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The Sketch and Caricature as Metaphors for the French Revolution

During the French Revolution, all factions exploited political caricature and diverse forms of graphic satire to address the mass of French citizens. Each side lampooned the other’s perspective on vital social and political issues, and the resulting broadsides were read together with other forms of propagandistic material. These prints participated directly in the polemics of the Revolution and aimed at contributing to the restructuring of French life and society. Thus caricature played a fundamental role in the formation of the revolutionary character.*

It is not necessary to belabor the point that caricature is the graphic metaphor for revolutionary protest. In this paper I want to explore why and how this is possible by seeking analogies between the caricature as a marginalized or substandard category of aesthetic creation and the idea of the sketch as both a primal and regressive stage in a higher order of the creative process. I will then go on to argue that the shared qualities of caricature and sketch, as well as the strategies of their use, bear a fundamental relationship to the idea of a society in gestation, with its utopian promises and its imperfections.

A word about the use of the terms »sketching« and »caricaturing,« I will not be arguing strictly on the basis of technique and the appearance of technique, but also on the basis of their shared reductive character and elimination of superfluity. Eighteenth-century reproductive processes often ellided the broken and crude contours of an original drawing and made the whole cohere into a neat configuration. The »sketch« here obtains in its capacity to resist finicky academic detail and polish even when preceded by other studies. Spon-

taneous activity must also be described in relative terms, for we now know that every nervous squiggle and irrational impulse can be grasped within chaos theory and even digitalized. Perhaps only a biological reflex or involuntary gesture may be perceived by the individual as »spontaneous,« but even there psychoanalytic theory may preempt this last refuge of devil-may-care individuality.

The caricatural genre differs from the sketch in its autonomous status, but their means and signifiers are strikingly similar. Both categories emerge in Italian and French cultural practices around 1600, deriving their terminology and connotative associations from these languages. The terms caricare and charger, to charge or overload, the schizzo and esquisse, implying the extemporaneous, or something done off hand, are the etymological ancestors of the modern forms and their connotations. The Italian and French terms for sketch descend from the Latin schedius, connoting haste and on-the-spot action and ultimately derive from earlier linguistic forms referring to fragmentation and dispersion. Both the caricature and the sketch signify an informality and verve with regard to subject and execution, the first pointing to a disfiguration and the second to a drastic condensation. At least one secondary French term for sketch, croquis, from the word croquer – to crunch or devour hastily – coincides with the caricature in its negative connotation of a misshapen and tasteless design. It also refers to the range of below-the-belt bodily parts and indecent gestures identified with caricature. David’s savage croquis of the grim-faced Marie Antoinette on the way to the guillotine is a clinical case study of this dual category (Fig. 1).

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The caricature and the sketch convey in coarse outlines, and with a bare minimum of detail, the prominent features of the subject. Numerous texts in the 18th century include the term «esquisse» in the title as a brief, summarizing statement of a larger system of work in progress, most notably Condorcet’s utopian analysis Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain – a work adopted by the National Convention in Year III for distribution throughout the republic. Often, such a work is hastily done up to bring before the public in moments of crisis, akin to the caricature designed for immediate circulation. The brief account or «sketchy» description providing the essential facts is also similar to journalistic reportage and pamphleteering during the revolutionary epochs. Thus the sketch is often associated with such qualifiers as rude, crude, flawed, and awkward, comprising work which may be dismissed as being no more than a «rough sketch.»

In this sense, the shorthand language of the sketch shares with the caricature – as well as with Freud’s definition of the joke – condensation, abbreviation, the disclosure of hidden similarities between things, and the economy of expenditure of psychic energy. This is related to the psychology of the sketch-like process which invokes for its completion the beholder’s imagination, cued by the spontaneous-like qualities and gestural equivalents of unconscious processes. Thus, like the caricature, the sketch permits a regressive operation invoking childhood associations.

This regressive feature also makes sketching a democratizing activity akin to caricaturing: both processes communicate more immediately to their audiences than more sublimated cultural forms. Diderot noted that «sketches generally possess a warmth that pictures do not. They represent a state of ardor and pure verve on the artist’s part, with no admixture of the affected elaboration introduced by thought: through the sketch the painter’s very soul is poured forth on the canvas ...»

