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### **1789 FRENCH REVOLUTION AS A MEDIA EVENT: IN IMAGE, RITUAL AND TEXT**

This article analyzes the 1789 French Revolution as an 18<sup>th</sup> century European media event present in image, revolutionary rituals and various texts. The dominating visual and written narratives in European reflections on the Revolution construed it as an horrific, unexpected event in European political culture – a cultural break. Emotions ranged from surprise to shock and from elation to fear and visions of a political apocalypse. We analyse the range of reactions through the interaction of private and public visual media discourses and public performances in revolutionary Paris and beyond the capital of France. We analyze how the concepts of “liberty” and “rights” are discussed internationally in the context of 1789. We conclude that the concept of liberty and human rights is not just in the domain of revolution: the concept developed as part of the lexicon of the opposition to 1789 as well and was presented in images and various political rituals.

**Keywords:** absolutism, French revolution, festival of Federation, freedom, tyranny, human rights, political journalism, sensationalism.

#### **Key questions of the article**

Our aim is to present a new approach to how the 1789 Revolution was perceived by concentrating on the emotions, images, conceptions, and visions of the most significant political break of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. How did Europeans outside France reflect upon the events and processes of the Revolution? How were their hopes, doubts, and fears presented at the start of and during the Revolution: how did they react on radicalization of the Revolution, victims, and heroes of the events? As a media event, the Revolution became a backdrop to internal political processes in various European countries and can help explain

how and why it was used by various segments of European societies to redefine themselves.

Various researchers note that theses about the Revolution as a part of political development appear in Enlightenment discourse in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. For example, German historian Volker Ullrich referred to Voltaire, who in the 1760s predicted processes now known as “revolution” and asserted that revolutions do not come suddenly, but grow out of a previous political system [37; S. 404]. We find proof of this idea in the testimonies of Parisians and foreign travelers during the period of 1789-1794.

The comments, emotions, and versions of the events by foreign observers and witnesses are the subject of analysis of our research: the events of the revolution are a result of socio-political and communication contexts. In our study, we present the events and processes of revolution, which resulted in long-term, geographically and politically diverse commentary from observers that stimulated the culture of liberty and rights in the political milieu of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The events of 1789 influenced local political culture and became the dominating topic of discourse in Great Britain, Russia, the US, the Germanic states, and elsewhere before being replaced by Napoleon’s empire and its policies in Europe.

If revolution is usually contextualized in a specific place with its internal societal and political issues, then our research focuses on the range of questions that arose outside France around discourse on revolutions – comments from observers from abroad as members of different political cultures. We seek answers to: Which social groups presented information on the Revolution? Which media reached the readers? What forms did participants of the discourse use to reflect upon the Revolution? How were the events positioned? What ideas did supporters and the opposition use to articulate their thoughts? What role did mnemonic devices such as space (Paris) and time (events) play? What versions of French society were presented? What questions did the Revolution pose that reflected internal activities and topics outside France?

These topics can be found in contemporary reflections, criticism, and observations. Thanks to the 18<sup>th</sup> century tradition by intellectuals to engage in transnational discussion in correspondence, the press, holidays, festivals and other symbolic activities, we can observe and analyze the reception of the Revolution (with the convening of the Estates General in May 1789 as the starting point) in contemporary social media.

Based on our research, we discovered that both the supporters and also the detractors of the Revolution used the same political terminology, based in French philosophy and economic theory developed during the Enlightenment, to define differing positions: republican (including the English reformists) and liberal, which became the basis of the German nationalism program in the 19<sup>th</sup> cen-

tury. The concepts of liberty and rights were used by both political factions, but with differing interpretations.

How the Revolution was received can be explained by political performative practices, interpreted within the theoretical frame of *performative turn*. Where do we find discourse about the Revolution? Theatre was one of the most intense spaces for development and expression of political practice and existed long before the spring of 1789. In fact, our research shows that theatre language and political imagery were used most frequently by witnesses to describe the political processes, events on the street, such as *Festival of the Federation* in 1790 in texts and images.

Discourse on the Revolution existed also in the space of religion: the interconnection between Catholicism and French statehood in the culture of absolutism is yet another aspect that French society and observers included in their reflections on political events between 1789 and 1794. We focus on sacred culture primarily as performative practice in revolutionary processes: staging masses in the city, performative aspects of forming ideas and rituals, and the conflict surrounding the new political calendar and observation of holidays and traditional cycle of liturgical year. Let us first reflect on groups of French society involved into the Revolution.

### **Who organized the Revolution? A genealogy of interpretations**

Before we proceed to analyse various aspects of the 1789 revolution as a media event, let us draw a panoramic summary of various theoretical interpretations of the revolutionary events. The major tool to detect theoretical differences is to ask the question - who made the revolution? Which groups shaped revolutionary processes? These were and still are questions which bring diversity of theoretical approaches to light.

Matthias Middell comments that after the Thermidor coup of 1794, which ended the year-long Reign of Terror, there was a plethora of written and visual material symbols and ideas to interpret the events of 1789-1794 that were also used in subsequent history periods. The range of reactions to and receptiveness of cultural artifacts of the Revolution, as depicted in the emotions of witnesses, is the basis of our study: they existed in many forms such as visual arts, media, drama, novels, opera, and religious practices [24; P. 25]. When Arthur Young wrote of his trip to France in 1789, he noted that many more capable authors than he could not describe this complicated topic, and he chose to be “removed from the extremes” as much as possible, realizing that he gained support from only a few [47; P. v]. This is a rare phrase in the reception of the Revolution: emotions, most diametrically opposed (particularly during the foundation

of the French Republic in 1792, Louis XVI's death in 1793, and the Reign of Terror in 1793-1794), stimulated polarization in many genres of public expression.

