COVER IMAGE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

Top: Anon., *La Nation française assistée de M. de la Fayette terrasse le despotisme et les abus du règne féodal qui terrassaient le peuple* (1789).

Bottom: Anon., *Portrait d'après nature du Sr. Harné natif de Dôle en Franche Comté Grenadier aux Gardes Françaises qui a monté le premier à l'assaut et à arrêté le gouverneur de la Bastille le mardi 14 Juillet 1789* (1789)

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PREFACE

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This set of paper abstracts has its origins in a day colloquium on ‘New Perspectives on the French Revolution’, held at Queen Mary, University of London on 15 December 2012, organised by Jeremy Jennings and Colin Jones. The day’s point of departure was a keynote address delivered by Charles Walton. Then of Yale University, and since of the University of Warwick, Walton was at that time visiting Queen Mary under the College’s Visiting Professorship scheme.

We took the opportunity to invite a wide range of scholars working within the British university system to present short papers in a seminar-style setting. We refrained from asking contributors for synoptic overviews of particular sectors of current French Revolutionary historiography. We did not wish to retread ground successfully covered, for example, in the ‘ ’89: Then and Now’ collection of articles on the state of research two decades after the bicentenary, published in French Historical Studies in 2009. Although we shared a title with Jeffry Kaplow’s 1965 collection of essays opening up social historical angles on the Revolution, we were wanting

to do something different. Rather, our intention was to initiate conversations around ‘coal-face’ archival projects in which contributors were currently engaged. History with dirty hands, so to speak rather than history with its head in the clouds.

We did not aim for comprehensiveness, either in terms of themes or scholars invited, but we do regret the fact that because of late withdrawals from the programme, the history of women and gender was not represented among the papers. But we believe that the end result is still a thought-provoking sampling of research projects currently being conducted within British universities. The study of the French Revolution on university syllabi is far less evident than it was 20 or 25 years ago, and the number of Revolution specialists in post fewer too. We are happy therefore to produce this collection of paper abstracts which, we believe, testifies to the continuing vitality of the field.

Several points about the collection stand out, as evidenced in the headings under which we have grouped the abstracts. First, we note the re-emergence of interest in economics – less through class analysis than through the history of political economy (Walton, Sonenscher, Livesey). Second, we note a concern to submit the traditional labels used to denote key political identities to review and revision (Andress, Doyle, Forrest, Jones, Gillen). And third, there is a growing interest in the ways in which ideas were circulated, in geographical terms (Fairfax-Cholmeley, Curran) and in terms of the material history of technologies of communications, transmission and conservation (Taws, Stammers).

What is also evident throughout is the wide array of frameworks in which the Revolution is now viewed. The days when the French Revolution signified what occurred within the Hexagon between circa 1787 and circa 1794 are long gone. The Revolution has stretched out chronologically in both directions, and assumed global dimensions. And in addition, the micro-historical angle juxtaposes approaches in *longue durée* style.

In his keynote address, Charles Walton provided an impassioned call to historians of the French Revolution to champion the field's continuing relevance in the contemporary world - for example, in relation to ongoing debates about democracy and the breakdown of
consensus regarding the Western liberal model of society. Walton also highlighted how current historiographical trajectories - in particular, towards global history - should not be seen as a threat; rather, if embraced, they can only serve to reinforce the rich potential of studying the French Revolution. In the same spirit, we hope that the current collection will in a modest way stimulate interest and further engagement in this field.
KEYNOTE ADDRESS

French Revolutionary Studies: Challenges and Potential Ways Forward

Charles Walton
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This paper aims to identify some challenges facing the field of French Revolutionary studies and proposes potential ways of moving forward. The most immediate challenge, I believe, involves making the Revolution relevant to debates about democracy. Throughout much of the twentieth century, interpretations of the Revolution were implicitly tied to competing conceptions of democracy, social and liberal. When François Furet famously stated that ‘the revolution is over’ in the 1970s, he meant that the Marxist philosophy of history had been debunked and that the ‘totalitarian’ nature of the French Revolutionary tradition had been exposed. (Furet, 1981 [orig. 1978]) Though controversial, his claims revitalized the field in the decade leading up to the Revolution’s bicentennial.

As the Marxist paradigm waned in the 1980s, so, too, did debates about the shape of democracy. Francis Fukuyama’s thesis in *The End of History and the Last Man*, which described the triumph of liberalism over socialism, although criticised at the time, was nevertheless reflected in the kinds of topics French Revolutionary scholars chose to investigate. (Fukuyama, 1992) Emphasis shifted from class to the individual (its psyche and gender), human rights (though, revealingly, not social and economic rights), political representation (and the dangers of sovereignty), and market culture (a vehicle for public opinion and individual freedom).

Research on the French Revolution after 1989 was thus conducted in a climate in which there seemed to be a general consensus about what democracy should look like. Though not everyone fully embraced liberalism, no robust alternatives were in sight, at least not in Europe and North America. Given this context, it is not surprising that critiques of liberalism did not work their way into interpretations of the Revolution. In explaining why a largely liberal revolution went wrong, historians pointed to either illiberal factors (proto-socialist ideology, counter-revolution) or contingent ones (the king’s flight, the war). The notion that liberal ideas and principles – civil and political, but also *economic* – may have contributed to the Revolution’s tragic course was not entertained.

**The politics of liberal political economy**

Although historians cannot make readers find relevance in the topics they study, they can seize opportunities to try to do so. The fissures appearing in western liberalism today strike me as offering such an opportunity. In light of the 2008 financial crisis (largely spawned by a liberal political economy that allowed financial markets to run amok) and increasing awareness of the corrupt, plutocratic influences in democratic polities (investment banks, energy companies, media magnates), conditions strike me as propitious for analysing how political and economic power related to each other in the French Revolution. How did contemporaries think these forms of power should relate to each other? That is, what was thought to constitute good governance or, alternatively, corruption? And how did those forms of power actually relate to each other in practice? That is, how was the
Old Regime’s political sociology of interests transformed by the Revolution?

Such questions call for integrating the problem of interests into the analysis of Revolutionary politics. The importance of interests in the French Revolution was largely obscured in late twentieth-century historiography. Although historians have recently sought to recover the economic dimension of the period, they have tended to focus on political economy, that is, on ideas about interests rather than the politics of them or their political sociology. Texts have been privileged over the rough and tumble of the street, or of heated assemblies, clubs, guilds (before their abolition), sections, committees and tribunals. Perhaps we should expand our purview of political economy to consider the politics of political economy. Specifically, we might examine the friction between economic and political liberalizations during the Revolution. The two are usually seen as distinct processes. Indeed, historians tend to think about politics and the economy as separate spheres. But as Karl Polanyi suggested in *The Great Transformation*, this conceptual separation of society into political and economic spheres is itself a product of the eighteenth-century imagination. (Polyani, 1944) It allowed for the emergence of the ‘self-regulating market’ idea, so cherished by political economists and many revolutionaries. The ‘self-regulating market’ was seductive as a principle for reforming society because it offered the promise of equity, material security and economic growth through the non-political (and hence, non-contentious) means of natural economic laws.

Despite common misreadings of his work, Polanyi never argued that the self-regulating market actually came into being in the eighteenth century. It was and has always been a myth, and a politically dangerous one: in seeking to unburden politics of its most vexing problems – interests, distributive justice, the social question – the self-regulating market principle exacerbates political tensions, leading to the adoption of drastic and often calamitous measures.

Although Polanyi had nothing to say about the French Revolution (he sought to explain the origins of fascism), his insights are helpful for interpreting its radicalization. In pursuing both economic and political liberalizations, early revolutionaries invited more individuals to the
political table but denied them the right to bring their material demands with them. The self-regulating market, liberal reformers insisted (in so many words), would satisfy needs and wants. To be sure, eighteenth-century economic liberals should not be confused with twentieth-century neo-liberals. As historians have shown, liberal political economists of the Enlightenment took sentiments, empathy and morality seriously, and many of them believed in social assistance and philanthropy. (Livesey, 2001; Rothschild, 2001; Shovlin, 2006) They were not the eighteenth-century equivalents of Milton Friedman. Moreover, historians have shown that the French economy had dirigiste tendencies both before and after the Revolution; it was never fully laissez-faire. (Horn, 2006; Minard, 1998; Potofsky, 2009) Polanyi would not have refuted these facts. Ultimately, his analysis points elsewhere, to the political implications of attempts to economically liberalize society. According to his theory of the ‘double-movement’, the more a regime tries to evacuate material demands from politics, the more likely those demands will return to politics with a vengeance. Society – and not just the lower orders – will respond to the economic volatility and social vulnerabilities that market freedom produces by pressuring the state to protect its interests (elites usually have an edge over others in obtaining that protection). The form that this return of material demands and interests to politics takes can vary according to conditions and available political and ideological currents – Polanyi posits no telos –, but if frustrations are running high, it is likely to be illiberal.

