also famously born on Christmas Day. In so doing, Maréchal transgressed every possible social distinction that defined ancien regime society – between saints and sinners, infidels and Christians, sacred and profane, noble and base. This was not all. In addition to the charge of impiety was that of arrogance, of daring to erase the Christian time line in favour of consecrating the present year as 'Year I of Reason'. 'As if', as the censor noted sarcastically in his report, 'reason could only date its empire from an epoch assigned by a vile troop of unbelievers, as if the world had, until the present, been consigned to darkness'.⁴⁴

Five years later, this almanac, burnt for ridiculing the Christian faith, became the prototype of the official calendar of the first French Republic. All the elements that would characterize the subsequent Republican calendar were already in place: the ten-day week, the 'numerical' months, the secular festivals, and the belief that rupture would release a new source of time that would regenerate all of mankind. At a time when

⁴⁴ 'Comme si la raison ne pouvoit dater son empire que de l'époque qu'un vil troupeau d'incrédulés veut bien lui assigner; comme si le monde avoit été jusqu'à présent dans les ténèbres'. Séguier, *Archives nationales*, X1B8987. This almanac was reprinted in 1836 (Nancy: Imprimerie de Vve. Hissette, rue de la Hache) with the *arrêt du parlement* by Antoine Séguier attached.

ALMANACH DES HONNÊTES-GENS.

L'An premier du regne de la Raison. Pour la présente Année.

Dis-moi qui tu hantes, je dirai qui tu es. Prov.

I. MARS, ou PRINCEPS.	II. AVRIL, ou ALTER.	III. MAY, ou TER.	IV. JUN, ou QUARTILE.	V. JUILLET, ou QUINTILE.	VI. AOUST, ou SEXTILE.
1 Mécé. 2 Martial, po. 3 Sc. Duplex. 4 Saladin. 5 Kéist, P. All. 6 Michel-Ange. 7 Antonin. 8 Freret. 9 Yonere. (10) Yon. de Yvoi. 11 Tesson. 12 Boileau. 13 L'Hôpital, Chamc. 14 Thémistocle. 15 Brutus tue César. 16 Euripide. 17 Marc-Aurèle. 18 Bugeot. 19 Bion. 20 Le Catvreur. 21 Toland. 22 Catinaut. 23 Aristote. 24 Ruyter. 25 Newton. 26 Wollaston. 27 Chamousset. 28 P. de La Harpe. 29 P. Signeur. (30) T. Porpoizut Att. 31 Descartes.	1 Bayard. 2 Harvey, Vinslow. 3 Jesus-Christ. 4 Jouvencet. 5 Hobbes. 6 Socrate. 7 Fleton. 8 Chevillon. 9 Bacon, Wolf. (10) Goussier. (11) Deslandes. 12 Bossuet, Young. 13 Mécène. 14 Handel. 15 Plutarque, Tasse. 16 J. Cassini. 17 Proclus, Ozanam. 18 Linnez. 19 Chénier. (20) M. Cervantes. (21) Numa Pompiliat. 22 J. Racine. 23 Pnyonie. 24 Vincent de Paule. 25 Louis IX. 26 Marc Aurèle. 27 Le Prince Eugène. 28 M. de La Harpe. 29 Abbé de St-Pierre. (30) Locaun, Senneque. 31 Pope.	1 Adisson. 2 Lemaître. 3 Benoit XIV. P. 4 Aldrovandus. 5 Astruc. 6 Papire Masson. 7 De Thou. 8 De Colomb. 9 W. Rockemann. (10) Lagonier, Turgot. (11) Fénelon. 12 Sautenil. 13 Barneveldt. 14 Henri IV. 15 Marulle. 16 Mar. Fabert. 17 Héloïse. 18 Fontenauer. 19 Yvon. (20) Albert Durer. (21) T. Campanella. 22 Cl. Bernou. 23 Linné. 24 Timoleon. 25 G. d'Amboise. 26 Lacroix. 27 Plutarque, n. Philae. 28 M. de La Harpe. 29 Bourdin. (30) Voltaire. 31 Pope.	1 Fleuch chaise Tarq. 2 Bichon. 3 Harvey. 4 Laure. 5 Tournedort. 6 La Vallière. 7 Tison. 8 Madaon, Ev. 9 Mère de Saint IV. (10) Genarot. 11 Dumarsais. 12 Moutdambert. 13 Agricola. 14 Clu. Fleury. 15 Beaubône, Yaloo. 16 J. Bus. 17 Rabot, Dumarsais. 18 W. Wallon. 19 Vincent de Paule. (20) Pétrarque. 21 Imp. Eudocie, Athén. m. 22 T. Chastel, de Bell. 23 Ach. de Harlay. 24 U. de Sali. 25 Thomas à Kempis. 26 Bouchardon. 27 Lucerne. 28 Chaulien. 29 Rousseau, n. Dig. 30 Gézard. (30) Gaill. Poin. 31 L'Abb. Chappé.	1 Duc de Ventône. 2 J. J. Rousseau. 3 D'Abousson, g. m. 4 Vaidé, Richardson. 5 Destouches. 6 Thom. Morus. 7 Triaeno. 8 Lalande, n. Abioste m. 9 Lalande, n. Abioste. 10 Lalande, n. Abioste. 11 Mocraty. 12 J. César. 13 Duguesclin. 14 Clu. Fleury. 15 Beaubône, Yaloo. 16 J. Bus. 17 Rabot, Dumarsais. 18 W. Wallon. 19 Vincent de Paule. (20) Pétrarque. 21 Imp. Eudocie, Athén. m. 22 T. Chastel, de Bell. 23 Ach. de Harlay. 24 U. de Sali. 25 Thomas à Kempis. 26 Bouchardon. 27 Lucerne. 28 Chaulien. 29 Rousseau, n. Dig. 30 Gézard. (30) Gaill. Poin. 31 L'Abb. Chappé.	1 Ph. d'Orléans, Rég. n. 2 Condillc. 3 Dolet. 4 Moh. Mahadi, Cal. 5 Tulla, la Vallière. 6 Fénelon. 7 Lallemande. 8 Lalande, n. Abioste. 9 De St. Amand. 10 De St. Amand. (10) G. d'Estrete. 11 Trajan. 12 Barclay. 13 Fra Paolo. 14 Devic. 15 Jac. Bernoulli. 16 M. Decker. 17 Labadie. 18 Pascal. (20) Bourdaloue. 21 Boece. 22 Villers, Valléteq. m. m. 23 Agricola. 24 L'Am. Coligny. 25 Hume. 26 Champen, I. Vég. m. 27 Carleley, Stroz V. m. 28 Alarabte Severo. 29 Trajan. (30) Soliman II. 31 Colbert, n. Soufflot, m.

N. B. Dans ce Calendrier tout profane, on n'a pas prétendu faire loi. Mais comme malheureusement les Habitans de la terre sont divisés de culte, on a tenté de les rapprocher par un lien commun de fraternité. Le Proverbe dit: *Il y a des Honnêtes-gens par tout*. C'est d'oux et pour eux qu'on s'est occupé ici. L'*ALMANACH DES HONNÊTES-GENS*, pourra être consulté également par le Catholique et le Protestant, le Luthérien et l'Anglican, le Chrétien et le Mahométan, l'Idolâtre et l'Hebraïen. On ne doit cependant regarder ceci que comme le germe informe d'un ouvrage plus important; comme le portique ébauché d'un Edifice de paix, où les hommes se trouvant un jour plus à leur aise que par tout ailleurs.

Qu'on ne fasse pas l'injure à l'Espece Humaine de croire qu'elle n'a produit de grands hommes que ceux dont les noms se trouvent ici; on n'a inscrit que ceux dont on a pu découvrir la date un peu certaine de la naissance et de la mort, les indiquant par une n, ou par une m.

Les changements qu'on s'est permis, s'expliquent assez d'eux-mêmes.

On a divisé chaque mois de cet *ALMANACH DES HONNÊTES-GENS* par Décades; c'est-à-dire de 10 en 10 jours; en sorte qu'il y a dans l'année 36 Décades; les 5 à 6 jours excédant les 360 jours, servent de *jours commodes* et peuvent être consacrés si l'on veut à des solennités purement morales. Par exemple,

Une Fête de l'Amour, au commencement du Printems, le 31 Mars ou *Priniceps*.

Figure 4. *Almanach des honnêtes gens* par M.P.S. Maréchal publié à Paris en 1788, et réimprimé à Nancy en 1836. © The British Library Board P.P. 2377.d.

ALMANACH DES HONNÊTES-GENS.

L'An premier du regne de la Raison. Dis-moi qui tu hantes, je dirai qui tu es. Prov.

Pour la présente Année.

VII. SEPTEMBRE.	VIII. OCTOBRE.	IX. NOVEMBRE.	X. DÉCEMBRE.	XI. JANVIER. ou UNDÉCEMBRE.	XII. FÉVRIER. ou DODÉCEMBRE.
1 Cabalet. m 2 Regnard, Parcieux. m 3 Le grand Condé. m 4 Alban, Cujas. m 5 Louis le Grand. m 6 Colbert. m 7 Bailon. n 8 Elisabeth, R. d'Angl. m 9 Saint-Evremond. m (10) Guillaume I. le C. m 11 Turenne. m 12 François I. R. de Fr. m 13 J. D. Cassini. Rollin. m 14 Montaigne. m 15 Boulangier. m 16 Maupertuis. m 17 Roger Bacon. m 18 Antonin. m 19 Antonin. m (20) L.L. Crassus. O. S. m 21 Cardan. n 22 Virgile. m 23 Pline le v. m 24 Platon. m 25 Platon. I. Second m 26 Lamotte Leveyer. m 27 Gou-Trouin. m 28 Ledigiere Massillon. m 29 Gustave-Vasa. m (30) G. Tell: H. Languet. m 13 Pres. Jeannin. m	1 Le gr. Pompée m 2 Alcibiade severe. m 3 Lucain. m 4 Alban, Cujas. m 5 Ph. Desportes. m 6 Mailherbe. m 7 Frossard, hist. m 8 J. Douza, Holl. m 9 Fallope. Cl. Perrault. m (10) Conscience, P. m 11 Zolka. m 12 Galilée. C. Religae. m 13 Malherbe, Versal. m 14 Guill. Penn. m 15 Virgile. m 16 Socrate. Demosthen. m 17 Nicou de Lenclos. m 18 Résumur. m 19 Democrite. Swift m (20) Lamoignon. m 21 Le Percin Reclact. m 22 C. Baur, styliens. m 23 C. Baur, styliens. m 24 Gasard: Tichobrahé. m 25 Ach. Harley, lanc. m 26 Galissonniere. m 27 Gou-Trouin. m 28 Ledigiere Massillon. m 29 M. le Tellier. m (30) Boudin. m	1 P. Pithou. m 2 Pline l'aic. m 3 Lucain. m 4 Cook. m 5 Plassis Normai. m 6 N. Trajan. Julien. m 7 Locke. m 8 Charon. m 9 Milton. m (10) Boulangier. m 11 Malinnet. m 12 G. de Magesnerai. m 13 Jean II. P. Hot. m 14 Leibnitz. m 15 Kepler. m 16 Gustave Adolphe. m 17 Faerne. le Sage. m 18 Bayle. m 19 Poussin. m (20) C. Folliguae. m 21 B. Sautere, P. m 22 Ab. Prevot. m 23 Perce. m 24 Spinosa. m 25 Bolinbroke. m 26 Quinault. m 27 Horace. m 28 D'Agnesseau. m 29 Tournfort. m 30 Mar. de Saxe. m	1 Carmanicus. m 2 Cailion. m 3 Perse. m 4 Hobbes. m 5 Machavel. m 6 C. Quirin. m 7 Alg. Sidney. m 8 Horace. m 9 Milton. m (10) Lamoignon. m 11 Colly. G. Condé. m 12 Lelutau, P. m 13 Suger. m 14 François. m 15 Gellert. m 15 Tychobrahé. m 16 Quosny. m 17 Wood. m 18 Prior. m 19 Gay. m (20) Amb. Paré. m 21 Racine. m 22 B. de Com. m 23 Senesque. m 24 Gama. m 25 Jesus-Christ. Newton. m 26 Helvétius. m 27 Kepler. m 28 Caton, cens. Bayle. m 29 Wicfel. m (30) Mar. de Bissac. m	1 Demoux. Ovide. m 2 Gécron. m 3 M. Moak. m 4 H. Montmorency. L. m 5 El. Petrovna, Imp. m 6 C. Quirin. m 7 Fenelon. m 8 G. Galilei. m 9 Fontenelle. m (10) Pres. Durany. m 11 G. de Magesnerai. m 12 Lelutau, P. m 13 Suger. m 14 François. m 15 Gellert. m 15 Gellert. m 16 Quosny. m 17 Skanderberg. m 18 Montesquieu. m 19 Pericles. m (20) Pythagore. m 21 Platon. m 22 Epicure. m 23 Senesque. m 24 Wolf. m 25 Bayle. m 26 Helvétius. m 27 Nerva. Tamerlan. m 28 Charlemaigne. m 29 Ch. Siguer. m (30) Rollin. m	1 Digne. m 2 M. de l'Hôpital. m 3 Ulyse Sals. m 4 Condamine. m 5 Sévigné. m 6 Arnaud le gr. m 7 Pellisson. m 8 Huot, ev. Prochas. m 9 Jurd. Brannus. m (10) Montesquieu. m 11 Platon. m 12 Fontenelle. m 13 Bourdoin, R. de Je. m 14 Cook, voyag. m 15 Freet. m 16 Plutarque. m 17 Moliere. m 18 Michel-Auge. m 19 Cepernié. G. Galilei m (20) Voltaire. m 21 Socrate. m 22 Gécron. m 23 Caton. m 24 Shafteld. m 25 Edit de Nantes. m 26 Shaftesbury. m 27 M. Boucicant. m 28 Raphael. Montaigne m 29 Agnes Sorel. m

Le défaut de place n'a pas permis de citer l'année de la naissance et de la mort des Grands Hommes de ce Calendrier. On desireroit aussi que chacun d'eux eût été peint d'un trait. On tachera d'y suppléer, dans un petit Livret intitulé qui paraîtra dans le cours de l'année, sous le titre de *Dictionnaire des Hommes-gens*.

On previent encore que chaque mois découpé peut s'adapter à chacune des douze colonnes d'une petite Rotonde formant un Almanach en relief. On peut en voir le modèle chez l'Editeur, M. P. SYLVAIN MARECHAL, rue des Prêcheurs, N° 49, où se distribue l'Almanach des Hommes-gens, soit en feuilles, soit collé sur carton, soit plié dans un étui.

Une Fête de l'Hyménée, au commencement de l'Éte, le 31. Mai ou Zer.
 Une Fête de la Reconnaissance, en Automne, le 31. Août ou Scartite.
 Une Fête de l'Amitié; en Hyver, le 31. Décembre.

Les Fête de tous les Grands Hommes aimés, c'est à-dire, dont on ne sait point la date de la mort et de la naissance, le 31. Janvier, ou *un-Décembre*.

Quant au choix des personnages, à l'exemple du Rédacteur, on sera libre d'y substituer tous ceux qui paroîtront mériter la préférence; ou bien imiter chacun dans sa famille; ce que le Rédacteur a fait pour la sienne, au 21 d'Octobre. Un Almanach composé en entier dans cet esprit ne pourroit tourner qu'au profit des mortels.

Figure 4 (cont.)

few of his contemporaries imagined 'revolution' in any form except as the reform of monarchy, Maréchal offered an image of revolution as a complete rupture of time. The changes in social relations that he envisioned were so absolute that they necessitated a new calendar, that is, an entirely new way of correlating natural events and social values in which previous chronologies would be completely forgotten.

Maréchal's almanac is such a significant document because it pushes back the starting point for any historical explanation of the revolutionary calendar to before the events of the French Revolution, when the modern understanding of revolution as an irreversible, historical event did not yet exist and 'revolution' as a term still referred predominantly to cyclical time. It requires us to consider the imagination of this one man who, although he could in no way foresee the events of the French Revolution, nonetheless provided it with one of its most potent images, that of being in Year I of a new time. In so doing, it forces us to think anew about the question of emergence. How, at the beginning of 1788, a year that has long been associated with a breakdown in the legitimacy of the old order, did a calendar become a way to express revolutionary ideas about social change? And how could one individual, Sylvain Maréchal, hope to change the social experience of time, especially given that a calendar – as an authoritative expression of social time – is precisely what is least amenable to individual change?

In Maréchal's almanac, a wilfully personal construction of time is turned against the authoritative time frame of the Christian calendar. Where the Christian calendar had established its cultural hegemony over a long process of acculturation, Maréchal's almanac claimed to make history anew by the stroke of a pen. Where the Christian calendar went forward in time, naturalizing its authority by adding to the astronomical layers of the Roman calendar and adapting itself to pagan festivals already in place, Maréchal's almanac worked backwards, stripping the Christian calendar of its significance to reveal the purely astronomical time beneath it. Finally, where the Christian calendar established Christ's birth as Year I of a new chronology after many centuries, when the entire Western world had come to sense the need for a new time line, Maréchal's almanac declared the present year as Year I. In a complete disregard for the immense historical process presupposed by the Christian calendar (and probably all calendars), his almanac privileges the time of a perpetual present. There are no peaks or troughs, no distinction between sacred and profane days. Instead an empty grid of identically repeating days indicates that time is equal for everyone. This recognition that people's lives

all occupy the same time attributes a new function to the calendar: It has become a personal device for the reclassification of values.

David S. Landes has shown how voluntarism, the ability to orient oneself in time without obeying the dictates of the church, went hand in hand with a world that was increasingly seen as being scientifically determined.⁴⁵ Units of time were measured with ever more precision. They became quantitative as opposed to qualitative categories that could be used by everyone individually rather than embodying a public, and communal, experience of time. These changes can be seen in Maréchal's almanac where he calls upon everyone to order their own time and values voluntarily. His almanac works best, he tells his readers, if everyone makes their own. As an example he points to 21 October, a day dedicated to his own father, and advises all to make such a calendar for use in their own homes.

It is around this central enigma of a 'private calendar' that a cluster of questions arises. How can every person construct his or her own private calendar when the goal of a calendar is to integrate individuals into social space as it is collectively experienced? And what does it mean anyway to establish a common measure of humanity? Rousseau, as we recall from his *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, associated measure with comparison, the first step in the construction of a series of social distinctions, between the powerful and weak, the rich and poor and finally between the masterful and the enslaved.

Maréchal's almanac, however, derives a common measure of humanity from a new understanding of a common or shared experience of lived time. By treating common lives as if they were worth the same as noble lives, and vice versa, Maréchal's almanac illustrates a conception of history that is no longer restricted to recounting the memorable actions of noble characters. Rather, notions of fairness, dignity, justice and honour are represented as qualities common to all the social classes. Moreover, by placing his *honnêtes gens* within a calendar that, emptied of saints, now appears as a grid or table, Maréchal is able to represent this common or lived experience of time as if it has already attained the level of cultural objectivity: as if it emanated from the rational measure of time itself.

To be sure, Maréchal's almanac was not the first to replace the saints with exemplary figures taken from secular life. There was already a popular tradition of replacing the saints with notable exemplars as a kind of

⁴⁵ Landes pinpoints the importance of chronometry in this evolution away from church control over time. See *A Revolution in Time*, 77–8 and 90–7.

memory aid to instruct people about certain values that were to be held in common.⁴⁶ But it was certainly the first that subjected sacred and profane orders to the same measure of time in a way that destroyed the very concept of a hierarchy of religious and moral value. In the censor's outrage we can still sense the shock at the abolition of the distinction between sacred and profane. What was outrageous was that people from different religions and social classes could be given equal weight by belonging to the same time; that Jesus Christ could inhabit the same temporal space as you or me or Mahomet. Or, to put it differently, that there was a growing split between different possible representations of time, and the one, unified, 'official' representation that made control over time something a censor could enforce.

But if Maréchal privileges a homogeneous, natural time, his calendar is far from empty. On the contrary, it is thickly peopled with an astonishing range of celebrities. His temporal grid foregrounds not just the individual subject, who is able to classify and re-evaluate the value of lives according to his or her own will, but also the biographical life as a means of organizing knowledge. By expanding the kinds of people who could be said to participate in a shared lifestyle or behaviour and starting a new historical time line, Maréchal demonstrates that a new social order already exists, outside historical time, in the ways of perceiving and experiencing reality that were already in place. Unlike the social order of the ancien régime, this order derives not from an immutable hierarchy based on birth but from a new conception of what, following Halbwachs, we can call 'class consciousness', that is, the consciousness with which people classify and describe themselves.⁴⁷

Nowhere is this emphasis on an affective, personal relation to the past and a common experience of time that links past and present better captured than in Maréchal's *Dictionnaire des honnêtes gens*, which

⁴⁶ Jean-Claude Bonnet traces the cult of *grands hommes* to 1758, when the traditional subjects of rhetorical competitions gave way to praise of *grands hommes*. *Naissance du Panthéon*, 10, 36. Grand-Carteret identifies the 1776 almanac *Heures nouvelles à l'usage des Magistrats et des bons citoyens*, which replaced the saints with illustrious men and included the still-living Voltaire, as the earliest precursor to Maréchal's almanac, xlv. Other precursors include Vasselier's 1785 *L'Almanach nouveau de l'an passé*, which replaced the saints with great military figures and celebrities, and Thomas Riboud's 1785 *Étrennes littéraires ou Almanach offert aux amis de l'humanité*, which replaced the saints with prominent *gens de lettres*.

⁴⁷ Another important convergence with Halbwachs. See Lewis Coser: 'In contradistinction to Marx's notion of class, which by and large locates class structures in the position that people occupy in the sphere of production, Halbwachs' social class ... is centered on class consciousness, i.e. the ways in which people classify themselves'. Introduction in *On Collective Memory*, 18–19.

was supposed to accompany the almanac but was not published until 1791. In this dictionary, which outlines Maréchal's justifications for his choice of names, Alexander the Great is shown to have merited a place but with 'lots of restrictions', while Dürer was praiseworthy less for his artistic accomplishments than for the rather cryptic virtue of having been 'a second Socrates with his wife who was another Xantippe'.⁴⁸ In a final blaspheming touch, Christ receives an entry that seems lifted right from a sentimental novel: 'Jesus, nicknamed the Christ, Jew and son of Mary, in memory of his conduct towards his adulterous wife, certainly the most beautiful trait of his life.'⁴⁹ This same combination of desecration and valourization is also given to female saints in his *Nouvelle légende dorée* (1790), a reworking of a medieval text.⁵⁰ (In the case of women, these moral values include sentimental and sexual values, unsurprising for this dedicated materialist for whom female sexual freedom also meant freedom from the authority of priests).

Brief, piquant and often startling in their associations, what matters in these biographical thumbnails is not the memorable deeds of noble persons – that is of persons capable of changing the course of history – but the moral values that any given individual can potentially represent. By the late eighteenth century, *honnêteté* had already become associated with universal values more than with any particular kind of noble birth.⁵¹ In his eponymous almanac Maréchal takes this redefinition one step further, using biographical facts and the historical record normally associated with the deeds of great people, to create a calendar of ordinary history. Like the exemplary history that inspired it, this new collective memory is identifiable with a universal history of mankind only because history itself is understood as the exemplification of a moral idea.

Maréchal's union of a modern time grid with a new understanding of exemplarity is significant for our understanding of revolutionary ideology. For it shows how a belief in the universal sameness of human nature over time came to be reconciled with an equally strong desire to revise history and thereby rupture with the past. On the one hand, we have a

⁴⁸ 'un second Socrates avec sa femme qui étoit une autre Xantippe'. Less cryptic perhaps if we consider that Xantippe was well known for having been a rather angry and difficult woman.

⁴⁹ 'Jésus, surnommé le Christ, juif et fils de Marie; en mémoire de sa conduite envers sa femme adultère; certes, le plus beau trait de sa vie.'

⁵⁰ For the relation to the genre of saints' lives see Delany, 'Afterlife of a Medieval Genre: The *Nouvelle légende dorée* (1790) of Sylvain Maréchal.'

⁵¹ For example, Diderot's article 'Bien (homme de)' in the *Encyclopédie* defines *honnête homme* as 'celui qui ne perd pas de vûe dans aucune de ses actions des principes de l'équité naturelle' [he who never loses sight in any of his actions of the principles of natural fairness]. See also Höfer and Reichardt, *Honnête Homme, Honnêteté*.

concept of individual agency in which we pick our own models in a way that confirms not only our own autonomy but also the irreducible singularity of the exemplar. This ensures that representation remains concrete, particular, physiognomical, related to the biographical contours of the individual life. Maréchal's father is, after all, an example to Maréchal and to no one else. On the other hand, there is an equally strong but opposing belief in the universality of the exemplar, a validity that is maintained by repressing as much as possible the historical awareness of a distance between the past and present. Praising great men for their ordinary deeds and ordinary men for their greatness, Maréchal uses his almanac to create what Nietzsche would later call 'monumental history, the representation of the past and the present as one and the same, always worthy of imitation'.⁵²

By privileging simultaneity and negating historical distance, Maréchal's almanac presents living memory as a key motor of historical rupture and change. It is thus quite wrong to interpret his calendar, as the censor initially did, as simply a necrology or book of the dead. For such a description does not register the changing attitude towards death that the almanac implies. Originally, saints' days commemorated martyrs who had died in defense of their belief in a Christian afterlife. Their function was to remind people continually of death and to encourage them to have the right attitude towards death. 'One believed in death', as Bernard Groethuysen has put it, 'as he believed in God and hell, or better, it was because he believed in death that he had faith'.⁵³ By the late eighteenth century death was no longer associated with terror and fear of the afterlife. Louis-Sébastien Mercier memorably expressed this changing attitude to death when he imagined the autobiography or the memoir as the new funeral rite: 'Each man writes down what he thinks in his best moments ... Before his death, he will put these thoughts together in the form of a book. This book is the soul of the deceased. It is read aloud on the day of his funeral and this reading functions as his only eulogy'.⁵⁴ Likewise in Maréchal's almanac, death is represented as the least important aspect of a person's life. In its place moral values, and the personal right to award or punish right or wrong actions, have become the dividing line between who is remembered and who is forgotten.

⁵² Nietzsche, *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life*, 15.

⁵³ Bernard Groethuysen, *The Bourgeois*, 7.

⁵⁴ 'Chaque homme écrit ce qu'il pense dans ses meilleurs moments. ... Avant sa mort il en forme un livre ... ce livre est l'âme du défunt. On le lit le jour de ses funérailles à haute voix, et cette lecture compose tout son éloge'. Mercier, *L'An 2440*, 73.

Maréchal's insight was to realize that autobiographical memory is always both 'historical' and 'personal' and never purely 'subjective', because it draws upon a social repertoire of exemplary or possible lives that situate the individual within a transcendent, historical time.⁵⁵ His other insight was to realize that by representing this intersubjective understanding of autobiographical memory in the form of a calendar, he could abolish the religious distinction between sacred and profane time. For Maréchal, the chief problem with the religious construction of collective memory was that it excluded the common people. Even if all members of this society participated in the celebrations that coalesced around sacred 'peaks' of time – high holidays, religious processions, feast days – this collective memory nonetheless enforced the fact that the ceremonies foregrounded highly ranked persons who performed the rituals for and in front of the people, who remained, to a large extent, excluded from the space of representation. Inclusion of the common people could only take place in the form of a rupture that contradicted the distinction between sacred and profane orders. In other words, it was only by making every day equal to every other day that collective memory could be expanded to include all the social classes. Only an atheist society could be a society built upon universal equality.

Nowhere was this hierarchical social structure more obviously encoded than in the aforementioned *Almanac Royal*. One need only consider the visual iconography of the example shown in figure three to see how Maréchal's atheist calendar was also aimed against the solar myth of absolutism, which represented time as completely subordinated to the temporal power of the monarch whose divine will was inviolable. As the *Almanac Royal* makes clear, there was no way to criticize the temporal authority of the Catholic Church without also invoking the 'civil' authority of the state. In other words, to posit, as Maréchal did, a purely secular homogeneous 'horizontal' distribution of time was *also* to posit a secular understanding of political authority. This correlation would not have been lost on Maréchal, who, as we shall see in [Chapter 2](#), was already an avowed regicide and frequently pitted a calendar of natural time, ruled over by a natural sun, against the heavenly sun of the divine-king.

To understand, therefore, how Maréchal's atheism was directed at both the church and the king, we need to compare his almanac not just to the church calendar but also to the visual iconography of the *Almanac*

⁵⁵ See Thomas Luckmann for the importance of biographical schemes in linking 'large stretches of a typical individual's life and his entire life to transcendent and historical times'. 'The Constitution of Human Life in Time', 162.

Royal. The almanac from 1716 pictured in figure three is typical in its proportions, depicting the king's portrait as standing upon and literally dwarfing the scrunched and barely legible calendar beneath it. The almanac's visual frame is that of a theatre in which the calendar supports the king's image just like a stage. The spectator-king stands on the stage of 'world-history'. His memorable deeds are what link the divine order with history. The religious calendar appears as the firmament that upholds the 'miracle' of the king's actions while also subordinating the everyday life of the people within it.⁵⁶

Maréchal's almanac, in contrast, replaces the image of the sun-king with a natural sun as the sole organizer of time. A table or a grid replaces the spectacle of the king's portrait, because the natural sun needs no images. It appears in place of images – of saints, of kings, of idols of various kinds – because it is the principle of visibility of all things. Instead of a visual field based on depth, whose focal point is the one gaze, the one perspective of the king, Maréchal's almanac represents the triumph of reason over the religious and political imagination. A natural calendar, like the natural sun, is the principle of 'nonrepresentational representation' par excellence because it no longer requires illusions, be it the illusions of power, of religion, of terror or fear of the afterlife. In such a way, Maréchal's almanac pits a vision of time as concrete action against the *image* of history represented by the king. This then is the true goal of Maréchal's revolutionary calendar: to destroy the tie that binds Christianity to kingship, to destroy, in other words, the fusion of sacred and secular time that reinforced the social hierarchy of the ancien regime.

Maréchal's almanac is noteworthy for showing how, prior to the French Revolution, a notion of rupture emerged as a way to reinterpret the role and function of collective memory in a rational universe; that is, a universe in which inequalities of social order were no longer instituted or 'naturalized' through unequal divisions of time. In this regard, Maréchal's almanac is significant in at least three ways. First, it shows how a concept of rupture first emerged not as a response to concrete, historical events but as an imaginative projection of a new collective memory that contradicted the existing order of time. Second, it demonstrates Maréchal's deeply held conviction that a 'secret' or 'untold' universal history of equality was not a

⁵⁶ Louis Marin compares this function of the royal image to the sacramental host, which similarly allows Christ's body to be historical and local as well as transhistorical, everywhere at once. Louis XIV's grandiloquent identification of himself as a sun-king ensured that he too could appear as sole agent and actor of history; as if history were nothing but the 'perpetual and successive miracle of the king and his body in action'. See *Portrait of the King*, 83.

figment of the imagination because it already existed within the collective memory of actual, historical lives. This allowed Maréchal to reconcile a desire for rupture with a synchronic or paradigmatic understanding of history as a series of exempla that repeat. In other words, Maréchal was able to represent as compatible two attitudes to history that normally would seem to be at odds. This was the desire to change the course of history while maintaining the postulate of an identity and permanence of human nature over time. Finally, his almanac pits secular time not just against the church but also against the divine authority of the king thus undermining, with one stroke, all three pillars of ancien regime society (aristocracy, church and king). In such a way a radical thinker such as Maréchal, who otherwise could not imagine or foresee the events of the Revolution, prepared the way for the negation of historical time that would become a hallmark of revolutionary culture.

But so far we have only talked about an object – a calendar – and not about living people. And yet, as Maréchal so well demonstrated, a collective memory lives both as a memory of things – almanacs, dictionaries, textbooks, catechisms – and as a memory of people.⁵⁷ What kind of person then was Sylvain Maréchal? And what kind of Revolution do we get with him as our guide? In the following chapter, I will focus on these intertwining narratives: how Maréchal's life and early career reflected the way the Revolution came to construct its own self-image as a rupture in time.

⁵⁷ Another similarity with Halbwachs, who also instructed us to read minor genres – posters, newspapers, popular novels – to understand the affective construction of collective memory.

Between the Volcano and the Sun
Sylvain Maréchal against His Time

It is Nietzsche who provides the best motto to encapsulate Maréchal's project: 'And if you want biographies then not those with the refrain 'Mr. So-and-so and His Time' but rather those whose title page should be inscribed 'A Fighter against His Time'.¹ This is how Maréchal presents his *honnêtes gens* and how he himself would have wanted to be read. The calendar is clearly intended as a temple of memory to his own kind. Aside from dedicating 21 October to his father, Maréchal inscribes himself in the company of his revered role models. His own birthday, 15 August, is the only day on the calendar left blank. This conspicuous blankness serves as the best metaphor for Maréchal's literary strategy. It is a strategy of *mimesis* in which he imitates his role models by concealing his identity under a series of literary *masques*.

Maréchal's own biography has been described as a 'classic illustration of the role of the 'Grub Street literati'.² Born in 1750 to a pious vintner in the Les Halles district of Paris, Maréchal first was a student of law and later became a librarian at the Bibliothèque Mazarine, France's great public library, before he was dismissed for penning a parody of the Bible, the 1784 *Livre échappé au déluge*. Maréchal's education coincided with the great flourishing of Enlightenment *philosophie*. This was a period during which the 'enlightened public sphere' had managed to win over the nation's elite. From the 1750s, when the first volumes of the *Encyclopédie* were published, to the 1780s, by which time most of the great philosophes had died (Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot and D'Alembert, to name a few), the philosophes had become the new makers of public opinion. The cohabitation of the enlightened public sphere with the state was such that when Christian VII, the young Danish king, visited Paris in 1768, he expressly invited eighteen of the most prominent philosophes for a roundtable discussion.³

¹ Nietzsche, *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life*, 38.

² Gumbrecht, 'Outline of a Literary History of the French Revolution', 187.

³ For this reference and more generally on the evolution of the philosophe see Gumbrecht, 'Who were the *Philosophes*?' 152.

Yet Maréchal, from his first writings, consistently opposed Enlightenment values to the public sphere. Lured into a writing career by the promise of a 'republic of intellectuals', Maréchal, like many denizens of the Grub Street, achieved only a modicum of success in the literary salons, and had to rely on piecework, often journalistic, as a way of getting into print. Robert Darnton has shown how this late-born generation of the Enlightenment came to wield great influence during the Revolution when writers from Grub Street were given free reign to express a generalized hatred of the cultural elite in their newfound role as journalists, agitators and organs of public opinion. Darnton traces the revolutionary opposition to all forms of hierarchy to this pre-revolutionary struggle between a 'high' and 'low' Enlightenment; between such canonized figures as Voltaire and d'Holbach and a later generation of impoverished scribblers who were raised on hopes of social advancement provided by Enlightenment *philosophie* only to end up most often in destitution.⁴

But if Maréchal shares his eventual ascent from hack writer to professional journalist and revolutionary militant with other denizens of the Grub Street whom he knew well, he also differs from them in his lack of political opportunism and unwavering commitment to a radically atheist and egalitarian ideology. This makes him both one of the last atheists in the erudite tradition and one of the very first 'professional' revolutionaries, an exemplar of a new social type: the militant atheist.⁵ He is someone who combined an atheistic desire for a total destruction of the religious past with an equally strong belief in a new golden age, in which he imagined that society would be reorganized into an archipelago of small, self-governing families (influenced perhaps by Morelly's description of such a golden age in his *Code de la Nature*). This commitment stretched from the theoretical – he wrote *Dame Nature à la barre de l'Assemblée nationale*, which criticized the unfinished revolution as early as 1791 – to the practical – he participated in the 'conspiracy of equals' led by Babeuf, which attempted to overthrow the Directory in the name of a more complete political Revolution that also included the redistribution of property.

Maréchal's life and works are thus important for our understanding of revolutionary time in at least five respects. First, for his role in creating the myth that the Enlightenment was the harbinger of the social equality that the Revolution was to fulfill. Maréchal's repeated criticisms of the 'unfinished' revolution, some voiced as early as 1790, show how the Revolution

⁴ Darnton, 'The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature in Pre-Revolutionary France'.

⁵ In addition to Dommanget, see Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men*, 5 and 71.

actively produced the myth of a radically egalitarian enlightenment that it then retroactively posited as its origin and historical 'cause'. Second, for his commitment to a 'popular' reason that involved modifying existing cultural forms and genres in order to show how new ways of relating past to present were *already* present in the ways in which people perceived and understood reality. Third, for his role as propagandist for the Revolution, most notably as dramaturge and choreographer of the revolutionary festivals. In addition to inventing the revolutionary calendar, Maréchal's early writings also elaborated a blueprint for a revolutionary cult that was imported almost wholesale by the revolutionary government a decade or more after it was written. The continuity between his early writings and his subsequent role as journalist and publicist for the Revolution demonstrate not only the intellectual influence of materialist, atheist ideas on revolutionary practice, but also the extent to which the Revolution had, in the first place, been conceived in aesthetic terms as a new way of perceiving and understanding reality.

Fourth, it is precisely this aesthetic dimension that allows us to trace the origins of revolutionary practice to the literary sphere, in particular to the literary strategies that emerged out of the late Enlightenment. Perhaps because we are still influenced by modernist notions of a revolutionary avant-garde, there is a common tendency to associate revolutionary ideas with 'revolutionary' literary practices. But for Maréchal the primary concern was aesthetic perception – the ability to see the new world in the old – rather than innovation, and he articulated his belief in a new golden age by and large through such established genres as pastorals, fables and moral maxims. This inevitably raises the question, How can literary genres that are products of a conservative establishment nonetheless be used to derive a radical vision of historical rupture? As I suggest in this chapter, the revolutionary will for political action and social change was first expressed in the form of conservative genres that depicted a timeless, static world because the dominant literary mode in which new ideas of historical agency came to be expressed was one of inversion and contradiction of the old order. The challenge was to express the new in old 'forms' that were understood by all, rather than to invent new forms for new experiences.

Fifth and finally, Maréchal's self-presentation invites us to reconsider the centrality of a linear biographical narrative to the enlightenment process. As Peter Sloterdijk has noted, for the first generation of Enlightenment philosophes, the enlightenment process went hand in hand with a biographical narrative of initial rejection, exile, return and initiation into a new society, which ended with the achievement of both a personal and philosophical

‘age of maturity’. This biographical narrative extended beyond individual life stories and applied to ideas about social evolution as well. Masonic societies in particular emphasized enlightenment as a narrative of progress from youth, initiation, reflection, maturity and finally illumination or a ‘breaking through time’.⁶ But for Maréchal and other members of his generation and social class, the closing down of the public sphere aborted precisely this biographical narrative, uncoupling the relation between enlightenment as an individual process and enlightenment as a social evolution. Thus while Maréchal’s reluctance to provide any autobiographical statement that was not couched in communitarian terms – that is, as the expression of a society in which he would have liked to live – makes him a difficult biographical subject, it also makes him a rewarding one. For it suggests that the desire for a total revolution can be traced to an original dislocation between biographical and historical time. If Maréchal appears to be so far ‘ahead’ of his time from the perspective of future historical developments, it is because he felt so ‘behind’ his own time, excluded from the enlightened public to which he wanted to belong. By writing and above all performing his biographical narrative as if his life already existed elsewhere – in an enlightened society of the future – Maréchal shows how the process of enlightenment came to be imagined as a break with the historical present, a rupture with the process of time itself.

SYLVAIN MARÉCHAL: A FIGHTER AGAINST HIS TIME

It was while living in his little attic above the library, which he had furnished, in the manner of Montaigne, by tacking onto the ceilings and walls his guiding epigrams, that Maréchal developed his provocative, anti-establishment mode of writing. He did so by cultivating the persona of the *honnête homme* as someone who kept a distance from society. Repudiating the socially engaged image of the philosophe personified by Voltaire, Maréchal presented himself as someone for whom self-reflection, the postulate of a private, inner space outside society, became the basis of a thoroughgoing critique of social relations. In one of his few autobiographical writings, Maréchal describes his ‘conversion’ to atheism. Imitating his great hero Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Maréchal claimed his ‘heart alone’ to be the sole judge and jury:

I learnt two things. The first to distrust human reason, which is so fragile and always progresses by touch and feel. The second, to stand by whatever my

⁶ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 83.

conscience approved, once all external influence was cleared away. From that moment on, I closed all the polemical books, which only *obstructed* my progress, and I took nature's hand. I resolved to only have recourse to facts. ... I consulted the works of priests and philosophers; my heart alone became the tribunal by which I judged them in the last resort. I was not *long* in coming to my conclusions.⁷

This autobiographical confession is more interesting for what it leaves out. Maréchal makes no mention of the influence of the salon of Guillaume Wasse that, in the early 1770s, gathered together literary figures who, for the most part, were unbelievers (frequent guests included Roucher, Monvel, Imbert, and Baculard D'Arnaud).⁸ Nor does he mention that Wasse too furnished his salon by pasting his 'guiding' epigrams along the walls.⁹ He similarly makes no mention of the influence of the loosely Masonic society of the *Musée de Paris*, where he would have heard discourses by Court de Gébelin, the eminent Prussian atheist Clootz, and Bailly, amongst others.¹⁰ The *Musée de Paris* was an offshoot of the *Loge des Neuf Soeurs*, a *loge* originally inspired by Helvétius and founded by the astronomer Jérôme-François Lalande. Like the larger and more famous *Loge des Neuf Soeurs*, the *Musée de Paris* opposed the hermetic, occultist pretensions of the other lodges in favour of the kind of rational, symbolic and allegorical understanding of antiquity we saw in the previous chapter. Its mandate was to promote the arts and sciences within a framework of Masonic sociability that emphasized freethinking and put members of different social classes on equal footing. It is chiefly remembered for the subsequent role it would play in the establishment of France's higher education after the Revolution. Eleven of its members would go on to constitute the Institut national.

It is here, in this society, where Maréchal would have encountered debates about solar myths and the various rituals that the freemasons

⁷ 'J'ai appris deux choses. La première à me défier de la raison humaine, si fragile, et qui marche presque toujours à tâtons. La seconde, à m'en tenir au suffrage de ma conscience, dégagée de toutes considérations étrangères. De ce moment, je fermai tous ces livres polémiques, qui ne faisoient qu'embarasser ma marche, et je pris la main de la nature. Je me résolvai à ne recourir qu'aux faits; ... je fréquentai les prêtres et les philosophes; mon coeur seul devint le tribunal où je les jugeai en dernier ressort. Je ne fus pas *longtems* à prendre mes conclusions'. Maréchal, *Pensées libres sur les prêtres*, 199–200.

⁸ From Jacques Lablée's memoirs, hand-transcribed manuscript by Isère Lablée. Amsterdam, International Institute of Social History, box 1, dossier 29. See also Dommanget, *Sylvain Maréchal*, 27.

⁹ This apparently was quite the vogue. Mme de Genlis also used the walls of her home as 'pedagogical blackboards.'

¹⁰ Dommanget, *Sylvain Maréchal*, 71–2.

performed around it.¹¹ It is also where he may have heard recitations of *Les mois*, a lengthy poem on the calendar written by Roucher, resident poet of the *Loge des Neufs Soeurs*.¹² (This poem was recited during Voltaire's funeral celebrations at the *Loge des Neufs Soeurs*, where it produced 'le plus grand effet' – no mean feat given the spectacular theatrics, which included thunder and lightning, an operatic score, and the unveiling of a reconstructed pyramid!)¹³ Maréchal apparently recited his own poems at the opening of the *Musée de Paris* on 17 November 1780.¹⁴ According to the Abbé Mulot, he was also present when the society received Benjamin Franklin as an honorary member in 1782, and even composed a little poem of ten verses for the occasion that was immediately put to music.¹⁵

Neither does he mention his friendship with Lucile Duplessis, the future wife of Camille Desmoulins; the little poems he wrote for her in her notebook and the fact that her father offered him their home as a retreat when the scandal of the almanac broke out.¹⁶ There is no mention

¹¹ See, for example, the important celebration of the summer solstice by members of the lodge, which Mme Helvétius continued after the death of her husband. Aimable, *Une loge maçonnique d'avant 1789*, 17.

¹² Roucher, *Les mois*. In addition to the poem itself, Roucher includes an appendix outlining all the various erudite debates on the solar myth, citing Abbé de la Pluche, Court de Gébelin and others.

¹³ 'Le dernier morceau de littérature entendu dans cette mémorable séance, celui qui produisit le plus grand effet, fut la lecture par Roucher de l'un des chants de son poème des *Mois* non encore imprimé, où il avait inséré un passage faisant allusion à la persécution cléricale contre la dépouille mortelle de Voltaire.' Account cited by Aimable, *Une loge maçonnique*, 87.

¹⁴ See the *Mémoires secrètes*, t. XVI (1–4 décembre). Cited by Aimable, *Une loge maçonnique*, 190.

¹⁵ Dommanget, *Sylvain Maréchal*, 72.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 116–18. He consoled Lucile when her father first refused her hand in marriage to Camille Desmoulins with the following poem:

Ou les coeurs peuvent s'engager
Là sans prêtres et sans notaire,
Sur un autel de gazon frais,
Au milieu d'un bois solitaire,
Il s'unirent à peu de frais.

To which he added in his own hand:

Leurs travaux et leur industrie
Embellissent ces lieux déserts.
Ils oublièrent leur patrie
Et furent pour eux l'univers.
Vous qu'on persécute à la ville,
Jeunes coeurs, accourez près d'eux.
Leur toit de chaume sert d'asile
A tous les amants malheureux.

Cited in Claretie, 'Lucile Desmoulins', 144.

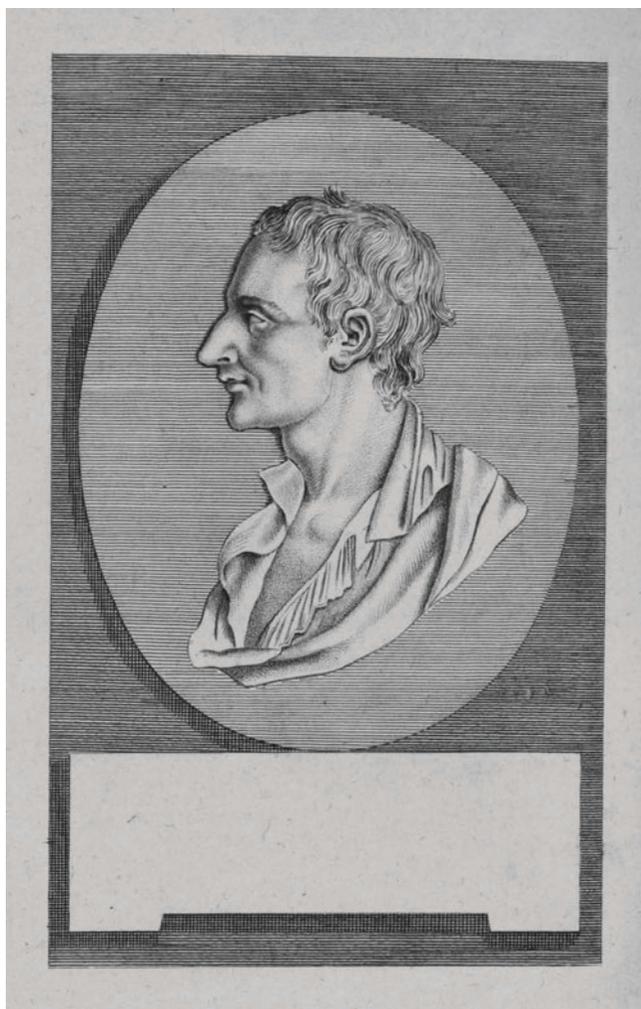


Figure 5. *Pierre-Sylvain Maréchal*. © The British Library Board 722.e.44.

either of the salon of Mme Lépine, practically two doors away from his parents' home, where he met with little success on account of his stammer and less than imposing looks (see [Figure 5](#)).¹⁷ Lalande, his mentor and greatest admirer, described him as follows: 'He did not possess

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

an imposing height, distinguished features, or a flattering manner. He stuttered; everything was against him at first.¹⁸

Unwilling to accept his exclusion by the literary salons, Maréchal instead took refuge in the erudite world of letters. The virtuous man was someone who, like Maréchal buried deep in his library, voluntarily severed himself from the 'theatre' of society. But for a young man who lionized Rousseau, detachment from society was not enough; Maréchal still needed a public forum in which to stage this work of inner self-reflection. He needed what the eighteenth century had readily granted its philosophes – an edifying spectacle in which the philosophe's virtue wins out over social and political oppression.

Cultivating the self-image of the marginalized but virtuous writer, Maréchal's favorite literary posture was that of a happy self-sufficiency or 'mediocrity': 'Always a Lover, never a Writer'.¹⁹ Adopting the symbolic status of a shepherd who 'cannot write', Maréchal rebaptised himself the 'Shepherd Sylvain', adopting the patronymic of the Roman God of the Forest, a child of Saturn, father of time, as his nom de plume.²⁰ As he noted, this divinity was particularly apt for describing the life of a dedicated materialist. Not only was Sylvain the god of matter (in ancient Greek, *hyle* was the word for both forest and matter); he was particularly worshipped by those who had devoted themselves to a life of study, presiding as he did over forests, the sanctuary of the muses and places of meditation.²¹

Maréchal's first works included an imitation of Gessner's *Bergeries*, a popular pastoral text at the time, an imitation of Montesquieu's erotic text *Temple de Gnide* (he rebaptised it as the *Temple de l'hymen* or Temple of Marriage) and an imitation of a popular sixteenth-century text, *Le livre de tous les âges ou Le Pibrac moderne*, which consisted of moral maxims written in the form of quatrains. Sometimes writing 'in the name of' Gessner, sometimes as a latter day Seigneur Pibrac, each of these works present Maréchal's virtuous detachment from society as a profound alienation from the prevailing *esprit du temps*.

¹⁸ 'Il n'avait pas une taille imposante, une figure distinguée, un ton avantageux; il bégayait; tout était contre lui de prime-abord.' *Notices sur Sylvain Maréchal*, 10; see also Dommanget, *Sylvain Maréchal*, 74.

¹⁹ 'Toujours Amant, jamais Auteur'. Maréchal, *Bibliothèque des amans*, 126.

²⁰ 'Saturnes entr'autres enfans eut Sylvain. Celui-ci, digne en tout de son père, montra les mêmes goûts pour les moeurs rurales et les vertues'. Maréchal, *Voyages de Pythagore*, vol. 4, 159–60.

²¹ Maréchal, *Antiquités d'Herculanum*, tome IV, 40.

In his 1775 *Odes anacréontiques*, Maréchal describes himself as a 'Berger sans détour', displaced from the 'siècle d'or' in which he should have been born:

In the harvest season
In vain desire do I lose *time*
For falling leaves autumn is the season
Yet I wither in my *springtime*²²

In the ode entitled 'Mon portrait' he gives the true sense of his *rôle* as 'berger d'amour:

Born without greatness or wealth
Of virtue alone I am heir
Heaven gave me but my heart
To love is my only share²³

This untimeliness is advertised in another autobiographical confession, this time referring to a certain S. Arlamech, a barely concealed anagram of his own name:

S'Ar-Lamech was born in the centre of a great city that was far from being the cradle of morality in a century that was hardly a Golden Age. Even while in his mother's belly, he could sense this, for it was only with great difficulty that he managed to be delivered. Some midwives, present at his birth, maintained even to have heard the newborn say: *What will I do on Earth! I am here much too late.* It is claimed that these words cost him such effort that, for having spoken ahead of his age, he stammered for the rest of his life.²⁴

²² Dans la saison où l'on recueille
En vains désirs je perds le *tems*:
L'Automne voit tomber la feuille
Je dessèche dans mon *printems*.

Maréchal, 'Odes anacréontiques' in *Essais de poésies légères suivi d'un songe par MM. Lablée et Maréchal*, 22; reprised in Maréchal, *Bibliothèque des amans*, 12.

²³ Je n'ai ni trésor, ni grandeur
Des vertus sont mon héritage;
Le Ciel ne m'a donné qu'un coeur
Aimer, voilà tout mon partage.

Maréchal, *Bibliothèque des amans*, 90.

²⁴ 'S Ar-Lamech naquit au sein d'une grande Ville qui n'étoit pas le siècle des mœurs, & dans un Siècle qui n'étoit pas non plus l'Age d'Or. Il le pressentoit dès le ventre de sa mère; car ce ne fut que par violence qu'on put le mettre au monde. Quelques femmes Sages, qui assistèrent à sa naissance, assurèrent même avoir entendu dire au nouveau né: *Que ferai-je sur la Terre! j'y arrive beaucoup trop tard.* On prétend que ces paroles lui coûtèrent de tels efforts, que pour avoir parlé avant l'âge, il resta bègue tout le reste de sa vie.' Sylvain Maréchal, 'Notice historique sur l'auteur' in *Livre échappé au déluge*. Unpaginated.

However, despite his consistent efforts to provoke the literary establishment, Maréchal met with little success until his almanac. In 1781 his first overtly atheistic work, *Fragmens d'un poème moral sur Dieu*, was published anonymously by the future deputy to the Convention, Brissot. Already the desire for an absolute rupture with the past was announced in the date and place of publication: Atheopolis, Year I of the Reign of Reason. But this depiction of an ideal city of atheists, modelled on Pierre Bayle's virtuous atheists, provoked little more than mild scorn from his detractors. Going so far as to advise his critics, in particular the same Abbé Mulot, that he indeed did write the book and even directing him where to buy it, did little to increase his profile. The response seems to have been more of exasperation than persecution, with Mulot claiming that Maréchal 'better deserved the madhouse' than the Bastille, and referring to the author as 'that little rascal Maréchal'.²⁵

Unable to obtain literary fame, Maréchal staged a persecution drama of a different sort, one that deliberately and ostentatiously broke all the rules governing the literary sphere. This can be seen in the way in which he consistently theatricalizes his transgression of all literary proprieties. If he masks his identity by imitating other writers, he does so not in order to hide the content of his thought but the better to expose it. He delights in exaggerating the contradiction between the mask and what lies behind it. As he states in the preface to his 1779 *Pibrac moderne*, 'This moral opuscule, undoubtedly still too long, was written *ex abundantia Cordis*, from an overflowing heart. Let it be judged by its Epigraph and not by its Title. The Epigraph is for the content of the book, the Title is only for the form.'²⁶ The same approach can be seen in a series of publications that parody religious texts. In his note to the *Livre échappé au Déluge* Maréchal states that the thirty-one psalms are designed so one is read each day of the month. In this same 'editor's' note, he also advertises the blatantly heretical intentions of his other publications. He claims his *L'Age d'or*, a pastoral collection of short stories to be 'in the same genre' as the biblical story of Boaz and Ruth; favourably compares his love poems to the Song of Songs; his set of moral quatrains to the Proverbs of Solomon; and his atheistic and anti-monarchical *poème moral sur Dieu* to 'some daring passages of Ecclesiastes'.²⁷

²⁵ 'Mériteroit mieux les petites maisons', 'ce petit coquin de Maréchal'. Cited by Dommanget, *Sylvain Maréchal*, 91–3.

²⁶ 'Cet opuscule moral (sans doute encore trop long) fut écrit *ex abundantia Cordis*, de l'abondance du Coeur. ... Qu'on le juge donc d'après l'Épigraphe & non d'après le Titre. L'Épigraphe est pour le fonds, le Titre n'est que pour la forme de ce Livret'.

²⁷ 'Quelques passages hardis de l'Ecclésiaste'. Maréchal, *Livre échappé au déluge*. Unpaginated.

Given Maréchal's preference for parody and satire, it comes as little surprise to find that on his almanac Rousseau and Diogenes are commemorated on the same day, with Rousseau born on the day that Diogenes supposedly dies. It is impossible to know whether Maréchal had heard of Kant's description of Rousseau as a 'subtle Diogenes', but such a Rousseau-Diogenes figure²⁸ is certainly a good emblem to situate a writer who adored Rousseau and would eventually name his own, short-lived journal, *Le Tonneau de Diogène*. Diogenes, after all, was the ancient cynic well known for having rejected all social conventions and material comforts, allegedly choosing to live in a tub and to own nothing more than a cloak, staff and lamp as his material possessions. In an unpublished manuscript, Maréchal linked Diogenes to Pyrrhus, describing the two as the most prudent of all the philosophers searching after the truth.²⁹ But what distinguishes Diogenes above all is that he chose a life of action over contemplation. What we know about Diogenes has come down to us in the form of aphorisms and fragments that embody a satirical style of thinking (based on unmasking the pretensions of those in power) that is also a style of living. It is this style – what Peter Sloterdijk has likened to a combination of parody and heavy satire³⁰ – that is adopted by Maréchal. He uses it not only to unmask existing power structures but also to lay bare the limits of reason. Everything in Maréchal is a performance of reason and this is what makes him unique. He transforms a radical enlightenment that has roots in an erudite, intellectual tradition into a literary and even popular 'theatre', a performance whose goal is to demonstrate that the enlightened society already exists in the here and now, as a mode of life.

A good example of satire is Psalm Three of his *Livre échappé au déluge*. Entitled 'A Prayer to God for the Conversion of the Rich' it goes as follows:

O bountiful God! Do not refuse me the gift of sensibility
 I want to penetrate the heart of the Rich
 Do the Rich have innards? And if they do, are they made of flesh?
 In the eyes of the rich, it is as if the poor did not exist.

²⁸ See Sonenscher, *Sans-Culottes*, for the importance of this 'Rousseau-Diogenes' emblem to the late eighteenth century, which linked together a discourse of morality with that of luxury.

²⁹ Maréchal, *Énigme philosophique*, Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, unpublished mss, box 2, dossier 44, 6–7.

³⁰ Sloterdijk has described Diogenes' style as lying between a 'satirical checkered writing', which parodies the conventions and speech of the empowered, and 'didactic pantomime', *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 60.

The heart of the rich is like a stone in which
The Word of a Bountiful God cannot take root.³¹

But if Maréchal's satire is heavy, it is also spliced with silences. Blank spaces anticipate censorship. In Fragment I of his *Dieu et les prêtres*, Maréchal writes:

If God existed, would Nero have been born?
.....³²

In Fragment 17 we have another glaring ellipsis:

If we needed Gods to be our models
Faithful guides on the road to truth
Why not choose a Socrates, a Cato
These Gods would never be a phantom, a vain name
.....³³

Similarly, in his *Pibrac moderne*, the quatrain 'On Religion' is followed by the curt remark 'This subject bears neither Commentary nor Analysis.'³⁴

By making the reader aware of the empty space – the parts of speech that are censored or forbidden – this strategy of writing does not hide or evade the censor. On the contrary, censorship is performed as the movement of critical thought. In making the reader aware of so many textual marks of censorship, Maréchal also encourages him or her to go beyond

³¹ Dieu de Bonté! ne me refuse pas le don du sentiment:
Je veux pénétrer jusqu'au cœur du Riche.
Mais le Riche a-t-il des entrailles? & s'il en a, sont-elles de chair?
Le Pauvre, aux yeux du Riche, est comme s'il n'étoit pas.
Le cœur du Riche est comme une pierre,
où la Parole du Dieu de Bonté ne peut prendre racine.

Maréchal, *Livre échappé au déluge*, p. 5.

³² S'il existait un Dieu, Néron serait-il né?
.....

Maréchal, *Dieu et les prêtres*, 6.

³³ S'il nous fallait des Dieux pour être nos modèles,
Dans le chemin du vrai nos conducteurs fidèles,
Que ne choisissons-nous un Socrate, un Caton?
Ces Dieux ne seraient point un fantôme, un vain nom.
.....

Ibid., p. 17.

³⁴ 'Ce sujet ne supporte ni Commentaire, ni Analyse.' Maréchal, *Pibrac moderne*, 199.

limits and conventions. In so doing, Maréchal converts all the material signs of a forbidden or underground literature into a didactic theatre that completely subordinates the language of belief to that of critical reason. In this sense, Maréchal's act of assuming a pseudonym – of writing in the role of a shepherd or as a lover, as the Seigneur de Pibrac or as an ancient biblical character – is more than just a simple expedient, a way of getting into print. To borrow Sloterdijk's phrase again, it is a kind of 'didactic pantomime'³⁵, a lesson in reason whose aim is to overturn the tacit rule governing the literary sphere, namely, that one is 'free' to think or reason as long as established authorities are not undermined.

