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Rereading the History of Feminism

> Those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere.
>
> —*Roland Barthes*

This book is an attempt to rethink the history of feminism by looking at specific campaigns for women's political rights in France from 1789 to 1944. Through an analysis of the writings and actions of individual feminist political activists at different historical moments, I have sought to provide an alternative to the typical approach to the history of feminism, one inherited from nineteenth-century feminists. Those feminists constructed a history to parallel the great evolutionary histories of their day. They wrote a teleological story of cumulative progress toward an ever-elusive goal; a story in which women inevitably found the means within themselves to struggle against their exclusion from democratic politics; a story in which the imaginative identification of feminists with the disparate and discontinuous actions of women in the past became an orderly and continuous historical tradition. Different generations have drawn from these stories additional moral lessons related to their own theoretical debates. Our late twentieth-century version is the insistence that all feminists in the past demanded either equality or difference and that one of these was (and still is) a more successful strategy than the other.[1]

This nineteenth-century approach prevents us from analyzing, even from seeing, the downside of feminist experience: its intractable contradictions, the obsessive repetitions that seem to doom one generation to relive the dilemmas of its predecessors, and its inability to secure

equal representation for women even when a long-sought goal such as the vote has been won. A feminist history that takes for granted the inevitability of progress, the autonomy of individual agents, and the need to choose between equality or difference reproduces without interrogation the terms of the ideological discourse within which feminism has operated. What is needed instead is analytic distance.

My sense of the need for a different approach to feminist history was brought home by a recent *New York Times* report from France.[2] Fed up with the minuscule number of women holding seats in the National Assembly (the proportion is smaller than in any other western European democracy and has remained virtually unchanged—ranging from 3 to 6 percent—since women were granted the vote in 1944), a group (composed mostly of women) insisted on gender parity in the Assembly. In demands they acknowledged as "a bit utopian," they sought passage of a law granting half of all seats in the parliament to women. "Exclusion of women has been part of France's political philosophy since the Revolution," said Claude Servan-Schreiber, whose book *Au pouvoir citoyennes!* (Take power, citizenesses!) is a manifesto for the group. "Women of my generation—I am 55—didn't have to fight for the vote," she adds, "but nothing has happened here since universal suffrage" passed nearly fifty years ago. I would add that the current parity movement is an attempt, in new form, to address a problem that antedates the suffrage, one that Servan-Schreiber accurately traces to the great democratic revolution of 1789.

That problem is the problem of how feminists could establish women's status as autonomous, self-representing individuals entitled to full political rights in a democratic republic.[3] Posed as a question, it is: why has it been so difficult for so long for women to realize the Revolution's (and every subsequent republic's) promise of universal liberty and equality, of political rights for all? The answer calls for something other than a chronicle of feminism's heroic struggles, undeserved betrayals, and strategic mistakes (although even this new account is not without its struggles and betrayals). It calls for something other than an internal history of the women's movement treated as tangential to the "larger" political scene, but also something other than an explanation that depends either on social or economic factors that precede or are external to politics, or on the reasons given for their

actions by politicians themselves. Instead, the answer requires reading the repetitions and conflicts of feminism as symptoms of contradictions in the political discourses that produced feminism and that it appealed to and challenged at the same time. These were the discourses of individualism, individual rights, and social obligation as used by republicans (and by some socialists) to organize the institutions of democratic citizenship in France.

Even as they wrote their own progressive histories, feminists were conscious of the repetitious quality of their actions. Writing in 1913, the psychiatrist and socialist activist Madeleine Pelletier associated the emergence of feminist movements with the turbulent revolutionary moments of the nineteenth century. But like Claude Servan-Schreiber in 1993, she traced these back to the trauma of the first revolution. It was then, she said, that feminism "learned how to enunciate all its claims for rights."[4] The legitimacy of those claims and their satisfaction depended on the recognition that the Revolution's proclamation of the rights of all was inconsistent with its refusal of citizenship to women. But what for feminists was a self-evident contradiction was not obvious as such to the legislators who repeatedly denied them the vote on the grounds of their difference from men.

Thus the theme of repetition in feminist history has regularly had to do with inconsistency and incongruity, and with arguments about what was and was not contradictory. But the question extends beyond the conflict between universal principle and exclusionary practice (a conflict that can presumably be reconciled) to the more intractable problem of "sexual difference." When exclusion was legitimated by reference to the different biologies of women and men, "sexual difference" was established not only as a natural fact, but also as an ontological basis for social and political differentiation. In the age of democratic revolutions, "women" came into being as political outsiders through the discourse of sexual difference. Feminism was a protest against women's political exclusion; its goal was to eliminate "sexual difference" in politics, but it had to make its claims on behalf of "women" (who were discursively produced through "sexual difference"). To the extent that it acted for "women," feminism produced the "sexual difference" it sought to eliminate. This paradox—the need both to accept *and* to refuse "sexual difference"—was the constitutive

condition of feminism as a political movement throughout its long history.

The difficulty of dealing in paradox was described in 1788 by Olympe de Gouges (who would later establish her place in feminist history as the author of the 1791 *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen*). In a long treatise written in emulation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, she set forth her version of the story of the social contract along with a set of observations about philosophy, science, progress, and the current state of the theater, as well as a list of proposals for political reform. At one point, in an aside about the ill effects on society of the pursuit of science and learning by artisans and tradesmen (their ambition led them—dangerously for social order—to want to escape their customary place and calling), she halted her diatribe with this comment: "If I go any further in this matter, I will go too far and attract the enmity of the newly rich, who, without reflecting on my good ideas or appreciating my good intentions, will condemn me pitilessly as a woman who has only paradoxes to offer and not problems easy to resolve."[5] For me this final description—"a woman who has only paradoxes to offer and not problems easy to resolve"—sums up the situation of Olympe de Gouges and her feminist contemporaries and successors. What was paradoxical was not only that de Gouges's opinions about social ambition contested widely held assumptions about the benefits of education and scientific progress; it was also that de Gouges's position as a woman in revolutionary France was produced by means of paradoxes and that she knew herself to be so constituted.