This insight opens up avenues of interpretation for the French Revolution. When early revolutionaries liberalized the grain trade, abolished the guilds and corporations, suppressed state regulatory institutions, curtailed the king’s budget (and, hence, his capacity to keep powerful courtiers and pensioners happy), forbade the formation of any association based on economic interests, closed the chambers of commerce and prohibited collective petitions, they tried to deprive interests of the institutional means of expression and negotiation. What were the results of this nearly total liberal economic revolution? Political frustration and radicalism, in both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forms.
In his *La fin des corporations*, Steven Kaplan appears to be moving towards a Polanyian interpretation when he observes that, after the National Assembly abolished the guilds in 1791, the artisan world of Paris transferred its socio-economic concerns to the political section: ‘[t]o a certain extent the section functioned as a corporative institution by proxy’. (Kaplan, 2001, p. 615) His conclusion suggests that, by studying *the politics of political economy* (and not simply political economy or politics), we might appreciate how the famous Aristotelian question *who rules?*, a question at the centre of so many studies of sovereignty and representation, was inseparable from questions concerning interests and distributive justice: *Who gets what? Who owes what to whom?* Sovereignty and distributive justice were, in both theory and practice, intertwined problems. If redistribution is a form of power, that is, a means of maintaining allegiances – as Hobbes well noted, it ‘procureth friends and servants’ – it is worth investigating what happens when the sovereign eschews redistribution, as the National Assembly did when it economically liberalized society. (Hobbes, 1651, p. 41) Without redistribution, is a regime left with only ideology and coercion as binding forces? Also (and to persist with this premise), if redistribution is power, then can its abandonment by the top help explain why power shifted downward to the clubs, sections, and sans-culotte ‘armies’, that is, to sites where redistribution did occur, albeit spontaneously, frenetically and often coercively? If this hypothesis is correct, perhaps the Revolution’s radical slide towards popular sovereignty can be attributed to changes in the theory and practice of redistribution.

In any case, factoring material interests back into French Revolutionary politics and examining the tension between political and economic liberalizations might open up new perspectives on both new and old topics, such as social and economic rights (largely ignored in histories of revolutionary rights), property (ecclesiastical, commercial, common and private), taxes (were they to be voluntary, as some thought; how were they to be collected and redistributed?), pensions and subsidies (who merited them and on what grounds?), charity (was it to be voluntary or managed by the state?), and subsistence (were food markets to be regulated or left to free-market forces?). Although many of these topics have been treated in the past, what is needed is a capacious interpretation that weaves them together into a larger story...
about democracy and distributive justice. Such an approach should render the study of the Revolution useful for thinking about the difficulties involved in abrupt liberal transitions more generally, especially in instances when political and economic liberalizations accompany each other.

**Epistemological imperialism and geo-temporal prejudices**

French Revolutionary studies face other challenges as well, notably, the perception that this field has an out-dated sense of its own importance and that it is still steeped in geographical and chronological biases, Euro-centrism (or Gallo-centrism) and exaggerated claims about holding the key to ‘modernity’. Pierre Serna has recently insisted that ‘an unspoken but both explicit and implicit historiographical prejudice about the superiority of the French Revolution must be consciously dismantled.’ (Serna, 2013) The statement expresses a post-modern sensibility, an embarrassment about the traditionally preeminent place of the French Revolution in narratives about modernity and Europe’s leading role in it. While prejudices should always be scrutinized, it seems to me that there is a risk of obscuring the French Revolution’s vast and important legacies. For better or for worse, these legacies have stretched across time and space, firing political imaginations the world over for more than two centuries, albeit with a great deal of cultural and contingent accommodation. The challenge, it seems to me, is to acknowledge and analyse the Revolution’s great geographical and chronological reach without lapsing into epistemological imperialism.

As the recent historiography on the French Revolution demonstrates, we are beginning to overcome geographical prejudices. Studies of France’s colonies, especially Saint-Domingue, are proliferating, as are ones that situate the Revolution in an Atlantic or global context. The recent volume *The French Revolution in Global Perspective*, edited by Suzanne Desan, Lynn Hunt and William Max Nelson, offers some of the most cutting edge work in this vain. (Desan, Hunt, Nelson, 2013) It is surprising, though, given the current interest in empire, that so few historians are examining the Revolution’s legacy in the First Empire. Historians of early nineteenth-century France tend to focus on Napoleon, domestic politics, or war. Yet, much of relevance might be learned by exploring how the Revolutionary legacy took
shape in the course of imperial expansion and forced regime changes. In any case, our field should welcome more studies like those of Jennifer Sessions, who has identified how the legacies of the First Empire figured in the conquest of Algeria, and Andrew Jainchill, who has examined the links between republicanism and empire in the minds of revolutionaries during the Directory. (Sessions, 2011; Jainchill, 2008)

If our geographical prejudices are beginning to break down (and there is more to do on that front), chronological ones persist. The French Revolution continues to be seen as the watershed moment of modernity. The belief, or perhaps assumption, that it ushered in the modern world is reflected in the structure of the European sections of many history departments, where 1789 marks the boundary between the early modern and modern periods. But the French Revolution is beginning to lose its privileged place in stories about modernity. In recent decades, modernity has come to be defined in many different ways and found in many different times and places – so much so that one wonders, as deep historians Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail do, whether the concept is still useful. (Shryock and Smail, 2013) Given this proliferation of ‘modernities’ and critiques of it, to insist today on the Revolution’s paradigmatic ‘modernity’ strikes me as ridiculous rearguard action. Modernity is (and I agree with Shryock and Smail on this point) epistemologically imperialist: it flattens out and subordinates everything that came before. It creates a temporal hierarchy that is implicitly bound up with identity: the modern (us) versus the pre-modern (them). The Revolution becomes the story of how we became ‘us’, unlike ‘them’.

In any case, I do not think we need the concept of modernity to make the case for the Revolution’s historical importance, which is empirically demonstrable. That post-modern sensibilities call for eschewing the French Revolution’s ‘superiority’ (as Serna puts it) is itself a sign of the event’s longstanding importance. Rather than be embarrassed about this fact, we should try to explain it. Why and how has this particular revolution captured political imaginations for so long, and not just in Europe? (Pol Pot and his fellow executioners read Rousseau and Robespierre!) Answering this question might involve collaborative studies on the French Revolution’s legacy from several
disciplines: history, philosophy, political theory, literature, art and film. Perhaps it is time to offer a collection of essays along the lines of Keith M. Baker’s *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture* of twenty years ago, but one that drops ‘modernity’ from the analysis, encompasses more than politics and reaches beyond the hexagon: *Global Legacies of the French Revolution?* (Baker, 1987-1994)

The current trend towards global history surely summons us to do more than study non-European/North American societies. It should, I believe, invite us to adopt more cosmopolitan analytical approaches – to make the familiar unfamiliar – even in European and North American history. Analytical categories drawn from cultural anthropology, such as debt, obligation and redistribution, may be helpful in this regard. Not only do these categories offer the opportunity to examine the relationship between interests and politics; they also help us analyse the Revolution in terms that render it comparable to other periods and societies, which we might too readily dismiss as ‘pre-modern’. For example, in his recent book *Debt: The First Five Thousand Years*, anthropologist David Graeber points out that in ancient Sumer, princes would periodically reverse trends of indebtedness, expropriation and enslavement by annulling all debts in society. These acts were called ‘declarations of freedom.’ (Graeber, 2011) But if freedom has historically meant the release from debt (one finds this in the Bible as well), how then do we make sense of one of the first acts of the French Revolution, which shackled the new regime to the old one’s debts? On June 17, 1789, just after a group of deputies to the meeting of the Estates General seized sovereignty and declared themselves to be the National Assembly, the nation’s debts were put under the safeguard of this new body, which also promised to continue making interest payments (a kind of redistribution). In this comparative light, the French Revolution begins to look strange. An aspect of it that has been taken for granted (shouldn’t states always pay their debts?) suddenly invites fresh analysis. To improvise on Rousseau’s opening to the *The Social Contract*, one might conclude that the French Revolution was born in chains but everywhere touted freedom. The chains (of debt) may have been self-imposed, but they were the pre-condition of being born. Financiers expected rents (interest on the debt), and the National
Assembly staked its legitimacy on its ability to meet this redistributive demand.