So much, then, for a portrait of Mr. Maréchal and his time. Or, to put it more accurately, Sylvain Maréchal in the literary rôles of his own time. What his biography does not explain is why and how an almanac that merely repeated many of Maréchal's earlier themes, ended up irritating the establishment to such an extent that ten years after the Revolution began, still bemused by the scandal, a French literary review would sum up its entry on Sylvain Maréchal with the remark that 'France is the only country in the world in which the government could have concerned itself with an almanac.'³⁶ How did Maréchal go from being 'missed' by his time to fighting so conspicuously against it?

THE SHEPHERD AND THE KING'S FOOL

Maréchal may have portrayed himself as the gentlest of men; but for the censor, he was a 'fanatic'. 'Halfwit', 'frenetic whose imagination only produces extravagant and irreconcilable ideas'³⁷ These were the terms with which Antoine Séguier, the royal censor, accused Maréchal when he ordered his almanac burned in what was one of the last, and undoubtedly one of the clumsiest, spectacles of book burning under the ancien régime. The perfect publicity stunt, this autodafé merely raised the popularity and price of Maréchal's almanac. Even Maréchal's punishment was tainted with the burlesque. Instead of being sent to the dignified, and more 'gothic', interrogational chamber that was the Conciergerie, the *lettre de cachet* his editor friends arranged for him ended up sending him to

³⁵ I borrow this term from Sloterdijk.

³⁶ 'La France est le seul pays de la terre où le gouvernement ait pu s'occuper d'un almanach.' Entry 'Sylvain Maréchal' in *Paris littéraire*, an VII, 1ère partie, 51. Cited by Dommanget, 'Sylvain Maréchal, Précurseur du calendrier révolutionnaire', 307.

³⁷ 'Esprit insensé', 'frenétique dont l'imagination ne produit que des idées extravagantes et inconciliables'.

the prison *St. Lazare*. Nominally a correctional institute for misbehaving boys, this prison had been recently graced by another literary light – Beaumarchais. Languishing there for four long months, Maréchal was punished less for being a radical philosophe than for refusing to hide behind the ‘mask’ of the Enlightenment.

What piqued the censor most was not the atheistic spirit per se. After all, from d’Holbach to Helvétius to Diderot, the eighteenth century had its share of prominent unbelievers. But most of these writers either published their works clandestinely or colluded with Malesherbes, the royal censor, who often would withhold his privilege to ensure that the work would be printed without excerpts, in its original form, in the underground press. Rather, the source of annoyance was that Maréchal made no attempt to hide himself. Not only did he sign his own name but he also gave the address of his parents, ironically located on the *Rue des Prêcheurs*, where copies of the almanac could be ordered. The censor inveighed as much against Maréchal’s guilelessness as against his spirit of the burlesque, this dangerous appeal to ‘popular reason’ that the censor rebuked as ‘the project formed long ago to destroy, if it were possible, the Christian religion by the ridicule heaped on its most zealous defenders’.³⁸

Thus while an erotic poem such as Maréchal’s *Noël anacréontique* – depicting a manger occupied not by baby Jesus and the Virgin Mary but by Cupid and his mother, Venus – was favourably received by the literary salons, those genres in which he directly addressed the people using popular idioms were roundly condemned. Even after his death, his early career as a light-hearted Shepherd of love, bringing back to life Anacreon and Sappho in the company of the select few, would continue to be remembered while his attempt to enlighten the ‘flock’ or to speak in an openly heretical manner was routinely dismissed as a ‘kind of craziness’.³⁹ The censor was right to detect in Maréchal’s appeal to ‘popular reason’ a dangerous and potentially anarchic element of subversion. For Maréchal relied on the burlesque and other ‘low forms’ to spread the word of reason to the lay people themselves.

To understand just how Maréchal came to link popular reason with a rupture in calendar time, it is useful to recall the older, more archaic relationship between authorship and time presupposed by the almanac

³⁸ ‘Le projet formé depuis longtemps d’anéantir, s’il étoit possible la Religion Chrétienne par le ridicule qu’on veut répandre sur ses zélés défenseurs’.

³⁹ ‘Espèce de folie’. See the *Nouvel Almanach des Muses pour l’an grégorien 1804, suivi d’une notice nécrologique des savants, hommes de lettres et artistes décédés en 1803*, 253. International Institute for Social History, handtranscribed mss, box 1, dossier 22.

structure. This is the one found, for example, in the popular *Almanach des Bergers*, in which the presumed author is a shepherd-sage who is represented as the 'master spectator of time and its happiness'.⁴⁰ As *Le Grand Calendrier compost des Bergers*, one of the oldest almanacs, which dates from 1491, indicates, a shepherd may not be able to write but he has common sense and is able to give advice on how to live the good life to readers who likewise may not be able to read but can nevertheless reason and think.⁴¹ The first edition of the *Compost* even references the 'noble' function of the shepherd, reinforcing the ancient tradition in which shepherds were believed to be the children of kings.⁴² This association of shepherds with just rule is an ancient one. It is common not just in the Bible but also in the religions of the ancient Near East, which link shepherds with the attributes of kingship, military protection (mountaintops and natural fortifications being the traditional domain of shepherds) and abundance (high pastures). The staff, the rod, the green pastures – all these are vital components of a metaphor that associated the shepherd with the ability to subdue princes and kings.

It is in this metaphorical context that Maréchal's adoption of the pseudonym 'shepherd' and his pretence of being an author who, unable to write, composes almanacs, emerges as an oppositional construct that contradicts not just religion but also the solar myth of absolutism. Pitting the shepherd and his almanac against the sun-king, Maréchal's almanac evokes a natural time that can be understood by the 'natural' lights of popular reason and needs no mediation by either king or priest. This can be seen in way in which Maréchal's almanac recalls a pastoral vision of life in which, as in the shepherd's almanac, time is divided by the seasons and activities. The only festivals celebrated in his calendar are those associated with seasonal changes that can be perceived by everyone: a festival of love in springtime, marriage in summer, friendship in fall and 'reconnaissance' or gratitude in winter. As in traditional shepherd's almanacs, the year is the primary unit of time. In the shepherd's almanac, the importance of the year as an organizational unit is reflected allegorically insofar as the

⁴⁰ 'maître spectateur du temps et de son bonheur'. Cited by Bollème, *Almanachs populaires*, 17.

⁴¹ See Bollème, 16. Bollème also cites the 1705 edition of the *Calendrier des bergers* (À Troyes, chez Jacques Oudot), in which the prologue states: 'Un berger gardant des brebis aux champs, et n'était nullement éclairé, n'y avait aucune connaissance des Écritures mais seulement par son grand sens naturel et bon entendement, disait: Quoi que vivre et mourir dépend de Dieu, l'homme doit pourtant naturellement vivre jusqu'à 72 ans ou plus, et disait en cette manière par ces raisons'. 42.

⁴² 'Le métier de la garde des ouailles est moult honorable et de grande autorité, ce peut-on prouver par la nature et par la Sainte Ecriture'. Cited by Bollème, 41.

seasons of the calendar year reflect the four seasons of a man's life but also practically, because each season is associated with work and virtue.

If, therefore, Maréchal references the pastoral almanac of shepherds, he does so in order to pit a vision of time as *labour* against the *illusions* of history represented by the king, as we saw in the previous chapter. However, in so doing his almanac replicates the same restrictions on the representation of time as the shepherd's almanac. Just as a shepherd's almanac serves as a guide to what is useful at all times and all places by generally avoiding references to specific historical dates, so too Maréchal's almanac appeals to all times and all places by representing a timeless social order that makes no reference to existing historical chronology. As Geneviève Bollème has noted, the primary reference points of a shepherd's almanac are either the entire world as it is experienced over the course of the year (the seasons, the cosmos) or the small world of the local region or district.⁴³ We shall need to keep these two references in mind when we consider how Maréchal came to imagine a timeless social order as an inverted image of all authority, an 'anarchic' social order in which there is neither state nor religion but only small, self-organizing communities based on the family unit.

Of course it goes without saying that Maréchal's almanac is not really a 'shepherd's almanac' and that Maréchal is not really a shepherd. Nonetheless by choosing a genre aimed at those with a limited ability to read and by implication those who are able to reason without being 'educated', Maréchal's almanac demonstrates the extent to which the search for radical simplicity was not simply an intellectual concern in the late eighteenth century. Erudite thinkers may have sought in the calendar a scientific grounding for society akin to the astronomical measures of time, but Maréchal's own literary career and search for genres that could appeal to a wide audience also reflects the formal constraints of propagating new ideas in forms that could be understood by the majority of the people. This was especially important for thinkers such as Maréchal or Rousseau who believed that these same people who otherwise had a limited ability to read were also the source of 'natural reason'. Maréchal's pretence of being a shepherd who makes almanacs thus makes possible the convergence of two aspects of eighteenth-century culture that normally appear at odds: the autonomous, anti-authoritarian, critical reason of the intellectuals (the bookish people, the 'clerics' of a new secular morality) with the cosmological, totalizing 'popular reason' of the lay people who were imagined to be the seat of universal reason and self-governance.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 39.

A new social and political order thus appeared first of all as a new *aesthetic* order in which established cultural forms or 'genres' – calendars, almanacs, pastorals, maxims, fables – were harnessed to new expectations and ends. The very familiarity and ubiquity of these genres made possible the representation of this new horizon as something that already existed, as a *lifeworld*. Moreover by foregrounding performance, Maréchal relied on literary and even parodic modes of literary intervention. After all what better vehicle than a shepherd to reveal the *theatre* of power wielded by his two doubles, the priest and the king? But if these popular forms allowed Maréchal to express a new order that contradicted established forms of authority, they also restricted the ways in which he was able to imagine this 'new time'. In particular, it restricted his ability to imagine social change as anything other than an inversion or overturning of existing hierarchy. Literary representations of a timeless and totalizing world were essential in developing a radical concept of a social change because they enabled one set of values to be substituted wholesale for another set of values, without altering the belief that the social order as a whole had meaning.⁴⁴ Let us now turn to consider more closely how Maréchal's ideas of historical agency borrowed from genres, in particular the pastoral – the first genre in which he expressed his belief in a new golden age, and the genre that links the idea of a natural calendar to the solar myth.

THE SOLAR MYTHS OF SYLVAIN MARÉCHAL

This question of how to relate the literary imagination to the political act is all the more complex given that evidence of the original solar myth derived not from any kind of verifiable historical record but from the myths and fables of antiquity, that is, from the literary record. As Jean Starobinski has argued, the world of *la fable*, the collection of fables and myths from pagan antiquity that had been passed down from Hesiod through Ovid, Apollodorus and other Latin writers, had served throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a timeless, universal code, tolerated by the church so long as it maintained its status as a fictional world, with its own 'internal chronology' that was 'not part of historical time'.⁴⁵ It is this same regressive aspect, the tendency of *la fable* to reflect a

⁴⁴ In a related but different context, Hölderlin would also attempt to capture this sense of living in a radically new world by reference to astrological, natural time. See Honold, *Hölderlins Kalender*.

⁴⁵ Starobinski, 'Fable and Mythology', 169–72; for the relation with revolutionary republicanism see Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right*, chapter 2.

closed, total world replete with its own codes and meanings that allowed writers such as Sylvain Maréchal to postulate an alternate memory of human origins, one that competed with the memory of both church and state. In other words, it is precisely the atemporality of the world of *la fable* that allowed it to serve as a collective memory for a new social body that had, as yet, no past to speak of.

Pastoral is one genre that has long been associated both with the idea of a common humanity and with calendars of natural time (Edmund Spenser's, *The Shepherdes Calendar* (1579), is a notable English-language calendar poem). As Empson argued long ago, the essential trick of pastoral was to reduce complexity into simplicity, the Many into the One. Maréchal's use of pastoral is so interesting because it shows how a genre normally associated with the encounter between 'high' and 'low' characters can be used to depict a new social order reflecting the values of a third class, that is, a class that has the potential to stand in for the values of the whole society because it reflects neither the wealth of the rich nor the blind religious faith of the poor. This raises two questions: how can a genre depicting a timeless world be used to represent a time of rupture, a break with existing norms? And how can a pastoral mode associated with a binary social structure come to reflect a third term, a mediating term as it were, that emancipates the entire hierarchy?

Pastoral has long been used as an oppositional construct, pitting shepherds against rulers, countrymen against city dwellers and the rustic peasant against the lord. For writers such as Gessner the pastoral mode was used to depict not real shepherds, whose lives were harsh and poor, but the chivalric and heroic world of the noble shepherd, which, as Fontenelle put it, consisted of 'leisure and love'.⁴⁶ Although pastoral suggests common or universal ideals, in its depictions of a fictitious golden age in which man was not yet burdened by labour and social distinctions it was also used, especially over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to mythologize the self-image of the noble class. As Erica Harth has argued, the flowering of pastoral novels at the beginning of the seventeenth century corresponded to a loss of social status on the part of the aristocracy who, in a retreat from history, preferred to identify itself with a mythological golden age.⁴⁷ In this world, there is an implicit opposition between wealth and virtue, social condition and

⁴⁶ 'Ainsi dans l'état que nous venons de décrire, il se fait un accord des plus fortes passions de l'homme, de la paresse et de l'amour'. Fontenelle, 'Discours sur la nature de l'élogue', 153.

⁴⁷ Harth, *Ideology and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France*, 36–7.

moral character. Without money to create problems of social distinction, the noble origin of these courtly shepherds is visible by their actions alone.

Maréchal, however, inverts the aesthetic rules of the genre by emphasizing social conditions as key components of moral character. Whereas traditional pastorals depict shepherds who remain noble while being impoverished, Maréchal uses pastoral to depict the moral values of the frugal class, that is, the class that is neither rich nor poor and in whom, he tells us, this golden age still exists. Since these virtues still exist in the form of *feelings* or moral sentiments, the aim of pastoral is not to express the longing for a mythological golden age but to reproduce the historical conditions of such an age in the here and now, by leveling all social distinction so that the many social types of the ancien régime are reduced into one universal figure of natural man. As Maréchal would later insist, the goal of the Revolution is a total social regeneration, a return to a time in which 'the earth contained neither masters, nor soldiers, nor king, nor nations, nor poor, nor rich, and men were simply men'.⁴⁸

But there is a deeper reason why the pastoral is such an effective genre to communicate radical new ideas about social equality, ideas that include eliminating differences between rich and poor by abolishing all private property. This is because the pastoral, as Fontenelle also notes, depicts a time of neither war nor terror, an economy of abundance in which there is no need for sacrifice.⁴⁹ The pastoral universe thus excludes both the aristocratic conception of honour as military glory and the accumulation of land through conquest as well as the religious conception of terror and belief in an afterlife. Like many writers, Maréchal used the pastoral to establish a homology between the pagan universe and Christianity as a way of criticizing the latter. His pastoralists – who, as he will later openly tell us, are really atheists – inhabit a world without sacrifice that nonetheless retains many traditional elements of Catholicism: temples, prayers, festivals, the importance of baptism and marriage. Two key elements of Catholicism are, however, excluded: belief in the afterlife and,

⁴⁸ 'Il n'y avait sur terre ni maîtres, ni soldats, ni roi, ni peuples, ni pauvres, ni riches; les hommes n'étoient tout naturellement que des hommes'. Maréchal, *Dame Nature*, 4

⁴⁹ The influence of Fénelon and his depiction of the pastoral society of La Bétique cannot be overstated. Fénelon's pastoral society is one in which all property is held in common; in which the egalitarian and fraternal order is maintained through marital fidelity and strict monogamy. As Fénelon states: 'Chaque homme ... ne peut avoir qu'une femme et il faut qu'il la garde tant qu'elle vit. L'honneur des hommes, en ce pays, dépend autant de leur fidélité à l'égard de leurs femmes, que l'honneur des femmes, dépend, chez les autres peuples, de leur fidélité pour les maris'. *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, 268.

consequently, funerary rites presided over by priests. Instead priests are replaced by what for Maréchal is the only legitimate source of authority, that of a father's 'natural' rights over his own children. A world without sacrifice is a world in which the ideal of Christian love is maintained even as the religious terror of the afterlife is abandoned. In one of Maréchal's tales, young lovers even kiss, with erotic undertones, the funeral urn holding the ashes of another couple as they prepare to wed!

Most importantly, however, Maréchal uses the pastoral to suggest that a complete society based on equality already exists in the virtues of the frugal, middle classes, the class to which Maréchal was born and that he would valorize in all his writings. It is precisely because it is neither rich nor poor that this middle class embodies the values of 'douce médiocrité' – that old stoic idea of a 'juste milieu' that translates both as a moral value and as a simplicity of style. Pastoral thus enables Maréchal to represent the social values of this class excluded from the benefits of feudal hierarchy and too educated simply to reflect, like the poor, a blind religious faith, as if it constituted a closed world, a completely autonomous society regulated by its own laws, rituals, practices and, of course, organization of time. It is, in other words, the very ritual structure of pastoral – its ability, as Empson argued, to combine a unified and static vision of the world in which 'nothing changes and nothing is worth doing' with an equally strong stress 'on ritual, on the exact performance of local duties and customs'⁵⁰ – that allows Maréchal to represent this middle class as a new totality. Pastoral thus makes possible the transfer of a concept of totality from religion to society all the while maintaining that there are limits to reason, that reason cannot go beyond what is perceived or felt. This allows Maréchal to represent the middle class as a self-sufficient, 'self-generating' social unit, a cosmological unit in which natural distinctions and social roles coincide because the only social distinctions are the natural ones of age and gender. By showing how this middle class existed not within society but outside it, Maréchal also shows how it reflects the potential for an absolute classless society. (Karl Marx made similar claims about the proletariat when he argued that the excluded classes were those endowed with emancipatory potential.)⁵¹ By the time of the French Revolution, this totalizing conception was used to characterize popular sovereignty: 'The people are everything; they can do everything; they have a right over everything and are duty-bound to no one; they reign over their king; they command to their chefs; they govern the governors;

⁵⁰ Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, 21. ⁵¹ See Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 37.

they break their own rulings; they disobey as they wish and are never inconsistent.⁵²

Maréchal's valorization of middle-class values was not, in itself, unique. But by linking these values to an atheistic discourse predicated on a revolt against God and religious authority (a discourse moreover that was more readily associated with aristocratic and libertine values), Maréchal was able to derive important political consequences. In a hierarchical society based on a tri-partite division of labour sanctioned by God, a middle order that 'mediated' between the rich and poor had no political meaning. Politically, it did not exist because the king mediated between the different social orders. He and he alone represented the unified body of the nation. Socially, however, such a class already did exist. By emphasizing what Aubert has called the 'primacy of the political over the economic', Maréchal extended his political and religious analysis of authority to pit this society, and this social class, against the state.⁵³

Bernard Groethuysen has described this new middle order as the world of the Catholic bourgeoisie, a new world that was inhabited by a man who was both churchgoing and worldly.⁵⁴ This was the world of the rational and prudent man who wanted insurances and guarantees from God in exchange for his belief. It was also the world of the obedient man who wanted to 'obey' his father the way his own children obeyed him. From Diderot's plays to Greuze's paintings to Rousseau's cherished figure of the 'vieillard', this was a world that already opposed the good father of the family to the king, the bad father of the nation. Maréchal's originality, however, lay in representing the patriarchal, bourgeois, family unit as eliminating both the king and priest, able to stand for the whole on account of its simplicity, and thereby emancipating all of society from its binary structure. Pastorals, fables, and other genres depicting a closed or total world thus intensified already prevalent social attitudes by showing how they contained the germ not just of alternate ideas or sentiments but also of *alternate forms of life*, life forms that contradicted all existing authoritative structures. As early as 1779, in his *Pibrac moderne*, Maréchal envisioned a cult of virtue taking the place of an empty throne:

If Destiny had me crowned
To win hearts and my rule correct

⁵² 'Le peuple est tout; il peut tout; il a droit sur tout, et ne se doit à rien; il règne sur son roi; il commande à ses chefs; il gouverne ses gouverneurs; il casse ses propres arrêts; il désobéit à volonté, et n'est jamais inconséquent'. Maréchal, 'Qu'est-ce que le peuple?', *Révolutions de Paris*, no.81 du 22 au 29 janvier 1791, 133.

⁵³ Aubert, *Sylvain Maréchal*, 47.

⁵⁴ Groethuysen, *The Bourgeois*.

In a vast Palace, on the steps of the throne
A Temple to Good Character I would erect!⁵⁵

In his 1781 *Dieu et les prêtres*, he represents the father as replacing the authority of both king and priest:

Mortel, free yourself from cults and laws!
Your heart to paternal power alone submit
All others are false; it alone is legitimate
It is no crime that a father to his children dictate
This is nature's law.
Oh how sweet it is to have one's father for a king.⁵⁶

By imagining the rituals and ceremonies of a new collective memory in which the 'good father' was the representative type that could function as a model for society as a whole, Maréchal was able to project a radical vision of rupture in which a self-governing society based on the patriarchal family unit literally replaces the conjoined authority of church and state. However, the same literary genres that enabled Maréchal to present the religious and political orders as 'ideologies' that is, as tools of oppression, also restricted his ability to imagine social change as anything other than a complete emancipation of society. If the world exists as a cosmological unity then there are only two options for agency: either to adapt to its order or to violate it completely. Since adaption was not an option for a radical atheist such as Sylvain Maréchal, the only other option was a complete rupture with the entire religious and political order. Maréchal's emphasis on a cyclical, repetitive world of ritual in which nothing changes and everything remains the same, thus ended up privileging rupture over continuity and a vision of historical change in which the inversion of an existing social order prevailed over progressive reform. For it only makes sense, in a pre-revolutionary world, in which the events of the French

⁵⁵ Si le destin m'eut fait le don d'une Couronne;
Pour épurer mon règne & me gagner les coeurs
Dans un vaste Palais, sur les marches du Trône
J'aurois voulu bâtir un Temple aux bonnes moeurs!

Maréchal, *Pibrac moderne*, 195.

⁵⁶ De cultes et de loix affranchis-toi, mortel!
Et ne soumets ton coeur qu'au pouvoir paternel.
Tous les autres sont faux; lui seul est légitime:
Un père à ses enfants peut commander sans crimes.
La nature elle-même en a fait une loi.
Qu'il est doux de n'avoir que son père pour roi.

Maréchal, *Dieu et les prêtres*, 88.

Revolution had not yet occurred, that the desire for social change should take the form of dissent and rebellion – modes of discourse that reflect the mindset of a man who obeys or disobeys, for whom the social order as a whole is still presumed to have meaning.

Indeed if there is a thread linking a literary imagination that claimed to reflect a natural order to the subsequent radical politics of the French Revolution, especially during the Jacobin years, it is to be found here: in a ‘heretical’ literary strategy that literalized the world of *la fable* and turned mimesis into performance in order to align the political sphere with the same embodied model of participation and communion as the popular Catholicism it was aimed against. Nowhere is this continuity between literary strategy and subsequent revolutionary political practice more evident than in those passages in the *Pibrac moderne* in which Maréchal imagines a cult of virtue that bears an almost exact resemblance to the revolutionary festivals whose hymns he would be commissioned to write almost fourteen years later. In this cult of virtue, a statue of Virtue replaces the Virgin Mary, busts of the sages replace the religious icons, excerpts from the lives of the Sages replace the Bible, and every father replicates this same cult in his own household.⁵⁷ Indeed if there is anything visionary about Maréchal’s attempt to establish a new secular cult it is the extent to which the Revolution, especially after 1792, would be characterized by a similar retreat from history and emphasis on a highly ritualized performance of a rupture with the past.

As we can see, the same literary conventions that enabled Maréchal to express his idea of a social and political revolution as a return to a natural time, also made him an outspoken regicide, a proponent of the death of all kings by law at a time when few imagined regicide as a possible outcome of the social and political turmoil of the time. Other writers such as Diderot in his secretly circulated 1772 manuscript, *Les Eleuthéromanes*, or Rousseau, may have mentioned the prospect of overthrown kings and abandoned thrones. But if they did so it was still in the context of a looming sense of crisis and, in the case of the latter, a certain pessimism regarding the existence of any political system that would not suffer recurring revolutions and crises.⁵⁸ Even the arch atheist d’Holbach drew

⁵⁷ Maréchal, *Pibrac moderne*, 195–6.

⁵⁸ ‘Vous vous fiez à l’ordre actuel de la société sans songer que cet ordre est sujet à des révolutions inévitables, et qu’il vous est impossible de prévoir ni de prévenir celle qui peut regarder vos enfants. Le grand devient petit, le riche devient pauvre, le monarque devient sujet: les coups du sort sont-ils si rares que vous puissiez compter d’en être exempt? Nous approchons de l’état de crise et du siècle des révolutions’. Rousseau, *Émile*, 252.

the line at regicide, invoking atheism as an aid to the education of kings and not to their detriment.⁵⁹ The originality of Sylvain Maréchal, I would suggest, lay in his development of the concept of regicide as a moral act, a foundational act of a new solar religion that would take the place of the 'sun-king'.

By 1788, Maréchal was using the solar myth to launch a two-pronged attack on both king and church. This was the year in which his most violently anti-monarchical writing appeared, disguised in the form of the innocently titled *Apologues modernes à l'usage du Dauphin; premières leçons du fils aîné d'un roi*. Written by a presumptive deputy to the future Estates-General, the opening epigraph set a derisive tone: 'To women and kings, one must speak in fables.'⁶⁰ The literary conceit of the fables was that the Estates-General had now become tutors of the king, charged with imparting the moral lesson that hereditary kings no longer existed.

Three fables in particular can be singled out for their use of the solar myth to 'kill' the king. *Le lever du roi* reveals an insomniac king, controlled by his ministers in a parallel universe of simulated time:

Once upon a time there was a king who, when he ascended to the throne, demanded that all clocks and other instruments that told time be removed from the palace. He divided his duties of king in twenty-four equal parts. Twenty-four chosen and approved ministers each took turns to tell him the hour and to charge him with a new task.⁶¹

In another fable Maréchal pits the natural sun governing his alter ego, the *berger*, against the arbitrary and despotic sun of the king:

Once upon a time, a young prince lost in the countryside asked an old shepherd for the time. Prince, it is noon by the sun! For you, retorted the young prince, but the hand of my watch says it is only eleven o'clock. Does this mean it is not working? No, cried out someone from the monarch's retinue, surely it is the sun that is playing tricks.

The old shepherd, a man of common sense, walked away shrugging his shoulders and muttering under his breath: you can say and do what you want as long as you are at court, but time does not pass more quickly for kings than for shepherds. Everyone has his own clock but there is only one sun for all.⁶²

⁵⁹ D'Holbach, *Le christianisme dévoilé*, xviii, 188.

⁶⁰ 'Aux femmes et aux rois, il faut parler par Apologues'.

⁶¹ 'Il était une fois un roi qui, à son avènement au trône, fit enlever de l'intérieur de son palais toutes les horloges & autres instrumens propres à marquer le tems. Il partagea sa besogne de roi en vingt-quatre parties égales; vingt-quatre ministres choisis & éprouvés venoient tour-à-tour lui annoncer l'heure de la journée, en lui proposant un nouveau travail'. Maréchal, *Apologues modernes*, 23

⁶² 'En ce tems-là; quelle heure est-il (demanda un jour à un vieux berger un jeune roi égaré dans la campagne)? Prince! il est midi au soleil. – Pour toi, (reprit le jeune prince) mais pour moi,

Finally, in the parable, *Cours d'anatomie*, he suggests decapitation by law as a way of regulating the power of kings:

Once upon a time a young king, susceptible to despotism, appeared to want to undertake some classes in anatomy. The senate ordained that these demonstrations would take place on the skeleton of a tyrant that had been beheaded by order of the law. The young prince was warned what could happen from the first lessons and this class served him as a moral treatise.⁶³

If this threat was not aggressive enough, this image of the natural sun – the *same* sun for all – entailed a vision of an undivided earth, one in which all goods and property were held in common. Maréchal explicitly presents this vision as a call for a radical rupture with the past: 'Our intention is to reestablish things once and for all on their original footing, their original state, which is to say on the most perfect and most legitimate equality.'⁶⁴ In case his readers mistake this *histoire* for a fable he adds: 'All this is but a *story* at the time that I write it. But I am telling the truth; it will become *history* one day. Happy are those who will be able to compare the one with the other.'⁶⁵ Regicide thus is presented as a logical corollary of a return to natural time, a necessary, *historical* step in replacing the king with the natural father as patriarch and symbolic organizer of time.

In 1789: *Emblems of Reason* Jean Starobinski argued that the symbolic home of regicide lay in the conjunction of two solar myths, the desire for death and destruction most readily associated with such libertine and aristocratic figures as Valmont and Sade and the bourgeois desire for new beginnings, for social regeneration as a kind of secular, eternal life.⁶⁶ Rupture and regeneration are thus two metaphors that express the same desire: a swift act of destruction that will yield a permanent source of light. Maréchal's uniqueness, however, lay in the way he combined these

l'aiguille de ma montre n'est qu'à la onzième heure; iroit-elle mal? Non (s'écria quelqu'un de la suite du monarque). Certainement, c'est le soleil qui te trompe. Le berger, homme de sens, s'éloigna en haussant les épaules, & disant tout bas: vous avez beau dire & beau faire, tous tant que vous êtes à la cour; le tems ne va pas plus ou moins vite pour les rois que pour les pasteurs. Chacun à son horloge; mais il n'y a qu'un soleil pour tous.' *Ibid.*, 102.

⁶³ 'En ce tems-là; un jeune roi, enclin au despotisme, parut désirer faire son cours d'anatomie. Le sénat ordonna qu'on lui en feroit les démonstrations sur le squelette d'un tyran décapité juridiquement. Le jeune prince en fut prévenu dès les premières leçons; et ce cours lui valut un traité de morale.' *Ibid.*, p. 14

⁶⁴ 'Notre intention est de rétablir pour toujours les choses sur leur ancien pied, sur l'état primitif; c'est-à-dire, sur la plus parfaite et la plus légitime égalité.' *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁵ 'Tout ceci n'est qu'un *conte* à l'époque où je le trace. Mais je le dise en vérité; il deviendra un jour une *histoire*. Heureux ceux qui pourront reconfronter l'une à l'autre.' *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁶ Jean Starobinski, 1789, *Emblems of Reason*, 43–51.

two versions of rupture and regeneration into one and the same vision of social and political change. He did so by linking a 'bourgeois' understanding of secular time as a kind of natural Catholicism, a Catholicism without the priest but *with* patriarchal Christian family values still intact, including and especially the Christian values of monogamy and marital fidelity, to a radically atheist desire for rupture and a total destruction of all religious and political authority. The clockwork universe of the Catholic bourgeoisie was thus combined with an atheism that prefigured the world of revolutionary violence and regicide to yield the image of a *revolutionary bourgeoisie*.

Before the events of the French Revolution, then, and before the bourgeoisie was named as a social class with a distinct political agenda, Maréchal provided an image of a new kind of political actor: someone who ostentatiously performed his life as if he already existed in a new time. But for this 'new time' to become truly visible in the here and now, a further catalyst was needed – that of a secular terror that would restart time and recalibrate society on its original footing. Like his fellow atheist the Marquis de Sade, Maréchal used literature to construct the image of such a regenerative rupture. He did so by drawing on one of most recurrent images of rupture in the eighteenth century: that of the volcano.

VOLCANIC RUPTURE

The enlightened epoch had, from the beginning, placed itself under the sign of catastrophe. With the 1755 earthquake in Lisbon, immortalized in Voltaire's poem to the city, an entire generation saw its disbelief in providential history confirmed. This earthquake that crushed thousands attending church on All Saints' Day: what God could create such a catastrophe? Require such human sacrifice? The Lisbon earthquake was one of several catastrophes that punctuated the eighteenth century, from the plague in Marseilles (1720) to the earthquakes of Calabria and Messina (1783) to the series of volcanic eruptions: six eruptions of Vesuvius, the spectacular eruption of Mt. Etna in 1787 and of Mt. Laki in Iceland in 1783, which darkened the sky all around Europe for an entire summer, leading to one of the coldest winters in Europe on record and causing great social unrest.

Whereas previously catastrophes were understood to be signs of God's wrath, over the course of the eighteenth century, catastrophe came to stand for an event with its own social and political significations. No longer correlated with divine punishment, catastrophe came to signify a natural disaster. In place of biblical accounts of the earth's creation, which

privileged the disaster of the Flood over all others, the eighteenth century discovered an earth filled with many disasters, some of which suggested a far longer time line than biblical accounts allowed. New scientific interpretations of the fossil record in particular, and with it the realization that nature had a history that was far longer than human time, not only uncoupled the joint origin of human and natural history in one act of creation; it also suggested countless such acts of creation and destruction.

This understanding of catastrophe as a cyclical pattern of continual alteration overlapped with the eighteenth century's understanding of revolution as a similar kind of periodic occurrence. Catastrophe and revolution became almost synonymous terms and the term 'revolution' gained a geological meaning in addition to its geometrical and astronomical one. This can be seen in d'Holbach's entry on 'Revolutions' in the *Encyclopédie*. After describing the geometrical and astronomical meaning of 'revolutions' and a brief mention of the only singular use of the term – by the English who referred to the political events of 1688 as the Glorious Revolution – d'Holbach describes the *révolutions de la terre* as a pattern of cyclical catastrophes: 'This is the term by which naturalists designate those natural events that have and will continue to alter the surface of our earth, in its different parts, by fire, air and water.'⁶⁷ In d'Holbach's account there is no longer a privileged catastrophe (the Flood) but an endless series of catastrophes proving that there is neither God nor providential order in nature.

D'Holbach's article 'volcano' also references a new contingent understanding of the relation between the past and future. The article alternates between describing the volcano in mechanical terms as a great furnace of fire and air and apocalyptically as a kind of end of time itself: 'Volcanic eruptions are ordinarily preceded by underground booms that sound like thunder, by frightful hissing and an interior tearing apart. The earth seems to shake to its very foundations.'⁶⁸ Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger similarly envisioned an endless repetition of catastrophes that resulted in a shifting boundary between 'ancient' cultures (lost to humanity) and modern ones: 'To go further back and search for another human culture would be in vain. The physical revolutions of the earth have drawn an impenetrable

⁶⁷ 'C'est ainsi que les naturalistes nomment les événements naturels, par lesquelles la face de notre globe a été & est encore altérée dans ses différentes parties par le feu, l'air, et l'eau.' D'Holbach, article.

⁶⁸ 'Les éruptions des volcans sont ordinairement annoncées par des bruits souterrains semblables à ceux du tonnerre; par des sifflemens affreux, par un déchirement intérieur; la terre semble s'ébranler jusque dans ces fondemens'.

wall between ancient and new mankind'.⁶⁹ And perhaps most directly relevant to Maréchal's own understanding of the golden age, Morelly postulated that the first human societies consisted of small family units that had been dispersed onto archipelagos after a massive flood.⁷⁰

But if the discovery of a 'deep time' of nature uncoupled the inherence between nature and history, the two were brought together again in the materialist accounts of the origin of religion. Boulanger and d'Holbach looked to catastrophe to offer a natural, and geological, account of the origin of religious belief. Religion, they argued, derived from the feeling of fear and terror before a natural catastrophe, feelings that were then converted into religious beliefs by various groups in order to enslave the population.⁷¹

These materialist interpretations of religion as an emotional reaction to a natural terror recalibrated the history of man with nature, and in this sense replayed the biblical narrative in secular key. For in these accounts, the frame-narrative is still one of synchronicity between human history and natural events. Political history – which is also always religious – begins in response to a natural terror. As in biblical accounts of creation, the moment in which a political and religious order is instituted is one in which natural and human history align. Such synchronicity is what enables Boulanger to explain the structural similarities between different religions as manifestations of the same natural phenomena. Because all people experience the same emotions of fear and trembling before the same natural events, religion functions as a fossil record of human prehistory: It is the spiritual fossil or 'vestige' of an original, emotional impression.⁷²

This postulate of a natural terror also implies notions of spectatorship and the transformation of catastrophe into an aesthetic object. Nowhere is this association of catastrophe with a theatrical and spectacular sublime more apparent than in the eighteenth century's fascination with Vesuvius, which became a highlight of the Grand Tour and the subject of numerous etchings, paintings, poems and travel narratives. These two understandings of revolution as 'regeneration' and 'catastrophe' converged in popular representations of this famous volcano. For unlike earthquakes, floods or fires, which destroyed all traces of the past, volcanic fire could also regenerate time.

⁶⁹ 'En vain vaudroit-on remonter plus haut & chercher un autre homme; les révolutions physiques de la terre ont mis entre l'ancien & le nouveau genre humain un mur impénétrable'. Boulanger, *L'Antiquité dévoilée par ses usages*, 12.

⁷⁰ Morelly, 'Code de la Nature', 305, 353–71.

⁷¹ D'Holbach, 'Système de la nature', 391, 393–4.

⁷² See Boulanger, 'Oeconomie politique' in *L'Encyclopédie*: 'Nous avons suivi d'âge en âge les diverses opinions & les coutumes des hommes, tant que nous avons su y connoître les suites, ou au moins les vestiges des impressions primitives; & par-tout en effet il nous a semblé appercevoir dans les annales du monde une chaîne continue ... une unité singulière cachée sous mille formes'.

The association of Vesuvius with regeneration dates back to the mid-eighteenth century when the cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii were discovered as if they had been preserved alive by the fires of Vesuvius. From centuries of oblivion, a complete civilization reappeared almost as if there had been no intervening passage of time. Here was a sudden reappearance of the ancient world, not as a copy or ruin of its former self, but as a full *presence*, as if the very force of volcanic destruction had preserved these towns from the ravages of time. The source of fascination is obvious. Here we have the reappearance of a lost past as a tangible, corporeal presence that breaks all expectations of the succession of time. Books, wheat, grains, figs even whole loaves of bread reappeared undamaged by the passage of time, preserved in their petrified state by the volcanic heat.⁷³

As the discoveries of Herculaneum and Pompeii made clear the volcanic eruption was capable of creating a break in the historical continuum because it changed the relation to the past as well as the future. The idea that volcanic rupture concealed multiple, perhaps countless origins, suggested that the volcano was the source of good as well as bad energy: it was a fire that created as well as destroyed. This animist conception of the volcano can be seen in the various personifications of the volcano as a living being, embodying the 'belly', 'entrails' 'stomach' and 'bowels' of the earth.⁷⁴ It is also seen in its association with the rays of the sun and with fertility.⁷⁵ As Maréchal put it, fire represents both 'Nature warmed up, invigorated by the sun's rays' as well as sexual energy, 'les feux d'amour'.⁷⁶ Finally, it also represents the sublime energy that overtakes all human representations of power, including political power. Even kings must flee before the wrath of the volcano. Lalande's account of Vesuvius twice notes this spectacle of the fleeing king,⁷⁷ which brings to mind the original meaning of catastrophe, theatrical in origin, as the 'subversion, overturning, upheaval' of the destiny of a king or a man.⁷⁸ And d'Holbach claims that the volcanic eruption

⁷³ Lalande, *Voyage d'un François en Italie, fait dans les années 1765 et 1766*, T. 7, 96.

⁷⁴ In his article 'Volcan' d'Holbach alternates between describing volcanoes as 'fourneaux' (furnaces) and 'cheminées' (chimneys) as well as personifying them as stomachs that 'vomit'. Lalande refers to 'une vapeur qui étoit la respiration', *Voyage d'un François*, 161. See also McCallam, 'Picque-niquer sur le volcan: De Wickelmann à Sade', 259–70.

⁷⁵ In his article 'Vésuve', Jaucourt describes how the earth around Vesuvius is of a 'bonté merveilleuse', producing such famous wines as the Greco malatesta (lachrima Christi).

⁷⁶ 'La Nature échauffée, vivifiée par les rayons du soleil'.

⁷⁷ Once during the reign of Emperor Leon when the eruption of 472 was felt as far away as Constantinople (155). And once again during the eruption of Vesuvius on 19 October 1767 when the rain of ashes and sand was so great that it reached Naples where 'l'on ne voyait ... que des processions de Penitents'. Lalande, *Voyage d'un François*, T. 7, 166.

⁷⁸ 'Subversion, renversement, bouleversement'. This is the first definition given by the *Dictionnaire Furetière*. See also O'Dea, 'Le mot "catastrophe"' 35–48, 37.

is nature's blessing because it is always accompanied by a 'total subversion in the countries it effects'.⁷⁹ In a later work, Maréchal even traces the origins of the moral sentiments of good and evil to the twin symbols of the sun and the volcano. Volcanic fire provided mankind with the first image of hell, but it also functioned as an image of justice, a natural terror that was an inverse image of the sun on earth. He describes how the Ausones, an ancient sun-worshipping Italian tribe living in the shadow of Vesuvius, would throw into the volcano, as a sacrifice to their God, anyone ambitious enough to threaten equality.⁸⁰

If, for Maréchal, the volcano became the master symbol of a new will to historical action, to a future that differed from the past, it is partly because his first overtly atheistic writings coincided with the 1779 Vesuvius eruption. It is around this time that he published his first commissioned work, the *Antiquités d'Herculanum*, a series of commentaries that accompanied the catalogue of the excavations. This magisterial eleven-volume work, first published in 1781 (a twelfth volume was added later), put Maréchal in contact with such encyclopedic luminaries as the Chevalier de Jaucourt and gave him a taste of the enlightened sociability that he so craved.⁸¹ But if, as for so many of his generation, Maréchal's initiation in the world of erudite scholarship occurred via the medium of images,⁸² he also took advantage of this opportunity to add his own running commentary and personal interpretation of the etchings.

All of the main themes of his mature work can be found here, in his erudite meditations before the engravings of this ancient world regained. Commenting on the frank sexual paintings discovered in Herculaneum, Maréchal sings the praises of natural sexuality, claiming that these erotic paintings were of divine rather than pornographic inspiration and aimed to strengthen the marital bonds of husband and wife.⁸³ In the phallic cult of Priapus or Bacchus Maréchal sees another version of the solar myth.

⁷⁹ 'Subversion totale des pays où ils se seroient sentir'. D'Holbach, 'Volcan'.

⁸⁰ Sylvain Maréchal, *Voyages de Pythagore*, vol. 3, 39.

⁸¹ According to Aubert, Maréchal collaborated on two parts of the article 'égalité': 'égalité (logique) and 'égalité naturelle', *Sylvain Maréchal*, 13.

⁸² As Grell notes, the second half of the eighteenth century saw a decline in historical and erudite knowledge of the ancient world and a rise in the study of ruins that privileged images and visual representations of antiquity. *Le Dix-huitième siècle et l'antiquité en France, 1680–1789*, vol. II, 1176.

⁸³ 'Je veux parler de la Religion qui, chez les Anciens, légitimoit et consacroit ces nudités si expressives, ces représentations trop énergiques. C'étoit les Dieux adorés dans leurs Temples, dont ils multiploient les images autour d'eux, dans l'intérieur de leur maison. [...] Imitateurs de leurs Divinités, ils se faisoient un devoir de placer leurs modèles sous leurs yeux. Quel sujet convenoit mieux dans la chambre nuptiale de deux époux qu'un Tableau des noces d'Ariane et Baccus?' Maréchal, *Antiquités*, tome 4, 27.

Bacchus, he tells us, was sometimes considered the same divinity as the sun.⁸⁴ The Phallus, like the sun, is a symbol of regeneration, but also shares traits in common with Comus, the god of comedy, whose farces were first performed during festivals of marriage.⁸⁵

This link between marriage, the time of sexual and social regeneration, and comedy, the time of farce and inversion of social hierarchy, would later resurface in Maréchal's revolutionary plays, songs and operas. Similarly the ancient practice of placing portraits and sculptures of the dead both inside the house and all over town would resurface in his blueprints for a secular religion, some of which were taken up in the various festivals of reason celebrated throughout France in Year II. Praising the ancient preference for the personal portrait over the tombstones, mausoleums, sarcophagi and other 'gothic' memorials designed to inspire fear of death, Maréchal remarks that a living, autobiographical memory, in which dear departed ones enjoy a 'second life' amongst family and friends, is preferable to Christian images of the afterlife.⁸⁶

Finally in his numerous disquisitions on music and dance, we see the future choreographer of revolutionary festivals. Music and dance, Maréchal tells his readers, are to the moral sciences what astronomy is to the physical sciences: both represent the original 'just measure' of time, the habit of thinking and acting according to the 'proper measure' of things.⁸⁷ It is here that we find an early formulation of the role of art in what will later become revolutionary propaganda. Recalling the original function of poetry as the 'music of the celestial spheres', Maréchal notes that if poets have for so long been accused of manufacturing lies, it is because they have been confused with priests who have taken over poetic language as 'the most effective instrument of

⁸⁴ Maréchal, *Antiquités*, tome III, 169.

⁸⁵ 'Ne pourroit-il pas passer pour Comus, le Dieu des festins, & de tous les plaisirs qui en font la suite; Divinité à peu-près la même que Bacchus & Priape. On plaçait aussi sa statue à l'entrée de l'appartement de l'époux & de la nouvelle mariée ... On a fait venir le mot de Comédie, de Comus, c'est-à-dire Como digna canere; et en effet, ce fut dans les festins que l'on joua les premières farces qui, perfectionnées, produisirent la Comédie telle que nous l'avons'. Maréchal, *Antiquités*, tome IV, 32.

⁸⁶ 'On ne pouvait voyager sans rencontrer le tombeau d'un de son ami, de son frère, de son maître, de ses enfans, de son bienfaiteur, d'un concitoyen libérateur de la patrie. Ces monuments sacrés ... excitoient des souvenirs chers. Ceux qu'on aimés jouissoient, pour ainsi dire, alors d'une seconde vie'. Maréchal, *Antiquités*, tome II, 75.

⁸⁷ 'Quoiqu'il en soit, les premières sciences que les Anciens étoient jaloux de faire apprendre à leurs enfans, étoient la musique & la danse. Il prétendoit par-là leur former le judgment, les habituer à penser juste & à ne rien faire, pour ainsi dire, qu'en mesure; la Musique étoit chez eux, non-seulement un Art agréable; mais encore une science utile & profonde, une branche importante des Mathématiques.' *Ibid.*, 99.

persuasion to communicate their prophetic and lying oracles'.⁸⁸ This resulted in the forgetting of the original function of poetic legislation: namely the writing of Code in verse, teaching the people through song of the harmony of the laws.⁸⁹ As Maréchal notes, if the original function of the poets was to 'teach sovereigns the art of speaking and governing well' in modern times, it is only in theatre that poets 'can still give Princes salutary, if indirect, lessons'.⁹⁰

As these parallels between ancient and modern sexual, political and religious practices show, it is not simply a belief in a golden age that 'converted' Maréchal from a shy and retiring *érudit* to a militant revolutionary. Rather this 'conversion' was the result of an electrifying encounter between the world of *la fable* and the redemptive fires of volcanic destruction, which preserved this past for the future. Because history only went back as far as the latest revolutions of the earth, prehistory could reappear at any time; antiquity was as modern as the next volcanic eruption. The periodic eruptions of the volcano and other natural catastrophes thus allowed Maréchal and his contemporaries to represent a cyclical understanding of time in the form of a line, that is, as a sign of history that expressed itself as a will to a future that differed from the past. Moreover, because this past reappeared in the form of images, it appeared as a past juxtaposed; as a break in temporal succession that changed the relation to the past as well as the future.

This understanding of rupture as a sign that could refer to either history or nature – in other words that signified both freedom from nature and the power of nature over history – can be gleaned from two glosses in the *Antiquités*. The first involves an appeal to reinstitute the Greek festival of love, *les Érotins*, celebrated every five years. Calling on the French to become the new Greeks, Maréchal presents antiquity as a future hope: 'We have great need for such festivals today but do we need to be Greek to create them? Perhaps amongst all the modern peoples, it will be up to the French to imitate the Athenians.'⁹¹ The second makes explicit mention of the need for calendar reform, correlating the declaration of a Universal

⁸⁸ 'L'instrument de la persuasion le plus propre à faire passer leurs oracles prophétiques & menteurs'. Ibid., 7

⁸⁹ 'Le tems fut court, pendant lequel le Législateur, Philosophe & Poète tout-à-la-fois, dédaignant le rôle d'inspiré, ne faisoit usage de l'art des Vers que pour mettre plus de précision dans son Code peu volumineux, & pour faire goûter au peuple, dans l'harmonie de ses expressions, celle de ses loix'. Ibid., 7.

⁹⁰ 'Apprendre aux Souverains l'art de bien dire & celui de bien gouverner'; 'peuvent encore donner aux Princes les leçons salutaires, mais détournés.' Ibid., 52

⁹¹ 'Nous aurions grand besoin de pareilles Fêtes aujourd'hui, mais il falloit être les Grecs pour les inventer? Peut-être parmi les Peuples modernes, seroit-ce aux François d'imiter les Athéniens.' Maréchal, *Antiquités*, tome 1, 132.

Code of human rights and duties to the reestablishment of a cyclical measure of time:

We can add that the Calendar is still in need of improvement, despite all the successive reforms of every nation. What remains to be desired is one sole Calendar for all nations illuminated by a single Sun. A universal Code founded on the duties and rights of Man is even more necessary, but its implementation will not be any easier.⁹²

As this statement makes clear, the declaration of the rights of man and a new universal calendar express the same desire: for a rupture so strong that it would reduce the various 'times' of history to one universal measure. The desire for volcanic rupture thus appears in Maréchal's calendar not as a catastrophic loss of control over representations of time, but as the potential for a far greater *concentration* of time than had ever been known. It thus symbolizes the discovery of our freedom *from* the passage of time, from history, which is also the freedom of self-determination, the ability to control time itself.

If Maréchal was the first to invent the idea of a 'revolutionary calendar' it is because he still understood rupture as a periodic regeneration of time, as a new creation that would abolish history and return society to the mythic time of a golden age. By stopping time to begin it again, a new calendar enabled the return to the original time of social institution, a time in which biocosmic cycles and their social or 'symbolic' significance had not yet been separated by the history of class usurpations and ideological deceit. That this golden age was not a figment of the imagination was evident in the various festivals around the world that had preserved this cultural memory of an original equality. This was especially evident in the festivals that greeted the New Year in the various religions, in particular the Roman festival of the Saturnalia, in which the end of one year and the beginning of another were marked by the overturning of values, and during which slaves regained their humanity by becoming masters for a day. Returning to an original solar calendar was thus a way of reenacting, in terms of human time, the equivalent of a volcanic eruption. It was a way of abolishing all norms and overturning all values in order to revert to the primordial unity expressed in the cyclical, repetitive time of the calendar year.

It is perhaps fitting, therefore, to conclude this chapter with Maréchal's most strikingly transgressive image: that of the volcano that kills the king.

⁹² 'On pourrait ajouter que le Calendrier, malgré les réformes successives de chaque peuple, en est encore susceptible; qu'il seroit à désirer qu'il n'y en eût qu'un seul pour toutes les Nations éclairées par un seul Soleil. Un Code universel fondé sur les devoirs & sur les droits de l'Homme, seroit encore plus nécessaire; mais l'exécution n'en seroit pas plus facile.' Ibid., 167.

This is the scenario that would become famous in 1793 when Maréchal's hit play *Le jugement dernier des rois* would stage the death of all monarchs by an exploding volcano. Here in 1788 this scenario appears in its original form, as the prophecy or 'dream' of a universal festive revolution. Five years before the revolutionaries would bypass the juridical process to execute Louis XVI, Maréchal imagined an internationally coordinated armed insurrection as the final step before the regeneration and beginning of a 'new time'. Appropriately enough this uprising against and imprisonment of all kings on a deserted island would take place on the day of the annual Saturnalian festival. In this image, Maréchal's true identity as the Shepherd Sylvain is finally revealed. He is the son of Saturn, the planet that has the longest revolution and whose tutelary deity controls the duration of the year and the success of the harvest. Saturn's association both with the inverted world of the carnivalesque and with a golden age of material abundance and equality were well known. Maréchal draws on both these associations to present the image of a permanent festive revolution, in which the people have regained control over time and history to institute a new golden age in the here and now:

Once upon a time, a weary visionary returned from court and went to sleep. He dreamt that on the day of the Saturnales, all the peoples of the earth passed the word around for each of them to lay hold of their respective kings. At the same time, they arranged to assemble this handful of crowned individuals at a general meeting before relegating them to a small uninhabited yet habitable island whose fertile soil only required some work and light farming. A cordon of armed rowboats was put in place to inspect the island and prevent the new settlers from escaping. The discomfort of the new arrivals was not slight. They began by stripping off all the royal paraphernalia with which they were encumbered, for to survive, each of them needed to pitch in. With no more servants, no more courtisans, no more soldiers, they had to do everything themselves. These fifty-odd dignitaries were unable to live in peace for very long and the human species, calm spectator, had the satisfaction of seeing itself delivered from its tyrants by their own hands.⁹³

⁹³ En ce temps-là: revenu de la cour, bien fatigué, un visionnaire se livra au sommeil, & rêva que tous les peuples de la terre, le jour des saturnales, se donnèrent le mot pour se saisir de la personne de leurs rois, chacun de son côté. Ils convinrent en même temps d'un rendez-vous général, pour rassembler cette poignée d'individus couronnés, & de le réléguer dans une petite isle inhabitée, mais habitable; le sol fertile n'attendoit que des bras & une légère culture. On établit un cordon de petites chaloupes armées pour inspecter l'isle, & empêcher les nouveaux colons d'en sortir. L'embarras des nouveaux débarqués ne fut pas mince. Ils commencèrent par se dépouiller de tous leurs ornemens royaux qui les embarrassoient; & il fallut que chacun, pour vivre, mit la main à la pâte. Plus de valets, plus de courtisans, plus de soldats. Il leur fallut tout faire par eux-mêmes. Cette cinquantaine de personnages ne vécut pas long-tems en paix; & le genre humain, spectateur tranquille, eut la satisfaction de se voir délivré de ses tyrans par leurs propres mains. Maréchal, *Apologues modernes*, 30–31.

History and Nature
The Double Origins of Republican Time

Until 1792, Maréchal's utopian dream of a total social and political revolution marked by a new calendar, was an isolated one. It was not until four years after the beginning of the Revolution, when the Revolution had already accumulated its own tumultuous and conflicting history, that the idea of reforming the calendar moved to centre-stage. By the time 1792 was retroactively designated as Year I, the revolutionaries had celebrated multiple beginnings and had declared numerous endings. The storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789 was immediately hailed as Year I of Liberty. A year later, the Fête de la Fédération on 14 July 1790 was declared as the Revolution's true moment of regeneration. Two years later, the Parisian insurrection on 10 August 1792 that deposed the king and paved the way for the establishment of the French Republic was spontaneously proclaimed as Year I of Equality. This coexistence of multiple time lines suggests that orientation in time was a challenge and that no one time line played the role of a historical absolute. After all, unless the Revolution had come to an end, how could its true beginnings be ascertained?

For Gilbert Romme, the mathematician who was the calendar's chief architect, none of these dates held the status of a true origin. It was not enough to associate a new beginning with this or that historical event because a new epoch only truly began once history returned to its origins in nature. The Revolution's true origin, thus, was the solar equinox of 22 September 1792, the day the National Convention, the Republican government instituted after the overthrow of the king, first convened as a new governing body. Just as the autumn equinox marked the very moment when day and night occurred in equal duration, so too the new Republic would henceforth incarnate in real time, *in* and *as* the beginning of a new history, a natural equality that was previously experienced only as myth. Thanks to the Republican calendar, the utopian revolution discussed in [Chapters 1 and 2](#) would now become the framework for all future history.

But aside from the fortuitous collusion of the autumn equinox with the opening of the National Convention, Romme's rhetorical conceit still left the relation between nature and history unresolved. After all, if the new calendar was to commemorate the end of monarchy and the beginning of a new Republican era, why not begin on 10 August 1792, the day the king was overthrown and Year I of Equality declared? Postponing the historical birth of the new Republic to coincide with the convening of the National Convention was certainly politically and symbolically expedient. It resulted, however, in a curious lag time between the end of the old world and the beginning of the new. The *historical* world ended on 10 August 1792, with the overthrow of the monarchy, but the *natural* world did not begin until 22 September 1792. This implied that the time between 10 August and 22 September 1792 belonged neither to the past (identified with the ancien régime, which was *over* on 10 August when the king was forcibly deposed) nor to the new time of the Republic that had to wait until the solar equinox in order to be consecrated by nature. Although heralded by the revolutionaries themselves as the beginning of a new time, the events of these hot summer weeks were nonetheless condemned to remain outside the chronology established by the new calendar. The result was a paradoxical calendar from the outset. Was the calendar an image of nature or of revolutionary history? Did the calendar represent a patriotic memorial for the French Republic or was it to serve as a truly universal standard of time?

This chapter considers this delayed birth of 'Republican time' – the gap between the declaration of new time and the institution of it – from two perspectives. First, it considers how the overthrow of monarchy was articulated, both rhetorically and in terms of concrete political action, as a break with the past and the beginning of a new time. Second, it assesses the connections between all these extraordinary proclamations of new time and the actual project of calendar reform. In so doing, it shows how the calendar attempted to resolve the intractable problem of all revolutionary change: how to ensure the cogency of before and after, a consensus on what part of the past is really truly past.

THE SCENE

Let us first consider 10 August 1792, the day that the king was overthrown and that was to remain outside the new chronology established by the calendar. In an important sense, this event had been long in the making. The flight of the king to Varennes in June 1791, followed by the massacre of the Champ de Mars on 16–17 July, where La Fayette's troops had fired

on petitioners demanding the king's resignation, had already mobilized a number of deputies against the idea of a constitutional monarchy. The declaration of war against Austria in April 1792, coupled with the king's refusal to comply with the decrees of the Legislative Assembly, further exacerbated the tension between those deputies supporting constitutional monarchy and those vowing to overturn it, by force if necessary. A weakened state, a discredited king, a constitution lacking executive power and a country in a state of war – these factors provided the context for the extraordinary events of 10 August 1792.

But 10 August marks not just a rupture with France's political and cultural past; it also signalled a rupture with the Revolution's own past. It has been variously interpreted as the moment when direct democracy, under the aegis of the Paris Commune, took over political representation. Or, conversely, as the day when the Legislative Assembly lost control over the constitution and thus of any semblance of political representation bound by the limits of the law. In either case, the summer of 1792 was characterized by an increasingly tense confrontation between the Legislative Assembly, which upheld principles of political 'representation' and the clubs, those unofficial organs of public debate and social gatherings that claimed to directly incarnate the 'will of the people'.

At stake was the issue of political representation: who gets to represent whom? Who is left out of the space of representation? Equally at stake was the legitimacy of a political model that believed 'representatives' could be trusted to use their own disinterested reason to arrive at a consensus. In theory, consensus did the work of reason because it stripped away any influence of party politics. In practice, however, the political climate of the summer was one of increasingly strident factionalism. Although the constitution strictly prohibited any 'factions' or 'parties' that stood between the individual and the sovereign body of representatives, the clubs more and more relied on party politics, and their own power over public opinion, to trump the work of consensus. Even before the Legislative Assembly's inception on 18 September 1791, when the king, having bungled his escape, reluctantly accepted the revised constitution, the model of rational consensus had been vulnerable to the growing influence of the clubs. With 650 clubs by April 1791, 745 on the eve of the king's escape, 833 immediately after his return and nearly 1,000 when the constituent Assembly disbanded in September 1791,¹ the clubs more and more vociferously staked their claim to being proto-parties, charged with incarnating a popular will that had grown impatient with the mediations of 'representation'.

¹ Gueniffey and Halévi, 'Clubs and Popular Societies', *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, 463.

But here is what is curious. In those critical first days of August 1792, when the clubs demanded, in increasingly strident terms, the suspension of the king, the Assembly responded not by addressing these demands but by discussing whether General La Fayette had violated the constitution when he had threatened to clear the Assembly of factions a few days before, on 28 June 1792. Did he violate the constitution when he allegedly threatened to use the National Guard to purge the Assembly? Or was he upholding the constitution's very principles? Did he speak as a private citizen? Or did he act as the general of an army and thus as a *saboteur* of the very constitutional unity he claimed to support? Even when the news filtered that the Tuileries were surrounded and the king and his family taken hostage, the Assembly still persisted in debating the actions of La Fayette as a means of establishing consensus on the meaning of the constitution itself. Faced with increasingly hostile pressure by the clubs, the Assembly chose to displace this pressure by discussing the political viability of the constitution's first and foremost symbolic figure – the commander of the National Guard, who, in 1789, had played a leading role in returning the king to Paris.

By the time the tocsin sounded at midnight on 9 August in the Faubourg St. Antoine and the clubs took to the streets, the hero of the 'deux mondes', the leader of both the American and French Revolutions, had been prepared for sacrifice. La Fayette had been transformed from a heroic figure of national regeneration, a man who had drafted the Revolution's first constitution and had practically overshadowed the king himself at the Fête de la Fédération, to someone whom one deputy disparaged as an 'objet d'horreur'. This fall from grace signalled a new phase of revolution: the sacrifice of the first generation of heroes and founding fathers.² Let us now analyze more closely the process by which this symbolic breakdown – and the implied consensus on the Revolution's relation to its own origins – occurred.