The Marxist interpretation of the 1789 Revolution, dominated by economic theory until the end of the 1960s claimed that it was a social revolution in which the middle class overthrew feudalism, which inhibited its economic growth and interests. George Comninel stressed that Marxist theory of historic development, based in the evolution of social groups, highlights the development of bourgeois economic interests [8; P. 8]. In his analysis of historian Alfred Cobban's interpretation of the Revolution in the lecture *The Myth of the French Revolution*, Comninel noted that Cobban viewed the Revolution as the confluence of several factors that began to develop before the events of 1789, as did Lefevre, who believed that a total of four revolutions had taken place with four major groups involved: aristocrats, bourgeois, *sans-culottes*, and peasant as driving force of the events [8; P. 6]. Many of these participants were absent from historic discussion for decades, until the early 1990s introduced new groups.

During our review of research completed in the 1990s on the Revolution, we noted that researchers discovered the intense activity of Catholic clergy at the onset, making up almost one-quarter of the Estates General and many Jacobins. This is due partly to the make-up of the clergy: unlike the 17<sup>th</sup> century when sons of middle-class families and civil servants entered the church, the majority of clergy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was made up of sons from peasant or merchant families. A career in the clergy was no longer as financially promising as before [33; C. 114]. In addition, lower social groups, such as the Catholic peasantry, were considered beneficiaries of the Revolution for some time, but the role of Catholic peasants in counterrevolutionary activity became a topic of research only at the end of the 1970s [44; P. 23].

After a lengthy period of the notion of the anti-clerical revolution, religion as a research topic appeared in Christofer Hodson's discourse on the use of religious language, elements from the New Testament, and the imagined dimension of Christianity in the creation of the public image of the Third Estate and the National Constituent Assembly. This language was used to counteract the characterization of the aristocracy as a parasitic group and also to create a series of quasi-religious cults, such as the one calling for the canonization of one of the leading politicians of the Revolution and journalist Marat [17; Pp. 338-339, 346, 357].

Historians belonging to so-called revisionist school at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century went even further in their thoughts on the aristocracy as a driving force of the Revolution and claimed that two political currents existed: one that strove to overthrow absolutism (liberal constitutionalists who supported the form of the British monarchy) and aristocratic constitutionalism that wished to increase their

role in power institutions by liquidating absolutism [14; P. 15]. We believe this dualism – social history in opposition to cultural symbolism – is essentially flawed and bound to lead to methodological difficulties in that it presents revolutionary processes as “big blocks” of economic and social development. The economic crisis, court politics, influence of the intellectuals, famine-induced rioting, and elections to the Estates General convened on 5 May 1789 need to be analyzed as events in the public space.

We believe debates on the basic elements and drivers of the Revolution can include a variety of interpretations, highlighting concrete aspects and topics, but social groupings are primarily those that create, renew, and ensure cultural processes in a socio-economic context. Conflicts in analyses are resolved if the development of the Revolution is interpreted as a cultural process that offers testimony about group projection in the public space. But where does the revolution take place? Does it happen definitively in the urban space or in the media space on paper? We chose the media discourse analysis as the methodological framework for this study.

### **The French Revolution occurred in the media – methodological aspects of the research**

We interpret the French Revolution as a long-running late 18<sup>th</sup> century European media event and chose the period from 1788 to 1794 for analysis. The *event* is key to understand the Revolution in which witnesses have not been present, regardless of the length of the process. The event transforms into an *idea about the event*, which replaces actual physical presence of those, who later shape the content and form of the events. As such, ideas on events dominate over experience, for obvious reasons. In the case of revolution, an individual’s direct or indirect experience of an event is supplemented with interpretation of an event. British political observers, such as Mary Williams, Lady Elizabeth Holland, Russian Count Pavel Alexandrovich Stroganoff and his French tutor Gilbert Romme, and other Europeans and Americans were observers in the National Assembly gallery, but the majority of German and English political commentators and European media contributors had never set foot in France or met with participants in the Revolution. Thus, mediated reception dominated reflections on the Revolution across Europe. In her analysis of revolutions in the Near East, Judith Butler described media as an enlarged stage that becomes a player in the events itself. She noted that media content is subject to influence, censorship, and layout [2; C. 92]. We believe Butler’s thesis can be expanded to include a historic perspective of events prior to the age of digital revolutions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Revolutions are similar in actual and mediated imaginary presence in

the public space, and the events are presented by media through various filters, including physical and time distances and situations where the person doing the reflecting has not been at the scene. In this space, people who articulate their interests and positions are politicized and create new images, practices and ideas, thus reflecting on the events of 1789-1794.

Our research discusses the interpretation of revolution in the media of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; therefore, we interpret events as political discourse in various media and analyze content and performative aspects of events that uncover interpretations of 1789 among 18<sup>th</sup> century Europeans.

### **Images and texts as sources**

The extensive number of private sources used in our research requires formulation of a methodology for analyzing the interpretation of processes of the French Revolution. Taking into consideration that the goal of our study is to analyze the reception of political processes – that is the construction of revolution at a specific point in time – we believe that hermeneutics is an effective method to reveal the preconceived notions of the actors of the period, context and expressions that in combination will be able to restore the history of how the Revolution was received. In our research, political culture is interpreted as the construction of the reflection of political actors of the time, and our analysis aims to understand elements of these reflections, event clarification models, and patterns of thought among the contemporaries (some of whom were actual witnesses) of the Revolution.

In addition to the intellectual construction of reflections on the Revolution, reception is also a performative practice that manifests itself in the public space. In regard to victim commemoration culture after the Reign of Terror and later during the Bourbon restoration (1815-1830), letters from prison became a significant source of reception.