In short, the global turn in history and postmodern sensibilities should not prompt us to make the French Revolution smaller than it really was. While rejecting epistemological imperialism – the French Revolution as the midwife of modernity – we should try to make historical sense of its global legacies while opening it up for comparison with other abrupt political transitions. Doing so can make it useful for thinking about recent times as well as the deep past.

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I.

POLITICAL ECONOMY
I.1. Politics and Economics

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Keywords: absolutism; ancien régime; England; equality; Jacobinism; monarchy; political thought; public debt; reform; republic

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was usual to associate endorsements of economic and social equality with Robespierre and the Jacobinism of the Year II of the first French republic, rather than with claims about the power and capabilities of absolute royal government. Before the French Revolution, however, it was just as common to make the opposite assumption and to associate economic and social equality with absolute government. This type of claim was one of the features of French political thought all the way through the eighteenth century – from François Fénelon’s *Adventures of Telemachus* of 1699 and 1715 to Voltaire’s *Henriade* of 1723, the marquis d’Argenson’s *Considerations on the Present and Former Government of France* of 1764 and Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s *Studies of Nature* of 1784. From this perspective, there was nothing unusual in the vision of a reforming royal government that formed the centrepiece of the young Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s *L’an 2440, rêve s’il en fut jamais* of 1770 and, less than two decades later, Robespierre’s own call for an egalitarian programme of royal reform in 1789.

Before the French Revolution, republics were more usually associated with economic and social inequality and with a range of mixed or balanced forms of government, particularly in the tradition of political thought associated with Machiavelli. Only in the early nineteenth century did it become usual to associate republican systems of government with the egalitarianism that had once been associated with the type of absolute system that had been symbolised by the France of Louis XIV.

The aim of this paper was to suggest some of the reasons for this transformation and the switch of moral evaluations and political assessments that it involved. The argument summarised here was made up of three parts. The first consisted of a number of claims about the eighteenth-century French combination of absolute government and public debt and the possibility that it threatened to produce either real despotism or an economically and socially catastrophic debt default. The second part was a reassessment of the so-called English system of government in the light of a set of claims about the origins of its stability made by the Genevan political theorist Jean-Louis Delolme. This reassessment, it is suggested, has a strong bearing on the political strategy followed by Jacques Necker both before and after the fall of the Bastille. The third part of the explanation is an account of both the failure of this Anglocentric political strategy and of the various attempts, also inspired by discussions of British political stability, to turn the newly baptised French national debt into the basis of the new regime. As described in more detail in my Sans-Culottes, these steps make it easier to see why, during the French Revolution, the largely unrelated subjects of republicanism and egalitarianism began to appear to go together.

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WORK CITED

I.2.

Capitalism and the French Revolution

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Keywords: capitalism; economic history; Jourde, François; Paris Commune

One of the less well-remembered contrasts in the history of the French Revolutionary tradition is that while the Communards burned the Ministry of Finance they spared the Banque de France. In fact the Commune was financed by loans from that bastion of capitalism. At his trial before a military commission, the délégué aux finances of the Commune, François Jourde, insisted, against the protestations of the deputy governor of the bank the Marquis de Ploeu, that the 20 million livres borrowed from the bank in April and May 1871 were regular loans authorised by the board of the bank. (La Commune, 1871, p. 11) The Bostonian travel writer William Pembroke Fetridge, who gave eyewitness testimony as to what was going on in the bank, reported that de Ploeuc issued the loans to the Commune, with Thiers’s knowledge, on the same terms he issued them to the Versailles government. (Fetridge, 1871) Jourde’s was not the most extreme example of

financial regularity under the Commune. Treillard, commissioner in charge of assistance publique was captured and executed in the gardens of the École polytechnique on 25 May 1871. His widow subsequently surrendered his account books, scrupulously kept, and the 53,012 francs and 86 centimes that remained in his charge, to the colonel who had shot her husband. The Communards could imagine the state withering away, ending male domination and transforming material culture, but hard money and its institutional supports were beyond the reach of their revolution.

Engels, in his preface to the 1891 edition of Marx’s *The Civil War in France*, was characteristically ironic at the expense of such unrevolutionary revolutionaries, remarking that ‘the hardest thing to understand is certainly the holy awe with which they remained standing respectfully outside the gates of the Bank of France’. It is indeed hard to understand why they did not simply requisition the bank, but it was not because some “holy awe” in the face of money stalled their understanding of the possibilities of political change. After all, Jourde was not a naif who did not understand the political economy of banks. In the early pages of his account of his exile and escape from New Caledonia he explained that the reason that island’s mines remained unexploited was for lack of capital and that the Banque de la Nouvelle Calédonie, which was mandated to operate as an investment bank, was nothing more than an instrument for financial speculation. (Jourde, 1877, p. 21) In fact it was precisely because he and those around him had a sophisticated understanding of the relationship of money to the process of revolutionary change that he, and the Commune, left the bank in place. De Ploeuc appealed to the experience of revolutionary money when he explained that ‘the day you lay your hands upon the Bank of France, its notes will not be worth more than the old assignats’. (Fetridge, 1871, p. 472) It seems far more credible that Jourde and the Commune left the bank in place not because they did not understand the relationship between revolution and the institutions of capitalism, but because they understood it only too well.

The nineteenth-century discussion of the relationship of revolution to capitalism was complex and sophisticated. Men like Jourde benefited from immersion in a rich scholarship and continuing debate on the role of politics, even revolutionary politics, in economic development.
Some of that work has not been surpassed: Charles Gomel’s series of books on the fiscal and financial aspects of the Revolution remain standard works of reference. However that complex discussion was, for much of the twentieth century, put aside in favour of the exploration of the capitalist roots of the Revolution and in particular of the role of class in its origins. A rigid categorical distinction between politics and society obscured the really vital role played by institutions, such as the law, that could be reduced to neither. Without taking a position on the existence or non-existence of the pre-revolutionary bourgeoisie or the role of class in the Revolution it is clear that restricting the discussion to a debate on origins has obscured key issues in political economy and in particular in the relationship of the Revolution to capitalism. (Cf. Heller, 2006; Ado, 1990) The recent strange neglect of a properly historical account of economic life, which has been a general phenomenon, has been particularly marked in Revolutionary studies. (Sewell, 2010) We have struggled to address the paradigmatic modern revolution through a historiography that has had enormous difficulty conceptualising it as a commercial revolution.

I want to propose three hypotheses for a renewed history of the French Revolution and capitalism, and in so doing point to work that already exists around these areas. The first is that the norms of capitalism as we inherit it emerged in the period of the French Revolution. One has to be careful here to distinguish between a claim about origins, which I am not making, and an observation that the institutions of capitalism, with their characteristic normative orientations, legal forms and cultural processes, crystallised in the Revolution. Braudel’s observation that the origins of capitalism lay in the habits and behaviours of participants in long-distance trade remains compelling; harder to explain is their diffusion as the norms. Jean-Laurent Rosenthal’s work on changing legal instruments for control of water resources in a regime of rights and Jeff Horn’s study of models of industrialisation are models of explanation of emergent features of political economy. (Horn, 2006; Rosenthal, 1992) Allan Potofsky’s work and the forthcoming dissertation by Hannah Callaway illustrate the connections between the rather large-scale problems of institution-building and the local and specific problems of managing Paris in a period of political turmoil. (Potofsky, 2012)
The second hypothesis is that the emergence of capitalism was a contingency, which is just an awkward way of saying a surprise. Capitalism was not the project of any particular movement or group, not even the Girondins. John Dunn observes that democracy was similarly unforeseen as a possible resolution of political crisis, and while it is impossible to point to a moment such as the summer of 1792, when the appeal to political democracy emerged, capitalism was a similarly unpredictable outcome. (Dunn, 2005) The axis of political debate before, and for the most part during, the Revolution, was between those who thought the process of improvement could abolish poverty, as Gareth Stedman Jones has phrased it, and those who thought that impossible. (Stedman Jones, 2005) That polarity made for strange bedfellows and stranger oppositions. Christians, for instance, were divided between those inspired by Fenélon, Grégoire and Berkeley, who thought that caritas demanded the application of industriousness to the condition of the poor, and the more rigorous neo-Augustinians such as de Maistre who thought that the desire to alter the human condition was sinful. The particular resolution that linked sovereignty and improvement through capital was unforeseen. We still do not have a convincing account of how and where the early-modern debate on politics transformed itself in this way.