THE SACRIFICE OF LA FAYETTE

'War has been declared between Louis XVI and France. Each day, each hour is becoming centuries, becoming eternity. One instant lost and

² The malleable nature of La Fayette's prestige over his long career nicely indicates the changing meanings of the term 'revolution'. In July 1830, La Fayette, wearing the tri-colour cockade that he invented, once again commanded the National Guard that helped overthrow King Charles X and install Louis-Philippe on the throne. His (re-established) prestige contributed considerably to establishing the legitimacy of the new regime.

France can be lost.³ As early as 4 August, the section Mauconseil intoned its *cri de guerre* as the capacity to make time slow down. Every second stretched the present, transforming it into a slice of eternity in which it was no longer capable of reflecting either the past or the future except as an immense force of rupture. By claiming that each second was like an eternity, the section Mauconseil effectively bracketed the present from the flow of time.⁴ France could only be saved on condition of a complete break between past and future.

The address of the section Mauconseil was unambiguous. Popular demand for action against the king was also a declaration of war against the constitution. The section deliberately inverted the original meaning of patriotism when it declared: 'The most saintly duty, the most cherished law is to forget the law to save the country.'⁵ Patriotism originally referred to love for the *pater*, that is, love for the king as both lawgiver and father to the nation. Here, however, 'patrie' was redefined as a sovereign body that stands above the law. The true duty of the patriot was now to suspend the law in the name of a higher sovereignty, one that had its source in an *unmediated* representation of the people's will. Destruction of the monarchy became a symbol of patriotic love: 'Strike the terrifying colossus of despotism so that it falls, that it breaks into pieces, and that the sound of its downfall makes tyrants grow pale in the furthest reaches of the world.'⁶

In this space of a present that belonged neither to the past nor to the future, appeared a new political voice: the 'will of the people' as expressed by the clubs. The rhetoric of temporal dilation allowed the clubs to identify themselves explicitly with a 'public' use of reason no longer bounded by 'legal representation'. As the section Mauconseil said to the Assembly, it was the voice of public opinion that declared that it 'no longer recognizes Louis XVI as the king of the French'⁷ This same section, claiming to speak on behalf of the nation, insisted that henceforth the patriotic oath serve as the sole legally binding mechanism of consensus: 'in renewing the oath to live and die free, and to be faithful to the nation, [the Assembly] renounces all other oaths as excessively taxing of public

³ 'La guerre est déclarée entre Louis XVI et la France; chaque jour, chaque heure, chaque minute deviennent des siècles, deviennent l'éternité; un instant perdu, la France peut être perdue'. *Archives parlementaires* 47, 474. Henceforth abbreviated as *AP*.

⁴ See the *Dictionnaire de Furetière* for the following definition of *epoch*: 'Ce mot d'*Epoque* vient du Grec *epochi*, qui signifie *inhibitio*, *repressio*. L'*Epoque* définit & détermine un certain espace de temps'.

⁵ 'Le devoir le plus saint, la loi la plus chérie, est d'oublier la loi pour sauver la patrie'. *AP* 47, 458.

⁶ 'Frappons le colosse effrayant du despotisme, qu'il tombe, qu'il se brise en éclats et que le bruit de sa chute fasse pâlir les tyrans jusqu'aux extrémités du monde'. *AP* 47, 457.

⁷ 'Elle [public opinion] ne reconnaît plus Louis XVI pour roi des français'. *Ibid*.

goodwill'.⁸ Public opinion no longer obeyed legal or, for that matter, national boundaries. By claiming to have stopped time itself, the clubs were able to represent the impending insurrection as a crisis of apocalyptic proportions. Escalating this discourse, the deputy and constitutional clergyman Pierre Anastase Torné warned the Assembly on 9 August that the 'accusation was almost universal'.⁹ According to Torné an essentially political struggle between the clubs and the Legislative Assembly over who best represented the public will had taken on the dimensions of a world-historical event in which 'the four corners of the world' awaited the judgement of Louis XVI 'as a signal of the downfall of all kings'.¹⁰

The notion of the Revolution as a rupture and break in time was opposed to what, until then, had been the predominantly cyclical understanding of revolutionary time as a regeneration or restoration of the past. La Fayette was the privileged symbol for this concept of 'revolution' chiefly for the role he played in the American Revolution. His journey from the old world to the new and back again served to bind both as a unity across space and in time. Thanks to La Fayette's participation in both Revolutions, the French Revolution could envision itself as the return of the 'new' world to its rightful place as the 'origin' or 'foundation' of its European elder. This symbolism was captured most memorably in the 1790 Fête de la Fédération, which commemorated the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille and the birth of constitutional monarchy. It featured a mass on the Champ de Mars led by three hundred priests and a reluctant Louis XVI, who showed up late. At its epicentre stood La Fayette, whose own oath as leader of the National Guardsmen signalled the final reconciliation of the king with liberty. Hailed by many historians as the birth of the French nation, this festival drew *fédérés* from all over France. Many of them were National Guardsmen, who had never before made the journey from the provinces to Paris. Mona Ozouf has described how the festival was perceived as a quasi-miraculous victory over both space and time.¹¹ Michelet even went so far to call it the 'death of geography', the moment when citizens learnt to identify themselves with France as a whole rather than their local or regional place of birth.¹²

⁸ 'En renouvelant le serment si cher à son coeur, de vivre et mourir libre, et d'être fidèle à la nation, elle [the assembly] abjure le surplus de ses serments, comme surpris à la foi publique'. Ibid.

⁹ 'L'accusation est presque universelle'. Discours de Pierre-Anastase Torné, presented on 9 August but read to the Assembly on 10 August, *AP* 47, 679.

¹⁰ 'Il faut un jugement solennel. [...] et les quatres parties du globe l'attendent comme un signal de la chute de tous les rois'. Ibid.

¹¹ Ozouf, *La fête révolutionnaire*, 84–96.

¹² 'Où sont donc les vieilles différences de lieux et de races? Ces oppositions géographiques, si fortes, si tranchées? Tout a disparu, la géographie est tuée.' Michelet, *Histoire de la révolution française*, 406.

Whatever one thinks of these references to a ‘miraculous’ contraction of space and time, it is certainly the case that the festival reproduced a Christian cosmology that relied on a hierarchical concept of representation.¹³ The very act of assembling citizens under the impartial gaze of the king was meant to embody, in the temporal realm, the equality of all Christians assembled before the absolute gaze of God. Moreover, by choosing to symbolize the unity of the nation through La Fayette, this festival maintained a critical distinction between ‘public’ actors and ‘private’ spectators. La Fayette’s popularity as hero and public figure of consensus derived precisely from his ability to channel the will of a people who themselves neither acted nor spoke.

This contrasts greatly with the very different festive atmosphere of the August insurrection. By the time the actual revolt took place on 10 August, everyone was primed to play the role of hero. From the point of view of the participants themselves, 10 August produced the euphoric feeling of having broken down all the barriers of representation. The parade of people pronouncing the oath to self-defence; the feeling, as the deputy Henry-Larivière told his colleagues, of a ‘thousand embraces, thousand friendships’; the transformation, in one instant, of the entire Assembly into a ‘true family’¹⁴: All these were expressions of an unmediated public sentiment that had abandoned a rational model of consensus in favour of a festive model in which spectators finally got to be actors, and vice versa.¹⁵ By casting their political struggle against king and constitution as an immense slowing down of time, the clubs managed to give the insurrection mythic proportions. The oath of the citizens of Rouen to the Assembly on 19 August made clear the extent to which the insurrection was imagined to change *both* the future and the past:

They all swear to you in one voice, steadfastness in face of hardship, unassailable commitment, loyalty unto death at the same time as condemning the base and corrupted deputies who have betrayed or abandoned you, to the opprobrium and scorn of present centuries and the horror and loathing of centuries to come.¹⁶

¹³ See Gumbrecht, ‘Chants révolutionnaires, maîtrise de l’avenir et niveaux du sens collectif’.

¹⁴ ‘Mille embrassements, mille amitiés; ‘véritable famille’. *AP* 47, 652.

¹⁵ The model of just such a festive reciprocity between actors and spectators, elaborated by Rousseau in his famous *Lettre à D’Alembert sur les spectacles*, could not have been far from people’s minds. It is tempting to conjecture that in this case, as in many others, this reciprocity may well have been, at least in part, self-consciously reproduced.

¹⁶ ‘Tous d’un concert unanime, vous jurent constance à l’épreuve, attachement inviolable, fidélité jusqu’à la mort, en même temps qu’ils dévouent à l’opprobre et l’infamie des siècles présents, à l’horreur et l’exécration des siècles à venir, les membres vils et corrompus qui vous ont trahis ou abandonnés.’ Adresse des citoyens de la ville de Rouen, *AP* 48, 365–6.

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As the *sans-culottes* surrounded the Tuileries and took the king and his family hostage, and as the cannons threatened to turn on the Assembly itself, the deputies discovered that this rhetoric of temporal dilation had changed the very space of representation. Deputies that hours, indeed minutes earlier, had grouped themselves according to opposing convictions – the ‘aristocrats’ and Monarchiens on the right, the liberal nobles and bourgeoisie on the left – now found themselves constrained to mimic this effervescence by demonstrating, in turn, their own ‘fraternity’. The very space that had, as late as 6 August, insisted on defining itself as a sanctuary of law¹⁷ suddenly found itself harbouring a fetid object: the king and his family, who, forced to flee, sought asylum within the Assembly itself. Having barely escaped the furies of popular vengeance, the king – the entire executive branch of the government – and his family were made to hide in the transcribers’ *loge*. Prohibited from presiding over legislative debate, the French monarch remained huddled out of sight of the legislators, who could not refrain from humiliating him. While outside the Assembly, the patriots pledged euphoric oaths to self-defence in a kind of spontaneous *levée en masse*, inside the Assembly the deputies were torn between fear of the armed crowds and loathing of the already vandalized effigy of the monarch in their midst.

The deputies survived the insurrection, if we can even call it survival, by emphasizing a similar rhetoric of suspended time. The Assembly no longer stood for the rule of law. Instead it too participated in what it now termed its ‘higher’ calling – to express the moral will of the people. As Condorcet reminded the deputies on 13 August, a legal abdication had not yet taken place.¹⁸ In his attempt to justify the extra-legal position of the Assembly after 10 August, Condorcet attributed the failure of the constitution to the fact that the will of the people and the time of reason were moving at different speeds:

It was the Assembly’s duty to only make pronouncements after a mature and thoughtful examination, after a serious discussion in which all opinions were duly considered and weighed up. But the patience of the people was exhausted. All of a sudden the people appeared, as a whole, unified with one will and one goal.¹⁹

¹⁷ See, for example, the speech of Carnot-Feuileins: ‘Vous qui nous entendez, songez qu’une fois entrés dans le sanctuaire des lois, vous devez être impassibles à tout sentiment qui n’est pas l’amour de la patrie’. *AP* 47, 525.

¹⁸ *AP* 48, 97.

¹⁹ ‘Il était de son devoir [of the Assembly] de ne prononcer qu’après un examen mûr et réfléchi, après une discussion solennelle, après avoir entendu et pesé toutes les opinions; mais la patience

The constitution may have failed because deliberative reasoning was *too slow*, but the will of the people was able to take its place – or so went the justification – because it was so instant. In other words, deliberative reasoning was trumped not by the threat of violence or by the power of mass mobilization, but by a higher moral unity. The people, who otherwise did not reason, were able to express a moral law that, because it was immediately intuitable, had also to be naturally right.

But precisely because it was so contagious, this moral enthusiasm was also ambiguous. As a letter from the Conseil général Bar-le-Duc of 13 August made clear, supreme liberty was to be achieved at the expense of total destruction: 'Liberty or death, these energetic words echo throughout the land as the French people compete for the glory of dying because liberty must arise from their ashes.'²⁰ The club leaders, as well as the popular press, used this desire for destruction to exert pressure on the Assembly to capitulate. On 15 August, Robespierre appeared before the Assembly to proclaim the events of 10 August as a judgment on the Revolution as a whole:

The decree of 10 August only referred to crimes committed during that day and this places too strict a limit on the people's vengeance, since these crimes go much further back. Those who are most guilty did not even appear on this day, and according to the law, it is impossible to punish them.²¹

Caving in to public pressure, the deputies instituted the extraordinary tribunal on 17 August and promptly proceeded to acquit Montmorin, the first accused to appear before it. The deputies expressed their fear of a revolution that, all of a sudden, threatened to be interminable. On the same day, Thuriot demanded a drafting of the minutes of 10 August that would transmit to posterity, 'this extremely important day in our history'.²² And Merlin expressed his fear that even the latest revolution was vulnerable to counter-revolution. Quoting from the aristocratic journal *Le Logographe*, he complained about its portrayal of 10 August as the moment when 'at the sound of the cannon, the entire assembly was seized with fear'.²³ According to this counter-revolutionary pamphlet, the deputies were in

du peuple était épuisée: tout à coup, il a paru tout entier réuni dans un même but et dans une même volonté'. Ibid.

²⁰ 'De toutes parts retentissent ces mots énergiques, *la liberté ou la mort*, et les Français se disputent tous la gloire de mourir, puisqu'il faut que la liberté renaisse de leurs cendres'. AP 48, 292.

²¹ 'Il [the decree of 10 August] n'y est parlé que des crimes commis dans la journée du 10 août, et c'est trop restreindre la vengeance du peuple; car les crimes remontent bien au-delà. Les plus coupables n'ont point paru dans la journée du 10; et d'après la loi, il serait impossible de les punir.' AP 48, 81.

²² AP 48, 313.

²³ 'Au bruit du canon, l'assemblée entière a été saisie d'effroi'. Ibid.

such a state of panic that 'they were obliged to detain in the aisles of the hall many deputies who fled their posts out of fear'.²⁴ This desire to end the insurrection encouraged the deputies to depict it as if it had already been safely and peaceably concluded. The date 10 August, Merlin insisted, had to enter the historical annals as quickly as possible so that future generations would see how the deputies, even 'under the knives of assassins', persisted in occupying themselves 'calmly in the interests of the Empire and in expressing their desire for the salvation of the people'.²⁵

In order to assure themselves that the insurrection was in fact the end of revolution and not yet another attempt to restart it, the deputies blamed the insurrection almost entirely on La Fayette. As Chabot argued: 'The decree absolving La Fayette has attracted the attention of all citizens. This decree alone was the cause of the recent insurrection. La Fayette's absolution was what made French blood flow in the Tuileries'.²⁶ And in a moment of almost hysterical frenzy, he concluded that 'La Fayette must be declared a traitor to the country, let all the citizens hunt him down like a wild animal'.²⁷ When the commissars of the *armée du nord* announced La Fayette's defection from France on 21 August, they hailed it as 'the decisive stroke which completely guarantees the success of the new revolution'.²⁸ Everyone agreed on one point: The flight of La Fayette was the flight of the past out of the present. This flight destroyed the cyclical understanding of revolution as one in which La Fayette could still stand as a symbol of the union of the ancient and modern. Horror, LaSource told the Assembly, was the appropriate supplement to legal impunity. 'La Fayette may have escaped the arm of the law but he cannot escape the hatred of the nation and the horror of posterity. I call for a motion declaring him exposed to the righteous anger of the French nation and declaring his name an object of horror for all good citizens (loud round of applause)'.²⁹ Carried away by this enthusiasm, Merlin added, 'I call for La

²⁴ 'On a été obligé de retenir au bord de la salle plusieurs membres que la peur faisait fuir de leur poste'. Ibid.

²⁵ 'Sous le couteau des assassins'; 'froidelement des intérêts de l'Empire et faire des vœux pour le salut du peuple'. Ibid.

²⁶ 'Le décret qui a absous M. La Fayette a appelé l'attention de tous les citoyens; ce décret seul a occasionné l'insurrection qui a eu lieu [...] c'est l'absolution de La Fayette qui a fait répandre le sang français aux Tuileries'. *AP* 48, 314.

²⁷ 'Il faut déclarer La Fayette traître à la patrie, inviter tous les citoyens à courir sus comme sur une bête fauve.'

²⁸ 'Coup de parti qui décide entièrement le succès de la nouvelle révolution'. Lettre des commissaires envoyés à l'armée du Nord, Reims 21 août 1792, *AP* 48, 611.

²⁹ 'La Fayette vient d'échapper à la loi mais il ne peut échapper à la haine de la nation et à l'horreur de la posterité. Je demande que par une délibération vous déclariez qu'il est voué à l'indignation

Fayette's house to be razed to the ground to immortalize the memory of his crime (new applause). [...] And that a column recording his crime be erected on its place'.³⁰

Using the old political language of treason, the deputies came to express a significant new change in the meaning of revolution. By acknowledging the success of the insurrection, they legitimated a contingent act of political intervention that had nothing whatsoever to do with the work of reason. The only way to maintain the legitimacy of the insurrection was to declare this revolution the final one: a total rupture that purified the Revolution of all traces of its past. La Fayette's symbolic transformation from Père nourricier, a revolutionary image of the king himself, to an 'anthropophage' reveals a break in the Revolution's self-image. Henceforth the Revolution would struggle with its own double: the past from which it broke away and the 'hideous' past it still wore as its own mask.

THE GEOLOGICAL TIME OF INSURRECTION:
THE ISLAND AND THE SEA

With the sacrifice of La Fayette, the 'deux mondes' of the ancients and moderns no longer appeared so conciliatory. Geographical metaphors of rupture increasingly replaced historical metaphors of continuity as the Revolution came to define itself in what were properly mythic terms, as a universal judgment on all of human history. This resulted, on the one hand, in the depiction of the events of 10 August as a return to a kind of primordial matrix, a mythic sea or ocean capable of engulfing all existing social structures. On the other hand, this worldwide revolution was announced at the same time as the deputies were deserting the Assembly in droves. As Merlin observed, out of the four hundred deputies present to vote on the fate of La Fayette, less than two hundred remained in any given session after the events of 10 August. La Fayette was both the last figure to provoke consensus as well as the first to enact its failure.

It is in this context of mutual fear – and pessimism about the powers of reason – that Marie-Joseph Chénier presented his plan for universal French citizenship to the Assembly on 24 August. Brother of the poet André and the man who scripted much of the Fête de la Fédération, he

de la nation française et que son nom soit un objet d'horreur pour tous les bon citoyens (*vifs applaudissements*). AP 48, 609.

³⁰ 'Je demande que, pour éterniser la mémoire de ce crime, la maison de La Fayette soit rasée (*Nouveau applaudissements*) [...] Et qu'à sa place il soit élevé une colonne sur laquelle son crime sera transmis'. AP 48, 609.

is found here actively choreographing the 'symbolic' origins of the new Republic before it was even officially born. Whether out of opportunism or sheer enthusiastic élan, he rejected the very revolutionary heroes whose apotheosis he had previously arranged in favour of a new global vision of world citizenship:

All those who, in the various countries of the world, have developed human reason and prepared the path of liberty, ought to be considered as allies of the French people. [...] We ask that you accord them the rights of French citizenship. Pay this debt to humanity and you will be repayed in turn by public approval. Oh if only the will of the people could bring these illustrious men to the National Convention, what an imposing and solemn spectacle the Assembly would make, this Assembly, which will determine so many great destinies! [...] It is by such adoptions that this universal fraternity, which is the first wish of philosophers and the first goal of the social order, can be achieved.³¹

To avoid responding to the demands of public opinion for a purging of the government, the Assembly sought instead to renew, in an even tighter bond, the Revolution's ties with the Enlightenment values of universality and reason. It is as if the deputies preferred to be judged by a fictitious public sphere of enlightened opinion rather than the factions on the street. In such a way, the very move that cast the first Revolution back into the ancien régime also precipitated something out of it: a Republic that operated through universal sentiment and not just deliberative reason. Out of the ashes of a past that had been reduced to what the deputy Dusaulx revealingly called a 'simulacre d'horreur',³² a new vision of consensus was born. This was a consensus based not on rational agreement but on something much more spontaneous and affective: a 'universal fraternity', what the constitutional bishop and deputy Lamourette went so far as to call a 'philosophical consanguinity'.³³

Once the deputies became 'universal citizens' rather than mere 'representatives' of the nation, the insurrection could take on the appearance of moral regeneration. In this sense, this restaging of the Revolution as the expression of a universal or total general will tried to reconcile what Kant

³¹ 'Tous ceux qui, dans les diverses contrées du monde, ont mûri la raison humaine et préparé les voies de la liberté, doivent être regardés comme les alliés du peuple français. [...] Nous vous demandons pour eux les droits de citoyen français. Payez la dette du genre humain; vous serez payés à votre tour par l'approbation publique. Eh! si le choix du peuple portait ces hommes illustres à la Convention nationale, quel spectacle imposant et solennel offrirait cette assemblée qui va déterminer de si grands destins! [...] c'est par de telles adoptions qu'il est possible de réaliser cette fraternité universelle, premier vœu des philosophes, premier but de l'ordre social'. *AP* 48, 689.

³² *AP* 48, 624.

³³ 'fraternité universelle', 'consanguinité philosophique', *AP* 48, 689.

would later distinguish as two incompatible concepts of revolution – revolution as complete moral regeneration (which presupposes a cyclical structure of time as rebirth) and as political action (which operates in the time of the instant).³⁴ Instead of accepting the insurrection as a destabilizing, and, from the point of view of the constitution, very much illegal uprising, the deputies rushed to outdo each other in giving it world-historical dimensions. Lamourette, in the same passage cited previously, lauded it as a sign of the imminent and universal liberation of all nations, optimistically describing it as a great catastrophe that ‘should offer us a vision of a free world and a universe without thrones’,³⁵ while the Prussian baron and atheist Anacharsis Clootz called it a ‘saintly insurrection’, one that would re-establish ‘the level between men as the eruptions of the ocean have reestablished the level of the seas’.³⁶ As he put it on 11 September, in the strongest redefinition of revolution as a catastrophic rupture: ‘There is only one ocean; there will be only one nation.’³⁷ This statement is significant for its suppression of all references to an already existing revolutionary history in favour of a cosmic timescale that, in its appeal to an ‘oceanic’ memory, seems straight out of the pages of Buffon.

METRIC TIME FOR METRIC SPACE:
THE GUTENBERG REVOLUTION

Nothing is more symptomatic of the changing semantics of revolutionary time than the attention accorded to Anarchasis Clootz on 11 August 1792, the day after the insurrection. Ardent atheist and proponent of a universal cosmopolitan revolution, the Prussian baron was the first to receive honorary French citizenship on 26 August 1792. In one of the Revolution’s crueler ironies, this self-styled *orateur du genre humain* would be guillotined after Robespierre accused him, falsely, of spying for foreign banks. Much like La Fayette before him, Clootz all of a sudden appeared as a privileged figure of consensus. Clootz appealed to deputies and insurgents alike, I would suggest, because he was the first to move the insurrectional moment back into the history of progress so dear to enlightened

³⁴ For the reference to Kant see Koselleck, ‘Revolution’ in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 730.

³⁵ ‘Doit nous offrir le spectacle d’un monde libre et d’un univers sans trône’.

³⁶ ‘Le niveau entre les hommes comme les éruptions de l’océan ont rétabli le niveau des mers’. These remarks, as well as the citations that follow, unless otherwise indicated, are all from Clootz’s speech of 9 September 1792, *AP* 49, 498–500. In this speech, Clootz presented himself as an ‘orateur du genre humain’. He is described in the transcripts as appearing ‘à la tête de plusieurs artistes typographes à la barre de l’Assemblée’.

³⁷ ‘Il n’y a qu’un océan: il n’y aura qu’une nation.’

discourse. On 27 August, in his speech accepting French citizenship, Cloutz offered a somewhat appealing conflation of patriotism, universalism and *sans-culotterie*:

I pronounce the oath of loyalty to the universal nation, to equality, to liberty and to the sovereignty of the human species. An eternal Gallophile, my heart is French. My soul is sans-culottes (loud round of applause).³⁸

In his oath, being French, a citizen of a universal nation and a *sans-culotte* appear as interchangeable attributes of one and the same identity. Once citizenship is presented as a sentimental rather than a political right, and patriotism is redefined as a universal humanitarianism, citizens of other countries can become French. That such a radical figure, a foreigner in a time of war, could produce any kind of political consensus at all reveals much about the rhetoric at work here. For almost two whole months, between August and September, the Republic was defined not in terms of a nation-state but globally, that is, in terms of a universal vindication of human rights. It was not until 25 September, after the French army had successfully beat back the Prussians at the Battle of Valmy, thereby sealing the authority of the new government, that Danton declared the Republic to be restricted to the territory already more or less occupied by the French state. In other words, the universal Republic became unequivocally defined in terms of *national* sovereignty, only once the National Convention had convened and the threat of invasion diverted. We will need to keep these global terms in mind when we consider the institution of the calendar itself.

For now, it suffices to note how Cloutz, in his several political interventions over these six weeks, re-inscribed this essentially lawless insurrection into a universal history of a global, and liberal, enlightenment. Haranguing the deputies who seemed to accord him full attention, Cloutz insisted that the insurrection was merely the final spasm before the arrival of a universal, perpetual peace:

Two great errors are the source of most of our troubles: the fraudulent sovereignty of Princes and the partial sovereignty of peoples. Now is the time to repatriate all the members of the human family by putting in motion the eternal principle of the indivisible sovereignty of the human species. The rights of man are the same everywhere: they are the sole law, the only sovereign (applause). Without this salutary principle, the smallest village could declare itself sovereign, sadly

³⁸ 'Je prononce le serment d'être fidèle à la nation universelle, à l'égalité, à la liberté, à la souveraineté du genre humain. Gallophile de tout temps, mon coeur est français. Mon âme est sans-culottes. (*Vifs applaudissements*).² AP 49, 41.

isolating itself and sowing discord throughout the world. However, with this luminous and fertile principle, this first commandment of nature, a constant harmony will cover the earth with all the blessings of perpetual peace.³⁹

Cloutz then proceeded to create a new history for the Revolution by nominating Gutenberg as the first revolutionary hero. The importance of Gutenberg for enlightened thinkers was nothing new. Many eighteenth-century universal histories hailed the invention of the printing press as *the* event of modern times.⁴⁰ The printing press enabled the public sphere to establish itself as a network or circulation of ideas independent of any political or cultural centre (which is perhaps why it often featured in the short universal histories often printed on the front pages of almanacs, a genre that was popularized thanks to the printing press). Cloutz presented the Revolution as if it too belonged to this same smoothed space of universal history, in which time was marked by inventions and discoveries. In this same speech he also applied the notion of a free network or circulation of ideas and goods to critique the 'partial' or 'unfinished' Revolution. Evoking what he called a 'Germanie des deux hémisphères', Cloutz rhapsodized about a universal revolution in which 'crime would be very rare' because nations would no longer have borders and 'humans would not know any other corporation, any other alliance, any other treaty than that of the confederation of individuals on the alter of the law, the will, and the universal force'.⁴¹

Cloutz's utopia is revealing for the *distance* it assumed from the actual experience of political events as they unfolded. Everything that marked 10 August as a qualitatively distinct experience of time – the unspoken fear of the deputies before the crowds, the humiliation and overthrow of the king, the flagellation of La Fayette, the massacre in the Tuileries of the Swiss guards – was repressed in favour of a natural image of time. In an early formulation of the Republican calendar's own ideology, Cloutz claimed that 'the true social system is as simple as the true planetary

³⁹ Deux grandes erreurs enfantent la plupart de nos maux; la souveraineté frauduleuse des Princes, et la souveraineté partielle des peuples. Voici le moment de repatrier tous les membres de la famille humaine, par la promulgation du principe éternel de la souveraineté indivisible du genre humain. Les droits de l'homme sont les mêmes partout: loi unique, souverain unique (*applaudissements*). Sans le principe salutaire, le moindre hameau pourrait s'ériger en souverain, s'isoler tristement, et semer la zizanie sur la terre; mais avec ce principe lumineux et fécond, avec ce premier commandement de la nature, une harmonie inaltérable couvrira le globe de tous les bienfaits de la paix perpétuelle. From Cloutz's speech of 11 August. *AP* 48, 72.

⁴⁰ It was not just universal histories but also almanacs that privileged the invention of the printing press as the key event of 'modern' times.

⁴¹ 'Les hommes ne connaîtront pas d'autre corporation, d'autre alliance, d'autre traité, que la confédération, des individus sur l'autel de la loi, de la volonté, de la force universelle'.

system'.⁴² There is no acknowledgement of the insurrection as a contingent *historical* event, that is, an event capable of unleashing forces or meanings that could not be so easily subsumed under the cyclical time of nature. Instead Cloutz treats the insurrection as if it were just the type of catastrophic rupture that would allow the earth's surface to be reorganized along the lines of the new French *départements*. As he prophesied: 'A new era begins, France is free, the departmental grid will level out the earth'.⁴³ One could conjecture that Cloutz's proclamations were tolerated by deputies and insurgents alike because they presented the events of 10 August as the end of revolutionary history; as if the overthrow of the king had somehow already fulfilled the eminently liberal desires of the 'philosophes économistes' to transform the globe into a frontier-less sea enabling an endless circulation of goods and ideas. Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, the first technology to enable the free exchange of ideas, is thus harnessed to a vision of history as an end of time, a return to the perpetual 'circulations' of ideas and goods that replicate nature's cycles.

UNITY IN HYSTERIA: THE SEPTEMBER MASSACRES

But as September approached, with the flight of La Fayette and the fall of such important strategic bulwarks as Thionville, Metz and Longwy, this ideal was increasingly at odds with that *other* experience of revolutionary patriotism: the defence of the French territory in the face of the advancing Prussian army. With the fall of Verdun, announced in Paris on 2 September, this 'ideal' Revolution was anointed, for the first time, with the 'slaughterhouse of history' (to borrow Hegel's famous formulation). The events leading up to the September massacres are well known. The Prussian's steady approach had generated the rumour that, should the foreign armies arrive, the Paris prisons would themselves open to set the imprisoned aristocrats on the patriots. In a pre-emptive strike, therefore, the patriots turned on the prisons, indiscriminately butchering inmates in what was, for the Revolution, an unprecedented act of organized violence. The estimates of the number of victims killed between 2 and 6 September ranged from 1,090 to 1,395 victims, roughly half of the entire prison population of Paris.⁴⁴ Throughout these four horrendous days, the Assembly made no concerted move to stop the violence. The same held for

⁴² 'Le vrai système social est simple comme le vrai système planétaire'.

⁴³ 'Une nouvelle ère commence, la France est libre, le damier départemental va niveler la terre'.

⁴⁴ Article 'Massacres de septembre' in *Dictionnaire historique de la Révolution française*, 724.

the Commune of Paris as well as the provisory executive council headed by Danton and Roland (the latter even had the temerity to suggest a certain salutary effect of these 'expéditions' in the prisons!). The September massacres were not simply the end of an optimistic anthropology. They were also the culmination of what could be called, without exaggeration, a collective hysteria at the failure of representation. One of the most moving, but also most hypocritical, moments of this hysteria was Vergniaud's speech to the Assembly on 17 September.

When Vergniaud, laying the blame for the massacres on faceless 'brigands' and 'anarchists', cried out in a paroxysm of self-hatred 'Let the National Assembly and its memory perish provided that France shall be free!', the entire Assembly rose up with what the transcripts describe as a unanimous movement to repeat 'Yes, yes, let our memory perish provided that France shall be free!'⁴⁵ Even the tribunes, the much maligned hecklers of the deputies, rose up at the same time to respond in their turn by repeated rounds of applause. Affirming the failure of representation on the one hand while projecting a better, more ideal revolution into the future on the other, Vergniaud's speech reflected a more general desire to repress the memory of the events of the recent weeks. Vergniaud concluded his impassioned speech with all the ambiguity that the inauguration of the National Convention – and the reign of equality it stood for – entailed:

Let the memory of the National Assembly perish if, upon our ashes, our more fortunate successors are able to establish the foundations of a Constitution that guarantees the well-being of France and consolidates the reign of liberty and equality.⁴⁶

In Vergniaud's image, the revolt of August and September 1792 was so thorough going that it had left only cinders in its wake. The end of the Legislative Assembly was coterminous with the death of the Revolution as it had been experienced and conceived up until that time.

I would now like to turn to the institution of the actual Republican calendar in order to consider the new conception of revolutionary action that arose out of the ashes of these two months. In so doing I will also provide an answer to the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter: What specifically connects this rhetoric of new time to calendar reform?

⁴⁵ 'Périssent l'Assemblée Nationale et sa mémoire pourvu que la France soit libre!' 'Oui, oui périssent notre mémoire pourvu que la France soit libre!' *AP* 50, 93.

⁴⁶ 'Périssent l'Assemblée nationale et sa mémoire, si, sur nos cendres, nos successeurs plus heureux peuvent établir l'édifice d'une Constitution qui assure le bonheur de la France et consolide le règne de la liberté et de l'égalité'. *Ibid.*

And what does the institution of such a calendar tell us more generally about the experience of this lag time, not just between the time the monarchy was toppled and the Republic convened but also more generally the increasingly evident gap between the Revolution's dual, and conflicting, origins as both 'nature' and 'history'?

FROM NEW TIME TO A NEW CALENDAR

The rhetorical pressure announcing a new epoch came from all sides. On 21 August 1792, *Le moniteur*, the official newspaper of the Assembly bore the dates Year IV of Liberty and Year I of Equality. After 22 September, the day the National Convention opened, all state documents were dated Year I of the French Republic. Goethe, observing the famous Battle of Valmy, where the French army, in a surprising victory, beat back the Prussians, associated that fateful day with the birth of a new epoch. As he tried to console the Prussian soldiers on the evening of 20 September 1792: 'From this place and this time forth commences a new era in world history and you can all say that you were present at its birth.'⁴⁷

But it is one thing to announce a new epoch, quite another to institute a new calendar. The demand to consolidate the Revolution's multiple beginnings into one origin had been mounting even before the overthrow of the king. On 2 January 1792, the Legislative Assembly, not knowing how to stamp its coins and new medals, posed the following question. Should it count Year IV of liberty from 14 July 1789, according to the revolutionary chronology, or from 1 January, according to the calendar year? If they counted from 14 July, this meant that Year III of Liberty would only have lasted six months. On the other hand, retaining 1 January as the official beginning of the year had the advantage of conceding to popular usage of revolutionary chronology while avoiding full-fledged calendar reform. The Assembly opted for the latter. They found persuasive such arguments as the one made by the deputy Ramond de Carbonnière, who pointed out that the Revolution had multiple beginnings, including the memorable dates that preceded 14 July 1789.⁴⁸

In the context of this debate, we encounter Sylvain Maréchal and his calendar once again. By this time Maréchal had become a vocal critic of the 'unfinished' Revolution, both as editor of Prudhomme's radical

⁴⁷ Cited by Schama, *Citizens*, 640.

⁴⁸ A summary of the debate can be found in Dommangeat, *Sylvain Maréchal*, 206. See also the *Moniteur* no. 4, 4 January 1792.

newspaper, the *Révolutions de Paris*, and as author of such texts as *Dame Nature à la barre de l'Assemblée nationale* (1791), which urged the redistribution of property, and *Le Catéchisme du curé Meslier* (1790), which bore the imprint 1789, Year I of the Reign of Liberty. Here, we find him taking a stand against moving the date of the Revolution's origins. Angry at the Assembly's decision, Maréchal responded in the *Révolutions de Paris* with the unequivocal headline: '14 July, the only true epoch of French liberty.'⁴⁹ Unlike 1 January, which still belonged to the despotic past, 14 July was the moment when a theory of liberty first became a historical reality:

It is not true that our liberty dates from the first of January. [...] This date is not comparable and must not be confused with that forever sacred and uniquely glorious epoch of the annihilation of despotism crushed by the downfall of the Bastille [...] 14 July brought us the solemn implementation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen which only a short while ago was but a brilliant theory.⁵⁰

As the moment when intellectual progress became historical fact, 14 July marked the fixed point from which a new civilization began, and deserved to be acknowledged as such by a new chronology:

Why, when we have well surpassed all the peoples of antiquity, should we not also mark out for ourselves a great epoch in the history of the world and assume the rank we deserve? Why should it not be said all over Europe, and above all in France, that 14 July is the first month of the third or fourth year of French liberty like it was once said for the third or fourth year from the fall of Troy or the foundation of Rome?⁵¹

At the same time, 14 July represents a *naturalization* of human time:

It mattered more than we think that the beginning of the year commence at the same epoch as the political regeneration in France. This connection is necessary to ensure that the laws of nature and those of society go together. Nature has always played a part in the intrigues of kings; what *mattered* was to make the

⁴⁹ 'Quatorze Juillet 1789, seule et véritable ère de la liberté française'. *Révolutions de Paris*, tome XI, no. 131, du 7 au 14 janvier 1792: 84–90.

⁵⁰ 'Il n'est pas vrai que notre liberté date du premier janvier [...] cette époque n'est point comparable & ne doit pas être confondue avec cette époque à jamais sainte et bien autrement glorieuse de l'anéantissement du despotisme écrasé sous la chute de la bastille. ... Le 14 juillet nous a valu l'exercice solennel de la déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen, qui n'eût été longtemps encore qu'une brillante théorie'. *Ibid.*, 84.

⁵¹ 'Pourquoi nous venons de nous élever bien au-dessus de tous ces peuples d'antiquité, pourquoi ne fournirions-nous pas aussi une grande époque dans les annals du monde, & n'y prendrions-nous pas le rang qui nous convient? Pourquoi ne dirait-on pas dans toute l'Europe, est sur-tout en France, le 14 Juillet premier mois de l'an troisième ou quatrième de la liberté française comme on *disoit* l'an troisième ou quatrième de la prise de Troye ou de la fondation de Rome?' *Ibid.*, 86.

public feel that the wisest people are those that are closest to nature and that their judgments are seconded by those of nature. Nature is at its most energetic and fertile in the month of July when the sun is at its zenith ... It is also in the month of July 1789, like the sun at that date, that the French people reached its full height, its full force and harvested for the first time the gentle fruits of the precious seeds of reason and independence that it had been germinating for many years.⁵²

Maréchal relies on the master symbol of the sun – 14 July is both the day that the Bastille fell and one of the longest and brightest days of the year – to represent the union of historical time with the laws of nature. In addition to being the first day of a new calendar year, and the first year of a new chronology, 14 July should also be the *only* festive day to be henceforth celebrated. As Maréchal explains, this would ensure that the historical event of the French Revolution— here identified with the Fall of the Bastille – functions as an axial moment, a true rupture that also reorganizes the experience of time for the rest of the year:

There should be only one festival in the year but it must be placed in such a way to influence the rest of the year. Let 14 July be that great day, the day *par excellence*, which will leave a profound impression on all the other days of the year. [...] Let 14 July be the first day of our calendar and the only day to strike us by its remarkable colour, which is the colour of the blood of kings and their henchmen, for the blood of kings and their henchmen, burning as it does with most disorderly passion, should be more acrid, more livid, and darker than that of other men.⁵³

But until the insurrection of August 1792, Maréchal remained an isolated voice. Even Abbé Sieyès, one of the revolution's great reformers, drew the line at time, insisting that 'time is too heavy a mass to move'.⁵⁴ With the establishment of the Convention, however, the multiple beginnings of

⁵² Il importoit plus qu'on ne pense que le renouvellement de l'année se fit à l'époque même du renouvellement politique des choses en France; ce rapprochement étoit nécessaire de faire aller ensemble les loix de la nature & celles de la société. La nature s'est jouée constamment des combinaisons des rois; il *importoit* de faire sentir que le peuple le plus sage se rapproche d'elle et prouve ses calculs par les siens. C'est au mois de juillet qu'elle est dans toute son énergie, dans toute sa fécondité et le soleil dans toute sa grandeur ... c'est aussi au mois de juillet 1789 que le peuple français parvenu, comme le soleil à cette date, à toute sa hauteur, à toute sa force, récolte pour la première fois les doux fruits des germes précieux de raison et d'indépendance qu'on *avoit* jetés dans son esprit depuis plusieurs années'. *Ibid.*, 87–8.

⁵³ 'Il ne devoit y avoir qu'une seule fête dans toute l'année; mais elle devoit être placée de manière à influer sur le reste du temps. Que le 14 juillet soit le grand jour, le jour par excellence, & qui laisse une impression profonde pour tous les autres jours de l'année. [...] que ce soit le 14 de juillet, qu'il se présente le premier sur notre calendrier, & qu'il soit le seul qui frappe la vue par une couleur remarquable, & qui ait la teinte du sang des rois & de leurs suppôts; car le sang des rois & de leurs suppôts, brûlé par le feu des passions les plus désordonnées, doit être plus acre, plus livide, plus noir que celui des autres hommes'. *Ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁴ 'Le temps est une masse trop lourde à remuer'. Cited by Ozouf, 'Calendrier révolutionnaire', 482.

the Revolution all of a sudden appeared as an intractable problem. On 6 November 1792, the deputies Manuel and Gorsas insisted on the need to reform the almanac.⁵⁵ François de Neufchâteau, the president of the department of the Vosges, suggested a national competition for remaking the civil calendar. Lakanal meanwhile presented a proposal to the Convention on 2 July 1793 that revived Maréchal's *fête du mariage* and fixed the beginning of the year on the spring equinox. On 21 December 1792, the Committee of Public Instruction, chaired by Gilbert Romme, was asked to clean up the problem of the Republican era. Flouting the Convention's demands for a reform without delay⁵⁶, nine months later Romme and his associates presented a proposal for a complete restructuring of the calendar. Romme borrowed many of his reforms from Sylvain Maréchal's *Almanach des honnêtes gens*, most notably starting a new time line from Year I and replacing Sunday by the *décadi*, the tenth day of rest in the new decimal week. (In keeping with the decimal system, he also proposed ten-hour days and one-hundred-minute hours).

Like Maréchal, Romme presented his calendar as a secular myth. It had the dual advantage of aligning the birth of the Republic with the sacred traditions of Egypt (Romme, like Dupuis, who was also associated with the committee on calendar reform, believed that Egypt was at the origin of all time)⁵⁷ while not belonging to any of the established religious sects. The calendar, thus, changed the landscape of revolutionary politics in two ways. First, it transformed the moral and political vacuum of August–September 1792 into a final judgment on the Revolution itself. By incarnating new time, in the form of a new calendar, the revolutionary government hoped to fulfill the sense of expectation in a way that would silence any further demands voiced on behalf of the future. Second, and consequently, in presenting itself as the definitive solution to this crisis, the government ended up putting even more pressure on a vision of time in which the Revolution fulfilled the expectation of a universal enlightenment. In other words, the less likely it was that the crisis appeared to be over, the more pressure the government put on a concept of history in which history itself had ended.

⁵⁵ These interventions are cited by Dommanget, *Sylvain Maréchal*, 227–8. See also James Guillaume, *Procès-verbaux du Comité d'Instruction Publique*, t. 1, 236–7.

⁵⁶ Mona Ozouf, 'Calendrier révolutionnaire', 483.

⁵⁷ As Romme notes in his report: 'Les traditions sacrées de l'Égypte, qui devinrent celles de tout l'orient, faisoient sortir la terre du cahos, sous le même signe que notre République, & y fixoient l'origine des choses et du temps'. Gilbert Romme, *Rapport sur l'ère de la République fait à la Convention nationale dans la séance du 20 septembre de l'an II de la République*, 6. All citations concerning Romme's calendar are from this report. For the involvement of Dupuis, see Andrews, 'Making the Revolutionary Calendar', 524.

This can be seen from the calendar's most ambitious task, which was to construct a collective will and identity for a people who had, ostensibly, *already* expressed their will.⁵⁸ By transforming the collective rhythms and personal life of all French citizens, the calendar would construct the ideal 'people' in whose name the Convention was formed and the monarchy abolished. No longer associated with the aggressively rhetorical agitators that had brought down the government, the 'people' would henceforth be identifiable with the transparent and above all neutral space of a thoroughly rationalized society. In such a way, the Republican calendar played a crucial role in retroactively constructing 'the people' as both cause and effect of the Revolution.

We are now in a better position to see how these demands for a 'new time' were taken up by the project of calendar reform. The utopian space of the calendar allowed a 'science' of society and a 'theory of history' to converge for the first time. By making the demands for new time appear as if they affirmed what was simultaneously a history of progress and a return to a natural time, the calendar 'resolved' the crisis in political representation provoked by the deposition and subsequent decapitation of the king. Auguste Comte, another advocate of a universal calendar of humanity, understood this point well when, many years later, he would present his own 'revolutionary calendar', as a way of resolving the 'final crisis' of revolutionary history.

However, before Romme's Republican calendar became the order of the day, it once more faced criticism from Sylvain Maréchal, this time in the form of direct competition. Impatient with the Convention's delay, on 5 October Chaumette, procurator of the Commune, authorized two thousand copies of Maréchal's *Almanach des Républicains* to be printed by Bonneville's press, le Cercle Social. Only a last minute decision by the Convention to pass the first five proposals of Romme's calendar prevented Maréchal's almanac, a revised version of his original *Almanach des honnêtes gens*, from being the first official calendar of the new Republic.

Maréchal's *Almanach des Républicains* stands out for its insistence on naming the months not after concepts or events but people and the social types they represent. Each month uses a stock image to represent a complex social reality in a condensed space. Some of the months are renamed *les pères, les époux, les amans, les mères de famille* in honour of Maréchal's domestic cult; others represent different aspects of 'new man'. February is

⁵⁸ Baczkó makes a similar observation, remarking that this calendar, made in the name of the people, was also an instrument intended to forge these same people. 'Le calendrier républicain', 85.

renamed 'le peuple', July is the month of 'les hommes libres', August 'les républicains' and September 'les égaux'. Some of the commemorated dates are obvious. 14 July is maintained as the sole festival of the Revolution and its link with a Christ-like image of death and Resurrection emphasized by renaming it the 'Easter of the French People' to mark the day the French people passed from servitude to liberty. The date 10 August is noted as the day the Tuileries was besieged and conquered; 20 August for the declaration of the rights of man (again, as in the almanac tradition, events that occurred in different years are commemorated according to the *month* in which they occur; that is, they are subordinated to the cyclical time of the calendar year rather than arranged on a linear chronology). Other dates, however, are less positive. Unlike the Republican government, which moved quickly to suppress the memory of the September massacres, Maréchal marks 2 and 3 September conspicuously as days of mourning when there was a 'forgetting of the law'. In contrast to the future Republican calendar, which would emphasize the unity of the state, in Maréchal's almanac, the regeneration of civil society is the primary concern. The date 21 September is thus preceded and followed by two important milestones of civil regeneration: 19 and 20 September, commemorating the passing of laws on divorce and civil status, and 28 September, when, in 1791, slavery was abolished in France, a declaration that Maréchal celebrates as having effaced 'the odious line of demarcation that differences in skin colour had drawn in our colonies, between groups of men.'⁵⁹

In the tradition of universal histories, Maréchal is more interested in commemorating revolutionary events as signposts on the way to greater freedom and equality than as specifically French Republican dates: freedom from servitude, from feudal privileges, from the oppressive institution of marriage, from distinctions of race. In Maréchal's typical fashion, these freedoms are not expressed as abstract concepts but as a regeneration of the emotional ties that bind people together. It is for this reason that his calendar privileges the family as the true cell of society. The family, not the abstract citizen, is the only true political subject of the Revolution because only the family is capable of ensuring unity and sameness over time – the two conditions for true equality. This theme is reprised in his various revolutionary writings of the early 1790s. It appears in his *Décret de l'Assemblée Nationale portant régleme[n]t d'un culte sans prêtres*⁶⁰ and

⁵⁹ 'De l'odieuse ligne de démarcation que la différence de couleur avait tracée dans nos colonies, entre les hommes et les hommes'.

⁶⁰ Maréchal, *Décret de l'Assemblée nationale portant régleme[n]t d'un Culte sans prêtres*, 3

also in his *Dame Nature*, in which he claims that the grand charter of humanity can be summarized in the following terms: ‘child, husband and father, filial piety, conjugal tenderness, paternal care.’⁶¹

Unlike the Republican calendar, therefore, and the various revolutionary festivals that would try to instantiate it, Maréchal opposes the new revolutionary values of both patriotism and fraternity. As he notes in *Dame Nature*, ‘Never have I heard men so often call themselves brothers. How is it that all these brothers continue, the one to serve, the others to be served? Are brothers the masters and valets of one another?’⁶² In a similar vein, his 1793 *Correctif à la Révolution* will complain that ‘few crimes have done more damage to humanity than this patriotism that has been made such a heroic virtue. Patriotism is to mankind what exclusive love for oneself is to the individual.’⁶³ It is useful to keep Maréchal’s *Almanach des Républicains* in mind as we take a closer look at the Republican calendar’s own mytholo-scientific resolutions of the contradictions of revolutionary time.

GILBERT ROMME’S CALENDAR

‘Time opens a new book in history and in its new march, as majestic and simple as equality, it must write with a new and vigorous instrument the history of regenerated France.’⁶⁴ One year later, on 14 September 1793, this was how Gilbert Romme described the birth of Republican time. Gone were the historical events of August–September 1792. In their place was a vision of history that unfolded according to an egalitarian measure of time, based on the exact length of the solar or tropical year. As this length was most conveniently measured from the equinox, this new scientific ‘measure’ coincided most happily with the first official session of the National Convention on 22 September 1792. Of course the association of the sun with both earthly and divine powers was an ancient trope, as I have discussed in [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#). So too was the association

⁶¹ ‘Enfant, époux & père, piété filiale, tendresse conjugale, soins paternels’. Maréchal, *Dame Nature*, 43.

⁶² ‘Jamais je n’ai entendu les hommes se traiter si souvent de frères. Comment se fait-il que des hommes tous frères continuent, les uns à servir, les autres à se faire servir? Des frères sont-ils donc maîtres & valets les uns des autres?’ Maréchal, *Dame Nature*, 17.

⁶³ ‘Peu de crimes ont fait plus de tort à l’humanité que l’amour de la patrie dont on a fait une vertu héroïque. L’amour de la patrie est pour le genre humain ce que l’amour exclusif de soi-même est pour chaque individu’. Maréchal, *Correctif à la Révolution*, 20–1.

⁶⁴ ‘Le temps ouvre un nouveau livre à l’histoire; & dans sa marche nouvelle, majestueuse & simple comme l’égalité, il doit graver d’un burin neuf & vigoureux les annales de la France régénérée’. Romme, *Rapport*, 2.

of astronomical portents with historical events, a commonplace of early modern annals. But where previously kings had represented themselves as ruling over astronomical as well as historical time, the Republican calendar erected a vision of a natural time ruled by a natural sun. The solar year was used to establish the new Republic not in a transcendental or religious source of time but in a natural measure that was also the basis of equality.

On 21 September 1792, the last day of the monarchy and which is to be the last day of the common era, the representatives of the French people, convening as a National Convention, opened their session and declared the abolition of royalty. On 22 September, this decree was proclaimed in Paris and on the same day, at 9 o'clock, 18 minutes and thirty seconds in the morning, the sun reached its true equinox, entering the sign of Libra. Equality between day and night was marked by the heavens at the very moment when civil and moral equality was proclaimed by the representatives of the French people as the sacred foundation of its new government. The sun illuminated the two poles at the same time and then, successively, the entire globe on the same day that the torch of liberty, which will one day illuminate all of the human race, shone in all its purity on the French nation. The sun passed from one hemisphere to the other the same day when the people, triumphing over the oppression of kings, passed from monarchy to a republic. [...] The concordance of so many circumstances imprints a *sacred nature on this epoch*, one of the most distinguished of our revolutionary annals and which will no doubt be one of the most celebrated in the festivals of future generations.⁶⁵

The calendar thus grounds, both scientifically and in terms of a new mythology, a political will that claimed to inherit the figure of the earth, and not the body of the king, as its source of legitimacy. In contrast to the ancien régime, which had associated the king with just measure – encapsulated in the popular motto ‘One king, one law, one weight, one measure’ – these ‘new hours’ were so natural that they allegedly even reflected

⁶⁵ ‘Le 21 septembre 1792, le dernier jour de la monarchie et qui doit être le dernier de l’ère vulgaire, les représentants du peuple français, réunis en Convention nationale, ont ouvert leur session et ont prononcé l’abolition de la royauté. Le 22 septembre, ce décret fut proclamé dans Paris; et le même jour, à 9 heures 18 minutes 30 secondes du matin, le soleil est arrivé à l’équinoxe vrai, en entrant dans le signe de la Balance. Ainsi l’égalité des jours aux nuits était marquée dans le ciel au moment même où l’égalité civile et morale était proclamée par les représentants du peuple français comme le fondement sacré de son nouveau gouvernement. Ainsi le soleil a éclairé à la fois les deux pôles et successivement le globe entier le même jour où, pour la première fois, a brillé dans toute sa pureté, sur la nation française, le flambeau de la liberté qui doit un jour éclairer tout le genre humain. Ainsi le soleil a passé d’un hémisphère à l’autre le même jour où le peuple, triomphant de l’oppression des rois, a passé du gouvernement monarchique au gouvernement républicain. [...] Ce concours de tant de circonstances imprime un *caractère sacré à cette époque*, une des plus distinguées dans nos fastes révolutionnaires et qui sera sans doute une des plus célébrées dans les fêtes des générations futures’. Romme, *Rapport*, 5–6.

the rhythms of the average human body. The decimal second, or so Romme argued, was superior to any other unit of measurement because it was equal to 'the pulse rate of an average-sized healthy man, marching at a military pace'.⁶⁶

Desperate measures of semantic overdetermination aside, this search for a new eternal referent begs the following question: are we opening a new epoch in history or are we returning to what was pre-given in nature? If the calendar was to initiate a new *historical* consciousness a return to the eternal cycles of nature was precisely *not* the way to keep this consciousness of radical innovation alive. As Koselleck has observed, by insisting on the repetitive cycles of nature, the calendar risked occluding the very consciousness of living on the brink of a new time that it wanted to evoke.⁶⁷ Moreover, there was something *unnatural* about a calendar that claimed to represent a permanent, global enlightenment. A universal enlightenment that, to paraphrase Romme's words, overcame fourteen centuries of darkness and oppression, presupposed a continuous light emanating from a single point, not the perpetual time of a natural calendar with its endless alternation between light and dark. It presupposed, in other words, an absolute standpoint on human history, that those who control time occupy, as it were, the position of the sun, and not the relative perspective of secular history.

This is significant for it suggests that in trying to undo the old calendar the revolutionaries ended up reoccupying a solar myth associated with absolutism. This is a myth in which control over time also signified a control over the meaning of history, a union made possible because the king represented the centre and unity of both historical and natural time. It is interesting in this respect that although there was no popular mandate for the new calendar, Romme presented it as the logical extension of the reform of weights and measures that had already taken place.⁶⁸ In Romme's mind what linked the two reforms was a concern with rationalizing society.⁶⁹ The same metric system that derived its standard from the measure of the earth would also serve as the new measure of time, in which history would instantiate the progress of reason:

⁶⁶ 'Le battement du pouls d'un homme de taille moyenne, bien portant, et au pas redoublé militaire'. Ibid., 8–9.

⁶⁷ Koselleck, 'Remarks on the Revolutionary Calendar and Neue Zeit', 151.

⁶⁸ This was the opposite of the reform of weights and measures that was vigorously demanded in the *cabiers de doléance*.

⁶⁹ Baczkó connects these two reforms with a third one: the universalization and rationalization of language that were to eliminate all linguistic difference, *Les lumières de l'utopie*, 75.

You have undertaken one of the most important tasks for the progress of the arts and human knowledge, which is only able to succeed at a time of revolution. This is to forever abolish the diversity, incoherence and inexactitude of the weights and measures, which were a constant obstacle to industry and commerce, and to derive, from the measure of the earth itself, a single and invariable standard of all new measures. The arts and history, for which time is an element and a necessary instrument, also ask that you provide them with new measures for marking time that will be similarly freed from the errors that credulity and a superstitious routine have transmitted to us over centuries of ignorance.⁷⁰

Even history and the arts, the two spheres 'for which time is a necessary instrument' will henceforth proceed at an even tempo, according to these same natural measures. If, therefore, the Republican calendar fulfilled the promise of enlightenment, it was at the expense of history, or at the very least the notion of progress as something requiring a perpetual and ongoing awareness of innovation, of historical difference, of *every* present differing from the past.

But perhaps the most original aspect of Romme's proposal was the way he combined the cyclical structure of the calendar with a linear narrative of revolutionary history. Secularizing an essentially Christian view of time, Romme maps the story of a Revolution that began in the spring-time of 1789 and ended with the decapitation of the king and the establishment of permanent equality (see Figure 6).

Although the calendar itself begins on 22 September, Romme's story begins on the spring equinox, in the month now called *régénération* (corresponding to 21 March–19 April on the old calendar). This is followed by the months *réunion* (20 April–19 May), celebrating the opening of the Etats généraux, and the month named *jeu de paume* after the famous oath (20 May–18 June). The last month to bear the imprint of a specific event is the one commemorating *la bastille* (19 June–18 July). All of a sudden, though, Romme's narrative accelerates ahead by three years. The calendar commemorates the heady summer of 1792 not by referring to specific dates but to abstract concepts. The months formerly associated with July, August and September on the old calendar are now named *Peuple* (19

⁷⁰ 'Vous avez entrepris, une des opérations les plus importantes aux progrès des arts et de l'esprit humain et qui ne pouvait réussir que dans un temps de révolution: c'est de faire disparaître la diversité, l'incohérence et l'inexactitude des poids et des mesures qui entravaient sans cesse l'industrie et le commerce, et de prendre, dans la mesure même de la terre, le type unique et invariable de toutes les mesures nouvelles. Les arts et l'histoire, pour qui le temps est un élément ou un instrument nécessaire, vous demandent aussi de nouvelles mesures de la durée qui soient pareillement dégagées des erreurs que la crédulité et une routine superstitieuse ont transmises des siècles d'ignorance jusqu'à nous.'

I I

Ces noms sont renfermés dans le tableau suivant de
la révolution jusqu'au 10 août dernier.

<p>ORDRE DES MOIS de la République.</p> <p>7^e du 21 mars au 19 avril</p> <p>8^e du 20 avril au 19 mai.</p> <p>9^e du 20 mai au 18 juin.</p> <p>10^e du 19 juin au 18 juillet.</p> <p>11^e du 19 juillet au 17 août.</p> <p>12^e du 18 août au 16 septembre.</p> <p>13^e du 22 sep. au 21 octobre.</p> <p>14^e du 21 octobre au 20 nov.</p> <p>15^e du 21 nov. au 20 déc.</p>	<p>Les Français, fatigués de 14 siècles d'oppression, et alarmés des pro- grès effrayans de la corruption dont une cour, depuis long-temps cri- minelle, donnoit et provoquoit l'exemple, sentent le besoin d'une <i>régénération.</i></p> <p>Les ressources de la cour étoient épu- sées, elle convoque les Français, mais leur <i>réunion</i></p> <p>fait leur salut. Ils se nomment des repré- sentans dont le cou- rage irrite le tyran. Ils sont menacés ; mais rassemblés au . . . <i>jeu de paume,</i> et sous la sauve-garde du peuple, ils pro- noncent le serment d'arracher le peuple à la tyrannie ou de périr. Ce serment re- tentit dans la France, par-tout on s'arme, par-tout on veut être libre, <i>la bastille</i> tombe sous les coups d'un <i>Peuple.</i></p> <p>Souverain et courrou- cé. Les malveillans se multiplient, des tra- hisons éclatent, la cour forme des com- plots, des repré- sentans parjuressacrifient les intérêts de la na- tion à des vues sordi- des, mais <i>la Montagne,</i> toujours fidèle, de- vient l'olympé de la France; entourée de la nation et en son nom la Convention natio- nale proclame les droits du peuple, la constitution et . . . <i>la République,</i> <i>l'unité,</i> <i>la fraternité,</i></p>
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Figure 6. Romme, Gilbert, *Rapport sur l'Ère de la République*, 1793.

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4^e du 21 déc. au 19 janvier.

5^e du 20 janvier au 18 fév.

6^e du 19 février au 20 mars

sont la force des français, et la liberté, par un acte souverain de . . . la justice nationale, qui fait tomber la tête du tyran est à jamais unie à la sainte égalité.

Le mois de la *Régénération* est le premier du printemps, où toute la nature se régénère.

Le mois de la *Réunion* est celui qui est consacré par l'acte constitutionnel pour les assemblées primaires.

Le mois du *Jeu de Paume* consacre le serment qui a sauvé la France.

Celui de la *Bastille* renferme l'époque où elle fut prise par le peuple.