Pan-European sources illustrate that the performative nature of material and non-material cultural symbols of the Revolution was so intense that they were not only criticized and despised, but they also became a tool for communication by turning the symbols on their head and appropriating them against the Revolution. Such examples were vivid during the Restoration period, but also at the onset of the Revolution.

In the early 1790s, in addition to ridiculing the Liberty Tree, anti-revolutionaries took to wearing a white cockade, as opposed to the revolutionary cockade. The white cockade was worn by royalists and by representatives of the Bourbon dynasty. This transferred coloring of a revolutionary symbol indicates an important, but heretofore little known side of the historic importance of the debates on liberty in public performance. In addition to symbols in the environ-

ment, clothing, too, took on symbolic importance. Our research contains instances of witness accounts that refer to clothing as an indicator that can quickly identify a political position – a symbol of resistance, fear, or aggression.

### **The Revolution goes abroad: 1789 as a global media event**

Our most important questions are about the reception of information presented by the media. What did people from 1789 until 1794 know about the many events that were considered revolutionary and included also in counter-revolutionary propaganda? The *Revolutionsalmanach*, an almanac which criticized Revolution, published in Leipzig 1794, used ideas that tried to show that a free and independent press did not exist in revolutionary France but that the press consisted only of articles commissioned by the ruling elite or corrupt journalists, *Propaganda Söldner* (propaganda soldiers) and “paid leaflet authors” [12; S. 233]. In what context did receipt and interpretation of news occur? In his analysis of the Revolution in Germanic lands, Rolf *Reichardt* proposed the concept of translation methodology. In his opinion, it was important to determine what of the Revolution had “made it” to Germany, and he offered the analysis of localization in a specific context, i.e. texts that allowed the reader to determine the events by adapting them to the local political context. What were the “translation” contexts? As our research shows, the localization of the events was the result of variations of censorship, which deleted or softened news from France. This conclusion is illustrated by *Revolutionsalmanach* when in 1794, the editor, Johan Christian *Dieterich* offered apologies to the authors for deleting black humour (*skurillen Witz*) or literary “*sans-culottes*-isms” [41].

The fall of the Bastille on July 14 1789 became a catalyst for interpretation outside France, initiating publishing of books, translations, picture collections, and song texts that lasted over ten years and served to transfer French political ideals and images into German cultural space. As indicated by travelers’ memoirs, many who were in France during the Revolution were united in the desire for a new experience and transformation of their image in the public sphere of their own society: commenting on political changes transformed the traveler into a critic and commentator – elevating him or her to something similar to a modern day expert.

Research completed in the last five years have given a boost to interpreting the Revolution as a global media event. The widening of the chronological frameworks of globalization gives opportunities to shape a wider perspective of the reception of revolution by including nations and societies outside the European political space through reflection on the revolutionary process or experience of the revolutionary process in their own lands. Middell stressed that the

decline of the school of national history in favor of a trans-European comparative approach also encourages the analysis of revolution through the lens of globalization. By researching reactions to French Revolution, he offered a post-colonial paradigm: France was a new colonial power where discourse on freedom took place not only in the metropolis of Paris and elsewhere, but also in the colonies, such as Haiti, where liberty became a frame for political action [24; P. 34]. Arguments supporting this position can be found in the images of the Revolution in art and elsewhere. The pretense of universal liberation, a global wellspring of liberty, played an important role in revolutionary rhetoric. Pierre *Bourdieu* interpreted the nationalism as a pre-revolutionary tool with its development into a pretension of the universality of a nation during the Revolution [4; S. 283].

The reception of the Revolution can be recreated not only through classic contemporary media sources but also through private media – in texts as places of reflection that were included in the collection and circulation of public ideas such as collections of correspondence, memoirs, diaries, and travelogues of those who visited continental Europe and France in particular. Paris was the logical destination for foreign travelers. It was ours as well.

### **Paris in foreign media – beautiful and bloody**

Paris is described in the memoirs of 18<sup>th</sup> century aristocrats and middle class travelers as a city of many delights. Countless memories can be gleaned from doctor James Houstoun's recollection during the first quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the Duke of Orléans was regent of France: "I lived in Paris for two or three months without any care and enjoyed everything the city had to give: assemblies, operas, plays, etc." Only later did the doctor remember that the purpose of his visit was to research the birthing house *Salle des Accouchement de l'Hotel-Dieu* [23; P. 65]. Another traveler, a Sicilian-born aristocrat, described his memories of live in the capital in the 1740s. Enjoyment and grandeur were the central aspects of Parisian life – changing, intermingling, blurring, and erasing borders between the elite and the lower classes, but the aristocracy was surrounded by many servants and the women ruled over the men [21; Pp. 19, 37], a thesis that in the literary genre was most vividly portrayed in Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* in which foreign travelers observe favoritism and submission to the whims of women.

A different view of Paris developed during the Revolution is seen in several English traveler texts – an empty city that once embodied the pleasures of urban life [36; P. 189]. It was precisely luxury goods, which impressed visitors during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which no longer appeared on the streets after 1789. Rural and urban elements of architecture – arches, chairs, rows –are



not neutral, but rather saturated with ideology. We will illustrate this in the epicenter of the Revolution – Paris – and how it became a dangerous place. At that time, Paris was a city of fear, a place of poverty, chaos, and arbitrary political rule where political tourists were also not safe. The disappearance of many equestrian statues of rulers heralded the end of the *ancien régime* in the public space of Paris.