The third hypothesis is that the process through which capitalism emerged in the French Revolution was global. Capitalism was not a national project and much of the work defining the nature of privacy, crucial to establishing the space for the economy and demarcating its boundaries, was done by declared enemies of Revolutionary France. The Congress of Vienna created the European balance of power that would endure to 1914 and the conditions for European imperialism. It also defined the commercial rules that would condition economic behaviour. The origins of the practices of global free trade and the international legal instruments that defined it in the leagues of armed neutrality have not even begun to be explored. The commercial cosmopolitanism that animated much of the global behaviour of the European powers similarly emerged from the Revolution. Democratic or liberal capitalism has been the most globally successful civilisational form of the past two hundred years. Historical scholarship for most of the twentieth century interrogated the dual revolutions that created that form, industrial and democratic, through a
debate between a variety of stadial theories. Marxists and modernisation theorists may have disagreed about everything else but all parties agreed that some pattern of development had universal applicability. That easy universalism has been completely undermined in recent years and we have a much sharper understanding of the contingent and historically specific nature of modern economic structures. (Cf. and ct. Barrington Moore, 1966; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2009) The global significance of economic innovation in eighteenth-century Europe has been creatively explored in economic history. We also have a good understanding of how the practices of merchants, forms of labour discipline and credit institutions developed in the Atlantic economy in the eighteenth century were projected into the world in the nineteenth, largely through the agency of European empires. (Bayly, 2004; Darwin, 2009) However the divorce of this literature from the work on the period of the French Revolution has left us with a lopsided understanding of these processes. We understand the power of liberal capitalism, but not its normative attractions. We may continue to approach the French Revolution without attending to the history of capitalism, but we cannot understand modern capitalism without a view to the French Revolution.

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I.3.

Reciprocity and the French Revolution

Charles Walton
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Keywords: citizenship; duties; morality; National Assembly; patriotic gifts; physiocracy; political economy; public debt; rights; subsistence; Terror

La base de notre moralité n’est pas la religion […]
c’est la réciprocité

Rétif de la Bretonne, Les nuits de Paris, ou Le spectateur nocturne (1789)

Reciprocity is not a concept that readily springs to mind in thinking about the French Revolution. It tends to be associated with pre-modern ‘gift’ societies, not modern ‘market’ ones. But as this paper shows, the term emerged in the Enlightenment and shaped political imaginations and practices during the Revolution. At its inception, it was not invoked to describe past or ‘primitive’ societies as it would be after cultural

anthropologists, most famously Bronislaw Malinowski and Marcel Mauss, appropriated it in the 1920s. (Malinowski, 1922; Mauss, 2000) Rather, reciprocity was used to work through the contemporary problems of political economy, rights and citizenship.

What did reciprocity mean? First, it is important to note that the noun, which was new, carried conceptual freight that the age-old adjective did not. Before the Enlightenment, groups in society were sometimes thought to have ‘reciprocal’ obligations, but that did not mean that those obligations were considered commensurate. Hierarchy, not equality, structured how obligations were imagined. With the rise of the noun, the mere qualifier ‘reciprocal’ was turned into a full-blown principle of society. In the 1750s, when the Bordeaux magistrate Charles de Lavie set out to abridge and modernize Jean Bodin’s *Les six livres de la République*, he invoked the term to convey an idea that would have been alien to the sixteenth-century jurist: ‘L’union ne subsiste que par la réciprocité; si on la viole, la société cesse’. (Bodin and Lavie, 1755) The conceptual world of ‘reciprocity’ privileged ‘individuals’ and ‘society’ over castes or corporations, and individuals were generally assumed to be moral equals (gender and racial hierarchies notwithstanding). Reciprocity was thus bound up with the development of the concepts of ‘society’ and the ‘individual’, the evolution of which has been traced by Keith Baker and Louis Dumont. (Baker, 1994; Dumont, 1976, 1986) In short, ‘reciprocity’ provided a term through which to rethink social bonds as religion, hierarchy, privilege and corporatism became contested.

In discussions of political economy, some Enlightenment thinkers invoked reciprocity to convey the notion of exchange equivalence through the barter, in which putative equals transacted their ‘reciprocal utilities’. Moreover, for liberal political economists, material reciprocity was to be achieved, not through political will, but through de-politicized, self-regulating markets (a concept brilliantly analysed by Karl Polanyi, albeit not in the context of the French Revolution). (Polanyi, 1944) For other thinkers, however, reciprocity implied not equivalent exchange, but generosity and sacrifice. It meant giving without necessarily receiving, or at least not immediately or with expectations of a return gift. (In this sense, eighteenth-century conceptions of reciprocity resemble Marshall Sahlins’s notion of ‘generalized reciprocity’ in *Stone Age Economics.* [1972])
New Perspectives

In addition to appearing in tracts on political economy, reciprocity was invoked in discussions of rights and duties. Although historians have written much about rights of late, less attention has been paid to duties. For contemporaries, the two were interdependent and mutually reinforcing. One set without the other, they worried, would lead to anarchy or despotism. Responding to criticism that revolutionaries had failed to promulgate a declaration of duties in 1789, Thomas Paine assured his readers: ‘A Declaration of Rights is, by reciprocity, a Declaration of Duties’. (Paine, 1985)

How did these various ideas about reciprocity work out in the Revolution? The period between June and October 1789 is revealing in this regard. On the day that the National Assembly came into being (17 June 1789), deputies chose to address two of the most pressing demands at the heart of the Revolutionary crisis: interest payments on public debt (rents) and subsistence (bread). They realized that the Assembly’s legitimacy depended on their ability to satisfy these demands, but they chose to approach each of them differently. In light of impending bankruptcy and the breakdown of tax collection, they sought to encourage citizens to make patriotic gifts. These contributions were conceived of as forms of reciprocity, sometimes as equivalent exchange (the just price for receiving freedom and rights), sometimes as civic sacrifice (the virtuous citizen puts the nation’s interests before his or her own). In October, deputies institutionalized patriotic giving, calling on citizens to voluntarily give twenty-five per cent of their income to the nation in formal declarations made before tax receivers. When, in March 1790, this campaign proved to be insufficient, they made the patriotic contribution obligatory. As it turned out, revenues remained meagre until the outbreak of war and terror between 1792-1794. Historically significant in all this was that, in initially making contributions voluntary, the National Assembly moralized the problem of finances. Stinginess – the opposite of reciprocity – soon smelled of treason, and patriotic generosity became a litmus test of loyalty to the new regime.

If revolutionaries opted to moralize and politicize the problem of finances (and distributing rents on public debt was their greatest priority), how did they deal with the problem of food? As Judith Miller has shown, national deputies remained divided on the matter. (Miller, 1999) Some believed that subsistence, like finances, was a matter of
political will and that access to it was a right. Many of the model rights declarations circulating in the summer of 1789 included economic and social rights: the rights to work, to subsistence and to aid for the aged and infirm. Often these rights were framed, implicitly or explicitly, in terms of reciprocity. In the end, however, deputies omitted social and economic rights from the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789. In lieu of such rights, they passed a law liberalizing the grain trade. Proposed on 22 August and passed a week later, the law sought to reconcile moral reciprocity, which called for political will, with material reciprocity, which necessitated market freedom. (As Emma Rothschild shows, eighteenth-century political economists had often tried to reconcile the two. [Rothschild, 2001])

The text of the law began with gushing fraternalism, much like what one would expect from Jacobins three years later. It reminded citizens of their duty to provide ‘reciprocal aid’ to their ‘brothers’ and stressed the sacredness of subsistence. Its language echoed that found in formulations of economic and social rights, and given that the law was proposed during debates on the declaration of rights one surmises that it was meant to compensate for the absence of those rights in the final draft of the declaration. In any case, the text suddenly and quite remarkably veered off into market-economics. After explaining the theory of ‘supply and demand’, it insisted that only complete market freedom could ensure efficient and fair provisioning. The law concluded on a decidedly un-fraternal note. It threatened anyone who interfered with free-market forces, be they citizens or officials, with the capital crime of lèse-nation. Some individuals were charged with this crime later that year. The law was reiterated in 1792 but was fiercely debated on 10 March, the day Danton declared terror to be the order of the day.

