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The Cultural Reorganization of Time; French Revolutionary Calendar and Jacques Louis David

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THE CULTURAL REORGANIZATION OF TIME;
FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY CALENDAR AND JACQUES LOUIS
DAVID

By

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In

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# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgments**
   - Page ii

**Abstract**
   - Page iii

**Table of Contents**
   - Page iii

**Introduction**
   - Page 1
     - Rationality and the Enlightenment
     - Page 4
     - Time
       - Gregorian Calendar
       - Origins of the French Revolutionary Calendar
       - Framework of the French Revolutionary Calendar
       - Page 8
     - Jacques-Louis David
       - Realism
       - Page 13
       - David as Politician
       - Importance of the "Martyr Paintings"
       - Page 17
       - Le Pelletier de Saint-Fargeau
       - Page 22
       - Marat at his Last Breath
       - Page 27
       - The Death of Joseph Bara
     - Page 30
     - David and the Failure of the Republican Calendar
       - Page 33

**Appendix**
   - Page 53

**Bibliography**
   - Page 65

   - Page 73
The ambitious reordering and reconfiguring of fundamental societal organizational tools and concepts have made the French Revolution fertile ground for academic studies (Lucas, Colin (ed) 1991); (Chartier 2000); (Kennedy 1989). The purpose of this paper is to investigate the conceptual understanding and representation of time during the French Revolution. I will take as my two points of departure the French Revolutionary Calendar which was in effect from October 5, 1793 to January 1, 1806 and three paintings by Jacques Louis David, “The Death of Le Pelletier de Saint-Fargeau,” “Marat at his Last Breath,” and the “Death of Joseph Bara.” These three well-studied works of David are commonly referred to as the “Martyrs” (Crow 1995). I will use these paintings to show the problems evident in the inability of the French to conceptualize changes in the calendar system beyond basic ideological and logical pretenses. This lack of integration into the cultural norm is evidenced in the three “Martyr Paintings” which were executed by David during this time of cultural change.

The failure in the French Revolutionary Calendar stemmed from the inability of the framers themselves to conceptualize the change. Once the rhetoric of antichristianism and rationalism was stated (Lefebvre 1964: 76), the underlying truism remained that irrationality is the basis for much of social organization, dooming purely intellectual attempts to change society to failure. This was especially true in a revolution where the end was the hardest thing to imagine.

During the French Revolution, David served as the propaganda arm of the Jacobin leadership, charged with propagating and popularizing Jacobin ideas (Crow 1985: 258). David served the government not only in his capacity of communications
wizard and propagandist through his paintings but also as an integral part of the
government, signing death warrants and creating policy. Traditionally, artists, like
journalists, are seen as observers outside of the contamination of power (Le
Huenen 1997). The two roles of David have been much discussed and criticized as he is
an example of an artist taking active part in the political arena (Johnson 1993: 72). In an
age before mass production, David’s art served as the template for other artists to copy in
order to spread a message. Through reproduction of his original work, David’s art was
able to reach a larger audience. Much like war posters of the past two world wars,
David’s art successfully manipulated the populace by igniting passions and desires to
continue in a war where causalities were large. The “Martyrs” not only popularized and
aggrandized the Jacobins during the reign of terror, but also created an image of how
David personally wanted to be seen by the French people present and future.

Time is a malleable segment of our daily lives that we often mistake as a constant.
Like a template placed to provide the basic structure of a design, the imposed
organization of time is used to rationalize the human endeavor, but time itself is not an
inherent quality (Hubert and Mauss 1909: 248). Prompted by Enlightenment ideas that
sought to rationalize the world, the French Revolutionaries tried to reconfigure the
world around them as they broke with the past (Huet 1997: 2). One such attempt was the
creation of the metric system. Successfully promulgated at the time, it has by now
become the standard for scientific research as well as the standard daily measurement in
virtually all countries other than the United States (Doyle 1989: 393). A less successful
attempt to rationalize the world was made at the same time with the development and
implementation of the Revolutionary Calendar. Following a base 10 metric model, and
dividing every aspect of the time system into tens, French revolutionaries tried to control
time by redefining it (Friguglietti 1991: 17) “Authority over the annual calendar...not
only controls aspects of everyday lives of persons but also connects this level of control to
a more comprehensive universe that entails critical values and potencies in which
governance is grounded” (Munn 1992: 109). They believed that the new measurement of
time would distance the populace from past norms and therefore break the hold of the
power of tradition (Friguglietti 1991:16). Instead it became a bellwether of their failed
attempts to change the daily habits of the people and ability to control the political
climate. At the same time, their reliance on Christianity as a propagandist source
displayed their ambivalence about the utility of breaking entirely with social norms
already in place. E.R. Leach stated in “Two Essays Concerning the Symbolic
Representation of Time,” that it is “religion, not common sense, that persuades men to
include such various oppositions (linear and cyclical time) under a single category such
as time (Leach 1966: 126) Despite their desire to do away with all remnants of
Christianity, the masters of the Revolution had been schooled with the imagery of
Christianity and therefore much of their propaganda was tinged with Christian-like
emblems(Crow 1995: 166).

While there are many possible ways to examine the Revolutionary Calendar and
David’s relationship to it, I shall explore here the failure of this conceptual restructuring
of time by examining David’s art. The cultural artifacts that David had created serve as
testaments to the mindset of the French during the French Revolution, or at least what
they were supposed to be thinking as defined by the government.
Rationality and the Enlightenment

The French Revolution found its theoretical basis in the Enlightenment. Propagated throughout France by its writers, the Enlightenment changed the modern way of thinking (Lefebvre 1964: 297). Influenced by the scientific discoveries rampant in the 17th century, the writers of the Enlightenment, known as "les philosophes," believed that the universe was rationally ordered and that laws could be discovered which would explain not only planetary movement but also the behavior of people (Lefebvre 1964: 300). The philosophes examined the humanistic qualities of man -- in other words, the individual attributes that made all men, not just the richest, worthy.

Another key intellectual question posed by the Enlightenment was the natural state of man; are humans born naturally good or naturally evil? Along with this discussion of the basis of human behavior was the question on how best man should be educated. "Enlightenment social philosophy thus took man out of the realm of divine creation and made him eligible as a subject for empirical inquiry" (Pelto 1962: 13).

A driving force behind Enlightenment philosophy was the belief that progress was inevitable. Knowledge was continually accruing toward the eventuality that the world could be understood by rational organizational laws. This belief in the rationality of the universe had profound effects on the start of the French Revolution as well as on its progression. Most importantly, the desire to rationalize the world eventually led to fundamental forms of social revisionism. The basic belief systems of the people were to be effaced. Even while religious iconography was used to communicate the message of
the Revolution, the Church no longer stood as a revered and holy institution. Instead it was condemned for its corruption and its legitimizing relationship with the king. The pair, the attester of the "divine right of kings" and the ruler himself were viewed as simultaneous oppressors of the people. Doing away with the Church and its hold on the people required, as a matter of revolutionary thoroughness, breaking the measurement of days and season away from reminders of the expunged Church. What better way than to make traditional holidays lost in the system of a new calendar? Respecting neither old divisions nor names, the new rationalized calendar buried the past.

While both reforms found their birth in rational "necessity," the metric system reform found a far more lasting success than the new calendar. Whereas the Calendar system enjoyed 12 years of moderate acceptance, the metric system has become the universally adopted standard of measurement in almost all countries (even certain Anglo-Saxon holdouts nevertheless have adopted it in scientific work.) The Jacobin measurements of size and time are both based on the simple concept that the natural division of units should be by ten, since that is the number of fingers which humans possess and has long been the basis of most counting systems.

The need to reform the existing system of measures was abundantly clear. The original idea of the metric system was proposed by Simon Stevenius in 1584 (Bartlett 1996-2000: 1) it was introduced in France in 1670 by Gabriel Mouton who believed that the standard unit of measurement should be based on the arc of one minute of longitude on the world's surface divided decimally. The metric system draws on a decimal system using 10 as the dividing factor. Unfortunately, what was being divided into ten units was
not agreed upon in different areas of the country. This created a commercial problem as each city had its own version of measurement, making trade between cities difficult.

In 1791, the French Academy of Sciences decided to rationalize the metric system by establishing a universal norm for the definition of a meter. A meter became defined as one-tenth millionth of the distance of the meridian which passes through Paris and the two poles. The reform of the meter itself entailed the further rationalization and regulation of all weights and measures.

Prior to his death in 1759, Nicolas Boulanger, a little known philosophe, had pointed out the apparent irrationalities in the Gregorian calendar. Boulanger observed that there were two major errors in the Gregorian calendar. First, despite the addition of a leap year every four years, eleven additional seconds exist unattached or unmeasured in the Gregorian calendar year, creating 10 full days of disparity every 600 years. On a more practical level, the second source of irrationality was the constant changing of the dates of holidays. For instance, holidays such as Easter, whose schedule was based on an arcane algorithm not universally shared, regularly fell on different calendar days, determined by the day of the week and the position within the month, or on a lunar month, rather than on a solar order. Eviatar Zerubavel points out in the “The Seven Day Circle,”(1985) that there is no clear relationship between the week and the solar year: “the week evolved quite independently of other building blocks of our time-keeping system. Consequently, despite having coexisted with our calendar month and year for nearly two thousand years, it has yet to be mathematically coordinated with them”(1985: 44). The incapability of our time measuring devices makes for the day of the week to
constantly traverse every given date so that the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of September can fall on any day of the week depending on the year.

During the Reign of Terror, the Committee of the Convention decided to rectify the apparent irregularities in the calendar. On September 20\textsuperscript{th}, 1793, Romme presented his plan for the newly configured French Republican Calendar to the Convention (Friguglietti 1991: 16). It is not surprising, given the parallel nature of the endeavors, that Monge and Lagrange worked on both metric reform and the calendar reform (Zerubavel 1977: 873-874). The success of the metric system, compared to the failure of the calendar reform, is in large part reflected by the fact that the metric system unified diverse measures that were already in existence, whereas the calendar sought to replace an already unified system of measurement with newly invented units.
This plan, for the newly convened French Republican Calendar, is designed to be implemented during the Reign of Terror. The Convention of the Convention decided to replace the Gregorian calendar with the Republican calendar, which was modeled on the ancient Egyptian calendar. The Republican calendar was based on a year of 365 days, divided into 12 months of 30 days each, with five extra days at the end of the year. This system was chosen instead of the older lunar calendars because it was easier to calculate and provided a more consistent calendar system. The changeover, which occurred in 1793, was a significant step towards standardizing the calendar and aligning it with the Gregorian calendar. The transition was marked by the Gregorian calendar being replaced with the Republican calendar, and the new calendar was adopted by the people and the government. Despite some initial resistance, the new calendar was widely adopted and became the official calendar of France.
culture (Postema 2000: 90). In this essay, I will explore the way that in France, the
line, the realization that one has of time and the role it plays in a particular
calendar meaning. Perceived time, on the other hand, is the significance accorded to
changes that mark a beginning and an end to each day and which later are reversed with
Physical time is based on planetary and celestial
explained by Jan J. Postema (2000). V. More useful and likely approach is
humanly constructed ideal (Postema 2000: 19). A more useful and likely approach is
systems to create a shared sense of time. Some scholars have posited that time is
In order to comprehend time, human communities have constructed calendars
also based on our desire to control it.
exist as part of the general cultural framework. And the human desire to organize time is
for people to interact socially, a paradigm of community agreed upon mechanisms must
reference framework which is shared by all members of the society” (1977: 86). In order
As Zygmund stresses, “one of the fundamentals of social life is a standard temporal
simultaneity present. The social implications of this capacity for abstraction are evident.
animals is our ability to conceive and reference identities of actions in which we are not
forced to adapt to external changes. Part of what makes us human, different from
experience day and night as well as the changing of seasons, as their physical beings are
and a future. Embedded in animal behavior is a sense of temporality. Animals
contextual framework within daily life, can be understood, creating a past and a present
TIME is an organizing principle for all cultures. Societies use it to establish a
perceived notion of time can be manipulated, or at least was intended to be manipulated, in order to further a series of political ideals. According to Paul Ricoeur, calendars are "the first bridge constructed by historical practice between lived time and universal time...its institution constitutes the invention of a third form of time." (Ricoeur 1984: 105) In this analysis of time, Ricoeur identifies historical time as that which can be studied and analyzed in discrete units, lived time is time whose placement in the immediate present makes its long term weight unknown--a time where the actors' very presence in the moment blinds him from understanding the context. Calendars as a bridge between these two domains, creating an institution whereby participation does not preclude a generalized understanding of the importance of the event as it provides a construct in which the actors themselves may imagine their role within the wider construct of their predecessors, contemporaries and successors. By creating a new form of time, the calendar becomes a purely cultural institution, straddling the time that we as humans are aware of and the time that we know has transpired.