In de Gouges's time as in our own, "paradox" is used most often in its nontechnical sense. Technically, logicians define it as an unresolvable proposition that is true and false at the same time. (Robert's dictionary offers as an example the liar's statement: "I am lying.") In rhetorical and aesthetic theory, paradox is a sign of the capacity to balance complexly contrary thoughts and feelings and, by extension, poetic creativity. Ordinary usage carries traces of these formal and aesthetic meanings, but it most often employs "paradox" to mean an opinion that challenges prevailing orthodoxy (literally, it goes against the *doxa*), that is contrary to received tradition. Paradox marks a position at odds with the dominant one by stressing its difference from it.[6] Those who put into circulation a set of truths that challenge but don't displace

orthodox beliefs create a situation that loosely matches the technical definition of paradox.

But the history of feminism is not simply a history of contrary women uttering dissenting opinions. Nor can it be captured by the oxymoronic description of "women claiming the rights of Man." The paradoxes I refer to are not strategies of opposition, but the constitutive elements of feminism itself. The history of feminism is the history of women who have had only paradoxes to offer not because—as misogynist critics would have it—women's reasoning capacities are deficient or their natures fundamentally contrary, not because feminism somehow hasn't been able to get its theory and practice right, but because historically modern Western feminism is constituted by the discursive practices of democratic politics that have equated individuality with masculinity.

The word "individual" has ambiguous meanings that are present in its various usages. On the one hand, the individual is the abstract prototype for the human; on the other, the individual is a unique being, a distinct person, different from all others of its species. The first definition was often employed in political theory as the basis for the claim (made in France by Enlightenment philosophers and revolutionary politicians) that there were natural and universal human rights (to liberty, property, happiness) that gave men a common claim to the political rights of the citizen. The revolutionary philosophers made abstract individualism the rhetorical basis for their republic, even though historically republics had not rested on such inclusive notions.[7] The second definition was present when philosophers as different as Diderot and Rousseau articulated a notion of a unique self and specified its uniqueness by its differentiation from an other. This other provided the boundaries of the self's existence, its distinctive qualities and characteristics, as in the entry for "individual" in the *Encyclopédie*:

> Peter is a man, Paul is a man. They belong to the same species; but they are distinguished from one another by *numerable* differences. One is handsome, the other ugly; one learned, the other ignorant. Each is etymologically an *individual* because he cannot be divided into another subject who has an existence that is really separate from him. His assembled traits are such that, taken together, they cannot apply to anyone but him.[8]

These differences were not categorical; it was precisely their endless variety that distinguished individuals from one another. What the human species had in common, according to this definition, was its individuality, the fact that every person was different from every other. And it was precisely through a relationship of contrast that individuality was established. This notion of radically different individuals existed in tense relationship with the political idea of the abstract individual, which sought to articulate some more essential human commonality. Indeed it was the search for a common basis for political community that made the kind of difference articulated here intolerable.

For political theorists at the time of the French Revolution, the abstract individual expressed this essence of human commonality. Its rights were considered natural because (in the words of the Marquis de Condorcet) "they are derived from the nature of man," defined as "a sensitive being . . . capable of reasoning and of having moral ideas."[9] To conceive of all humans as the same in this regard required abstracting individuals from the differentiating social statuses attributed to birth, family, wealth, occupation, property ownership, and religion.[10] It also meant treating them as disembodied, apart from the distinguishing physical characteristics of physiognomy, skin color, and sex. This abstraction made it possible to posit a fundamental human sameness, a set of universal traits, and thus opened the way for thinking about political, social, and even economic equality. If humans were fundamentally the same, they could be figured as a single individual. The abstract individual was such a singular individual.[11]

But precisely because it was a singular type, and because it was described as possessing "a certain set of invariant psychological characteristics and tendencies,"[12] the abstract concept of the individual could also function to exclude those who were thought not to possess the requisite traits. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, sensationalist psychologists emphasized the physiological basis for cognition, and so raised the issue of difference.[13] When the body's organs were taken to be the source of one's impressions and experiences, then the skin in some cases, the generative organs in others, became markers of human ability. Psychologists used these organic differences to distinguish between those (white men) who exemplified the human individual through their reason and moral integrity and those (others—women, and initially blacks as well) whose so-called natural tendencies precluded their ability to live up to the individual prototype. Thus, while the medical doctor Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis argued that all humans had in common a visceral sensitivity to the sufferings of others and so the capacity for morality, he differentiated between the profound and desirable sensibility of men and the fleeting feelings of women. These differences followed from the differences in their internal organs and determined their social roles. Men were, by nature, fully moral (and thus the better representatives of the human); women were less so.[14] Here then was one of the useful, even necessary, contradictions in the concept of the abstract individual: articulated as the foundation of a system of universal inclusion (against the hierarchies and privileges of monarchical and aristocratic regimes), it could also be used as a standard of exclusion by defining as nonindividuals, or less than individuals, those who were different from the singular figure of the human.

When abstract individualism referred to a prototypical individual, it at once made a generalization about all humans and evoked a notion of individuality as unique. But to conceive of the uniqueness of an individual still required a relationship of difference. What was an individual, after all, if not a distinct unit? How distinguish its unitary nature, if not by bounding it, by setting it off from others? How else secure a sense of individuality except by a relation of contrast? To put it another way, individuality required the very difference that the idea of the prototypical human individual was meant to deny.

Addressed as it was to eliminating political privilege, the concept of the abstract individual both raised and disregarded questions about this process of establishing the boundaries of individuality. But to disregard it was not to resolve or erase it; the problem of difference remained. The abstract individual, a singular type with specified characteristics, did not allow either for the existence of varieties of individuals or for the role of an other in securing any individual's existence. Yet the notion of individuality also carried with it a sense of distinction and differentiation.

Some theorists of rights, among them Condorcet, argued that the usefulness of abstract individualism for defining *political* participation lay precisely in its deliberate disregard for difference: "It would be

difficult to prove that women are incapable of exercising the rights of citizenship. Why should individuals exposed to pregnancies and other passing indispositions be unable to exercise rights which no one has dreamed of withholding from persons who have the gout all winter or catch cold quickly?"[15] Social characteristics and relations of difference existed, of course, but they were not meant to be taken into account for purposes of determining formal political participation. Condorcet recognized that political equality was itself a paradoxical concept, necessarily ignoring the differences it must also recognize (in order to declare them irrelevant).