Although considerable argument about what is an agent of culture process – space or place – has not subsided, it is clear that geography and the construction and planning of cities result from collective political discourse. Travelers, who observed the ceremonies that accompanied the changes in Paris, detected ideas of transformation in architecture, often defining these observations in theatric terms [26; Pp. 14-15]. In addition to eyewitness accounts, the close ties between European aristocracy and middle class ensured a tight network of relations that became a notable source of information and reflection on revolutionary transformations. As an example, Caroline Ponsonby, the future Lady Lamb and publicly acknowledged lover of Lord Byron can be mentioned. She was related to the Duchess of Devonshire Georgiana, and Marie Antoinette was a close family friend of the Duchess, so news and versions of revolutionary events in Paris could spread far beyond borders of France, using global communication networks of aristocratic families and their clients.

### ***More News! Media events, uncertainty, and sensationalism***

Simon Gunn analyzed in his study social behavior as a public performance and stressed several key elements of public politics: they are situational, unstable, and fluid actualizations of the self that are improvisations in a specific social setting [15; P. 190]. Mark Philp noted that cultural, or as he put it, discourse on the analysis of revolution is limited because people's narratives can only be partially viewed as intellectually logical reflections of events, which are transformed by historians or readers through retrospective reflection. Philp asks the question – to what degree can we assume that people actually believed what they wrote in their reflections? [27; Pp. 9, 16] He does not offer an answer to this essential question. We believe that investigation of reflections of contemporaries of the 1789 Revolution required acknowledgment that a significant portion of the sources can be defined as the product of affective behavior and reflection. Changes in attitudes towards the Revolution could happen due to forced emigration or even imprisonment or execution of distant relatives or correspondence partners.

Situationalism, chaos, and change are personal, emotional, and material motives and the sum total of a wider social context and influences that devel-

oped in the reception of the Revolution in 1789. This situationalism can be observed in the visual images found in the public space and the interpretation of their usage by foreign observers. Upon arriving in Calais, American traveler Stern noted that he and others were forced to wear revolutionary cockades to guard from attack by locals [10; Pp. 11-12], but in other situations, he was enthralled by revolutionary successes.

Criticism of the Revolution also included fashion reviews, particularly where specific fashion accessories acquired negative connotations. Fashion became politicized and an excuse for reprisals. The Leipzig *Revolutionsalmanach* noted that during the *ancien régime*, it was possible to dress as one pleased, but now young people who wore tight trousers in the style of the *ancien régime*, which had suddenly become *culottes de foie* (enemy pants), were equated with being aristocrats [25; S. 304]. Not only trousers, but also Jacobin hairstyles interested the author of the almanac, who claimed that Jacobins wore their hair short, as did Benjamin Franklin, but they lacked Franklin's wisdom [25; S. 306].

The quality of news was sacrificed in face of increased demand and calculated profits, which facilitated the flow of "fake news" in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Such was a comment in the 25 January 1793 edition of *The Times* in its report on the death of Louis XVI. It stated that many morning newspapers, attempting to reap the most from readers' desires for news, misled the public by publishing details of the execution of the French King before it had even happened: newspapers that were dependent upon speculation and fast news and knowing of the planned murder of the ruler presented this to the public as a completed event even before they had received news of it [46; P. 2].

Tension as a backdrop for the Revolution is also described. In his reflections, German intellectual Eichhorn developed the narrative of political noise and passion, parallel rumors and exaggeration: "...uncertainty that could not be borne" [13; P. 168]. An important aspect that must be included in media analysis is the desire for news of the progress of the Revolution. It was significant, as can be seen in introductions to travelers' notes as well as repeated editions – often two or three in a year's time. H. M. Williams' *Letters* were so popular that in 1792, her travel notes from the summer of 1790 were released in a third edition. We could call the Revolution the period of genesis of sensationalism in the media, substantial increase of consumption of media, and new forms of media development and circulation.

How did 18<sup>th</sup> century media reflect on the events of 1789? Which ideas dominated discourse? The idea of despotism was the basis for the rhetoric that formed the dictionary of the Revolution narrative. Discourse of this idea can be couched in terms accepted during the Enlightenment. Blanning noted that despotism had become a political expletive in the 1750s and was entrenched as such during Louis XV's conflict with *parliaments* [3; P. 32]. Despotism as a term was

widely used by both political camps and slung at each other to describe their political aims, which in the case of the anti-revolutionaries was order and social harmony restored, but for the pro-revolutionary camp, support for natural rights and equality. Despotism as a political concept became part of a pan-European pro-Revolution lexicology and was regularly used also outside France, for example, in discourse on forms of power and goals of the Revolution in the Mainz Republic.

Revolution as an idea was also key in media content. Prussian Count von Hertzberg in his lecture defined revolution as “great, violent, and forced change in state ownership or state political, civic, and religious leadership” [42; S. 6]. He described three types of revolution. The first was external: changes in foreign policy, conquest, and change in sovereignty starting with Alexander the Great up to the Moslem conquests in Europe. Such changes were no longer possible in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century because leaders were “enlightened” and rule in Europe could be considered moderate, particularly in monarchies [42; S.6, 20]. The second revolution was religious in nature – the spread of Christianity and the Reformation brought on by Luther’s spiritual revolution [42; S. 12-13]. The third type was political, which, according to the Count, occurred in order to install one of three types of ruling orders; here he recalled Montesquieu as well as Cicero’s “De republica” in mentioning three types of rule – monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. He based this type of revolution in Roman history, starting with the overthrow of Roman kings, Tarquinian family rule [42; S. 14].