Le mois du *Peuple* renferme les deux époques immortelles du 10 août.

Le mois de la *Montagne* vient immédiatement après la sanction solennelle donnée par la Nation aux efforts des Représentans fidèles du peuple.

Le mois de la *République* commence à l'époque où elle fut décrétée.

Le mois de l'*Unité* & de la *Fraternité* sont ceux où les hommes, après avoir recueilli dans les champs tous les fruits de la terre, se retirent sous leurs toits, & jouissent ensemble, & fraternellement, des bienfaits de la nature & d'une bonne organisation sociale.

Le mois de la *Liberté* & celui de l'*Egalité* sont liés par celui de la justice du peuple qui, par ses représentans, jugea & condamna à mort le dernier de ses rois.

Les cinq derniers jours répondent aux 17, 18, 19, 20 & 21 septembre, & pourront être consacrés à des fêtes nationales. Nous croyons que leurs noms peuvent être pris dans l'exposé succinct du but moral de nos nouvelles institutions.

Figure 6 (cont.)

July–18 August) and *la Montagne* (19 August–21 September). Significantly, the month of August is designated as the month that contains the ‘two immortal epochs of 10 August’. In Romme’s calendar, the radical different of 10 August 1792 – its resistance to interpretation and its inability to be neatly folded into a rational history of progress – is maintained. The desire to naturalize the Republic’s foundations without sacrificing an awareness of historical *novelty* is nowhere more evident than in this strange calendar that commemorates two different epochs, each with its own respective chronology, on one time frame.

Romme not only maintains this sense of collision between two radically incommensurate epochs; he *resolves* the tension by changing narrative gears and offering an entirely different picture of historical agency after this eventful date. Until this point Romme’s symbolic nomenclature had functioned by keeping the historical dates of the old Gregorian calendar, and the events that they evoked, alive to the memory. However, after the month named ‘people’ – acknowledging the entry of the people into the space of historical representation during the events of 10 August – Romme’s narrative escapes from history altogether. Rather than refer to further auspicious events in the Revolution’s history, the remaining months of the year are named after abstract political concepts: *la République* (22 September–21 October), *l’unité* (22 October–20 November), *la fraternité* (21 November–20 December), *la liberté* (21 December–19 January), *la Justice* (20 January–18 February) and *égalité* (19 February–20 March). In other words, after the month commemorating 10 August 1792, Romme’s historical narrative is compressed in favour of a *plot* in which abstract political concepts play the role of characters or agents. By using the calendar as a plot device, Romme presents revolutionary history as the ultimate instantiation of cyclical time. Consider, for example, Romme’s account of the trial and execution of the king, which he commemorates by the months *la liberté*, *la Justice* and *égalité*. After ‘liberty and ‘justice’ have executed the tyrannical king we return to first principles, the ‘regeneration’ that begins a new ‘revolution’, in the cyclical sense.

4th from 21 December to 19 January	<i>Liberty</i> by a sovereign act of national
5th from 20 January to 18 February	<i>Justice</i> , which causes the head of the tyrant to fall, is forever united with holy
6th from 19 February to 20 March	<i>Equality</i>

Thanks to the calendar, the dates of revolutionary history have become bona fide date concepts. The calendar's synchronic presentation imposes, if only in a *fictive* or *mythological* sense, a logical connection between events that had themselves occurred contingently and in succession. The picture of intention is one in which concepts play the role of historical agents. This same desire for tabulation extends to the days of the new week, now associated not with saints but with practical or symbolic objects of this 'new time', the Phrygian cap, the revolutionary cockade, the plough, the oak tree and so forth. That a historical tableau was necessary to 'classify' the events of the Revolution seemed to be self-evident to many of the Convention's deputies. Baczkó cites the example of the deputy Sergent who insisted that 'this nomenclature alone has the rare advantage of clearly classifying the revolutionary ideas that ought to be cherished by all men.'⁷¹ Just as a tableau classifies and orders objects that can be found in space, Romme uses the calendar to classify and order events and symbols in time. Revolutionary time is presented as a closed cyclical world, an island that had just been discovered and mapped rather than an unknown future that remained to be explored. At least in terms of time, if not also as an actual space, the new Republic was to appear very much like Diderot's Tahiti: an island of time outside of time in which a natural organization of society was to derive from historical rupture alone.

But it would be Fabre D'Eglantine and not Romme who would ultimately instantiate the new calendar as a *uchronia*, that is, as an island of time outside of time. Whereas Romme vacillated between representing the Revolution as a new historical epoch and as a return to natural time, Fabre D'Eglantine opted unequivocally for the latter (see [Figure 7](#)).

FLOWERS NOT CADAVERS:
FABRE D' EGLANTINE'S CALENDAR

Fabre D'Eglantine's criticism of Romme's proposal was pointed: 'abstract, dry, empty of ideas, wordy and confusing for civil use, especially for those accustomed to the Gregorian calendar.'⁷² Fabre D'Eglantine's proposal, on the other hand, demonstrated the full ambition of calendar reform:

⁷¹ 'Cette nomenclature ... a seule le rare avantage de classer clairement les idées révolutionnaires que doivent chérir tous les hommes'. Baczkó, *Les lumières de l'utopie*, 81.

⁷² 'Locution abstraite, sèche, vuide d'idées, pénible par sa prolixité & confuse dans l'usage civil, sur-tout après l'habitude du calendrier grégorien'. Fabre D'Eglantine, *Rapport fait à la Convention Nationale, dans la séance du 3 du second mois de la seconde année de la République Française*, 9. All references are from this report.

F R U C T I D O R.			
Douzième mois. Du 18 Août au 21 Septembre, (vieux style.)			
Primidi.	1.	Prune.	
Duodi.	2.	Millet.	
Tridi.	3.	Lycoperde.	
Quartidi.	4.	Escourgeon.	
Quintidi.	5.	BARBEAU.	
Sextidi.	6.	Tubéreuse.	
Septidi.	7.	Sucron.	
Octidi.	8.	Apocyn.	
Nonidi.	9.	Réglisse.	
Décadi.	10.	ÉCHELLE.	
Primidi.	11.	Pastèque.	
Duodi.	12.	Fenouil.	
Tridi.	13.	Épine-vinette.	
Quartidi.	14.	Noix.	
Quintidi.	15.	Goujon.	
Sextidi.	16.	Orange.	
Septidi.	17.	Cardière.	
Octidi.	18.	Nerprun.	
Nonidi.	19.	Sagette.	
Décadi.	20.	HOTTE.	
Primidi.	21.	Églantier.	
Duodi.	22.	Noisette.	
Tridi.	23.	houblon.	
Quartidi.	24.	Sorgho.	
Quintidi.	25.	Écrevisse.	
Sextidi.	26.	Bigarade.	
Septidi.	27.	Verge-d'or.	
Octidi.	28.	Mais.	
Nonidi.	29.	Marron.	
Décadi.	30.	CORBELLE.	

Figure 7. *Convention nationale. Rapport fait à la Convention nationale* by Fabre D'Eglantine. © The British Library Board F.R.370 (t) 1793.

LES SANCULOTTIDES.		
<i>Fin de l'année.</i>		
PRIMIDI.	1.	Fête de la VERTU.
DUODI.	2.	Fête du GÉNIE.
TRIDI.	3.	Fête du TRAVAIL.
QUARTIDI.	4.	Fête de l'OPINION.
QUINTIDI.	5.	Fête des RÉCOMPENSES.
ANNÉE BISSEXTILE.		
SEXTIDI.	6.	LA SANCULOTTIDE.
DE L'IMPRIMERIE NATIONALE.		

Figure 7 (cont.)

to re-educate the people's imagination away from the church towards a new collective memory centred on the nation. To achieve this, Fabre D'Eglantine abandoned historical narrative entirely in favour of the image. By relying on images the calendar could achieve what the methods of the Catholic Church had done for the ancien régime – indoctrinate the people by establishing a sentimental and affective bond to the new order. Unabashedly fascinated with the success of the church's own methods, Fabre D'Eglantine insisted that a calendar of reason was not enough to give birth to a new time. Instead visible symbols were needed because images, not concepts, were the building blocks of the understanding. A calendar based on natural images enabled Fabre D'Eglantine to present what was in fact a very old method of education as an ultra modern application of the materialist and sensualist belief that man's imagination and reason derived from the senses.

We cannot conceive anything without images. In the most abstract analysis or the most metaphysical combination, our understanding is only made possible through images, our memory depends upon, and rests solely upon images. You should therefore apply this principle to your new calendar if you wish the method and the whole of this calendar to penetrate the understanding of the people with ease and to be quickly engraved in its memory.⁷³

Combining lay pedagogy with a theory of the imagination heavily influenced by Condillac and other eighteenth-century materialists, Fabre D'Eglantine insisted that a new collective memory could be constructed *ex nihilo* and quickly through an affective immersion in images. The Republican calendar would thus usurp the empire of the church by replacing the icons of the religious calendar with what he called the 'intelligible signs' taken from agriculture and the rural economy. Instead of the 'prettified cadavers from the catacombs of Rome'⁷⁴, the new calendar would function, in the words of Bronislaw Baczko, as an odoriferous 'herbarium'. It also, as Perrine Mane has noted, had the added advantage of referencing the botanical and natural calendars popularized by Linnaeus.⁷⁵

But there is a deeper relation between the revolutionary belief in the power of images and the specific project of calendar reform. By

⁷³ 'Nous ne concevons rien que par des images: dans l'analyse la plus abstraite, dans la combinaison la plus métaphysique, notre entendement ne se rend compte que par des images, notre mémoire ne s'appuie & ne se repose que sur des images. Vous devez donc en appliquer à votre nouveau calendrier, si vous voulez que la méthode & l'ensemble de ce calendrier pénétrent avec facilité dans l'entendement du peuple et se gravent avec rapidité dans son souvenir.' *Ibid.*, 2

⁷⁴ 'Squelettes beautifiés tirés des catacombes de Rome'. *Ibid.*, 6

⁷⁵ See Mane, 'Calendrier et nature', 14.

emphasizing the image, Fabre D'Eglantine calendar purported to resolve the tensions of narrative history still evident in Romme's proposal, that is, the fact that there could be different narratives for any one time. In contrast to Romme's calendar, which emphasized the importance of dates and awareness of historical progress, here natural images replaced historical dates as so many 'stations' or supporting structures for memory. A calendar that previously reflected a religious imaginary of time now embodied a natural memory that, at least ideally, was completely impervious to the historical record.⁷⁶ Fabre D'Eglantine's insight was to realize that for the Revolution to appear as a cataclysmic rupture with the past, it needed to produce a new totalizing system, one based on a complete forgetting of the past. After all, how else could a cataclysmic rupture with the past be made visible, except as the replacement of one imagined total-ity with another?

In the effort to achieve this total remake, the image is called upon to function simultaneously as an iconoclastic sledgehammer as well as an educative tool – two functions that are clearly in tension, if not downright at odds with one another. On the one hand, Fabre D'Eglantine's calendar represses the religious imaginary of time by destroying all representations with a 'transcendent' function. Religious icons exerted power over the people because they were believed to represent the very real presence of a spiritual truth. They were understood not as arbitrary signs of divinity but as an objective reality, one that linked the material to the spiritual world. The Republican calendar, in contrast, insisted that material presence was the only objective reality. By replacing the saints with fruits, vegetables, farming utensils and other 'ordinary' objects, the Republican calendar aimed to show that these images signified themselves and nothing else. To prevent any gap between signifier and signified from emerging, Fabre D'Eglantine hypostatizes a natural memory in which there is no room for a flight of the imagination *away* from reason because all symbols refer to what is 'real' and 'effective'.

Whereas Romme's calendar struggled to maintain, albeit with difficulty, a sense of innovation and novelty, Fabre D'Eglantine's calendar emphasizes natural time at the expense of any notion of historical progress. It unabashedly promotes stasis, a return to a golden age, 'a time when the laborer was more esteemed than all the world's kings taken together and agriculture was considered among the first arts of civil

⁷⁶ Maréchal would criticize the final calendar, both for assuming that the seasons are the same throughout the French Republic and for avoiding the opportunity to 'familialiser la génération qui s'élève avec les époques de notre révolution'. *Révolutions de Paris*, no.131, 138.

society'.⁷⁷ The version of the Republican calendar finally accepted by the Convention reveals much about the new government's reaction to its own historical genesis. To make the rupture with the past appear total, the new Republic promoted a 'natural' memory of 'eternal' equality as the basis of social and political consensus over any acknowledgement of progress as a relevant social or historical category.

This brings us to what appears, at least in contemporary eyes, as the calendar's greatest contradiction: the fact that the so-called neutral, transparent time of reason was made visible through symbolic overdetermination. The famously poetic names of the months evoking the seasons are all meant to reproduce reason not as an abstract sign but as a material presence. Such is the logic of epochal breaks. The cataclysmic rupture with the past only becomes reality when the knowledge of reality itself has changed. Thanks to the calendar's symbolically induced 'paradigm shift', Thermidor would evoke the high heat of the July sun and no longer the fall of the Bastille, Vendémiaire would recall the joyous time of harvest and not the tumultuous and painful events of the previous September. Indeed the identification with this new totality was so complete that even the sounds of the names were to instantly evoke the natural cycle of seasons to which they referred. *Vendémiaire*, *brumaire* and *frimaire*, the months of autumn with their etymology deriving from the 'vendanges' and 'brouillards' and 'froid' [harvest, fog and cold] were supposed to be characterized by a grave sound and a medium-long cadence. The winter months of *nivôse*, *pluviôse* and *ventôse*, associated respectively with 'neige', 'pluies' and 'vent' [snow, rain and wind] were to have a heavy sound and long meter. Springtime with its connotations of fertility was divided into the months of *germinal*, *floréal* and *prairial*, all of which were lively with a quick beat. Finally *messidor*, *thermidor* and *fructidor*, the summer months that represent the cycle of planting and harvest each have a sonorous sound and a broad rhythm.

With the new calendar, natural rhythm replaces historical time as the basis for social and political consensus. Identification of the citizens with each other would occur 'behind their backs' as it were, through a new rhythm of everyday life that would transform the ongoing historical struggle over the meaning of the Revolution into a *common experience of time itself*. In other words, the citizen of the new Republic would identify him or herself with a collective memory based on what was effectively *no*

⁷⁷ 'Un temps où un laboureur est plus estimé que tous les rois de la terre ensemble, & l'agriculture comptée comme les premiers des arts de la société civile'. *Ibid.*, 13.

one's experience of time. In this sense, the calendar demonstrates to what extent the French Republic first appeared not in or as space, whether as a bounded territory or as the presence of a unified people, but on the order of time, as the new imagined totality that would foreclose any future disruptions of history.

Even more so than Romme, then, Fabre D'Eglantine's calendar excludes almost all traces of the events of August–September 1792, that is, all references to the actual historical genesis of the new Republic. But when he broaches the issue of the new festive cycle his calendar, like Romme's, cracks open to reveal an immense disjunction within the Revolution's 'official' image of new time. Where are the people whose festive presence would transform the calendar from a moribund image of time, a mere artifact of political will, into a self-sustaining entity, one that breathed with its own ritual and symbolic life? More pointedly, how could revolutionary enthusiasm, which overthrew the political order of the ancien regime, be translated into a festive cycle that would ensure the perpetuity of the new order? We are back once again to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter. How do the events of August–September 1792, responsible for the sense of unprecedented historical rupture, relate to the calendar's image of new time from which they are excluded?

Fabre D'Eglantine's solution to the problem of political representation – how to give the people, these new citizens, a voice – is startling. It appears towards the end of his proposal, when he consecrates the five or six extra days at the end of the calendar year to a set of festivals he calls *Les sansculottides*. Of the various festivals, the *Fête de l'Opinion*, also called the *Fête de Délation*, is most revealing. This is because it evokes not just a general need for a new festive culture, but specifically refers to the kind of festive moral judgment that recalls the heady atmosphere of the summer of 1792. As if acknowledging that the festive enthusiasm that brought down the political order of the ancien regime cannot be strictly aligned with a time of reason, this festival is described as a burlesque version of a moral tribunal: 'an entirely new kind of tribunal, at once gay and terrible'.⁷⁸ The irony of this festival is that it compensates for the fact that, at the end of the day, even in the ideal republic, political representation is mediated. Throughout the year the people must submit themselves to the decisions and orders of the deputies as the law demands. But should the deputies have in any way lapsed, the *Fête de l'Opinion* offers a valve for 'public opinion' to express itself. 'During the unique and solemn day of

⁷⁸ 'un tribunal d'une espèce nouvelle, & tout-à-la-fois gaie et terrible'. *Ibid.*, 17.

the Festival of opinion, the law allows all the citizens to express themselves on the morals, private lives and public actions of its deputies, giving free reign to the playful and gay imagination of the French people.⁷⁹

Significantly, on this day when the law expresses the will of the people, it speaks not in the voice of reason, but in a festive mode: 'songs, allusions, caricatures, lampoons, bitter-sweet irony, wild sarcasms'.⁸⁰ All these festive expressions of popular sentiment are called upon to regenerate a political assembly that otherwise operates according to the dictates of reason and political representation. The implication seems to be that public opinion is self-regulating only as a festival, when collective effervescence prevents particular interests from being exercised. As collective modes of self-expression, these rituals manifest themselves in a manner quite unlike the placid image of consensus offered by the calendar itself. In this sense, the enthusiasm of 10 August is re-inscribed in Fabre D'Eglantine's calendar as a kind of absolute festival. Spectators become actors and political representation takes the form of popular sovereignty: 'by the very character and the gaiety that is its nature, the French people will preserve its rights and sovereignty; tribunals can be corrupted but never public opinion'.⁸¹ Privileging this festival above all others, Fabre D'Eglantine insists that the 'festival of opinion alone is the most effective shield against all kinds of usurpations and abuses of power'.⁸² It is the condition for ensuring that the calendar otherwise operates as the ideal model of consensus for the rest of the year. In other words, the institution of such a festive tribunal was a way of avoiding the experience that politics could be everyday like a festival, grotesque and redemptive at once.

NEW ORIGINS FOR NEW TIME:

A RETURN TO THE RADICAL ENLIGHTENMENT

The Republican calendar thus originated from two different sources: the historical violence that brought about the rupture of 10 August and the natural or 'utopian' time that heralded the birth of the new Republic

⁷⁹ 'Dans le jour unique & solennel de la fête de l'opinion; la loi ouvre la bouche à tous les citoyens sur le moral, le personnel, & les actions des fonctionnaires publics; la loi donne carrière à l'imagination plaisante & gaie des Français.' Ibid.

⁸⁰ 'Les chansons, les allusions, les caricatures, les pasquinades, le sel de l'ironie, les sarcasmes de la folie'. Ibid.

⁸¹ 'Par son caractère même, par sa gaieté naturelle, le peuple français conservera ses droits & sa souveraineté; on corrompt les tribunaux, on ne corrompt pas l'opinion'. Ibid.

⁸² 'Fête de l'opinion seule est le bouclier le plus efficace contre les abus & les usurpations de toute espèce'. Ibid., 17–18.

on 22 September. The former was symbolized by the spontaneous proclamation of a new linear chronology starting from Year I; the latter by a return to the cyclical and astronomical time of nature. However, as the lag-time between the end of the old world and the beginning of the new makes clear, such an amalgamation was accomplished in part by repressing everything new and unprecedented about this experience of history. Although the new Republic was quick to affiliate itself with a rhetoric of new time voiced by the clubs and on the streets, it also sought to distance itself from it. It did so by returning to a myth of natural time conceived under very different historical conditions, by radical thinkers who could in no way foresee the historical rupture of 10 August 1792. That a polarizing figure such as Anarchis Clootz could be voted the first universal 'citizen' of the new French Republic or that a radically atheist calendar devised by Sylvain Maréchal could all of a sudden become mainstream underlines how important it was for the new revolutionary administration to maintain links with an Enlightenment ideology of reason and progress. Only by reorganizing society according to rational 'measures' could the rupture of 10 August 1792 be seen as the legitimate origin of a 'new time' and not merely the outcome of contingent, and largely uncontrollable, events.

By minimizing the distance between physical 'measures' of time and their moral or allegorical significance, the new Republican calendar sought to ensure that revolutionary events would no longer disclose different strata of historical experience. Indeed the institution of the Republican calendar coincided with a veritable explosion of allegorical figures, that reached its peak between 1792 and 1795 (205 figures, more than a third of the revolutionary corpus, were fabricated in this period).⁸³ As the allegory of all allegories, the calendar was to be the systematic cadre designed to ensure the perpetuity of revolutionary symbolism over time. To it alone was reserved the properly mythological task of making sure that time reflected the *intentions* of revolutionary history.

But as we all know, instead of founding a new civilization, the Republican calendar became increasingly identified with the failure of allegory to trump historical experience. Moreover, by keeping open the utopian horizon of the radical Enlightenment and with it the demands for further 'total' revolution, the Republican calendar eventually became associated with new dates signifying new ruptures: 9 Thermidor, 22 Vendémiaire, 18 Fructidor, 18 Brumaire. The calendar thus became

⁸³ Figures cited by Antoine de Baecque, 'The Allegorical Image of France, 1750–1800', 126.

identified with a dynamic of increasing rupture, a volcanic 'hot' sun of revolts, purgings and coup d'états that took it further and further away from the restorative, gentle sun dreamed of by the utopian Enlightenment. Nowhere is this double chronology of ideal and historical time more in tension than in the first few months of Year II. And nowhere is the revolutionary dramatization of history more apparent than in revolutionary theatre, which came to assume a privileged role in articulating the revolutionary premise of rupture. How theatre was used to supplement the calendar's solar myth with an image of natural terror, is the subject of the following chapter.

Death by Volcano
Revolutionary Terror and the Problem of Year II

On 16 October 1793, the twenty-fifth day of Year II, Marie-Antoinette, the last queen of France, was executed in one of the most memorable trials of the French Revolution. Two days later, Marie-Antoinette's death was refracted in a festive laughter that greeted the death of all kings, staged at the Théâtre de la République. Received with 'the most intense bursts of laughter and applause', Sylvain Maréchal's *Le jugement dernier des rois* featured the imprisonment of all the European monarchs on a deserted island and their volcanic destruction.¹ The enthusiastic audience clapped an entire half-hour at the sight of the enchained monarchs on stage. Indeed the need for this play was so acute that, at a time when France suffered its worst military defeats and the inhabitants of Paris stripped the walls of their buildings for saltpeter, the government sacrificed twenty pounds each of saltpeter and gunpowder for the volcanic explosion at the end.²

Two similar but ultimately radically different events thus marked the beginning of Year II. On the one hand, we have the trial and execution of a defunct queen; on the other hand a theologically impregnated volcano that performed the last judgment of all kings. In contrast to the actual violence that characterized the queen's trial and execution, Maréchal's play represents the death of the monarchs by an act of nature. Thanks to the volcanic foreshortening of time, human agents and their actions are absolved of any responsibility for ongoing revolutionary violence. Instead, the past disappears in a rupture so great that the Revolution appears non-violent. The world is regenerated and moral salvation attained because the agent of change is situated outside historical time: safely located in a volcano that functions as a secular version of eschatological time.

¹ 'Des éclats des rires et des applaudissements les plus redoublés'. *Journal des Spectacles* no. 112. Cited by Hamiche, *Le théâtre et la Révolution*, 171.

² Comité de salut public, decree of 29 brumaire. *Recueil des Actes du Comité de Salut public*, t. VIII, p. 555. Cited in Dommanget, *Sylvain Maréchal*, 263.

What can this theatrical representation tell us about the contemporary perception of historical events, including the trial of the queen?

To answer this question, I propose to analyze both the trial and the play from the perspective of a Revolution that claimed to have enacted an irreversible rupture with the past and the beginning of a 'new time'. Seen from the perspective of the Revolution's premise of rupture, Marie-Antoinette's trial and Maréchal's play are linked by more than a shared trope or even a common social code of interlocking images and themes. The two events share the same temporal horizon. They both reflect a Revolution for which the historical breach with the past, associated with the death of the king, was to establish a new temporal relation between events. Symbolized by the new Republican calendar whose chronology began in Year I, the Revolution was henceforth to fix all events with respect to a new ground zero, one that collapsed all ontological difference between historical and possible worlds. Like Maréchal's volcano, this ground zero established the compatibility or incompatibility between historical events by remaining a 'time outside time' – by remaining, as it were, a time of nature rather than history. As I shall argue, the play's utopian depiction of a world-historical revolution in which *all* of Europe's monarchs have disappeared provides the ideological context for understanding how Marie-Antoinette's own execution was staged as if belonging to a similar time of rupture.

But whereas Maréchal's play vividly demonstrates how theatre provided the revolutionaries with a potent symbol of rupture – one in which farce and laughter affirmed that the hierarchical order of the past was indeed overturned – the same could hardly be said for the trial of the queen. My contention is that the continued existence of the queen, *after* the symbolic act of regicide, reflected a profound crisis in the revolutionary self-image. Year II was intended to be an ideal moment in which the foundation of the French Republic in a universal time of nature finally seemed possible. At the same it was also a moment marked by the realization that the history to which it belonged was not that of an ideal time. Marie-Antoinette's lingering existence was an uncomfortable reminder that the struggle between past and present was ongoing; that time had not returned to nature but still belonged very much to the dimension of history. In the absence of an actual volcano capable of destroying all remainders of the past, what were the dramaturgical tactics by which the revolutionaries sought to re-establish the compatibility between historical events?

MARIE-ANTOINETTE AND THE PROBLEM OF 'NEW TIME'

Marie-Antoinette's trial and execution remain an enduringly symbolic image of the French Revolution. For some, the impact of her public image was so profound that she symbolized the Revolution itself.³ At the same time, occurring nine months after the death of the king, her trial was, if not politically insignificant, at the very least redundant. Unlike the king, who was tried by the Convention and whose death inaugurated the birth of a new nation, Marie-Antoinette was tried before the revolutionary tribunal as a most unusual suspect: a mere citizen who was the widow of an executed king, a former queen in a world that no longer acknowledged the existence of either kings or queens.

As Lynn Hunt reminds us, the trial of a queen in a country that had specifically excluded queens from ruling had no legal precedent.⁴ Unlike the king, the queen had no symbolic body. Ernst Kantorowicz has shown how, in the medieval doctrine of the king's two bodies, the king's power was divided into his physical, visible, mortal body and his symbolic, mystical body that bound the nation to the eternal realm. Recalling this symbolism of the king's two bodies, the execution of Louis XVI was meant to enact the ideal regicide as a double death – the death of the king as both physical body and an embodiment of the nation. Indeed it is precisely as a double death that the violence of regicide was made consonant with the Revolution's symbolism of rupture. Regicide was the sacred baptism that founded the equality of all citizens before the law. At the same time it was the mechanism by which the French nation was to have ruptured once and for all with the eternal realm, returning to the time of the here and now, the immanent time of nature that signalled the beginning of a new history.

But while the violence of regicide enforced the revolutionary symbolism of rupture and regeneration, what could be done with the queen now that the rupture with the past was supposed to be complete? The queen had not only survived the death of her consort, she had survived what was supposed to be the death of kingship in general. Moreover, although

³ This view was especially pronounced in the radical press. For example, *Les crimes de Marie-Antoinette d'Autriche, dernière reine de France avec les pièces justificatives de son procès pour servir de supplément aux premières éditions des Crimes des Reines de France* blamed Marie-Antoinette for 'entravant pendant quatre années la marche d'une grande révolution qui auroit pu s'accomplir en quatre mois', 438.

⁴ See Hunt, 'The Many Bodies of Marie-Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution'.

politically redundant, Marie-Antoinette remained profoundly symbolic. As mother of the dauphin, she linked the monarch's symbolic body to its physical reincarnation in the next generation of kings. The fact that Marie-Antoinette was not only still alive but also apparently secreting a 'mysterious symbolism' (Hunt's term)⁵ frustrated the revolutionaries' claims that the new world was in place and the Revolution over. At a very minimum, the fact that both mother and son were still alive threatened to expose as fictional, as merely symbolic rather than historical and real, the revolutionary premise of rupture.

In the nine months separating Marie-Antoinette's trial from that of her husband, the protean ability of her royal body to attract conflicting meanings became disturbingly clear. Languishing in prison since the overthrow of the king, Marie-Antoinette in her physical deterioration was at first hailed as a sign that the Revolution was over. What better symbol of social regeneration than a naturally deteriorating queen? Already during the hot summer of 1792 the same energy of revolt that was heralded by some as a regeneration of the public body was inversely reflected in Marie-Antoinette as a physical degradation. Witnesses described her transformation from public body to abject object in physical terms: 'She does not stop losing weight. Her breasts have fallen. Her face, burning with fever, is covered in cold sores, her eyes are heavy-lidded and sunken, saliva continually moistens the sides of her mouth.'⁶ What the revolutionaries experienced as festive energy, she experienced as bodily disease. A year later, suffering from hemorrhages and bouts of dizziness, she was isolated completely. Locked up in the Temple, in July Marie-Antoinette was separated from her son, who was placed in the care of an illiterate *sans-culottes* cobbler to be re-educated as a citizen. But far from preventing the 'contamination' of the public body, her very isolation served as a new source of prestige, one that grew in proportion to the revolutionaries' attempts to deritualize the royal body. This prestige was made evident during her execution, when, with legendary sangfroid, she apologized to the executioner for stepping on his toe. Even the revolutionary newspapers could not refrain from quoting her: 'Sir, my apologies, but it was not intended.'⁷

⁵ As Hunt explains: 'The queen did not have a mystic body in the sense of the king's two bodies, but her body was mystical in the sense of mysteriously symbolic.' 'The Many Bodies of Marie-Antoinette', 120–1.

⁶ 'Elle ne cesse de maigrir. Les seins tombent. Le visage, enflammé, se couvre de boutons, les yeux deviennent abattus et caves, une salive humecte continuellement les coins de sa bouche.' Testimony collected by Mallet du Pan in *Le procès de Marie-Antoinette*, ed. Gérard Walter, 20.

⁷ 'Monsieur, je vous demande excuse, je ne l'ai pas fait exprès.' The gloss in the *Révolutions de Paris* No. 212 attributes it to her pride; see 459–60.

Even if political reasons could be found to justify this delay (for example, using the queen as ransom in the war against the Austrians), the queen's existence made visible a deeper problem: the increasing gap between the revolution's ideal time and historical reality. On 10 August 1793, when France celebrated the first anniversary of the king's deposition and the end of monarchy, Marie-Antoinette and her progeny were still alive. On 10 September, when the first version of the new calendar was presented to the Convention, her trial had yet to begin. On 22 September 1793, the beginning of Year II, the queen was very much present while the new calendar was not yet in place. Even when the new calendar was formally accepted on 5 October, the preparations for the queen's trial were not yet complete. By the time the calendar's official implementation was decreed on 24 November, the divergence between the Revolution's real and ideal time had become apparent to all.

That the deputies actively debated the new calendar while they prepared to execute the queen demonstrates the high level of revolutionary anxiety around the institution of Year II. This anxiety pervades Barère's speech of 1 August 1793, in which he first accused Marie-Antoinette of crimes against humanity and demanded her immediate transfer from the Temple to the Conciergerie. In this speech, Barère emphasized the symbolic significance of Year II and insisted that the Revolution must not risk undoing the linear progression of its various stages:

The epochs are easy to recall. They are rocks left by Liberty on the steep road of the Revolution. This trajectory, which traveling politicians retrace at their own peril, must be made present before our eyes more than ever, in today's circumstance.

On 10 August 1792, the cannon opened the way.

On 21 September, the Convention marked its birth. ...

On 21 January 1793, the declared Republic was strengthened by the tyrant's death.

On 2 June, the political prospect, obscured by the fumes of federalism and anarchy, cleared. The people's wrath struck down some arrogant heads. ...

On 23 June, the Republic was constituted ... and the hopes of the people became attached to the Constitution. ...

Finally, as 10 August draws near, the statue of Republican liberty, whose amalgamation has been so laborious, will be solemnly inaugurated.⁸

⁸ Les époques sont faciles à rappeler. Ce sont des pierres déposées par la liberté sur la route escarpée de la Révolution; et cette route sur laquelle les voyageurs politiques ne rétrogradent jamais sans péril, doit être présente à vos yeux plus que jamais, dans les circonstances actuelles.

As Barère's report makes clear, maintaining the right order and symbolic compatibility between events was essential because it was the only way to achieve what the trial and execution of the king had failed to grant: the definitive end of the Revolution in a 'durée certaine'. In contrast to Year I, in which the postulate of a new time had been marred by the execution of the king, Year II would repeat the moment of foundation but with a difference: It would consecrate a republic that had *already* returned to a time of nature. How then were the revolutionaries to guillotine the queen without violating their own precept that moral regeneration was already complete and that violence was no longer necessary to intervene in history? And what were the dramaturgical means by which the revolutionaries attempted to integrate the death of the queen within the overall logic of rupture and regeneration?

STAGING THE QUEEN'S TRIAL

Staging a non-violent, natural extinction of the royal race was one way out of this impasse. The appeal of such a fiction is evident from some of the proposals put forth to deal with the problem of the redundant queen and her progeny. Lequinio suggested that Marie-Antoinette should be forced to sweep the streets of Paris or be taken on as a worker at the Salpêtrière as a lesson in civic education.⁹ This proposal echoed a motion made to the Convention by Louis-Sébastien Mercier on 7 January 1793 to exile the entire royal family to Tahiti or another such southern island for rehabilitation through contact with nature.¹⁰ Nowhere, however, is this fiction of a natural extinction, and the revolutionary belief in the inherent goodness of all humans, more evident than in the ostentatious grace that the revolutionaries accorded to the king's son. Although the

Le 10 août 1792, le canon ouvrit la route.

Le 21 septembre, la Convention marqua sa naissance ...

Le 21 janvier 1793, la République proclamée s'affermir par la mort du tyran.

Le 2 juin, l'horizon politique, surchargé des vapeurs du fédéralisme et de l'anarchie royale, s'éclaircit: la foudre populaire frappa quelques têtes orgueilleuses ...

Le 23 juin, la République fut constituée et les espérances du peuple s'attachèrent ... à la Constitution.

Enfin, le 10 août qui s'avance; la statue de la liberté républicaine, dont la fusion a été si laborieuse, sera solennellement inaugurée. ... ' Barère, 'Rapport sur la situation de la République au nom du comité de Salut public', *Archives parlementaires* 70, 90–112. All citations by Barère are from this report.

⁹ Cited by Thomas, *The Wicked Queen*, 71.

¹⁰ Cited by Thomas, 156.

existence of the dauphin made the return to monarchy a real possibility, the revolutionaries opted instead to deritualize his royal body 'non-violently' by re-educating him as a citizen and sans-culotte.

Interestingly, it was Hébert, the substitute procurator of the Commune and the one responsible for fabricating the famous trumped up charge of incest between mother and son, who criticized this re-education scheme most vocally. As Hébert warned, there was a contradictory desire to get rid of the past while maintaining the illusion of a 'natural' extinction of the royal race: 'Poor Nation ! ... this darling little brat will be fatal to you sooner or later; the funnier he is, the more he is to fear. He and his sister ought to be thrown onto a deserted island: we must get rid of them, whatever the price'.¹¹ Echoing Barère's fear of a reversal of history, Hébert imagined a deserted island as an optimal way to get rid of the royal family. As we shall see, this image reappears in Maréchal's play as a deserted island that is also volcanic. It is an island upon which monarchs can be rehabilitated through contact with nature or, failing that, also be destroyed.

What Hébert emphasized was the necessity of extending regicide to the mother as well as the child. The proclamation of new time was not enough to end the Revolution because what was needed was a more decisive act of violence, one that would break the genealogical continuity that reaffirmed the king's symbolic presence once and for all. For Hébert and other critics from the radical press, Marie-Antoinette was a symptom of all that had not been achieved with the overthrow of the king and the alleged end of Revolution.¹² It, therefore, made sense that in order to realign the events of Year I with the Revolution's intended outcome, Hébert and the painter Jacques-Louis David would resuscitate the pornographic attacks against the queen that had peaked in the summer of 1792 when the queen was called to judgment by the people in terms so vehement that it was doubted whether she would survive the insurrection.¹³ In addition to pandering to popular conceptions of the queen, the fabricated charge of incest had a further advantage. By attacking the reproductive

¹¹ 'Pauvre Nation! ... ce petit marmotin, il te sera bientôt funeste tôt ou tard: plus il est drôle et plus il est redoutable. Que ce petit et sa soeur soient jetés dans une île déserte: il faut qu'on se défasse à tel prix que ce soit'. Cited by Cottret, 'Introduction' of *Madame de Staël: Réflexions sur le procès de la Reine par une femme*, 10.

¹² 'Au lieu de se contenter de l'incendie de quelques baraques de la cour dite des princes, une fois maître du château il devoit y mettre aussi-tôt le feu, et de suite, de porter à l'assemblée nationale, en arracher toute la famille Capet, l'immoler sans pitié [...] et sur les cadavres sanglans de toute cette horde perverse, proclamer solennellement la République'. *Les Crimes de Marie-Antoinette*, 454.

¹³ See the *Correspondance secrète* of 30 August, 'Le peuple désire le jugement de la reine ... et il sera peut-être difficile de le faire attendre jusqu'à la Convention nationale'. Walter, *Le procès de Marie-Antoinette*, 22.

organs of the royal body, the revolutionaries were able to violate the body of a future king that their own premise of rupture and universal regeneration prevented from killing outright.

In her book *The Wicked Queen* Chantal Thomas argues persuasively for the role played by pornography in creating a living myth of Marie-Antoinette as a degenerate, evil queen. Thomas shows how the charge of incest, by reviving the pornographic literature associated with the queen, functioned as a kind of mythic speech, a speech that desecrated the body of the queen. But Thomas's claim that the revolutionaries made no distinction between the popular myth and Marie-Antoinette's eventual conviction overstates the case¹⁴ and does not address the wholly new problem raised by Marie-Antoinette's trial: namely, justifying the use of violence against a redundant queen and the need to accelerate what was supposed to have been a natural extinction of the past.

As I have been suggesting, a more appropriate context for evaluating this dramatization of the family bond is the symbolically overdetermined moment of Year II. From this perspective, the charge of incest had the effect of transforming a body suffering from imprisonment and psychological stress into a body whose medical symptoms could be read as signs of a revolt against nature. Incest also served a further symbolic function, that of dramatizing the execution of the queen as a kind of naturally induced self-destruction. The staging of Marie-Antoinette's execution as a double death – a 'moral' death by incest and a physical death by guillotine – mirrors the same logic of new time that we see in Maréchal's fictional representation, in which the monarchs are first staged as tearing each other apart before they are killed by a vengeful volcano. In both cases, farce and travesty were used to stage the self-destructive nature of the monarchs before their ultimate sacrifice by 'nature' for the good of the whole.

If the beginning of Year II, and the impending anniversary of the king's deposition was a crucial influence on Marie-Antoinette's trial, it was because the trial enabled the revolutionaries to revisit not just the events of August 1792 but also the king's execution, which had produced such troubling effects. By killing the king, the revolutionaries had created a royal martyr, an observation not lost on the counter-revolutionaries who immediately hailed Louis XVI as the latest saint in a parade of saints. Where the king's execution had revived the ancient conception of royal death as a *théâtre de la mort*, a theatre in which death merely affirmed the

¹⁴ Thomas argues: 'And for Marie-Antoinette's judges to have made no distinction between the charges of the scandal sheets with which they had been intoxicated for years and those they laid against her at the time of her trial made her death sentence the true monstrosity', 21.

monarch's eternal life, the execution of the queen had to be performed in an entirely different register. Barère made this clear when in the same speech calling for the queen's trial, he also insisted that the upcoming anniversary of the king's deposition on 10 August 1792 be celebrated by destroying the royal mausoleums of St. Denis. This destruction was to be both symbolic – David's festival for 10 August 1793 featured a giant bonfire to burn the remains of feudalism – and physical – the royal bodies were exhumed, some even mutilated and fashioned into relics, as was the case of Catherine de Médicis and Louis XIV.¹⁵ At stake, thus, in the trial of the queen was also the destruction of a certain form of time, a way of remembering and relating past to present. Marie-Antoinette's death was to be staged in a manner that rendered obsolete once and for all those great royal fests in which 'even the tombs had learnt to flatter kings'.¹⁶

The register furthest removed from tragedy was farce. Although the revolutionaries generally disliked the bawdy and farcical, preferring morally uplifting drama, Marie-Antoinette's trial and execution posed a double challenge: It had to pre-empt a tragic spectacle of death and it had to appear as if it was not the revolutionaries but the people themselves who had willed it. How better to represent the will of the people than by using some of its popular forms? The fact that, in eighteenth-century France, a farce or satirical parody was regularly performed after a piece of serious theatre is important for understanding the dramaturgical tactics of the queen's trial and execution.¹⁷ By using elements derived from farce to defile the once adored body of the queen, the revolutionaries aimed to destroy the still viable transcendental vision of time summed up in the motto 'The king is dead; long live the king.'

Of course, by claiming that the revolutionaries wanted at all costs to avoid another tragic royal death, I do not mean that Marie-Antoinette's trial was meant to be funny. Rather, what the revolutionaries borrowed from the genre was the way in which it emphasized the reversal of hierarchy as well as the presumed dignity of the royal role and the baseness of the actual actors. Normally subaltern characters such as the cobbler Simon and his wife were now 'educators' of a future king charged, among other things, with teaching him to speak the popular language of the people. Simon may have been a real person, but he also recalled the popular figure of the cobbler who, like Père Duchesne, was a stock character from

¹⁵ See Jean-Clément Martin, *Violence et Révolution*, 199.

¹⁶ 'Les tombeaux mêmes avaient appris à flatter les rois'. Barère, 103.

¹⁷ See the *Dictionnaire de l'académie française*, 4th ed. (1762), 270: 'Farce; s.f. Espèce de petite Comédie plaisante et bouffonne; qui se joue ordinairement après une pièce de théâtre plus sérieuse'.

popular theatre, someone who spoke the honest language of the people.¹⁸ The reversal of hierarchy was further emphasized by the trial itself, which was conducted in farcical mode insofar as it was procedurally inflated, literally ‘stuffed’ (*farci*) with elaborately contrived pieces of evidence and sexual innuendo, including the visual gag of a bandage covering the dauphin’s violated genitalia. It is worth dwelling a moment on this visual gag at once suggestive of a medical contamination of a child whose body was as natural and vulnerable as any child’s as well as a blatantly theatrical manipulation of the body of a future king.

He declared moreover that he had been caught several times by Simon and his wife committing unhealthy indecencies in his bed. He admitted that he had been taught this pernicious habit by his mother and aunt, that several times they amused themselves by making him repeat this act before them, and that this occurred when they made him sleep between them. Citizeness Simon tells us that once his mother made him approach her, resulting in copulation and the swelling of one of his testicles for which he wears a bandage. His mother forbade him to speak of it. This act was repeated several times since.¹⁹

With crude literalness, the freshly ‘re-educated’ eight-year-old is represented as voluntarily pressing to give the declaration. Jacques-Louis David, taking time out of completing his portrait of Marat, even interrogated (unsuccessfully) the dauphin’s fifteen-year-old sister. But for all this elaborate staging of a natural justice operating in a natural time, the effect was highly ambiguous. On the one hand, the revolutionary presumption of innocence was maintained because it was the ‘rehabilitated child’, and not the revolutionaries, who accused the unnatural mother. On the other hand, Charles Capet was also very clearly a prop that revealed the intentionality behind the production instead of concealing it. Aware perhaps of the unreality of such a theatre, after the death of the queen, the revolutionaries drop all mention of the royal progeny. As if to maintain the illusion of a natural extinction of the royal race, there was no more mention of rehabilitation and Charles Capet and his sister literally evaporate from

¹⁸ See Root-Bernstein, *Boulevard Theater and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, 90–5.

¹⁹ Il leur a déclaré, en outre, qu’ayant été surpris plusieurs fois dans son lit par Simon et sa femme, chargés de veiller sur lui par la commune, à commettre sur lui des indécences nuisibles à sa santé, il leur avoua qu’il avait été instruit dans ces habitudes très pernicieuses par sa mère et sa tante, et que différentes fois elles s’étaient amusées à lui voir répéter les pratiques devant elles et que bien souvent cela avait lieu lorsqu’elles le faisaient coucher entre elles. Que de la manière dont l’enfant s’est expliqué, il nous a fait entendre qu’une fois sa mère le fit approcher d’elle; qu’il en résulta une copulation et un gonflement à un de ses testicules, comme l’a dit la citoyenne Simon, pour lequel il porte un bandage, et que sa mère lui a recommandé de n’en jamais parler: que cet acte a été répété plusieurs fois depuis. Walter, *Le procès de Marie-Antoinette*, 39.

the political scene. His re-education having progressed no further than acquiring a good vocabulary of swearing, Charles Capet was abandoned to his dungeon to die of neglect. His sister, the sole survivor, was delivered to the Austrians in exchange for French prisoners on 19 December 1795.

ARISTOCRATIC TIME ON TRIAL:
THE *COUP DE THÉÂTRE* AND THE MORAL TABLEAU

But so long as symbolic meaning continued to coalesce around the queen, an aristocratic vision of time threatened to undermine the Republic's claims to belong to natural time. The queen's trial should thus be understood in the context of a symbolic battle over time, one that competed with the aristocratic concept of punishment and execution as a kind of *coup de théâtre*, a reversal of fortune that ultimately served to affirm the divine and eternal body of the king. This aristocratic attitude manifested itself most noticeably in Marie-Antoinette's own comportment before and during her trial, her insistence on treating the Revolution as a reversal of fortune that could still be absorbed in the ongoing romance of her own family.²⁰

That the aristocratic *fête* was put on trial alongside Marie-Antoinette would have been clear from anyone who had read the popular press. Alongside the pornographical literature, this had been a key aspect of the newspaper campaign launched against the queen. For example, in a satirical announcement of 1790 Babeuf disparaged the Fête de la Fédération by comparing it explicitly to the aristocratic model of the festival. Provocatively entitled 'The Queen will throw a brilliant celebration on Sunday 25 July 1790 at the Champs Elysées and Tuileries',²¹ this fictive announcement was written to coincide with the Fête de la Fédération. Presenting the queen as feigning ignorance of the political importance of 14 July, Babeuf claims that little is known about this mysterious *fête* except that the national celebration will be delayed because 'it is said that she has offered to come dance and mingle with the good people'.²² But how can a queen whose melancholy character requires her to be distracted with *ephemeral pleasures* ever dance with the good people? Sylvain Maréchal,

²⁰ Even in the Temple, witnesses argued, she insisted on serving her son at dinner as if he were already king. *Ibid.*, 60.

²¹ 'La Reine donnera, le Dimanche 25 Juillet 1790, les fêtes brillantes aux Champs Elisées et aux Thuileries'. Unpublished manuscript Ms. Aut. Juillet 1790. 4 p. ½ in-8. Special collections, Stanford Library.

²² 'On assure qu'elle se propose de venir danser et se confondre avec le bon peuple'.

describing Marie-Antoinette's crimes in 1791, makes an even more explicit association between moral dissipation and a symbolic dissipation of time embodied by the aristocratic festival:

It is certain that on the eve of the sacking of Paris, when troops had assembled from all around with the aim of putting it to flames. ... Antoinette and her courtisans were dancing at Versailles to the music of the German troops, whom these impious women were working up to a frenzy by the movement of their dance, the sound of the instruments and strong alcohol. Well! On 5 October when the all-powerful nation had pardoned so many horrors, did we not see the same scene being recreated? Did we not see new orgies?²³

In contrast to an aristocratic universe governed by the *fête* and the *coup de théâtre*, the revolutionaries insisted that the Revolution conform to a different type of dramatic representation: the moral tableau of a universal humanity embodied by the revolutionaries themselves. In his *Entretiens sur le fils naturel*, Diderot defined this opposition between *coup de théâtre* and moral *tableau* as explicitly involving differing visions of time. The *coup de théâtre*, he tells us, is 'an unforeseen event which finds expression in the action and which suddenly alters the circumstances of the characters.' A *tableau*, on the other hand, is 'a disposition of the characters on the stage which is so natural and so true that it would please me if it were faithfully rendered on canvas by a painter'.²⁴ Criticizing the *coup de théâtre* for failing to observe the real time of history, Diderot claims that the dramatic *tableau* bypasses this problem by reflecting a universal human nature.²⁵ By freezing dramatic action, the *tableau* allows the spectator to emotionally identify with characters that speak, not in the language of words, but in the universal language of gesture. This corporeal language communicates independently of social roles, producing a situation of universal pathos in which spectators identify with queens as mothers, kings as fathers and princes as sons. Diderot in his search for a *drame bourgeois*, as well as Mercier, Lessing and Goethe, concurred in associating the

²³ 'Il est certain qu'à la veille du sac de Paris, tandis que les troupes destinées à le mettre en cendres l'environnoient de toutes parts ... Antoinette et les courtisanes ... dansaient à Versailles au son de la musique des troupes allemandes, dont ces femmes impies animoient la fureur par le mouvement de la danse, le bruit des instrumens, et par liqueurs fortes. Eh bien! au 5 octobre lorsque la nation toute-puissante avoit pardonné tant d'horreurs ... n'a-t-on pas vu se renouveler la même scène? n'a-t-on pas vu de nouvelles orgies?' Maréchal, *Les crimes des Reines de France, au commencement jusqu'à Marie-Antoinette*, 452. Although this volume is attributed to Louise-Félicité de Kéralio Robert, Sylvain Maréchal likely wrote the avant-propos as well as the section on Marie-Antoinette, 433–66.

²⁴ Diderot, 'Entretiens sur le fils naturel', 37.

²⁵ 'Ne voyez-vous pas qu'il faut des siècles, pour combiner un si grand nombre de circonstances?' Diderot, *Entretiens*, 42.

moral tableau with a new concept of sociability based on the intimacy of the family.²⁶

It is significant that although there was sufficient evidence of political misdemeanors to convict the queen, the revolutionaries chose instead to stage the trial as a domestic drama. Thus although the revolutionaries relied on the mode of farce to deritualize the symbolic body of the queen, this farce itself was framed by a *drame domestique* that aimed to detach Marie-Antoinette from the public world in which her execution could have a political meaning. Too degenerate to deserve the optimism about the natural goodness of humanity so ostentatiously accorded to her son, Marie-Antoinette was charged above all for her sentimental failings. It is not because of revolutionary intervention but because she was unable to complete the transition from queen to mother – that is from a world structured by the social hierarchies of the past to the present time of nature – that Marie-Antoinette was expelled from the moral tableau of the universal human family.

The recourse to the moral tableau as a framing device to mask revolutionary intentionality was even more urgent after the trial and execution of the king. Even during Louis XVI's trial, no amount of careful arranging concealed the fact that regicide did not reflect the people's will. The guillotine was moved from the place du Carrousel to the place de la Révolution, today's place de la Concorde, across from the recently dismantled statue of Louis XV. Facing the Assemblée nationale, the institution that the king betrayed, the execution was to symbolize regicide as the decree of the people. Even the guillotine was to symbolize an instrument of justice, reproducing as close as possible a gentle, and, therefore, humane, death.²⁷ But the immense silence that greeted the king's procession, as well as the equally immense silence after his beheading, indicated a stage that was haunted, even before the execution, by the return of the king. As Daniel Arasse has argued, with this bloody baptism, the guillotine accrued a new symbolic meaning as a 'sacred' sacrament.²⁸ Once tainted with the blood of the king, the guillotine no longer served as an instrument of natural justice but appeared to many as an out and out *coup de théâtre*, an incursion from the heavens that proved the king's ultimate divinity.

²⁶ For more on the different moral universes evoked by the tableau and the coup de théâtre, see the seminal article by Szondi, 'Tableau and Coup de Théâtre: On the Social Psychology of Diderot's Bourgeois Tragedy'; Frantz, *L'esthétique du tableau dans le théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*, 170–3.

²⁷ As its inventor had famously insisted, death by guillotine was so gentle that 'on ne saurait que dire si l'on ne s'attendait pas à mourir et qu'on croirait n'avoir senti sur le cou qu'une légère fraîcheur'. From *Le Moniteur*, 18 December. Cited by Arasse, *La Guillotine et l'imaginaire de la terreur*, 26.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 65–93.

This same inability to control the 'effect' of regicide appeared again in Marie-Antoinette's execution. It was as if the more the revolutionaries attempted to cast the Revolution as a moral tableau, the more they ended up reproducing exactly the effects of a *coup de théâtre* that they most wanted to avoid. This is clear in the conflicting reports of Marie-Antoinette's execution. According to the *Rapport de l'observateur Prévost*, the festive mood that greeted her procession to the scaffold was proof of a regenerated public.²⁹ Yet, as the same report testifies, the sudden hush of spectators resembled more an audience in a theatre: 'The execution took place at noon in the greatest stillness; all the spectators applauded on seeing her head.'³⁰ Others, such as the revolutionary pamphleteer Rougyff, an anagram of the deputy Guffroy, considered only a distinctly *unfestive* silence as a true sign of regeneration:

What an imposing spectacle it would have been to see this woman pass by with two gendarmes and the executioner of the people's will. This isolation would have proved, to my eyes, that France was truly regenerated [...] What an important sight it would have been to see the spectacle of a queen led to her execution in the midst of the silent satisfaction of a great people!³¹

But, as he confesses, even this majestic choreography did not go uninterrupted: 'The people's majesty was eclipsed by this stupid and insolent noise: bring it down! bring it down!'³² As for the executioner, it appears that he was sufficiently moved by the spectacle to resign forever from his post.³³

The trial and execution of Marie-Antoinette thus stands out for its ambivalent theatricality. Instead of evoking a theater of world-history in which nature confirms the acts of mankind, Marie-Antoinette's trial appeared as a *coup de théâtre* that emphasized the divergence between the ideal time of nature and the real time of history. Indeed the failure of natural time to act as an adequate framing device can be measured, *a contrario*, by the success of Maréchal's play. The success of this production reveals what the trial and execution of the queen tried so hard to conceal: that the last judgment of all kings was *still* symbolically needed even after the execution of both king and queen. The fact that the play's author was

²⁹ Cited by Walter, 101.

³⁰ 'L'exécution a été faite à midi dans le plus grand calme; tous les spectateurs ont applaudi en voyant sa tête'. Ibid.

³¹ 'Quel spectacle imposant qu'eût été celui de voir passer cette femme avec deux gendarmes et l'exécuteur de la volonté du peuple. Cet isolement eût prouvé à mes yeux, que la France était bien régénérée. [...] C'eut été une chose intéressante à voir que le spectacle d'une reine conduite au supplice au milieu de la satisfaction silencieuse d'un grand peuple!' Ibid., 103.

³² 'La majesté du peuple a été éclipée par ce bruit bête et insolent: à bas! à bas!' Ibid.

³³ Arasse, 159.

also the original inventor of the revolutionary calendar leaves no doubt that the theatrical representation aimed to make history reflect the same ground zero that the new chronology starting from Year II had tried, and failed to accomplish.

The importance of theatre to the revolutionary self-image cannot be overstated.³⁴ If, as Danton famously declared, Beaumarchais's *Le Mariage de Figaro* killed off the aristocracy and Marie-Joseph Chénier's *Charles IX* destroyed the monarchy, then Maréchal's play overturned all boundaries between the real and the ideal.³⁵ Collapsing the difference between historical and possible worlds, *Le jugement* not only placed the people directly on stage but also represented living monarchs – Catherine the Great, King George III – some of whom were waging war against France. By depicting a utopian horizon of a world-historical revolution, the play represented as a task for the future, the arrival of a new time that the government already claimed to represent. Moreover, the fact that a still unfulfilled utopia was deployed to legitimate a government that understood its own power as a control over time reveals a Revolution unable to solve the problem of rupture: How does a new time, symbolized by rupture, come to be experienced as such by the people? Let us turn to *Le jugement* to see how its theatrical representation of the death of all monarchs transformed a (still fictional) premise of a total rupture with the past, into a collective celebration that was felt and experienced by all.

THE SOLAR VOLCANO: SYLVAIN MARÉCHAL'S
LE JUGEMENT DERNIER DES ROIS

Two days after the execution of Marie-Antoinette, Maréchal's *Le jugement* was staged at the Théâtre de la République. Rousselin in his *Feuille de Salut Public* no. 112 claimed that the enthusiasm of the crowd was so great that 'the entire orchestra appeared to be composed of a legion of tyrannicides, ready to attack the leonine species, known under the name of kings'.³⁶ While in the *Père Duchesne* no. 310, Hébert's character described the play to his wife with highest praise: 'you will see all of Europe's tyrants obliged to devour themselves and be swallowed up, at the end of the play,

³⁴ See, for example, Friedland, *Political Actors: Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the Age of the French Revolution*; Susan Maslan, *Revolutionary Acts: Theater, Democracy and the French Revolution*.

³⁵ Cited by Hamiche, 62.

³⁶ 'La salle de la parterre entière paroissaient composé d'un légion des tyrannicides, prêts à s'élaner sur l'espèce léonine, connue sous le nom des rois'. Cited by Hamiche, 171.

by a volcano.³⁷ Subsequently staged in almost every major city in France, the play was performed before more than 100,000 spectators and had a print run of around 20,000 copies (6,000 of which were explicitly destined for the French troops).³⁸

The regicidal volcano is such a successful image because it combines two contradictory images of new time. No ordinary volcano, it projects a catastrophic image of nature that is nonetheless completely subsumed under human intention. Erupting with periodic regularity – more like a clock than a real volcano – the volcano reflects the beginning of a new history as well as a return to a natural, geological time. In its effort to align a revolutionary history predicated on rupture with a natural (and anti-Christian) time derived from geology and the earth sciences, the volcano articulates the same temporality as the new calendar. Just as the revolutionary calendar abolished Christian chronology in favour of a new time line and a return to a natural cycle derived from astronomy, so too the volcano explodes six thousand years of biblical chronology to reintegrate human history within a much longer geological age of the earth.³⁹ Thanks to the dramatic device of a volcanic guillotine, Maréchal is able to bypass the entire problem of human agency.⁴⁰ The volcano not only establishes the right compatibility between historical events but it does so without imputing violence to the revolutionaries. The Revolution is staged as if it belongs to a linear time of irreversible progress in which history fulfills a moral demand without resistance. This dual function of the supernatural volcano as both rupture and regeneration is elaborated in the play's double plot.

The play begins when the sans-culottes arrive with their cargo of imprisoned monarchs, on what they believe is a deserted island only to encounter its sole inhabitant: an old man exiled to the island twenty years prior to the Revolution by Louis XV. As the old man explains to the sans-culottes, he was exiled for protesting the imprisonment of his daughter in the infamous Parc aux Cerfs, the king's private bordello, at the edge

³⁷ 'Tu verras tous les tyrans de l'Europe obligés à se dévorer eux-mêmes, et engloutis, à la fin de la pièce, par un volcan. Voilà un spectacle fait pour des yeux républicains.' Cited by Hamiche, 173.

³⁸ Hamiche, 174–6. Kennedy disputes these figures, counting twenty-two performances at the Théâtre de la République. See *A Cultural History of the French Revolution*, 435. Nonetheless the government sponsored publication, and the play's performance in Lille, Metz, Le Mans, Grenoble and many other towns suggests a wide reception. For the increasing tendency of revolutionary theatre to represent contemporary events, see Darlow 'Staging the Revolution: The *fait historique*'.

³⁹ For Buffon, Hamilton and other naturalists see McCallam, 'The Volcano: From Enlightenment to Revolution'.

⁴⁰ Ailloud-Nicolas reminds us that catastrophe is a Greek term that originally referred to the dénouement of a dramatic action put into motion by the characters even if they did not control it. See 'Scènes de Théâtre: *Le tremblement de terre de Lisbonne* (1755) et *Le jugement dernier des rois* (1793)'.

of Versailles.⁴¹ Banished on the island by a bad king, the good father has managed to transform the volcano from a symbol of punishment into one of freedom. The first thing the sans-culottes see when they arrive on the island is the following inscription on a rock: 'It is better to have for a neighbour / A volcano than a king / Liberty ... Equality.'⁴²

In addition to the last judgment of Europe's remaining monarchs, then, the play interpolates a second narrative in which the old man plays the role of hero and prophet of a new secular religion based on liberty, fraternity and equality. It is by means of this secondary plot – staged as a series of pantomimes and moral tableaux – that the play explains the transition from a sacred to a secular world, symbolized by the transition from a divine interpretation of justice and punishment to a natural one. Amazingly, the old man has been spared both by the volcano as well as the wild animals during his twenty years on the island. Unlike the savages who, every evening, come from a nearby island to worship the volcano, offering sacrifices to appease it, the old man has tamed the volcano by adopting an enlightened religion that no longer requires sacrifice. Instead of fearing the volcano as an instrument of punishment, the old man teaches the savages to worship a more enlightened religion based on the sun. The sun, like the volcano, consists of fire but it is also light, that is a fire that burns without burning. When the savages try to elevate the old man to the status of a priest or king, he refuses and makes them swear instead to never have priests or kings. In a Promethean gesture, the old man has stolen the instrument of punishment from the bad father (the king) and has divided it up amongst his brothers (his equals). The volcano obeys this prophet of a secular religion because he is the founder of a society based on natural equality, in which the logic of punishment and sacrifice no longer exists.