In another place he asks rhetorically, «Why does a sketch give us more pleasure than a fine picture? Because we find in it more life and fewer formal details.» This quality also puts the making of sketches at the disposal of children, amateurs, neo-phytes, and women engaged in it as a pastime: «How is it,» he asks, «that a young pupil who could not even make a mediocre picture can dash off a magnificent sketch? Because the sketch is a work of fire and genius, while the picture is the product of labor, long and patient study and consummate experience of art.»

By definition, sketching stems from an impulsive mentality rooted in individual biology and psychology.

Diderot’s argument seems to bring into relation irreconcilable categories of «genius» and amateur-

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ishness, magnificent creations and inexperienced youths. Further, sketching in this period carried clear associations with elite culture, since gentlewomen and gentlemen normally practiced it as part of good breeding. Yet it is precisely because all of these social types were incapable of producing even a «mediocre picture» that they could pretend to flights of «genius». It was their very absence of professionalism and thus public commitment that allowed them to uninhibitedly achieve a result akin to the expression of genius. But this expression was condemned to remain in the private world of the creator, whatever her or his station in life.

Indeed, even for the seasoned master it was not proper decorum to hang one’s sketches in public — it would be comparable to hanging one’s dirty linen in public. Academicians wished to guard sketches as private; they hesitated to disclose what was felt to be the intimate recording of feelings and personality. They were in a sense as self-conscious about their preliminary studies as they would be self-conscious about their own bodies, and therefore could not accept the censorious consequences of revelation. It is the act of disclosure that would be embarrassing for them as it concomitantly generates the illusion of uniqueness of character about their inner feelings or their bodily functions — inner feelings and bodily functions otherwise unremarkably generic to the whole species. Diderot claimed that «through the sketch the painter’s very soul is poured forth on the canvas». The «sketch-confession» is therefore original in the double sense of disclosing what is nascent and fundamental to all creatures and in disclosing, on the other hand, what is uniquely embarrassing to each person taken in isolation. We are singular not in our ownership of common instincts, but in the self-conscious sensation that we suffer their constraint, each and every one of us, alone.

This guarded concern for one’s private life, like the mystifying narratives of class and religion, was undermined by the invasion of the Revolution into the public sphere. The public commitment or civil responsibility required open allegiance to the community. Gradually, the private world of exclusive preoccupations, rituals, and secret societies converged with the public world either because of a convergence of sympathies or the threat of unmasking. Especially in the early stages of the Revolution it was necessary to stand up to be counted or risk exposure and censure. Hence sketching processes could now be foregrounded, as in the case of open competitions for official art commissions which were decided on the basis of a compositional sketch.

The mindset from which sketching springs exposes the inner dynamic of the creator as much as that of the stimulus-subject. Its generative and embryonic functions identify it with Bakhtin’s idea of the «bodily lower stratum». The sketch thus becomes a metaphor for the open character of a revolutionary situation which now foregrounds daily what was normally a ritualized practice reserved for feast days. The temporary reversal of hierarchical principle in the mock ritual involves regressiveness akin to the sketching process. They involve both a degrading and a regenerating operation. In revolutionary situations every day is a holiday from hierarchical modes and requires experimental, improvised programs for novel circumstances. In such a state, the paradigm of the finished picture carries a conservative signification while only the crude approximations of the caricature and sketch maintain the integrity of the initiating impulse. The function of the counterrevolutionary caricaturist is to exploit the appeal of these crude outlines in an attempt to return society to the hierarchical state. Thus the counterrevolutionary wishes to restore the situation to the level of the periodic travesty and stigmatize the ongoing nature of the upside world as a temporary aberration.

Although the graphic differences may often appear similar, the conservative caricaturist normally

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3 Ibid., II, 153–54.
5 M. Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, Bloomington 1984, 368–436.
takes fewer risks with composition and form. Neither the caricaturist nor his or her constituency could stoop, at least initially, to the level of a Père Duchesne. During the early phase of the French Revolution, these counterrevolutionary caricaturists depended on the textual tradition of the royalist journal *Actes des apôtres*. Later, as the pressure to influence popular opinion intensifies these caricaturists begin taking liberties with the form, so that the differences between the radical and conservative lie mainly in the choice of targets.