But Condorcet espoused a decidedly minoritarian position in the history of French politics. The more typical way of dealing with individuality and difference in politics explained difference as a function of gender, idealized sometimes in terms of a functional division of reproductive labor, sometimes as the natural and therefore unquestionable expression of heterosexual desire.[16] In this approach, the infinite variety of the self/other difference was reduced to a matter of sexual difference; maleness was equated with individuality, and femaleness with otherness in a fixed, hierarchical, and immobile opposition (masculinity was not seen as femininity's other). The political individual was then taken to be both universal and male; the female was not an individual, both because she was nonidentical with the human prototype and because she was the other who confirmed the (male) individual's individuality.[17]

A vignette from the official record of the National Convention in 1794 illustrates the way in which difference—for purposes of defining the individuality that conferred political citizenship—was equated with sexual difference. In 1794 the revolutionaries (seeking to defeat the British in the Caribbean) abolished slavery and conferred citizenship on former slaves. (Free men of color had been enfranchised in 1792.) As emancipation was proclaimed, the two deputies of color in the assembly walked to the tribune and there embraced and received a presidential kiss. Then the deputy Pierre-Joseph Cambon (also a member of the Committee on Public Safety) took the floor: "A citizeness [*citoyenne*] of colour who regularly attends the sittings of the Convention has just felt so keen a joy at seeing us give liberty to all her brethren that she has fainted. (Applause) I demand that this fact be mentioned

in the minutes, and that this citizeness be admitted to the sitting and receive at least this much recognition for her civic virtues." The woman was allowed to sit near the president for the rest of the session; as she took her place, brushing tears from her eyes, she was greeted with cheers and applause.[18] The woman's "civic virtue" consisted in her outpouring of gratitude to legislators, who had acted on her behalf by permitting the men of her race to represent her. It was no accident that Cambon seized on this moment of fraternal inclusion to make a black woman the sign of the entry of black men into the ranks of citizenship. The men's difference from women served to eradicate differences of skin color and race among men; the universality of the abstract individual was in this way and at this moment established as a common maleness.

As we shall see in the chapters that follow, the gendering of citizenship was a persistent theme in French political discourse. Rousseau offers an important example since his formulations were often employed by later French revolutionaries. It was men's consciousness of sexual difference, experienced as the desire to possess a beloved object, that distinguished them from "savages," he wrote. This desire was the basis not only for gentle love between man and woman, but for jealousy and discord—for politics—among men. Whereas men must pursue their desire, Rousseau held, women ought to contain or redirect theirs in the interest of social harmony.[19] Rousseau affords by no means the only example. More than a century later the sociologist Emile Durkheim, writing against what he considered the moral egoism of the Rousseauian individual, insisted that ties of friendship—of "solidarity"—had come to replace more primitive, calculated forms of human interchange. His model of friendship was "conjugal society" because it was based on an attraction of fundamental difference. If social relations depended on likeness, he argued, they would not work:

> When the union results from the resemblance of two images, it consists in an agglutination. The two representations become solidary because, being indistinct . . . they confound each other, and become no more than one . . . On the contrary, in the case of the division of labor, they are outside each other and are linked only because they are distinct. Neither the sentiments nor the social relations which derive from these sentiments are the same in the two cases.[20]

The kind of attraction for difference that Durkheim wanted to portray as "organic solidarity" was best exemplified, he thought, by heterosexuality, where there could be no problem of fundamental resemblance. "Precisely because man and woman are different, they seek each other passionately." Their attraction was based, moreover, on the fact that their differences "require each other for their mutual fruition."[21] This passionate attraction for difference made inconsequential (but did not disturb) legally sanctioned differentials of power. Women's "withdrawal from politics," which Durkheim took to be a sign of civilization, was part of the new system of the division of labor. To the extent that citizenship was still consonant with individuality, it was deemed a prerogative of men.

On the question of individuality, there could be no more stark contrast than the one offered by the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who was widely read in France during the Third Republic: "All women fall into the same category, whereas each man is an individual unto himself; the physiognomy of the former conforms to a generalized standard; that of the latter is in each case unique."[22]

The historical variations on these themes, discussed in the following chapters, are crucially important since they stem from specific and historically distinct epistemologies that changed the meanings of the term "individual." Originally defined in opposition to the social and legal privileges of feudalism, the concept of the individual was a way of declaring all men equal before the law in 1789. By the end of the nineteenth century, the individual was defined by some theorists not in opposition to the social or society, but as its product. Others posed the individual against the crowd, which had been created by mass democracy. Rationality, independence, and autonomy were seen by the critics of mass democracy as attributes of superior intelligence and education; they were neither the prerequisites for nor the products of citizenship. Still, in France until 1944 the common ground for individuality, as for citizenship, was masculinity.

There was, then, a persisting theme evident in attempts to reformulate ideas about individuality and citizenship: the universal individual who exercised the political rights of "man" was at once abstract and concrete; difference from a woman (whether a matter of desire or reproductive function) secured both his typicality *and* the boundaries of his individuality. Individuality was not only a masculine prerogative;

it was also racially defined. The superiority of white Western men to their "savage" counterparts lay in an individuality achieved and expressed through the social and affective divisions of labor formalized by the institution of monogamous marriage.

Where philosophers and politicians offered "sexual difference" as an explanation for the limits they placed on the universality of individual rights, feminism emerged to point up the inconsistencies. The word "lie" echoed from one end of the nineteenth century to the other as feminists denounced the Revolution and the First, Second, and Third Republics for betraying the universal principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity by refusing citizenship to women. Feminists not only pointed to inconsistency; they attempted to correct it by demonstrating that they, too, were individuals according to the standards of individuality of their day. The law had even recognized this, they pointed out, in various pieces of civil legislation. But they could not avoid (or resolve) the problem of their presumed sexual difference. Feminists argued in the same breath for the irrelevance and the relevance of their sex, for the identity of all individuals and the difference of women. They refused to be women in the terms their society dictated, and at the same time they spoke in the name of those women.[23] The ambiguities of the republican notion of the individual (its universal definition and masculine embodiment) were thus carried into and exposed by feminist arguments.