During the Revolution, reciprocity also shaped ideas and practices concerning rights and citizenship. Although historians tend to stress national identity and the ‘natural right’ tradition, contemporaries more often than not based their thinking on these issues on reciprocity, that is, on ‘give-and-take’ and sacrifice. Arguments in favour of extending active citizenship rights to disenfranchised groups (Jews, women, slaves) emphasized more their contributions to society than their essential humanity. ‘Reciprocal’ thinking had practical implications. Receiving state pensions or a certificat de civisme in 1792 and 1793, for
example, required proving that one had made a *contribution patriotique*. By the time of the Terror, failure to give was grounds for suspicion and arrest, and in several parts of France, suspects were released from prison after paying a ‘patriotic gift’. Moreover, when individuals appeared before local committees of surveillance to request something to which they had a legal right (protection from violent attacks, a *certificat de civisme*, the return of seized property, etc.), they often enumerated their civic acts of generosity, as if those acts offered a better justification for making demands than the law. In some extreme cases, patriotic generosity could even save one from the guillotine. When only two of thirty-one general tax farmers were acquitted of corruption charges (the others were executed) in the fall of 1793, authorities justified their decision on the grounds that the two men had provided food for the poor and uniforms for soldiers. In short, citizenship was a moral (and not just legal) matter, and reciprocity expressed how contemporaries imagined morality in an increasingly secular and egalitarian world.

By examining the various meanings of ‘reciprocity’ in late eighteenth-century France – as equivalent exchange or as generosity; as requiring moral and political will or as resulting naturally through the self-regulating market – we can better appreciate the philosophical, moral and political tensions of the Revolution. It was from these tensions, I believe, that rival conceptions of society – liberal and social – took form.

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II.

IDENTITIES
II.1.

What is a Sans-culotte?

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Keywords: Paris; Parisians; popular politics; sans-culotte

The figure of the heroic, aggressive, plebeian sans-culotte has been an unchallenged part of the landscape of understanding the French Revolution for a long time. Its implicit acceptance coloured many other works – for example Darnton’s ‘Great Cat Massacre’ – that might otherwise have struggled to take a bearing on the significance of events. (Darnton, 1985) However, the image of the sans-culotte has in fact been under challenge for several decades. By the end of the 1980s, ample material was available from the research of Michael Sonenscher and Steven Kaplan to disprove a range of foundational assumptions about the interplay of socio-economic status and political culture in the artisanal world of the late 1700s. (Sonenscher, 1987, 1991; Kaplan, 1985-6) Without the solidity of paternalistic workshop structures behind it, Albert Soboul’s vision of the master-artisan class as effective and acknowledged leaders of a wider plebeian sphere crumbled – so much so that Richard Andrews was able provocatively to propose that the sans-culotte image functioned more as a means of control over workers by masters than as a symbol of their unity. (Soboul, 1958; Andrews, 1985-6)
At the same time, however, David Garrioch complicated our image of the Parisian ‘crowd’ by examining neighbourhood life in closer detail. Where George Rudé found evidence of bourgeois revolutionary ideas falling on an essentially passive population and raising them to revolt, Garrioch instead suggested, along with Arlette Farge, that ordinary Parisians were sophisticated spectators, commentators and participants in at least semi-politicized collective life long before 1789. (Garrioch, 1986; Rudé, 1959; Farge, 1993, 1994)

While a majority-Anglophone historiography has tugged strongly at some of the foundations of the sans-culotte, it is noteworthy that some Francophone currents have continued and reinforced its underlying assumptions. Work on the ‘acculturation’ of the common people to Revolutionary politics often fails to ask what politics such people had before, and whether they were more than passive recipients of pre-packaged radicalism from educated ‘porte-parole’. While a few scholars, notably Haim Burstin, have engaged with the complexities of individual and collective adoption of sans-culotte identities, others, such as Sophie Wahnich, have gone down the road of simply naming ‘the people’ as a collective participant in radicalization, without feeling the need for further specificity. (Burstin, 2005; Wahnich, 2008)

The historiographical connection between the idea of the sans-culotte and actual popular participation in the French Revolution is therefore at an impasse, one that can only be resolved by a willingness to dissect in much finer detail the implications of that idea. My own research into the street-life of Paris shows quite clearly that one can find men and women of the popular classes between 1789 and 1791 occupying every imaginable political position, with almost-indigents and semi-respectable people alike speaking up for Marat and the Cordeliers on one side, and the urgent need for social discipline to contain brigandage on the other. Prostitutes could speak the language of liberty against the revolution’s own new laws, while National Guards deplored the authorities’ unwillingness to tackle gambling-dens and other nests of counter-revolutionary corruption. In the middle there was a seething mass of opinions such that tumult seemed constantly to threaten – yet never from any truly consistent direction. (Andress, 2006)
If one leaps ahead to 1793 it is possible to say that there was no sans-culotte ‘popular movement’ that could reasonably lay claim to that name except through the jargon of self-aggrandising ‘porte-parole’. Soboul’s own evidence suggests that the presence of a popular rank and file was heavily tempered by the leading role of a solid cohort of the educated and propertied. Morris Slavin has provided excellent illustration of this in his research showing that the Comité central révolutionnaire that planned the 31 May–2 June rising included four lawyers, five men of letters and a series of others linked to either rentier income or entrepreneurial activity, including one former noble – but no wage-earners or working artisans. (Slavin, 1986)

Looking at the great ‘popular’ insurrections and journées of sans-culotte Paris, it is notable that the most successful were those clearly planned by radical leaderships in advance – such as the purge of the Girondins, or indeed the fall of the monarchy. When great events seem to have begun as relatively spontaneous agitations – such as 20 June 1792 or 5 September 1793 – they were either, as in the first case, stymied by a lack of political follow-through, or as in the latter, swiftly co-opted into a parade of institutional elite spokespersons, and a legislative agenda that did very little except strengthen the hand of the state. When popular agitations came too close to explicitly crossing the agendas of power, as in the foodriots of early 1793, or even when certain spokespersons presented an agenda too disruptive to the circuits of power, as with the enragés of the summer of that year, these events were struck down by verbal force, or anathematised in words and sometimes, as with the fate of Jacques Roux, deeds as well.

How, then, can research move on from here? I think there are three routes: 1) figure out how to think about the deep ingraining of street-level political awareness against and across the currents of top-down ‘acculturation’; 2) reimagine ‘the people’ of 1793 as having been there for what went before, and what several years’ experience of upheaval really meant to them; and 3) think about what it might mean to interpret the surviving language of ‘popular’ discourse in the absence of retrospective definitions of class and assertions of collective purity. We might look for a rich ‘local’ history of Paris in the mould of a book like Donald Sutherland’s about Aubagne – where the labels of the factions, and the jargon they spouted are all visible, but so too very clearly is the personal engagement, the contextual history and the gritty complexity
of individual motive. If we did all that we might be clearer on what is, and is not, a sans-culotte. (Sutherland, 2009)

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II. 2.

In Search of the Girondins

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Keywords: Bouche de fer; Cercle social; Girondins; Montagnards; radicalism; slavery; women

Although the Girondins are one of the best-established categories in the history of the French Revolution, much of the research on them over the past half century has been devoted to arguing what they were not. Michael Sydenham, who first reopened this subject in 1961, demonstrated that they were in no sense a political party. Alison Patrick, eleven years later, showed that they did not constitute a majority in the Convention before they were purged on 2 June 1793; nor, she showed, were they the representatives of capitalism and thus economically distinguishable from more populist Montagnards. C.J. Mitchell in 1988 argued persuasively that they were never monarchists, even during the last weeks before the fall of the monarchy in 1792. Even in Bordeaux, in the department after which they were named, and where the only monument to them was erected at the turn of the last century, there was disagreement from the start about who it was meant to commemorate, and no names at all were placed on the monument until 1989. Those added then were exclusively deputies sent by the department of the Gironde to the Convention, and subsequently executed. They did not include others normally associated indissolubly with the group, and who died with them or around the same time, such

as Brissot, Buzot, Barbaroux, Pétion, or Mme Roland. The Girondins as a meaningful group, it would appear, had been a construct of their sans-culotte and Montagnard enemies, a construct too readily taken up and perpetuated in historiography by writers tracing their own ideological ancestry to the policies introduced after the purge of June 1793, and enforced by Terror. These policies were abandoned at the same time as the Convention, following the fall of Robespierre, readmitted deputies who had protested against the purge.