Nations and citizenship were new political categories, which became topics for reflection outside existing French media. In Germanic lands, the idea of nation (Volk) developed predominantly in terms of culture (particularly theatre) and education and was interpreted as ties to Germanism as a phenomenon that crossed state boundaries – a cultural and emotional category that was not as politicized as it was in the French Revolution with its associated understanding of a unified legal framework of participants – a political nation. Instead a concept of a cultural nation was formulated in Germanic countries during the period of 1789-1794, further developed during and after Napoleonic wars.

### **Awareness and horror – the discourse of catastrophe in the perception of the 1789 Revolution**

We identified two basic narratives on revolutionary events of 1789-1794 – revolution as a social catastrophe and revolution as the dawn of happy humanity. It should be noted that narratives of both must be positioned into context to include situational and floating reflections because the idea of catastrophe can also be the precursor for a new day, thus couched in positive terms. In our dis-

cussion of the narrative of catastrophe, we explain its source, participants, and results as reflected upon by 18<sup>th</sup> century observers, among whom the dominating disposition was critical of the revolutionary process itself, including partial or complete negation of the Revolution.

Basic to understanding the reception of the Revolution is the long process leading up to the events and its sudden appearance. Several testimonies offer descriptions of a sudden political storm; many others point to its evolution. But the most vivid illustration of the apparent contradictions is offered by de Tocqueville. He did not analyze French history, but he introduced the reader with judgment that the sudden catastrophe did not reflect current reality, but rather that the Revolution had been long in coming [31; S. 22].

Media, as a deliverer of information and interpretations, is located in the physical world and is held captive by the technological capabilities of the era. Thus, another aspect should be added to discourse on catastrophe – its intensity and distance from the epicenter. The contemporaries of the Revolution knew of the most vivid example of a natural catastrophe, the earthquake in Lisbon in November 1755, which was discussed at great length. Earthquakes, as an element of nature, were included in political discourse as a political metaphor of the events of 1789.

In our study, the Lisbon disaster is important as the synthesis of nature and political culture: witnessing such events affects communication resulting in discourse – events, persons, and places meet in parallel, conflicting, and complementary formulas, actions, and ideas. The events in Lisbon entered the reality of political catastrophe, resulting in interaction of natural and political catastrophe. But the revolution as a dawn of humanity was noted in other media, specifically public demonstrations and celebrations in which the Revolution was observed in terms of a political theatre performance. Such an example is the Festival of Federation in 1790 in Paris that left vivid impressions on political tourists as well as on later German and British political discourse, even though most commentators had never participated in the festival.

***“...with the pomp of religious ceremonies, which simultaneously address the imagination, understanding, and the heart” [45; P. 6]. The Festival of Federation and the construction of Antique Republicanism***

Theatrics and drama in political discourse, along with natural disasters and religious apocalypse, are included in the narrative of the horrifying revolutionary period. A series of authors illustrated how the events were perceived in *ancien régime* theatre culture. In her letter to Virginia Julien, Rosalie Julien wrote “...our National Assembly has presented to the world one of the most beautiful performances in history” [20; P. 56]. Edmund *Burke*, in his letter to

Lord Charlemont at the start of the Revolution after the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was proclaimed in August 1789, created a theatrical metaphorical summary: "...our wonder at the magical performance that is being created in our neighboring country – our competitor – what an audience and what actors!" [6; P. 13]

Events in Paris and elsewhere – complete with collective actors performing "political" tasks such as oath taking and ceremonies in Paris – were political cataclysms that were often compared to drama, usually tragedies, but sometimes as performances without a specifically defined genre. The lexicon of theatre performances and natural disasters (in German sources called *Naturschauspiel*) mingles with the assistance of 17<sup>th</sup> century European Baroque semiotics, particularly in shows about hell and disaster in the style of the Italian court drama where short-term loss of logic and safety is restored by the ruler, God, or heroes. Revolutionary events were perceived using European theatre language widely used by the educated elites and audiences of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

Concurrently with Baroque-era theatrical esthetics and Christian eschatological elements, reflections were shaped by growing interest of commentators of the Revolution in ancient Rome, particularly the period of Republicanism as reflected in 18<sup>th</sup> century art and other neo-classical genres. The theatrics of life and its connection to politically motivated or public death, as noted by Margarita *Carucci* was a trait of Roman elite culture, widely acclaimed in the revolutionary public politics [7; P. 210].

The Festival on July 14 1790 functioned as a consolidation ritual for the nation in a new, post-feudal society in which political sacral elements were clearly assigned in festival proceedings, basically describing the new political form – the nation. The performative elements, as well as the scenarios of new festivals, according to Wanich, showed a political dichotomy in the sacral space of "us" and "them" [43; S. 67] that coincided with Dyan and Katz's defined ceremonial politics, which aimed to consolidate the collective by illustrating a vision of the new world, but not reflecting the actual political situation [9; Pp. viii-ix.].

The Festival of Federation on 14 July 1791 took place in two languages – that of the brotherhood of the nation and that of the Catholic mass – sacralizing the new order in ritual and its verbalization – in a performance of *Te Deum* with a large orchestra. The altar of the Fatherland joined the Catholic liturgy and new sacral revolutionary elements on 17 July 1791 in Mars Square in violent reactions to the National Constitutional Assembly's decision to keep the king as the head of state. This led to suppression of the bloody uprising and illustrated Parisians' view of the altar as a new, safe sacral space of the nation. No shots were fired upon it and many of the persecuted went there for sanctuary.