The play's double plot has a further function – that of presenting this secular religion, depicted through a series of tableaux – as a framing device for the volcanic *coup de théâtres* of revolutionary history. As the sans-culottes explain to the old man, revolutionary history occurred much as a volcano erupts. It was a spontaneous eruption in which the will of the people was magically transformed into deed: 'In short, France is a Republic in all senses of that word. ... The French people arose. They said: "*I no longer want a king* and the throne disappeared. They said once more: *I want a Republic* and here we are all Republicans."⁴³

⁴¹ Charles Collé's *La partie de chasse de Henri IV* is an intertext.

⁴² 'Il vaut mieux avoir pour voisin/Un volcan qu'un roi/Liberté ... Egalité'. *Le jugement dernier des rois*, 305. All citations are from Hamiche, *Théâtre de la Révolution*.

⁴³ 'En un mot, la France est une république dans toute la force du terme. ... Le peuple Français s'est levé. Il a dit: *je ne veux plus de roi*; et le trône a disparu. Il a dit encore: *je veux la république*, et nous voilà tous républicains' 310.

This same insurrection was replicated across Europe with each nation experiencing the exact same sequence of historical events, directed by a general assembly of sans-culottes based in Paris, each of which had its '14 juillet et 5 octobre 1789, son 10 août et 21 septembre 1792, son 31 mai et 2 juin 1793.'⁴⁴ To the old man's query about the missing French king and the meaning of the new term 'guillotine', the French sans-culotte gives the laconic reply: 'We have cut off his head, as the law commands.'⁴⁵ There is no mention of the rest of the royal family, of either Marie-Antoinette or her two children who have evaporated in the face of this entirely spontaneous, yet perfectly legal, revolution. Instead the momentous historical event of regicide is framed by a series of moral tableaux in which the origins and outcome of the Revolution perfectly align. The 'before' image is that of the old man and the savages who founded a new society based on natural sentiments. They communicate through pantomime, the language of gesture that, as the old man reiterates, is the original language of the heart. The 'after' image is that of a universal tableau of humanity, also expressed by pantomime, in which the sans-culottes and savages, communicating perfectly, gather around the old man as he offers a basket of fruit to the sun. Framed by these idealizing tableaux, the guillotine – like the volcano – is represented as a caesura of time. It is a force of rupture that restores history to its true origins in a natural time.

This theatrical representation of the unity, and moral innocence, of the revolutionary will, however, masks a profound contradiction. On the one hand, *Le jugement* stages the people as a political force in their own right. Once the European Revolution is over, the newly regenerated nations establish a European Convention in which the last judgment of all kings is proclaimed. Condemned to deportation, the monarchs are quarantined on a deserted island where they are to remain until the death of the last king. Maréchal is careful to insist that the sans-culottes themselves cannot kill the kings. Thus although the sans-culottes are presented as sovereign actors in history, they are visible only as an absence. The volcanic island, and not the international coalition of sans-culottes, enacts the true end of history. As Pierre Rosanvallon has noted, this trope of a volcanic eruption that would figure so prominently in the writings of Victor Hugo and others, identifies the people with a force of nature in part to account for their absence from the space of political representation.⁴⁶ Maréchal, however, goes one step further. The trope of a volcanic eruption is also

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 311. ⁴⁵ 'Nous lui avons tranché la tête, de par la loi' 309.

⁴⁶ See Rosanvallon, *Le peuple introuvable*, 39–40.

used to stage the autodestruction of the old régime. As the sans-culottes explain, the monarchs must be given the time to punish themselves with their own hands:

It is more appropriate to offer to Europe the spectacle of its tyrants imprisoned in a menagerie and devouring each other. ... It is satisfying to give them the time to mutually reproach each other for their infamy and to punish themselves with their own hands.⁴⁷

VOLCANIC LAUGHTER: *LE DÉFILÉ DES ROIS*

In addition to the linear time of moral progress, then, the dramaturgical staging of the Revolution as a kind of end-time also involves the comic time of inversion. In a world marked by an absence of violence, derisive laughter reached where the guillotine could not go, killing the remaining European monarchs by stripping them of their symbolic value as representatives of their respective nations. Through laughter *Le jugement* provided the instantaneous identification of spectators with revolutionary actors that enabled recent events of the Revolution, in particular the execution of the queen, to appear as a collective action performed by the sovereign body as a whole. As Jean-Marie Apostolidès has argued, it does so by staging a festive inversion of the religious act of self-sacrifice that once characterized the privileged destiny of the divine-king.⁴⁸ Maréchal's preface celebrates the play as an inversion of the traditional roles of spectator and actor. Emancipated from their traditional comic functions as servants and valets, it was now the turn of the people to laugh at *les grands* represented on stage.⁴⁹

Indeed by far the most popular aspect of the play was the *défilé des rois*, in some cases the only part of the play that was performed. Disembarking from their ship, the monarchs were made to enter one by one onto the stage, in a parody of the traditional royal procession. Royal mantles on their shoulders, golden crowns on their heads, a long chain, held by a sans-culotte, around their necks, the monarchs – some of whom like

⁴⁷ 'Il a paru plus convenable d'offrir à l'Europe le spectacle de ses tyrans détenus dans une menagerie et se dévorant les uns les autres. ... Il est bon de leur donner le loisir de se reprocher réciproquement leurs forfaits, et de se punir de leurs propres mains' 312.

⁴⁸ See Apostolidès, 'La Guillotine littéraire'.

⁴⁹ 'Citoyens, rappelez-vous donc comment, au temps passé, sur tous les théâtres on avilissait, on dégradait, on ridiculisait indignement les classes les plus respectables du peuple-souverain, pour faire rire les rois et leurs valets de cour. J'ai pensé qu'il était temps de leur rendre la pareille, et de nous en amuser à notre tour.'

George III were actively waging war against France – were presented as caricatured images of their formerly prestigious bodies. Made to avow their crimes to exuberant yelling and clapping, their judgment took place in an atmosphere far removed from the uncomfortable silence occasioned by the king's execution (or for that matter, the ambiguous reaction following that of the queen). This royal 'parade' clearly recalled the burlesque street festivals that were celebrated in the first six months of Year II, in which priests were made to ride asses backwards and effigies of the king and queen were burnt.⁵⁰ But it is one thing to celebrate a festival, quite another to represent 'une parade' on stage. Such a derisive spectacle was a complete break with anything staged in the past. It suffices to recall the objection of the actor Grandménéil who, horrified to learn that he was to play the role of the real king of Poland, expressed a fear of being hanged should monarchy be reestablished.⁵¹

Whether it was the king of Spain with his long, fake nose of flesh-coloured taffeta or the king of Sardinia dressed as a financier, the monarchs' costumes provided the de-ritualization of royal symbolism that Marie-Antoinette's trial, as I have argued previously, did not adequately provide. In particular, Maréchal's lecherous send-up of Catherine the Great, depicted at one point in a sexual act with the king of Poland, at another wrestling the pope, referenced the same licentiousness associated with the hapless French queen.⁵² This stripping down of the royal body achieved perhaps its purest expression in Boulogne-sur-Mer, in which Catherine the Great was performed 'au naturel' with all her *jewels* by a mustachioed man of the greatest height which represented quite well the modesty and decency that everywhere accompanies this august princess.⁵³

In contrast to the ambiguous self-destruction by incest performed in Marie-Antoinette's trial, Maréchal's play stages the end of monarchy as a kind of festive self-sacrifice. Significantly, the royal costumes, the most visible aspect of the royal body, are torn apart by the monarchs themselves. Abandoned on the island by the sans-culottes who, out of the goodness of their hearts, leave behind some sea biscuit, the monarchs are too monstrous to understand the true meaning of this act of grace. Rather than adapt to the state of nature and work the land for nourishment like

⁵⁰ See Vovelle, 'Les autodafés des personnes royales dans les mascarades de l'an II', 119–28.

⁵¹ Halläys-Dabot. *Histoire de la Censure théâtrale en France*, 9. Also discussed by Hamiche, 178.

⁵² The radical press frequently associated the two Catherines (Medici and the Russian empress) with Marie-Antoinette. See *Les crimes de Marie-Antoinette*, 433.

⁵³ 'Au naturel avec tous ses *ornemens* par un homme-moustaches de la plus haut taille qui ne rendait pas mal la modestie et la décence qui accompagnent partout cette auguste princesse'. Cited by Dommanget, 264.



Figure 8. *Queen Marie Antoinette (1755–93) on the way to her execution, 1793* (pen and ink on paper) by David, Jacques Louis (1748–1825) Private Collection/
The Bridgeman Art Library.

the old man and the savages, the monarchs instead fight over this barely edible ‘bread’ like a primitive horde, ripping their clothes off in the resulting frenzy. Despite the abundance of fruits on the island, the monarchs fight over this misperceived last meal, before being turned over to their executioner – the outraged volcano who engulfs the naked bodies. In this parody of the Eucharist, the monarchs symbolically auto-destruct before they are destroyed by nature.

This laceration of the royal costume echoes – in a festive mode – the stripping down of Marie-Antoinette’s own body during and after her trial. As Pierre Saint-Amand notes, this was a process that began with the confiscation of the queen’s wardrobe and ended with David’s highly abstract, final sketch of the queen, glimpsed by the painter from a windowsill on her way to the guillotine (see [Figure 8](#)).⁵⁴ The play’s success thus demonstrates the need to subvert the royal spectacle – the ability of the royal body to retain the public gaze – even after the execution of both king and consort. Whether in Marie-Antoinette’s trial in which the queen’s symbolic excess is stripped away in the effort to represent her death as a self-destruction, or in Maréchal’s play in which a volcano *supplements* the Revolution’s claim to have ruptured with the past, the logic is the same. For the volcano makes clear that the myth of natural time used by the revolutionaries to play the rôle of historical agent cannot reproduce itself through reason alone. It makes clear that the institution of a linear time of reason and moral progress requires the supplement of a symbolic terror, a way of achieving through fear what could not be achieved through historical violence.

THEATRES OF JUSTICE: THE SELF-EXECUTION AND SELF-GENERATION OF REASON

The same dramaturgical tactics that had destabilized the representation of the queen reappeared with resounding success in Maréchal’s play, which was a faithful representation of the revolutionary culture of Year II. And yet the fact that the queen retained a symbolic excess also reveals the Revolution’s failure to establish what Roland Barthes called a ‘mythologie’, a mythological time in which the social is passed off as natural.⁵⁵ Rather than take the Revolution’s claim to be living in a ‘mythological

⁵⁴ For Saint-Amand, this process signifies a denarcissification, a removal of the queen from the public gaze. See ‘Terrorizing Marie-Antoinette’, 267.

⁵⁵ See Barthes, *Mythologies*, 13–24.

present' for granted, I have argued that revolutionary culture in Year II relied on an ideology of restraint and non-violence to negotiate actively the meaning of historical events as they unfolded in time, in particular its own attitude to historical violence. This suggests that the Terror cannot be straightforwardly associated either with blind, unthinking violence or with a utopian flight from reality. Rather, it can be more accurately described as a dynamic and highly unstable process that emerged as a response to the Revolution's failure to institute its premise of rupture. Indeed expectations were changing so rapidly that even before the Terror was over, *Le jugement* ceased to be performed. By Year VIII, this play, which had succeeded in capturing the popular imagination in Year II, was attacked for being an 'indecent farce', 'a chef d'oeuvre of platitude, insolence and bad taste.'⁶⁶ Contemporaries slandered Maréchal's character. Henry Lumière called him a 'madman', 'a man tormented by a continual delirium' while Étienne and Martainville classified as abhorrent and barbaric the pleasure that Maréchal's theatre of cruelty evoked.⁶⁷

The fact that both the author and the play were so quickly rejected from the literary canon underlines a revolutionary culture destabilized by the very premise of a 'new time'. One detects beneath these charges of 'bad taste' a frustration with the need for a symbolic coding of violence that Maréchal's play represents and especially with his attempts to include the people (and popular taste) in the space of theatrical representation. But if subsequent literary history has, for the most part, forgotten Maréchal's play, it has also misunderstood the play's essential insight: that a non-violent 'self-executing' reason presupposes an understanding of historical agency based on the archaic myth of a self-sacrificing sovereign body. It is perhaps fitting to conclude with a literary precursor to Maréchal's play: the utopian fantasy of a completely voluntary and 'non-violent' execution found in chapter XVI of Louis-Sébastien Mercier *L'An 2440*.

Although a pre-revolutionary work, Mercier's novel about a utopian society of the future very much resembled the regenerated society that the revolutionaries claimed to have instituted in Year II. The fictional prototype and the nascent French Republic both claimed to be societies in which rational assent, and not violence, was the sole basis of political and moral legitimacy. In chapter XVI, Mercier even explicitly addresses

⁶⁶ 'Farce indécente, un chef-d'oeuvre de platitude, d'insolence et de mauvais goût'. *Le Tribunal d'Apollon ou Jugement en dernier ressort de tous les auteurs vivants, an VIII*, t. 2, 62–3. Cited by Dommanget, 271.

⁶⁷ 'Un forcené', 'un homme tourmenté par un délire continu'. Lumière, *Le théâtre français pendant la Révolution*, 212–20. Étienne et Martainville, *Histoire du théâtre français*, 122.

the problem eventually faced by the revolutionaries: how does one justify punishment in a society in which all decisions are supposed to reflect reason and force and coercion are a thing of the past? Mercier resolves this conundrum by constructing his utopian society as one in which even criminals voluntarily agree to be executed in order to serve as a model of reason and redemption for society as a whole. Perhaps because even for a utopian novel the idea of a criminal who rationally assents to his own execution was not entirely plausible, Mercier supplemented this fantasy of a 'non-violent' execution by imagining the criminal responding not just to the call of reason but also to the call of nature. On the day of the arranged execution, a 'divine wrath' demands the sacrifice that reason alone may be too weak to perform. The need for violence is thus acknowledged but only insofar as it remains symbolic, deflected in an image of a catastrophic, *natural* terror. In Mercier's story, as in Maréchal's play, rational society relies on a symbolic terror to maintain social cohesion, but only by denying the time of agents and their action. The execution of a criminal – be it a monarch, a pope or an ordinary citizen – appears as a rational process only if it is written twice, once as contingent, as the exercise of the sovereign will, once as necessary, as the expression of a natural terror.

Interpreted thus within the symbolic context of Year II, Maréchal's play holds the key to understanding the Terror as the attempt to accelerate, through spectacle, the very end of history in which reason could appear. In the end, the Revolution never did manage to transform the guillotine into a volcano. But in its struggle to align history with nature it bequeathed to posterity a profoundly non-synchronous understanding of progress. The importance of Maréchal's play, therefore, lies not just in his catastrophic vision of history in which revolutions – like volcanoes – periodically erupt to perform the will of the people. It is also crucial for showing how fiction was used to posit, in the realm of the imagination, what could not be affected in historical time. This escalating demand to make the Revolution 'real' rather than 'apparent' and the growing anxiety, across the political spectrum, to delimit historical reality from 'fiction' is the subject of the following chapter.

Unenthusiastic Memory
Imagining the Festive Calendar

Décadi 20 Brumaire An II would long be remembered as a high mark of inventiveness in revolutionary culture. This was the day when the Church of Notre Dame was rebaptized the Temple of Reason in the first official festival of Year II. It was also the day in which a semi-nude actress, incarnating the goddess of Liberty, unveiled herself to signal the triumph of reason over religion. To anyone familiar with French history, this living goddess is immediately recognizable as a popular incarnation of the French Republic. After 1792 she replaced the king as the symbolic representation of the French nation, appearing variously as the goddess of justice, reason and liberty before devolving into the familiar figure known as Marianne, who continues to this day to be incarnated by a living woman.

Today, the living goddess belongs to a specifically French history of revolution and counter-revolution, a history that, as Maurice Agulhon has noted, is characterized by the opposition between two political regimes, two regimes of social thought, and two symbolic systems.¹ But in Year II, the living goddess belonged to a different logic of revolutionary time, one that opposed the new world, based on secular time, to the ancien régime. The first festival of reason relied for its prototype on a festival originating in the Commune of Ris, outside Paris, whose inhabitants had replaced their patron saint with Brutus and dismissed their curé with the pledge that ‘the majority of their citizens no longer recognize any day of rest other than that of the *décadis*, any festivals other than those of the heart, any religion other than that of liberty’.² When the citizens of Ris substituted Brutus for their patron saint, they referred not just to the Roman past but also to the Roman *time* of the new Republic, symbolized by the new Republican calendar ratified on

¹ Agulhon, *Marianne au combat*, 49

² Aulard, *Le culte de la raison et le culte de l’être suprême*, 36: ‘La majorité de leurs citoyens ne connaît plus de jour de repos que les *décadis*, de fêtes que celle du cœur, de culte que celui de la liberté’.

5 October 1793.³ Just as Brutus replaced the patron saint of the village, so too the citizens of Ris stripped the Christian calendar of its saints to reveal the original Roman calendar of universal and civic time that lay beneath it. It was a short step from Brutus to a Roman goddess of Liberty, who, in the course of a few weeks, became a French goddess of reason. By the time the festival was celebrated in the Church of Notre Dame, and in subsequent re-enactments all over France, a living woman was opposed to the central female icon of Christianity, the Virgin Mary. The section des Tuileries hoped that such a festival would be repeated every *décadi*, effectively replacing Sunday Mass. Chaumette, the principal organizer, insisted that the day be inscribed on the new Republican calendar as the ‘day of Reason’, placing the goddess as an object among other objects – plants, animals and farming utensils – that henceforth replaced the gods and saints of the religious week.⁴

Partisans hailed the festival as a frontal assault on the entire ancien regime. Ancient symbols of authority, whether images or statues, exerted power over the people because they were believed to represent the very real presence of an eternal and divine truth. They were experienced not as arbitrary representations of the divine, but as an objective reality that had a material presence, going so far as to bleed or cry like humans. Images of the king or Christ may have represented a transcendental time external to society, but they were also experienced at the heart of civil society as a material presence that unified it from within. The living goddess, in contrast, was to initiate a new relation between the image and time (see [Figures 9](#) and [10](#)). Unlike the religious image, she heralded the triumph of life over death, the sensual presence of the material body over the transcendental soul. Replacing the transcendental – and from the revolutionary perspective now lifeless – body of the king, the living goddesses stood for a society unified purely out of a different kind of material presence, that of living bodies to one another.

The previous chapter showed how the trial of the queen attempted to deal with the problematic status of a rupture that was supposed to have been achieved with the death of the king. This chapter focuses on the problem of embodiment and abstraction: How does one incarnate a new regime – and above all a new symbolic power – based on abstract reason

³ The calendar reform was voted 5 October 1793, although Fabre d’Eglantine’s nomenclature was not adopted until 24 November.

⁴ *Archives Parlementaires* 78, 710.



Figure 9. *Brumaire (October/November)*, second month of the Republican Calendar, engraved by Tresca, French, c. 1794 (engraving) by Lafitte, Louis (1770–1828) Musée de la Ville de Paris, Musée Carnavalet, Paris, France/The Bridgeman Art Library.



Figure 10. *Messidor (June/July)*, tenth month of the Republican Calendar, engraved by Tresca, French, c. 1794 (engraving) by Lafitte, Louis (1770–1828) Musée de la Ville de Paris, Musée Carnavalet, Paris, France/The Bridgeman Art Library.

alone? Implicit in this question is the conflicting revolutionary attitude to the role of the body in political representation. With the death of the king and the establishment of a secular Republic, the revolutionaries had rejected the physical metaphor of the human body that had for so long associated the French nation with the monarch's physical presence. The revolutionary search for a non-anthropomorphic basis of representation was reflected not just in the natural borders that now defined the French nation, but also in the attempt to re-organize space and time according to measures derived from the natural body of the earth. The new metric system, decreed in 1791 and fully adopted in 1799, based its unit of length on the earth's meridian; the new Republican calendar was to apply this same decimal division to time. However, at the same time as they rejected anthropomorphic representations associated with the body of the king, the revolutionaries also renewed their emphasis on the natural body as the basis of all political and social representation. New representations of the body politic remained resolutely immanent only if they did not go beyond the equal, and, therefore, concrete, bodies of the citizens. The metaphorical body politic, thus, had to function as more than a mere symbol. It had to impinge directly on individual bodies and their senses. In other words, it had to reflect a new *rhythm* of time that would coordinate the individual bodies of the citizens, allowing them to perceive themselves as a collective subject.

But how was a secular calendar, based on natural patterns, to enable the same sense of rupture and renewal as a religious calendar? It is, after all, one thing for religions to invoke ruptures in time. It is quite another to demand the same ability to restart time from a secular and human history. How then was something as nationally circumscribed as the French Revolution to appear foundational enough to warrant a change in calendar time?

In what follows, I show how the fate of the goddesses of reason reveals much about the ways in which the revolutionaries attempted to endow secular history with the same power to break with the past as the Christian calendar that it had tried to replace. Before I do so I wish to make clear that I am not suggesting that the Republican calendar and the de-Christianization campaigns are one and the same. I *am* suggesting, however, that the festivals of reason are significant for understanding the whole project of calendar reform because the goddesses were thought capable of suturing the relation between individual physiology (bound up in old habits of perception) and the new rational world proclaimed by the calendar. A supplement at once unnecessary and all too critical, the

goddess was instituted alongside the calendar because she was supposed to symbolize, on the level of the individual body and sense perception, the cognitive rupture that the calendar was supposed to achieve on the level of the whole. This supplement of 'reason' to a traditional figure of female liberty reflects the entirely new intention that the revolutionaries wished to attribute to calendar time, one in which sense perception was to serve as a 'binding concept' authorizing a new shared way of understanding the relation between social values and natural constraints. But the fact that the goddess of reason was so quickly repressed, while the new calendar continued to be revived over the course of the entire revolutionary period, suggests a very different logic of time at work. By revealing that the living image could not perform the same function for the new calendar as the religious icons did for the old, the goddesses of reason produced a series of cascading fissures in almost every single aspect of the revolutionary premise of new time. The failure of the living goddesses to internalize the abstract time of the state thus raises fundamental questions about the whole project of calendar reform. Can reason be embodied? What would it look like? Can a rupture with the past be enacted without compromising reason?

THE GODDESS OF REASON AND THE TEN-DAY WEEK

Given the emblematic role played by the goddesses during the de-Christianization campaigns of 1793, historians have traditionally subsumed the festival of reason under the rubric of a 'revolutionary religion'. Alphonse Aulard famously interpreted the festival as an instance of the more general cooptation of religious ritual by rival political factions attempting to pass themselves off as 'incarnations' of the new Republic.⁵ According to this interpretation, the festival of reason reflected the militant atheism of the Hébertiste faction before being conquered by its antithesis: the Festival of the Supreme Being, organized by Robespierre. Mathiez, in contrast, argued that the festival of reason reflected the collective desire to found a new revolutionary religion. According to this (Durkheimian) view, the festival of reason was merely a trenchant example of the overall unity of a revolutionary imagination that attempted to replace Christianity with new religious 'forms of life'.⁶ More recently, Mona Ozouf has claimed that far from representing any clear intention, the festival of reason was in fact

⁵ Aulard, *Le culte de la raison et le culte de l'être suprême*.

⁶ See Mathiez, *Les origines des cultes révolutionnaires*.

a misnomer, designating any number of festivals that celebrated reason and liberty indifferently, often with the same scenario and using similar theatrical means.⁷ Neither of these interpretations, however, addresses the specific change in the conception of festive time once the new calendar was in place.

Until the institution of the Republican calendar, inaugurated two weeks prior to the first festival of reason, the revolutionary festivals had based themselves on heroic deeds and memorable events – the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789, the insurrection against the king on 10 August 1792, the festivals honouring the various martyrs. With the establishment of the new calendar, however, the task became something else altogether. In addition to the new chronology that was to establish an absolute discontinuity with the past, the Republican calendar was to integrate this new time into the thousands of ordinary relations that make up the everyday world. Whereas previously, the revolutionary festival had contributed to a mnemonically inflated depiction of the Revolution's first four years, now it was to mark the return to a new, uneventful, historically empty period of nature and reason.⁸

Central to the revolutionary understanding of time as both rational and natural, objective yet materially embodied, was the imposition of the *décade*. As Eviatar Zerubavel has noted, the week is the only major rhythm of human activity that reflects no natural pattern and is based solely on mathematical regularity.⁹ In its autonomy from both the lunar month and the solar year, the week represents one of the fundamental innovations by which man freed himself from dependence on nature. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the revolutionaries chose the weekly cycle to represent the autonomy of reason from tradition and the past. In the Christian tradition, Sunday traditionally represents a day of rest. Originating in the Jewish practice of the Sabbath, this day was chosen to represent the weekly repetition of the Resurrection celebrated annually at Easter. This observance of a holy day demarcated from all the other days of the week not only gave the Christian week its particular rhythm; it allowed the mythic time of Resurrection to be experienced in the here and now, as the very structure of daily life.

In contrast to the Christian week, the revolutionary *décade* aimed to institute a purely secular cycle of repeating days that no longer relied on

⁷ Ozouf, *La fête révolutionnaire*, 158–67. For an analysis of the Aulard-Mathiez debate, see also Ozouf, 'Revolutionary Religions' in *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, 564.

⁸ The term 'mnemonic inflation' is from Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, 28.

⁹ Zerubavel, *The Seven Day Circle*, 4.

the distinction between sacred and profane experiences of time. Although intended as a neutral mathematical unit that had no overt symbolic significance, the ten-day week also recalled the decades of the ancient Greek calendar, firmly placing the new calendar in direct lineage with the solar myths of the ancient world. This meant that, strictly speaking, the Republican calendar had no need for 'holy days' because every day was to be experienced as a holiday in which freedom and mutual equality were celebrated. Rousseau is perhaps the most famous proponent of this belief in a natural religion in which every day was a festival in which the mutual acknowledgment of a shared freedom – and the absence of social distinction – was the substance of every gathering. Seen in the context of this popular solar myth, the decade represented the revolutionary ideal of a festive society that remained entirely transparent, its homogeneous rhythm ensuring that the only spectacle that would take place was that of living bodies coordinating their daily activities with one another.

In addition to incarnating the revolutionary ideal of a body politic modelled on pure presence, the *décade* aimed to transpose to the order of time the circle of equality that was so central to the Revolution's self-image. If, as Émile Durkheim has argued, time is a functional analogue of a social division of space,¹⁰ then the new calendar aimed to incarnate materially, as an everyday lived experience, not just the natural body of the earth, but also the redistribution of social space on a Republican model. The same way in which the figure of the circle stood for equality because it was the only geometrical form from whose centre all points were equal, so too a weekly cycle based on a repetition of homogeneous units of time was supposed to ensure the perpetual duration of a similar equality in time. Lequinio's characterization of the new festive calendar as an 'image morale du cercle géométrique' best expresses this desire for a homogeneous body politic unified almost exclusively by the anticipations and repetitions of cyclical time:

It is necessary that everyone finds themselves simultaneously actor and spectator; that the joy of pure pleasure develops the feeling of trust; that everyone is given to understand that he is happy if he wants to be ... May the festival leave imprinted upon everyone, in a very profound way, the regret of seeing it finished and the keen desire to see the festive period return anew.¹¹

¹⁰ Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 346–7.

¹¹ 'Il faut que chacun se trouve acteur & spectateur tout en même temps; il faut que la jouissance des plaisirs purs y développe la confiance; que chacun ait à saisir qu'il est heureux s'il veut l'être. ... Qu'elle [la fête] y puisse laisser imprimé d'une manière très profonde, le regret de voir finir la fête & le vif désir d'en voir revenir la nouvelle époque'. Lequinio, *Des fêtes nationales*, An III.

However as Zerubavel notes, by replacing the Judeo-Christian seven-day week with a ten-day weekly cycle whose origin was Greek, the Republican calendar also revealed the socially constructed and, therefore, arbitrary character of all weekly cycles, a fact that ultimately undermined its claim to have instituted a time that was closer to nature.¹² In order for the *décadi* to prevail over the Sunday, a quantitative measure of time was not enough; a new qualitative feel to time was required. But how was the *décadi* to assert itself given that as a unit it remained identical to any other day of the week?

AN EMPTY CALENDAR

Year II represents the moment in which an ecstatic experience of living in a new time was supposed to become the model of, and sanction for, all human activity. Yet the same calendar that was to provide the qualitative experience of new time with an intentional structure was empty of festivals. In place of a perpetual communion of living bodies, the calendar granted neither a personal experience of lived time nor a collective or social rhythm of public time. Without festivals, the calendar risked becoming an empty concept, the mere form of enlightenment and not its actualization. Even worse, as the brochure *Cérémonies à l'usage des fêtes nationales, décadaires et sans-culottides* observed, the national festivals already in place had become hopelessly boring: 'always the same marches, the same trophies, the same lay-out, the same tone. This strange monotony has left minds hungry for variety, and from whence without doubt stems that coldness that has been remarked in the latest festivals.'¹³ According to this brochure, the very intensity of the great revolutionary festivals now highlighted a different kind of emptiness:

Keen emotions, great festivals, make us all the more weary of days empty of all pleasure. The more strongly the soul attaches itself to an object that provokes its admiration, the more it becomes fatigued when the objects which fixated it remain the same for too long, then the soul cools down because it no longer has anything to be enthusiastic about.¹⁴

¹² Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms*, 94.

¹³ 'Toujours les mêmes marches, mêmes trophées, même plan, même ton. Cette monotonie étrange, a lassé les esprits avides de variétés, et de-là sans doute, cette espèce de froideur qu'on a remarqué dans les dernières fêtes.' *Cérémonies à l'usage des fêtes nationales, décadaires et sans-culottides, de la République Française, saisies dans leur but moral, combinées dans leurs rapports généraux, et rendues propres à être exécutées dans les moindres Communes* par les Éditeurs du Rituel Républicain, BN Lb41 4055, 9.

¹⁴ 'Les émotions vives, les grandes fêtes, lassent encore plus la triste monotonie des jours vuides de tout plaisir. Plus l'âme s'attache fortement à un objet qui provoque son admiration, plus elle se

The emptiness of the new calendar was even more apparent when compared with the dizzying pace of historical events: the passing of the law of suspects on 17 September, the trial and execution of the Girondins in October, the declaration of revolutionary government in December, not to mention the wars waged both within France and without. How was a calendrical, and cyclical, model of revolution to reconcile itself to a secular history of human making? The Christian calendar had been able to synchronize historical and natural time because history itself was assumed to have one meaning, reflecting a stable natural world made in God's image. The new Republican calendar, however, had to synchronize natural time with a secular history that was linear and accumulative in nature. In so doing it had to navigate between two sources of emptiness: the loss of religious festivals and the open-ended empty future. In his speech on 14 Brumaire, Marie-Joseph Chénier warned that the immense accumulation of historical experience meant that the new festivals could no longer be subsumed under ancient models.¹⁵ It was not enough to go back to a Roman or Greek past; new festivals had to be invented. This call to inventiveness was enthusiastically heeded. According to Michel Vovelle, in the six months following the establishment of the new calendar, 5,000 documents regarding festivals passed through the Convention, 3,758 of which concerned the cult of reason.¹⁶ Between Frimaire and Floréal, the Convention received more than fifty proposals on the establishment of the *décade* as the new secular rhythm of time. That this took place despite ongoing political struggles indicates a strong consensus both from within the government and on behalf of the public on the need for a festive calendar.¹⁷

Despite this consensus, the new calendar faced two immediate challenges. First, this desire for a metrical calendar dissipated no sooner than it had been declared. As Mona Ozouf has shown, between Vendémiaire and Ventôse of Year II, a 'great wind of mockery' exploded the rational image of the revolutionary festival.¹⁸ Whereas before Vendémiaire, the first month of the new calendar, Jacques-Louis David's cortèges ruled

fatigue et quand ces objets qui la fixent, restent les mêmes pendant trop long-temps, alors elle s'attiédit, parce qu'elle n'a plus de quoi suffire à l'enthousiasme'. *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁵ M.-J. Chénier, *Discours prononcé à la Convention Nationale*, 15 brumaire, an II, *AP* 78, 373–6. Chénier argued that the 'inégalité prodigieuse d'expérience, de moyens, de connaissances positives, qui existent entre les sociétés anciennes et les sociétés modernes' meant that it was necessary to 'créer et non de compiler, d'inventer et non de se souvenir'.

¹⁶ Vovelle, *La Révolution contre l'Église: De la raison à l'être suprême*, 18.

¹⁷ Meinzer, *Der französische Revolutionskalender (1792–1805)*, 55.

¹⁸ Ozouf, *La fête révolutionnaire*, 150.

almost imperiously over the festive scene, the first six months of Year II were characterized by a dazzling variety of festivals: priests forced to ride asses backwards, effigies of the pope and cassocks set on fire, feudal insignia dragged around by goats and pigs. Such a festive enthusiasm opposed the association of reason with physical presence and a geometrical distribution of space by emphasizing a disjunction between appearance and reality that belonged more to the world of theatre. As Ozouf remarks, 'The greater the gap between appearance and reality, the more successful was the effect.'¹⁹ The fear was that these Saturnalian manifestations signified not the *presence* of reason, but its opposite – reason as carnival, a re-enactment of the very religious processions that the new calendar had intended to abolish. This implied a second, and corollary problem, namely that reason and the imagination suddenly appeared to belong to different temporal frameworks. In a significant statement, Chénier attributed this tension between reason and the imagination to two different speeds of progress: 'The field that swift imagination peruses and devours in one instant, seems to stretch out each day before reason which walks with slow steps but whose footprints imprint immortal traces upon the earth'.²⁰ Instead of a calendar that unified the different times of reason and the imagination, Chénier's statement implied that the imposition of a new festive calendar might have the opposite effect: that of exacerbating the difference between an imagination without reason and a reason lacking imagination.

STONE GODS AND LIVING STATUES:
HOW REPUBLICAN TIME BECAME DOUBLE

If the problem was a non-synchronicity – both between reason and the imagination as well as between nature and history – how was the living goddess a solution? The initial appeal of the living goddess, I would suggest, originated in part from her unique origins in both the egalitarian fantasies of the popular imagination and in materialist theories of cognition. In terms of the popular imagination, the living goddess was a fusion between the Roman goddess of Liberty, who was to replace the centrality of the Virgin Mary in Roman Catholicism, and the pastoral image of the Rose-Girl. The festival of the Rose-Girl or, *rosière*, was celebrated

¹⁹ Ibid., 145.

²⁰ 'Le champ que l'imagination rapide parcourt et dévore en un moment, paraît s'étendre chaque jour devant la raison qui marche à pas lents, mais dont les pas s'impriment dans la terre, en laissant des vestiges immortels'. Chénier, *Discours prononcé à la Convention Nationale*.

throughout the 1770s and 1780s. It originated in a festival in the village of Salency in which the most virtuous girl of the village was chosen by popular vote to win a dowry from the village seigneur enabling her to marry within the year. The *rosière* festival was popularized by Mme de Genlis in her writings as a kind of pastoral union of the social classes, in which the good seigneur laid aside his ancestral rights to the girl's virginity out of respect for her virtue, thereby ensuring her the freedom, and the material conditions, to follow her heart's desire. By the time of the Revolution, this village festival had become a full-fledged social movement, supported by such influential revolutionary figures as the Abbé Grégoire as a way of encouraging virtue.²¹

Equally important to understanding the living goddesses is the trope of the living or animated statue, popularized by Enlightenment writers such as Buffon, Bonnet and Condillac. Although the image of the living statue dates from at least antiquity, it received renewed attention throughout the eighteenth century as writers advanced a materialist view of cognition in which all knowledge derived from the senses and no ideas were innate. Condillac, for example, used the example of a statue that comes to life to demonstrate how humans can acquire reason merely through the communication of the senses. Proceeding by touch and through a series of observations, the statue, initially 'a body without a past', becomes a sentient being capable of reasoning, judging and remembering.²² Interestingly, this idea of a living woman who stimulates the development of reason also appeared in the early works of Sylvain Maréchal. In 1779, Maréchal imagined reason as 'a woman still young, neither serious nor frivolous, who would like to smile and whose delightful and instructive company would both please and excite curiosity, whose happy nature would lend itself without foibles to the weakness of those associated with her'.²³ In Maréchal's materialist vision of the Enlightenment, in which a

²¹ The popularity of the Rose Festival was such that in the *Almanach des honnêtes gens*, the day of 8 June, the traditional day of the festival, was dedicated to St. Médard, the bishop who allegedly founded the festival. For more on the Rose Festival see Maza, 'The Rose-Girl of Salency: Representations of Virtue in Prerevolutionary France', 395–412. According to Maza, abbé Grégoire thought that the *rosière* ceremony was the only social institution from the past worth keeping, 310.

²² This description of Condillac's living statue as a body without a past is drawn from W. Anderson, '1754 From Natural Philosophy to Scientific Discourse' in *A New History of French Literature*, 462–3.

²³ 'Une femme encore jeune, ni grave, ni folle, qui *aimeroit* à sourire, dont la société agréable et instructive *plairoit et intéresseroit* tout à la fois, dont le caractère heureux se *prêteroit sans foibles* à la *foiblesse* de ceux qui la *fréquenteroient*'. Maréchal, *Le livre de tous les âges*, 106. Also cited by Dommanget, *Sylvain Maréchal*, 279.

calendar of new time played a central role, the imagination needed to be first aroused, by visual charms, into 'loving reason'.

The first festival of reason, which took place in Notre Dame, featured a fabricated mountain, with a temple of philosophy at its summit and a script borrowed from an opera libretto. At the sound of Marie-Joseph Chénier's *Hymne à la Liberté*, two rows of young women, dressed in white, descended the mountain, crossing each other before the 'altar of reason' before ascending once more to greet the goddess of Liberty. This latter, whom Chaumette characterized as the 'chef d'oeuvre de la nature',²⁴ wore a white dress, blue mantle and staff associated with popular representations of liberty. She was, according to contemporaries, the actress and singer Mlle Aubry. As the *Père Duchesne* put it, 'those pretty damned ones sang better than the angels'.²⁵

That the replacement of the Virgin Mary with living statues of reason succeeded in shocking religious believers needs no explanation. What is less obvious, however, is the way in which the goddesses succeeded in dividing even those partisans of the calendar who otherwise supported the ideology governing the festival. As the *Révolutions de Paris* explained, the festival's intent was to induce a cognitive revolution whereby the senses would reveal a social world comprising the same characteristics as the empirical order of nature:

One wanted from the first moment to break the habit of every species of idolatry; we avoided putting in the place of a holy sacrament an inanimate image of liberty because vulgar minds might have misunderstood and substituted in the place of the god of bread a god of stone ... and this living woman, despite all the charms that embellished her, could not be deified by the ignorant, as would a statue of stone. Something which we must never tire of saying to the people is that liberty, reason, truth are only abstract beings. These are not gods, for properly speaking, they are parts of ourselves.²⁶

According to this article, the living woman cannot be deified because she is an intransitive image: she points to no symbol or meaning beyond

²⁴ AP 78, 711.

²⁵ 'Les jolies damnées chantèrent mieux que les anges'. Cited by Aulard, 55.

²⁶ On voulut dès le premier instant déshabituer les esprits de toute espèce d'idolâtrie; on se garda bien de mettre à la place d'un saint-sacrement un simulacre inanimé de la liberté, parce que des esprits grossiers auroient pu s'y méprendre, & à la place du dieu pain substituer un dieu pierre ... & cette femme vivante, malgré tous les charmes qui l'embellissaient, ne pouvoit pas être déifiée par les ignorans, comme l'eût été une statue de pierre. C'est donc une chose qu'il ne faut pas se lasser de dire au peuple: la liberté, la raison, la vérité, ne sont que des êtres abstraits. Ce ne sont point des dieux, car à proprement parler, ce sont des parties de nous-mêmes. *Révolutions de Paris*, no. 215; translation from Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution*, 64–5.

herself. Living images were to replace the stone statues of idolatry in the collective imagination in two ways: by motivating viewers to direct their memory *towards* sense perception and by stopping the flight of the imagination *away from* sense perception. But although the article clearly supports the use of images to re-educate the people into perceiving the natural order of things, it also shies away from justifying the festival in these terms, preferring instead to describe the woman as a theatrical prop, a way to give an added kick – ‘plus de promptitude et de vivacité’ – to the otherwise transparent Republican festival.

Thus at the same time as the living woman was hailed as a substitute for the mythic body, that is a new primal locus for a thoroughly empirical foundation of space and time, she was also denied this function. The danger was that in provoking desire for the living body the goddess also revealed desire, and not reason, to be the source of all intentionality. David many years later and in exile in Brussels, reminisced fondly about the ‘fresh charms of the goddesses’,²⁷ while a certain Jacques-Antoine Brouillet, in his imprecations to the Société des Amis of Avize, made little distinction between the sensuality and the *sensibilité* of the new imagination: ‘Goddess of Reason! Man will always be man. ... You offer us Reason, whose emblem you are, with such artlessness, that we will be tempted to confuse the copy with the original’.²⁸ In contrast, the atheist Salaville and the readers of his *Annales patriotiques et littéraires* found the effect mildly shocking, licentious even, to present so grave a figure as reason in so young and frivolous a form. He urged readers instead to free themselves from the allegorical imagination in its entirety and become accustomed to seeing ‘in a statue only stone, and in an image only canvas and colours’.²⁹ Robespierre in turn rebutted this secular understanding of representation as rooted in non-signifying, mute matter. In his deliberately unsensual Festival of the Supreme Being, the charming woman was replaced by, among other things, a colossal effigy depicting ‘atheism’³⁰ that was burnt to the ground partly in order to blunt the liveliness of this memory, the seductive woman who put such a pleasing face on the iconoclastic imagination.

²⁷ ‘Frais appas des déesses’. Cited by Ozouf, *La fête révolutionnaire*, 165.

²⁸ ‘Déesse de la Raison! L’homme sera toujours homme ... Tu nous offres avec tant de naturel la Raison, dont tu es l’emblème, que nous serions tentés de confondre la copie et l’original’. Cited by Aulard, 88–9.

²⁹ *Annales patriotiques et littéraires*, vols. 16–17 (Paris: 23 brumaire an II), 1467. Cited by de Baecque, ‘The Allegorical Image of France, 1750–1800: A Political Crisis of Representation’, 133.

³⁰ In David’s presentation to the Convention the statue of atheism dominates the whole tableau, with ambition, egoism, discord, false modesty and misery. *Plan de la fête à l’Être suprême*, AP 90, 142.

Faced with this excess of meaning, the festival's partisans insisted that reason should be incarnated not by actresses but by women who have proved their virtue. The prestige of virtue, as the aforementioned article in the *Révolutions de Paris* maintained, was sufficient to suppress a popular imagination that inclined towards the 'the license of desire and of speech'.³¹ Indeed in many provincial towns, it was middle-class women, not actresses, who played the role of reason. Michelet insists on this point to the extent of remarking, rather cruelly, that a particular goddess that he knew in her old age, a woman of irreproachable virtue, had always been quite plain.³²

Instead of imposing a unified vision of time, the living goddesses merely exacerbated the diverging interpretations of the meaning and function of the image in time. Starobinski has suggested that the problem lay in conflicting interpretations of the social bond. Theoretically, reason was supposed to be transparent, abstract, non-figural. Practically, the political education of the people was to be achieved by images since reason originated in sense perception.³³ As Geneviève Fraisse has pointed out, this double bind resulted in the difficult question of deciding what reason would look like. If it was abstract, it should be equally present in all bodies. If it was concrete, it existed only in particular (male and female) bodies and perceived with their particular (male and female) senses.³⁴ But the problem, I would suggest, ran even deeper. Instead of conjuring up a social world based on a natural order, the living goddess revealed what Ernst Gellner has called the 'reentry problem', a rift between the cognitive claims of reason and sense perception on the one hand and the social and cultural world on the other.³⁵ She exposed, in other words, the impossibility of using sense perception to reveal the kind of cosmos presupposed by the original calendars of mankind, a cosmos in which natural concepts and social roles interlocked. What a difference, after all, between Gilbert Romme's spare, abstract vision of an astronomical calendar based on reason and the Festival of Philosophy in Yvetot, which featured two goddesses, one for liberty and reason each, and a pregnant woman, 'a precious symbol of fecundity and abundance'.³⁶ Instead of a cognitive rupture

³¹ 'Licence des désirs et celle de propos'.

³² 'J'en ai connu une dans sa vieillesse, qui n'avait jamais été belle, sinon de taille et de stature; c'était une femme sérieuse et d'une vie irréprochable.' Michelet, *La Révolution Française*, 633.

³³ Starobinski, *The Invention of Liberty*, 102–3.

³⁴ Fraisse, *Reason's Muse: Sexual Difference and the Birth of Democracy*.

³⁵ Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book*, 172–98.

³⁶ 'Simbole précieuse de la fécondité et de l'abondance'. *La société populaire d'Yvetot donne le Détail de la fête du triomphe de la philosophie, 1^{er} Germinal l'an II, Aux Représentants du Peuple de la Convention Nationale*. Archives nationales, Dossier 'Calendrier Républicain', D/38/3.

binding concepts and social roles into a new unified, and totalizing, worldview, the living goddesses revealed a culture that had become open to political contestation. The result was not a *festival* of reason but a spectacular performance of rupture that emphasized speed over the durable change in social reality that new time was supposed to establish.³⁷

The association of the living goddess with a catastrophic imagination is clear from the many reports sent back to the Convention. On 19 Brumaire, Dartigoeyte and Cavaignac, two ardent de-Christianizers *en mission* in the Southwest, reported that 'two meetings of the Montagnarde Society of Auch sufficed to strike down religious ideas'.³⁸ The same speed of rupture was allegedly present in the festival of Reason held on the same day at Nantes, where 'in a spontaneous movement everyone swore to no longer recognize any other god and worship no other cult except that of liberty and equality'.³⁹ In Strasbourg, this speed was literally depicted by erecting a volcano, bearing the traces of a recent eruption, in a church: 'the mountain was covered with boulders: some appeared to have detached themselves quite recently from its peak, and one saw that some terrible catastrophes had newly passed within it'.⁴⁰ The mayor's speech boasted that the transformation of the church from a religious 'theatre of imposture' to a bona fide temple of reason took only three days. At the festival of the *église St Roch*, attended by a delegation from the Convention, the actor Monvel, who played the role of the Vieillard in Maréchal's *Le jugement*, justified the need for acceleration on account of the difference between good and evil speeds of time: 'Oh how time passes quickly when doing evil and drags with slowness when it is a question of doing good. With what difficulty does reason pierce that dark night that surrounds us with obfuscating prejudices'.⁴¹ Finally, a notable festival held on 9 Frimaire in Chartres featured a scenario in

³⁷ For other theatrical representations of the new calendar see Shaw, 'Time and the French Revolution', 74–5.

³⁸ 'Deux séances de la société montagnarde d'Auch ont suffi pour terrasser les idées religieuses'. Cited by Aulard, 136.

³⁹ 'Par un mouvement spontané chacun jure de ne reconnaître d'autre dieu & de n'avoir d'autre culte que la liberté et l'Égalité'. *Fête de la Raison*, Nantes, BN: Lb41 3S29.

⁴⁰ 'La montagne étoit escarpée de rochers: quelques-uns semblaient s'être détachés tout récemment de sa cime, et on voyait que quelques catastrophes terribles s'étoient nouvellement passées dans son sein'. *Description de la fête de la raison célébrée pour la première fois à Strasbourg, le jour du 3^e décadi de Brumaire de l'an 2 de la République une, indivisible et démocratique*. BN: Lb41 3528.

⁴¹ 'O que le tems si rapide pour le mal, se traîne avec lenteur quand il s'agit d'opérer quelque bien! que la raison a de peine à percer cette nuit profonde qu'obscurissent autour de nous les préjugés'. *Discours fait et prononcé par le citoyen Monvel, dans la section de la montagne, le jour de la fête de la Raison, célébrée dans la ci-devant Église de St. Roch, le 10 frimaire, an 2^e de la République, une et indivisible*.

which Surveillance – an Argus figure wearing a dress stitched together with numerous eyes – wrestled with the masked figure of Fanaticism, who held a torch spewing dark vapours. At the end of the play, the cloud lifted and the new world, composed of young boys and girls and (significantly, this time) a *statue* of reason, was revealed to the spectator. As the procurator of the Commune explained: ‘It took centuries to establish the absurd edifice of tyranny and fanaticism and only one tremor to reestablish the empire of reason and liberty’.⁴²

The government’s response to this proliferation of pseudophenomenal images of reason was swift and total repression. The fear of what Danton called the ‘prodigality of enthusiasm’⁴³ caused even self-proclaimed atheists to back away from the original ambition of calendar reform, namely to replace the religious festivals with a rational, abstract but no less embodied and unified experience of time. On 8 Frimaire, Chaumette retracted his iconoclastic position to claim that the best antidote to religion was not atheism but perfect indifference. His caveat is revealing: The liberty of religion should be allowed ‘provided that these dreams were neither too loud nor raving’.⁴⁴ Even Sylvain Maréchal, a lifelong proponent of a total revolution, concurred, describing the festivals as an ‘unforeseen blow’, ‘inopportune’ and ‘a setback’.⁴⁵ In a surprising retreat, this ardent atheist and agitator suggested that the best antidote to religion was ‘the most perfect indifference’.⁴⁶ The terms in which the de-Christianization campaign was abandoned suggest a mutual fear of a festive imagination run amok. In a remarkable speech of 25 Floréal, Payan criticized the

⁴² ‘Il a fallu des siècles pour fonder l’édifice absurde de la tyrannie & du fanatisme, il ne faut qu’une secousse pour rétablir l’empire de la raison & de la liberté’. *Récit de la fête célébrée pour l’inauguration du Temple de la Raison, dans la ci-devant Cathédrale de Chartres, le 9 frimaire, l’an II, de la République, une & indivisible*.

⁴³ Danton’s speech is worth citing in full. From the report in the *Républicain français*, 6 frimaire an II, 1526:

Il existe une loi qui charge un Comité de recevoir les renonciations des prêtres. J’en demande l’exécution. On exalte beaucoup trop des démarches impérieusement commandées par les circonstances. Sans doute, ceux qui les premiers en ont donné l’exemple ont mérité des félicitations. Mais il ne faut pas savoir un très grand gré aux autres entraînés par l’irrésistible torrent de l’opinion. Des Républicains ne doivent pas se livrer avec tant de prodigalité à l’enthousiasme, pas même pour honorer le prêtre de l’incrédulité. En thèse générale, il ne faut plus admettre les mascarades antireligieuses. Que les individus éclairés par la raison, qui sentent qu’il doivent apporter le matériel de leur culte, renoncent à en faire trophée. Notre mission n’est pas de recevoir des processions et d’entendre des prêtres qui abjurent: ce serait toujours les mêmes à parcourir, les mêmes discours à écouter. Il y a un terme à tout: je demande que ce terme soit posé.

⁴⁴ ‘Pourvu que les rêves ne soient ni trop bruyants, ni trop furieux’. Cited by Aulard, 225.

⁴⁵ ‘Un coup imprévu’, ‘intempêtif’, ‘à contre-tems’. *Révolutions de Paris*, no. 224, du 18 au 25 pluviôse, pp 478–80. Cited by Dommanget, 275.

⁴⁶ ‘La plus parfaite indifférence’. *Ibid.*, 276.

de-Christianizing campaign for erecting a new religion in place of reason, a religion whose power over the imagination resulted precisely from the equivocation of meanings.

Thus reason, in their words, took on whatever signification was useful for their interests. Sometimes it signified insurrection against liberty; sometimes it was the wife of a conspirator carried in triumph among the people. One day it was the actress who, the evening before, had played the role of Juno. ... In sum, a mythology more absurd than that of the ancients, priests more corrupt than those that we had overturned. Goddesses more debased than those of the fables were to reign over France.⁴⁷

Far from unifying reason and the collective imagination in a new rhythm of time, the living goddesses interposed a *fictional* imagination that exacerbated the rift between ritual and reason, the world of culture and that of nature. This fictional imagination effectively undermined the dramatic model of enlightenment, which assumed that a transparent and consensual society could be achieved through imitation and re-enactment. This not only implied the failure of the classical model of festive legislation. It also implied a new explicitly political function of the Republican calendar, one that severed all ties with the popular imagination in order to associate the fledgling state with abstract reason alone.

By 16 Frimaire, both atheists and believers voted to ensure the liberty of religious cults provided that they were privately and not publicly worshipped. With this decision emerged a new understanding of secular time that, I would suggest, reproduced a distinction between private religion and public law that was inherited from absolutism.⁴⁸ Instead of a calendar that represented a totalizing worldview, the deputies reinstated a double time that ensured that the public time of the state remained rational because it remained abstract – having nothing whatsoever to do with a popular imagination – while religion was consigned to the private sphere in which the ‘fictional’ imagination and nonreason alike had its place. This re-emergence of a double time did not just signify the end of a total social revolution that aimed to transform the hearts and minds of all men; it also resulted in a breakdown of the analogy with the Christian calendar. Unable to replace the Christian religion with a unified vision of society, the new calendar was used instead to establish a strict distinction between politics and religion, subordinating the religious sphere to the secular arm

⁴⁷ Aulard, 282–8.

⁴⁸ As Koselleck has argued, the privatization of religion and its subordination to the public reason of the state had been justified by the various European powers as a way of ending the wars of religion. See *Critique and Crisis*, 1988, Chapter 1.

of the state. The maintenance of the *décade*, the symbol of the autonomy of reason from tradition and the religious past, thus ensured that the public time of the state remained rational and progressive even as the dramatic model of enlightenment was abandoned. Indeed I would suggest that the living goddesses were so hastily repressed as much as to save Enlightenment philosophy from becoming fictionalized as it was to prevent a religious backlash. The calendar was used to associate the state with 'reason' and the progress of enlightenment even as the attempt to create a collective, embodied, thoroughly immanent imagination was abandoned. This explains why although the living image was repressed, the *décade* continued to be reinforced with a vehemence that made it one of the most powerful tools wielded by the state against religion. With the dissolution of the seven-day week, the traditional festive cycle of Catholicism was entirely destroyed or went underground, making the *décade* the most important symbol of the victory of the government over the ancien régime.⁴⁹

PUBLIC REASON, PRIVATE CULT:
DOMESTICATING THE GODDESSES OF REASON

In the historiography of the French Revolution, the festival of reason is normally considered to have come to an end with Robespierre's Festival of the Supreme Being, celebrated on 20 Prairial Year II (20 June 1794), on what was traditionally the day of the Pentecost. Erected upon the ashes of the living image (as we recall an effigy of atheism was burnt during the celebration), this festival was intended to be the first festival of a new decadal religion, which comprised thirty-six festivals corresponding to the thirty-six decades of the new calendar. Although this festival was celebrated barely eight months into the calendar's life, by spring 1794, many of the original supporters of calendar reform had met their end: The Hébertistes and Cloutz had been guillotined on 4 Germinal (24 March); while Fabre d'Eglantine and Chaumette met their death alongside the Dantonistes on 16 and 24 Germinal, respectively (5 and 13 April). However, and despite the early demise of many of its principal supporters, the Republican calendar continued to be enforced with renewed vigour.

But what does it mean to have a ten-day week in the absence of a materialistic and atheistic imagination? In his speech of 18 Floréal Year II

⁴⁹ See Meinzer, *Der französische Revolutionskalender*, 156; I discuss Napoléon's concordat, which in an important sense completed the original intent of calendar reform by taking away religious authority over time, in Chapter 7.

(7 May 1793) Robespierre strongly differentiated his proposed decadal religion from the festivals of reason. Whereas the festivals of reason had emphasized the living body, the new festive cycle was to reflect belief in the immortality of the soul. Accusing the de-Christianizers of erecting themselves as the 'fiery apostles of the void', Robespierre asked, How were people to continue to die for the Republic if their belief in the afterlife had been taken away?⁵⁰ The new festive cycle, Robespierre insisted, had to include a heroic dimension that was best expressed as the desire for immortality: 'A great man, a real hero, has too much self-regard to bask in the idea of his annihilation.'⁵¹ Whether for reasons of political expedience or out of true conviction, Robespierre insisted that only a belief in the afterlife could provide adequate symbolic justification of the guillotine, a tool of secular terror far more effective in wiping out opposition to the Revolution than any calendar. Indeed for many historians, the Festival of the Supreme Being was intended symbolically to justify the famous law of 22 Prairial, declared two days later, that sent more than 1,376 people to their death in less than two months and ended only with the death of Robespierre himself.⁵²

However, as Françoise Brunel has noted, to conflate the Festival of the Supreme Being with the laws of 22 Prairial is to adopt a post-Thermidorean discourse that wanted to lay the responsibility for the Terror at Robespierre's feet. Such a discourse conflates two temporal horizons that really ought to be untangled: the long duration of a future, permanent revolution that the festivals were meant to accomplish and the time of the present in which the guillotine repeatedly failed to operate what Billaud called 'le passage subit de la servitude à la république'.⁵³ Even in Robespierre's speech of 18 Floreal the two are hard to distinguish. With the return of the belief in the afterlife a sacrificial logic of transcendental time was maintained even as it was instrumentalized in service of the state. This is evident in Robespierre's use of Gregorian dates to commemorate the national festivals – 14 July 1789, 10 August 1792, 21 January 1793 and 31 May 1793 – which implicitly acknowledged a cumulative, epic quality to revolutionary history that had nothing to do with 'natural time'. At the same time, however, the renewed emphasis on the celebration of the weekly *décadi* implied a growing concern with acknowledging not just a new history but also a new egalitarian way of life.

⁵⁰ 'Apôtres fougueux du néant'. Robespierre, 'Discours sur les rapports des idées religieuses et morales avec les principes républicains, et sur les fêtes nationales', 18 floréal II, *AP* 90, 137.

⁵¹ 'Un grand homme, un véritable héros s'estime trop lui-même pour se complaire dans l'idée de son anéantissement'. *Ibid.*

⁵² See Lefort, 'The Revolutionary Terror'. Michelet famously described the Festival of the Supreme Being as a veritable Greek tragedy, *La Révolution française*, 804.

⁵³ Brunel, *Thermidor*, 47.

To resolve the problem of creating a lasting order Robespierre commissioned Sylvain Maréchal, inventor of the original revolutionary calendar, to write the thirty-six hymnes décadaires, twelve of which were lifted straight from Maréchal's *Almanach des Républicains*. It might be surprising to find this arch materialist and anarchist, friend of the recently guillotined Chaumette, linked to a state-sponsored festive programme (one moreover inextricable from the juridical Terror). However, Maréchal's participation appears less surprising if we consider the nature of the challenge, which had engaged him his entire life, namely how to recreate an egalitarian society voluntarily, in which the Revolution could be judged according to new norms. To create a truly free people it was not enough to insist on a historical, cumulative and linear understanding of the Revolution, which, as Robespierre indicated, would henceforth be associated with a patriotic and nationalistic memory. The Revolution would only be total if it could also be connected to the natural, repetitive and cyclical time of everyday life. In this regard it is significant that Maréchal's thirty-six hymns referred not to discrete events of revolutionary history but to two, complementary lifeworlds, each englobing and totalizing in its one way: the universal world of the human family (celebrated on those days dedicated to Mankind, Liberty and Equality, The Liberty of the World, Friendship, Frugality, Modesty, Hatred of Tyrans and Traitors and so forth) and the individual world of the nuclear family (celebrated on the *décadis* dedicated to Conjugal Faith, Paternal Love, Maternal tenderness, Filial Piety and so forth). We return once more to Maréchal's conviction that the family is the only true political subject of the Revolution because it is the only social unit capable of reproducing equality and love for humanity over time. A return to a natural time may not, strictly speaking, be possible but it can be reinstated in the sentimental time of domestic relations. What the Revolution had been unable to accomplish in the public, political time of the state, it was still able to accomplish in the private sphere of domestic, family life, which remained the sole, untouched sanctuary of reason.