Indeed feminists' agency consisted exactly in this: they were women who had "only paradoxes to offer." The courage and inventiveness of individual feminists, the subversive power and historical significance of their collective voice, lay (still lie) in the disturbing spectacle presented by paradox. For the identification and display of inconsistency and ambiguity—of self-contradictoriness—within an orthodoxy that strenuously denies their existence is surely destabilizing and sometimes even transformative. Ideological/political systems such as French republicanism work by endorsing the notion that coherence is a requirement for social organization and then by presenting themselves as fulfilling the requirements for coherence. In order to do this they deny or repress internal contradiction, partiality, or incoherence.[24] Thus the production of "sexual difference" was a way of achieving the otherwise inconsistent

exclusion of women from the categories of individual and citizen. The first revolutionaries and later republicans had, after all, premised their government on the idea that all human individuals (whatever their differences) were equally (and naturally) endowed with rights. Feminists accepted the republican insistence on the need for coherence. Precisely because they shared the commitment to coherence, they suggested that the system was not meeting its own test. By defiantly denouncing as hypocritical and incoherent a republicanism that enunciated universalist principles and excluded women from exercising full political rights, but also by themselves embodying the difficulty of resolving the inconsistencies, feminists flagrantly revealed the repressed fault-lines of their ideological/political system, and so opened questions about the system's original design and about the need for rethinking it. That was (and is) the power and the danger of feminism, the reason it provokes both fear and scorn.[25]

Feminist strategies exemplified an almost uncanny ability to sniff out and exploit ambiguities in the foundational concepts of philosophy, politics, and common sense. This ability was, of course, not at all uncanny, but the result of being discursively positioned in and as contradiction. Feminists engaged with the foundational assumptions of their respective ages in a most disquieting way—not in their guise as moral or scientific certainties, but as ambiguous and contested attempts to impose order on human social organization. They made the link between these concepts and their quest for political rights by seizing on contrary implications in ordinary usage and making disagreements about meaning work to support their own cause. Thus, feminists refused to accept "nature" as an explanation for women's disenfranchisement when there was doubt even among scientists about how the natural field could be read: was its meaning transparent, or always subject to imperfect human interpretation? And in science, where explanation was at best inconclusive, why assume that gender was the key to all physical differences?

In the late eighteenth century Olympe de Gouges took her contemporaries' uncertainty about the human faculty of imagination as a license to think outside the constraints of revolutionary politics and to argue—in terms of Enlightenment debates about the relationship between reason and imagination—that she had the capacity (required of

citizens) to represent herself. In 1848 Jeanne Deroin found in the ambiguities of the Romantics' notion of the androgyne an argument for the complementarity and absolute autonomy of the sexes. Hubertine Auclert accepted the importance of "the social" as defined by Third Republic politicians and then made the case for women's rights in terms of the right of "the social" to be the subject rather than the object of government policy. Madeleine Pelletier embraced radical individualism at the turn of the century and took up its claim to transcend homogenizing categories of social representation. She included gender as one of the categories that denied the uniqueness of individuals and urged women to reject feminine representations in order to achieve equality. In none of these cases was the strategy entirely successful, not merely because it did not attain the vote, but also because it was not without its own internal inconsistencies. In each case, albeit in different ways, the need to invoke "women" produced "sexual difference," thus undermining the attempt to declare it irrelevant for political purposes.

As these examples indicate (and as the chapters that follow will elaborate in detail), feminists formulated their claims for rights in terms of very different epistemologies, and their arguments must be read that way—not as evidence of a transcendent or continuous Woman's consciousness or women's experience. Although the notion of a repeated pattern of paradox carries with it an aura of timelessness, the concepts feminists used were rooted in their times and can finally be understood only in their specificity. History accounts not only for the variety of positions one finds in feminist writing, but also for the different ways in which the social and individual identity of "woman" was conceived. Jeanne Deroin, drawing on romanticism and utopian socialism, wrote rapturously of a spiritually pure and loving mother who, like the Virgin Mary, bore within herself the redemption of the world. Hubertine Auclert, accepting the Third Republic's standards, aspired to the heights of scientific, secular rationalism. Madeleine Pelletier drew on new psychological teachings in the early twentieth century to refute the idea of natural sexual differences. She defined femininity as "psychological sex" and deemed it the cause of women's subordination. Emancipated women, she thought, were those who knew how to "virilize" themselves. The difference among these women lies not in what each emphasized

but, far more profoundly, in the very identity of each as a feminist and of the women whose rights she defended. The subject of feminism was not constant; the terms of her representation shifted, and in those shifts we find not only women's history, but also histories of philosophy, psychology, and politics.

The history of feminism can be understood as an interplay between a repetitious pattern of exclusion and a changing articulation of subjects. The terms of exclusion repeatedly produce "sexual difference" as a fixed, natural boundary between the political and the domestic, or the self-representing and the represented, or the autonomous and the dependent. But the terms of exclusion are also variable and contradictory, based in different epistemologies, and this variability and contradiction result in fundamentally different conceptions of the "women" whose rights are being claimed.

The repeated exclusion of women from politics provided a sense of commonality among feminists, even as their vision of who they were and what women should be differed. Indeed, the common experience of being excluded was sometimes mistaken for a shared vision of the meaning of being female. As a result histories of feminism, while they have attended to sharp disagreements on questions of strategy and tactics, have often neglected differences in the concepts "women" and "feminist," assuming a self-evident and unchanging meaning for those terms.

Following the lead of Denise Riley, I want to interrogate the terms "women" and "feminist" by looking closely at the different ways in which they have historically been used.[26] To do this, I have focused on four feminists who claimed political rights (specifically, the vote) for women in different revolutionary and/or republican contexts. It was in moments of revolution or constitutional transformation that the question of political rights was most open to discussion; and it was under republican governments that the extent and universality of the suffrage could be contested. Olympe de Gouges demanded during the French Revolution that women be made citizens on the same basis as men; Jeanne Deroin defied the Second Republic's constitution and ran for legislative office on the democratic-socialist ticket in 1849; Hubertine

Auclert was the first to call upon the Third Republic to live up to its promise by enfranchising women; and Madeleine Pelletier made the vote the cornerstone of a plan for the republican emancipation of women that also included abortion as an "absolute" right of control over one's body.[27]

None of these women were philosophers by training; their levels of education varied. All were political activists and writers who spoke in popular language and who improvised strategies (sometimes alone, sometimes in association with other feminists) to advance their claims for rights. What is of interest is how these women formulated their claims and in whose name, the ways in which they were constructed as feminist subjects, and the differences among them. Also of interest is the way in which universalist discourses, specifically the discourses of abstract individualism and of social duty and social right, enabled them to conceive of themselves as political agents even as those same discourses denied women political agency. And of greatest interest is the historical specificity of feminist agency, the incomparability of feminist philosophies, beneath the formal similarity of paradox.