The putative father of the French Revolution, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, had a modern understanding of the relationship between sketching and caricature. In a preliminary draft of his *Confessions* he wrote:

If I aspire to execute a scrupulously written work like everyone else, I will not succeed in painting a true picture of myself but only a polished version. It is a question here of my portrait and not a book ... I will say everything as I feel it, as I see it, without studied elegance, without constraint ... In the yielding simultaneously to the impact of the original impression and the sensation of the moment, I will paint the state of my mind in a double sense: in its awareness of the moment of the original event and the moment when I am describing it ... The work ... represents a basis of comparison for the study of the human heart. ⁶

While he eliminated all but the final line of the above quotation in his definitive work, Rousseau began Book I by declaring:

I am undertaking a work which has not precedent, and whose execution will have no imitator. I desire to show my fellows the likeness of a man in all the truth of nature, and this man is myself. ⁷

Rousseau's attempt to catch himself, so to speak, in the act of living, was a true caricatural attitude. This is not to deny that Rousseau was a consummate writer who carefully staged his scenarios. His «caricatural-sketch» attitude, however, derives from a conceptual narrative mode based on feeling and set up over and against the conventional artifice and decorum that masked class origins or condescendingly treated the lower social registers. In describing the environment of his origins and his thoughts and conduct, Rousseau used an allusive style, vocabulary and textual structure that openly exposed his state of mind at any given time and in any given place. He claims to display himself «as vile and despicable» when his behavior was such, and «as good, general, and noble» when he was so. His basic intellectual position stemmed from his capacity to set up antinomies for comparison, and these categorical opposites could be seen in terms of norms and deviances. They are negative with regard to vices, positive in their suggestive prototypes for an ideal society. Unlike his predecessor in political science, Montesquieu, Rousseau made no pretense at being a scientist or a detached scholar. He was a passionate propa-

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gandist as well as first-rate thinker. He formulated the sentiments and views for the Third Estate in his *Social Contract*, setting forth the philosophic and moral justification for revolt. For the group or class type he substituted the abstract, the cosmopolitan, the universal type.

Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Inequality of Man* established the opposition between a person in a state of nature and the civil person. The first represented a contented ethical being, the other a grotesque monster steeped in decadence and moral degeneration. Having set up these antinomies, he then opened himself to attack from critics such as Voltaire. Rousseau’s ability to invoke these sharply antagonistic types inspired a caricatural sensibility. Fuseli’s satirical frontispiece for his study of Rousseau’s writings depicts the sage holding up a plumb bob to measure the sincerity of Voltaire’s criticism, while Voltaire is seen riding the Natural Man like a beast of burden in anticipation of caricatures of the French Revolution showing the Third Estate bearing on its shoulders the nobles.
and/or clergy (Figs. 2–3). This is an early attack on the essential conservatism of Voltaire’s position within the Enlightenment; while thundering against despotism of kings he could write d’Alembert that he «never pretended to enlighten shoemakers and serving maids.» Rousseau’s mission was to oppose the exaggerated emphasis on reason that decomposes society into a hierarchy of individuals in favor of a system based on feeling that forges and preserves the collectivity. In the modern period the potential state of nature remains submerged in the political and social system and had to be released. Hence Rousseau’s standard of comparison—now embodied in the idea of the General Will posed against Privilege—found expression in the Estates General. The caricatural idea had become the norm for the revolutionary process, part of the visual vocabulary used in inventing and transmitting a tradition of revolutionary action. Indeed, Fuseli’s Rousseau holding the plumb bob visualizes Rousseau’s own statement that one should hold a «Balance à la main» to measure the virtues and vices of the social person—alogously to the emblem of the carpenter’s level that became one of the key visual signs of the Revolution.