Yet it is unrealistic to wish the Girondins away, and simply to stop using so familiar a name because of the unsustainable historiographical freight which it carries. I have long felt, and hinted in print a number of times, that it is time to think more carefully about who the Girondins were, less by counting heads than by looking at what those given the name had in common intellectually. Paradoxically, I think that the place to begin is with one further thing that they were not: although it is one of the more conventional labels often attached to them, they were not moderates. Brissot’s public political radicalism predated the Revolution, as did that of Condorcet. The most radical forum for public discussion in early Revolutionary Paris, the Cercle Social, and its newspaper the Bouche de Fer, were created by future Girondins like Fauchet. The very name sans-culotte was first used, and then approvingly, in the way that was to become classic by the Girondin journalist Gorsas. At the king’s trial, all Girondins accepted that he was guilty, and their argument that the Convention’s verdict on this momentous occasion should be endorsed by the Nation which had elected it seems impeccably democratic. Later, their reluctance to establish a price Maximum showed their commitment to the radical economic outlook which almost all revolutionaries had initially shared. They held out for all these things in the face of growing hostility from the sans-culottes of the capital, who spoke only for themselves rather than the Nation at large. It was the Montagnards who buckled under this sectional pressure, eventually sacrificing the integrity of the Convention itself by expelling colleagues targeted by this outside force. In this, the Montagnards were pragmatists, just as they were in their acceptance of a Maximum in which they did not believe, and in their acquiescence to attacks on press freedom when sans-culotte gangs smashed the workshops of Girondin printers. It was scarcely a coincidence that Thomas Paine, the greatest international revolutionary of the age, was a Girondin sympathiser. The Girondins were martyred
because, like him, they stood by first principles rather than forced principles.

It is surely also time to remember other aspects of Girondin radicalism. They were certainly far more open to the claims of women to a public role than the Montagnards. While the latter, appealing to the authority of Rousseau, closed down female political organisations, the Girondins had one of their centres of gravity in the salon of Mme Roland. The notorious Revolutionary ‘Amazons’ were Girondin supporters, including Olympe de Gouges, author of the Declaration of the Rights of Women. Condorcet had long been a campaigner for women’s political rights. Then there was the question of slavery. Brissot was one of the founders of the Société des Amis des Noirs, and Robespierre blamed the great slave uprising in Saint-Domingue on Girondin talk of emancipation. The two national commissioners sent in 1792 to deal with that rebellion, Sonthonax and Polverel, were nominees of Brissot. It was they who proclaimed the freedom of the slaves in Saint-Domingue – ironically after the Montagnard Convention, unknown to them, had decreed their recall as Girondin suspects. It seems unlikely that the Convention would have issued its general emancipation in February 1794 without this prior Girondin fait accompli.

As the ideological, not to say the emotional, commitment of historians to the Montagnards as ancestors of the modern Left continues to fade, it seems to me that the Girondins should be allowed to emerge, not as any sort of moderates, but as the truest of French Revolutionaries.

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II.3.

Were the Revolutionary Armies Revolutionary?

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Keywords: ancien régime; military history; patriotism; Seven Years War; soldiers; war

The view of the Revolutionary armies as patriotic, idealistic and innovative has proved extraordinarily resilient. Yet most of the evidence for this view lies in rhetoric and in the Revolution’s clarion calls to sacrifice and patriotism. It was politicians, not soldiers, who first suggested that the Revolutionary armies were inherently different from traditional armies and that they fought from an idealism and inner faith that other troops could not share. This paper re-examines some of these assumptions and asks how far we should accept the equation of republican and citizen, soldier and volunteer, or the revolutionaries’ claim that theirs was a better-motivated army which fought differently from others, with the relish of free men pitted against the ‘slaves’ of the ‘tyrants’ who, they liked to assert, ruled in the other states of Europe.

There are certainly reasons for doubt. The Revolution may have filled its armies, but it did so with increasingly reluctant conscripts and sustained consistently high desertion rates, while the evidence of the writings these recruits left behind is ambiguous. Though some soldiers

did write about their Revolutionary ideals or expressed contempt for the rural backwardness and provincial piety which they encountered on campaign, such instances were not numerous; indeed, in their letters home most soldiers limited themselves to the customary complaints of men at war about the poor quality of their rations and the gruelling conditions of the march. Where they expressed the hope of obtaining a rapid victory, it was often in the context of ending the war and returning to see their loved ones; if they showed faith in their generals it was because they believed that they were inspired tacticians who could lead them to victory and save their lives. There was little that was revolutionary in this. It would suggest that French soldiers had come to think like any other soldiers, concerned with the day-to-day realities of war, with avoiding crippling wounds, with simple survival.

And what of the supposed differences from the army they replaced, the army of the Bourbons? Recent research suggests that the image of the ancien régime army contained in Revolutionary speeches is something of a caricature. It would seem that French soldiers before the Revolution also fought with passion and commitment, that they shared and understood concepts of military honour, and that they largely consented to the punishments meted out. This paper discusses the implications of these findings for our reading of the revolutionaries’ claims, and it examines some of the reform proposals made after the debacle of the Seven Years War. The Bourbons, of course, never implemented these ideas; it took a political revolution to do so. But the ideas were not new. Like so much of what the revolutionaries achieved, their army reforms did not spring perfectly formed from the Revolutionary imaginary; rather, they had been part of a lively military debate for several decades. It was one of the Revolution’s achievements to back the reform lobby and enact some of the measures that it had advocated for a generation – as a response to the military crisis the country faced.
II.4.

The Thermidorians of 9 Thermidor

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Keywords: archives; Barras; National Convention; Paris; politics; sans-culottes; Robespierre; Soboul

The day of 9 Thermidor Year II (27 July 1794) when Robespierre was overthrown ranks alongside 14 July 1789, 10 August 1792 and 18 Brumaire Year VIII as one of the definitive dates of the Revolutionary decade in France. Curiously, it is little studied. A great many historians have covered the day in terms of the plans and intentions of its central character. Others have considered it as an exercise in factional politics within the National Convention. Yet very few indeed have explored it as a day in Parisian politics, even though the day witnessed an attempted popular insurrection. The most useable guide to this facet of 9 Thermidor remains Albert Soboul’s account in his great work on the sans-culottes of Year II. (Soboul, 1958) This draws extremely heavily on the fuller coverage given in the neglected study by Paul Sainte-Claire Deville on the Commune which dates from 1946.

This long-standing neglect may also appear surprising in view of the exceptionally rich documentation which exists for the journée, most
notably in police archives (Archives Nationales F7). Barras, who suppressed the Parisian insurrection on 9-10 Thermidor, ordered an extraordinarily thorough enquiry into every aspect of the day in each of the city’s forty-eight sections. In addition, the weeks following saw the arrest of hundreds of militants, and this activity threw up large numbers of personal accounts of the day (denunciations, interrogations, petitions for release from goal, etc). Probably no other Revolutionary journée is so well-documented. Ironically it may even be that the very plethora of information has deterred historians from examining it more closely in recent years.

A study of recent histories of the Revolution indicates that Soboul’s account of the day is generally accepted. The Parisian popular movement, it is held, failed to support Robespierre in sufficient numbers because the Committee of Public Safety had effectively neutered it and depoliticised it in preceding months. 9 Thermidor saw the triumph of popular indifference, with Robespierre and his companions left abandoned in the Commune building at the Hôtel de Ville at midnight, as crowds who only hours before had been demonstrating in their support outside the building preferred to return home rather than stand and fight.

There remains one awkward fact that disproves this argument however. It is that Parisian crowds did not return home in a state of indifference, but stayed up and about in huge numbers on the streets of Paris during the night of 9-10 Thermidor. Accounts of the day in police archives show irrefutably that the people of Paris chose to stand and fight, but for the Convention rather than for Robespierre and the Commune. The present consensus ascribes popular support for the Convention to the Parisian masses’ ‘false consciousness’ (a not especially Marxian term incidentally). It is surprising that such an explanation still seems to hold currency.