As a cultural institution, the measurement of time becomes a way to control people. Nancy Munn states in her appraisal of anthropological methods of dealing with time ("Time Between Rhythm and Representation"): "control over time is not just a strategy of interaction; it is also a medium of hierarchic power and governance" (1992: 107). This cultural basis of a calendar system lends itself to a rich exploration of the society that houses it.

Important in any discussion of time is the contrast between linear versus circular time. Western thinking primarily grounds itself in the notion of linear thought, with a clear beginning, middle and end. It implies a continual forward moving process which
can be stopped and restarted. This notion of time was pivotal in the Calendar reform of the French Revolution since the notion of a rupture with the past was crucial in the decision to create a new calendar system. As argued by Marie Hélène and Michel Froeschle-Chopard, “Wanting to make a clean slate of the past, these heritors of the Enlightenment, naturally substituted the superstitious calendar with that of the Republicans whose primary objective was to rationalize time.” (“Voula ont faire “table rase” du passé, ils (les héritiers des Lumières) remplacent tout naturellement le calendrier des superstitieux par celui des républicains qui doit répondre à un premier objectif: rationaliser le temps”) (1990:173). Much of the reason for the Western dependence on the linear notion of time is evident in our roots in Judeo-Christian beliefs. The Hebraic calendar begins at the creation of the universe and is constantly increasing by one year every year. The Christian calendar’s break with the Hebraic calendar was the precursor to the Revolution’s break with the Gregorian calendar. The Gregorian calendar (and before that the Christian adaptation of the Julian calendar) created the day of the birth of Jesus as the severance point of time. A linear notion of time makes the idea of rupture possible. The birth of the "Christ" in the year zero acts as the equilibrium point between the two notions of the earth, one in darkness and one visited by a representation of God.1 Along with the idea of severance, another important aspect of the linear calendar is the notion of causality. The idea that each event and action leads to and affects the next—the basis of much scientific reasoning—was also crucial in the original formation of the French Republican Calendar. Interestingly, the continual momentum of the French Revolution and the inability of the people or the rulers to stop it once it had

1 According to Dionysis, the incarnation of Christ occurred on March 25th in the year before 1 AD.
started, has led many to state that the French were victims of history. In other words, they were unable to control the sequence of events which unfolded in a seemingly random manner around them, causing one "Revolution" to lead to another and placing the notion of causality into question (Retat 1990: 121).

In contrast to the linear notion of time with which we are most familiar, is the idea of time as circular. Circular time is the cyclical nature of time and seasons where repetitive functions make time unending and without beginning. Combining both circular and linear time is our notion of anniversaries that celebrate the repetitive nature of events even as they progress forward. Anniversaries and birthdays celebrate the repetition of the day of the event while at the same time emphasizing the longevity and the recurrence in a linear fashion. This notion of circular calendars is apparent in the Chinese calendar system where the emphasis is on separate dynastic or sixty year cycles without one clearly denoted as the first one.

In exercising control of a nation, the imposition of a unifying system is fundamental to its functioning. Calendars may serve as one of those links. Durkheim stated that humans grappling with both the sacred and the profane leads man to "introduce into the continuity and homogeneity of duration certain distinctions and differentiations which it does not naturally have." (Durkheim 1965 (original 1912): 347)

In order to make sense of the complexities of living in large communities, people impose a standard on the world around them, thus creating a shared understanding of the world. Given that French revolutionary thinking was couched in a philosophy where the rationalization of the universe was supposed to be innate to the working of the system, I do not believe that they philosophically understood the caprices of their action. On the
other hand, they were forced to struggle with the ramifications of the supposedly illogical nature of the calendar and the implication that one system of measurement could be in fact the "true" way to measure time. Similar to the artifice implied by Durkheim, Hubert and Mauss (1909) asserted that humans stop the continual flow of time by inserting "critical dates" that create symbolic meaning for those within a society. The concept of the passage of time can differ from person to person, or even moment to moment, therefore the continual flow of time is not necessarily perceived as a constant. According to Charles S. Peirce, "all reason is an interpretation of signs of some kind" (Preucel and Bauer 2001: 88). Therefore, one's person's version of reality is not prescribed by any fixed understandings but rather on the synthesis of many such moments, creating a closer approximation of reality.

The human interpretation of time is based on at least two systems of time; perceived and ordered. Unlike the personally based perception of time, the ordered time system is a social rendering of our experience. It is through the ordered concept of time that we are able to communicate effectively between individuals. This is most easily expressed in our decision to meet on a given date at a given time. Of course our own personal perception of time, when not dictated by a watch becomes skewed, as when we show up five minutes late because we "lost track of time." Furthermore, non-western societies such as Balinese employ calendar systems which do not facilitate planning or reporting the future (Geertz 1973: 393). By changing the calendar system, French revolutionaries sought to impose a new ordering of time onto the populace, but through custom, much of what was initially ordered time such as market days had become part of
personalized time for it was a regular marker of a week’s conclusion with or without the knowledge that it was Sunday.

**Gregorian Calendar**

Why were the French Revolutionaries so eager to change the Calendar? Before the change to the Republican Calendar, the French were using our modern calendar system. The Gregorian calendar was adopted by Pope Gregory in February 24, 1582. Prior to that, the Julian calendar was the standardized way of telling time. Both the Gregorian and the Christian Julian calendar drive from the Christian religion, with the birth of Jesus as the central orienting point. The Christian Julian Calendar was the Christianization of the Julian calendar which began *ab urbe condita*, the founding of the city Rome, and was established by Julius Caesar in 48 BCE.

The Christian calendars have two principal holidays. The first is the fixed day of Christmas which occurs on December 25th. The second major holiday is the movable feast of Easter. A movable feast stands in contrast to the immovable feasts such as Christmas and the Annunciation which are bound to a certain day. The Gregorian calendar was reformed by Pope Gregory in his “Inter Gravissmus” Papal Bull, because the date of Easter kept moving further and further away from the time of the Jewish Passover to which it is related. This occurred because the Julian calendar had fixed the date of the spring equinox on March 21st while at the same time using the Metonic cycle (following the occurrence of the moon eclipse falling on the same date every nineteen years) as the basis for the lunar calendar. This resulted in a growing distance between the
actual equinox, which throughout the centuries approached the beginning of March, and the placement of Easter. This disparity caused a separation between Easter and the Jewish Passover to which it was supposed to be tied (since the Last Supper was a Passover seder). To remedy this problem, the Gregorian calendar defines the date of Easter as the Sunday that follows the ecclesiastical full moon which lands on or after March 21st.

The year of the Gregorian calendar is measured by the time it takes the earth to journey around the sun. The rotation of the earth around the sun is called a tropical year and measures approximately 365 days. Given that the rotation of the earth itself takes almost of a quarter of a day more per year, leap years were created since the development of the Julian calendar around 46 BCE. Thus every four years an extra day is added, and we have a February 29th. The month, on the other hand, was developed based on the time that it takes the moon to orbit around the earth which is approximately twenty nine and a half days.

Crucial to the reforms that were to be put in place by the French Revolution were the origins and notions of the week. Unlike the year and the month which seem to be rooted in scientific observation, the week is a cultural institution. The bible states that God created the earth in six days and on the seventh He rested. The historical roots of notions of the week are much disputed. The most likely account is the notion of tying together the seven days to the planets known to the ancient world (Zerubavel 1985: 12). The first noted documentation of the seven-day week occurred when Sargon I, King of Akkad, imposed the seven-day week on the Sumerians after conquering them (however, they most likely were already using a seven-day week)(Bridgeman 2001:108). The
Sumerians were important time innovators for they invented not only the seven-day week but also the notion of a 60-minute hour. In contrast to Sumerian use of the seven day week, Ancient China and Egypt both used ten day weeks.

Many of the stories and traditions found in the Bible were in fact borrowed from the Sumerians. The crucial number seven has its origin in the seven gods of the sky whom the Sumerians worshipped (Bridgeman 2001: 108). Furthermore they believed in a seven-branch Tree of life and seven heavens. This bias towards 7 is apparent in the Epic of Gilgamesh:

While the two of them together were making love,
He forgot the wild where he was born.
For seven days and seven nights
Enkidu was erect and coupled with Shamhat.
(Epic of Gilgamesh as quoted in Bridgeman 2001: 108)

Unlike the Judeo-Christian belief that the Seventh day is a holy day and therefore a day of rest, the Sumerians believed that it was a day of darkness and evil and in order to protect themselves, they made it a day of rest. The Hindus also adopted the notion of a seven-day week based on the constellation of the Pleiades which they called the “Seven Mothers of the World and the Seven Priestesses who made judgment on men” (Bridgeman 2001: 108).

It is important to note that while the Jewish Bible seems to adopt many aspects of the Sumarian calendar into the idea of a week, its explanation for keeping the Sabbath goes against the astrological basis of the seven days. The separation of the week from any “natural” entity was designed to show the holiness of god. “Not being personified as any particular natural force, the Jewish god was to be regarded as untouched by nature in
any way" (Zerubavel 1985: 11). The lack of rationality was the basis for the imposition of the Sabbath, a day devoted to God who was above the natural.

Throughout the conquests of the ancient world, the names of individual days were adopted from the complementary gods of the conquering people. Finally ending with the Romans, gods such as Mercury became the French, Mercredi, mars being Mardi (di meaning day).