In this sense, caricature is not only the best art form for revolutionary protest but is itself a carrier of the new idea. Like the sketch, it possesses a capacity for vividness and direct appeal to the emotions. Rousseau’s own attempt to delineate himself embraces the dual nature of the caricature and of the sketch. His idea of a «spontaneous» confessional expression corresponded to the free, if indecorous revelation of sentiment, as against the more definitive work suggestive of «polished» society and convention. It is difficult to distinguish between spontaneity of creation and spontaneity of effect, between the «reality» and the «artifice,» but in Rousseau’s case his class-based narrative provides a solution. Yet Rousseau, I believe, achieves both despite his meticulous writing style by virtue of his immediate identification with his autobiographical «plot» and the environment in which it unfolds. His language issues from a direct association with a milieu that would be described in moralizing and condescending terms by a Marmontel and a Diderot. Rousseau locates himself at the level of the people that Marmontel sees through the lenses of a sophisticated enlightenment critic who is prouder of his ascent of the ladder than the base rung from whence he derived. Rousseau, on the contrary, exploits the energy and ideology of the poor to clarify his personal position.

In his first Discourse, on the arts and sciences, Rousseau claimed that «the good man is an athlete who likes to compete in the nude.» He disdains cosmetics and ornaments invented «only to hide some deformity.» Prior to the invention of art human customs were «rustic but natural, and differences of conduct announced at first glance those of character.» In the modern period, rules govern appearance; propriety represses inclinations and all are afraid to appear as they are. The result of this is that no one trusts the other, and only emergencies enable us to know our friends thoroughly. The use of caricature may be likened to this emergency which unmask the veil of politeness and decorum that renders us incapable of sincere friendships.

The rewards for talent have led to the debasement of virtuous action. There are physicists, geometers, chemists, astronomers, poets, musicians, painters; but there are no longer citizens. Hence Rousseau’s second discourse speaks to the specialization and the professionalization of knowledge which create social stereotypes and thereby contribute to the corruption of morals.

The state of the human in nature breeds a more humane type, responsive to the needs and sufferings of others. The closest parallel in society is the

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† The titlepage of Rousseau’s Social Contract bore the allegorical personification of the republic holding the scales. See Rousseau, Du contrat social, ou principes du droit politique, Amsterdam 1763, titlepage.
»canaille« and »femmes des Halles« who, in riots and street fights, »separate the combatants and prevent honest people from murdering each other, »while the prudent people of civil society move away«. Despite Rousseau’s consistent gender bias and elitist position, he assigned positive affective qualities to men and women of the underclasses who, like the savages of the American wilderness, most closely approximated people in a state of nature.

The progress of inequality follows from the establishment of the law and of the right of property, the institution of government, and finally, the transformation of legitimate power into arbitrary power. At this point, revolution is needed to dissolve the government altogether or bring it closer to its legitimate functions. Political distinctions necessarily bring out civil distinctions. The growing inequality between the people and its leaders makes itself felt among individuals, where it is modified in a multitude of ways according to passions, talents, and events.

Having set up the prototypes of people in a state of nature, Rousseau proceeds to compare them to their counterparts in civil society. For example, when a person in a state of nature resolves the problems of life’s necessities, they are at peace with all nature and with each other. But for the civil person, it is not simply a matter of providing for the necessary, but for a surplus, leading next to immense wealth, and then, finally, to slaves and arbitrary power. As Rousseau states:

Compare, without prejudices, the state of civil man and that of savage man, and seek if you can how many new doors – other than his wickedness, his needs, and his miseries – the former has opened to suffering and death.

The conceptual model for Rousseau’s state of nature is remarkably close to the naked expression and utopian promises of the sketch. The sketch serves a dual function in signaling the perceived reality unmediated by conventions of finished, »polite« (polished) discourse, and at the same time revealing a new truth about the world through the expression of direct feeling. It is this truth, disguised by convention, that carries a »utopian« message, even when that message is essentially negative as in the case of David’s croquis of Marie Antoinette on the way to the scaffold. For those who used Rousseau’s Social Contract for a revolutionary manual, the idea of a voluntary, spontaneous union of free people approximated the imaginative state of nature. It is altogether unsurprising to find in Burke’s hostile tract against the Revolution a desire to attack it through the strategy of the sketch analogy. In one case, he takes issue with the idea of the French Revolution as an outcome of the search for liberty and translates the status of French society in provisional and fragmentary terms that do not permit of clear definition:

The wild gas, the fixed air is plainly broke loose: but we ought to suspend our judgement until the first effervescence is a little subsided, till the liquor is cleared, and until we see something deeper than the agitation of a troubled and frothy surface.