In Maréchal's decadal festivals, the patriarchal family unit replaces the living goddesses as the repository of a new collective imagination. However, this shift to a sentimental religion based on paternal values did not mean that the living goddesses had completely disappeared. Indeed there is no better illustration of the changing function of the living goddess – and the changing boundary between public and private life that she implied – than another of Maréchal's works, his 1793 opera *La Fête de la Raison*. Censored by the state for its proximity to the festivals of reason and not given permission to be performed until almost a year later,

this one-act opera nonetheless offers insight into what the ideal festival of reason *could* have been. It also poses the central problem facing a secular revolution: Can people live without religion and if so, what will take its place? I would like to conclude by way of this work because it shows how a materialist conception of secular time was tolerated, even by such a militant revolutionary as Sylvain Maréchal, only to the extent to which it upheld a new moral order based on the cult of the family.

The opera consists of a double plot in which a church is converted into a temple of reason during a *rosière* ceremony. Instead of a traditional Sunday service, Alison is crowned the wisest girl in the village, the first of what the libretto promises will be many ceremonies in which living Rose-Girls will replace the 'worm-eaten saints' of the Catholic Church. In the course of the ceremony, the patron saint of the village is rejected in the name of the *décadi*, religious symbols are burnt in a bonfire and nuns dance the *carmagnole*. The curé abdicates to become a *sans-culotte* and even vows to go to Rome to *sans-culottize* the pope! Beyond these antics, the libretto also offers a didactic explanation of the living image that goes far beyond the simple physical identification of reason with a female body. This is because the *rosière* is also a young bride. She thus represents a *domesticated* woman, whose power over the transcendental time of the religious icon lies precisely in her association with a secular rite of marriage.

Lisis, Alison's lover, expresses the true meaning of the cult of reason as a marriage not just between two individuals, but more importantly, as a union between the demands of reason and those of the sentiments:

Alison has the prize: how sweet it is for me to be able
 To worship reason under the spell of such grace!
 Tender object of my heart! How sweet it is for me
 to see
 That in becoming attached to your shadow,
 I find myself once again on the path to duty!
 Alison has the prize. ... How sweet it is for me to be able
 To love reason under the spell of such grace!⁵⁴

The sentimental bond of marriage symbolizes the triumph of reason over the religious image. Lisis is able to adore reason in all its presence because

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Alison a le prix: Qu'il m'est doux de pouvoir
 Adorer la raison sous le charme des grâces!
 Tendre objet de mon cœur! Ah qu'il m'est doux de voir
 Qu'en m'attachant sur tes traces,
 Je me retrouve encore au chemin du devoir!
 Alison a le prix. ... Qu'il m'est doux de pouvoir
 Adorer la raison sous le charme des grâces!

he is able to adore it *both* as it is sensually embodied 'sous le charme des grâces' of his beloved *and* as an abstract moral law or 'duty'. Unlike the love for the religious image, which is predicated on the absence of the physical body, the cult of reason evokes sentimental attachment that communicates naïvely, that is, immediately, in the absence of images. In this secular marriage between Lisis and Alison the contours of a new foundational myth of the Republic can be discerned. The *rosière* ceremony is first and foremost a naturalized version of a social contract. Whereas the original *rosière* ceremony enacted a new kind of social contract between aristocrats and peasants (in which the seigneur gave up his rights to endorse the popularly elected Rose-Girl), here the social contract takes place in a society of equals. Like a love marriage, the new social contract is voluntary, sentimental and geared to the mutual happiness of all parties. Like a love match too, the new social compact goes beyond the merely symbolic to impinge directly upon individual bodies and their senses. A social body formed in the image of a secular marriage is a collective subject that will experience reason both naïvely, as something immediately and concretely embodied, and sentimentally, as a return to a natural law that will function as the source of *both* the imagination and reason.

At the same time, it is undeniable that such a concrete experience of equality is itself unequal insofar as it presupposes a new boundary between male and female bodies and the respective social spaces that they occupy. Marriage might represent the ideal unity of imagination with reason for the man; for the woman, marriage rewards as well as reinforces her strictly domestic virtues. As the normative force that ensures male desire will never stray beyond the path of reason, the woman remains outside of reason's sphere, confined to the domestic sphere of a private life dominated by the biological rhythms of reproductive life. Instead of a body politic that remained equal and concrete because unified by a homogeneous rhythm of time, Maréchal's opera suggests a division of labour between the life of the individual, in this case reasoning man, and the life of the species, that, as Geneviève Fraisse has noted, characterized the festivals of reason more generally. Rousseau had already famously advocated such a sexual division between rational and biological time in his *Émile* and in other writings. And as early as 1771 Maréchal himself had described a goddess of marriage in almost the exact same terms as his goddess of reason. Tall and majestic, with bright eyes tempered by 'amiable languor', the goddess of reason was modest without being prudish, inspiring 'love and respect'

in equal measure.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the return of such a domesticated image of female reason at this critical juncture when the Revolution was clearly failing to embody its own premise of a new time allows us to understand the deeper continuity between an atheist and materialistic imagination obsessed with the notion of rupture and the bourgeois cult of family life. By the time the Directory promulgated a series of laws in Year VI that reinforced the *décadi*, Maréchal's private fantasy had become a matter of public policy. Civil marriage on the *décadi* became the primary means of enforcing the state's power in a secular rite that was openly compared to the social contract of the new Republic.⁵⁶

Out of the initial failure of the living goddesses to manifest the presence of reason there emerged a new temporal boundary by which the state attempted to construct the private sphere after its own image. The fact that the decadal week continued to be reinforced with vehemence even as the materialistic basis of the original revolutionary calendar was abandoned, suggests that secular time was no longer imagined in terms of concrete presence but had become a political tool wielded by an increasingly interventionist state. And yet the fact that the living goddesses continued to survive in the popular imagination, long after the Republican calendar itself was abandoned, suggests a vision of secular time that ultimately escaped control of the state. At a very minimum, the goddesses' long and eventful life as symbols of opposition and contestation throughout the nineteenth century indicates the triumph of secular history over nature. Thus the same move by which the family unit came to symbolize a 'natural time' of the state also made visible the impossibility of such a return to nature. The triumph of the living goddesses and, conversely, the failure of the natural calendar that they were intended to embody, reveal a culture open to political contestation. They also reveal a revolution that, unable to go backwards in time, could only go forward, establishing itself as a cult of history rather than as a memorial to natural time.

⁵⁵ *Le Temple de l'Hymen*, 41. Cited by Dommanget, 279.

⁵⁶ Arguing in favour of the 30 August/13 Fructidor Year VI decree stipulating that all marriages be celebrated on the *décadi*, Heurtault-Lamerville significantly defined marriage as 'un pacte volontaire avec la société, la nature et le bonheur'. *Conseil des Cinq-cents: Opinion de Heurtault-Lamerville. Député du Cher & membre de la commission d'instruction sur les fêtes décadaïres* (Messidor VI/16.7. 1798), BHVP 12272.

CHAPTER 6

Perishable Enlightenment Wearing Out the Calendar

After Thermidor, when the revolutionary symbols – the goddesses, the caps, the artificial mountains – had all but disappeared, the calendar still survived. For twelve years, two months and seventeen days, French history unfolded according to Republican time. Napoléon's Coronation and even the first year of the Empire were marked with the revolutionary calendar, before it was finally abolished on 1 January 1806. The overthrow of Robespierre on 9-10 Thermidor was followed by a renewed commitment to the *fêtes décadaires*. The crushing of the royalist revolt in Vendémiaire Year IV was followed by the reinforcement of a revised Republican calendar. So too was the coup of 18 Fructidor Year V, when the government re-established the *décadi* with a vehemence surpassing even the de-Christianizing campaign of Year II. Even after 18 Brumaire, a date that signals the end of the revolutionary period in many history books, the calendar was re-enforced even as Napoléon eliminated all the revolutionary festivals with the exception of two: 14 July celebrated on the old chronology and 1 Vendémiaire celebrated on the new. Finally on Germinal Year X, Sunday was re-established as the official day of rest even though it was not until three years later, on 15 Fructidor Year XIII, that the calendar was officially abandoned.

Each government acted as if the calendar still provided the absolute framework or horizon of time, even as each used the calendar to pass off its own version of events as representing the true course of revolutionary history. The result was a calendar that succeeded in accruing historical meaning even as it failed to provide a unity of time. This is evident in the way in which the various coups d'état all assumed the memorable names of the new calendar: 9 Thermidor, 22 Vendémiaire, 18 Fructidor, and 18 Brumaire. Even the political parties, as contemporaries pointed out, came to be known by the partisan names of Thermidoreans, Vendémiaireans and Fructidoreans.¹

¹ See Dorat-Cubières, *Le calendrier républicain poème lu à l'Assemblée publique du Lycée des Arts, le 10 frimaire an III* (Paris: An Septième), 21. See also Furet and Richet, *The French Revolution*, 363.

Gaining historical resonance as it lost symbolic meaning, the calendar found itself splintered into different epochs, each associated with a different retrospective on the Revolution. What kind of legitimacy then did the calendar continue to provide even as it found itself fractured by this new dynamic of revolutionary history?

In the following two chapters, I show how the calendar whose initial mandate was to institute a fixed perspective, an absolute standpoint in time that changed the meaning of *both* past and future, dissolved into a *panorama* featuring a changing cast of revolutionary administrations, each of which left its mark on the calendar. This loss of fixed perspective marked not only the failure of the Revolution's premise of rupture but also introduced time as a major actor in revolutionary representation. Like the revolutionary calendar, the panorama is a pictorial representation also invented in the 1790s. Its major novelty was to offer the viewer continually changing scenes or tableaux that succeeded one another in time. If revolutionary history had come to resemble more a panorama than a calendar, it is because of a growing realization that linear, not cyclical time was the appropriate framework for understanding events. In the absence of a functional calendar, events could be unified as a 'tableau' only by virtue of being continually displaced in linear succession.

The increasing use of the Republican calendar as a panoramic device to frame linear time, that is to give revolutionary history a semblance of unity it otherwise lacked, had important consequences for the way in which the Revolution tried to take into account its own historicity. In this chapter, I will focus on two related uses of the Republican calendar after the end of Year II. First, I will consider how the calendar was used to emphasize a new relation to history, which involved constructing new origins for the Revolution in the utopian Enlightenment. Second, I will consider how the calendar was used not just against the Catholic Church but also against the materialistic, atheistic imagination of the same utopian Enlightenment that it now claimed as its 'true' origin. My contention is that the calendar continued to attract so much support from the various revolutionary administrations because the Thermidorean Republic exercised its own legitimacy through a type of double time. In addition to maintaining the distinction between the 'private' time of religion and the 'public' time of the state, the Republican calendar was also used to erect a boundary between a stratified, mobile society, on the one hand, and the putatively egalitarian and geometric space of the state, on the other. Henceforth, an 'objective' account of revolutionary history would be associated with the egalitarian and rational state, while the merely

'subjective' experiences of social inequality and material deprivation would be relegated to the sidelines of history. It is from these sidelines that a new radical revolutionary movement would emerge, one that voiced its criticism of the Revolution from the standpoint of an ideal future rather than an ideal past.

THE CALENDAR DEBATES OF III, IV, VI

Clearly the calendar was thought to provide continuity there where the political process did not. This was especially the case after 9 Thermidor, when the downfall of Robespierre was hailed as the end of factionalism. Once again we find the indefatigable Barère using astronomical metaphors to hail Robespierre's overthrow as truly the last 'revolution'. The people had accomplished their 'revolution' on 31 May, he said; the Convention completed its 'revolution' on 9 Thermidor.² To reinforce the illusion that revolutionary history had a unity and centre, a series of extraordinary parallelisms were constructed. Robespierre was now the new Cromwell, the new Cataline, the new Charles IX. He was compared to Louis XVI and the guillotine was moved back again to the place de la Révolution, as if repeating this threshold event for one last time. It was even suggested that 9 Thermidor be amalgamated with the Festival of 10 August where two thrones were to be burnt – one for the king and one for the 'last tyrant' Robespierre.³

For Baczko, these inevitable synchronisms reflect a growing tension between past and present, the desire to create a break in the history of the Revolution while pledging continuity with it.⁴ As Baczko points out, even though 9 Thermidor was unanimously hailed as a moment of collective regeneration, in truth this was the moment when the illusion of a collective regeneration was finally expelled. The commune was silently liquidated (108 deaths in three days that were not mentioned either in the Convention or in the press); and, although prisoners were released, no amnesty was decreed and the law of suspects was retained. Given the continuation of repressive practices, 9 Thermidor stands out less for being the 'end' of the Terror than for the speed with which the recent past was revised. Tallien, one of the masterminds of the Terror, constructed an entire systematic theory of Terror all the better to lay the blame at Robespierre's feet.⁶ In so doing he echoed Barère, the first to speak of a 'système de la Terreur' that emanated from the despotic rule of one

² Brunel, *Thermidor*, 115. ³ See Baczko, *Ending the Terror*, 13, 14. ⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵ See Brunel, *Thermidor*, 109.

⁶ See the extended discussion of Tallien's speech in Baczko, *Ending the Terror*, 49–52.

man while conveniently ignoring that he was the one who demanded that Terror be placed on the agenda when the sans-culottes invaded the Convention on 5 September 1793.⁷ But perhaps the most striking revisionist was the pamphleteer and conventionnel Guffroy. The same Guffroy who had called so vehemently for Marie-Antoinette's head and whose intransigence earned him the nickname Citoyen Échafaud was now charged with investigating, and in all likelihood tampering with, Robespierre's personal papers in addition to publishing anti-Robespierrist pamphlets and persecuting his former allies.⁸ Even Sylvain Maréchal's otherwise highly irreverent one-act opera, *Denys Le Tyran*, with music by Grétry, was read as an attack against Robespierre.⁹ First performed on 6 Fructidor II (23 August 1794) it featured a deposed tyrant who becomes a tyrannical schoolmaster in Corinth until he is exposed by the chorus of schoolchildren. Although this opera expressed Maréchal's long-standing anti-monarchism, it is easy to see how it too was used to consolidate the myth of a tyrannical Robespierre.

The claims of rupture and the speed of revision mask what is in many respects a deeper continuity that links the two sides of 9 Thermidor. Robespierre may have been killed and the Republic of Virtue dismantled, but the men of the Convention were, for the most part, the same. Their lives, as Furet points out, were the biographical link between the Republic and the events of the Revolution.¹⁰ They could not begin the Revolution again because they themselves had written the pages of revolutionary history. Nor could they repudiate the past because, as Ozouf has argued, the majority were regicides.¹¹ More critically perhaps, these legislators had failed to provide the very thing that they had been elected to do in September 1792 when Year I had first been declared: a working constitution.

By Year III the Revolution was already six years old and a constitution had yet to be established. Whereas the revolutionaries had originally intended to found a constitution in an original source, what Keith Baker has called a 'zero point at which society existed prior to, and independent of, its form of government',¹² history had gone forwards without it. This assumption

⁷ Baczko, *Ending the Terror*, 49; Martin, *Violence et Révolution*, 189; Brunel, *Thermidor*, 12, 115.

⁸ Kusckinski, *Dictionnaire des Conventionnels*, 316–17.

⁹ See Couvreur, 'Le diable et le bon dieu ou l'incroyable rencontre de Sylvain Maréchal et de Grétry', 108.

¹⁰ Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, 152.

¹¹ Ozouf, 'Calendrier Républicain', 544.

¹² Baker, 'Constitution', 485. Baker traces this revolutionary notion of a constitution as something to be created rather than found and preserved in existing laws and ordinances to 4 August, when

that constitutions were only legitimate if they reflected an uncountable Year Zero, was central to the Revolution's claim to have created a new political order based on abstract reason alone. As Pierre Rosanvallon has remarked, the most radical rupture was one affected by reason because only reason was capable of opposing a new world based on unity and indivisibility against an old world marked by heterogeneity and social distinction.¹³ Regeneration of the body politic would be complete when the whole was interchangeable with each one of its parts such that there was no division, no difference, and especially no concept of ongoing historical differentiation. Within this logic of parts and wholes, the dominant paradigm for historical change remained a static one, in which the historical past was exchanged wholesale for a new totality. Events and chance played a negligible role and history was not granted an accumulative force of its own.¹⁴

By Year III, however, such a static and mechanistic conception of rupture was no longer possible. Already a year earlier, the *Almanach de Gotha* had remarked: 'The history of many centuries does not present as many unforeseen and great events, as many rapid changes in fortune, as many memorable transformations in the destiny of entire nations, as present history offers us in the space of a few months'.¹⁵ An event that, in the past, would have characterized an entire year, and that 'one generation would have passed down to the next', had become 'something half-forgotten in the space of a few days'.¹⁶ The very speed and congestion of events made any historical understanding of the relation between the past and present impossible. It is as if the Muse of History had abandoned her chisel. Transfixed, with 'a dreamy air', 'she does not dare yet write its history, nor explain its causes and outcomes'.¹⁷

the 'Assembly decided almost unanimously that the constitution would indeed be preceded by a declaration of rights', 483.

¹³ 'L'opposition du vieux et du neuf est le plus manifeste quand elle se traduit physiquement par le face-à-face de l'homogène et de l'hétérogène'. Rosanvallon, *Le peuple introuvable*, 35.

¹⁴ Ian Hacking argues that the eighteenth century had no positive concept of change. He cites Hume: 'Tis commonly allowed by philosophers that what the vulgar call chance is nothing but a secret and concealed cause'. *The Taming of Chance*, 13. This same notion of chance as a 'vulgar superstition' is found in Maréchal's own works, including his *Voyages de Pythagore*.

¹⁵ 'L'histoire de quantité de siècles n'offre pas autant de faits aussi imprévus et aussi grands, de vicissitudes aussi rapides de la fortune, & de changemens aussi mémorables dans le sort de nations entières, que nous en offre actuellement l'espace de quelques mois'. *Almanach de Gotha pour l'année 1794*.

¹⁶ 'Un évènement, qui peut-être eût suffi pour caractériser toute une année, un évènement, que dans tout autre tems une génération eût encore raconté à la suivante' est actuellement une chose à moitié oubliée au bout de quelques jours'. Ibid.

¹⁷ 'La Muse de l'histoire fixe, d'un air rêveur, ses regards sur le drame intéressant & compliqué qui se joue sous les yeux; mais le burin lui est échappé, elle n'ose point encore en tracer l'histoire, ni en développer les causes & les suites'. Ibid.

This same experience of historical acceleration confronted the authors of the Constitution of Year III. Boissy d'Anglas argued that the new constitution could not be based on the postulate of a Year Zero because the Revolution now had its own past, its own history from which lessons needed to be learnt: 'Oh, it is a great undertaking to obtain by wisdom an outcome that normally is only achieved by time. If we must preempt the future, let us learn from the past'.¹⁸ As the Revolution's past and future moved apart at an alarming rate, time once again became an actor in history. Boissy d'Anglas maintained that the Revolution's attempt to accomplish 'six centuries in six years'¹⁹ had transformed even the recent past of revolutionary France into a ruin. From the perspective of Year III, the Revolution's origins were as distant as those of a long lost age, suggesting both the force of political rupture and the unfinished nature of the historical process.

Yet despite the admission that the Revolution now had its own history and despite the speed of events, which impeded all attempts at establishing historical meaning and causation, the Republican calendar continued to exist. This suggests that the denial of historicity on the part of the political elite was just as strong as their acknowledgement of it. For it was one thing to acknowledge the historicity of the Revolution's past, another to acknowledge its corollary – an increasingly unknowable and open future. One important reason for denying the existence of such a future was to foreclose what François Furet has called the 'unlimited nature of rights'.²⁰ Did one have the right to resist oppression as in the constitution of 1789? To insurrection according to the constitution Year II (1793)? To education, work and food in addition to liberty (again the constitution of Year II)? Can rights be limited in the interests of stability and the law as in the constitution of Year III (1795)? A constitution respecting individual liberty assumed that one had the freedom to develop in unforeseen and unequal ways and, consequently, that the future could not resemble the past. Conversely, a constitution that insisted on maintaining equality presupposed a cyclical time in which the future would resemble the past and human nature would remain identical over time. The Constitution of Year III tried to have

¹⁸ 'Ah! c'est une grande entreprise que d'obtenir par la sagesse un ouvrage que souvent on n'obtient que avec du temps; mais, puisque nous voulons devancer l'avenir, enrichissons-nous du passé'. *Discours préliminaire au projet de Constitution pour la République française, prononcé par Boissy d'Anglas au nom de la commission des onze dans la séance du 5 messidor an 3* (23 juin 1795), 4.

¹⁹ 'Six siècles en six années'. *Ibid.*

²⁰ Furet and Richet, *The French Revolution*, 163.

it both ways: It claimed to ensure both individual freedom and social stability; both individual rights and social duties. Article 4 of the section on duty even defined citizenship in morally prescriptive (and communitarian) terms, insisting that a good citizen was a good son, good father, good brother, good friend, good husband. Despite its avowal of linear time, the Constitution of Year III continued to uphold a paradigmatic understanding of history as consisting of a series of exempla that repeat.

It is significant in this regard that Boissy d'Anglas still framed revolutionary history as a tableau. That is to say, he presented the Revolution as if there was still a fixed point or perspective from which the truth of its history could be revealed; an axial point from which the Revolution could still be conceptualized as an event that went backwards and forwards in time, revising the relation of *both* future and past:

It is by reflecting on the broad outline [tableau] of the causes of the Revolution, of the progress of public knowledge, of the stormy succession of opinions and events; it is by reminding yourselves of where you started from, the road down which you have been led and the position you find yourselves in, that you should be able to determine the end which you wish to reach.²¹

Far from acknowledging an open future, then, Boissy d'Anglas sought to return to what he called the Revolution's 'true' origins in Enlightenment ideas of reason and philosophy. The French Revolution was neither the outcome of unique historical events nor the creation of a few individuals.²² Rather it was 'the result of enlightenment and civilization, the fruit of centuries and of philosophy'.²³

Two characteristics were necessary for such a historical revision to be persuasive. First, the Revolution had to appear en bloc as one event that seamlessly fulfilled the promise of enlightened progress. Second, the Revolution's postulate of rupture had to be maintained, if only to ensure the continuing presence of an axial moment that transformed a largely contingent series of events into a necessary relation between past and future. Both these conditions were amply fulfilled by the revolutionary festivals, which, as Mona Ozouf has shown, contributed so much to

²¹ 'C'est en méditant sur le tableau rapide des causes de la révolution, des progrès de l'esprit public, de la succession orageuse des opinions et des événements; c'est en vous rappelant le point d'où vous êtes partis, le chemin où vous avez été entraînés, la position dans laquelle vous êtes, que vous pourrez assigner vous-mêmes le terme où vous voulez arriver'. Boissy d'Anglas, *Discours au projet de Constitution*, 4.

²² *Ibid.*, 5.

²³ 'Le résultat des lumières et de la civilisation ... le fruit des siècles et de la philosophie'. *Ibid.*

representing the historical events of the Revolution as if they belonged to their own time, a period unlike any other.²⁴

As the renewed discussion of the *fêtes décadaires* in Year III makes clear, this was the beginning of a historical reflection on the recent past. Not only was the discussion over the declaration of rights reopened,²⁵ the preferred origins for the Revolution were now to be found in reason and philosophy. Year I was still required to represent a rupture with the past but henceforth legislation and not violence was to secure the true path of the Revolution's future. Lanjuinais, an opponent of calendar reform represented this new anachronism succinctly when he voted to keep the Republican chronology while warning the Convention of associating a new constitution, which should last for centuries, with a calendar that merely represented what he disparaged as the brief instant of the revolutionary administration. Lanjuinais justified his position by explaining: 'The Republican chronology must stay, it existed before the reform and is independent of it.'²⁶ Even the proponents of the new calendar shared this unease. The decree of 7 Fructidor Year III, signed by Marie-Joseph Chénier, renamed the last five days of the Republican calendar 'complementary days' instead of the highly charged 'les sans-culottides', whose memory was now to be abandoned.²⁷ It is worth noting, in this regard, that Gilbert Romme, the calendar's chief architect, met his end in what turned out to be the final spasm of the militant politics of Year II. He was condemned to death for supporting the armed insurgents who invaded the Convention demanding the Constitution of 1793 during the Prairial uprising of Year III (20 May 1795). Romme committed suicide along with five other Montagnard deputies the day before he was to present his final solution to the problem of the leap year to the Convention.

If thus the revolutionary government of Year III relied on the calendar to frame the Revolution as the outcome of a linear progress of enlightenment, it did so on condition that the calendar underwent a process of 'dematerialization'.²⁸ Just as the death of Romme and the 'Prairial

²⁴ Ozouf, *La fête révolutionnaire*, 203–4.

²⁵ Baczko, 'Thermidorians', 406–8.

²⁶ 'L'ère de la République doit subsister, mais elle existait avant l'innovation, elle en est indépendante'. *Opinion de Lanjuinais sur l'introduction du calendrier des tyrans dans la Constitution Républicaine*. (Thermidor III/August 1795). ADVIII/15/C, pièce 173.

²⁷ *Loi, portant que les cinq derniers jours du calendrier Républicain, seront nommé jours complémentaires*, du 7 Fructidor, an 3. AD VIII/15.

²⁸ I am adapting here a term that Pierre Rosanvallon applies to the revolutionary conception of law and order. Rosanvallon explains how, for the object of law to be presumed general, it needed to exclude all specificity and become completely abstract in its treatments of persons and things.

Martyrs' marked the end of popular politics and the disarmament of the Parisian sections, so too the calendar no longer reflected the presence of the people but rather a purely immaterial, rational civil time comparable to the revolutionary division of space.²⁹ Similarly, just as the new geographical division of France into eighty-three administrative departments was intended to erase every pre-existing community of origins and interests, so too a purely civil calendar was intended to erase every pre-existing community of memory by instituting a neutral and instrumental division of time. Rameau called for a festive calendar that would, as he put it, wisely space out the principal epochs of the Revolution in order to avoid 'the multiplicity of festivals, their congestion'.³⁰ Lanthenas was even more explicit about the reduction of time to a kind of spacing of history. In place of the festive crowd – whose presence was to signify that the government represented the sovereignty of the people – he envisioned the festival as a kind of population control. The first article of his proposal states, 'The people will be marshaled into neighbourhoods and divided in multiples of tens, hundreds and thousands'³¹ with the gloss 'These divisions will reflect the varying degrees of movement the People require to exercise their right to sovereignty and to fraternize.'³²

As Lanthenas indicates, this abstract experience of space-time was used to redefine the meaning and political function of sovereignty. It was no longer a question of a lived experience of equality but of instituting a law that applied to all people equally insofar as it remained abstract or general: 'Equality of status', Boissy d'Anglas declared, 'is all a reasonable man can demand. Absolute equality is a chimera, for in order for it to exist, there needs to be complete equality between the intelligence, virtue, physical force, education and fortune of all men.'³³ Rejecting as 'primitivist' the idea that a rupture with history alone was sufficient to bring

This, in turn, shaped the objects of the law such that the 'application of generality became a process of dematerialization'. *The Demands of Liberty*, 56.

²⁹ For the policing of the new calendar see Shaw, 'Time and the French Revolution', 105–9.

³⁰ 'La multiplicité des fêtes, leur congestion'. Rameau, Just, *Apperçu philosophique et politique, sur la célébration des Décadés et des Fêtes nationales* (Nivôse III/Jan. 1795), BN Le 38.1206.

³¹ 'Le peuple sera organisé par voisinages et par divisions de dixaines, centaines et milles'. Lanthenas, François-Xavier, *Projet de loi, ou cadre pour l'institution des fêtes décadaires* (Nivôse III/Jan. 1795), AN ADVIII.17.

³² 'Ces divisions correspondront aux divers mouvemens dont le Peuple a besoin pour exercer son droit de souveraineté, & pour se réunir fraternellement.' Ibid.

³³ 'L'égalité civile voilà tout ce que l'homme raisonnable peut exiger. L'égalité absolue est une chimère; pour qu'elle pût exister, il faudroit qu'il existât une égalité entière dans l'esprit, la vertu, la force physique, l'éducation, la fortune de tous les hommes.' Boissy d'Anglas, *Discours au projet de Constitution*, 21.

about complete social and moral regeneration³⁴, Boissy d'Anglas accused the radical public sphere, and in particular the Jacobins, of not respecting the complexity of a modern agricultural state such as France, of wanting to change 'all our houses into cabins, all our towns into hamlets, and all our fields into deserts, who would ruin all to flatten everything out'³⁵. To posit unity against history, to replace heterogeneity with homogeneity was to deny the complexity and also historicity of a society that was both commercial and agricultural at once.³⁶

Boissy d'Anglas explicitly relates this differential enlightenment and its corollary – the restriction of voting privileges and representation to the select few – to property ownership. Those who did not own property did not have the leisure to think and, therefore, were not free to reason and deliberate. As lifelong 'domestics', they were condemned to a life of perpetual immaturity, parroting the received wisdom of their masters.³⁷ They were excluded from any public sphere not just by their social condition but also because of the way their social condition positioned them in relation to time and history. The unpropertied lived only for the present and hence were incapable of distinguishing between their true and apparent interest. Property-owners, in contrast, preferred 'what was good for the future to that of the present-day'.³⁸ In passages remarkably similar to Court de Gébelin's pre-revolutionary analyses of the astronomical and agricultural origins of civilization, Boissy d'Anglas argued that only a specialized ruling class, based on land ownership, manifested the long-term commitment that ensured the Revolution's stability. Property-ownership was thus the vital link that stretched both backwards to the origins of civilization, and forward into the enlightened future, in which the revolutionary administrators would replace the priest, that archetypal figure of feudal agricultural organization.

If the calendar continued, therefore, to be a central feature of the new government it did so as a purely civil calendar that signalled the victory of Enlightenment ideology over two forces: those who wanted to

³⁴ As he put it, 'Un pays gouverné par les propriétaires est dans l'ordre social; celui où les non-propriétaires gouvernent est dans l'état de nature'. *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁵ 'Toutes nos maisons en cabanes, toutes nos villes en hameaux, et nos champs en déserts ... qui ruinoient tout pour tout niveler'. *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁶ For further discussion see Livesy 'Agrarian ideology and commercial republicanism in the French Revolution'.

³⁷ 'Ainsi l'homme en état de domesticité ... il ne possède plus en effet son indépendance naturelle; il a changé contre un salaire quelconque une portion de sa liberté; il est soumis à un autre homme dont il emprunteroit malgré lui les opinions et les pensées, et donc il doubleroit l'influence dans les deliberations publiques', 23.

³⁸ 'L'intérêt de l'avenir à celui du jour'. *Ibid.*, 22.

destroy the Revolution by returning to monarchy and those who wanted to destroy the Revolution by insisting on a return to natural equality. Baczko has suggested that what needs to be thought of together is not the Thermidorean reaction against the utopian horizon of Year II; rather reaction and utopia need to be thought of together.³⁹ This is especially the case with the Republican calendar, which continued to draw on a utopian festive culture that originated in Year II even as expectations of collective regeneration were abandoned. In his *Essai sur les fêtes nationales*, Boissy d'Anglas called on the festivals to apply the 'effect of time' on the establishment of social institutions.⁴⁰ Not only was time now acknowledged as a new actor in history; by describing how the 'torrent' of events had overtaken all attempts to educate a truly Republican 'people' Boissy d'Anglas openly admitted the failure of the Revolution to return to an ideal norm.

Given the absence of any real experience of cyclical time, the festivals were now used to simulate a *pseudocyclical* time of an aesthetic education. The primary goal of the festivals was no longer to celebrate the birth of a new time but to teach old eyes to see new things. Just as a child learns to respect institutions because he associates them with the wonder with which he perceived the world for the very first time, so too the aim of the Republican festivals was to reproduce, through sentiment and affect, our original naïve relation to the world. Aesthetic novelty would play the same role in the modern world that historical venerability did for the ancien régime, recreating on the individual level what Boissy d'Anglas called the 'prestige of old memories', the power of 'original impressions'.⁴¹ Expressing a similar disappointment in the French Revolution, the German philosopher Friedrich Schiller would likewise insist that only an aesthetic education was capable of creating the kinds of living forms able to institute a 'new people'.

In Year III, then, the Republican calendar was faced with a new challenge, namely, how to keep alive the feeling of living in a new time, necessary for an aesthetic education, while foreclosing an increasingly open future, equally necessary if the Revolution was to present itself as the fulfilment of Enlightenment progress. In order to square the circle and satisfy these two incompatible demands, the revolutionary administration returned once more to the utopian Enlightenment, which was

³⁹ Baczko, *Ending the Terror*, 224–5.

⁴⁰ Boissy d'Anglas, *Essai sur les fêtes nationales: Suivi de quelques idées sur les arts et sur la nécessité de les encourager: adressé à la Convention Nationale*.

⁴¹ Boissy d'Anglas, *Essai sur les fêtes*, 20.

now resurrected in aesthetic rather than political terms. It has become a commonplace to claim that the Revolution, by insisting on a static vision of time, revealed the totalitarian nature of the utopian Enlightenment.⁴² But this is somewhat of an oversimplification. For in reviving in full force the pastoral festivals, the athletic games and even the fantasies of the great communal arenas depicted in the utopian drawings of Boullée and Ledoux, the revolutionary administration was also actively engaged in emptying the Enlightenment of its radicalizing potential. Rather than return to an 'eternal norm' derived from the past, these utopian spectacles aimed to accelerate the arrival of the future and thus expressed a different expectation of what history could or could not do. This is especially the case with the fairs dedicated to industrial progress, organized by François de Neufchâteau, the revolutionary playwright and minister of the interior under the Directory. Not only were these festivals the forerunners of the world fairs so popular in the nineteenth century, but they also demonstrated a new relation to time: the arts and sciences were associated with an exclusively linear time of progress even as they were celebrated according to the cyclical terms of 'festive time', complete with ancient temples, fireworks as well as the civil holidays associated with the Republican calendar.

Music in particular became increasingly important especially as the revolutionary festivals were attacked for being too pedagogical and abstract. As the one medium capable of appealing immediately to the senses while remaining 'non-representational', music was an ideal expression of an abstract yet 'emotional' social bond. Echoing François de Neufchâteau's efforts, La Revellière-Lépeaux, one of the three directors of the Conseil des Cinq-Cents, would insist on distributing song sheets to the crowds. LaRévellière-Lépeaux opined that choral music and in particular military rhythms were the only way to include the universality of spectators into the representation.⁴³ And composers such as Méhul even went so far as to write compositions in which two to three thousand people were made to sing in rounds. In a theoretical tract published in Year IX, the composer Grétry gave renewed importance to the familiar argument that in 'all the earliest legislation and moral philosophies ... harmony alone ... can transform man into a being capable of sharing with others life in the same society.'⁴⁴ Music thus supplemented a festive pedagogy that in other

⁴² See, for example, Mona Ozouf, *La fête révolutionnaire*, 23.

⁴³ La Revellière-Lépeaux, *Essai sur les moyens de faire participer l'universalité des spectateurs aux Fêtes nationales*, 16.

⁴⁴ M. J. Grétry, *De la vérité* (Paris, an IX), II, 214. Cited by Alexander L. Ringer, 'J. J. Barthelemy and Musical Utopia in Revolutionary France', 358.

respects had failed to generate a sentimental social bond. This emphasis on military rhythms and harmony constituted what was arguably the French Revolution's greatest contribution to European music of the early nineteenth century: the funeral march. Beethoven would come to admire the music of Luigi Cherubini, who wrote the funeral hymn for General Hoche (1797) and would later incorporate the funeral marches made famous by the French Revolution into his own music.⁴⁵

If, therefore, the deputies turned to the calendar to enforce a notion of festive presence they did so in part to evacuate any such presence from all other spheres of the state. The calendar and its festivals thus remained a legitimating norm for the Revolution even as civic time had come to signal a neutral time whose main function was to solidify state administration of everyday life. Brunel has suggested that the summer of 1795, not 9 Thermidor of the year before, marked the decisive break with the political culture of Year II.⁴⁶ Indeed the adoption of the new constitution was followed by the laws of 3 Brumaire IV decreeing that all festivals take place on the *décadi*, except two: the foundation of the Republic on 1 Vendémiaire and the celebration of the end of tyranny on 9, 10 Thermidor. The assimilation of the Revolution to the 'bad' Terror was now complete. The project of regeneration was henceforth to be subsumed under a completely chronometric 'rational' division of time.

However, the open acknowledgement of time as an actor in history revealed new fissures in the revolutionary problem of embodiment and abstraction. Whatever the deputies tried to do – whether forcing marriage to be celebrated on the *décadi*, upholding the marriage bond as the sentimental social contract⁴⁷ or marshalling Napoléon's military victories as themes for national festivals – nothing seemed to make the abstract

⁴⁵ To signal two of the most famous revolutionary funeral compositions – Gossec's *Marche lugubre* for Mirabeau's funeral in 1791 and Cherubini's *Hymne funèbre* for General Hoche in 1797. Beethoven's own funeral marches include the third movement of the *Piano Sonata No. 26*, a forerunner of the famous funeral march in the *Third (Eroica) Symphony* and a great influence on Chopin. Following the adoption of the Republican calendar in Venice in 1797, the Committee of Public Instruction also sought to impose a 'democratic' musical theatre. See Feldman, 'Opera and Sovereignty', 389–433. For the importance of marches and rhythm in elaborating a suitably Republican musical culture see Passler, *Composing the Citizen*, 120–7, 151–4.

⁴⁶ Brunel, 89.

⁴⁷ Creuzé-Latouche argues that 'le mariage est du droit naturel; & considéré dans cette abstraction, il n'est que l'union intime & volontaire. Mais dans l'état social, le mariage s'étend à bien d'autres conséquences'. 8. Heurtault-Lamerville evokes the marriage ceremony as compensation for a loss of belief in the afterlife: 'Il est un pacte volontaire avec la société, la nature & le bonheur: il est une conquête sur la destruction totale de nous-mêmes'. 5. *Conseil des Cinq-cents. Opinion de Heurtault-Lamerville. Député du Cher & membre de la commission d'instruction sur les fêtes décadaire* (28 Messidor VI/16.7.1798), BHVP 12272.

social bond represented by the new state appear concrete. Time revealed its practical side as a synchronization of everyday habits that resisted the demands of history while history revealed its ideological side as an abstract totality that had nothing to do with a personal experience of a life world.⁴⁸ One engineer to the committee of public instruction complained 'there is nothing real in the benefit gained by the exact subdivision of the month into three decades'.⁴⁹ Another anonymous letter writer, the self-styled 'Republican Priest' claimed that the very idea of a tenth day of rest was 'a chimera and source of annoyance for people who want to have their religious festivals and days of rest every seventh day at least'.⁵⁰ The scientific reign of reason might be chimerical, but the fish markets, the days of abstinence, the days when rent was paid and loans were due remained very much real.⁵¹

By Year VI, even the deputies most sympathetic to the new calendar were forced to recognize what Barennes called the 'sad bareness' of its festivals.⁵² As the deputy Jean Debry put it, recalling the warning of Mirabeau, French society was graced with such great social mobility that the people needed to be 'always surrounded by some marks of prestige'.⁵³ Unless the Republican calendar too was associated with prestige, Debry feared that the entire regime would be reduced to an abstraction. The government was now faced with two new challenges: how to make abstract reason concrete and how to suppress an increasingly mobile and competitive society

⁴⁸ We can see here the beginnings of a growing conflict between the time of history, associated with state ideology and the attempt to establish a 'false totality', and the practical activity of individual life described by Kosik in 'Dialectics of the Concrete'.

⁴⁹ 'Il n'y a rien de réel, dans l'avantage de la sous-division exacte du Mois, en trois Décades'. Letter from A. Pereix, l'ingénieur-ordinaire des Ponts et Chaussées résidant à Billon, Département du Puy-de-Drôme, 16 Thermidor, An 3. Aux Citoyens Représentans du Peuple, composant le comité d'instruction publique. *AN F17 1135, 2, pièce 26*.

⁵⁰ 'Une chimère et une source de gêne pour le peuple qui veut avoir ses fêtes religieuses et ses jours de repos au moins tous les sept jours'. Anonymous letter, dated 25 Thermidor, an 3. F 17 1135, 2, pièce 20.

⁵¹ This was a constant battle. Even in Year VI the government insisted that the municipalities 's'attacheront spécialement à rompre tout rapport des marchés au poisson avec les jours d'abstinence désignés par l'ancien calendrier'. *Arrêté du directoire exécutif qui prescrit des mesures pour la stricte execution du calendrier républicain*, No. 683. bulletin des lois, no. 194. 14 Germinal, an VI, 3. This policing of work and market days continued a policy of centralization begun in the ancien régime. As Shaw has shown in his research on police archives, it is 'possible, at least in terms of the policing of work, to view the new calendar within the context of growing, and long-term, official interest in the regulation of everyday life and a concern for social order, particularly in towns and cities' 120.

⁵² 'Triste nudité'. *Conseil des Anciens. Opinion de Barennes, député de la Gironde, sur la résolution du 6 thermidor, relative aux fêtes décadaires*, 2.

⁵³ 'Environner toujours de quelques prestige'. *Conseil des Cinq-cents. Motion d'ordre faite par Jean Debry, sur la célébration d'une fête consacrée à la souveraineté du peuple. Séance du 11 pluviôse an 6*, 5.

in which individuals were primarily motivated by prestige and individual degrees of difference rather than equality and sameness.

THE MULTIPLE EPOCHS OF A PRACTICAL AGE

The discredit in which the new calendar has fallen now that it is now longer sustained by revolutionary fanaticism would have dispensed us from publishing this review if this very calendar was not still being paraded by some sophists as the masterpiece of human reason.⁵⁴

So begins the preface to the *Examen critique du nouveau calendrier*, a pro-Catholic pamphlet published in Year V. As the pamphlet goes on to argue, the fundamental problem with the Republican calendar is that all its stated aims are already successfully fulfilled by the Christian calendar. The Christian calendar has the advantage of being both universal and practical, precisely what the Republican calendar is not. It is universal because it shares a seven-day week in common with almost all religions, ancient and modern, over the world; practical because it emphasizes a civic time that unites men together in trade and commerce regardless of which government or country they live. The Republican calendar, in contrast, is as far removed from the real world of agriculture and labour as it is from the world of commerce, which requires a uniform synchronization of time. Even its months only reflect seasonal variations that hold for certain regions and not the whole of France. The continual persistence of the Republican calendar, the pamphlet warns, highlights not the ascendancy of the 'age of reason' but the redundancy of philosophical reason for the modern age:

It is, in fact, a hindrance for modern philosophy, this marvellous agreement of all the earth's people regarding the division of the months into weeks. It is a hindrance for philosophy, this unanimous testimony of mankind in favour of a division of the week as old as the earth itself and to which nearly all nations owe their religion.⁵⁵

The parochial nature of the age of reason is not the only subject of attack. The pamphlet also accuses the calendar of being a narcissistic self-

⁵⁴ 'Le discrédit où est tombé le nouveau calendrier depuis qu'il n'a plus été soutenu par le fanatisme révolutionnaire, nous eût dispensé de faire paraître cet Examen si ce même calendrier ne nous étoit encore présenté par quelques sophistes, comme le chef-d'oeuvre de la raison humaine'. *Examen critique du nouveau calendrier*, 1797 An V, 1.

⁵⁵ 'Il est en effet embarrassant pour la philosophie moderne, cet accord merveilleux de tous les peuples de la terre dans la division des mois en semaines. Il est embarrassant pour la philosophie, ce témoignage unanime du genre humaine, en faveur de cette division des jours aussi ancienne que le monde, et que la presque totalité des peuples a leur culte'. *Ibid.*, 8.

projection of the philosophe. It speaks not to the people at large but to 'the city-dweller, the scholar, and above all poets'⁵⁶, who see in the calendar their own preferred self-image: 'In this way, we can clearly see how in all these philosophical institutions their creators are only addressing one another.'⁵⁷ According to this analysis, the failure of the calendar to be reasonable is precipitated in part by cynical self-representation. Instead of a calendar emphasizing unity, it is characterized by nothing but perishable self-interest. Even the festivals dedicated to merit merely encouraged the egotistical drive for distinction: 'In this way the philosophical year will end just as it started; everything will relate to man and everything will be limited to his ephemeral self-interest.'⁵⁸ The article concludes by rejecting the *dérison* of *philosophie* in favour of the *longue durée* of tradition, habits and practical reason. The evidence against the new calendar seems incontrovertible: 'Oh what, in the end, do all these *carefully thought out* festivals matter to the seven-eighths of the people who do not *think* at all!'⁵⁹

In contrast to the ephemeral and rapidly mutating Republican epoch, the Catholic Church now represented itself as belonging entirely to the modern age. It has become the torchbearer of religious pluralism, tolerance, freedom of opinion, even the separation of church and state – all traditional Enlightenment values. The Catholic Church thus combatted the new epoch inaugurated by the Republican calendar by urging the legislators to associate the new constitution not with a parochial and limited 'age of reason' but with a truly universal, civic time and a far more ancient and hallowed declaration of human rights and fraternity: the Christian one.⁶⁰ As Chateaubriand scathingly put it, the seven-day week might not be rational and scientific but it successfully accomplished the one thing the Republican calendar could not: align pleasure with faith.⁶¹

⁵⁶ 'Le citadin, l'homme d'étude et de cabinet, les poètes surtout'. Ibid., 27.

⁵⁷ 'C'est ainsi que l'on peut voir clairement dans toutes les institutions philosophiques que leurs auteurs ne se cherchent qu'eux-mêmes'. Ibid., 28.

⁵⁸ 'Ainsi l'année philosophique se terminera comme elle aura commencé; tout s'y rapportera à l'homme, tout s'y bornera à son intérêt périssable'. Ibid., 32.

⁵⁹ 'Eh! Qu'important en effet toutes ces fêtes *pensées*, aux trois quarts et demi du peuple qui ne *pense* point?' Extract from the *Annales Catholiques* No. 34, 1er mai 1797, article 'Quinzaine de Pâques' appended to the preceding *Examen critique*, 42.

⁶⁰ See, for example, the *Consultation sur cette question: Doit-on transférer le dimanche au décadi*, signed by the bishops of Amiens, Blois, Belley, Wandelaincourt, Saurine, Dax, Versailles and Cayenne (Paris: L'imprimerie Librairie Chrétienne, 1797), 8: 'Il y a dix-huit siècles que Jésus-Christ nous donne dans son évangile la déclaration des droits la plus sublime, en annonçant aux hommes qu'ils sont frères. ... Aussi l'église, en déterminant les occupations interdites les dimanches, maintient la faculté de pouvoir, en ce jour, donner la liberté aux esclaves. Elle vouloit par-là rappeler aux hommes leur fraternité et l'égalité de leurs droits primitifs.'

⁶¹ Chateaubriand, *Génie du christianisme*, vol. 2, 66.

It is in the context of this anti-philosophic turn, that the Directory attempted to find new ground for the calendar. The cult of Theophilanthropy represents one such last-ditch effort to combat church influence. Although the cult did not have the official approval of the regime, it was widely accepted that the revolutionary government had supported its creation in order to enforce public allegiance to the *culte décadaire* and to combat a Christian religion that still celebrated the Sabbath on Sunday. This cult included many prominent members of the government including Daunou, the author of the Constitution of Year III, La Révellière-Lépeaux; Valentin Haüy, director of the famous Institut des aveugles; and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. It also counted amongst its supporters more radical members of the literary fringe including Marie-Joseph Chénier and, it is alleged, for a brief time, even Sylvain Maréchal.⁶² Its main innovations – replacing priests with fathers of families and forbidding any reference to images, religious or historical – reproduced many of the central ideas of eighteenth-century deism.

Where this cult differed from deism, however, was in the way in which it self-consciously avoided all reference to any strong interpretation of cyclical time. If the theophilanthropists embraced linear time it was because, as Mme de Staël noted, they were at heart a modern religion: ‘although linking themselves with eternal ideas, the theophilanthropists are modern in their religious practice’.⁶³ A typical hymn included the following:

Less imperfect than their ancestors
Our grandsons will see
the birth of more virtuous successors
whom even better ones will succeed⁶⁴

Not only did the Theophilanthropists attempt to purify Christianity of religion but they also aimed to purify reason of the materialist imagination and by extension the more radical expressions of the public sphere, which, as we have seen in previous chapters, emphasized physical

⁶² Dommanget, 337.

⁶³ ‘Les théophilanthropes, quoique se rattachant aux idées éternelles, sont dans leur culte de création moderne’. Cited by Mathiez, *La Théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire (1796–1801)*, 269–70.

⁶⁴

Moins imparfaits que leurs aïeux
Nos petits-fils verront éclore
Des successeurs plus vertueux
Que de meilleurs suivront encore

Rituel des théophilanthropes, contenant l'ordre de leurs différents exercices et le recueil des cantiques, hymnes et odes adoptés dans les différents temples, tant de Paris que des départements. Paris: An VII. Cited by Mathiez, 249.

presence and embodied representation. In a striking symbol of this 'new Enlightenment', Valentin Haüy's choirs of young blind men were invited to sing services to a congregation that presented itself as similarly unseeing, using reason and not the imagination to picture before itself the moral progress of mankind. This suggests that the historical significance of Theophilanthropy and its official counterpart, *le culte décadaire*, lies not so much in the way it interpreted deist philosophy but in the way it made Enlightenment beliefs about progress and reason safe again.

It is perhaps for this reason that the Directory's increasing emphasis on surveillance and state administration of everyday life was accompanied by a surprising indifference to radical criticism. Censorship was lifted and journalism flourished (190 new journals in Year V alone)⁶⁵ even as public opinion was ever more tightly controlled. Once again, there is no better place to test the limits of tolerance – and what kind of enlightenment the Directory constructs – than with Sylvain Maréchal, the original founder of the cult of the 'père de famille' and sharpest critic of what the revolutionary public sphere had become.

STILL IN YEAR I: MARÉCHAL'S PRODUCTIVE YEARS

In Year VI, Maréchal entered what was to be the most creative period of his life. Between Year VI and his death in Year X (18 January 1803), Maréchal published his most critical writing. This includes the *Pensées libres sur les prêtres, Cultes et Loix d'une Société d'hommes sans Dieu* and *Correctif à la gloire de Bonaparte*, all published in Year VI, the *Voyages de Pythagore* and the *Histoire universelle en style lapidaire* in Year VII, the *Dictionnaire des athées anciens et modernes* in Year VIII and the *Projet d'une loi portant défense d'apprendre à lire aux femmes, Pour et contre la Bible* and the roman noir *La femme abbé* in Years IX and X. It could be said that Maréchal never lived more like a true 'philosophe' and atheist than under the 'bourgeois Republic'. At the same time, he was never a more open critic of such a regime, testing the very limits of its tolerance.

This critical stance led to events that would ensure Maréchal a place in history – his involvement with Babeuf and other members of the insurrectionary circle known as the Conspiracy of Equals. Maréchal had supported Babeuf before, directing him to Bonneville's journal *Le Cercle Social* and to his own *Révolutions de Paris* in December 1793.⁶⁶ We see him again in Year IV aligning with Babeuf in order to reopen the question

⁶⁵ Jones, *The Great Nation*, 533. ⁶⁶ See Dommanget, 233; 303–7.

left unanswered by the revolutionary government: What was the relation between an increasingly unequal, differentiated and mobile society on the one hand and the formal equality proclaimed by the state on the other?

Babeuf, like Maréchal, rejected the 'right of property' guaranteed in the Declaration of Rights. He joined other members of the Cercle Social in calling for an economic equality based on the redistribution of property and modelled on the land distribution that Tiberius and Caius Gracchus were thought to have imposed on the Roman Republic. In 1795 he founded *Le Tribun du Peuple*, whose motto, printed on every front page, was that 'the goal of society is the common happiness.' Its subject, Babeuf claimed, was not news but the 'making manifest' of the people's true interest and 'goal', which was the fulfilment of equality. Babeuf was rearrested in March 1795 only to emerge from prison six months later to assume leadership of the Club du Panthéon, a secret society of former Jacobins who met in the crypt of the Convent of Sainte-Geneviève. The club was raided and closed down by the young Napoléon in February 1796 but not before Babeuf published his *Plebeian Manifesto*, arguably the first of a new genre of revolutionary journalism and the forerunner of the *Manifeste des Égaux*, co-written by Maréchal.⁶⁷ Brought before the high court of *Vendôme* on charges of advocating the constitution of 1793 through writings and publications (which carried the death penalty), Babeuf, along with Darthé, was guillotined on 27 May 1797.

To understand the origins of this new genre of the revolutionary manifesto we need to step back a moment and consider the changing relationship between the writer and the state under the Directory. As R. B. Rose has persuasively shown, the conspiracy of equals began with the persecution of the *Tribun du Peuple* and the closing down of all communication channels enabling a legal anti-government opposition.⁶⁸ It ended with the application of the draconian press law of 27 Germinal Year IV, which transformed what had begun initially as an open and legal agitation for political reform into a crime against the state. At the centre of the trial was not so much a debate about the group's alleged communism but the status of free expression – whether one had the right to publicize and assemble to debate opinions contrary to the rule of state.

Maréchal's critique of this new policy of censorship is evident from a tract he published in response to the government's savage crackdown

⁶⁷ Jacque Le Roux's *Manifeste des enrégés* (1793) was not originally titled as such and lacked the systematic structure of Babeuf and Maréchal's *Manifeste des Égaux*. See Billington, 74–5 and 532.

⁶⁸ Rose, *Gracchus Babeuf*.

on Babeuf's paper. The title, *Opinion d'un Homme devant l'étrange procès tenté au Tribunal du Peuple et autres écrivains démocrates*, expressed Maréchal's outrage that the clubs, which claimed to represent the 'voice' of the people had been shut down by fiat, and that all presses that claimed to represent or encourage an immediate collective influence, had been banned.⁶⁹ Maréchal accused the government of using censorship to cover up the true aim of the revolution, which was democratic equality. Immediately printed in Babeuf's journal, this piece is remarkable for formulating many of the ideas that, word for word, were taken up in the *Manifeste des Égaux*. Beyond the redistribution of property, this includes the call for a greater social revolution, in which equality would be real rather than apparent. Once again the solar myth is the slogan, in a formulation lifted almost verbatim from Rousseau's *Second Discourse*: 'The Revolution will not be accomplished until mankind shares the fruits of the earth as they share the rays of the sun.'⁷⁰

In accusing the government of censorship, Maréchal and Babeuf reopened the debate over the relation between fiction and historical fact that the revolutionary administration had tried so hard to close. What was needed, Maréchal claimed, was 'a rigorous, real equality that was neither fictive nor simulated'.⁷¹ Otherwise the Declaration of the Rights of Man would remain 'a legal fiction, designed to be imposed on the People'.⁷² The struggle was no longer between revolution and counter-revolution but over representation, over what was real and what was *pseudophenomenal*. From the government's perspective, the postulate of a concrete equality was, as Boissy d'Anglas put it, 'a chimera'. For Maréchal and other supporters of the Club du Panthéon, the notion of a formal equality before the law was a fiction because it continued the 'aristocracie des riches'.⁷³ As Maréchal put it, so long as there was no difference between an unhappy life under a monarchy and an unhappy

⁶⁹ Rosanvallon notes that the attempt to clarify the relation between the freedom of the press and the freedom of the clubs became critical in spring 1796, when the clubs were shut down by fiat. He cites Jean-Baptiste Mailhe's attempt to distinguish between clubs, which encourage oral debate and aim to influence an assembled mass of citizens simultaneously, and a book or newspaper, which involves written communication and is between an author and an individual reader, *The Demands of Liberty*, 47.

⁷⁰ 'La Révolution ne sera faite tant que les hommes ne partageront pas les fruits de la terre comme ils partagent les rayons du soleil'. This references Rousseau's famous phrase in *Discours sur l'origine et les fondamens de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*: 'vous êtes perdus, si vous oubliez que les fruits sont à tous, et que la terre n'est à personne'.

⁷¹ 'Une égalité rigoureuse, réelle, qui ne fût point fictive ou factice'. Maréchal, *Opinion d'un Homme*, 2

⁷² 'Une fiction de la loi, faite pour en imposer au Peuple', 2. ⁷³ Ibid.

life in a Republic, the Revolution itself was a fiction, 'Only the names have changed.'⁷⁴

For Maréchal the Revolution remained unfinished so long as distinctions of birth, social rank, education and occupation continued to be the central defining feature of civilian life. Maréchal had presented this criticism of the unfinished Revolution as early as 1791. Recalling Rousseau's own analyses of the necessity of financial 'mediocrity' for political regeneration,⁷⁵ Maréchal warned his readers: 'You sing the praises and advantages of liberty to men chained by civil ties; you recommend equality to men forced to subject themselves to the yoke of social subordination'⁷⁶ As long as social inequality remained unresolved, the Republic would always be subordinated to the ties of self-interest, the real glue binding humans together in an unequal society. The result, Maréchal declared, was a two-fold life in which people identified their real life with their private interests and led only a fictional or imaginary life as citizens of an abstract state.

Maréchal criticized post-Thermidorian France for reproducing the same distinction between private religious conscience and public allegiance to the state that had been a hallmark of absolutism. Just as absolutism had created an untenable opposition in which man's 'true' self – his moral conscience – was pitted against his duties to an abstract state, so too the Thermidorean Republic pitted civil society and man's private interests against a state that, by virtue of its abstraction, functioned just as another religious 'divinity'. Any abstraction – whether religious or social – led directly to servitude because it separated concrete life from the source of power, allowing the few control and power over the many: 'An indivisible divinity composed of abstraction does not leave itself open to material beings. A dominant cult of priests, *ex professo*, leads directly to slavery and poverty'⁷⁷ For Maréchal the first step to political emancipation was religious emancipation, which for him meant the destruction of all abstract representations, which separated each individual from his concrete existence. This in turn could only happen with the destruction of private property, which in Maréchal's Rousseauist understanding was the source

⁷⁴ 'Il n'y a que les noms de changés.' Ibid., 7

⁷⁵ See Roberto Zapperi for the influence of Rousseau's argument for the relation between political equality and economic inequality in 'Introduction', *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers État*.

⁷⁶ 'Vous vantez les charmes et les avantages de la liberté à des hommes garottés dans les liens civils: vous recommandez l'égalité à des hommes forcés de subir le joug de la subordination sociale.' Maréchal, *Dame Nature*, 16.

⁷⁷ 'Une divinité invisible et composée d'abstractions ne laisse aucune prise à des êtres matériels. Un culte dominant, des prêtres *ex professo*, mènent droit à l'esclavage & à la misère'. Maréchal, *Dame Nature*, 22.

of private interest and the beginning of all differences between rich and poor. Since this did not happen, the only remaining option was the rejection of *both* civil society and the state in favour of a third term: a retreat into small self-sufficient communes in which the link between religious power and private interest could finally be broken. Already in his 1793 *Correctif à la Révolution* Maréchal had argued that ‘it is not possible to be a good citizen and good father at the same time; two masters cannot be served both at once, a choice between nature or society must be made.’⁷⁸

A new kind of journalism, which took the form of the revolutionary manifesto, emerged in the context of this radical critique of the unfinished Revolution. I say a new kind of journalism because the battle over who was to represent the Revolution was essentially played out as a battle between different representations of time. A Revolution that, for the one side, was a historical event and, therefore, firmly rooted in the ideology of new beginnings was, for the opposing side, an ongoing project and a future event. The manifesto became the privileged genre in which the *historical reality* of the revolutionary state and the assumption that the French Revolution was a unique event could be openly questioned and a different relation between past and future assumed. As the etymology indicates, the term ‘manifeste’ originates in the Latin *manus*, or hand, indicating something that is palpable, that can be touched and apprehended by everyone.⁷⁹ In addition to its connotations of a list or inventory of demands, the *manifeste* refers to something that is made public, before witnesses and as such can no longer be concealed.⁸⁰ Traditionally kings or princes would publish a manifesto in order to make clear their reasons for action. The revolutionary manifesto reproduced this same understanding of public reasoning as a public *manifestation*, an assembling of the people before the truth – exactly the kind of gathering the Directory was most keen to avoid.

⁷⁸ ‘On ne peut pas être à la fois bon citoyen et bon père de la famille’; ‘on ne peut servir deux maîtres à la fois: ou la nature ou la société, il faut opter.’ Maréchal, *Correctif*, 12

⁷⁹ The *Émile Littré* 1872 traces the relation between manifesto and plagiarism to 1606, ‘La tromperie est manifeste, Detecta est fraus’. It distinguishes between the making manifest of persons and of things. ‘En parlant des personnes, pris sur le fait, convaincu par le fait (le sens propre est saisi par la main) un plagiaire manifeste. En parlant des choses, qui est aussi palpable, aussi apparent que si on y pouvait porter la main’.