The name Sunday was created by Constantine the Great in 321 CE based on the idea of a “Sun’s day” rather than any Christian concept. For a while, early Christians observed both Saturday and Sunday as holidays, only deciding to celebrate Sunday exclusively when they deemed it necessary to differentiate themselves entirely from the Jewish community (Zerubavel 1985: 20-21). Christians co-opted the notion of the astrological Sunday and gave it special meaning by tying it to the resurrection of Jesus and naming it the Lord’s day. Constantine in an effort to appease both the sun worshippers and the Christians of his realm created the Sunday, as he himself saw the two gods as synonymous. The dual personality of Sunday can be viewed in the Germanic versus the Romance method of naming that day. Germanic languages celebrate the Sun God by calling it Sunday or Sonntag, whereas Romance languages celebrate the day’s holiness by calling it Dimanche, Domingo, etc. (Bridgeman 2001: 109)

The ability of the seven-day week to be adopted by diverse cultures is a testament to its strength despite the awkwardness of its numeration. While Christians spread it into the New World, Jews and Hindus long used it prior to contact with Christianity. The universality of the Gregorian calendar by the time of the French Revolution necessitates underlining its status as widely accepted, and this distinguished it from its counterpart in
the Revolutionary zeal to rationalize the meter. The implementation of the French Revolutionary Calendar demanded that people leave customs tied to religious beliefs as well as daily rituals that had been in place for centuries.

**Origins of the French Revolutionary Calendar**

"La revolution ne commence que quand le tyran finit."

St Juste (Quoted in Simon 1991: 459)

Adopted by the convention on the 5th of October 1793, the French Revolutionary or Republican calendar was officially abolished on the 1st of January 1806 by Napoleon (Furet and Ozouf 1988: 490). The purpose of the calendar was to "rationaliser, marquer la rupture, purger et remplacer" ("rationalize, to signal a break, to purge and to replace") on the old social order (Furet and Ozouf 1988: 485). At its core, the calendar sought to purge the power of the church by dechristianizing the system while at the same time serve as an example of a new, more rational system of living yet, the actual breaking down of time at a single historical event was far harder than might be expected. The Revolutionary Calendar was born out of the will of the leaders of the Revolution, but even they were prisoners to the society whom they were attempting to court and whom they were trying to wean away from the assumed tyranny of the nobility. A fundamental problem in not only the framework of the calendar but also in the revolution itself can be articulated by asking, "Where does the Revolution begin?" and later on, "When does the revolution end?" As Hannah Arendt observed (2000(1963):508), "the
revolutionary spirit was......starting something permanent and enduring; a lasting institution, embodying this spirit and encouraging it to new achievements.” Given the sort of uncontrollable energy that seemed to be fuelling the revolution, the application of an entirely “rational” system by the government seems highly irrational or at the very least precarious.

Beginning on July 15th 1789, newspapers and the French populace began to refer to the “Year of Liberty”. This popularly created calendar system ran into logistical troubles on January 1st, 1790 when the revolutionaries were forced to decided whether the changing of the year should occur on the 14th of July as reason would hold, or maintain the old concept of time advancement through the changing of the year on the first of January. Finally, it was decided that in order to simplify matters, the changing of the year should remain on January 1st. But decisions were not made quickly by the revolutionaries, so it was only in 1792, three years later that the January 1st date was put in place. This caused January 1st of 1792 to become year 4 of Liberty and not year 3 as logic would have dictated (Furet and Ozouf 1988: 483). The fall of the Monarchy on August 10th, 1792 caused the revolutionaries to reconsider the date which should serve as the mediating point between the Ancien Regime and the new structure of time. It is in this setting that St. Juste stated the words quoted above. “La revolution ne commence que quand le tyran finit.” (“The revolution begins only when the tyrant is finished.”)

This places a direct correlation between the death of the king and the beginning of a new era.

By redefining time, the French revolutionaries hoped to control the presentation of their struggle for all of history. They hoped to be charismatic, as Pocock put it.
"What stands outside of tradition is charismatic; where time itself is envisaged as the continuity of tradition, the charismatic may stand outside of time and become the sacred" (Pocock 1973: 243). A self-conscious view of history was necessarily among the motivating factors behind many of the revolutionary principles. The revolutionaries hoped to immortalize themselves as well as their cause. They hoped that by instituting a new calendar, they could create a new "Ere Française," but this desire in itself exemplified some of the limitations brought by a calendar based on the history of one country rather than a more globally important event.

The scope of the reform was almost total, as its architects attempted not only to gain social control by imposing a new rhythm of collective life, but also to bring about a total symbolic transformation of the standard temporal reference framework, as became an age pronouncedly devoted to total regeneration." (Zerubavel 1977: 870-871).

By controlling people's notions of time, the Jacobin wished to present to the people a new way of thinking about the world, devoid of Christian ideology and royally induced customs. They wished to demonstrate the power of knowledge and of themselves.

After the 10th of August, 1792 and its appellation in Le Moniteur, the major French newspaper of the time, and other public sources as the beginning of year one of Equality, the Jacobins realized the necessity to arbitrate between the three possible starting dates and systems for the new year. The Committee of Public Instruction therefore instructed Charles Guilbert Romme to regulate the calendars and devise a more logical system. The intellectual significance of the rupturing of time occupied a central place in the discourse of the day. The calendar itself became a pillar of the revolution, causing it to stand in for the aims of the Revolution as a whole. Fabre d'Eglantine stated
that "Nous ne pouvons plus compter les années où les rois nous opprimaient comme un temps où nous avons vécu." ("We can no longer count the years when kings oppressed us as lived time") (Furet and Ozouf 1988: 485). The ideological significance attached to the calendar became its driving force, infused with political meaning. Breaking away from the king also marked the distancing of the church from the people. The calendar system with its saints and supposed roots in biblical doctrine, was a central monument that needed to be crushed in order to deliver a new version of society. But according to Françoise Furet and Mona Ozouf, the dechristianization of the calendar was only of secondary importance, compared to the primary aims of the calendar to rationalize time and mark a break from the earlier regime (Furet and Ozouf 1988: 482). A contradiction to this sentiment may be inferred by noting that geographically the locations where anticlerical sentiment was most widespread correlate directly with the locations where the calendar was most widely adopted (Shaw 2001: 13), although this may be the result of the general fact that anticlericalism was usually synonymous with the greatest political revolutionary zeal. Nevertheless, it is clear that dechristianization played a fundamental role in the attempt to establish a new sense of time. The change from the seven day week to the "décadi" symbolized the replacement of the qualitative conception of time- which was associated with the traditional, religious and nonrational-by a quantitative orientation towards it, with an Age of Reason (Zerubavel 1977: 871).

A major problem inherent in this reform was that through their criticism of the Gregorian calendar was haphazard, the revolutionaries also suggested how haphazard all calendars would be. Despite their desire to rationalize time, it became evident that there is no sound objective basis for the calendar system, most notably the idea of a week or a
décadis. This meant that the imposition of the new calendar system needed not only to
disprove the old system and make it an artifact of a past culture but at the same time to
support and legitimize the new calendar. For as time progressed, Robespierre himself
grew uneasy with the radical dechristianization and even some of the calendar changes.
In an effort to ground the calendar in nature, the committee decided to name each month
after cultural artifacts (Zerubavel 1977: 872). The revolution gained its own momentum
regardless of the influence of the “Grand Homme” who strove so carefully to control it.
In the end, change began to happen merely for the sake of change without a sound
strategy, in an unending need to reform everything.

It would be false to claim that all revolutionaries were caught up in the zeal for change. Siéyes stated in June 1793,

_Le temps n’est pas venu de faire des changements dans la division de l’année:
nos habitudes, nos rapports si multipliés avec les habitudes des peuples environnants
et des siècles qui ont immédiatement précédé le nôtre se présentent comme une masse trop
importante à remuer._

(Time has not yet come to make changes in
The division of the year: our traditions and
our relations with surrounding peoples and
preceding centuries present themselves as
too large of a mass to play with.) (Furet and
Ozouf 1988: 482)

Siéyes was only too accurate in his analysis of the French culture. For he realized that the
calendar system was more than just a method of dividing up time, more than a
politically motivated set of arbitrary laws; it was the driving force of a culture that wanted to reform but not end.

**Framework of the French Revolutionary Calendar**

The change to the Republican Calendar required much planning. The French Revolutionary Calendar was created primarily by Charles Gilbert Romme, a former professor of physics and navigation. Aiding his efforts were scientists and mathematicians, Monge and Lagrange; astronomers, Laland and Pingré; as well as the chemist, Fourcroy (Zerubavel 1988: 873-874). Together the men worked to make a calendar based on the ideals of rationality. Despite the fact that the calendar factually began on September 22, 1793, the actual details of the calendar continued to be debated. Once the rules for the calendar were actually clarified, the calendar was then retroactively put in place, thereby making 1793 year II of Equality.

It makes rational sense to commence a new calendar system in the year II of Equality given the Revolutionaries’ desire to make their actions historical within a framework that would make decisions perpetual in the minds of future generation. The Christian Calendar sought to break with the past while maintaining its history as a way to show improvement caused by Christ’s birth. In order for Salvation to resonate the negative past is just as important as the favorable future. The French calendar, on the other hand, stresses the arrival and continuation of a new world order separated from the past whose basis is in rationality and theoretically not past societal ills. By beginning with the year 1, the future is all that counts.
The calendar was based on the decimal system. Each year was divided into 12 months: Vendémiaire (vintage), Brumaire (mist), Frimaire (frost), Nivôse (snow), Pluviosé (rain), Ventôse (wind), Géminal (sprouting time), Floréal (blossom), Prairial (meadow), Mésidor (harvest), Thérimidor (heat), and Fructidor (fruit). Relying on a 12-month year strikes one as odd as it clearly shows their continued reliance on some of the framework of the Gregorian calendar, or perhaps even worse, it shows that there is a strong rational correlation between the Gregorian calendar and the astronomical year.

Months were divided equally into three ten-day weeks. The last day of each Décadi, like the Gregorian calendar’s Sunday, was a day of rest. Unlike the poetic names of the months, the names of the days were perfunctory: Primi, Doni, Tridi, Quartidi, Quintidi, Sextidi, Septidi, Oxtidi, Nonidi, and Decadi (day of rest). Each day itself was then broken down into 10 hours. Unfortunately, the geometric nature of the creation of the decimal system did not reflect the actual rotation of the sun. To fix this incongruity, Charles Gilbert Romme added 5 extra days each year and foresaw the need for an intercalary year as well as an occasional day of leap year (Friguglietti 1991: 17). The extra five (or six days in a leap year) were called the Journées Sans-Culottide, commemorating the French Revolutionary fighters, the Sans Culottes. These days were called; Jour de la Vertu (Virtue Day), Jour du Genie (Genius Day), Jour du Labour (Labor Day), Jour de la Raison (Reason Day), Jour de la Recompense (Reward Day), and Jour de la Revolution (Revolution Day) (sans-culottide par excellence, leap years).

The need for an extra five days and an intercalary year seemed to undermine the creation of a more rational system. In contrast to this seemingly evident point, Romme
stated that the simplification of the year made up for the need for an intercalary year. Furthermore, he asserted that the change in the number of “rest” days from 56 to 32 rectified problems of the shortage of labor days which concerned economists in the 18th century (Furet and Ozouf 1988: 485).