Pursuing these topics requires the kind of close and detailed reading that focuses on individuals, however idiosyncratic. Precisely because these four women were neither typical—some held a decidedly minority position in the spectrum of feminist politics—nor unique—their views often overlapped and intersected with those of other feminists of their day—it seems to me that investigating them in depth—their ideas, their rhetoric and invective, their irony, and the outrageousness of their actions—can provide insight into the different political and philosophical issues historically involved in feminist claims for political rights.

Those seeking a biographical narrative with causal links between personal experience and individual action will not find them in this book. The personal life experiences of these women—their relationships to parents or teachers or lovers or children—do not provide a sufficient explanation for feminist politics. Biography tends to focus too narrowly on the circumstances of individuals, reducing the thoughts and actions of women to their personal life stories, neglecting the complex determinations of language (the social/cultural means by which subjects come into being). The biographical approach, moreover, fortifies the notion that agency is an expression of autonomous indi-

vidual will, rather than the effect of a historically defined process which forms subjects. The notion of agency as an expression of individual will is not a description of human nature (although it is often offered as one), but a historically specific conception, tied, in fact, to many of the same ideas that denied women individuality, autonomy, and political rights. Instead of assuming that agency follows from an innate human will, I want to understand feminism in terms of the discursive processes—the epistemologies, institutions, and practices—that produce political subjects, that make agency (in this case the agency of feminists) possible even when it is forbidden or denied.[28]

I do not think of these women as exemplary heroines. Instead I think of them as sites—historical locations or markers—where crucial political and cultural contests are enacted and can be examined in some detail. To figure a person—in this case, a woman—as a place or location is not to deny her humanity; it is rather to recognize the many factors that constitute her agency, the complex and multiple ways in which she is constructed as a historical actor.

One argument of this book is that feminist agency is paradoxical in its expression. It is constituted by universalist discourses of individualism (with their theories of rights and citizenship) that evoke "sexual difference" to naturalize the exclusion of women. A second argument is that feminist agency has a history; it is neither a fixed set of behaviors nor an essential attribute of women; rather it is an effect of ambiguities, inconsistencies, contradictions within particular epistemologies. In order to make these arguments, I must write the history of feminism by reading for the historically specific paradoxes that feminist subjects embody, enact, and expose.

Reading for paradox requires a different kind of reading than historians are accustomed to. We are used to reading for the clash of opposing positions (feminists versus liberal politicians, for example), but not for the internal tensions and incompatibilities (within feminism, within liberal individualism, within concepts such as liberty or separate spheres or the individual) of which these clashes are both symptom and cause. Reading in this technically deconstructive way does not work comfortably with linear narrative or teleology; it tends to undercut

those stories that establish the truth or inevitability of certain views of the world by eliminating accounts of conflict and power within them.

The result, however, is well worth the effort. For to ignore the unsettledness that paradox, contradiction, and ambiguity imply is to lose sight of the subversive potential of feminism and the agency of feminists. It is precisely because feminism embodies paradox that it has been trivialized or consigned to marginality by those seeking to protect the foundations of whatever status quo they represent.[29] Such protection involves denying contradiction by rendering it invisible and by displacing the source of the problem onto those who would point it out. Feminist paradoxes have thus usually been interpreted as the products of their own confusions, and this interpretation has then become the justification for their continued exclusion. Repeatedly, their calls for a coherent implementation of the principle of universal equality drew the reply that feminists were unreasonable and themselves dangerously incoherent (the charge that they were "male females" or "female males"—an impossible combination—regularly expressed the sense of incoherence as abnormality). Olympe de Gouges was guillotined by the Jacobins for her excesses of imagination; Jeanne Deroin was ridiculed for wanting to turn the world upside down. Hubertine Auclert was likened to the Medusa and deemed to be "afflicted with madness or hysteria; an illness which makes her look on men as her equals," the police reported in 1880.[30] Madeleine Pelletier was considered a source of moral disorganization by pro-natalists in the 1920s, and was confined to a mental asylum at the end of her life.

The paradoxes feminists offered were not wholly of their own making, and we do the history of feminism a disservice to ignore that fact. By writing the history of feminism as if it were simply a matter of choosing the right strategy—equality or difference—we imply that one or another of these options was actually available, that closure or resolution was and is ultimately attainable. But the history of feminism is not the history of available options or of the unconstrained choice of a winning plan. It is rather the history of women (and some men) grappling repeatedly with the radical difficulty of resolving the dilemmas they confronted (however successful they were in achieving specific reforms).

A history of feminism that takes these problems as its subject, that

attends to the sources and operations of paradox, not only establishes the historical significance of feminism; it also disputes those histories of democracy—whether in France or elsewhere—that attribute earlier exclusions to temporary glitches in a perfectible, ever-expansive pluralist system and that take the extension of the vote, outside its necessarily relativizing historical contexts, as a consistent indicator of the absence of inequality in a society. The history of feminism offered in the following chapters is enacted as a critique of this conventional approach to history and of the ideology it supports. I do not deny that feminism—at least when it claimed rights for women—was produced by the discourse of liberal individualism nor that it depended on liberalism for its existence; there was (is still) no alternative. My point is to emphasize the fundamentally unresolvable, though changing, nature of an enduring conflictual relationship. Feminism was not a sign of the benign and progressive operations of liberal individualism, but rather a symptom of its constitutive contradictions. These contradictions may have been displaced onto other arenas by reforms such as the vote, but they did not disappear, and for that reason neither did feminism.

Feminism has been historically a complex critical practice; its history should be no less so. Indeed, it is by engaging in such critical practice that the history of feminism becomes part of the project it writes about; it is itself feminist history.