In discussing the procession in which the king and queen were conducted from Versailles to Paris on 6 October 1789, he wrote: »A groupe of regicide and sacrilegious slaughter, was indeed boldly sketched, but it was only sketched. It unhappily was left unfinished, in this great history-piece of the massacre of the innocents. What Hardy pencil of a great master, from the school of the rights of men, will finish it, is to be seen hereafter«.

Burke’s irony here emerges from a sensibility that cannot anticipate a »finished« product from disciples of »the school of the rights of men«. Any act of a revolutionary and/or its cultural expression is doomed from the outset to appear in a vague, confused or violent state. Although the regicide towards which the revolution is inevitably drawing may be the finale of a performance, it can never be represented as a complete work of art and, at best, will remain at the level of the sketch. The

11 Ibid., 157.
13 Ibid., 108.
final curtain will be the representation of the wild
gesture of uninformed mentalities who can «finish»
their work only by destroying that which is al-
ready «finished». Attacking those who engaged in
revolution with the object of reform, he opines:
«I cannot conceive how any man can have brought
himself to that pitch of presumption, to consider
his country as nothing but carte blanche, upon
which he may scribble whatever he pleases»14.
For Burke the true patriot operates from the per-
spective of the perfectability of the finished pro-
duct, one who preserves and «makes the most of
the existing materials of his country». This product
is transcendent, and is explained in a section in
which he gives his version of the genuine social
contract. As against Rousseau, Burke rejects the
idea of a provisional, temporary, perishable com-
 pact made with a ruler who can be overthrown.
He states:
Each contract of each particular state is but a clause
in the great primaeval contract of eternal society, link-
ing the lower with the higher natures, connecting the
visible and invisible world, according to a fixed com-
pact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds
all physical and all moral natures, each in their ap-
pointed place15.
Here we follow Burke right into the heart of his
conservative position. Throughout his text on the
French Revolution he expresses his horror over the
inversion of the social order, the social pyramid
with the king at the apex. This explains his virulent
antisemitism, his biting attacks on women, blacks,
and the working classes. He exposes his worst
fears when he predicts that the next generation in
France «will resemble the artificers and clowns,
and money-jobbers, usurers, and Jews, who will be
always their fellows, sometimes their masters.
Believe me, Sir, those who attempt to level, never
equalize»16. Referring to the procession bringing
the king and queen to Paris, he borrows an analogy
from the untamed wilderness of the New World:
«It was a spectacle more resembling a procession
of American savages, entering into Onondaga,
after some of their murders called victories, and
leading into hovels hung around with scalps, their
captives, overpowered with the scoffs and buffets
of women as ferocious as themselves, much more
than it resembled the triumphal pomp of a civilized
martial nation ...»17.
For Burke these are the «levellers» who «only
change and pervert the natural order of things.»
This inversion of the social hierarchy is «unnatur-
al», a crime against nature: the association of tailors
and carpenters which comprise the republic can
never be equal to the situation into which, «by
the worst of usurpations, an usurpation on the
prerogatives, you attempt to force them.» The
state suffers oppression when hair-dressers and
working tallow-chandlers govern, and indeed,
such a situation runs counter to nature18. The «wild
beasts» unleashed by the revolutionary upheaval
have clawed their way through the gates and
threaten Burke's social edifice. His language and
invective take the form of verbal caricature and
satire to marginalize and dispossess the new rulers
of their claim. He wants to cashier them before
they even take up their new jobs. Here Burke's
invective takes the form of a verbal equivalent of
Gillray's Francophobe caricatures of sans-culotte
cannibals and monsters who devour civilized ci-
tizens. Although Burke's prose is always polished
and meticulously wrought, it deviates from the
norm in trying to describe novel events and ideas.
His harsh poetic phrases like «scoffs and buffets»
and strings of metaphors attempt to convey a
visual image of a stampeding horde of savage men
and women. His language of invective creates a
series of images reducing gender and ethnic differ-
cences to stereotypes, thus incarnating the qualities
of the sketch/caricature both as embryonic forma-
tion and satiric trope.
Caricature, from both the political left and the
political right, attempts to undermine the visual
sign system that sustains or valorizes political pre-
rogative. By discrediting the signifiers of author-