When Romme first presented the calendar before the Assembly, he did not have names for the months or days; instead, he intended to rely entirely on numbers to serve as delineating factors. The assembly found this absence of naming a deficiency, and thus began a disagreement over where the derivations of the names should be found. The Jacobins debated heavily whether the calendar should be based on history or nature. Romme’s second attempt at nomenclature was also unsuccessful. His assertion that the names should be based on historical events was voted down on October 5, 1793. The Assembly adopted his proposed calendar while at the same time rejecting the naming system he had provided. Their decision to emphasize the natural aspect of the calendar was made in the hope of universalizing the calendar more. It was their vision that the calendar, like the metric system, could be adopted outside of France. In their solipsism, they of course failed to realize that the breaking of time itself around the French Revolution was no less problematic in terms of the probable integration of the calendar into other societies. This problem was never to be tested given the calendar itself failed even within France.

After the second rejection of Romme’s nomenclature, Fabre d’Englantine was put in charge of the creation of an appropriate nomenclature for the new calendar. Englantine instituted a naming device based entirely on agriculture. The beginning of the new year on September 22 took on a whole new meaning after the decision to base the calendar on
nature was made. For now emphasis was placed on the beginning of the autumnal equinox since that is the day that the sun passes into the astrological sign of Litra, the sign of equality (Zerubavel 1977: 873).

Each Décadi was based on a plowing tool and each 15 day period, which simply served to divide the month into two equal parts, was named after a domestic animal. The nature-based naming system was then used for a favorable comparison to the Gregorian calendar which was faulted for its functional spirit. The nature-based naming of months was meant to contrast the “odorifient herbier” (“fragrant herbarium”) with “degoutant charnier” (“disgusting mass grave”) created by the priests. [Furet and Ozouf 1988, 486]

Using Rousseauian ideas of education, Englantine hoped that through the use of the almanac as a naming device for the calendar, he would be able to educate the people of France about nature. “The new calendar was to symbolize the centrality of natural phenomena in the life of the new society, thus expressing the belief of the French Enlightenment in the need for man to be in Harmony with Nature.” [Zerubavel 1977, 872] Thus, the calendar as a source of education as well as a pre-Romantic idealization of beauty served the dual purpose of function and “art.”

After the decision to change the calendar and its actual crafting by the Convention in Paris, the need to popularize the calendar still remained. In order to educate the people in the provinces, “posters were produced and disseminated throughout France to every commune, while each department was provided detailed instructions. As a result, news of the calendar was spread throughout France with relative swiftness” (Shaw 2001, 7). Most clerks were able to learn details of the new system through the governmental newspaper “Le Moniteur” and official handouts. A play was created called “l’Heureuse
"Décade" subtitled the "Divertissement Patriotique" on 3 nivose year II (24 December 1793)." The ballet "Le Calendrier Republicain" was performed during the sans culotidées of the year II (17-21 September 1793) (Shaw 2001: 7).

But despite the rapidity with which the calendrical changes reached the outlying provinces, problems still arose. The spelling of months varied; some months, especially Ventôse and Pluviôse, were often placed in the wrong order. [Shaw 2001, 8] So instead of the regimented and unified system of the Gregorian Calendar, the French were left with the problematic Republican Calendar. Not only did this pose problems to laymen; it also had larger consequences for army officials who no longer could be certain that their maneuvers and messages were being understood properly.
II. JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID

The importance of symbols and the infusion of the Calendar into public life was left in part to Jacques-Louis David. As both a politician and an artist, David attempted to pictorially represent the ideas of the Revolution. In the failure of David’s work to adequately portray the temporal reorganization, one can comprehend the failure of the Calendar for the masses. If the conveyer of messages is unable to translate the change through his art, how are the people to understand the fundamental change which is occurring in a top-down system of government?

Jacques-Louis David’s work is usually seen as an integral part of the French Revolution; his oeuvre has been studied continuously by art historians (Roberts 2000: xiii). But why is this the case? The French Revolution served the Western world as the emblem of what a Revolution is in part because its problems with a monarchy were seen as global as opposed to merely local (Lefebvre 1964: 5). The far reaching ramifications of the French Revolution, including the campaigns of Napoleon to advance its ideals before he changed direction and to create an empire, forced other nations to take interest in what began as an internal dispute. According the historian Eric Hobsbawm, “the French Revolution thus remains the revolution of its time, and not merely one, though the most prominent, of its kind” (1996 original 1962: 55). Parallel to this notion of the French Revolution as emblematic is the idea of David as the emblematic artist of the Revolution. This is so much the case that looking at many art history books one can almost assume that he and his pupils were the only ones painting during the French Revolution (Crow 1995) (which is, of course, a false notion). What was so revolutionary about David was
that he changed the form and subject elements of his art, painting his political zeal into
the canvas. In his paper delivered at the conference *David Contre David* (David versus
David), Ronald Paulson asserted; “*on peut dire qu’avec l’artiste comme révolutionnaire, l’aboutissement de la révolution tient en partie à la capacité de faire tourner de l’avantage la contingence, c’est-à-dire un changement de situation.*” (“One
can say that with the artist as a revolutionary, the outcome of the revolution depends in
part on the capacity to advantageously change the contingency, in other words, change
the situation” (1993: 501). The dual role of David and his confrères as the creators of the
message and of propaganda was well encompassed by the Revolutionary Calendar. When
thinking of the work of David, it is necessary to keep in mind that not only was David
dealing with issues that appeared larger than life, but that his work was presented on a
larger than life scale, rendered as they were on wall covering canvass’. David’s role as
creator and historian placed him as the translator of changes through artistic
representation and time, instead his paintings serve as windows onto the complexity of
the calendar and his failure along with the other revolutionaries to change time.

Beginning in 1781, the role of the artist in France changed; rather than being a
skilled worker, the artist became a thinker and a cultural insider, in much the way that
the French still view intellectuals today.

No longer the dutiful servant of the state and the church who defines successes in terms of official
favor, the new-model artist (invariably assumed to be male) vaunts his independence from the dictates
of royal patrons and postures of conformity; he speaks over the heads of insiders and bureaucrats to
make contact with the large audience who thronged the spaces of the public exhibitions, the so called
Salons (Crow 1994: 14).
Not only were artists accorded a new role in society, the definition of society itself began to change. The rise of a secular community enhanced the idea of the nation-state. This interpretation is well developed by Benedict Anderson (1991) in his book *Imagined Communities*, where he states that a nation is "imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (1991: 7). The idea of fraternité omnipresent in the rhetoric of the French Revolution correlates directly with the notion of "horizontal comradeship." In the creation of a national identity separate from religious affiliation is the necessity of national images. Anderson examines this notion through the image of the "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier" which is a direct descendant of David's "Martyr Paintings" (Appendix 1-4) which I will discuss later. "Void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly national imaginings" (1991: 9).

Art became a public offering, open to a larger crowd of people, and the message of the artist became more important as the audience grew. Previously, art had been sequestered by the nobility, the king and the church who were the people who could afford to commission art (Bordes 1989: 61). But now, regardless of where the commission came from, the painting was also a public object, and more people were able to comment and analyze the works of art. David was able throughout his career to use this access to the audience to deliver a message.
Realism

Jacques Louis David’s Neoclassical style, reflected not only his revolutionary credential but also the changes in style which permeated France from before the Revolution until the 1840’s and 50’s. It was meant to be reminiscent of classical Greece and Rome—a world of simple configurations and stark settings. Each individual depicted in David’s paintings appears almost as a statue in clearly defined space that separates him from the people around him. At first adopting Greek and Roman myths, such as that of Brutus, David depicted with great clarity figures in era-appropriate garb and in archeologically correct settings. Initially, David used Roman and Greek tropes in paintings as a way to highlight the contrast between the corrupt monarchy and the new social system in place reflecting the idealized perfection of the past. David was accustomed to employing neoclassical imagery in his paintings; in what may appear opportunistic he had initially used Roman and Greek myths to please the king and in contrast to the images of the past, there were elements here of contemporary furniture.

Eventually, his work developed away from this form. Beginning with his portrait of Le Pelletier (Appendix 1), David’s work began to concentrate less on myths and more on immediate events. In his drawing of Le Pelletier, he painted the corpse as it lay lifeless in its revolutionary clothing and surroundings. In contrast to the perfection granted to models from Roman times, David stuck more closely with the reality of the person, and was willing to create a flawed individual. This is not to say that people were represented exactly as they were, but rather that their representation reflected more
exactly than previously their actual form. David’s use of realistic figures draws the viewer into the painting, making his works even more resonant for his audience.

Instead of relying on the focal depth of the created representation to draw the viewer into his image, David flattened the picture plane through the placement of walls and curtains. This has the effect of bringing the painting to the viewer and making the space occupied by the viewer integral to the painting. This examination of the artistic space parallels the removal of the third wall in Beaumarchais’ “The Marriage of Figaro” earlier in the century (Scherer 1980: 172). In that play, Beaumarchais creates a new sense of space by having the characters hide behind chairs, manipulating the audience into knowing more than the characters on stage who cannot see the hidden person. The interaction between viewer and canvas is fundamental to the transmission of messages, both linguistic and pictorial. As Bakhtin puts it, “responsive understanding is a fundamental force, one that participates in the formulation of discourse, and it is moreover an active understanding, one that discourse senses as resistance or support enriching the discourse” (1981: 280-281) Paralleling the reading of a novel, the actual act of reading a canvas requires the active participation of the viewer. David’s work, according to James Henry Rubin (1993:786), was able to become aggressively performative and thereby was able to transform the social space of the time. David's style exhibited in the Salon-based expositions, made his paintings destined for public consumption becoming public amenity.

It must be remembered that David was an opportunistic and egotistical painter. From the beginning, he felt that he was in competition with other great French painters, such as Foussin (Johnson 1993: 10). His desire to paint grand scale paintings and to be
acknowledged as a master was boundless. His span of activity as an artist is extraordinarily long with patrons who were both numerous and at least nominally widely different. They included a king, a republican government and an emperor, all of whom saw him as their own. Simply put he painted for curried favor with those in power - at all times.

David’s artistic iconoclasm began initially with his anger towards the Academy. Created under Louis XIV, the Academy served as the doors through which all artists wishing to be famous should walk. The Academy rigorously trained talented painters, providing them with anatomy-based lessons as well as painting technique. By creating hierarchies of what sorts of paintings were deemed more important than others, and through a strict system of study, the Academy was a conservative force. Perhaps most importantly, the Academy controlled whose paintings would and would not be displayed at the biennial Salons. The highest honor that a painter could receive was the Prix de Rome. This fellowship was given to one pupil a year who was then sent to study in Rome for three to four years. In order to be eligible, painters were required to submit an historical painting. The subject matter chosen was deemed to be of the highest value. David attempted to gain entrance in 1771 despite his master Joseph-Marie Vien’s belief that he was not ready. The following year, David again was passed over for the prize only to win it in 1774. But the struggle to win the prize embittered David towards the Academy as an institution.