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of 1789, the architects of the French Revolution were aware of the danger of such a universalistic pronouncement: it was certain to conflict with the practical details of any constitution that was finally elaborated. Honoré Gabriel Mirabeau and Pierre Victor Malouet, both former nobles, both deputies of the Third Estate, said as much to the National Assembly. They cautioned against telling people about their rights before it had been decided what exactly these rights were, how they were to be implemented, and for whom.[1] But the concerns of the two deputies were overruled by the majority, who felt that a declaration of principle would teach the nation to love the liberty that was theirs by right and would serve to mobilize urgently needed support for the replacement of the Old Regime by a government based on the sovereignty of the people and "the natural order of things." The Declaration succeeded in rallying patriots to the Revolution. But, just as Mirabeau and Malouet predicted, it also made possible the discontent of those (women, slaves, and free men of color among them) who were excluded from citizenship by the terms of the constitution promulgated two years later.

The revolutionaries' awareness of an inherent conflict between principle and practice, between the rights of individuals abstracted from all social contexts and the need for a political policy that took social differences into account, provides an appropriate beginning for the

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The Uses of Imagination: Olympe de Gouges in the French Revolution

Even as they announced the principles of their revolution in a ringing Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in the autumn of 1789, the architects of the French Revolution were aware of the danger of such a universalistic pronouncement: it was certain to conflict with the practical details of any constitution that was finally elaborated. Honoré Gabriel Mirabeau and Pierre Victor Malouet, both former nobles, both deputies of the Third Estate, said as much to the National Assembly. They cautioned against telling people about their rights before it had been decided what exactly these rights were, how they were to be implemented, and for whom.[1] But the concerns of the two deputies were overruled by the majority, who felt that a declaration of principle would teach the nation to love the liberty that was theirs by right and would serve to mobilize urgently needed support for the replacement of the Old Regime by a government based on the sovereignty of the people and "the natural order of things." The Declaration succeeded in rallying patriots to the Revolution. But, just as Mirabeau and Malouet predicted, it also made possible the discontent of those (women, slaves, and free men of color among them) who were excluded from citizenship by the terms of the constitution promulgated two years later.

The revolutionaries' awareness of an inherent conflict between principle and practice, between the rights of individuals abstracted from all social contexts and the need for a political policy that took social differences into account, provides an appropriate beginning for the

history of feminism in France. But there is an additional complication to this story. The Revolution quickly granted women civil rights, especially in the realm of marriage. In 1791 marriage was defined as a civil contract, and in 1792 divorce was made a legal right of both partners. Male legislators thus passed laws with a contradictory effect on women, rendering them both objects of legislative concern and subjects with civil rights. Women's ambiguous status as objects and subjects, their recognition as civil agents and their exclusion from politics, engendered feminism.[2]

As the constitution was being debated in 1791, Olympe de Gouges published her *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen,* a document which insisted both that women, by nature, had all the rights men did (that they too were individuals) and that their specific needs as women made the exercise of those rights all the more urgent. De Gouges's *Declaration* was not the first or the only feminist statement in the Revolution, but it has for good reason become the exemplary one for feminists and historians alike.[3] It is arguably the most comprehensive call for women's rights in this period; it takes the Revolution's universalism at its word; and it exposes the incompleteness of that universalism in its own paradoxical attempts to represent women as abstract individuals by calling attention to the differences they embody.

De Gouges's challenge—to represent women as citizens—engaged with a troubling and far-reaching discussion among revolutionaries about the political and philosophical meanings of representation. Did the elected representatives of the people constitute the nation or only an imperfect substitute for it? What was the relationship between the general will and those who presumed to express it? If citizenship was an attribute of abstract individuals, could it also represent people in their concrete existences; did the citizen, in fact, represent a man, or did the conferral of citizenship create the possibility of his being as a political individual? (If the latter, then citizenship was clearly the key to representation for women.) All these questions involved not only the wisdom and practicality of delegating authority for purposes of governing, but also the nature of the relationship between sign and referent. To what real entities, after all, could the patently abstract

notions of "nation" or "people" or "rights-bearing individual" or "citizen" or "general will" actually refer?

The revolutionaries debated these questions endlessly. For some, the National Assembly was the nation; for others, it merely represented the nation. For some, elected representatives were delegates of the people; for others, they *were* the sovereign people. For some, the law was the general will; for others, it was an expression or reflection of that will; and so on. Epistemological problems *were* political problems. And the effort to settle them foundered on their ultimate unresolvability; whether representation accurately reflected a prior reality or created the very possibility of imagining such a reality could finally not be known, but the stakes in knowing were nonetheless high.[4]

One of de Gouges's strategies—a strategy characteristic of feminism—was to push the ambiguity of representation to its limit by toying with the relationship between sign and referent, using each interchangeably to establish reality. She did this not only in her many writings (in addition to the *Declaration* there is a rich lode of plays, pamphlets, and brochures) but in the very construction of her self. Indeed her efforts in this area have made the task of conventional biography difficult, as is evident in the struggle of one of her early biographers to sort out truth from fiction. Léopold Lacour spent many pages of his 1900 work trying to establish the facts of de Gouges's life: the accurate date of her birth in the town of Montauban (it is generally taken as 1748, though she changed it to appear younger as she grew older); all the sources of the name she took (she was born Marie Gouzes and changed her name after she was widowed in 1764); whether she left her husband, Louis Aubry, to go to Paris before or after his death; the exact occupation of this husband to whom she was very briefly married at age sixteen (cook? caterer? supplier of food for the intendant—provincial administrator—of Montauban?); the number of her children (there is a record of only one son, Pierre Aubry, but Lacour takes de Gouges's reference after she was arrested in 1793 to "two earlier pregnancies" to suggest the possibility of another living child); the names and number of her lovers (she lived as a courtesan in Paris in the years before the Revolution); and the identity of her father (the butcher Gouzes was listed in the birth records, but there were repeated rumors—which she denied—that she was the bastard child of Louis

XV, as well as stories—which she seems to have originated—that she was the illegitimate daughter of the Marquis le Franc de Pompignan).[5]