14 Ibid., 231.
15 Ibid., 144.
16 Ibid., 72.
17 Ibid., 97.
18 Ibid., 72–73.
ity, the caricaturist metaphorically inverts the social system. But to achieve these ends both the political left and the political right resort to the language of revolution, that is, caricature. This acknowledgement on the part of the right of the power of revolutionary graphics owns up to the progressive features of revolution and constitutes a confession of guilt. Counterrevolutionary caricatures carry the tacit admission that a new society is in the making. The unmistakable effacement of the past in revolutionary caricature is reinforced by counterrevolutionary examples. Although the political Right coopts the medium to retain control, its participation in the process yields a guilt feedback mechanism intensifying the imagined threat of retaliation as a projection of deep-seated fears. This in turn heightens the insecurity of the still reigning elite who pursue repression ever more relentlessly.

A prime example is the exchange between Edmund Burke, the arch enemy of the French Revolution, and Thomas Paine, the harbinger of the age of revolutions. Their satirical metaphors hover at the edge of verbal caricature. Burke rants and raves about the monstrous and grotesque political and social institutions coming out of France, while Paine heaps his abuse on the monstrous institution known as monarchy. Paine has a jolly time quoting Burke on nobility as the Corinthian capital of polished society, and then notes that his antagonist has omitted the base and reminds him that whenever a nation chuse to act a Samson, not blind, but bold, down go the temple of Dagon, the Lords, and the Philistines.

Burke labels the revolution a monstrous tragi-comic scene, and characterizes the members of the National Assembly as comedians of a fair before a riotous audience. Like an acute caricaturist, he observes that this body, which overthrows kings and kingdoms, has not even the physiognomy and aspect of a grave legislative body. He picks up the carnivalesque metaphor and describes their actions as a profane burlesque. On the other side, Paine likens hereditary succession to a burlesque upon monarchy. It puts the institution in the most ridiculous light by presenting it as an office as easily filled by an idiot as an insane person. It takes skill to be a common mechanic, but to be a king requires only the animal figure of a man — a sort of breathing automaton (he may as well have been speaking of American political institutions in the 1980's). Here Paine uses the idea of even my kid could do that to degrade the conventional dignity of kingship to the level of the dispossessed. He delights in comparing monarchy to something kept behind a curtain, about which there is a great deal of bustle and fuss, and a wonderful air of seeming solemnity; but when by any accident, the curtain happens to be open, and the company see what it is, they burst into laughter. The monarchical function is in reality as absurd as the mock ritual of Rabelais's time, when laughter was the response of a collectivity of equals.

Burke declaims against the Declaration of the Rights of Man as the work of a herd of demented scoundrels and rejects the idea of government founded on its principles. The new political and electoral divisions in France are filled with contradiction, akin to wild beasts shut up in a cage, to claw and bite each other to their mutual destruction. Paine retorts by suggesting that if governments are not founded on the Rights of Man they must be founded in behalf of the beast, the only other living creatures in existence. This would make government bestial and explain the origin of keeping wild beasts in the Tower of London, for they take the place of a written constitution and point to the origin of the British government. Burke certainly understands the nature of cari-

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cature; he notes, for example, that advocates of the revolution exaggerate «the vices of the ancient government, strike at the fame of their country itself, by painting almost all that could have attracted the attention of strangers, I mean their nobility and their clergy, as objects of horror.» The National Assembly produces «public measures deformed into monsters» which had previously underwent a «distortion» in political academies. But he himself enters into the debate with language remarkably similar to that employed by his perceived enemies: the National Assembly has been pressured «under the terror of the bayonet, and the lamp-post, and the torch to their houses ... by clubs composed of a monstrous medley of all conditions, tongues, and nations.» During the procession from Versailles, the pitiful royal captives «were slowly moved along, amidst the horrid yells, and shrilling screams, and frantic dances, and infamous contumelies, and all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women»24. Burke is clearly terrorized by the «bodily lower stratum» in more ways than one; the denatured, the unnatural for him is clearly the sexuality of the disinherit males and females who now have the power to expose his ideological anxieties in the form of their caricatures.