### **Who is to blame? The death of Louis XVI as media event**

In March 1793, *Berlinische Monatschrift* published news of the execution of Louis XVI, describing it as the “murder of a ruler”. The newspaper described Louis’ sentence as an ideological inconsistency of the Revolution and an illustration of lies that discredited the idea of rule of law: as a slogan of the Revolution, rule of law was lost and illustrated quite the opposite. This theme is close to perceptions found in other German media about the despotism of the Revolution: “How infuriating is the fact that law makers are also the accusers and that both wish to become judges” [38; S. 202-204]. The newspaper listed breaches in procedure and declared that the king was denied the rights afforded the most heinous criminal, and, in addition, the prisoner was humiliated and the testimony of his defenders ignored. The publication reflected the discourse of the legitimacy of power that was tied to constitutional monarchy in the German political space: the National Assembly was described as an ideal form for representing a nation and should facilitate rule of law, but that, unfortunately did not occur.

At the end of 1794, *Revolutionsalmanach* published news of the execution of Louis on 21 January 1793. It was declared a murderous brand on the century (Brandmahl unseres Jahrhunderts), and the author used language of the Old Testament, describing the execution of the ruler as murder-treachery, the mark of Cain, and he accused the Jacobins of devaluing the concept of liberty and justice – the very concept of revolutionary politics. Liberty as chaos was the denial of liberty and the “legal murder” (Justizmord) was negative example for other rulers in Europe not to support the idea of freedom and progress in their countries; it was too early to give the people liberty, for the animal (Tier), e.g. the nation, could break its chains and tear the ruler apart [5; S. 341]. The Revolution was perceived as an obstacle on the way to peaceful and slow evolution of political culture. Similar criticism is found in British commentator Burke’s rebuke: in his 1790 *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, he wrote that the Revolution’s leaders altered and blocked the power of the nation on the road to reform of political institutions, causing rulers to fear those who invited them to trust society or the nation. Rulers would view them as threats to their thrones and support the view that direct democracy does not suit any large nation. Burke referred to Aristotle’s comment that democracy can become tyranny [6; P. 228].

Victims and murderers of the Revolution existed on opposite sides of discourse maintained by critics and adepts. Death, in physical-political terms, had several elements: martyrdom (Corday as a martyr of royalists and Marat as a martyr of the Revolution), just death for murders (Robespierre, Saint-Just), and

the dance of death in 18<sup>th</sup> century politics (guillotining of large numbers of the aristocracy and other groups and the intensification of death through technology), as well as care for the dead – their sacrosanct memories. Reception of the scale of death, its description and intensity, became an intrinsic source of argument besides the legitimization of power in which the death of the ruler became a symbolic violation that served the Royalists' arguments of new barbarisms. De Baecque illustrated this in the case of the death and desecration of Princesse de Lamballe's body as he described the crowd that ripped her heart from her body, shared her lungs, and ridiculed her body and genitals in front of the windows of Marie Antoinette's prison [1; P. 69].

Horror, delight, and tempered criticism of the Revolution must be contextualized. We should note the essentially decentralized and diverse political discourse on Revolution. In the opinion of historians, intellectual discourse about the Revolution needed to be discovered in the intellectual texts of Masonic lodges, magazines, letters, and correspondence, in which reformism of monarchy was a desirable vision, and also in almanac texts published by governing institutions in the states along the Rhine and in Prussia [40].

Otto Dans' thesis that from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century on, the middle class in Western and Central Europe increasingly positioned their right of participation explains yet another receptive factor of 1789: reflection on the situation of the Revolution and its concrete events required defining oneself in the European political space by declaring support or opposition of the reigning interpretation in one's own society. This positioning was characteristic of various levels of society, including the aristocracy. When Catherine II, who was staunchly opposed to the Revolution for foreign policy considerations as well as a deep personal antipathy [22; C. 346], imposed censorship and the state began to control society's opportunities to discover the course of the Revolution, attitudes of society towards the Revolution changed to focus on attitudes towards their own government and political system. Her ambassador in France had to report on the Russians who lived in Paris – their attitudes towards the government and ruling order, for example, young Count Stroganov's interest in the Revolution and his participation in the Jacobin club, assisted by his Jacobin tutor Gilbert Romme [22; C. 342].

### ***Liberty is dangerous...* Discourse on the idea of liberty**

An undisputable source of research on discourse by supporters of liberty in the German-speaking space were *Sturm und Drang* texts that were the basis of criticism of the feudal society in drama and novels. In his letter to Daniel Schütte, Baron von Knigge described courts and German princes as cruel exploiters of

people; they wished to see a multitude of servants around them who would praise them and grab at any attention they could get from the ruler, like starving people who grab at morsels of bread [19; S. 212]. This rhetoric was portrayed by Louis-Léopold Boilly in his painting *Flag Bearer at the Festival of Freedom of Savoy* (1792-93) – the standard bears the text “Liberty or death” [28; p. 150]. This was also typical of pre-Revolution descriptions of Schiller’s literary heroes and language that depicted the court as an unnatural, rotten structure. Simultaneously, Schiller’s pathos closely resembles the rhetoric of critics of the Revolution in which the *ancien régime* was accused of unofficial networks and a culture of nepotism and favoritism that bolstered rulers and facilitated their erotic and political desires to morally degrade and exploit their subjects.

The Enlightenment was one of the ideals used by both political camps in their reflections on the Revolution. Alongside the supporters of the Revolution, anti-Revolutionaries too stressed the need for the Enlightenment as the tool for reforming political culture. The introduction of 1792 speeches by activist Wedekind of the Republic of Mainz underlined the arguments surrounding the Enlightenment: some considered it beneficial only for the elite – educated men and the aristocracy – and should not be afforded to peasants. Conflicts were clarified in Wedekind’s speech in which he described happiness as a concept not limited to professional activities, but as a concept in general, a condition possible to achieve by every single individual [30; S. 77].