Lacour's painstaking speculations on these matters yield no conclusive proof, and they overlook the historical importance of the fact that de Gouges sought to control the representation of her self. By rejecting the names of her father(s) and her husband, she in effect declared her autonomy, her refusal of the secondary status that patriarchal law assigned to women. No name other than the one she had given herself could designate (and define) her existence. She was unique; her self originated with herself. There was no preexisting subject, no malleable matter on which to stamp an impression; rather, through representation, de Gouges produced a self that had no antecedent to her enactment of it. She was thus, in the terms of her epoch, an active citizen, equivalent to, even identical with, the "new man" of the Revolution. Moreover, whatever their accuracy, her attributions of familial origins worked to produce the figure she wanted to be. By suggesting that Le Franc de Pompignan was her father she established a lineage for her elevated social aspirations and (since the Marquis had won a reputation as a man of letters) for her literary activities as a playwright and, from 1788 on, a political pamphleteer. (The final report on her trial and execution in 1793 lists de Gouges as "une femme de lettres," testimony to her success in controlling at least some of the terms of her self-definition.)[6] Lacour's struggle to establish the truth about Olympe de Gouges betrays a belief in the transparent relationship between a name and a person, a sign and its referent—a belief that she, along with philosophers of her own epoch, questioned. While the nature of this relationship plagued Rousseau and the revolutionaries influenced by him, de Gouges was willing to accept and even exploit his recognition that all signs might be arbitrary, particularly, perhaps, the sign of the self.[7]

De Gouges understood her ability to represent her self as an attribute of her imagination. It was by means of imagination that she portrayed herself as the possessor of the rights of "Man and Citizen" and explained her interventions in politics at a time when the political rights of women were highly contested. Sometimes she appealed to imagination directly, as when she explained the audacity of her attempt to

describe the origins of human society—a subject about which so many great minds had already ventured opinions—as a dream. Dreams and imagination were often synonymous for de Gouges and her contemporaries, or, if not synonymous, closely related. "I was, perhaps, lost in my dreams . . ."[8] In this she claimed she was no different from Rousseau or Voltaire, who had also imagined their accounts and whose genius did not protect them from criticism or error. "I want, ignorant as I am, to try to lose myself like the others."[9] At other times de Gouges simply acted imaginatively in the terms of her time, taking on the role to which she aspired, improbably recombining elements of her world, inserting herself into stories from which she might otherwise have been excluded. She was a second Cassandra, a wise man, Rousseau's imitator and his better, a lawyer defending the king at his trial. She compared herself to Homer and Joan of Arc.[10] In a pamphlet denouncing the crimes of Robespierre she signed herself with the anagram Polyme, described as "an amphibious animal." "I am a unique animal; I am neither man nor woman. I have all the courage of the one and, sometimes, the weaknesses of the other."[11] She was neither a woman nor a man, but also both a woman and a man. "I am a woman and I have served my country as a great man."[12] The achievement of citizenship was, in her terms, the result of her creative imagination.

For a woman to claim the powers of creative imagination at the end of the eighteenth century was to posit something that was at once plausible and inconceivable in the terms of existing debates. For imagination was an increasingly troubling concept as philosophers grappled with, but did not resolve, its ambiguities. In the dictionaries of the early eighteenth century, imagination referred primarily to the facility of the mind to represent things external to itself in the form of images or thoughts; secondary definitions involved inventiveness (the ability of the mind to make things up), but often this was taken as a degenerate form of reflexive imagination (as in the case of the hypochondriac, the "malade imaginaire," "the man whose imagination is so seriously compromised that he believes himself sick even though he is well").[13] It was in this sense that dreams were connected to imagination: "All objects of dreams are clearly tricks of the imagination," asserted an article in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*.[14] As the century wore on, the question of fantasy

and invention seems to have gained ascendancy and, with it, what one dictionary called the "nobler and more precise" definition, the ability of the mind to produce poetry and art, "to create by imitation."[15]

At the same time, as inventiveness and creativity were increasingly stressed, their relation to both reason and reality came into question. "The real world has its limits," Rousseau wrote in *Emile;* "the imaginary world is infinite. Unable to enlarge the one, let us restrict the other, for it is from the difference between the two alone that are born all the pains which make us truly unhappy."[16] He might have added that the difference between the two established the meaning of each term: without something designated as fiction to set its limits, the boundaries of the real were not always immediately apparent; without the imagination, how could the operations of reason be distinguished? In pursuit of impossible answers to this vexing question, Enlightenment philosophers came up with sharp (but necessarily ambivalent) distinctions.

Writing in the *Encyclopédie,* Voltaire attempted to reconcile these two aspects of imagination by positing two kinds: the passive and the active. The passive imagination was mimetic, simply mirroring to the mind things outside it. Imposed from the outside, these images possessed and inhabited an individual. As with a dream one had while sleeping, there was no control to be exercised over them. The passive imagination took one over, as did passion; it was associated with error and led to subjugation. Voltaire offered the example of uneducated people whose passive imagination became the instrument of their domination by others.[17] His colleague Diderot spoke of imagination in terms of imitation and equated such passivity with women. "Think of women," he wrote in *Le paradoxe sur le comédien.* "They are miles beyond us in sensibility; there is no sort of comparison between their passion and ours. But as much as we are below them in action, so much are they below us in imitation." Commenting on this passage, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe writes, "This does not mean that women do not imitate . . . But if they imitate . . . it happens only in passion and passivity, in the state of being possessed or being inhabited. Consequently, only when they are *subject.*"[18] Imagination imprints itself on an unresisting woman: she has no role in shaping it; rather she is (in Lacoue-Labarthe's words) "the matrix or the malleable matter on which the imprint is stamped." When they have genius, Diderot commented in

his essay *Sur les femmes,* "I think the imprint is more original on them than on us."[19] Originality here means likeness to the original as imagined by others; it is the imprint that displays originality, not the medium on which it is stamped. Absent is the autonomy of self-creation exhibited by the possessor of an active imagination.[20]

The active imagination, in contrast, assumed a sovereign subject. Voltaire described it as the source of the triumphs of creative genius in poetry, mathematics, and scientific invention. The active imagination involved considered thought, the recombining of existing images and ideas "because," as the philosopher pointed out, "it is not given to man to create ideas himself; he can only modify them."[21] But the modification meant also improvement: the surpassing of what was given in nature by the art of man. And, through this production that was not mere reproduction, man became the source of his own articulation.[22]