In response, once he gained notoriety, David created a rival studio. With an emphasis on a more classical and generalized education, David hoped to enable his pupils to decipher for themselves the deeper meanings of myths and other sources for
their paintings. As artists, David and his pupil's were able to shape the past and the present as they memorialized events. Through their work, artists are able to effect the individual memories of people, even those who were direct participants in an event by creating tension (Pearce 1996 (original 1994): 27-28). Through his pupil's David was also able to impart his version of events on them and therefore indirectly through their works. The act of instruction aided the idea of the artist as a seer of knowledge rather than as a simple tradesman. In contrast to the hierarchical structure of the Academy, David's studio, encouraged an egalitarian atmosphere among his disciples (Crow 1994: 16). Some of David's earlier problems with the Academy had been caused by his pomposity. Rather than restrain students, whether or not they had superior talent, as he felt he had been, David cultivated the idea of a natural artist. This ideal was incarnated by his pupil Drouais (Appendix 6), whose death by illness at a young age was romanticized, putting a value on early success and on terms guaranteed not by training and experience but "by the special inner qualities which set the artist apart from the routine existence and dulled perception of others" (Crow 1994: 26).

David as Politician

The Reign of Terror, which marked the descent into chaos of the French Revolution, was created by a few men with much power. Most notable among these was Robespierre, whose control of the Convention through force and fear sustained his enormous power and ensured the friendship of David until close to the end. During the
Reign of Terror the convention was controlled mostly through the Committee of Public Safety of which David was a member and the Committee of General Security.

The concept of *la Patrie* was fundamental to the French Revolution. *La Patrie* represented a universalized allegiance to one’s fellow citizens and to the idea of the general welfare, usually at odds with obedience to the dictates of the state and accepted social custom. The duty of the artist was to set an example of individual emancipation, to break free, at least subjectively from government patrons who represented only a self-seeking minority (Crow 1994: 14).

The government patrons referred to in the above quotation were the royalist regimes and not the Convention which was, paradoxically perhaps, seen to embody the people’s desire for *la patrie*.

In order to maintain power, the leaders the Revolutionaries put forward the idea of the "Grands Hommes." The intent was to separate the common man from those who contributed more wholly to the nation. The creation of *Grands Hommes* was in part to provide an outlet for religious devotion, to replace Christian icons and holy personages. A primary example of this can be seen in the conversion of the Pantheon, created by Soufflot as a religious building, into a mausoleum for France’s great citizens.

David’s importance in the government cannot be underestimated as he not only served as its official painter but also as one of its major politicians. His signature appears on many death warrants and his views were fundamental to decisions of the convention (Crow 1995: 160). Coincident with the Reign of Terror, David, developed a growth on his neck and found its increasing size sufficiently debilitating to make it hard for him to speak eloquently. Instead, to the benefit of the written record, he wrote down all his
statements and, most importantly for historical reasons, he had more incentive to exhibit his ideology in his canvases. T.J. Clark posits that, “what matters to the historical imagination, at least in the first instance, is how the actors-especially the Jacobins- saw things. I conceive them as wavering hopelessly between conspiracy and self-deception, between calculus of effects and belief in their own symbols. No one more hopelessly (therefore productively) than David”(1999: 28) David’s most powerful political outlet was not in the convention halls. Rather, the convention halls provided his paintings, his most potent outlet, with an even wider audience as they became official works of the government.
Importance of the “Martyr Paintings”

The three major works of David which coincided with the implementation of the Revolutionary Calendar are commonly referred to as the “Martyr Paintings.” The three paintings which make up the “Martyr Paintings” are “The Death of Le Pelletier de Saint-Fareau,” “Marat at his Last Breath” and “The Death of Joseph Bara.” As indicated by both the names of the individual paintings and their grouping, each of the three paintings depicts a victim of the Revolution.

The “Martyr Paintings” were an official part of Revolutionary propaganda. Though one, “Le Pelletier de Saint-Fargeau,” was destroyed, the “Martyr Paintings” were created to stand the test of time and they have done so successfully. Unlike much of David’s earlier work, the “Martyr Paintings” deal with current actual events. Each of the Martyr trilogy was meant to capture a fleeting moment in history, and as deliberate propaganda pieces they had to be created quickly. Underlying the speed of execution was the need for each one, individually, to present a strong clear message to the public. The mastery of David is his ability to convey his intended meaning onto the viewer of the canvass. “The meaning of the object (the paintings) lies not wholly in the piece itself, nor wholly in its realization, but somewhere between the two” (Pearce 1996 (original 1995): 26) Crucial to the impact of the “Martyr Paintings” is their derivation from religious sources most likely unconsciously. The martyrs of the revolution took the place of saints not only figuratively but also literally as churches across the country were looted of their religious objects and replaced systematically with paintings of Marat and Le
Pelletier (the reason for Bara not being used in the same fashion will be discussed later). Twenty nine towns and villages renamed themselves after the martyrs. Churches became meeting points of the *Société Populaire* (Clark 1999: 19). The physical location of the paintings was not the only parallel that can be drawn between the “Martyr Paintings” and their religious predecessors. The form and content of the paintings, as well as the importance of text within the paintings can be seen as almost transparent use of Christian iconography for a new purpose. With both Marat and Le Pelletier, the inscriptions on the paintings served an important role in trumpeting the importance of the painting, in the same way that Christ is presented with the letters *INRI* above his head. In both cases the letters depict the scene while they disguise themselves as décor. I shall now consider the “Martyr Paintings” in detail.

**Le Pelletier de Saint-Fargeau**

The first painting in the “Martyr Trilogy” was the portrait of Le Pelletier de Saint-Fargeau.² The art historian, Robert Simon, has described the work as the “revolution’s first image” (1991: 459). While the original painting no longer exists, replicas of the work, executed by contemporaries, allow art historians to have a clear image of its original depiction. A drawing of the painting was exhibited at the Salon of 1793 and is

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² There are two idiosyncrasies which must be raised in regards to Le Pelletier. The first is taxonomical in that there does not seem to be just one way to write his name in the literature; sometimes with two l’s, sometimes in two words. The other important issue is that some scholars believe that David was largely helped by his disciple François Gérard in the creation of this work. Some accounts even state that the only actual painting done by David's hand was the face of Le Pelletier. Whether these claims are true I am not in the position to argue, but I believe that for the purpose of my argument the important point is that they were done under the auspices of David and that he was the person who came up with the content of the painting even if he did not execute it entirely by himself.
the source for most art historical studies (Simon 1991: 459). Contemporary critiques of
the drawing by Stendhal, Coupin and David’s pupil Delécluze affirm its true depiction of
David’s original (Simon 1991: 466).

Le Pelletier de Saint-Fargeau was murdered by a pro royalist man as retribution
for the noble-born Le Pelletier’s vote in the convention for the execution of the king.
News of his death was widely circulated and his obvious transformation into a “man of
the people,” murdered for his beliefs, gained widespread fame. To tap into the swelling
sentiment of la patrie, Le Chénier, a fellow representative, decided to have a sort of
performance created to amplify the meaning of his death. Le Chénier created a rough
sketch of what the funeral should be like and then called in David to create the final
rendition (Roberts: 2000, 284). David was thus given the order to show the body with its
bloody clothes and fatal wound prominently displayed and with the murder weapon
visible, and perhaps most importantly with his last words engraved on a tombstone. His
dying words would read; “Je suis satisfait de verser mon sang pour la patrie; j’espère
qu’il servira à consolider la liberté et l’égalité, et à faire reconnaître ses ennemis.” (“I
am satisfied to shed my blood for la patrie, I hope that it will serve to consolidate liberty
and equality and to reveal its enemies”(Simon 1991: 463). The ground work was thus
laid for David to assume the role of master propagandist for the Revolution.

With great pomp and circumstance, David orchestrated an entire celebration in
honor of this first martyr. Complete with cavalry, processions, signs supporting the
causes and ideals of the French Revolution, and music, the death of Le Pelletier was
made into a fight for a cause rather than a mere funeral. The procession wound it’s way
into the Place des Piques (now the Place Vendôme). In the center of the square, where an
equestrian statue of Louis XIV had once stood, they placed the stubbed dead body of Le Pelletier. “The public performance of Le Pelletier’s martyrdom was enacted: Revolutionary theatre, massive, sectarian and very carefully stage-managed” (Simon 1991: 465). Le Pelletier, who had before his death been a member in opposition to the Jacobins despite his agreement with them over the execution of the king, was thus turned into one of their own in his death.

Despite the successful staging of martyrdom by David, he was not finished with his œuvre surrounding the affair. During the festival, he sat with his easel in the square and attempted to capture with his brush the corpse of the new martyr. Two months later, David presented his rendition of the event to the convention. From there, at the expense of the Republic, it was ordered to be engraved and sent to every department (Simon 1991: 465). The widespread dissemination of the painting and later its hanging in the Louvre alongside “Marat at his Last Breath” for all the public to see is especially interesting, given that the first martyr of the revolution was not a common citizen but rather a nobleman.

David’s canvas depicted a tranquil looking Le Pelletier dead on his bed, propped up at a 45 degree angle and twisted slightly so that his wounds could be more easily seen and framed by his body. The folds of the sheets on the bed twist and turn around and add depth and grace to the body which seems so simple in comparison. Hung in the air as if it were simply floating above the abdomen of the corpse is a sword piercing a ballot with the imprinted words “Je vote la mort du roi” (“I vote for the death of the king.”)

The portrait of Le Pelletier was full of ideological meaning. Continuing in his realist neoclassical style, David gave an accurate rendition of the corpse with the wound
openly shown. Details in the pillow on which Le Pelletier's head lies and the facial features all create the impression that the viewer of the canvas is present at the funeral, in a sort of communion with the body. Yet, though it is to be a depiction of a corpse, the body somehow seems to be still alive. The obvious parallels between the rendering of Le Pelletier and of the Christ figure, as in a pieta (appendix 7), appear in the manner in which the body is draped onto the table. Drawing on the iconography of the Church, David makes this noble man one of the people, the same way that Christ was a man despite being the Son of God.

By employing sacred symbols David is able to harness the power of religious symbolism for his cause. Religious belief allows a people to integrate their "ethos" or evaluative factors of a culture such as morals with the actuality of their everyday existence, or as Geertz (1973: 126) terms it, their "world view". By placing a Christ-like figure into his painting, David is able to distill Christ's symbolic meaning. "Sacred symbols thus relates an ontology and a cosmology to an aesthetics and a morality: their peculiar power comes from their presumed ability to identify the fact with value at the most fundamental level, to give to what is otherwise merely actual, a comprehensive normative import" (Geertz 1973: 127). Therefore the power of the image lies in its ability to reference something larger than itself. The emotional charge is embedded in Le Pelletier, his graphic representation is bound with more than just his own death, but also the death of "the saviour."

The murder weapon which hangs precariously above the body both indexes the body and acts as a stand-in for counter revolutionary thought. The sword is the weapon of the royalty while the guillotine is the purveyor of popular justice. To make this double
point clear, the handle of the sword is in the form of rooster, an emblem of France, with the shaft of the sword engraved with the word “Paris,” the name of his killer. The words on the paper ballot make it clear for the viewer why this man was killed. The cross formed by the sword itself holding up the phrase forces a comparison between the cross on which Christ is nailed and INRI as the delineation of who he is.