Testimonies used in this section illustrate that liberty and rights and rule of law are the central political ideas through which debates about the revolution coursed. It should be noted that understanding of liberty had gradations, aspects of which were accented according to the changing political positions of the actors and stimulus received during the various phases of the development of the Revolution. Therefore, we need to discuss hybridization of the understanding of liberty: liberty as the central element of a constitutional monarchy in Britain was freedom of representation and participation that for many early supporters of the Jacobins in Britain, seemed to be denial of true liberty which is to be found in republicanism. Discrediting liberty by setting limits to it within constitutional monarchy was a central argument in the British Republican version, which is vividly apparent in British debates about the French Revolution and its effect on the development of British political culture.

### ***British arguments about the French Revolution. Internal political debates in the context of 1789-1794***

Researchers stress that the perception of the French Revolution in Great Britain was tied to British interpretation of their 1688 revolution. Jeremy Black contends that Burke’s work must be explained using two differing interpreta-



tions of the Revolution in Britain at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Burke's juxtaposition of the 1688 and 1789 revolutions was supported by a segment of the British press, such as the *The Public Advertiser*. But *The Times*, in July 1789, commented positively on the events in Paris, positioning the revolution as a continuation of the American Revolution in Europe [11; Pp. 110-120]. No less important was the dialogue between French Revolutionaries and English constitutional culture. For the Republicans in Britain the French events of 1789 were a continuation of the 1688 Revolution, the continuation that should follow also in Britain.

Discourse on the English revolution of 1688 touched on several basic questions about the relationship between the king and society in Britain, which in French debates were presented as discussion about reform of the *ancien régime* when the first constitution in France (1791) was adopted. The moment the constitution became a new political symbol in French reality, discussion of the English experience changed, as did the image of French politics, which was also influenced by long-standing colonial war competition between two countries. Yet another aspect can be found in the British-French constitutional debate – functionality of political communication. The correspondence between the Revolution Society in England and the National Assembly in France, newspapers and brochures, various celebrations and political performances resulted in the circulation and discourse of revolutionary ideas, illustrating the changing intensity of that discourse that depended on the author's internal political needs or interests and reducing mutual elation as the proclamation of the French republic neared in 1792. French republicanism in the public space stimulated pan-European communication amongst republicans. In addition to British supporters, similarly intense communication took place between Jacobins in the Germanic lands and their political partners in France. The Mainz Jacobin Society exchanged correspondence with Friends of the Republic in Paris on technical affiliation questions, concurrently proclaiming political fraternity.

British and German reactions to the events of 1789 can be viewed as reflections on the political self: as witnessed by travelogues, the Revolution linked a pan-European community of Enlightenment philosophers in an intense network that had regional variations in forms of political participation. In Prussia, for instance, even before the Revolution, an intense public space, or even several public spaces, existed as noted by Eduardo *Tortarolo*, who based his thoughts in Habermas' concepts of a multi-faceted space and ideas – church, Masonic lodges, academic debates, theater, taverns, and science. This was unified by the work of journalists and writers, thereby creating an intense public space in the 1780s [34; P. 153]. Many of them travelled to France during the Revolution. Let us summarize impressions of three political tourists.

### *Three Brits travel to revolutionary France: travelers' notes on political upheaval*

Richard *Twiss* was among three British travelers who became commentators on the French Revolution. His book, *A trip to Paris in July and August 1792*, differed from the initial euphoria apparent in Williams' letters. Twiss' publication appeared in 1793 when the initial period of constitutional debates with the introduction of a constitutional monarchy in France had ended. Various patriotic celebrations that heralded the symbolic unity of the French nation, such as the Federation Festival, were mild manifestations that interrupted radicalization. Radicalization of the Revolution was expressed in various performances that the British travellers observed with irony and distance. Why did Twiss decide to travel to France at such an unsettled time? Curiosity was the main reason. He mentions three reasons, among which the desire to experience the events of the Revolution was foremost. This was followed by the desire to discover the truth about the many rumours of the impending counter-revolution and the desire to "see the gardens around Paris" [35; P. 2]. The last is reminiscent of pre-Revolution *Grand tour* travelers, who went to France to experience the garden culture and view agricultural accomplishments. He noted that he frequently travelled to France before the Revolution, and thus, comparisons were inevitable.

Travel to revolutionary France meant that the visitor, who wanted to become better acquainted with the events, had to obtain symbols of the Revolution that had to be used in the new ideological setting. So did Twiss: "I immediately obtained the national cockade, which was a blue silk sash with blue, white, and red stripes" [35; P. 4]. One of the revolutionary symbols Twiss saw during his travels was the Liberty Tree that was placed in the market square: the look of this post with torn off branches and leaves was deplorable and fallacious. "The post was topped with a red wool or cotton nightcap that was called the Liberty Cap. Red, blue, and white ribbons were wrapped around the post" [35; Pp.13-14]. National colours adorned almost everything, including the statues of saints in churches.

In the cityscape, street names were another symbol that indicated political changes. The British political tourist named several Parisian streets that had been renamed in honour of Enlightenment philosophers – Voltaire, Rousseau, and others – and revolutionary politicians, such as Mirabeau. Even the royal garden at Versailles was renamed the National Botanical Garden.

Another traveler, T. F. Hill, visited Paris in the autumn of 1791, and as he approached the capital of the Revolution, he mused on the phenomenon of tyranny that, in his mind, could manifest as the tyranny of republicanism [16; P. 5]. Hill repeated the argument widely used by opponents of the Revolution – royal

despotism had been replaced by revolutionary one. Although he was critical of further development of the Revolution, he repeated the widely published thesis on the degradation of the ideals of the Revolution. Hill described the period up to the creation of the first French constitution (1791) as the most progressive period of the Revolution. In his opinion the fact that the king recognized the constitution was a sign of progress [16; P. 6]. He also described in great detail societal changes and the distancing from superficial “French nature” on the road to becoming a political community.