⁸⁰ The *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* 1762 defines *manifeste* as ‘Notoire, evident, connu de toute le monde. C’est une erreur manifeste. C’est une chose manifeste et publique. Rendre un crime manifeste’. It also notes that a *manifeste* is an ‘écrit par lequel un Prince, un Etat, un Parti, ou une Personne de grande considération rend raison de sa conduite en quelque affaire d’importance. Publier un manifeste. Un tel Prince, avant de déclarer la guerre, fit publier un manifeste.[...] Vous en verrez les raisons dans son manifeste’.

With the revolutionary manifesto, journalism once again linked up with a radical public sphere but with an important difference. Whereas revolutionary journals such as *Le Père Duchesne* mainly commented on events, reinterpreting them to fulfil the expectations of their readers, revolutionary journals such as Babeuf's *Le Tribun du Peuple* criticized present events from the perspective of a future revolution. Accompanying this change in literary function was a new role for the revolutionary journalist. From someone who channelled a certain constituency or 'voice', the revolutionary journalist now became the intellectual leader of a future revolution, he who manifested the true meaning of history in the name of a universal reason (and total enlightenment) not yet in place. Maréchal even went so far as to imagine an ideal Revolution that was accomplished in three days because it was led by a dedicated team of intellectuals and journalists who understood the Revolution's true goal. If only Babeuf, LeBlois and other journalists had led the Revolution from the beginning, 'we would not have had the Constitutions of 1791, 1793 and 1795, nor a Convention, nor the two Councils, nor a Directory and other obscure inventions of this kind.'⁸¹

It was a short step from an ideal revolution led by intellectuals to a future revolution orchestrated by a small coterie of self-elected intellectuals – the model for all future social revolutions in France and beyond. It should be noted, however, that unlike Babeuf and his other conspirators, Maréchal was not an advocate of any of the revolutionary constitutions no matter how far they extended rights. In an analysis that foreshadows the arguments of Karl Marx, Maréchal opposed *all* declarations of rights and all constitutions as being nothing but the rights of what Marx would call 'egotistical man, of man separated from other men and from the community.'⁸²

Given the anti-statist cast of Maréchal's criticisms, it comes as somewhat of a surprise to find him aligned with the insurrectionary movement established by such militants as Babeuf, Félix Le Peletier, Buonarroti and others in Germinal Year IV with the aim of overthrowing the revolutionary government and putting the 'Secret Directory' in its place. Although the *Manifeste des Égaux* was unsigned, Buonarroti claimed Maréchal as the author. Not only the style of the *Manifeste*, but also the fact that it repeats almost verbatim the criticisms raised in the *Opinion d'un Homme*

⁸¹ 'Nous n'aurions pas eu les Constitutions de 1791, 1793 et 1795, point de Convention, point de deux Conseils, point de Directoire, et autres rares inventions de cette espèce'. Maréchal, *Opinion d'un Homme*, 5

⁸² See Marx, 'On the Jewish Question'.

as well as his earlier *Dame de Nature* and his later *Voyages de Pythagore* makes Maréchal's authorship indisputable. As for how to reconcile Maréchal's pacifism with this newfound militancy, the opening lines of the *Manifeste* give us a clue: 'Always and everywhere men have been lulled to sleep with beautiful words: never and nowhere has the word accomplished the deed.'⁸³

The Conspiracy of Equals has often been described as a paper revolution, that is, a revolution of ideas and words that never had a chance of galvanizing real military support or coercive power.⁸⁴ But to dismiss it as merely a last gasp of a utopian literary sphere is to overlook the new relation between words and deeds that was in the process of being forged. For a writer like Maréchal, nourished on the literary strategies of the ancien régime, the relative tolerance of the revolutionary administration presented a new obstacle in the goal of transforming Enlightenment theory into political action. Before the Revolution, transforming words into political actions against the state had been relatively easy because laws of censorship, like official representations of the state, had been clearly defined. As the incident provoked by Maréchal's *Almanach des honnêtes gens* had demonstrated so well, one only had to transgress these laws to transform words into acts against the state. The Jacobin Republic had been no different in this regard and in fact extended this notion of exemplary censorship to all aspects of life. Such a conception presupposed not just a norm or behaviour that was recognized by all, but also a public sphere based on the Roman idea of censorship, a notion still present in eighteenth-century definitions of censorship as a type of self-correction. With the fall of the Jacobin Republic this understanding of censorship as self-correction dissolved as society divided into private individuals and their self-interested freedoms or 'rights', on the one hand, and an imaginary, factitious state, on the other. This marked the end both of an exemplary citizenship and of a public sphere that embodied a universally valid norm.

It is precisely because the new regime was one of both tolerance and mystification that any intellectual action against the state now had to assume the form of criminal intent, a thought crime. Maréchal admits so much when he exclaims: 'What a beautiful crime it is to conspire for the

⁸³ 'Toujours et partout on berça les hommes de belles paroles: jamais et nulle part ils n'est obtenu la chose avec le mot.' *Manifeste des Égaux*, reproduced in Dommanget, *Sur Babeuf et la Conjuration des Égaux*: 77–9, 77.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Lyons, who notes that 'the conspiracy had only existed on paper, and it was the seizure of papers, manifestos, and nominations for a future government which sealed Babeuf's fate'. *France under the Directory*, 34.

common good. How gentle and glorious it is to hear oneself labeled an anarchist and a disrupter.⁸⁵ Voluntarily assuming a criminal identity was a way for Maréchal, Babeuf and other militants to stand outside society and the state, maintain, as it were, the only viable moral position, which was that of a universal judgment. We have already seen how Maréchal's early writings repeated the dominant mode of literary critique under the ancien regime, which took the form of persecuted virtue. The goal had been to provoke the state into oppressing the writer through censorship, an act that was then interpreted as a crime against nature and freedom of expression by an immoral state. After the Revolution, however, the relation between the radical writer and the state was reversed. Maréchal's contemporary the Marquis de Sade had already demonstrated how the moral hypocrisy of social and political institutions was best exposed from the vantage point of the criminal rather than the victim. Here we find Maréchal adopting with similar pride the epithet of outlaw and criminal. Like Sade's criminal, the revolutionary who performed the 'beautiful crime' positioned himself on the side of limitless nature against law and society.

This, then, was the true meaning of a manifesto: It was written against all constitutions and all laws. Because it stood naked before all forms of authority, it was and could only be an anarchist text. As Maréchal expressed it, apostrophizing the people, neither the Constitution of 1793 nor the Constitution of 1795 could have inspired the 'beautiful manifesto'.⁸⁶ This is because nature and the heart, not the rights of man, were the only legitimate sources for a revolutionary compact. If this theme of a sentimental republic was an eighteenth-century commonplace, it is evoked here in the name of a new opposition that pits the laws of nature not just against society but also against a new and emerging 'modern' conception of history. Above all, it challenges the premise that the French Revolution was a unique event. It does so by opting for an even greater rupture with the present, one that would close off the future and restore an exemplary relation with the past.

Practically, this meant dissociating the solar myth, with its idea of a natural code visible and perceptible to all, from any kind of legal mechanism. So long as society remained divided between rich and poor, every government, even a revolutionary one, merely legitimated a fundamental

⁸⁵ 'C'est un beau crime que de conspirer pour le bonheur commun. Qu'il est doux et glorieux de s'entendre qualifier d'anarchiste et de désorganisateur'. Maréchal, *Opinion d'un Homme*, 5.

⁸⁶ Maréchal, *Opinion d'un Homme*, 6.

iniquity at its base. Maréchal extrapolates this critique, again from Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, in order to call for the end of all representation: 'Let these revolting distinctions between rich and poor, great and small, masters and servants, *governors and the governed* finally disappear'.⁸⁷ Unlike the selective tabula rasa represented by the French Republic and the new calendar, Maréchal calls for a tabula rasa of all historical reference, all cultural memory including that of the arts: 'We consent to do everything for equality, a *tabula rasa* of everything to stay true to equality alone. Perish, if they must, all the arts so long as real equality remains!'⁸⁸

A corollary of this commitment to a concrete universality is the end of an unequal division of labour: 'We declare that we can no longer put up with the vast majority of people working and sweating in service to, and at the bidding of, an extreme minority'.⁸⁹ For Maréchal an equal measure of time equates to an equal expenditure of time, which is necessary if enlightened reason is to be universalized. After all, what are the terms 'rich' and 'poor' but an expression of an unequal division of time? For the privileged few, time is a surplus value, something to be expended while the vast majority lacks the time to reason, think and become self-reflective. A true enlightenment cannot reproduce the old distinctions between the labouring many (where most of humanity is essentially indistinguishable from the domesticated animal) and the privileged few to whom are offered the pleasures of thinking. On the contrary, true enlightenment requires an equal distribution of resources ('le bien commun et la communauté des biens'), which also means an even distribution of the resources of the imagination. This, after all, is the true meaning of the solar myth. It is a time used equally well by everyone, in which pleasure is never autonomous from labour. There is no superfluous or abstract time (such as the notion of an eternal afterlife) from which only the few can benefit.

We are thus back again once more to the enlightened ideal of a natural calendar, in which there is no need for constitution or laws of any kind because time is saturated with presence. In rejecting all state structures and calling for the creation of self-governing societies, the *Manifeste des Égaux* combines the utopian projections of so much eighteenth-century

⁸⁷ 'Disparaissez enfin, révoltantes distinctions de riches et de pauvres, de grands et de petits, de maîtres et de valets, de *gouvernants* et de *gouvernés*'. *Manifeste des Égaux*, 78.

⁸⁸ 'Nous consentons à tout pour elle [l'égalité], à *faire table rase pour nous en tenir à elle seule*. Périssent, s'il le faut, tous les arts, pourvu qu'il nous reste l'égalité réelle!' Ibid.

⁸⁹ 'Nous déclarons ne pouvoir souffrir davantage que la très grande majorité des hommes travaille et sue au service et pour le bon plaisir de l'extrême minorité'. Ibid.

fiction with an updated and naturalized version of radical humanism. For Maréchal freedom is located neither in a long gone golden age nor in any kind of utopian state. It is located instead in a social circle that remains small enough for all representation to remain concrete. In such a social circle there is no need for laws or constitutions because everyone lives by example. Over and over again we find Maréchal insisting that behaviour not rules, norms not laws, are the only way of fulfilling 'a revolution started by a few great men of Antiquity and our own time'.⁹⁰

A small world constructed out of exemplary behaviour, rather than rule of law, presupposes that all learning takes place by imitation. The mimetic self is crucial for Maréchal because it presupposes a self that is neither 'private' nor possessed of 'private goods'. The self that identifies completely with his or her role models is in a better position to experience what Rousseau identified as the primary, natural instincts of empathy, namely the ability to put oneself in another's place. More specifically, it is able to experience what Maréchal identified as the primary social bonds that govern all societies, that of maternal care (which he viewed as antithetical to the priestly cults based on human sacrifice). In this sense, small worlds are self-governing because they encourage virtues of altruism and solidarity, that is, virtues of identity and identification rather than those of difference and distinction.

Maréchal thus resolves the problem of a divided self by opting for a more radical choice: rejecting society in order to remake society on entirely new foundations in which small autarchic extended family units would replicate most closely the natural conditions of primitive man. True social regeneration would be accomplished when members simultaneously divest themselves of both material and spiritual needs, which, for Maréchal, are one and the same. Without private property to which to attach personal interests, members of this utopian commune would be thus liberated to relate to one another not as self-seeking individuals but as members of the same human family. For Maréchal, the family unit is the basis of all social organization because it replicates most closely the natural world in which, according to the traditional materialist hypothesis, there are no ruptures or gaps of any kind.

Voicing a desire for a complete change (revolution) in the historical condition of man while affirming the unchanging nature of the human heart might seem counterintuitive from the modern perspective. These aspects,

⁹⁰ 'Une révolution ébauchée par plusieurs Grands-Hommes de l'Antiquité et de notre âge'. *Opinion d'un Homme*, 7.

however, appear less contradictory if we consider that for Maréchal and other like-minded materialists there was no such thing as an irreversible flow of time. Time, as Maréchal tells us in another text, bears no relation to the universe, which has no concept of past and future. The universe is continually changing yet remains unchanging. For this reason it contains neither historical memory (which is but a subjective construct of humans) nor any concept of the chance event. Like most eighteenth-century thinkers, Maréchal considered 'chance' to be a word used by the vulgar to describe what they either did not know or did not take the time to study because the universe was governed by unchanging constant laws.⁹¹ This is significant for it suggests that if Maréchal attempted to reproduce a natural existence on a small scale, it was not simply to deny history and progress but also because such a mechanistic conception of the universe lacked a concept of chance and, therefore, of the unique event, both central concepts for a modern concept of historical time. In this sense, Maréchal's master concept of a 'juste milieu' reflects a more general understanding of the Revolution as aiming towards a middle point or structural equilibrium. Whether between nature and culture, poverty and wealth or for that matter poetry and prose, the concept of a 'juste milieu' expresses social change as the rearrangement of already existing forces rather than as the introduction of something new. If Maréchal was a historical materialist insofar as he sought to change the material and social conditions of mankind, it is also true that he conceptualized this change as a kind of zero-sum game in which what is lost in one part of the system is gained in another and overall stability is maintained.

As it should be clear by now, whether espousing neo-primitivism or insisting that true regeneration is accomplished not by legislation but by moral precept alone, the goal remains the same: that of finding maxims for behaviour that are generalizable even as they remain concrete, embodied in the particular actions and attitudes of individuals. All of Maréchal's literary productions of the post-Thermidorean years are concerned with maintaining an analogical relation to history in which the present replicates the past, which is an example to the future. This is why he continues to insist that the only literary productions worthy of regenerated societies are those that take the form, in one way or another, of a thesaurus or dictionary of biographical lives. This is also why he continues

⁹¹ 'Le chaos n'est autre chose que le passage d'une combinaison de la nature à une autre; et il ne se fait point au hasard, et selon le caprice de la destinée aveugle, comme plusieurs l'ont avancé, mais en vertu des forces graduées du grand Tout agissant et réagissant sans cesse sur lui-même'. Maréchal, *Voyages de Pythagore*, vol. 4, 148.

to date all his publications with Year I of the Reign of Reason. The revolution is always in Year I so long as an exemplary relation between past and present is maintained.

This is evident in his *Culte et Loix d'une Société d'hommes sans dieu*, a blueprint for a self-governing society dated Year I of Reason, but published in Year VI, in response to the government's demand for a new *culte décadaire*. In this publication, Maréchal clearly aims his cult against the recently defunct cult of Theophilanthropy. In contrast to the government backed cult of Theophilanthropy, which was founded and supported by extremely wealthy patrons, some of whom had been made even wealthier by the Revolution, Maréchal stipulates that the H.S.D (*hommes sans dieu*; men without god) must never own more than three times their personal needs. In another pointed criticism of the revolutionary administration, Maréchal makes clear that 'the H.S.D do not ascribe to a double doctrine. More genuine and more courageous than the Philosophers of antiquity and their contemporaries, they speak and publish all their thoughts'.⁹² In other words, they embody a total and transparent enlightened public sphere, the only sphere in which a self-generating society based on censorship or self-correction rather than law, can truly exist. Explicit references to current events aside, this blueprint repeats many of Maréchal's earlier themes. This is a society in which there is no more distinction between the subjective time of 'individuals' and the public time of community because there is no gap between individual behaviour and moral precept, between the subjective feelings of moral sentiment and their objective fulfilment. Thus at a moment in which the distinction between subjective and objective experiences of time was being contested on all sides of the political spectrum, Maréchal offers a unified vision of time in which moral or exemplary history is the only history.

The society of H.S.D. is patriarchal, consisting solely of fathers above the age of fifty who meet every ten or five days to announce their meditations. Echoing Maréchal's earlier writings, this cult contains all the traditional elements of Catholicism – temples and prayers, the importance of baptism and marriage (no adulterers or divorcés allowed) – even as it rejects the notion of an afterlife. Some elements of Catholicism are parodied. For example, younger members who express dismay about the non-existence of God are invited to confession, in which they are

⁹² 'Les H.S.D. n'ont point une double doctrine: plus vrai ou plus courageux que les Philosophes de l'antiquité et que leurs contemporains, ils disent et publient toute leur pensée'. Maréchal, *Culte et Loix des H.S.D.*, 18.

philosophically consoled by the H.S.D., who are hidden behind a white veil. The rite of passage into this venerable inner circle requires undertaking a vow of silence. Other institutions include a library with very few books, a domestic theatre in which families perform edifying spectacles for one another, and laws forbidding second marriages, the carrying of weapons and the aforementioned accumulation of wealth. Instead of a holy book, the cult produces a calendar, 'in which each day is marked by the name of a wise S.D. and presents an episode from his life'.⁹³ Other books include a moral catechism, a biographical dictionary and finally an immense repertory of 'solemn authorities in favour of the H.S.D'.

Attentive readers of the eighteenth century would have recognized the white veil, the vow of silence and preference for oral teaching as references to the famous school of Pythagoras, which I discuss in the following chapter. But for now it suffices to note that the H.S.D. live in Year I of reason because their society is constructed exclusively as a compendium of exemplary lives in which there is no concept of a historical break between past and present lives. Never one to hold back from practicing what he preached, Maréchal published just such a compendium in Year VIII. Entitled the *Dictionnaire des athées anciens et modernes*, it lists all the prominent authorities in favour of atheism. As the title indicates even as late as 1798 Maréchal would continue to privilege synchronic representations of time in which ancient and modern could be compared because they both belong to the same time. In the lengthy preface to the dictionary, Maréchal situates the atheist as an enemy of both the old feudal order authorized by religion and the new revolutionary state because he is an enemy of 'political abstractions as much as religious ones'.⁹⁴ Unlike priests or latter day revolutionary politicians, the atheist is an ideal type because he lives an unmediated existence. Like Rousseau's *l'homme de la nature*, signalled by the epigraph, atheists belong neither to the past nor future but live solely in an eternal present. They live in the restricted space of their household and community that is also a restricted time, 'restricted to the present which is the only thing that belongs to them, their interest obviously is in the best possible use of time'.⁹⁵ The atheist never feels boredom because he leaves 'no emptiness in his day, which follows the course of the sun'.⁹⁶ He also has no need for the imagination because his thoughts and feelings replicate natural patterns as exactly as

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁹⁴ 'Des abstractions politiques, autant que religieuses'. Maréchal, *Dictionnaire des athées*, xxiv.

⁹⁵ 'Bornés au présent qui seul leur appartient, leur intérêt bien entendu est dans le meilleur emploi possible du tems'. *Ibid.*, ix.

⁹⁶ 'Aucun vide dans sa journée, modelée sur le cours du soleil'. *Ibid.*, xij.

possible. Self-referential and self-enclosed, the atheist is a flat self who is never given over to self-projection or self-comparison. He (and it is always a he because for Maréchal women adopt the beliefs of their fathers and husbands) is patriarchal but unheroic; honourable but perfectly disinterested; self-sufficient but duty-bound.

In short, as an ideal type Maréchal's atheist is everything that Boissy d'Anglas's bourgeois revolutionary is not. Dispossessed both materially and spiritually, the atheist lives exclusively in the time of the eternal present, which is also that of nature and a natural justice based on equal measure. Boissy d'Anglas's bourgeois revolutionary, in contrast, is emphatically modern rather than mimetic, able to maintain objectivity and 'fly above' particular interests because of his long-term commitment to stability and order. As an oppositional construct, Maréchal's atheist is directed against both the 'théiste-révolutionnaires', whom Maréchal accused of using Providential history to justify 'the bloody iniquities of a ten year long Revolution',⁹⁷ and the *hommes d'état*, who have followed the priests in declaring atheism to be demoralizing for the people. Even worse, for Maréchal, is the realization that the revolutionary administration was actively reproducing the same double doctrine of enlightenment for the few that had characterized the ancien régime. Nowhere is this clearer than in their espousal of a double calendar, one for civilian and one for religious use. Maréchal likens the revolutionary compromise to the Egyptian custom of hiding the solar calendar from the people so that priests could retain their monopoly over religious ceremonies, agricultural production and civil affairs.⁹⁸ The situation may be inverted but the result is still the same: power over the people concentrated in the hands of the few. Indefatigably, Maréchal hammers home once more his message: 'Fear the consequences of partial enlightenment. People need all or nothing. A partially enlightened nation is the most detestable of all nations'.⁹⁹

But if Maréchal criticizes this differential enlightenment as being yet another attempt at mystification, it is also true that the official tolerance towards the public sphere in post-Thermidorean France made it

⁹⁷ 'Les sanglantes immoralités d'une révolution de dix années'. *Ibid.*, xviii.

⁹⁸ See Maréchal, *Les Voyages de Pythagore*, vol. 1, 405–8: 'Ce double calendrier me répugne, l'un vague et civil, l'autre fixe et sacré; celui-ci à votre seul usage; l'autre servant de règle à toute l'Égypte, malgré son imperfection, que vous lui laissez volontairement, et sans doute avec des intentions: pourquoi ne pas faire jouir votre pays de la vérité toute entière? pourquoi la réserver pour vous seuls? pourquoi certaines fêtes sont-elles à votre disposition, quant au temps de les célébrer? On dirait que vous voulez retenir le peuple dans votre dépendance, et faire en sorte qu'il ait toujours besoin de vous', 408.

⁹⁹ 'Craignez des suites des demi-lumières. Il faut au peuple tout ou rien. Un peuple éclairé à demi est le peuple le plus détestable de tous les peuples'. Maréchal, *Dictionnaire des athées*, xxii.

difficult for his critique to be received as such. Although audacious to the verge of slanderous in drawing names from the living as well as the dead, the public impact of the *Dictionnaire des athées* was much more diffuse than Maréchal's previous experiments in the same genre. Now that the state associated itself openly with secular time, atheists no longer figured, as they did in the past, on indexes or lists of proscribed authors. As Maréchal notes in his introduction, there was as little appetite for proscription among the deputies as there were authors seeking such a privilege: 'The former are weary of banning and wish to consume in peace the fruits of their crimes; the latter perhaps are also weary of being banned.'¹⁰⁰ Atheism, it would appear, was far more effective as a critical tool when it was used to undermine a regime predicted on one perspective, a theology of the gaze based on a transcendental God. Within a regime characterized by 'tolerant' surveillance, it was merely one point of view amongst many.

The result is a loss of function of one of the key genres of the radical Enlightenment – the critical biographical dictionary, which, ever since Pierre Bayle, had been considered an ideal genre for a subversive 'counter-history'. This can be seen from the mixed reactions that greeted the publication of Maréchal's dictionary. Contemporaries such as Louis-Sébastien Mercier were not only chagrined to find themselves in it; they were also in equal parts scandalized and perplexed by the choice of a biographical dictionary. As Mercier noted: 'What better belongs to our century than this Dictionary of Atheists which has caused such a terrible scandal amongst us and which has been made so voluminous by recklessly and unjustly including so many names taken at random.'¹⁰¹ The editor Charles Pougens was bewildered by what he called 'such a soul-destroying viewpoint' in an otherwise bizarre work,¹⁰² while others, such as the poet Millevoye, oblivious to the importance of the fragment for Maréchal, poked fun at the entire conceit of an alphabetical order.¹⁰³ Only Maréchal's erstwhile

¹⁰⁰ 'Les uns sont las de proscrire; ils veulent consommer en paix les fruits de leurs crimes; les autres, peut-être sont las aussi de se faire proscrire.' *Ibid.*, xxxv.

¹⁰¹ 'C'est un épouvantable scandale *jetté* parmi nous, et qui n'appartient qu'à notre siècle que ce *dictionnaire des athées* qu'on a cherché à rendre volumineux, et où l'on fait entrer si témérairement et si injustement, tant de noms pris au hasard.' Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Le journal des Débats*, 4 Germinal VIII. Cited by Dommanget, *Sylvain Maréchal*, 374.

¹⁰² 'Une opinion aussi desséchante'. Cited by Dommanget, 375.

¹⁰³ See Millevoye's *Etrennes aux sots*, cited by Dommanget, 376:

Fait un Dictionnaire et nie un Créateur.
Oh! qu'un Dictionnaire est une belle chose!
Contre un livre pareil, c'est en vain que l'on glose.
Il ne demande pas de grands efforts d'esprit,
Il peut être diffus, négligé, mal écrit;

mentor the astronomer Lalande was impressed, declaring that being labelled an atheist was an honour greater than any of his scientific accomplishments: 'I congratulate myself more on my accomplishments in atheism than those I was able to achieve in astronomy, because few people have acquired the clarity that I believe to have reached.'¹⁰⁴ Indeed he continued the dictionary after Maréchal's death, noting in the preface to his edition that 'the loss of Sylvain Maréchal is a loss for philosophy for he had a courage that is almost impossible to find.'¹⁰⁵ Lalande's participation provoked in turn the wrath of Napoléon. Far from dismissing this publication as an anodyne affair, he enjoined the institute to urge Lalande to abandon his association with the atheist fantasises of Maréchal.¹⁰⁶ As for the editor Gremond, who reissued Lalande's edition in 1833, he was less laudatory, rehashing the familiar complaint that it was a shame that a writer known for being 'sweet-sounding and light' should become 'all of a sudden harsh and rebellious'.¹⁰⁷ It was, he concluded, Maréchal's insatiable desire for fame that pushed his 'impetuous imagination beyond the limits of reason and led him completely astray'.¹⁰⁸

As misunderstood as he often was, Maréchal had an impact on post-Thermidorean culture that extended further than it is normally assumed. In his role as 'publicist' for the radical Revolution, Maréchal formulated the two key tenets of future revolutionary organization: the creation of small worlds or communes in which the revolutionary dream of universal brotherhood was kept alive and the notion that a future 'great' revolution would henceforth be directed by a cadre of intellectual-journalists. He also provided the key critical vocabulary that would later be taken up by radical movements throughout Europe, namely, the association of atheism not just with religious emancipation but also, and more crucially, with emancipation from the *secular* state. Napoléon understood this well when he accused the dictionary of atheists of undermining the entire

Mais dès qu'on en fait un, l'on est un homme unique,
Et l'on a de l'esprit ... par ordre alphabétique.

¹⁰⁴ 'Je me félicite plus de mes progrès en athéisme, que de ceux que je puis avoir faits en astronomie, parce qu'il y a peu de personnes qui aient acquis l'évidence à laquelle je crois être parvenu'. *Supplémens pour le Dictionnaire des athées par Jérôme de Lalande*, 3.

¹⁰⁵ 'La perte de Sylvain Maréchal en est une pour la philosophie, car il avait un courage qu'on ne trouve presque jamais'. *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Napoléon, hand transcribed letter that first appeared in the *Moniteur*, 2–3 November 1863. International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, box 2, dossier 50.

¹⁰⁷ 'Et cet esprit jusqu'alors doux et léger', devenu tout-à-coup dur et frondeur, oublia totalement le genre auquel il avait dû ses premiers succès'. *Notice nouvelle sur Maréchal et ses Ouvrages*, par J.B.L. Germond, 9.

¹⁰⁸ 'Imagination fougueuse au-delà des limites de la raison et l'égara totalement'. *Ibid.*

social order. In this sense, Maréchal's analysis links up not only with the future critiques of Karl Marx but also those of Alexis de Tocqueville, who similarly questioned the Revolution's premise of rupture. Last but not least, Maréchal also played an important cultural role in transforming the exemplary tradition from a backwards-oriented way of linking past and present to a future-oriented expectation and promise. This reorientation is evident in what is arguably his most influential assessment of the relation between the ancients and the moderns in a period of revolutionary crisis: his best-selling six-volume *Voyages de Pythagore*, published in 1799. What Maréchal qualified as the two most beautiful terms of Pythagoras – monde and philosophie¹⁰⁹ – would be taken up by the likes of Buonarroti, who in the 1820s also professed to belong to a secret society called *Monde* with pretensions at a pan-European revolution. In the following chapter, I will consider this work and what it reveals about the piecemeal decay of the Republican calendar in light of the following question: What kind of structure did the Republican calendar continue to provide in the absence of a synchronic framework of history?

¹⁰⁹ Maréchal, *Voyages de Pythagore*, T. 5, 367.

*The End of the Lyrical Revolution
and the Calendar's Piecemeal Decline*

In the previous chapter, I showed how the accumulation of historical events undid the cyclical structure of the Republican calendar. Originally the Republican calendar had been conceived as analogous to the religious calendar. Like the religious calendar, its intent had been to transform a historical sequence of events into a repetitive structure that would allow past events to be experienced as an ongoing present. But the accumulation of new historical events, each of which was different from all preceding events, made it impossible to subsume the narrative of revolutionary history under cyclical time. Instead of a Revolution marked by a few singular events, commemorated and repeated every year, each new event emphasized a growing divergence between the past and present. In response to this need to order events that were unique, a new concept of both history and calendar time emerged. Both of these changes can be seen in the changing function of the Republican calendar. First, the absence of a viable framework of cyclical time meant that the Republican calendar came to function more like an empty grid. Second, and accompanying this transformation of the calendar into a stationary grid, was a changing concept of the relation between past and present. In the absence of repetitive structures, events could only be related to one another serially, that is as a sequence in linear time. A new historical discourse emerged that occupied itself not with the past conceived as a potential field of action and experience for the present, but with tracing events that had already happened in actuality.

Nowhere is this changing relation between past and present more evident than in the shift from a lyrical to a narrative understanding of the Revolution. It is common to define the difference between lyric and narrative representations as the difference between showing and telling. Lyric is about what something is; narrative is about what happened; lyric communicates the emotional reality of an unchanging truth; narrative registers the difference between past and present. While it is tempting

to associate the lyrical stance with an unproblematic representation of a 'timeless' truth, in its emphasis on a 'lived' experience of an emotional reality, lyric also expresses the challenges of experiencing this universal truth on its own terms, as a present reality.¹ If we apply this same distinction to the calendar we see how a calendar whose original, framing structure was lyrical insofar as it showed and communicated an emotional sense of a new social reality that was supposed to exist in the here and now became a calendar whose function was to subtend an increasingly narrative understanding of history.

In what follows, I propose to consider the changing function of calendar time in the context of this more general shift from a lyrical to a narrative representation of history. The calendar's changing function reflects three important changes in the meaning and representation of the French Revolution. First, the Revolution ceased to be identified with a natural referent (and by extension the vital Enlightenment concept of a 'universal measure') and became instead a national, historical event. Second, the Revolution ceased to embody a poetic relation to the past. That is to say, it ceased to express what Aristotle called a 'general truth', poetry's ability to capture 'the sort of thing that would happen in any time' given the same circumstance.² This in turn resulted in the third important change in the Revolution's self-image: revolutionary history was no longer represented as having a vector or goal. For while narrative history captures the idea of an ordered sequence of dates, it cannot account either for the notion that history has a direction or for the fact that each event or date was a present at some point in the past and hence open to other possible futures.³

¹ As Paul de Man has argued, lyric 'designates more generally the problematic possibility of all literature's existing in the present, of being considered, or read, from a point of view that claims to share with its own sense of a temporal present'. See 'Lyric and Modernity' in *Blindness and Insight*, 167.

² Although Aristotle subordinated *both* poetry and history to narrative representation insofar as he claimed that the relevant difference between them was not between poetry and prose but between general and particular truths, he is nonetheless useful in highlighting the importance of possibility as a superior mode of relating past and present. 'The difference between the historian and the poet is not merely that one writes verse and the other prose – one could turn Herodotus' work into verse and it would be just as much history as before; the essential difference is that the one tells us what happened and the other the sort of thing that would happen. That is why poetry is at once more like philosophy and more worth while than history, since poetry tends to make general statements, while those of history are particular'. *Poetics*, in *A New Aristotle Reader*, 1451 b.

³ On this difference between tensed and historical time see Paul Ricoeur, who takes it from Émile Benveniste. *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 109. See also the excellent discussion by Andrew Abbott, *Against Narrative: A Preface to Lyrical Sociology* to whom my distinction between a lyric and narrative understanding of the process of social change is much indebted.

This chapter begins with the literary and artistic fields, as this is where a poetic and above all lyrical relation to the Revolution was maintained the longest. I will consider three of Maréchal's late productions: the six-volume *Voyages de Pythagore*, the *Histoire universelle en style lapidaire* (Year VIII, 1800) and the *Histoire de la Russie* (Year X, 1802). As all three works straddle our modern distinctions between history and literature, they provide a window on the changing boundaries between historical representation and the literary imagination in this period. The first is arguably the most significant of Maréchal's late writings because it allows us to trace the reception of revolutionary utopianism by the Romantic generation of the early nineteenth century. The French Romantic critic and writer Charles Nodier would recall the *Voyages de Pythagore* as being influential for his own youthful publications, including his attempt to found a revolutionary sect. This work aroused interest in German-speaking countries, and Russia where, beginning in 1804, it appeared in official government journals in Russian translation. Alongside Maréchal's *Histoire de la Russie*, which included a biting critique of Catherine the Great's reign of 'enlightened despotism', this work would go on to influence the Russian radical tradition.⁴

The second half of the chapter returns to the official representations of the French Revolution up to the end of the calendar in 1805. Although Napoléon famously declared his reign to be the beginning of the Revolution's 'true history', he nonetheless continued to rely on the Republican calendar, which survived not just the Concordat and Napoléon's rapprochement with the Catholic Church but also the first year of Empire. This raises a different set of questions about the changing boundaries between fiction and history: How and why did the calendar continue to exist even in the absence of a viable framework of cyclical time? And what role did these remnants of Republican time continue to play even after the reestablishment of the Christian calendar had been more or less achieved?

⁴ For the distribution in Basel, Breslau, Metz, Strasbourg and Vienna see Dommanget, *Sylvain Maréchal*, 349. James Billington has argued for the influence on this text of the Pythagorean sects that developed in Russia in the late eighteenth century, which he considers forerunners of the Russian radical tradition. He traces it to Maréchal's promotor, a D. Dimitrevsky, who, as a protégé of the occultist Nicholas Novikov, may have played a role in formulating a new kind of revolutionary 'mysticism' in the Russian Empire especially after the defeat of Napoléon. See *Fire in the Minds of Men*, 104–5 and 545 for Russian scholarship on this question. In the English-speaking world, Tobias Smoller's *Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature*, vol. 27, 1799: 533–43, praises it for its erudition but complains that it is marred by more than a few 'French witticisms about priests and kings'.

LYRIC ANTIQUITY

From the German Romantics onwards, writers and critics have concurred that the 'frame condition' for the experience of modernity was the change from an antiquity experienced as presence to an antiquity experienced as a lost or absent origin.⁵ Throughout the eighteenth century, the experience of the past as an ongoing presence was particularly associated with a Greek antiquity, popularized by such best sellers as Abbé Barthélemy's *Voyage du Jeune Anacharsis*, which featured a fictional Scythe, descended from the sage of the same name, who travelled the Greek world from 363 to 377 B.C. This text placed the Greek itinerary at the centre of a utopian revision of the Greek past. As Starobinski reminds us, the frame condition for this normative experience of Greek antiquity was a cyclical understanding of historical time: 'If history was made up of cycles and periods (and this was one of the meanings of the ambiguous term *revolution* as it was then used), why should men not hope to live again in that antique light and according to that eternal Norm?'⁶

After 9 Thermidor, France saw a revival of the Greek style. As if exhausted by all the Gracchi, Catos, Brutuses and Horatii, there was a return to a Greek topos. The painter Jacques-Louis David even urged a return to a Greek style.⁷ Amor and Psyche, Hyacinthe, Sappho, Laocoon, Daedalus, Icarus, Endymion – these became the subjects of paintings exhibited under the Directory. Interior design was inspired by Egyptian, Greco-Roman and Etruscan styles. Women's fashions became Greek. Mme Récamier had her portrait painted with an Etruscan 'hairstyle' reclining on her 'ethereal couch', famous throughout Paris. She, along with Mmes Beauharnais and Tallien, typically greeted visitors to their celebrated salons, supine on their divans and dressed in transparent Greek robes.

Whereas prior to the Revolution antiquity had stood for the unity of aesthetic and moral values, now antiquity came to signal a pure aesthetic style without normative content. Different styles became associated with

⁵ See Gumbrecht, 'Ce divan étoilé d'or. Empire als Stilepoche/Epochenstil/Stil/Epoché?', 269–94.

⁶ Jean Starobinski, *Emblems of Reason*, trans. Barbara Bray, 166.

⁷ Instructing his students to return to a Greek style, David was reported to have said: 'Peut-être ai-je trop montré l'art anatomique dans mon tableau des *Horaces*; dans celui-ci des *Sabines*, je le cacherai avec plus d'adresse et de goût. *Ce tableau sera plus grec*'. The primary source for this citation and other aspects of David's relation with his students is the account of his former student, M.E.J. Delécluze, 'Les Barbus d'à présent et les barbus de 1800' (first published in *Livre des Cent-et-un*, VII, 1832), reproduced in *Louis David et son temps* (1855), 71–2.

different periods as the past became a depository of historical meaning that could be picked out at will. Antiquity no longer signalled one origin but many origins: no longer the cyclical time of an eternal norm but with the evanescent time of luxury, fashion and the arts, a collection of styles to be plotted on a chronological line. Indeed it is hard to tell which occurred first, the reduction of the past to a collection of 'period-styles'⁸ or the linear time line that enabled these pasts to be associated with different styles. In a revealing remark, Louis-Sébastien Mercier attributed this multiplication of styles to the overly prescriptive attempts to forge a Republican civil life:

To undertake to change the character and spirit of a nation is a very difficult task. [...] One can only suffer from the inordinate number of rules and regulations. ... Every codebook is riffled through; futile sayings are drawn from every nation on this earth. Soon we will have Chinese and Egyptian rites, mixed with those of the Greeks and Tartars. [...] With all these civil institutions, civil life will come to resemble a kind of bird organ. ... Do you want me to hold forth and listen to music and be crowned with flowers on my wedding day? Oh, let me do that the day after tomorrow and I will see if I should laugh or cry! ... Shall I then write a daily Family Record Book? Oh, good God, always books, fine phrases and scripts.⁹

As Mercier's observation makes clear, these performances illuminated not just the failure of Enlightenment ideology but also a new sense of living in a temporal present in which the past can never be relived but only copied in ever-weaker imitations.

But perhaps the single most important difference is that antiquity ceased to stand for a focal point of consensus. It became instead a contested field and, therefore, part of the contemporary present rather than an ideal past. From this perspective, the Greek fashion and clothing adopted by the new elite was symptomatic of both an acceleration of historical time and a dematerialization of the antique past. The Greek style enabled the elite to position themselves ironically vis-à-vis these revolutionary experiments

⁸ On the inherence among 'style' 'period' and 'periodization' see Gumbrecht, "Ce divan étoilé d'or." *Empire als Stilepoche/Epochenstil/Stil/Epoche?*

⁹ *Entreprendre de changer le caractère, l'esprit d'une nation, c'est un ouvrage très difficile. ... Il faut gémir de la quantité désordonnée de lois et de règlements ... on dépouille tous les codes, on va puiser chez toutes les nations de la terre de vaines formules. Bientôt nous aurons des rites chinois, des rites égyptiens, mélangés avec ceux des Grecs et des Tartares. ... Avec toutes ces institutions civiles, la vie civile deviendrait une espèce de serinette. ... Voulez vous que je pérore et que j'écoute de la musique, et que je me couronne de fleurs le jour de mon mariage, eh! laissez-moi faire cela le surlendemain et je verrai si je dois rire ou pleurer! ... Vous voulez ensuite que je compose journellement le *Livre de famille*? Eh! bon Dieu, toujours des livres, des phrases et des écritures. *Réflexions de Mercier sur le projet de Leclerc dans Peltier, 'Paris en 1797'*. In Mathiez, *La Théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire (1796–1801)*, 199.*

that had been taken seriously only a few years ago by some of these same people. Such an ironic stance also enabled them to drain antiquity of its presence, which in David's case quite literally involved sapping his paintings of the physicality of his earlier works, which he now criticized as being 'too anatomical'.¹⁰ The elite were not the only ones for whom dress became a key marker of social and political sensibility. Opponents of the Directory's culture of conspicuous consumption also took to wearing antique costume in order to maintain a continuity with revolutionary memory. This is especially true in the case of the group of artists known as the *barbus* or *les primitifs*.¹¹ These former students of the artist David took to wandering the streets of Paris dressed in Greek costume to oppose their master whom they criticized for becoming too 'rococo'.¹²

In contrast to the ironic attitude of the elite, the *primitifs* adopted a lyrical attitude to the past, living as if antiquity was an emotional reality, a field of action that was still present. When asked by Napoléon why they had adopted the long beards and the flowing robes of Pythagoras, their leader, Maurice Quai, responded that it was in order to 'separate themselves from the world'.¹³ By setting up their own small world as a world apart, they attempted to recreate aesthetically the same kind of shared, intersubjective lifeworld that the revolutionary government had tried to impose politically – a closed inalterable world of meaning in which the antique style and moral norms, aesthetics and experience could once more be made compatible. Charles Nodier notes that these former students of David adopted many of their ideas about Pythagoras from Sylvain Maréchal, including the 185 maxims, many of which Nodier reproduced in his own publication entitled *Les Apothéoses et imprécations de Pythagore*.¹⁴ Advocating the lifestyle and mores of Pythagorean fellowship, these artists attempted to live out the revolutionary dream of a universal brotherhood, even going so far as to create a kind of artistic commune in the outskirts of Paris in which all goods were shared in common.¹⁵

¹⁰ See David's comment cited in note 7.

¹¹ The most comprehensive account of this movement remains Levitine, *The Dawn of Bohemianism: The Barbu Rebellion and Primitivism in Neoclassical France*. See also the more recent *Artistic Brotherhoods in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Laura Morowitz and William Vaughn.

¹² The composition of the *Sabine Women* was criticized as too 'Vanloo, Pompadour et Rococo'. Delécluze, 421.

¹³ 'Pourquoi, lui dit le futur Empereur (il s'en fallait de deux ou trois mois), pourquoi avez-vous adopté une forme d'habillement qui vous sépare du monde? – Pour me séparer du monde, répondit le peintre'. Delécluze, 441.

¹⁴ See Paul Bénichou, *Le Sacre de l'écrivain 1750–1830*, 216.

¹⁵ They retreated to the deserted Convent of the Visitation de Sainte-Marie at Chaillot, where they were joined by Gleizes and on at least one occasion allegedly even by Chateaubriand.

By treating the ancient past as a way of life, that is, as a practical and affective field of action, the *primitifs* sought to counter the weak imitation of antiquity found in fashion and in the artworks of their former master. In this they concurred not only with Maréchal's early critique of David's patronage culture in his article *À David, ci-devant peintre du roi, aujourd'hui représentant du peuple*.¹⁶ They also adopted a strong stance towards antiquity of the kind advocated by Maréchal: mimetic, non-ironic and deliberately oppositional. In a further parallel, they associated their communal mode of life with a kind of radical primitivism, which they extended to the arts. They preached belief in the oldest forms of literature (the Bible, Homer, Ossian) and the oldest forms of art (Greek vase paintings). In a remarkable echo of Maréchal's own call for the destruction of the arts in his *Manifeste des Égaux*, their leader, Maurice Quaï, even urged the destruction of the masterpieces of human civilization in order to model art directly on nature. The *primitifs* movement thus recreated in the aesthetic field the same relation to reality that Maréchal sought to establish in the political field. Both expressed a lyrical attitude to their temporal present in which reality was neither represented nor embellished but used to articulate a 'lost' past that was nonetheless ever present in nature. The reception history of Maréchal's *Voyages de Pythagore* thus leads us to a set of different but related questions: What happened to the Greek itinerary in the moment of crisis? How did the relation between the ancients and moderns change when Paris failed to become a New Athens?¹⁷ Finally, how and why did Pythagoras emerge as such a popular figure at precisely the time when antiquity itself no longer functioned as an ideal norm?

Pythagoras and his followers had long been hailed as the first true enlighteners of antiquity, unafraid to oppose prevailing customs in order to bring moral and religious practice in line with reason. With their tunic-like garments, long hair and ascetic habits, Pythagoreans had been associated with opposition, if not downright marginalization, since they first established themselves in Southern Italy in the sixth century B.C.E. Their impact on European thought was considerable. Illustrious European thinkers, especially from the Renaissance onwards, frequently emphasized their Pythagorean lineage.¹⁸ Over the course of the eighteenth century,

¹⁶ Maréchal, *Révolutions de Paris*, no. 198, 20 au 27 avril 1793, 226. See also Dommanget 247.

¹⁷ I borrow this question from François Hartog, who asks it of Chateaubriand. See also *Régimes d'Historicité*, 29, 86–9.

¹⁸ During the Renaissance, Pythagoreanism was considered a fountainhead for both physical science and mysticism. Pythagorean cosmology influenced such famous scientists as Copernicus,

the Pythagorean practice of basing their schools on friendship and goods held in common was emulated by Masonic lodges and various 'philosophical societies' all over Europe and America. Now at a moment when the revolutionary ideal of a universal brotherhood seemed to be forever lost, Pythagorean fellowship offered the hope of maintaining egalitarianism in a world otherwise characterized by disappointment. By restricting revolutionary brotherhood to a small circle and keeping alive the notion of a 'secret thread' of history linking the most ancient past to the most recent present, Pythagoras showed how a Republic of Equals could still exist in the absence of universal regeneration. More importantly, Pythagoras offered a way of reconciling belief in Enlightenment values with a pessimistic anthropology, a fear and loathing of the unregenerate people that sometimes bordered on misanthropy.

Both these aspects are evident in Maréchal's *Voyages de Pythagore*, which openly acknowledged its own status as a kind of wishful thinking. Was this voyage around the ancient world a memory or a dream? Did it represent a past as it was lived and experienced, as a historical reality? Or was rather merely a possible past, the past as it might have happened? As Maréchal admits in his preface, his text freely drew inspiration from the *Voyages du Jeune Anacharsis*. But whereas Anacharsis had been a fictional character undertaking a journey through historical Greece, Maréchal chose to present a historical figure in the form of a historical fiction. Pythagoras is conveniently the one ancient figure 'about whom the chronologists agree the least'.¹⁹ This lack of historical specificity gives what is otherwise an erudite tome of epic proportions an elegiac quality. Maréchal is interested not in the past as it was but in the past as it might have been – this 'might have been' allows him to use Pythagoras as a way to mourn the lost futures and expectancies of the revolutionary present.

Thus although Maréchal constructs a travel narrative out of erudite examples and anecdotes, the dominant framing structure is not narrative but a lyrical account of history as a past present. Pythagoras is made to travel to the limits of the ancient world, meeting many more sages than he probably did in real life, including the Brahmins of India and the Druids of the North, and discussing many more political and social issues than the historical evidence allows. Most notably Pythagoras allows

Galileo and Newton. The popularization of Pythagorean ideas throughout the eighteenth century led to the establishment of Pythagorean clubs such as the Philadelphians, a club established in 1777.

¹⁹ 'Le personnage de l'Antiquité sur lequel les chronologistes s'accordent le moins', Maréchal, *Voyages de Pythagore*, t. I, x.

Maréchal to reconcile a longing for a regenerated human society based on small, self-subsisting groups with a pessimistic anthropology born of his later years. As he notes in a bitter remark that he attributes to Pythagoras: 'Beware of the three P's: the people, priests and princes.'²⁰ Elsewhere he is even more explicit: the people are nothing but ignorant animals.²¹

Pythagoras thus emerges as an ideal figure of hope for a failed enlightenment. Even in his own time, we are told, the golden age in which humans lived in an archipelago of small communes was already a distant past. As Pythagoras's teacher says: 'Society has taken hold of the most beautiful places, the most fertile countryside; only sandy deserts remain unsullied'.²² Pushing the golden age further back in time even from antiquity, Maréchal represents the Greek itinerary as a ruin. It is a symptom both of a lost past and an ongoing historical process that turns every present into a past. The most one can hope for is to recreate a *desert* within society, a tabula rasa of historical reference. With this (decidedly Romantic) trope of a desert, the distant present takes the place of the ancient past; geography replaces history. The Greek archipelago no longer represents a voyage back in time but rather a type of inner expatriation, an imaginative separation of the self from society and from the present. Unlike the historical Pythagoras, who in fact returned to Samos at least once in his life, Maréchal presents his Pythagoras as a perpetual traveller who never returns to his homeland. It is a way for Maréchal, like his hero and alter ego, to 'exile himself forever' – from his own society, his own time, by choosing to live a life apart.²³

Maréchal's lyrical stance towards antiquity is most clearly manifest in the final volume dedicated to Pythagoras's sayings. Although Pythagorean sayings were commonly understood to be allegorical symbols of a hidden or unsaid truth, Maréchal emphasizes their lyrical side. They are lyrical insofar as they show rather than tell. Passed down orally from generation to generation, they are enigmatic rejoinders of a truth that is visible only in action. Maréchal takes advantage of this fact to pass off his own ideas in the mouth of the sage. The full disclosure of Pythagoras's secret doctrine is that there is no doctrine, only a mode of living and attitude to life – a lifestyle that can be recreated in small enclosed groups whose

²⁰ 'Garde-toi des trois P's: le peuple, les prêtres, les princes'. Ibid., t. VI, 279. See also Dommanget, 358.

²¹ Ibid.

²² 'La société s'est emparé de plus beaux sites, des campagnes les plus fécondes; elle n'a laissé d'intact que les déserts sablonneux', Maréchal, *Voyages de Pythagore*, t. 1, 181.

²³ 'S'expatrie pour jamais', *ibid.*, vii.

members voluntarily give up their possessions to live like the original human family. The golden age archipelago reappears in the here and now on condition that these 'small worlds' remain self-enclosed and cut off from society. In a final twist, Pythagoras's 'secret' atheism and communism is extended to the wives and children of the adepts who, according to Maréchal's vision, are encouraged to live *en famille*.²⁴

Although these lyrical representations of a lost human family may appear hopelessly regressive, it should be emphasized that they were primarily conceived as ways to assert a difference from the contemporary present, and in particular an emerging narrative understanding of history that insisted on treating the past and present as separate and distinct categories. This anti-narrative stance is made explicit in Maréchal's *Histoire universelle en style lapidaire*. As he remarks in the preface, there is a 'prodigious ability to multiply books today'; in fact, 'the field of History is overcrowded with them'.²⁵ In contrast to this burgeoning prose history, Maréchal presents his own attempt at writing a universal history as a kind of lapidary writing.

History should be brought back to its point of departure, by reestablishing the *lapidary style* so that a restricted space forces at last a sparing use of words, which will bring out what is essential. Brevity and clarity are the two principle duties of a historian, which he can only discharge by reducing the annals of nations to nothing but a series of *epitaphs*.²⁶

As the title suggests, a lapidary style aims for the same concision and precision of an inscription cut in stone. Its aim is not to narrate a sequence of events but to express, in the form of striking images, a truth that is universal. What matters is neither real time (the time it actually takes for events to occur) nor narrated time, but the impact of the past on lived time, that is the time of action. As Maréchal's prologue notes (in a font and placement that mimics epitaphs):

THE STYLE OF HISTORY
AS FAST AS TIME FLIES
SHOULD BE AS BRIEF
AS LIFE

²⁴ See, for example, his description of the Pythagorean school as a place where 'chacun de nous peut amener son épouse et ses enfants, et vivre en famille', *Voyages de Pythagore*, t. V, 351.

²⁵ 'Prodigieuse facilité de multiplier aujourd'hui des livres'; 'le champ de l'Histoire en est encombré', Maréchal, *Histoire universelle*, 15.

²⁶ 'Il faut ramener l'Histoire au point d'où elle est partie, en rétablissant le *style lapidaire*, et qu'un espace donné oblige enfin à une parcimonie de mots qui fera ressortir les choses. Laconisme et clarté sont les deux principaux devoirs d'un historien; il ne peut s'en acquitter qu'en réduisant les fastes des peuples à n'être qu'une suite d'*inscriptions*'. *Ibid.*, 1.

MORE ACTIONS
THAN SAYINGS²⁷

Maréchal's use of lapidary writing to present history in the form of a *tableau* recalls the theories of historical representation discussed in Chapter 4. Diderot in particular, as we have already seen, shared Maréchal's insistence on freezing narrative digression into an emblematic gesture. Both writers sought to subordinate historical narration to a dramatic representation in which visual impact was privileged over verbal form, what Maréchal calls 'the mid-point between poetry and prose'.²⁸ And both dismissed an overly linear narration of events as a digression that distracts the viewer or reader from what truly matters – *showing* a universal portrait of human nature. For both writers the relevant question was not what to include but what to exclude. What images do we use to paint the past and can they also apply to the present?

It is interesting in this regard that Maréchal explicitly begins his universal history by refusing to narrate the *historical* origins of the Egyptian or Chinese civilization or even to decide which of the two is older. Rather he begins lyrically, with an evocation of a lost golden age. He does so not simply out of nostalgia. Like Vico, Court de Gébelin and other eighteenth-century writers on mythology, he does so out of a conviction that the earliest stages of history are most relevant to the present insofar as they show how history has the potential to be otherwise.²⁹ The function of universal history is thus not to amass details or establish historical accuracy but to restore a time before narrative. This was a time marked not by dates but 'by a few nails hammered onto a column as in ancient Roman times'.³⁰ Maréchal evokes the figure of the Roman pontiff for whom history took the form of a daily almanac; the pontiff would first note what occurred each day of the year and then inscribe these daily observations onto white tablets for everyone to see and judge for themselves.³¹ In this reference to a

²⁷

LE STYLE DE L'HISTOIRE
AUSSI RAPIDE
QUE LE VOL DU TEMPS
DOIT ETRE BREF
COMME LA VIE
PLUS DE FAITS
QUE DE DITS

Ibid., 25.

²⁸ 'Le milieu entre la poésie et la prose', Maréchal, *Histoire universelle*, 12.

²⁹ See *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, 281–4, 412–15.

³⁰ 'dans les premiers siècles de Rome, on ne comptoit les années que par une suite de clous attachés à la muraille d'un temple', Maréchal, *Histoire universelle*, 6.

³¹ Maréchal, *Histoire universelle*, 7: 'Le grand pontife ... écrivait ce qui se passait chaque jour dans le cour de l'année: il transcrivait ensuite ces mêmes choses sur des tables blanches et il les exposait ... afin que chacun pût s'en instruire et en juger'.

history without dates, we are back again to large time units that exceed the organization of events into any probable or necessary sequence. Lapidary history establishes a lyrical stance to the past in which time is marked by deeds, not dates, and cyclical structures prevail over linear ones.

If Maréchal's universal history tried to reduce the past to an outline, the verbal equivalent of a Greek vase painting, his history of Russia invokes a different visual metaphor, that of the fresco. This text, whose full title is *Histoire de la Russie réduite aux seuls faits importants*, begins with Obrin and ends with a scathing criticism of Catherine the Great's attempts to manipulate public opinion to consolidate her own power (a veiled attack on Napoléon?). It is notable not just for this critical stance but also for its prologue, which sets out a new program of 'writing history'. Like his lapidary history, this text insists on the need to express history in a common language and with easily recognizable images. Its aim is to enlighten the Russian people – who are situated outside history, having remained 'outsiders to the progress of civilization in the rest of Europe' – regarding the true nature of their rulers.³² We have already seen how Maréchal uses stock images – the shepherd, the rural peasant, the urban dweller, the father and son – to convey a complex social structure in a condensed space. *Histoire de la Russie* pushes this problematic further to diagnose the problem of identifying complex social structures in the context of a large empire. As Maréchal notes, previously it might have been enough to paint a portrait of a ruler or a king in order to illustrate an entire epoch. The new history, however, can only be written like an immense fresco, with rapid and broad brushstrokes: 'History is like a fresco painting which certainly requires less accuracy than painting on an easel. With a sure hand, the writer must go quickly, to be read with the same speed with which he writes.'³³

The reference to the historical fresco is revealing. It suggests that the desire to visually condense all of history into one space is still the norm. But it also suggests that the tableau is becoming too full. The accumulation of historical events and the multiplication of storylines require new methods if they are to be represented in a coherent space. To counter the increasing number of historical books being published Maréchal claims that the true book of history remains to be written: it would be entitled 'The Lacunae of History'.³⁴ A book based on subtraction, a return to the

³² 'Étrangers aux progrès de la civilisation du reste de l'Europe'. Maréchal, *Histoire de la Russie*, 357.

³³ 'L'Histoire est une peinture à fresque, qui veut sans doute moins de correction qu'une toile de chevalet: l'écrivain, sûr de lui, doit aller vite, et se faire lire avec la rapidité de sa composition'. Maréchal, *Histoire de la Russie*, vj.

³⁴ 'Les lacunes de l'Histoire', *ibid.*

visual clarity of an outline, would enable multiple storylines to coexist in one space. Maréchal offers his *Histoire de la Russie* as an example, freely admitting it might be a poor one. Successful or not what matters, according to Maréchal, is the attempt to capture the past as an emotional reality, in this case, history perceived from the point of its victims, as a history of crime. This is the importance of the lyrical stance. History may no longer be subsumable – as it was in Maréchal's ancient Rome – under the cyclical structures of calendar time. Nonetheless a writing style that knows how to punctuate historical narrative with lyrical moments – descriptions that function as images or what would later be called 'photo-montage' – will be able to illuminate the social structures that subtend and give meaning to all historical events.

As it should be clear by now, post-Thermidorean France cannot be described by simply evoking the familiar understanding of the Revolution as a rupture, a threshold event forever separating past from present. Rather than assume such a clean break it is more accurate to describe this period as one of increasingly open conflict between a still viable lyrical representation of the past and an increasingly modern understanding of history as a series of events succeeding each other in a linear time. This modern attitude to history, in which the intellectual intelligibility of the past would be increasingly transmitted via a 'scientific' historical method rather than compendiums of lives, is best represented by Volney, who criticized the limitations of biographical history and called for history to be written according to the 'laws of probability'.³⁵ As the first chair of history of the newly formed *École normale*, Volney greatly influenced the emergence of history as a scientific discipline. But his prescriptions (and precisely because they *are* prescriptions) hardly account for all the ways in which people related to the past in this period. Indeed in several works, Maréchal takes explicit jabs both at Volney and at the attempt to transform history into an objective science.³⁶

More importantly, if we are ever going to provide a convincing account of how French materialism led to socialism and communism, it is not enough to rely on linear historical narratives. For we need to also understand how

³⁵ Volney called this new history a 'biography of a nation, and the physiological study of the laws, of the growth and decay of its social body', 61. He also criticized exemplary history: 'For it is obvious that nothing is more difficult than to prove with certainty, and retrace with truth, the actions and character of any man whatsoever. [...] Biographical works are almost always panegyrics or satires', 35. Volney, *Leçons d'histoire* (Year III, English translation, 1800).

³⁶ In *Histoire de la Russie*, Maréchal remarks: 'Dans nos modernes Écoles, on a institué un Professorat d'Histoire; *Cui bono?* Pour savoir l'histoire, il suffit de savoir lire; il n'en va pas de même pour la rédiger' vj–vij.

revolutionary utopianism was experienced in its own present as a lyrical enactment of the past, that is to say, as a deliberately anti-historical gesture. Thus while it is tempting to describe the Pythagorean circles as religious cults or as evidence of a resurgence of the occult,³⁷ it is also misleading. As I have tried to show, the more immediate context is less the reenactment of a religious sensibility than a defense against the increasing differentiation between past and present. Whether in the case of Maréchal's fictional Pythagoras or in the real-life Pythagorean cult of *les primitifs*, the decision to promote a self-referential world of meaning was undertaken deliberately in order to negate ongoing change in the historical world. After all the lyrical stance, as Paul de Man has argued, is always associated with its own modernity; it is not a timeless voice from nowhere. Thus although these small worlds manifest the same search for cosmological unity that we find, for example, in the revolutionary calendar, what they actually express is the fragmentation of such a unity, a longing for a lost past and the attempt to reconstitute it through an act of the imagination. Instead of one cosmos, we have many sub-universes, all of which remain internally compatible on the condition that they remain self-enclosed.

The transformation of the Republican calendar from a lyrical frame of history to an empty concept is thus symptomatic of an overall change. Once the calendar becomes a grid, a background rather than frame of historical understanding, history becomes narrative in structure. What is gained in terms of historical accuracy and 'objectivity' is lost in terms of 'possibility'. Historical narration, which treats the past as an already established reality, replaces the lyrical expression of the past, which treats the past as if it was a present at some point and hence still open to other possible futures.

But if Maréchal's late writings can be considered an elegy for a lost horizon of antiquity, it is also true that the Republican calendar continued to survive in ways that its original inventor had never intended. Let us now turn to consider this changing boundary between the horizon of history and fiction from the reverse perspective, that of a national history and a national calendar that eventually came to dominate all relations with the past. Even at this late stage of the Revolution, the Republican calendar plays a surprisingly prominent role in these changes. Once shorn of its lyrical dimension the Republican calendar proved to be an essential tool in the reconciliation with the Catholic Church that terminated in the Concordat.