What I hope to do in this new project is to provide an account of 9 Thermidor that integrates the three levels on which the day operated (inside Robespierre’s head; inside the National Convention; and within the city of Paris). By focusing in particular on the individual motivations and actions of city-dwellers on the day, I hope to throw light on the nature of the political outlook of Parisians. The people of Paris did not stand idly by as Robespierre was overthrown: they
overthrew him, and it is worth knowing why. Analysis of the micro-politics of the hopes, fears, plans and projects of the Parisian popular classes should take us beyond considerations of false consciousness or retrospective assumptions about ‘Thermidorian’ (i.e. right-wing) mentalities, and give us a better sense of who the Thermidians were and what they were about.

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II.5

**Comparative Counter-Revolutionaries**

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**Keywords:** America; Britain; Burke; comparative histories; counter-revolution; democracy; Enlightenment; Ireland; republicanism

The basic principle behind the research informing this paper on comparative counter-revolution, concentrating on France, Britain and Ireland, is the idea that counter-revolutionaries saw themselves in as international a context as revolutionaries: they were consciously engaged in a struggle for the future of European civilisation as well as to protect the regimes and social orders within their own states. The paper discusses the key themes in counter-revolutionary ideology, exploring how local conditions in the various countries helped shape common counter-revolutionary ideas in each country. It argues that counter-revolution was a diverse, dynamic and agile intellectual movement.

The paper argues that the key intellectual themes of international counter-revolution were monarchy, religion, property, aristocracy and, perhaps seemingly counter-intuitively, democracy. In doing so, the paper builds on recent work on counter-revolution such as that of

William Doyle’s and Amanda Goodrich’s analysis of debates on aristocracy in France and America, and in Britain. (Doyle, 2009; Goodrich, 2005) France, Britain and Ireland provide a useful set of comparators given the differences and similarities between them, especially in religious and political terms. For example, Ireland and Britain had formally identical political systems, but the different religious make-up of their populations contributed greatly to radically different popular responses to the French Revolution. While British state-sponsored patriotism could expand to accommodate a large section of the reformers during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, Irish counter-revolution was hamstrung by religious tensions which meant that the most fervent supporters of the status quo were hostile to those they were trying to convince to reject ‘French principles’, and doomed to failure. There is a good case to be made that the counter-revolutionaries had a much clearer idea of the social and political implications of the growing popularity of the term ‘democracy’ than did their radical opponents, whose understandings of, and commitment to, the concept of democracy evolved more slowly than is often assumed.

The paper discusses the relationship between the Enlightenment and counter-revolution. It argues that instead of viewing counter-revolution as inherently linked with counter-enlightenment, it is much more profitable to see the disputes between revolutionaries and moderate counter-revolutionaries as disputes between self-professed adherents of the Enlightenment. At stake were the implications for political, religious, social and economic policy of differing understandings of the Enlightenment. Recent developments in the historiography of the Enlightenment, especially the emphasis on political economy, allow for counter-revolution to be integrated further into the main intellectual currents of late eighteenth-century Europe. By focusing on the more moderate elements of counter-revolution, including some who initially embraced the French Revolution, we can see the presence of a modernizing trend within counter-revolution, committed to the creation of commercial and religiously-tolerant societies, and at odds with their more traditionalist and religiously-inspired counterparts.

The paper argues that in order properly to comprehend the nature of international counter-revolution, we must think again about the
centrality that has been accorded to Edmund Burke. In doing so, it follows the insights of work such as that of William J. Murray on the French right-wing press, which demonstrates the speed with which ideological opposition to the Revolution developed. (Murray, 1986) In Ireland, Burke’s work also fed into ideologically sophisticated pre-existing opposition to the Revolution in the conservative press. The term Burkean (like Painite) serves as useful short-hand but can conceal the chronology and development of counter-revolutionary ideology.

The paper concludes by raising the question of counter-revolution in the United States, and arguing for the necessity of investigating what can be learned by comparing the counter-revolution of monarchists in Europe to that of Republicans in America.

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III.

LOCATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS
III.1.

The Republic of Books

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Keywords: commerce; commodities; Europe; geography of the Enlightenment; markets

A Parisian walks into a French-language bookshop in late-eighteenth-century Amsterdam, Geneva or London. Berlin perhaps. Do the shelves bow under the weight of familiar editions? Might he be anywhere in the decentralised, amorphous francophone republic of letters – Cosmopolis – surrounded in equal measure by Lyonnais or Lausannois editions, Amsterdam or Avignon impressions? If he seeks-out political theory, might Montesquieu spring to hand; should he require a lighter diversion, could the proprietor point him towards the latest Dutch travelogue or Swiss romance? Let us suppose that this is Isaac Bardin’s Geneva store, at number 244 rue de la Cité, during the spring of 1771. And let us suppose that our gentleman browser is something of a freethinker. With a well-directed nod and a wink, might he secure a copy of the baron d’Holbach’s incendiary *Essai sur les préjugés*, published in Amsterdam, and then Berlin, the previous year? Or, let us suppose him to be a more humdrum buyer at the counter of the Luchtmans of Leiden as the famously bitter winter of 1783-1784 first bites. Might Henri Rieu’s spanking new Neuchâtel-published

translation of Fanny Burney’s *Cecelia* have already found its way north? And what does it matter?

This paper uses the Burrows and Curran *French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe database* to locate the local and international sales and networks of the Société typographique de Neuchâtel in the context of those of competitor houses. In the process, it empirically addresses questions of regional variation in the early-modern francophone book market. The intellectual geography of the francophone book trade, it contends, differed importantly from the republic of letters as imagined by contemporaries and later scholars. Books, it suggests, were not letters. They never floated freely around theoretical networks. They ground their way down highways approaching fierce competition and haemorrhaging profitability by the kilometre. Transporting them across a continent was a tricky business proposition: they were volumetrically inefficient (bulky and of limited value); fragile (subject to water damage and wear); and highly, unevenly and sometimes capriciously regulated. As such, viewed as material commodities, they suffered an appreciable ‘friction of distance’, as physical transport costs, insurance premiums and risks all disadvantaged the long-distance swapping of books amongst publishing houses. Further, the natural cartels that dominated the international trade in francophone books steered clear of each other’s wares. The cutthroat ‘republic of books’, the paper shows, little resembled idealised Cosmopolis.

So, a Parisian walks into French-language bookshops in late-eighteenth-century Amsterdam, Geneva and London. Berlin too. For sure, he recognises many of the authors and titles, and oftentimes he even stumbles across the same editions. But much is unfamiliar. He fails to find pocket materialism in patchwork Romandy; and he has no luck locating *Cecilia* on the banks of the Old Rhine. And in each shop he finds subtle but telling differences in the authors, titles and discourses on offer. So what does it matter? It matters because if the books on the shelves of French-language bookshops in Amsterdam, Geneva, London, Berlin and Paris differed, then perhaps the reading publics that drew upon them experienced aspects of the Enlightenment differently. Perhaps francophone Europe’s pre-Revolutionary intellectual geography needs revisiting afresh.
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III.2.

The French Revolution and Haiti

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Keywords: the Atlantic; Bourbon Restoration; National Convention; Paris Revolutionary Tribunal; Saint-Domingue; slavery; Thermidorian reaction

I have become increasingly interested in the potential of using Saint-Domingue/Haiti as a prism through which to study French society during the Revolutionary era. Not only is the story of the revolution in Saint-Domingue important in its own right, but the complex and contradictory reactions it provoked back in the metropole offer an opportunity to put Revolutionary and counter-revolutionary principles under the microscope. The Haitian revolution was, after all, a test case for revolutionaries in France, who were debating the limits and potential of liberty and equality – as set against concerns over issues like the sanctity of private property, public order and geopolitical security. A Haitian prism on French politics has two further distinct advantages. First, it encourages, or perhaps even demands, a much broader timeframe than is usually employed in Revolutionary historiography, with French recognition of Haiti’s status as an independent nation in 1825 one obvious end point. Second, it leads naturally to engagement with the developing transnational
historiography of the Atlantic world during this period – for example, work that looks at American condemnation and support for a successful slave rebellion in its vicinity. (Geggus and Friering, 2009; Sepinwall, 2012) This is therefore an opportunity to site French Revolutionary historiography in a truly international context.