The sketch, for traditional and historical reasons, is more feminine than masculine. The sketch was associated with the child and the mediocre artists, because the sketch did not require the elaboration accessible only to the most skilled master. Trapped in the academy’s hierarchy of genres, women could do the kind of work – flower pieces, still-lifes, and landscapes – associated with sketchy and half-finished techniques (even Chardin was discriminated against by the academy because of his subject matter and technique and his request for a royal pension was denied on the grounds that his type of art did not entail the expenses and time of the history painter). At the same time, the sketch is a work in process, in a state of becoming, and thus may be connected with the generativity of women. The association of the woman, liberty, generativity, caricature and sketch-like attributes come together in the key representations of the revolutionary moments of 1830 and 1848 – Eugène Delacroix’s Liberty Leading the People and Honoré Daumier’s Figure of the Republic. But the precedent had already been established in caricatural, i.e., embryonic form, during the First Revolution (Fig. 4). In these later works, we see the revival of the idea of the sketch as an example of independence and spontaneity now associated with a woman who constitutes a threat to male authority and established power25.

One seeming exception to this gender-based identification in the context of the earlier revolu-became the hallmarks of every major avant-garde move-ment of the modern era.

25 It should be noted that both sketching and/or caricature
tion sketch is David’s *Oath of the Tennis Court* (Fig. 5). David’s masterwork of the First Revolution never passed beyond the expression of the passionate energy of the first sketch. It preserves the coincidence of artistic elan with the sense of spontaneous unity of a collective ego. David identifies his own thought and feeling with the national will, orchestrating the masculine bodies of the Third Estate as a metaphor of popular sovereignty. The exaggerated body language and expressive physiognomies of the deputies visually attempt to convey the outward aspect of the inner feeling which precedes reason and locate the picture at the threshold of caricature. This is reinforced by the timely lightning bolt (emblematic of Enlightenment) crashing around the chapel of Versailles—a symbolic manipulation of the electric weather of June 20, 1789.

As it captures an utopian moment in the early progress of the French Revolution, the work’s completion was bound to suffer from subsequent counterrevolutionary developments and compromising reactions. Within a short time, the rapidly accelerating events so far outstripped the topicality of the scene that the heroic unity of the social classes to which the sketch referred was an anachronism before David could translate it into a definitive tableau. As the insurrection progressed, the shifting political alignments transformed many of the deputies that David would have immortalized as deliverers into victims of the guillotine—condemned as traitors to the Revolu-

leading to the definitive tableau identify it as part of the generative stage of neoclassic production.

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26 Although the drawing is carefully executed, its proportions, colorations, and its peculiar status in the process
tion. Utopia had lapsed into dystopia – a return to the repressed.

The work is especially striking for the absence of women from the central action, although they are present as spectators and serve, together with their children, as witnesses to a promising future. The male-dominated space relegates the female gender to the peripheries, reminiscent of the Oath of the Horatii. Yet closer inspection of the picture reveals that in this instance of revolutionary ardor and fraternal passion the males have usurped the female traits of affection, sentiment, tenderness, and maternal love. Robespierre places his two hands on his chest, ostensibly to indicate «two hearts» beating for his country, but in effect suggesting imagined breasts to nourish the children of the fatherland. Everywhere males embrace and hug one another like lovers, thus pointing to a momentary relaxation of the warrior attributes and integration of masculine and feminine traits to represent the outpouring of a kind of collective parental affection.