³⁷ This is, for example, how Billington describes Pythagoreanism. Although Billington provides compelling evidence for the importance of this social formation, he does not, in my view, sufficiently distinguish between the 'rational' traditions of primitivism and the more occult ones.

18 BRUMAIRE, CONCORDAT AND CORONATION:
THE DOUBLE LIFE OF THE CALENDAR UNDER NAPOLÉON

18 Brumaire VIII (9 November 1799) probably remains the best-known date on the Republican calendar. This is the day when Napoléon, in collaboration with a handful of deputies including Abbé Sieyès, overthrew the Directory and replaced it with the Consulate. As with the other coups, the aim was to overthrow the Constitution in order to prevent the dissolution of the French Republic, which the conspirators believed was in danger of collapse. Although not intended solely or primarily as a military coup, a series of events spread out over two days ended when Napoléon's soldiers cleared the chambers of any remaining opposition. A year later Napoléon's adviser Roederer, who had played a considerable role in engineering the coup, would describe the events of 18 Brumaire in almost mythological terms as the day in which Napoléon single-handedly brought about the Revolution's end: 'One single day, and one sole man have brought about these changes. This day is the 18 Brumaire. It is in celebrating its anniversary that the great sight of the general Restoration unfolds'.³⁸ Napoléon enabled the Revolution's historical intentions and actions finally to align because, as Roederer put it, he represented the unity of reason, will and power.³⁹

From the beginning, 18 Brumaire was hailed as the start of a 'modern' political regime that no longer trafficked in an outdated antiquity. The ex-conventional Lambert Tallien characterized the coup as the work of a modern man who valued historical continuity, especially with religious traditions, over rupture and a return to an idealized past: 'Nobody knew better than him to recognize the empire of habit and of religious opinions. That is worth more than having studied mankind in *Anarcharsis* and wanting to make us *Greek*'.⁴⁰ Lambert was not the only one to hail Napoléon as an anti-Anarcharsis. Napoléon's brother Lucien described the coup as the victory of practical reason over philosophical will:

The Republic is not entirely inhabited by philosophers. The principles by which a small Laconian town was able to be governed would not be appropriate for

³⁸ 'Un seul jour, un seul homme ont produit ces changements. Ce jour est le 18 Brumaire. C'est par son anniversaire que se déploie le grand spectacle de la Restauration générale'. Roederer, *Journal du Comte P. L. Roederer*, 102.

³⁹ 'Ce sont les fruits: De l'unité de pensée; de l'unité de vouloir; de l'unité de pouvoir'. Roederer, 102.

⁴⁰ 'Personne n'a plus que lui appris à connaître l'empire de l'habitude et des opinions religieuses; cela vaut mieux que d'avoir étudié les hommes dans *Anarcharsis* et de vouloir faire de nous des Grecs'. Cited by Mathiez, *La Théophilanthropie est le culte décadaire*, 588.

a populous nation, for whom commerce, luxury and the arts have created a multitude of needs.⁴¹

Instead of philosophical principles applicable at best for a 'Laconian backwater', Napoléon signalled the triumph of a modern political state based on commercial society over the antique model that was now revealed to be a metaphysical construct. 18 Brumaire, Lucien Bonaparte argued, is a victory of practical philosophy over the *esprit de parti*, that is to say, a victory of 'practical philosophy, which tends to win over and make citizens happy, over their [the factions'] metaphysical theories, which has often led patriotism astray.⁴² Napoléon claimed to represent a new alliance of history with realism. In his famous speech to the Council of the State in 1800, he defined the modern age as the beginning of an age of realism and as the end of the age of philosophical fictions:

We have finished the Romance of the Revolution. Now we must begin its history, looking only at what is real and possible in the application of principles and not what is speculation and hypothetical. To pursue a different course today would be to philosophize, not to govern.⁴³

But if 18 Brumaire marked a new epoch of practical reason why did Napoléon insist on maintaining that paragon of pure, philosophical reason, the Republican calendar? And if his mandate, as he presented it, was to reconcile a nation polarized by conflicting attitudes to the Revolution's premise of rupture, why did he maintain the one artifact that more than any other represented a coercive attempt to impose an entirely new set of habits and structures on a resistant population? Some of the very first decrees of the new regime concerned the Republican calendar. On 30 Brumaire Laplace circulated a decree declaring: 'It is in continuing to observe with the most scrupulous attention the laws instituting the national festivals and the *décadaires* of the Republican calendar, the new system of weights and measures and so forth that you will justify the trust placed in the government'.⁴⁴ Maintaining the Republican calendar was a

⁴¹ 'La République n'est pas entièrement peuplée de philosophes, les principes, par lesquels on a pu gouverner une bourgade de Laconie, ne sauraient convenir à un grand peuple, chez qui le commerce, le luxe, les arts ont introduit une foule de besoins'. *Ibid.*, 592.

⁴² 'Une bourgade de Laconie'; 'la philosophie pratique, qui tend à rallier, à rendre heureux tous les citoyens, sur ces théories métaphysiques, dans lesquelles le patriotisme s'est souvent égaré'. *Ibid.*, 591.

⁴³ 'Nous avons fini le roman de la Révolution: il faut en commencer l'histoire, ne voir que ce qu'il y a de réel et de possible dans l'application des principes et non ce qu'il y a de spéculatif et d'hypothétique. Suivre aujourd'hui une autre marche, ce serait philosopher, et non gouverner'. Cited by Furet, 'Napoléon' in *Critical Dictionary*, 279.

⁴⁴ 'C'est en continuant à faire observer avec la plus scrupuleuse exactitude les lois qui instituent les fêtes nationales et *décadaires* du calendrier républicain, un nouveau système de poids et mesures, etc., que vous justifierez la confiance du gouvernement'. Mathiez., 589.

way of ensuring that Napoléon's *coup* was not a *coup* against the Republic but only against certain of its representatives (in particular the remaining Jacobins).

However, even though Napoléon used the Republican calendar to maintain a historical continuity with the Revolution, he quickly moved to empty the calendar of any notion of a festive model of representation. This rejection of a festive understanding of the Revolution is evident from the second decree issued on 2 Nivôse, which stipulated that henceforth only two revolutionary festivals were to be celebrated each year, one to mark the beginning of the Revolution and one when it *should have ended*: 14 July, the 'epoch which began the Revolution' and 1 Vendémiaire, 'the epoch which should have ended it'.⁴⁵ Laplace's interesting use of the past conditional not only associates revolutionary history with a normative horizon (its ideal endpoint); it effectively erases all the intervening years since 22 September 1792, consigning both the Jacobin Republic and the Directory to historical oblivion. (This purging may be one reason for the still prevalent impression that the decade of the 1790s produced very little in terms of innovative cultural policy when in fact, as I argue in Chapter 6, it was quite the opposite with many of the innovative changes involving new ways of orchestrating the mass spectacle.) But if erasing one set of festivals and replacing them with another mimicked previous revolutionary governments, each of which had used the calendar to project its own administration as the true outcome of the Revolution, there is in fact a crucial difference. Instead of associating the state with the 'peak' moments of a festive calendar, Napoléon distanced the state as much as possible from any kind of festive revolutionary memory. Emptied of their symbolic and commemorative function, the revolutionary festivals came to reflect instead what Mathiez called 'pure fairground pleasures'.⁴⁶ As if to emphasize its distance from any kind of symbolic legitimacy associated with festive time – and by extensive the revolutionary ideal of the festival as presenting the presence of the people – the government did not even deign to appear for the festival of 14 July Year IX.

This transformation of the Republican calendar from a lyrical and festive celebration of a revolutionary 'present' to an abstract and neutral time frame provides a new solution to the old problem of the relation between embodiment and abstraction. By claiming that he alone embodied the Revolution, Napoléon aimed to depoliticize France of its various warring factions. Insofar as he concentrated executive power in his own person,

⁴⁵ 'Époque qui commença la Révolution'; 'époque qui aurait dû la terminer'. *Ibid.*, 590.

⁴⁶ 'Les pures réjouissances foraines'. *Ibid.*, 606.

Napoléon was able to represent the revolutionary Republic as an entirely legal state, one that demanded obedience on the part of all its citizens because it represented no one in particular. The people were equal before the law to the extent that the law itself was an abstract expression of justice and not the self-proclaimed imposition of a group. A parallel can be drawn here between the new civil code instituted by Napoléon and this new 'abstract' use of a symbolically 'empty' calendar. As commentators have noted, Napoléon's civil code re-established Roman law as the basis of the new revolutionary state only by evacuating it of its political content, in particular the right of people to assemble.⁴⁷ This was in marked contrast to the revolutionary governments for which Roman law was still associated with the assembly of the people *before the law*. In a manner similar to Napoléon's civil code, the calendar was used to ensure state control over the temporal realm even as it too was evacuated of its content, in this case the festivals that assembled the people together. The result was a wholesale abandonment of the great experiments in festive assembly conducted under the Directory in which the revolutionary administration still imagined that the task of the calendar was to supplement political legislation by embodying abstract law as lived time.

Once liberated from the task of symbolizing presence, the Republican calendar became an abstract time schema reflecting an impersonal and abstract state. This transformation paved the way for the final reconciliation between France and the Catholic Church, which resulted in the eventual restoration of the Christian calendar. But the fact that this restoration took place on Republican time and involved a protracted negotiation between Republican and Catholic time frames demonstrates that, far from dying a slow death, the Republican calendar contributed in crucial political ways to the modernization of time. Contrary thus to the perceived wisdom that the Republican calendar was abandoned because of a lack of significance or because it 'did not work' the final reconciliation between church and state was only reached when *both* calendars were updated and modified.

The Concordat, ratified on 26 Messidor Year IX (15 July 1801), re-established the links between France and Catholicism and instituted a calendar of public holidays that would be used in France throughout the nineteenth century. Its main achievement was to separate temporal and spiritual authority by giving the state all authority over religious holidays.⁴⁸ While it is true that Napoléon mollified the church by abandoning

⁴⁷ See Tulard, *Napoléon: The Myth of the Saviour*. Furet, 'Napoléon' in *Critical Dictionary*.

⁴⁸ Shusterman, 'Une loi de l'église et de l'état: Napoléon and the Central Administration of Religious Life, 1800–1815'.

the *décadi* and re-establishing Sunday as the official day of rest for state functionaries, it is also true that the Concordat in an important sense completed the original intent of calendar reform by taking away religious authority over time. The agreement stipulated that no religious holidays could be celebrated without government permission.⁴⁹ It further decreed that all religious holidays had to be celebrated on Sunday with the exception of four: Christmas, Ascension, Assumption and All Saints Day. However, although Napoléon acknowledged Catholicism to be the religion of the 'majority' of Frenchmen, he stopped short of legislating Sunday as the official day of rest for the country as a whole, despite the church's demands.⁵⁰ This was in keeping with his vision of France as both a tolerant state in which there was a majority religion but no official state religion and a modern state in which work was valued over days of rest. As Napoléon is reported to have said: 'Why has the law of 18 Germinal Year X reduced the number of festivals? In order not to distract from working those men who need to work to live and to not suspend too frequently the work and function of those public servants who are dedicated to the service of the state.'⁵¹

It is thus from the perspective of a double time – a public time of the state that was still Republican and the private time of 'religion' – that the work of the Concordat was accomplished. The agreement required the abandonment of a festive understanding of calendar time by *both* the Republican state and the Catholic Church in favour of an abstract understanding of calendar time as a homogeneous space whose main goal was the synchronization of events in time. During the negotiations, Napoléon demanded the reduction of the number of Catholic festivals, while the Nonce demanded the suppression of the *décadi* and in particular, the cult of Theophilanthropy. From the perspective of both sides, the common enemy was cyclical time: for Napoléon the rituals of an eternal order; for the church the attempt to create a religion out of a secular enlightenment.

The result was a final and decisive breakdown in the analogy between the festive Revolution and the Christian calendar. Secular time was no

⁴⁹ See article organique XLI. Aucune fête, à l'exception du dimanche, ne pourra être établie sans la permission du Gouvernement.

⁵⁰ See article organique LVII. Le repos des fonctionnaires publics sera fixé au dimanche.

⁵¹ 'Pourquoi la loi du 18 germinal an X a-t-elle diminué le nombre des fêtes? Pour de ne pas distraire trop souvent de leur travaux les hommes qui ont besoin de travailler pour vivre et pour ne pas suspendre trop fréquemment les travaux et les fonctions des personnes consacrées au service de la société'. Portalis, *Rapport touchant la célébration des dimanches et des fêtes conservées par le concordat*, 21 janvier 1807, in *Discours, rapports, et travaux inédits sur le concordat de 1801 (26 Messidor an IX)*, 547.

longer allegorically conceived as the alignment of historical referents onto the cyclical patterns of nature. In other words, it was no longer associated with the time of *la fable* in which antiquity was used to postulate a natural religion whose structures contradicted the church calendar only insofar as they were also closely modelled upon it. The state would henceforth inhabit a secular time without cosmological pretensions, beginning with a calendar that no longer attempted to integrate revolutionary history with nature. But if the Republic returned to the Gregorian calendar it was on condition that this calendar too had been 'revolutionized' in the process, that it too was stripped of its cosmological and religious dimension to become a civic calendar marked by periodicity, that is by the perpetual repetition of identical units of measure rather than festive highs and lows.

However, there is a further reason why Napoléon abandoned the *décadi*: because, for him, a secular state was still a state that needed religion. A return to the Gregorian calendar was a way of ensuring that a regime that otherwise remained revolutionary, especially in its emphasis on new laws and new legislation, nonetheless gave the appearance of returning to continuity and tradition. As Portalis put it, better a false religion than a false philosophy: 'False systems of philosophy render the intellect contentious and the heart cold. False systems of religions at least have the advantage of rallying people around some shared ideas and disposing them towards a few virtues.'⁵² Religion in this regard was instrumentalized not only against the fantasies of the festive Enlightenment but also to ensure that no more social demands were made upon the state. Whereas the Directory had tried to use the Republican calendar to erect a boundary between an (unequal) society and an equal because abstract state, Napoléon used the religious calendar to accomplish the same purpose. Religion, as he famously declared, ensured social stability because it displaced demands for social justice onto a providential nature:

Society cannot exist without disparities in wealth and disparities in wealth cannot exist without religion. When a man is dying of hunger beside a man who is bursting at the seams, it is impossible for him to accept this difference unless some authority tells him: 'God wishes it so. There must be poor and rich in this world but later, and throughout eternity, the distribution will be made otherwise.'⁵³

⁵² 'Les faux systèmes de philosophie rendent l'esprit contentieux et laissent le coeur froid: de faux systèmes de religion ont au moins l'avantage de rallier les hommes à quelques idées communes et de les disposer à quelques vertus'. Portalis, *Discours sur le Concordat*, 189.

⁵³ 'La société ne peut exister sans l'inégalité des fortunes, et l'inégalité des fortunes ne peut exister sans la religion. Quand un homme meurt de faim à côté d'un autre qui regorge, il lui est

The result was a state in which the contingency of origins was readily acknowledged but not the contingency of outcomes. As Portalis explained, while the novelty of laws could be readily justified, this did not hold for religion whose man-made origins needed to be obscured by the mists of time.⁵⁴

Finally, this explains in part why the Republican chronology and the names of the months were maintained even as the calendar's ten-day week was abandoned. It was to enforce the impression that history, and especially history as it was embodied and personified by Napoléon, marched to its own tempo. This tempo, moreover, had nothing to do with the everyday world of traditions and habits, now once more associated with religion. To history belonged the task of synchronizing the Revolution's future with the expectations of the past. Roederer expressed this retrospective logic when he justified Napoléon's election as Consul for Life on 14 Thermidor Year X (2 August 1802) as a way of closing off the frighteningly open future, constructing a barrier against the 'abyss' that had opened up between past and future:

Squeezed between the all too recent memories of the past and fear for the future, France sees in its recent ascent only the danger of collapse. France asks for a barrier between it and the abyss, a support, something to lean on, at the summit of its glory.⁵⁵

Napoléon's clear preference for a revolutionary chronology indicates the continuing importance and indeed significance of the Republican calendar to its very end. It is significant in this regard that Napoléon crowned himself Emperor on 11 Frimaire Year XIII (2 December 1804), the last major event to be dated with the Republican calendar before it was finally abolished. In the months leading up to the Coronation, Napoléon scrupulously observed the Republican dates, harassing the pope to crown him by the anniversary of 18 Brumaire. As commentators have observed, this insistence on a Republican chronology was incongruous. If, on the

impossible d'accéder à cette différence s'il n'y a pas là une autorité qui lui dise: 'Dieu le veut ainsi; il faut qu'il y ait des pauvres et des riches dans le monde: mais ensuite, et pendant l'éternité, le partage se fera autrement.' Roederer, 14 Thermidor An VIII (2 août 1800), *Journal*, 18–19.

⁵⁴ Portalis, *Le Concordat*, 193: 'Les lois humaines peuvent tirer avantage de leur nouveauté, parce que souvent les lois nouvelles annoncent l'intention de réformer d'ancien abus ou de faire quelque nouveau bien, mais en matière de religion, tout ce qui a l'apparence de la nouveauté porte le caractère de l'erreur ou de l'imposture. L'antiquité convient aux institutions religieuses'.

⁵⁵ 'Serrée entre les souvenirs trop récents du passé et des craintes pour l'avenir, elle [la France] ne regarde son élévation que comme un danger de chute. Elle demande une barrière au-devant du gouffre, un soutien, un appui au sommet de la gloire'. Roederer, *Consulat à Vie* (1er mai 1802), *Journal*, 135.

one hand, Napoléon was indeed trying to establish a new dynasty, why did he not demand that the Coronation be held in Year I of the Empire? If, on the other hand, he intended to re-establish a French monarchic tradition that made him the worthy successor of Charlemagne, the 'heureux soldat', why did he not return to the sacred calendar of kings? Why, when faced with two such obvious contenders, did Napoléon insist on maintaining the Republican calendar to the point of declaring that if the pope did not manage to arrive by the deferred date of 11 Frimaire, 'the coronation would take place and we would be forced to postpone the Consecration'?⁵⁶

The decision to opt for Republican dates appears less paradoxical, however, if we consider the Coronation not so much as a new beginning but as a conclusion and apotheosis of the Republican epoch. In order to close off the Republican era that began in Year I, the Coronation needed to maintain its allegiance to revolutionary beginnings (hence the chronology). But it also needed to acknowledge that these new beginnings no longer referred to such abstract concepts as 'antiquity' or 'nature' but instead had been reintegrated into a specifically French national history. In other words, before France could return to European history and a European framework of time by returning to a common calendar, it needed to assert its difference from this shared European past. Revolutionary beginnings had to be reinterpreted as national beginnings.

Yet, as so many times before, this attempt to designate a new threshold event dissipated under the pressure and speed of historical change. In the case of Napoléon's Coronation, the attempt to identify the outcome of revolutionary history with his own person backfired in part because the demands for symbolic presence could not be reconciled with a modern secular understanding of historical time. The Coronation remains, in this sense, something of an enigma. Here, after all was a man who identified so strongly with the contingency of history that he declared, in a letter written to Joséphine: 'I depend on events, I have no will'; 'one depends on events and situations'.⁵⁷ Yet this same man would subscribe to a 'portrait-theory' of history and attempt to impose himself and his own self-image as the portrait of his age, in the tradition of Louis XIV and other French kings.⁵⁸ This was to prove difficult because Napoléon was far from a stable

⁵⁶ 'Le couronnement aurait lieu et l'on serait forcé de remettre le sacre'. In Masson, *Le sacre et le couronnement de Napoléon*, 148.

⁵⁷ 'Je dépends des événements; je n'ai point de volonté'; 'l'on dépend des événements et des circonstances'. *Ibid.*, v.

⁵⁸ For a fascinating account of Napoléon's various metamorphoses and his historical models see Jourdan, *Napoléon: Héros, imperator, mécène*.

icon. As Stendhal had noted, this instability was especially evident in the difficulty that artists faced when trying to portray him. Should he be portrayed as a realist? In a classical style? As a Romantic hero? Stendhal complained that almost all the portraits gave him the inspired eyes of a poet, which was at odds with his particular genius, while the ones by David and Canova, masters of the neo-classical style, were the worst.⁵⁹

Napoléon's inability to project himself visually as a stable 'portrait' that transmitted the 'spirit' of his times was evident during the Coronation ceremony, which seemed almost deliberately shot through with an awareness of the contingency of representation. Napoléon insisted on reviving Charlemagne as his preferred ancestor to the extent of searching for his original sword only to discover that, after all, his own sword functioned much better precisely because it marked the beginning of a new epoch of military expansion. As Roederer put it, 'The ceremonial sword has disappeared; victory's sword remains. This is the sword that has done great deeds and that merits honour'.⁶⁰ He insisted on receiving the *sacre*, a divine anointment, even as he denied its basis in the 'eternal' and unchanging time of ritual. As Portalis stated blithely, 'We will remove that part of the ceremonial that does not fit our ways'.⁶¹ Even as small a detail as his affection for the bee, the symbol of kings, revealed the deficiency of representation. His ministers complained that Napoléon scattered bees around *without giving any reason*.⁶² Napoléon's greatest caprice – his decision to crown Joséphine, to whom he was not married and despite the fact that there was no historical precedent for crowning queens in French history – merely established his own difference from the past; it was not enough to inaugurate a new tradition.

Kitsch, a term that developed much later, is not part of the revolutionary vocabulary. Nonetheless, it is useful for understanding how and why the Coronation failed to achieve its intended effect. It failed not just because it was a tasteless copy of an extant style, a pantomime of loftier cultural ideals that were no longer in place, but because it emphasized the divergence between representation and the 'spirit' of the revolutionary age that it tried to embody.⁶³ Napoléon in many ways, and perhaps precisely because of his iconic instability, *did* represent this new experience

⁵⁹ 'Beaucoup de peintres lui ont donné les yeux d'un poète. Ces yeux-là ne vont pas avec l'étonnante capacité d'attention qui est le caractère de son génie. [...] Les moins mauvais portraits sont de Robert Lefèvre et de Chaudet; les plus mauvais de David et de Canova'. Stendhal, *Napoléon*, 209.

⁶⁰ 'Le glaive des fêtes a disparu; l'épée des victoires est restée; c'est elle qui a besoin et qui mérite les honneurs'. Masson, *Le sacre*, 140–41.

⁶¹ 'On retranchera ces cérémonies qui ne vont pas à nos moeurs'. *Ibid.*, 142.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶³ For kitsch and its relation to the contemporary present see Hermann Broch, *Geist und Zeitgeist*.

of history (as he was well aware). But by opting to model his regime on an archetype, he merely ended up revealing everything that was new about this regime and could no longer fit into a portrait theory of history. If history was to be visually represented, a better genre may well have been the historical frescoes advocated by Sylvain Maréchal, the literary equivalent of the grand historical paintings that would soon become so popular, and not the portraits of rulers who, no matter how memorable their deeds, no longer controlled the assignation of either symbolic or historical meaning. This failure to stabilize representation was immediately evident to contemporary observers. Sarcastic anagrams like the following parodied the very idea of attempting to found something as foundational and long lasting as an empire:

NAPOLÉON EMPEROR OF THE FRENCH

THIS MAD EMPEROR WILL NOT SEE OUT THE YEAR⁶⁴

And royalists such as Joseph de Maistre observed the Coronation with glee: 'Nothing can be more useful than this ephemeral ascension of Bonaparte to the throne which will hasten his own downfall and reestablish the foundations of monarchy without costing the slightest disfavor to the legitimate prince'.⁶⁵

LAPLACE'S FINAL VERDICT

On 22 Fructidor Year XIII (8 September 1805), the Sénatus-consulte voted to abolish the Republican calendar. Having first lost its festivals, then the ten-day week, the calendar was abandoned on 1 January 1806. As Laplace observed in his report, this marked the end of the Revolution's attempt to model itself on the universal time of astronomy and nature and a return to a European time frame of trade and commerce. The philosophical age of reason had finally become practical.

But even as he outlined the uselessness of the Republican calendar in a practical age, Laplace was keen to emphasise its real scientific advantage over the old Roman Catholic calendar. The Republican calendar

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NAPOLÉON EMPEREUR DES FRANÇAIS
CE FOL EMPIRE NE DURERA PAS SON AN

Masson, *Le sacre*, 258.

⁶⁵ 'Rien ne peut être plus utile que l'accession passagère de Bonaparte qui hâtera sa propre chute et rétablira toutes les bases de la monarchie sans qu'il en coûte la moindre défaveur au prince légitime'. *Ibid.*, 271.

represented reason and progress. If it failed, it did so for contingent reasons, reasons that now required the dissociation of time measurement from the standardization of weights and measures. Interestingly, Laplace makes no mention of the common assumption that the calendar failed because it was unable to change people's ingrained habits and perceptions of time. On the contrary he attributes its failure to having accumulated too much historical significance. This is evident internally, within France, where it was associated with civil discord. It was also evident externally, outside of France, where, thanks in part to France's military victories, the Republican calendar had become the calendar of the French conquerors, hardly qualities that encouraged universal assent. Moreover the return of the seven-day week had destroyed the one true scientific advantage that had made the new calendar superior to the old Roman Catholic one – the exact alignment between the days of the week and those of the month enabled by the decimal week.

The calendar's weaknesses were both historical and scientific. The first mistake was to start the year with an event particular to French history and not according to what, in Laplace's view, was the natural and universal beginning associated with either springtime or the winter solstice. The second mistake was scientific. Gilbert Romme was sentenced to death the day he was supposed to submit his proposal for correcting the problem of the leap year. A truly perfect calendar would have functioned as a perpetual clockwork. But insofar as it required extra days to be added to the end of each year, the Republican calendar was no better than the Christian one. Even worse, the extra days unravelled the perfect correspondence between the days and the months – the only real scientific advantage that the Republican reform had offered.

But by far the most significant aspect of these admissions was the reorientation of 'universality' away from an astronomical and natural time and towards a universal time that was now understood conventionally as the standardization of different time frames into one homogeneous space. The real reason for the return to the Gregorian calendar was not because it was better or more scientific or even less controversial, but because it enabled the most generalizable experience of time. As Laplace remarked, the Gregorian calendar was the only calendar whose use had spread to the greatest number of neighbouring countries: 'Its greatest benefit resides in this universality, so desirable and so difficult to obtain'.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ 'C'est dans cette universalité si désirable, si difficile à obtenir, que consiste son plus grand avantage'. Laplace, *Motifs du Sénatus-Consulte sur le calendrier* 15 thermidor an XIII, 20.

This move away from universality and towards generality implied a changing conception of historical significance. The original intent of the Republican calendar had been to universalize the historical event of the French Revolution. By mapping the historical experience of rupture and a new beginning onto the cyclical repetitions of nature, the French Revolution would be transformed from a specific, national event into a structure of historical understanding applicable for all peoples and all times. However, the return of the Gregorian calendar signalled a reorientation of universality away from a structural understanding of history modelled on an axial moment (i.e., a rupture that changed the relation both to the past and the future), towards universality understood as the synchronization of different events in the same time. Generality did not require an axial moment of rupture; universal history did, so long as it sought to subordinate historical narrative to astronomical measure.

Far from merely documenting the insignificant death of a short-lived artifact, Laplace's report bears witness to a sea change in European conceptions of time that had been regulated, for centuries, by a religious and fundamentally Christian understanding of calendar time. Here we have Laplace downgrading the calendar from what Paul Ricoeur has called a 'reflective device unifying universal time to lived time'⁶⁷ to a technological device, a tool permitting the coordination of dates and events. Of course by the beginning of the nineteenth century the complexity of the modern world had made enormous demands on the synchronization of time. In this sense abandoning the Republican calendar meant leaving behind the last 'unmodern' aspect of the Revolution – its conviction that history had direction and meaning.

Laplace concludes that the mistake of the Republican calendar, and of the Revolution more generally, was to attribute historical meaning to events whose significance only the future could decide: 'You put in its place a new chronology which originates in a particular epoch of your history, an epoch that has not yet been judged and whose meaning only future centuries will determine'.⁶⁸ History no longer had lessons to teach. Time became a medium for the accumulation of historical events whose meaning could only be retroactively constructed once the future had past.

It is thus fitting to conclude the many adventures and misadventures of the Republican calendar not with an ending, but with the remnants of an

⁶⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 104.

⁶⁸ 'Vous mettez à la place une ère qui a pour origine une époque particulière de votre histoire, époque qui n'est pas jugée, et sur laquelle les siècles seuls prononceront'. Laplace, *Motif du Sénatus-Consulte*, 12.

ending, for the modification of France's public calendar continued even after the Republican calendar was officially abandoned. As the complaints addressed to the emperor by the church attest, there was considerable difficulty in reinstating Sunday as a 'general' if not 'universal' day of rest.⁶⁹ Shops stayed open and especially in the cities people either continued to work or frequented cabarets, suggesting that the *décadi* had succeeded in dislodging a centuries-old habit of resting on Sunday. It was not just in the cities. Michael Meinzer has documented that even in the countryside the notion of the week as an abstract timetable remained even after Sunday returned.⁷⁰

Even if the importance of the religious festivals had begun to recede in everyday life, the political regime found it difficult to wean itself off from the legitimacy that cyclical time provided. No sooner was the calendar abandoned than two new festivals were instituted: Saint-Napoléon, celebrated on 15 August, Napoléon's birthday,⁷¹ and the Festival of the Coronation, celebrated on the first Sunday of December (a date that also commemorated the Battle of Austerlitz). Each festival relied on what Portalis called 'les grandes époques' of the earth and the heavens to align intention and action, the man and the deed. Only the cosmic time of the planets, 'those lively symbols marking events in ancient times' could render the recent military and political victories of Napoléon's reign 'contemporary with all the ages'.⁷² Here we see the political order once more relying on cyclical, natural time to forestall the forward march of history. But in appealing to the great cosmic cycles of a non-existent calendar – neither secular nor religious with Napoléon as the only saint – this political regime was able to achieve no more than what every previous revolutionary government had done before it: proclaim yet another origin for the French state.

⁶⁹ Portalis, *Réponse aux observations présentées au nom de sa sainteté le pape à sa majesté impériale et royale*, 30 ventôse an XII, 301.

⁷⁰ For a synopsis of his findings see Michael Meinzer, 'Der französische Revolutionskalender und die, Neue Zeit', 22–60.

⁷¹ This festival was named after Neopolis, an alleged Roman martyr who was canonized as Saint-Napoléon in 1804 and whose name day conveniently coincided with Napoléon's birthday and the feast of the Assumption on 15 August. For the nineteenth century history of this festival see Hazareesingh, *The Saint-Napoleon*.

⁷² 'Vivante représentations des événements des temps anciens', 'contemporains de tous les âges'. Portalis, 'Rapport présenté à sa majesté impériale par le ministre des cultes, relativement à l'établissement des fêtes anniversaires; l'une du rétablissement de la religion, l'autre de la victoire d'Austerlitz, le 19 février, 1806' in *Discours, rapports*, 354.

Conclusion

The story of the Republican calendar merits concluding with a preface in more than one way. This is because the Republican calendar served as a preface to a Revolution that never really did end, or at least not before the communist and socialist revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ostensibly abandoned because the Revolution was over, the calendar reappeared several times over the following century, in the works of Auguste Comte, who devised a calendar of humanity dated Year 61 of the Great Revolution¹; under the Commune, which dated itself Year 79 of the Revolution; in the socialist almanacs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; or with the Soviets, who briefly floated their own ideas for calendar reform. The Republican calendar may well have been forgotten – who after all remembers 31 December 1805 as the official end of the Republican era? – but its legacy lived on in a kind of double chronology in which the various revolutions in France and beyond seemingly operated in their own time frame, while civil society kept the calendar of old. This conceptual distinction between the ‘time of revolution’ and that of ‘society’ and the ‘state’ would become fundamental to future theories of revolutionary action. Here we see how these conceptual distinctions first emerged as a response to a temporal division made possible by the (failed) institution of the Republican calendar.

Nowhere is this double chronology more clear than in the way in which the French Revolution is still conceived as an axial point in French national history. As Furet notes, for the ‘same reasons that the Ancien Régime is thought to have an end and no beginning, the Revolution has a birth

¹ See Comte, ‘Catéchisme positiviste’. Comte’s calendar consists of 13 months, of 30 days each, with each month dedicated to a ‘stage’ in human history and each day of the week dedicated to a ‘grand homme’ associated with the stage. For example, the second month of the year is named ‘Homer’, and the days of the week are named after Sophocles, Pindar, Ovid, Virgil; the last month is called ‘Bichat’ after modern science and commemorates Copernicus, Kepler, Lagrange, Lavoisier and so forth.

but no end.² Insofar as new origins of history can only appear *in time* by changing the meaning of *both* the past and the future, French history still operates on a Republican chronology that flows backwards and forwards from a putative Year I. Perhaps because it has remained implicit for so long, this time line has had resounding success in restructuring French national history in a way analogous to the B.C./A.D. time line with which we are familiar today. As we recall, the B.C./A.D. time line, instituted slowly over the course of the seventeenth century, was a key intellectual breakthrough because it made it possible for 'prehistory' in the Christian sense (the time from the beginning of Creation to the Fall) to reflect a very long past, a past of infinite regress.³ So too a revolutionary time line based on a putative Year I made possible a new 'prehistory' in the revolutionary sense, in which the ancien regime came to stand for a very long past, a past of infinite regress.

However, unlike the Christian calendar, whose chronology was instituted many years after the birth of Christ, the French Revolution had a chronology that ultimately could only go forward in time. By attempting to institute new time in the form of a new calendar, the French Revolution merely revealed what it had tried so hard to conceal – that secular history may attribute axiomaticity to this or that event but it can only count the years from scratch without this effectuating the cosmological value of the calendar. This problem did not just concern the Revolution's own past. As 1830, 1848, 1871 and 1917 would soon make clear, the candidates for rupture could equally belong to the future.

What these repeated incarnations of a revolutionary Year I represent is not so much a successful time frame as the desire to maintain an aggressive resistance to linear time. Thanks to this resistance, the Revolution was able to escape, as it were, its own epoch and become a myth applicable to all times and all places. Central thus to the story of the calendar's failure is the story of how the Revolution came to dramatize its own beginnings and endings, origins and outcomes, to resist the accumulation of historical meaning. If the French Revolution succeeded in exporting itself as a universal event in subsequent revolutions around the globe, it is because it was propelled forward by its very resistance to linear time. This makes it arguably the first, and possibly last, event in modern times capable of projecting itself as an axis of world history even in the absence of the 'objective' cosmological time of nature.

This question of cosmology raises a second and related question, that of the relation between time's measure and historical narration. After

² Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, 3.

³ See Hunt, *Measuring Time/Making History*, 39.

all, the Republican calendar was instituted alongside the metric system, which eventually succeeded in its aims, even though Napoléon proposed abolishing the latter along with the calendar (the metric system was eventually abolished in 1812). This is an important point, for to attribute the Republican calendar's lack of success to a more general ideological failure on the part of the Revolution to turn theory into action is to overlook the fact that metric reform too only succeeded because it was enforced from 'above'.⁴ Who knows what might have happened had French troops not withdrawn so quickly from Switzerland, the Netherlands, Italy and parts of Germany, where the Republican calendar had been instituted? Baczko notes that the Republican calendar, unlike the metric system, did not suppress the diversity of temporal measurement partly because this was already accomplished. It thus imposed by force an alternate unity to one that already existed.⁵ This question of unity, however, goes much deeper than pragmatic issues of synchronization or arguments about the force of habit. The Republican calendar's failure, this book suggests, is witness to a more general decline of an eighteenth century cosmology that derived historical narration from measure; that assumed, in other words, that the historical and natural sciences offered two different perspectives on what was essentially one world, one unity. As I have tried to show, this was a world in which history was understood as consisting of both event and structure, in which diachronic and synchronic axes of analyses were imagined as functioning in tandem.

It is, therefore, helpful to rephrase this question of the Republican calendar's impact to ask: what remains of this cosmology, and what imprint did it leave on our narratives of the French Revolution? In particular, as I have tried to show, paying attention to the curious persistence of this double chronology helps clarify some of the historical and conceptual problems that arise when we try to map a chronological history of the Revolution onto a premise of 'total rupture' that was first formulated within a cosmological understanding of a global 'axial' age. I began by suggesting that the calendar enables us to recover two time lines, the conventional chronological account of events and the imagined time frame in which these events were adjusted to meet changing expectations. I further suggested this was a way to understand how the French Revolution was constructed and interpreted in its own present, when the linear,

⁴ See Witold Kula, *Measures and Men*, for an analysis of how the popular demand for a standardized, invariable measure (expressed in the *Cahiers de Doléances*) nonetheless resulted in resistance to the institution of the metric system, which took fifty years and was imposed by force.

⁵ Baczko, *Lumières de l'utopie*, 174.

homogeneous time of modern history was not yet firmly in place. This is a crucial point for such a two-pronged perspective enables us to reframe the dominant narratives about the French Revolution, which all too often adopt at face value period distinctions that presuppose the Republican calendar as their framing device (1792 as Year I of Equality, 1793 as Year II, 9 Thermidor as the end of the Terror, 18 Brumaire as the end of the Revolution).

Many perennial questions concerning the French Revolution – Do all Revolutions slide inevitably into Terror? What is the relation between the social and the political? Are the principles of liberty incompatible with those of equality? – look different when reinterpreted from the perspective of conflicting conceptions of time. Françoise Brunel has noted that the historiography of the French Revolution can be divided into two narratives: a ‘liberal’ interpretation that tends to amalgamate the Revolution with a limitless Terror (Palmer, Furet, Ozouf) or a ‘socialist’ interpretation that tends to castigate it for failing to solve the social question (Marx, Labrousse, Soboul).⁶ Building on this observation, we can add that the Republican time line is so deeply embedded in both these narratives that it is virtually impossible to distinguish the dates demarcating the events of the Revolution from the conceptual uses made of them. On the first ‘liberal’ interpretation, the Revolution is frequently assimilated to the Terror that is supposed to be ‘over’ on 9 Thermidor while 9 Thermidor is linked to 18 Brumaire as if the four intervening years of the Directory were of little importance. Such a time line uncritically reproduces the claims made by the various revolutionary administrations on their own behalf and occludes the contribution of Years III, IV and VI in reinterpreting the heritage of Year II, creating amongst other things the amalgam Robespierre = Terror. The result is the familiar story of a two-phase Revolution in which all revolutions are condemned, like Saturn, to devour their children (to recall Vergniaud’s famous phrase). However, this narrative only works if the Revolution’s premise of rupture is taken for granted. Just as the alleged break of Year II is the hinge that enabled the utopian Enlightenment to be constructed as the ‘origin’ of the Terror, so too the putative break of 9 Thermidor is the hinge that enabled the revolutionaries to construct, ex post facto, the myth of the Terror as a system.

With regard to the second, ‘socialist’ interpretation, the detailed exegesis of Sylvain Maréchal’s writings casts doubt on the extent to which

⁶ Brunel, *Thermidor*, 45.

the social revolution was *ever* really on the revolutionary agenda, at least not in the way it was understood by this early social theorist of class distinctions. For Maréchal, there was never a break in the fabric of society as a whole. Year I of the French Republic was never Year I of the Reign of Reason, which is why Maréchal retained Year I for almost all his publications, rejecting the revolutionary time line over the course of the Revolution's meandering history. The fact that the utopian and historical origins of the Revolution never did align suggests that non-synchronicity – rather than continuity between revolutionary intention and action – was the primary characteristic of revolutionary agency and the revolutionary experience of 'history in the making'.

If the first narrative can be criticized for not being sensitive enough to the way each subsequent stage of the Revolution reinterpreted its recent past in light of future expectations, the second narrative can be criticized for cleaving all too closely to the Revolution's projected hopes and aspirations. Whereas the first narrative focuses on a linear chronology of events at the expense of an awareness of the impact of imagined 'futures', the second narrative focuses on the Revolution's imagined future at the expense of sufficient attention to how the linear sequence of largely contingent and unpredictable events fundamentally altered the Revolution's stated intentions and goals. One can restate this more forcefully as a problem not just for the French Revolution but as endemic to all historical writing: a chronological account of events and actions cannot take into account 'horizon preferences' because it only deals with history as it happened, and not the future that did not come to pass. Conversely, a focus on utopian horizons fails to acknowledge the role of contingency and the event in altering human intention. With respect to the French Revolution, what needs to be acknowledged is that if the utopian horizon of the French Revolution was kept open for so long it is because history was still understood – across the political spectrum – as a recapitulative circle, in which meaning was conserved over time rather than as an irreversible flow in which meaning is lost or transformed.

Indeed one of the chief reasons why the Republican calendar continues to be so deeply embedded in revolutionary historiography, even though the full political and cosmological significance of the calendar is rarely reflected upon, is that the events of the French Revolution coincided with the birth of modern history. The result is a profound anachronism. Republican dates continue to organize our understanding of the French Revolution but do so in service of a modern understanding of history whose very establishment they were meant to deny. This crucial

point has several consequences for our ability to understand and assess revolutionary agency. First, no sooner was the revolutionary intent to control the outcome of history declared than the force of events shattered the mythological frame in which such an ambition could make sense. Perversely perhaps, what our modern chronological accounts of the French Revolution fail to adequately grasp is precisely the contingency of the event that they are designed to explain – its explosive potential to rule out certain futures and not others. Nowhere is this explosive potential more visible than when set against the background of the Republican calendar itself. Instead of a smooth, uneventful history subsumed under cyclical time, we have a series of barely disguised ruptures, each claiming to be the last one, the ‘volcano’ that would ‘complete’ the Revolution and return it to a solar time. The volcano and the sun – these two master images would function as the couple, the ‘mechanism’, the ‘motor’ of all future revolutionary history, with rupture making up for the loss of a cyclical time frame and cyclical time used to overdetermine the meaning of rupture. This achieved its most explicit formulation in Sylvain Maréchal’s *Le jugement dernier des rois*, in which a wrathful volcano staged the ‘end’ of history that the Revolution’s premise of new time alone could not.

And yet it is precisely insofar as the promise of ‘total rupture’ not only persists but is also redirected to a future Great Revolution that the continuity between revolutionary history and the so-called modern experience of time breaks down. Once again there is no better place to gauge the difference between the two than by considering the fate of the mental universe represented by the almanac. The Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi expressed it best in his *Dialogue between An Almanac-Maker and a Passer-by* (1824), which mourned the decline of this age-old genre. In this short dialogue, Leopardi suggests that what made time modern was the fact that the future always trumped the past. He suggests that in a universe without repetition, the almanac was no longer able to look forward to the New Year by describing the year that has passed. Without the cyclical time of eternal return, there would be no happiness because the future, of which we know nothing, would always outstrip whatever experiences, good or bad, we have had in the past.

If we take seriously this picture of the French Revolution as struggling to resist this ‘modern’ experience of time in which the future always outstrips the past, key events of the Revolution appear in a different light. In particular the various ‘peaks’ of revolutionary history appear not as ‘origins’ or ‘ends’ of the Revolution’s various phases (an interpretation that presupposes that these dates are already incorporated in some narrative

about the Revolution as the whole). They appear rather as symptoms of overdetermination, when the gap between a linear and cyclical experience of time was at its furthest remove. In this sense, the desire for a radical rupture and total revolution described in [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#) cannot be construed as a historical ‘origin’ or explanatory ‘cause’ of the radical Revolution of Year II because it reflects a ‘theoretical’ origin that never did quite materialize in historical time. By tracing the origins of the revolutionary calendar back to the pre-revolutionary period, I have emphasized the profound difference between a utopian revolution still steeped in a mythological worldview, whose concept of total rupture was elaborated in the absence of a properly modern understanding of history, and the experience of ‘new time’ that characterized the rupture of August 1792, henceforth to become Year I on the new chronology. [Chapter 3](#) showed how Maréchal’s revolutionary calendar became mainstream not because the French Revolution had finally aligned itself with its utopian origin but as a *reaction* against a very different experience of new time, marked by the contingency of events, and the threat of violence on the streets. For if the utopian Enlightenment was constructed *ex post facto* as the origin of the Revolution, it was in order to close off rather than open any further ‘social’ questions: to make it seem as if the premise of a total rupture with the past had fulfilled any and all claims that can be made of the Revolution.

Of course no sooner was ‘new time’ declared the order of the day than the demands for rupture escalated. But here again rather than take this premise of rupture at face value, it makes more sense to consider it from the perspective of the weakness of reason to effectuate such a break with the past. A more fruitful approach to understanding the Terror, therefore, is to consider it from the perspective of this resistance to the irreversible time of history, associated with violence, contingency and the accumulation of divergeant retrospectives on events. In other words, I am suggesting that the Terror should be interpreted from the perspective of the dream – and also failure – of perpetual peace that lies at its centre. The Terror in this regard was neither blindly utopian nor blindly violent precisely because it was grappling with the problem of historical violence in an enlightened and rational age. Insofar as this dream of perpetual peace is to a large extent shared by the ‘liberal’ ‘enlightened’ ‘modern’ ‘democratic’ West, the problem of the Terror is also our problem. The Terror in this sense is not an ‘anomaly’ that can be relegated to a moment of time, nor is it a stepping stone to future totalitarian regimes, but part of a dynamic of utopia and reaction that characterized much of the

Revolution as a whole. After all, as the long half-life of the Republican calendar shows, the cultural policies associated with Year II both ended and did not end on 9 Thermidor. Reaction did not simply 'follow' utopia; utopia also conditioned the spirit of reaction and indeed in many ways the Republican calendar succeeded in changing the relation between state and society, not just in those places where a new understanding of the weekly cycle as an abstract timetable persisted even after the Christian week returned⁷, but also by making explicit new conflict zones that had heretofore been implicit.

Maréchal's own evolution from radical idealist to militant revolutionary to misanthropist is paradigmatic in this regard. By 1798 his motto of 1788 – To women and kings one must speak in fables – had been expanded to shower disdain on the people: 'To people and to kings, to children and to women, only speak in symbols.'⁸ Political revolutions, which he likened to 'foam' or mere episodes of history, would always suffer from a fundamental lag time. As he expressed it: 'Do not give laws to people in the process of revolution. These would arrive either too late or too early.'⁹ Or again: 'Nations! Leave revolutions to the sun, it is to up to the sun alone to make them for the benefit of all.'¹⁰ This combination of misanthropy with revolutionary zeal contributed to keeping alive a belief in a fundamental, indeed necessary, non-synchronicity of revolutionary history. Future generations of revolutionaries would continue to act as if a double chronology was still alive, in a counter-history or even secret history that constituted its own *monde*, or 'world', apart. What links a revolutionary anarchist such as Bakunin to the Thermidorean Republic and even a socially conservative thinker such as Auguste Comte, is the ongoing insistence on cyclical time as the proper frame for understanding politics, a frame moreover that can only erupt 'in time' by stopping, halting or even destroying the linear accumulation of history itself.

Finally, what this panorama of revolutionary time reveals is the price paid for purging the revolutionary imagination of the materialist, atheist and above all *embodied* dream of a total universal enlightenment. The constitution of an entirely rational, abstract and disembodied enlightenment as the 'origin' of Revolution is predicated on a separation

⁷ See Meinzer, *Der französische Revolutionskalender*, 156.

⁸ 'Au peuple et aux rois, aux enfans et aux femmes, ne parles que par *symboles*.' Maréchal, *Voyages de Pythagore*, T. 6, 183.

⁹ 'Ne proposes point de lois à un peuple en *révolution*. Elles arriveraient trop tard, ou trop tôt.' *Ibid.*, 334.

¹⁰ 'Peuples! laissez les *révolutions* au soleil; à lui seul appartient de les faire pour l'avantage de tous.' *Ibid.*

between the 'literary' imagination and historical reality. As the swift rejection of Maréchal's own theatrical productions show, the literary canon was almost immediately constructed as if it went straight from the Enlightenment to Romanticism with the revolutionary period dismissed as being too 'toxic' for a fragile aesthetic imagination. But the fact that Maréchal's life spanned the Enlightenment, Revolution and early Romantic periods, and that he pursued the same aesthetic and political programme for nearly thirty years suggests that these (once again linear) periodizations are inadequate for capturing the energy of the revolutionary imagination, its refusal to accept the reduction of the aesthetic field to a 'mere' fiction, a 'mere' representation or, even worse, a representation that can be divided into different, mutually incompatible historical 'periods'. Out of this act of resistance, emerged a number of new genres, encompassing not just Maréchal's experiments in theatre and opera but also the revolutionary manifesto, a powerful expression of the lost function of the embodied public sphere. Again, it is important to stress that these genres were not self-consciously 'innovative' in the modernist sense associated with a revolutionary avant-garde. Rather they were deliberately conservative insofar as they searched for ways to express the appearance of the new in the forms of the old, using established genres to overturn and contradict the existing social hierarchy in a manner that was communicable to the greatest number of people. It is in this sense that the desire for a total revolution needs to be understood in the wider context of literary agency, which focuses on intention, feelings and aspirations, and for which historical agency, with its focus on actions and events, will always be inadequate.

This brings me, finally, to the reason why Maréchal is such an illuminating figure, someone who deserves to be taken seriously by literary scholars and historians alike. This was a man for whom literature and the arts were not just 'fictions' or 'embellishments' or 'entertainments' but a way of life. His commitment to a lyrical understanding of the relation between the historical past and his own present was not just, or primarily, a matter of taste. It was a moral choice about living his life seriously. From our twenty-first-century perspective, what is most striking about Maréchal's life story is how committed he remained to his own persona and how genuine his peers took this self-dramatization to be. One can even say that here in this self-dramatization the dream of the revolutionary Enlightenment finally came true: This was the dream of a self-generating or self-executing reason, which would create the laws and norms to which it would then voluntarily submit.

And yet a man who began his career by audaciously projecting himself in the place of the saints on the religious calendar would see his career end much the same way as the Republican calendar: increasingly forgotten as the calendar dropped off into oblivion. There is no better metonymy for the incompleteness of the Republican epoch than the final years of Maréchal's life in which he never lived more openly as a true revolutionary even as his literary productions were more and more ignored. The Revolution, it would seem, no longer recognized itself in the temporal categories in which it had first established itself as a new beginning.

DEPRECIATING LEGACIES:

THE REPUBLICAN CALENDAR AND SYLVAIN MARÉCHAL

Rejected by the literary establishment and his political role in the French Revolution largely forgotten, Maréchal spent the last years of his life reading and writing, in the company of family and friends. With money earned from journalism and writing, he was able to buy two properties: a house in the Faubourg Saint-Marceau, where he retired with his wife, father and father-in-law, his 'domestic gods', which he then sold to buy a property in Montrouge, then a small village in the outskirts of Paris.¹¹ It is here, in this bucolic setting, 'midway' between the urban centre and the rural countryside, that Maréchal was at last able to live out the moderate lifestyle of his beloved sages. Of all the revolutionary activists that traversed the bloody history of the French Revolution, Maréchal remained certainly among the most successful in living out the Enlightenment dream. Remaining true to his ideals, he spent his last years peaceably, greeting the morning dawn before retiring to his library where he was capable of spending up to fifteen hours a day. When he was not working, Maréchal enjoyed visiting his brother, who was a *dessinateur* at the Jardin des plantes; reading the foreign newspapers; and taking vegetarian meals à la Pythagoras in the company of his wife, a devout Catholic, and loyal friend, Mme Gacon-Dufour, an agrarian economist and *femme de lettres*. And yet it is also against such female readers that he would write his final piece of legislative fiction, the notorious *Projet d'une loi portant défense d'apprendre à lire aux femmes* (1801) reprinted four times in the nineteenth century.

¹¹ See Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, 50–1, for the impressive salaries of many revolutionary journalists.

From this pastoral setting, we see Maréchal fling his final missives against the compromised post-revolutionary world. After the disdain that followed the publication of the *Dictionnaire des athées anciens et modernes*, Maréchal turned his pen against what he considered to be a feminization of the revolutionary imagination. He refused to accept the failure of literature to function as moral legislation, to take the place of religion. Or what was worse, the cohabitation of the secular state with religion. The return of Catholicism as a de facto state religion had downgraded the writer from his privileged role of legislator-sage, a prophet of a new world order, to a mere *littérateur*. The writer who had once declared that he wanted to be a poet and not a writer of fiction because images were the books of the ignorant now found himself reduced to the status of a mere dreamer, a novelist, a writer for women.

Indeed it is the Revolution's failure to reform social relations that bore the brunt of Maréchal's critique. The restoration of Catholicism meant that women, the first educators of future generations of children, were once again privy to the 'fictions' of the priest rather than subservient to the 'natural' authority of their husbands and fathers. The remarkable extent to which that familiar couple – the woman and the priest – resurfaces not just in the work of Maréchal but also that of Auguste Comte, Jules Michelet and other nineteenth-century thinkers, is the subject of another book. It suffices to note here the importance that the domesticated woman will assume as the lynchpin of new revolutionary social models. Only she is able to unify reason with the sentiments and overcome this immense cleavage between the time of reason and that of the imagination, still ruled over by religion. Only she holds the seeds of a future total revolution in which society would be regenerated in the image of the universal human family. If her emancipation from religion was to be achieved by dint of her domestication in the private sphere this was a small price to pay for the overall freedom of humanity from a (religious) world dominated by hierarchy and social difference. Maréchal's analysis is important for showing that the question of woman's liberation (or not) cannot be simply or even a question of extending rights to yet another disenfranchised group. On the contrary, it is the essential question so long as the revolutionary family – and not the individual – is conceived as the only true political subject.

If Maréchal's attitude to women remains a blindspot from our own contemporary perspective, the blindspots of his own contemporaries are no less glaring. All the obituaries recall the sentimental poet of his youth

or the mature man able to regale visitors with his erudition in his later years, often recited in verse from memory. None mentions his revolutionary activities, with Mme Gacon-Dufour's going so far as to declare that theatre was the one genre he never really dabbled in. To be sure Maréchal preserved a code of silence to the end, as much in imitation of the great sage Pythagoras as, in all likelihood, to protect his inner circle from his more disreputable revolutionary activities. In this respect the inability of his acquaintances to acknowledge his theatrical productions is understandable, and would be less relevant if it did not so perfectly reproduce the dominant judgment of the age. Charles Nodier best expressed this judgment when he declared that the Revolution had produced nothing new in terms of theatre; that a revolutionary style, if there was one, was to be found in the field of political rhetoric and not in the theatre, which, of all the arts, remained 'inert' and 'stationary' to the new social formations.¹²

In hindsight, we know that Maréchal broke all the rules of theatrical and operatic convention, producing innovations that predate modern theatre by almost a century. This literary genealogy can be traced down to Alfred Jarry, whose theatrical productions most closely paralleled Maréchal's spirit. In another striking parallel, Jarry would be the one to signal the final death knell of the revolutionary calendar as a genre for understanding literary 'sociability'. The nonsense calendar he invented to commemorate his own literary circle of 'pataphysicistes' aimed to represent a world without reason. Published in 1901, it dated from Alfred Jarry's own birthday and renamed the months *absolu*, *haha*, *as*, *sable* (absolute, haha, ace, sand) and so forth.

If Jarry's calendar signals the end of literature's seriousness, it also signals the end of a certain seriousness about time. This could not be further from Maréchal whose entire literary production was situated under the sign of theatre, or at the very least a dramatic understanding of what a totally enlightened society might look like. Even at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Maréchal persisted in posing the question of the relation between reason and history, theory and practice, in essentially dramatic terms, as the problem of creating a living, breathing, embodied experience of social equality. Indeed some of Maréchal's last writings were aimed at forestalling precisely what he saw as a 'spiritualization' of the literary imagination, a turn away from the dramatic enlightenment.

¹² Nodier, *Souvenirs de la Révolution et de l'empire*, T. 1, 355.

Accusing Chateaubriand's *Atala* of popularizing this return to religion, Maréchal riposted with his *Pour et contre la Bible* (1801), which reproduced the stance of his earlier atheistic writings. Echoing the *Manifeste des Égaux*, Maréchal's challenge to the nineteenth century was to purify the Republic of Letters, to return once more to the abandoned dream of the almanac as the people's Bible. Everything was to be sacrificed for the reign of reason, that is to say, for a world of actors and not readers in which the only relevant text would be Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*.

Yet surely we should not take this call for a holocaust of books at face value from a man who remained a bibliophile until his death and whose library provides an exemplary snapshot of eighteenth-century culture. What is striking when we consult the inventory of books sold upon his death by his widow is the extent to which Maréchal's notion of a 'monde' or secret society is predicated on an encyclopedic (and erudite) understanding of world history as the sum of all the best books written by mankind.¹³ To be sure, ninety of his books were about the recent Revolution, yet the greatest concentration lay in the traditional subjects of jurisprudence, natural sciences, literature and religion (the latter including a hand-annotated Fénelon, three manuscript volumes of Toland and Nicholas de Bonneville's more recent *De l'esprit de religion*).¹⁴ For someone professing a dislike for the prolixity of history, by far the greatest concentration of books lay in the fields of history, antiquity and travel literature, together comprising more than 137 volumes. Of Maréchal's library it can truly be said to have functioned as a kind double-sided history of humanity, in which all the books dedicated to the progress of mankind were placed alongside all the books indicating the error of man's ways. This library is the backbone of all his almanacs, maxims, poems and dictionaries as well as being the inspiration behind the revolutionary calendar. The encyclopedia and the revolutionary calendar: These, I would suggest, are the twin forms, the mirrors through which the long and protracted history of Enlightenment and Revolution came to be reflected and refracted, not

¹³ *Catalogue des livres de Feu de M.P. Sylvain Maréchal* – lundi 24 prairial an XI (13 juin 1803). International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam; also reproduced in Aubert, *Sylvain Maréchal: Passion et faillite d'un égalitaire*.

¹⁴ Maréchal's abiding interest in education is reflected in a two-volume book of treatises by Mirabeau, Tallyrand, Condorcet, among others, as is his interest in calendars (Roucher's calendar poem can be found along with Dupuis's *Origine de tous les cultes* and a number of other poems in the 'solar' genre). In addition to 39 volumes of the *Encyclopédie*, his library contained a considerable number of books on theatre including Grétry's musical essays and a book on the origin and progress of pantomime among the ancients.

just in the eighteenth but also over the course of the revolutionary nineteenth century as well.

The material and intellectual wealth represented by this library speaks volumes for Maréchal's twin successes in life. He managed, against considerable odds, to become a professional intellectual, an *écrivain engagé*, having made enough money from journalism and his commissioned works to reside in his version of paradise: a country house with an extensive library, surrounded by a close circle of friends and admirers. That he achieved all this while remaining loyal to the literary field as a field of action rather than contemplation is all the more remarkable. Again and again, Maréchal used literature to light up the world with a new horizon of possibilities that would break through established social reality. However, as the demise of the Republican calendar made equally clear, this world of possibilities turned out to be available only as fiction, that is, as part of a closed world or static order that refused to accept historical change. The entire battle between reason and the imagination, as it was staged, not just in Maréchal's own works, but in the revolutionary sphere as a whole amounts to this: the failure to establish a new frame or horizon for historical experience, the failure, in other words, of the literary imagination to become a *world*. Having failed to transform the hearts and minds of the people, the Revolution remained a preface. It remained a preface because, as Hegel so well observed, it was only an *abstract* beginning.

Yet even among the ruins of such a beginning, a happy ending can be found. When Maréchal died, after a long illness, at midday on 28 Nivôse Year XI (18 January 1803), in the arms of these two women, his devout wife and loyal friend, he had succeeded, materially and morally, in living his life as he had intended. He had succeeded, in other words, in living a life of both action and contemplation, a life devoted to love and not religious devotion. What better place to leave behind the story of both Maréchal and his revolutionary calendar than with three couplets from his early poem *Ma vie*, to which he returned just before his death:

Do you want to know what is my life?
If he so chooses, let a famous historian write it
It will not be voluminous

My science, my system
My projects and desires
My greatest deeds and gentlest pleasures
Are all summarized by one word: *I love*

You who were my only thought
 In all the moments of my life
 After my death, dear Sylvie
 Write on my tomb: he *loved*.¹⁵

15

Veut-on savoir quelle est ma vie?
 A quelque historien fameux,
 Si de l'écrire il prend envie,
 Il sera peu volumineux.
 Et ma science et mon système;
 Et mes projets et mes désirs,
 Mes plus grands faits, mes doux plaisirs
 Tout se réduit à ce mot: *J'aime*.
 Toi qui seule m'occuperas,
 Dans tous les instans de ma vie;
 Après ma mort, tendre Silvie,
 Écris sur ma tombe: il *aima*.

Recounted by Mme Gacon-Dufour, 'Notice sur Sylvain Maréchal' in *De la vertu* (1807), 13.

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