Yet another traveler, the previously mentioned Arthur Young, depicted the Revolution as a series of observations. He was among those political tourists who was initially enthusiastic about the political changes but who later was disillusioned and even shocked by the violent events after 1791 [48; P. 3].

### ***Criticism of the philosophy of Enlightenment: religion, nationalism and political alternatives***

Conservative commentators from various European societies mentioned the reduction of the authority of Christianity and its replacement with human rights during the *ancien régime* as a factor for the advance of the Revolution. In his treatise on the causes of the Revolution, Russian writer and historian Nikolay Karamzin, who visited revolutionary Paris, mentioned discussions between philosophers and an abbot in which the clergyman relayed his thoughts on how boredom had facilitated the chaos of the Revolution as did ambition: economists and intellectuals combined academic intrigues with interests in parrots, puns, and magnetism. The Russian traveller compared the Revolution with a collective craze for destructive and chaotic boredom that was filled by dangerous ideas [18; C. 379].

Reflections in the *Revolutionsalmanach* on Enlightenment reveal discursive changes in the volumes: in the 1793 edition, liberty and rights were commendable ideals that had been perverted, but in the 1794 edition, these same rights were described as the root of political chaos and economic collapse in France. The 1794 edition changed the tune – disillusionment with the results of the Revolution was predominant mood. The publication *A German traveller's notes on how the new French are still the old French* illustrates this argument. This traveller, like so many others, went to France in hopes of seeing how the Revolution had changed French society. The author uses xenophobic terminology to state that he had never liked French flippancy and love of intrigue, and he was disillusioned with what he had experienced in France [32; S. 17-18]. He used the lexicology of antique republicans to juxtapose morals, citizens, and respect in terms of traditional French caricature – political affectations of the

French transferred easily from the *ancien régime* to the new order. Revolution was depicted primarily as political unsustainability and chaos, quick change of political mood and impatience of young politicians. First the French created new revolutionary idols and then destroyed them. Among idols destroyed were Lafayette, Necker, and Mirabeau.

The decrease of religiosity in Germanic territories for the authors of the Almanach was another political risk of exporting the Revolution: they predicted that if this process was not halted, then similar events could occur in 20 to 25 years, and the German masses could repeat the events of France. Moreover, the Almanac attempted to determine proto-sociological categories for religiosity through comparisons between Catholic and Protestant countries and large cities and the countryside, concluding that the greatest risk for secularity existed in large Protestant cities [38; S. 116].

The reduction of religiosity was tied not only to increasing skepticism on the part of congregations, but also among the clergy, particularly younger members and theology students, who exhibited untoward irony for the postulates of faith and its representatives. One author, an anonymous traveler who found himself in a Protestant city, reported that he heard members of the clergy call Christ the “Jewish national god” [38; S. 117].

### **Conclusion. Birth of news culture**

For European witnesses and contemporaries, events of 1789-1794 were the most profound political change. Its descriptions and intellectual and emotional reflections were used as a forum to discuss the most shocking political upheaval of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. To describe this event, intellectual and emotional patterns typical of the *ancien régime* political discourse, experiences and artifacts, traditional performative practices were applied. Members of various national and social groups left historic testimonies of their reactions to the events of 1789 using the language of European theatre, including opera plots in which ancient Rome and Greece were frames of explaining and coping with the traumatic experiences of the Revolution. How and with what principles does analysis of such a vast array of sources take place? Our research primarily focused on sources from contemporaries who lived outside France during the Revolution, from 1789 until 1794. The object of research was the “observer” from abroad, direct or indirect for whom the Revolution was a great source of enthusiasm or anxiety, but who, in most cases, did not actually participate in the event, but created products of imagery in pictures, texts, songs and performative practices. Testimonies included reports and travelogues from inhabitants of Great Britain, Germany, Russia, and other European nations. As such, many of these testimonies described news obtained while travelling and knowledge and impressions

gathered through contact with the residents of France – urban and rural dwellers: their stories, views, values, and experiences in political practice. Our sources included travellers’ notes that were written in letters, memoirs, and discussions. A parallel source was printed media – newspapers and almanac materials.

The main focus of our research was testimonies; we were interested in the body of reflections of first- and second-hand experiences during the French Revolution. Thus, the main research question focuses on the performative receptiveness of these illustrations of the Revolution.

Our sources consisted of testimonies that illustrated direct and indirect witness perceptions of Revolution symbols. Researchers of 18<sup>th</sup> century literature and the press question how to assess these sources. This problem can be solved partly with hermeneutic methods, but the researcher must take into consideration the many projections and preconceived notions about oneself and the outer world in these sources. The emotional subjectivity of these sources is the content of cultural processes, which are supplemented by testimonies from French citizens living in France and those who went into exile.

One of the main visions identified in these sources is that during the Revolution, a futuristic dimension of the materialization of historical processes occurred. Pre-conceived notions of a better society defined by Enlightenment philosophy were transformed into objects of space and legislation, monuments, ceremonies, speeches and architecture. Those who supported the Revolution were witnessing the Enlightenment in the political reality – Williams and others were fascinated. Others were shocked and afraid of political chaos. Revolution, as public performance, turned politics into a visually perceptible reality and allowed witnesses to “feel” their own presence in the historic events. Presence at historic events became a premise for substantiation of later memoirs and afforded the authors of comments validation to participate in discourse on the Revolution, thus creating symbolic capital in the development of the image of a political expert.

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