The Oath is David’s most positive visual commentary on the French Revolution, and remains unfinished. The idea of the progressive republic as a kind of sketch or crude caricature and therefore a threat to the finished, eternal work of Burke’s world is unmistakably linked with the sexualized female body. On the one hand, the confident and bold execution of the first idea conjured up the creative, generative republic which threatened conservatives, while on the other, the sketch-republic could be condemned for its vague and un-realized promises. In this way the enemies of the revolution inevitably challenged the fundamental concept of the new state. The attempt to achieve the final republic by a series of trials and provisional institutions, or sketchlike policies that comprise a continuously unfolding society, represented an attempt to reach the authentic realization of the social form of Rousseau’s general will. But insofar as the regime had to be final and complete in order to produce the good society, the sketched out plans must have been frustrating approximates. The collective policies of the fledgling republic was a sketch inspired by an ideal that it could not reach but could not cease attempting – hence the image of the republic in motion. As long as the picture remained open and fluid, it retained the originality and promise of the first impulse; but the ideological capitulation in favor of the conservative bourgeoisie chilled the expression into the polished artifact. The advocates of the Terror resorted to the destruction of the counter-revolutionaries to keep the revolutionary situation open and fluid. Burke’s voice then became a self-fulfilling prophecy as the «school of the rights of men» went on to «complete» their «history painting.» Here the Terror may be seen as an exaggerated last gasp to maintain the openness of the sketch in political action. Yet in the end it only served to hasten the advent of those who advocated a more «finished» ideal. Burke’s French successor, Louis de Bonald, one of the foremost exponents of conservatism in the nineteenth century, would refer to the restored monarchy as «une société finie.» Thus the spontaneity and the stability of the social order were incompatibly poised against each other like sketch and finished work.

7 L. de Bonald, Réflexions sur l’intérêt général de l’Europe, suivies de quelques considérations sur la noblesse, Paris 1815, 35, 37, 40.

The Changing Face of the Temple of Janus in Mantegna’s *The Prisoners*: Politics and the Patronage of the *Triumphs of Caesar*

The fame of Mantegna’s *Triumphs of Caesar* was assured by 26 August 1486, the earliest reference to the series. One of Francesco Gonzaga’s servants reported that following his boat trip around the lake, Duke Ercole d’Este had proceeded to Corte to admire the *Triumphs*, on which Mantegna was then working. They became one of the sights for later visitors to Mantua. During the course of the sixteenth century they were praised both by local writers, from Mario Equicola to Raffaello Toscano, and by outsiders, from Serllo to Vasari.

The earliest references date from Marchese Francesco’s long reign, from 1484 to 1519. His active support for the commission and proprietary use of the *Triumphs*, for feasts and theatrical shows, must have suggested not simply that he supported the commission but that it had originated with him. Because of this the early sources do not discuss either the original setting for the *Triumphs* or their patronage. Although they could have been commissioned by any of three Marcheses, conventional wisdom had associated full responsibility with Marchese Francesco. His claims were restated by Ronald Lightbown in his monumental catalogue of Mantegna’s œuvre and were given causious approval by Charles Hope in the catalogue of the *Andrea Mantegna* exhibition. In the intervening period Andrew Martindale had suggested that, since Mantegna worked slowly, the commission may well date from much earlier than the first reference in 1486. He argued that Lodovico, born 1412 and Marchese from 1444 until his death in 1478, had the intellectual and artistic interests to have initiated the series. The suggestion did not command the support of Lightbown, Hope or of Caroline Elam. In the *Splendours of the Gonzagas* exhibition she raised another possibility: that the patron had been Federico Gonzaga, born 1441 and Marchese from 1478 until 1484. Her proposal rested on his cultural achievements, his role as a collector of antiques and owner of at least two *studii*.

Mantegna’s early designs for six of the canvases, together with an unexecuted project, *The Senators*, are known through copies of finished drawings. The British Museum drawing for Canvas IX, the *Triumphator*, represents an early stage in the design: the Herculean signifier who stands before the triumphator was moved to canvas VIII, he was replaced by a youthful standard bearer while the

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2. Venetian ambassadors were shown them in December 1492 and again in November 1516, Martindale, 182 doc. 6, 185 doc 24; by Charles V’s visit in 1530 the Palazzo del Te had become the main attraction, E. Verheyen, *The Palazzo del Te in Mantua. Images of Love and Politics*, Baltimore and London 1977, 21–22.
3. Equicola’s *Chronica di Mantova* of 1521 is cit. Martindale, 185, doc 26 and ‘Toscano’s *L’edificiione di Mantova* of 1587, idem 187 doc 32.
6. Martindale, 184 docs 17, 18, 22 and 22A.