One illustration of what such an angle can bring to the table can be found in the trials of two former governors of Saint-Domingue, Philibert François Rouxel de Blanchelande and Jean-Jacques-Pierre d’Esparbès, at the Paris Revolutionary Tribunal during the Terror. In spite of the high profiles of both these men, Haitian and French Revolutionary historians seem to lose interest in these individuals once they are removed from the colony. However, both men publicly campaigned for their freedom while sitting in the Abbaye prison in Paris from the end of 1792 onwards (until they were tried separately in April 1793), and both campaigns provoked positive and negative reactions in the Revolutionary public sphere. The fact that the prosecution of both trials, playing to a sans-culotte public gallery, laid out a strikingly anti-slave discourse regarding the causes and course of the rebellion in Saint-Domingue calls into question essential parts of traditional chronologies of the abolition movement during the French Revolution, which often do not clearly interrogate the differences between the slow, tortuous path to 4 April 1792 (the reaffirmation of political rights to a limited number of free people of colour) and the uncharacteristically quick ratification in February 1794 of Sonthonax’s unilateral decision to offer the slaves of Saint-Domingue their freedom. It may be that the influential accounts of Yves Bénot and Jean-Daniel Piquet rely on too selective a range of sources in their desire to provide a chronology for a consistent, popular abolition movement during 1792-4. (Bénot, 1988, Piquet, 2002) By 1793 this requires the filtering out of a significant amount of evidence pointing towards the opposite phenomenon in public discourse – as the cases of Blanchelande and d’Esparbès clearly show.

Beyond the Terror, I believe more can be done to unpick the influence of Saint-Domingue/Haiti on the French Revolution. Indeed, Jeremy Popkin has recently been working on Thermidorian interactions with Saint-Domingue, when there is a very interesting debate about the conflicting rights of white colonists, slave owners and former slaves and how they fit into the metropolitan republican vision as it develops
post-Terror. (Popkin, 2009) Yun Kyoung Kwon, meanwhile, has demonstrated some of the ways in which these links underwent further development during the Bourbon Restoration, with both the real-time story of the young Haitian Republic and narratives of its bloody genesis important weapons in the ongoing political struggles between liberals and counter-revolutionaries over the direction France should take in the new century. (Kyoung Kwon, 2011) It would be interesting to chart the way in which competing narratives developed on these issues, all the way from Blanchelande and D’Esparbès to the reign of Charles X and France’s official recognition of Haitian nation status, on 17 April 1825.

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III.3.

Revolutionary Telegraphy

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Keywords: Chappe, Claude; communication; signs; technology; visual environment

The development of a successful optical telegraph network in France in the early 1790s transformed the ways in which information could be transmitted across space and time. This semaphoric system, devised by Claude Chappe, was an important and widespread means of communication until electromagnetic telegraphy rendered it obsolete in the 1850s. Chappe’s system, developed with the assistance of his brothers, consisted of a network of relays, situated on tall buildings or hills, on top of which were installed articulated metal arms. The arms of the telegraph were set into encoded positions and were viewed through a telescope by an operator at the next station, who then passed the message along the chain.

Operating in public, but conveying secret messages, optical telegraphy emerged at a time when the legibility of signs and the use of images for political ends were increasingly pressing issues. The telegraph became a ubiquitous sight in the first half of the nineteenth century, transforming the role of architecture and the ways in which landscape, both urban and rural, was perceived and represented. In a

range of contemporary texts, the telegraph’s intractable communications were figured as a disturbance in the visual field, while elsewhere they were integrated more seamlessly into their environment. The profoundly visual character of this technology has not, however, been sufficiently recognized, and the relationship between telegraphy and other forms of visual communication has seldom been discussed.

This paper therefore examines the relationship between telegraphy and its representations in France during the Revolution and in the early nineteenth century. Although the power of the optical telegraph was based on its ability to thwart visual interpretation – in fact, for this reason especially – I believe that the optical telegraph should be considered in terms of the visual, whether that be the self-evident necessity of the visual to the operation of the telegraph, the broader visual effects of telegraphy on those who perceived it in action, or the many images representing telegraphs produced by artists working in a range of media. Indeed, a wide variety of images represent the telegraph in situ, even when it is not the ostensible subject of the image (in this paper I pay particular attention to images of the telegraph on the Louvre). More broadly, this project explores the artistic, social and epistemological problems posed by optical telegraphy during and after the French Revolution, and considers the implications of these for our understanding of both the political and affective dimensions of visual transmission in Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary France.
III.4.

Salvaging and Archiving the Revolution

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Keywords: antiquarianism; collecting; conspiracy; counter-revolution; Empire; the Fronde; mysticism; Revolutionary ephemera; Wars of Religion

Private collectors played a significant and overlooked role in the complex process by which the French Revolution became history. Their desire to stockpile pamphlets, books, autographs and prints, sometimes at considerable risk to themselves, reflected a faith in the historical import of the contemporary moment. Ephemeral and unique sources such as autographs were avidly collected as authentic relics of a momentous age; antiquarian sciences, like numismatics and bibliography, were stretched in order to accommodate the shock of these new materials. In selecting, sorting through and classifying the print culture of the 1790s, private collectors were the first to confront those vexing questions of periodization, of continuity and change, which still dominate the historiography. Thanks to the systematic nature of their purchases, and the sheer size of their stockpiles, it is clear that several pioneers - such as Delisle de Sales, Portiez de l'Oise or Mathieu Guillaume Villenave - were more than trophy-hunters: they

were self-conscious archivists of the Revolution for whom collecting the present was inseparable from interpreting it.

Collectors’ activities have been marginalized in a scholarship fixated with the birth of the museum and the creation of a truly national heritage. Yet despite the satire hurled their way, these men were not monomaniacs and misfits but described their activities in highly moralized terms. Arthur-Henri Boulard amassed an extraordinary library of 550,000 volumes over the course of the Revolution and the Empire—a haul second only to the Bibliothèque Nationale. A pious royalist, he claimed to be moved by pity to save books that had been thrown out in the street at the time of the dispersion of the academic, corporate and clerical libraries. His bulk purchases were portrayed as a kind of Christian charity, and his private residence in the faubourg Saint-Germain was viewed as analogous to Alexandre Lenoir’s Musée des Monuments Français. Ironically it was conservatives like Boulard who took a key role in preserving Revolutionary print culture—all the while blaming the Revolution for drowning out older and wiser voices.

Early collectors were fascinated by the historical echoes and antecedents to 1789. The Wars of Religion and the Fronde were constant points of reference, since in those crises too the collapse in royal authority had unleashed a wave of heretical opinions and scurrilous cartoons. The vogue for customizing books or print folios by appending other extraneous sources only facilitated trans-historical comparisons. This wider chronological perspective was seen as crucial to decoding many of the oblique references and puzzling allegories found in Revolutionary print culture. Conservative commentators—such as Boyer de Nîmes, the first historian of Revolutionary caricature, beginning in 1792—discerned a conspiratorial logic latent in popular imagery: only the study of a large corpus of sources in different media might expose these secret affinities.

The most striking example of such tendencies was the abbé Soulavie, a geologist, historian, repentant Jacobin and owner of over 22,500 prints and drawings that chronologically traced the history of France. Soulavie was obsessed with authenticity and commissioned many unknown participants in the key events of the French Revolution to draw what they had seen, no matter how brutal. The aim was to try and establish an objective depiction of the nation’s recent troubles, with Soulavie convinced that the brush and the burin were far more reliable
witnesses than the pen. Yet the indexical function of the visual sources was undercut by Soulavie’s much more occult and mystical notion of time, covering his prints with retrospective marginalia, and constantly pointing out unexpected epochal correspondences. Most intriguingly, Soulavie had a dedicated sub-section of prophetic prints: images whose full meaning would only be disclosed in hindsight. So certain was Soulavie of their predictive powers that he insisted these prints should never be sold abroad or be allowed to fall into enemy hands should his cabinet be dispersed.

In fact, very few of these collections outlived their owners, or were even adequately catalogued. Those that did were stripped of their idiosyncratic labels when they were eventually swallowed up by larger, public institutions. Yet recovering these micro-practices sheds light on how pioneering amateurs thought about, and thought through, the artefacts of the Revolutionary decade. Their cabinets were the storehouses of truths which would otherwise be lost amidst the flurry of censorship, accusation and self-exculpation. Collectors protested that even the crudest or most rudimentary document could be a clue in deciphering the Revolution’s bloody trajectory – what Soulavie called the underlying ‘revolutionary mechanism’. This quest for objectivity helps explain why it remained the ideological foes of the Revolution – men like the comte de la Bédoyère and the baron de Vinck – who did most to conserve and transmit its textual and material heritage in the nineteenth century.

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