Of vital importance is the time of the painting’s creation. Unlike earlier works of David, which were labored over by members of his atelier for long periods of time, Le Pelletier’s portrait attempted to captures a specific moment and thus necessitated a faster production time. The death of Le Pelletier occurred on January 20, 1793, the painting itself appeared before the convention in late March of that same year. Simultaneously, discussion over the implementation of a new calendar system was occurring in the Convention, through it had yet to make any law. That would not occur until October 5, 1793. Therefore the date of the painting would only retroactively become made in the Year II of Equality. This places the canvas within an interesting conceptual moment when dates and logical systems of dating were being called into question. According to Delécluze, the painting was inscribed in the lower right hand corner “A Peleletier, David” and dated “20 Janvier 1793”(Simon 1991: 466). Therefore in some ways this revolutionary prototype became anti-revolutionary a few months later in terms of its dating system, highlighting the depth of the quagmire which faced the revolutionaries, as well as showing the constant flux of meaning given to revolutionary signs.
Marat at his Last Breath

Having set the precedent for “Martyr Paintings” with Le Pelletier, David became a well entrenched-political artist. The “Marat at his Last Breath” is perhaps the single best known example of the struggle the revolutionaries experienced between ideology and creation. The revolutionary and prolific writer, Jean-Paul Marat best known for his newspaper “L’ami du Peuple,” was killed in his bathtub on July 13th 1793 by Charlotte Corday. Marat was at the far left of the revolutionaries, representing the sans-culottes. His politics were more extreme than Robespierre’s and most members’ of the convention. Regardless, his assassination for political reasons, provided the Jacobins the perfect opportunity to unify the populace by appropriating his dead body into their body politic.

As the writer of “L’ami du Peuple,” Marat embraced a radical discourse. He opposed artists as "ouvriers de luxe" because as he stated “tout manque au peuple contre les classes élevées qui l’opprient.” (“The people lack everything in their fight against the upper classes who oppress them”)(Marat, quoted in Clark 1999: 25). He thus understood the power of the artist and was wary of it. How ironic that he is perhaps best remembered through his depiction by David as a martyr of the French Revolution.

Following the death of Marat, David was instructed by deputies aligned with Marat to create a memorial to honor him. “Redonne-nous Marat tout entier” (“return Marat to us whole,”) Audouin shouted to David on the convention floor (Clark 1999: 32). This statement not only shows the role of David as the generally recognized creator of Revolutionary symbols but also places David as something more than just an artist.
Audoin does not want a painting of Marat: rather he wants him “whole,” as if David’s paintbrush was like the miraculous hand of God. David, who was not without ego, responded favorably to this demand to create a new revolutionary symbol. “Le peuple redemandait son ami, sa voix désolée se faisait entendre, il provoquait mon art, il voulait revoir les traits de son ami fidèle...J’ai entendu la voix du peuple, j’ai obéi.” (“The people asked for the friend again, their grief-stricken voice was being heard, it inspired my art, they wanted to see again the features of their faithful friend, I obeyed”)(David, quoted in Clark 1999: 33) Here David positions himself as the man in service to the people, co-opting the mythic status that Marat was able to assume for the masses through his writings. David uses his portraits to increase his political capital as not just a painter but a spokesperson and shepherd in the Christ-like sense of the role.

His task was more complicated than at first it may appear. The Jacobin leadership feared a public display of emotion for Marat which they saw as dangerous.

Far from seizing the opportunity to claim Marat’s memory through elaborate symbolism, the Revolutionary leadership hated its immunity from control, recoiled from the prospect of extravagant rituals improvised from below and feared new voices of popular discontent which might emerge from a carnival of mourning (Crow 1995: 63).

Robespierre and others in the leadership, with whom David was aligned, wanted only mass festivals and the creation of symbols which they controlled. They understood the difficulty of controlling the mob and feared the movement of the masses. This left David in a precarious position, forced to neutralize both the power of the masses and the objections of his colleagues.
Using many of the same tools harnessed to make Le Pelletier a martyr, David went to work to do the same with Marat. He depicted Marat dead in his bathtub, hunched sideways over the brim of the bathtub with his right hand touching the ground, pen in hand. The bathtub seems to be covered by a plank of wood, which in turn is covered by a green cloth. His left arm lies listless on top of the cover in front of his body, clutching a letter that appears to have blood smudges on the lower left corner. The placement of his arms allows his torso to be open to the viewer, putting a still bleeding wound near his clavicle into plain view. His restful face is propped sideways. It, in turn, lies gently on a sheet-covered box which is at just the right height to cradle his turban-covered head. In front of the bathtub is a sort of soap box, just slightly shorter than the bathtub itself. Placed on the box is an ink well as well as a second quill and two small notes. Branded onto the bottom of the soap box in large type are the words “À Marat, David.” Like other works of David, the foreground of the images is pushed forward and the background is left devoid of color.

Rather than being merely a depiction of Marat at the moment of his death, “Marat at his Last Breath,” is consciously designed as a propagandist image. “The detail of politics is what David’s Marat is made of”(Clark 1999: 21). David again employed traditional symbolism, especially Christian symbolism, as had been apparent with Le Pelletier. In this way, composition had the added weight of familiarity to create a powerful image to harness the power of the masses, embodied in the corpse of Marat. Following the example of Le Pelletier, the use of words within the canvas was of vital importance. “The job of the painter, in his opinion, was to conjure Marat back from the realm of the dead, and make his body and attributes present. I have been arguing that the
offer of presence on which the picture turns is a piece of writing, reaching forward into our space. Reading and seeing are strangely conflated at this point, the one term consuming the other” (Clark 1999: 48). In this way, the historical event of Marat’s death is recalled simultaneously with the consciousness of David’s lens as a historian and politician. The letter that lies open on the soapbox serves to show the viewer that we are seeing an interrupted moment in the life of Marat. It is not odd that Marat’s killer, Charlotte Corday, attacked him in his private bath as Marat regularly received guests and did most of his work confined to a bathtub to help alleviate the pain of a skin condition. The letter that is open is a letter Marat was writing to a widow to give her money. This humanitarian letter was meant to show his kind nature and reaffirm his standing as “L’ami du peuple.” This letter mirrors the ballot found in Le Pelletier’s painting. Both tie the cause of death directly to those letters which show the murdered men as friends of the revolutionary cause and the murderers as enemies of the people.

The second letter is meant to convey the extent of the treachery of Marat’s killer. It is supposed to be the letter that Charlotte Corday used to gain access to Marat. The letter’s use as a ruse for entry is apocryphal, however Corday did have a similar letter attached to her body when she was arrested. A propagandist tool, the inclusion of the letter in this tableau is ripe with social commentary. In French, the second person personal pronoun “vous” often invokes a hierarchical system where the speaker is of inferior status. In order to reform society, revolutionaries chose to do away with the word “vous” and other forms of hierarchical address. Instead they chose the exclusive use of the egalitarian word “tu.” “Additionally, they called everyone “citizen,” stressing a Frenchman’s primary role. “If vous is suitable for Monsieur, toi is suitable for the
Citoyen" (Chronique de Paris of October 1792, quoted in Clark 1999: 39). Contrary to this clear rhetorical point, the letter to Marat states, "Il suffit que je sois bien malheureuse pour avoir droit a votre bienveillance." ("It is enough that I should be very unhappy to claim the right to your benevolence.") This use of "votre" could be meant to illustrate, along with the Gregorian Calendar dating system which will be mentioned shortly, Corday’s revelatory counterrevolutionary instincts (Clark 1999: 39). Despite this close examination of the language which would make David seem to be completely in control of his symbols, the letter written by Marat also has the controversial "vous."

"Vous donnera cet/assignat à cette/mère de 5 enfants/ et dont le mari est parti pour la defense( où pour la mort)/de la (patrie.)" ("You will give this money to this mother of five children whose husband as left to defend (or to die) for the (patrie)" )³. The only way that this phrase could be viable within the political rhetoric brought forth in the painting is if he were writing the letter to several people, thereby making the "vous" not one of hierarchy, but rather invoking the plural. The other option is that given the rapidity with which this canvas was made and the small size of the letter, perhaps David is betraying the fact that old habits die hard, or that Marat wasn't pure either.

At the crux of the political meaning of the painting is the dating system. In this canvas, David tried to adopt the use of the new calendar and use it as a political rallying point. The letter of entry written by Charlotte Corday is dated the 13 Juillet, 1793. Thus, the murderer's political affiliation is revealed through the dating system, showing the importance that the revolutionaries attached to the reformation of society through dating.

³ In the original painting the last word of the letter is unclear as the paper curls, blurring the last word. Subsequent copies commissioned through David's studio make the last word clear as the paper shifts its position slightly to allow the viewer to see the "patrie." [Crow 1995, 40]
methods. “One of the most effective ways to accentuate social contrasts is to establish a calendrical contrast. Schedules and calendars are intimately linked to group formation.” (Zerubavel 1985: 22) The contrast to this overt show of royalism appears at the very bottom of the soapbox. In small letters, David has dated his painting using the republican calendar system, for it states in block letters, “l’an deux.” This pulling apart of the calendar as a rhetorical way of viewing power seems to be a way for David to integrate his political ideals into the canvas. But even as he appears to come so close to fully pushing through the idea of the republican calendar, he reveals its weakness. In the corner of the same soapbox, on the same line as the year 2 inscription is the date 1793 divided into 17 and 93 on the left and right bottom corner of the box, whose shape and dedication create the image of a tombstone. The date appears to be smudged out but it still readable as if David was himself acknowledging the fact that its erasure as a system of measurement was impossible or that it was at the point of vanishing and fading away.

The Death of Joseph Bara

David’s final Martyr Painting least resembles the previous two. This painting diverges from its predecessors in two major ways in the creation and the presentation of the Martyr. Unlike Le Pelletier and Marat, Bara was entirely created by the revolutionaries to further their cause in the last moments of the “Reign of Terror” (Appendix 4).

Joseph Bara was a young boy who had been killed while fighting in the revolutionary army against royalist rebels in Vendée. Although he was to young to have
been enlisted, Bara had served as a hussar following the Revolutionary Army. He was killed by royalist after he refused to hand over his horses (Crow 1995:174). In December 1793 (Firmaire Year II), a letter was read to the convention to honor the death of this young boy. But rather than just remain the story of a boy who was too stubborn to turn in his horses as the original letter stipulates, Bara became the bearer of the republican cause. On December 28, 1793 Robespierre spoke before the convention and reported that Bara had been instructed to shout “Long Live the King!” but had refused and instead had shouted, “Long Live the Republic.” For his defiance, according to Robespierre, he was killed (Crow 1995: 175) Of course this was all purely political discourse; Robespierre had invented the boy’s last words to advance a political agenda. And to further it, he called on David to create another public festival in honor of Bara, the new mythic martyr.

Furthermore, the procession was to end at the Pantheon where Bara was destined to be buried as an example of a grand homme. Bara marked a departure from the previous two figures in that he truly was one of the people rather than one who had held political power.

David’s depiction of Bara changes radically from the first two martyr portraits. There are many reasons for this, not the smallest of which is that for the first time the painting was purely ideological and based on an abstract idea of a boy rather than on a real public figure as was previously the case. It is hard to know exactly what the painting was intended to look like, for it was left unfinished as Robespierre and the Jacobin government were overthrown the day before the festival and the revelation of the painting were supposed to occur (Boime 1987: 466). Given the fact that the change in political power occurred only the day before and was in part inspired by fear of the impending
festivities and the opportunity it would present for Robespierre to continue to gain power by massacring his opposition, I think that the form of the painting that is currently apparent must have been close to the final desired rendering.

“The Death of Joseph Bara” is formally very simple. In yellowish beige tones, a young pubescent boy lies on the ground. Rather than being directly in the foreground like the previous two Martyrs, the boy’s body seems to be just slightly distanced from the viewer so that one feels almost voyeuristic. Most of the canvas is empty space filled only with textured variations of color. One important distinction between the other two portraits and this one is that, unlike the other two where the blood and gore of the actual fatal wound were prominently displayed, there does not appear to be any wound at all on the boy’s body. Instead, his mortality and pain are shown through the position of his body that seems to be broken in two. His torso leans over and arches up in pain that seems about to be relieved through death while his legs seem to be impossibly contorted, drawn as if they were attached to another being altogether. Aside from revealing the inner pain and the death of the boy, this awkward pose also serves to hide the genitals of the boy beneath a shadow cast through his contortion. Thus the boy, angel-like, appears to be androgynous with shoulder length wavy hair and a face in ecstatic pain.

The incorporation of his own pupils’ work is obvious in David’s depiction of the boy. The glorified androgynous nude that characterized Girodet’s “The Sleep of Endymion” (Appendix 5), painted 3 years before, is evoked in the smooth and incandescent skin of Joseph Bara. The twisted torso which is supposed to evoke the pain caused by a bayonet hit on the abdomen mirrors Drouais’ “The Dying Athlete” (1785) (Appendix 6), whose contorted body shows his mortality despite his
seeming perfection. Whereas the bodies of Marat and Le Pelletier were cloaked in sheets, Bara remains exposed and nude. The nude is “the emblem of virtue and self-sacrifice in youth and their vision of physical perfection carried with it a statement of anti-authoritarian originality in style and conception” (Crow 1994: 33). The nudity of the boy and the starkness of the scene evoke a feeling of timelessness, as if this painting could be depicting any boy at any moment in this situation. It is almost as if David is attempting to free himself from the constructions that have been imposed on him through the ideology of the revolution.

The conflation of David’s direct drawing upon his pupils’ work with his seeming lack of ideological meaning in the canvas, as well as the absence of words (of course this could have been added later), does seem to point to something new. “The regard of the artist, with which we are invited to identify, appears to have scandalously little to do with civic virtue or battlefield heroism, despite the charge to the painter…Commentators have assumed with near unanimity that the painting suffers from an overbalancing from public to private preoccupations” (Crow 1994: 32). The almost apolitical aspect of the work renders it almost void of argument, especially as it came never to be displayed publicly and as it was never finished. Unlike the previous martyrs the desolation of the government caused the painting never to achieve its role as a current symbol for the Revolutionaries. Using Barthes’ terminology (1977), one might say that through the “Death of Bara” the parole of David attempted to become the signifier of loss of heroic innocents for a noble cause and the heinous nature of their enemies (see also Roberts: 2000, 270). The sign of the dead boy was meant to unify support behind the Jacobin’s as the attempted to further weed out their enemies from power. Seeking to incorporate the
portrait into the *langue*, social conciousness of the people, David placed Bara in a safe zone of abstractness. With the collapse of the Jacobin dictatorship, the “Death of Bara” became part of historian’s *langue* for the failure of the Jacobin’s, a position the calendar was soon to join.

The change from overt contemporaneous imagery as evidenced in the earlier martyr portraits to timelessness in the “Death of Joseph Bara,” is evidence of David’s attempt to move away from the close relationship previously established between sign and symbol. The notion of timelessness references Benjamin Whorf’s examination of the Hopi language. Void of spatial referents, the events described in Hopi “varies with each observer, does not permit of simultaneity and has zero dimensions”(1998 (originally 1956): 216). The nude Bara alone in a sponge like canvas lies there in a timeless dimension, to be interpreted by each individual void of the constraints of time. But while the painting evokes timelessness, the very fact that it was unfinished betrays the impact that time had on it. Crucial to this interplay is the dialogue between the eternal aspect of the painting and the ephemeral nature of the moment David was expected to capture.

David’s depiction of the three martyrs’ paintings outlines David’s struggle at self definition. Through his works, he attempts to adopt the role of a “grand homme” or even a god. For he is the one who is able to record the events for time immemorial while the politicians were involved in their vision of creating structures and systems which would become history. In the “Marat at his Last Breath” David places special emphasis on Marat as the executor of an art, writing. He paints Marat with the very tool which allowed him to gain so much power that even his memorial scared the leading authorities. David wants to seize this power. Through Bara he brings out the idea of
perfection and sexuality that was apparent during the time of the Greeks and Romans, a notion of perfectibility and timelessness which only God can grant. David wants this power and through his depiction of the Martyr he hopes to manipulate his viewers into making him a deity, someone who transgresses time. In many ways he achieved this goal.
III. DAVID AND THE FAILURE OF THE REPUBLICAN CALENDAR

It is important to examine the Republican Calendar while looking at the art of the
time in order to understand the underlying culture of this attempted reform. The working
definition of culture that I will use in this paper is: those ways of behaving (including
speaking), cognizing (including beliefs), and valuing the world insofar as they are socially
learned and socially transmitted (see Urban 1991). What is fascinating about the
Revolutionary Calendar is that in the attempt to break tradition and create a new system,
the French Revolutionaries in a sense tried to escape their culture and form a new one.
But this is not possible even though, to be sure, culture itself is constantly changing. In
order for changes to occur, the culture surrounding the change must be able to adapt and
internalize the rapid destruction of the old. The French Revolution can serve as a perfect
example of ideology overreaching its cultural possibilities as it sputtered and spurred in
attempts to neutralize itself and stop the flux and flow of revolutions. When it is said
that history controlled the destiny of the French Revolution (Furet and Ozouf 1988: 486)
does this mean that their very culture prevented them from achieving what they
ideologically believed they wanted?

Earlier attempts to change calendar systems were possible through the guidance of a
higher belief system. The most obvious case of this occurred in the transformation from
the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, where 10 days were added to the current week
through a papal degree. Through proclamation of Pope Gregory XII the day following
October 4, 1582 became October 15, 1582. Catholic countries adopted this change
because they were able to legitimize it through a system previously in place, the Catholic
Church. It would take England until 1700 to adopt the reform but by then the idea of change had been enough in the peoples social conscious as well as in their trading and warring relations that the switch could be made.

The French Revolutionary calendar attempted to dismantle both the Gregorian Calendar and the practices that it represented. The use of strict calendar dates was actually relatively new practice for France. Through the examination of 16th century documents, Gerard T. Moran has demonstrated that the universal use of Gregorian calendar dates, rather than religious festivals as anchors, dates only to the late 16th century (Moran 1981: 3). The coincidence of the change in dating mechanisms and the War of Religions is not coincidental. The cyclical nature of the religious feasts had been gradually replaced for the less “idolatrous” Gregorian Calendar. Therefore it is conceivable that the revolutionaries could have attempted a similar gradual progression from one system to another, but they also may have realized that they faced a dual problem with the Gregorian calendar and the Saints days acting almost as two distinct systems needing to be overthrown. The situation involving two calendar systems in 16th century France parallels the vision of time which Evans-Pritchard examined among the Nuer, in that they bare examples of another form of dualism in time. Evans-Pritchard contrasted what he called “oeccological time,” which are evidenced in people’s relationship to the environment around them through daily activities and “structural time” which were the socially constrained rendering of time (1947 (original 1941): 94). By examining these two cohabiting time structures, we are able to see the relation between the segmented time of calendars and the ritualized time created through regular activities.
Despite the continuing debate about the Republican Calendar, it still failed to be rationalized. Inherent in the problem of rationalization is that the world itself is not "rational". Enlightenment philosophies demanded neatly ordered packets of knowledge even when this was contradicted by actuality. A clear example of this was to be found in the tempering of the musical scale during the mid 18th century. As there is in the music of nature an inherent discord between notes, Enlightenment thinkers attempted to harmonize the notes to make them fit with their preconceived system.

Contrary to the modern scientific method, the Enlightenment thinkers came up with theories and then at times sought to fit them with dubious facts. This rationale was the fundamental problem of the Revolutionary Calendar system; the idea was interesting but its execution was impossible. Initially, Romme wanted to keep some order in his intercalary years by having them appear every four years. Delambre pointed out the problems with this: the celestial leap year would not fall every four years, falling at times on the fifth year if the equinox was maintained as the universal starting date. Romme was then forced to make very complicated rules in order to fit his vision of the planetary movement into the actual one. The intercalary year was then to occur every 400 years and 36 centuries (Furet and Ozouf 1988: 487).

The backlash against the enforced calendar was strong, as the calendar itself became symbolic of the Jacobin Government. During the Thermidor reaction, it was said that the Committee of Public safety officials were tyrants, and the proof for this was found in the Committee of Public Safety’s desire to control time and days. In contrast, during the neo-Jacobin era that followed the 18th of Fructidor, the people clung closely to
the Revolutionary Calendar system as the idea of reversing the calendar system became closely aligned with the casting off of all revolutionary ideals and changes.

The mass acceptance of the new calendar system was probably most hindered by the masses' reliance on a seven day week. An advantage of the décadé for the revolutionaries was that it broke up the flow of the Gregorian calendar week where church could be attended every Sunday. Another advantage, as mentioned earlier, from the economic standpoint, was that it called for fewer days of rest in a calendar year. But the revolutionaries did not comprehend the power and the inertia of tradition. Heavy laborers felt cheated by the switch to a ten-day week. While the calendar's nomenclature was ostensibly agriculturally-derived. The motivation came from an idealistic view of nature and its beauty. Its creators were not farmers and they did not have a sense of the hard work and scheduling that is required in order to cultivate the land. In addition, by reducing the number of rest days, it also decreased the number of market days, stifling commerce. Evidence of the religious tenacity of the people can be found in statements regarding the use of time, as revolutionary ardor waned and the calendar fell increasingly out of use. On the fourth of Germinal VII, the Comissioner of the Selles-sur-Cher canton wrote, "there may be ten celebrations of Sundays and Catholic holidays in a row, celebrated for a while now with as much pomp and circumstance as before"("Les dimanches, les fêtes catholiques y en aurait-il dix de suite, sont célébrés depuis quelque temps avec autant de pompe et d'éclat qu'autrefois) (Furet and Ozouf 1988: 489). One can see that despite official rulings, the French clung to their traditions.

The Revolutionary Calendar gradually fell out of favor. Given that it was a top-down institution which was never fully adopted by the people, its demise came as soon as
the government stopped forcing the issue. The inability to convert between the old and the new calendar made it very difficult for trade, for history and accounts, as well as for the conceptualization of time. Unlike adopting a new system of weights and measures where no is certain without some arbitrary standard, past or present, of exact quantity, days and the rotation of the sun are easily perceivable by everyone. A day is a day no matter what you call it and the equinoxes and solstices are also unalterable. They are physical realities whose interpretation in the minds of knowing agents is strongly constrained by processes directly experiencable. Thus the concept of a day is immutable while the concept of a unit of measure can be arbitrary. As Alfred Gell explains regarding psychological perceptions of time,

Temporal cognitions do not come in the form of estimated durations, but in the form of significant events in the outside world which have temporal meanings... The whole world is just one big clock, but it is one which different people can read differently – because what we can see, out there in the objective world, is only, so to speak, the hands of the clock, but not the clock-face in relation to which, and to which alone, the configuration of the hands assumes its particular temporal meaning (1992, 96).

The failure of the calendar and the success of the metric system are therefore the result of an underlying reality. As evidence of the Calendar’s inability to penetrate society, “Le Moniteur,” the primary newspaper of the day, continued to bracket the Gregorian calendar date next to that of the revolutionary calendar in order for the newspaper to be understood (Anders 1931: 528). Perhaps the publishers were more keenly aware than the Jacobins of the course that history would take.

The breakdown of the calendar became official beginning in Year VIII, when all revolutionary holidays with the exception of July 14th were removed from the calendar.
by the government. In the month of *Germinal* in Year X, the law on the Organization of Religion reasserted the use of Sunday as a day of rest for public officials, thus eliminating the idea of the *décadi*. The final blow came on the 15th of *Fructidor* Year XIII, when Laplace separated the calendarical reform from the metric reform. His reasons for doing so were the irrationality of the intercalary method and the nationally insular basis of the calendar itself. Finally on January 1, 1806 Napoleon reintroduced the Gregorian Calendar. Matthew Shaw stated in his essay the Reactions to the Republican Calendar, that “the calendar became a question of politics, and the perception of politics, rather than temporality” (2001: 25). This is a simplistic rendering of the demise of the calendar; one rather sees temporality as becoming too much of a social construct to be changed so dramatically. In the wrangling over the calendar system, the need to reform overrode the logic behind the reform. Politics and ideology became the only compass for the revolutionaries. Absent was a reference to the lives of the common people whom they were supposedly trying to defend. But popular rejection of and inability to incorporate the working cultural knowledge has just as much to do with the inertia regarding perception of time as with the political goals of the Revolutionaries.

With the Enlightenment and the passage of history, the importance of time had taken a larger place in society. While it may be argued that past calendrical changes were just as haphazard, I believe that this would be misleading. While dates might have been fudged slightly by the Popes, they continued to employ the same generalized framework that was already in place, substituting names and perhaps reasserting a single notion rather than completely changing the system while denouncing the earlier system. The Popes sought to co-opt earlier thinking; the revolutionaries sought to overthrow it.
The understanding of the French Revolution requires an understanding of its symbols. The renowned French Historian Furet stated that the 19th century French scholars were best able to understand the Revolution because they "attached central importance to the Revolution's symbolic investment in a new image of power" (Furet, quoted in Clark 1999: 47) David was central in the development in a new lexicon of symbols; to understand changes occurring in society one must examine the importance of those symbols and as their creator. According to Art Historian James Rubin; "Le site de la représentation, c'est le siège du pouvoir, c'est le terrain de la souveraineté." ("The site of representation is the seat of power, it is the ground of sovereignty") (1993: 783). Applied to the work of David, this statement about the extent of power may seem far fetched, but upon closer examination one must acknowledge that there is some truth to this message. For unlike his fellow revolutionaries, David was able to not only escape the Reign of Terror and the Revolution alive - his work as art had created a timeless dimension to the revolution and its commemoration.

Art is an important propagandic device as it forces people to see the artists' point of view without the viewer necessarily being fully aware of its creator's objective. Granted there are variations in propagandic art. It would be hard to miss the point of World War II posters that instructed the viewer to "Buy War Bonds!" In contrast to this obvious message, David's art is more nuanced with the emotionally laden messages he conveyed in his paintings. The importance of art in formulating public opinion has been long known and been executed at times with great skill by court painters and the like. But what was different about David's work is that for the first time his art was really meant for public view. "Where it had been a floating and passive crowd it becomes the
embodiment of active public opinion, a palpable force with a role-even a dominant one-in determining the success of painting and sculpture” (Crow 1994: 14). The creation of a more open salon changed the audience and therefore the art itself.

The “Last Breath of Marat” and the Portrait of Le Pelletier were hung in the public space of the Louvre on David’s request and then were placed at the entrance to the Convention. Albert Soboul states in “Les Sans Culottes,” “Art is no longer reserved for a privileged minority” (quoted in Clark 1999: 34) With the enlargement of the Salons and the break down of the Academy, art became accessible to more than just the higher classes, but it would be mistaken to state that art became the property of the people themselves.

Les fêtes de la révolution française doivent être considérées comme un mélange de propagande, education, de “pain et jeux” offerts par le Comité de salut public à son “électorat” supposé. Comme l’a montré Mona Ozouf, le fameux peuple lui même ne prenait jamais part, sauf de façon fortuite...Cet art important et durable de la révolution française n’était pas un art du peuple, par le peuple, ni meme pour le peuple, c’est a dire les bras-nus et les sans-culottes, mais un art de l’élite dirigeante, par elle-même et pour elle même.

(The festivals of the revolution should be considered as a mixture of propaganda, education, and “fun and games” given by the Committee of Public Safety to their assumed “electorate.” As Mona Ozouf demonstrated, the famous people never really took part except in chance roles. This important and lasting art of the Revolution was not of the people, by the people or even for the people, that is to say the Bras Nus and the Sans Culottes, but rather
an art from a ruling elite, by and for themselves.) (Paulson 1993: 516)

This statement by Ronal Paulson stresses the calculated meaning of the festivals and shows that the target audience was in fact not all the people as the revolutionaries proclaimed but rather some of the people. On the other hand, while it is true that it did not include large numbers of the population, the de-privatization of art did bring more people into the definition of the “public.”

Art’s public place in the French Revolution was integral to it. Even at the time, the importance of art and its symbols was well recognized. The journal “Les Révolutions de Paris” stated in September 1789: “nous ne devons pas oublier dans cette révolution le language puissant des symbôles.” (“we should not forget in this revolution that strong language of symbols.”) Drawing on this general knowledge of the importance of symbols, the Jacobins used not only paintings but also festivals to acclimate the public to their created symbols. Part of the reason for the proliferation of symbols and the seeming ubiquitous nature of them is that artists who formally found their employment in the upper classes were now forced to find alternative projects to make a living. They found their sources of income in the creation of symbols(Crow 1994: 31)

The far reaching power of David’s paintings as well as the symbols prevalent in the revolution are due in large part to the creation of a mass audience. Etchings, copies and engravings of all his paintings were made by himself, his pupils and other artists so that non—Parisians and Parisians alike could view the ceremonies and art that were taking place in the capital.
The importance of paintings as conservers of time is important when discussing the monumentality of the David’s work. The fast production of the paintings in the martyr trilogy was meant to best capture a fleeting moment in time. This linear concept in time is the same one that is found in the need to number dates in a progressing pattern. On the other hand, the actual use of a painting points one more to a sense of circular time. Each time a viewer gazes upon the canvas, she is drawn into the moment of creation because, she, rather than the painter, now occupies the position of power in regards to the painting. The painting acts as a sort of memorial of the moment of its inception, or at the very least of the moment that is depicted within the canvas. The force of the painting is in its universal appeal, its demand for the empathic identification of the viewer with something that happened to another person at another time. The freshness of the emotion and the immediacy of the image warps time. This conception of time becomes even more convoluted if the subject of the painting is a martyr. A martyr by definition is someone who has died for his cause. In order for a martyr to have an impact on society his death must be viewed as just the beginning, granting that person an air of timelessness within what at first seemed to be an immediate and easy encounter, the viewer in front of an object.

Time is difficult for most people to conceptualize. Instead we rely almost unquestionably on the set rules that have been created to make sense of a complex and abstract subject. These sets of rules form an integral part of our conception as citizens in the world. Like many rules that we just accept as fact, we know the chronology that to be a cultural object and ideology that is passed on from generation to generation. This concept of culture is inextricable in many ways from the pattern of life that we have set
for ourselves. In fact, Levi-Strauss defined rituals as “machines to suppress
time” (“machines à supprimer le temps”) (1975: 71-79) The importance of rituals, such as
church-going, supersedes a calendrical reform because it is out of the domain of the
organization of time (the switch from the Julian to the Gregorian Calendar was effective
because it placed the already existent daily patterns of the people within the new time
framework).

Walter E.A. van Beek stated that “the timelessness of ritual is not a negation of
time, but a negation of the effect of time on the central tenets of the society and of the
ritual itself” (2000: 43) For van Beek, the ritual puts itself out of the context of time.
While it is true that culture is constantly changing, the organic manner in which culture
changes, growing like coral on the remaining dead tissue, is crucial to its development.

The French Revolutionary calendar, in contrast to this amorphous growth pattern,
sought to break with its past tradition completely, purposefully weeding out cultural
traits which may have made it more easily adapted. The radical change which was
pushed onto the people afforded no flexibility to allow for any co-opting of old ways,
patterns and rhythms of life, such as church-going, market days, etc. During this acute
change, a reformulation of symbols was crucial. That necessity was recognized by many
in the French government. France’s icons multiplied rapidly, lending credence to the
objections. David’s ability to manipulate public opinion was crucial in the revolutionaries’
attempt to create the system. But David too struggled with the problem of time and
seemed to move towards a timeless setting rather than an adjusted time schedule. The
multiple references to time in the “Marat at his Last Breath” reveals David’s inability to
completely adapt to the new calendar even as he determinedly pointed to Mme. Corday’s culpability through the dating system used on the letters.

Despite proclamations to the contrary, the Jacobin Terror was a system of top-down rule where power was seized by the few and thrust on the many. Power was taken and death warrants were given out (Van Doren 1991: 231). “At no point did he (David) view the revolution from the perspective of the street” (Roberts 2001: 317) The systematic killing of those who had lost favor was crucial to the support of people still in power. But the ebb and flow of the Revolution from the Terror on, demonstrated not that the people could replicate and rationalize the world around them through a new system of counting the days, but rather that history itself was stronger than they. Furthermore, given the top-down way of governing, systematic changes did need to be adopted in order to grant any weight to the philosophical ideology that the revolutionaries were presenting. The calendar system failed to be adopted and remained a burlesque of ideology rather than of practice in large part because the rulers failed to make the change comprehensible to the common people.

Unlike most societal changes, the revolutionary calendar was a rapid change which, from its inception invalidated the past system. Unlike fashion or artistic style, the way we order time is presumed by most people to be stagnant. If culture is transmitted through social relationships and their patterning as my working definition of culture asserts, then ineffectual communication of culture dictated from on high is sure to fail, as individual’s patterns of daily life remain dissonant with a seemingly arbitrary proposal.
Appendix


3. David, *Marat at his Last Breath* (detail of Appendix #2).


Appendix 1

Appendix 2
Appendix 4
Appendix 5
Appendix 6
Jean-Germain Drouais, *The Dying Athlete*, 1785. Oil on canvas, 125X 183 cm.
Paris, Musée du Louvre.
Appendix 6

Jean-Germaine Drouais, *The Dying Athlete*, 1785. Oil on canvas, 125X 183 cm.
Paris, Musée du Louvre.
Appendix 7
Basilica of St Peter, Vatican.
Bibliography