The most difficult ambiguity for Voltaire lay not in the passive/active contrast, but in the active imagination itself. At its best, the active imagination could be directed to useful and enlightening ends. But there was always the danger of excess, for although the imaginative faculty might be susceptible to reason's regulation it was not inherently reasonable. In fact, to the extent that imagination (of whatever kind) involved imitation or re-presentation, what Lacoue-Labarthe calls a "logic of semblance," it was "articulated around the division between appearance and reality, presence and absence, the same and the other, or identity and difference . . . This is the division that grounds (and that constantly unsteadies) mimesis. At whatever level one takes it . . . the rule is always the same: the more it resembles, the more it differs. The same, in its sameness is the other itself, which in turn cannot be called 'itself,' and so on infinitely."[23] An active imagination became active precisely through a positive form of alienation, in which one literally created oneself (there being no prior subject on which to act). At the same time, there lurked the possibility of another kind of alienation: what could operate successfully as art might also lead, destructively, to madness. Writers, for example, might merge with the characters they so skillfully fashioned, and such identification, Voltaire warned, "can degenerate into madness." This kind of imagining took one literally beyond oneself, into an ecstatic or exalted state that constituted a misidentification, a confusion of self and other. There were,

moreover, two aspects to this confusion. The imitator lost a proper sense of self and failed to appreciate the distinctive features that made the other different from him or her self; both the imitator and the object of imitation were thus called into question by the blurring of the boundaries of difference. Thus Rousseau warned in the preface to *La Nouvelle Héloïse:* "Wanting to be what we are not, we come to believe ourselves something other than what we are, and this is how we become mad."[24]

Voltaire, seeing the danger of excess implicit in the active imagination, expressed it in terms of the loss of reason's power to regulate—the identifying mark of the self.[25] While fiction and poetry were acceptable products of the creative mind, the "fantastic" imaginings of fairy tales went too far. "Always bereft of order and good sense, they cannot be esteemed; one reads them from weakness, and one condemns them by reason."[26] From a different perspective Condillac shared this concern about the dangers posed to understanding by the active imagination: it had the power to recombine sensory impressions in a manner "contrary to truth."[27]

The correction to the potential dangers of active imagination lay in the ever-vigilant, regulatory powers of reason. The line between fiction and reality, error and truth, madness and sanity, disorder and order needed constant policing by internal mechanisms of self-government. Indeed, the active imagination was a characteristic only of self-regulating, self-governing individuals; and they often became the external agents of regulation for those who could not control themselves. The entry for "songe" (dream) in the *Encyclopédie* seems to carry this double implication of external and internal regulation: "The waking imagination is a policed republic, where the voice of the magistrate restores everything to order; the imagination of dreams is the same republic in a state of anarchy, where the passions make frequent assaults against the authority of the legislator even while his law is in force."[28]

The voice of reason is the voice of the (male) magistrate, the voice of the Law whose prohibitions regulate waking imagination. Order—both political and personal, the metaphor suggests—depends on internalization of this law. The anarchy of dreams is figured as an attack by passion and desire on "the authority of the legislator" (a male figure,

to be sure). The difference between day and night is the difference between order and chaos, reason and passion, discipline and desire, active and passive. Waking dreams are coherent, the author suggests, unlike the dreams of sleep, in which "all is unravelled, without order, without truth."[29] As long as subversive dreams are confined to sleep they are only potentially disruptive; their existence is nonetheless troubling. The difference, for Diderot, was also the difference between men and women. In his essay *Sur les femmes,* Diderot described the phantoms, the delirium, the "extraordinary ideas" produced in women by the uterus, "the organ specific to her sex," an organ susceptible to "terrible spasms." He went on to describe cases of what seemed incurable hysteria, cured nonetheless by the intervention of doctors or magistrates. For "this fiery imagination, this spirit that seemed irrepressible, one word sufficed to beat it down."[30] "One word," the word of the Law, laid these eruptions of fevered imagination to rest.

Still, for Voltaire the dilemma persisted, evidence for us of the futility of trying to fix the necessarily unstable logic of imagination; the source of creativity and the autonomous self, it was ever prone to excess and to alienation. For him the distinction between men and women offered by the Abbé Féraud ("an exalted imagination leads men to heroism and precipitates women into terrible disorders")[31] did not offer sufficient reassurance. The line between dreams and waking thoughts was difficult to establish, he wrote, because apparently coherent ideas could appear in dreams. But then were they to be trusted? And "if it is incontestable that coherent ideas form in us, despite ourselves, during sleep, what assurance do we have that they are not produced the same way while we are awake?"[32]

Rousseau's conception of imagination added yet another dimension to these discussions by explicitly raising the question of desire in terms of the self/other, male/female relationship. For Rousseau imagination was both a consoling and perverse faculty. It could lead to the pleasurable abandon of reverie, when a man was transported beyond himself, without diversions or obstacles.[33] In this state he was somehow closer to nature, free of the restraining discipline imposed by directed thought, open to sensations otherwise unknown to the reasonable mind. But this romantic conception was checked by a sense of danger. Imagination was a projection of desire and, as such, both a cause and

a product of civilization. While men in nature acted only to satisfy physical wants and formed no permanent emotional attachments, he wrote in the Second Discourse *(On the Origin of Inequality)*, with society came the human faculties of memory, imagination, egoism, and reason. "The imagination, which causes such ravages among us, never speaks to the heart of savages." As men began to live in closer proximity, imagination not only expressed desire, but fixed it on a single object: "[Men] acquired imperceptibly ideas of beauty and merit, which soon gave rise to feelings of preference." From this followed the twin passions of love ("a tender and pleasant feeling") and jealousy ("impetuous fury"). Without imagination there would be no love, no commerce, no creativity, but also no competition, no murderous passion, no war. Imagination was at once the foundation of social organization and politics and the seed of their destruction.[34]

In Rousseau's conception, imagination and desire were one. Man's imagination, he warned in *Emile*, "scandalizes the eye in revealing to it what it sees not only as naked but as something that ought to be clothed. There is no garment so modest that a glance inflamed by imagination does not penetrate with its desires."[35] Women, too, were driven by desire; indeed it was their desire that stimulated men's. For Rousseau the way finally to manage, if not to eliminate, the dangers of erotic excess in both sexes was to restrain it in women. Thus Sophie's education aims at making her a modest, selfless creature whose only goal is to serve her husband; her job is to confirm Emile in his vision of himself, not to seek through him a self of her own. The key to her education lies in the control if not the repression of her imagination.

Or perhaps it is better to say that the point of her training is to serve as the screen upon which Emile can project his imagination. In this sense, she exercises only a passive imagination in eighteenth-century terms, one that bears the imprint of what others offer it rather than producing images of its own. Sophie is the object of Emile's imagination, not the subject of her own. To the extent that imagination expresses desire, it confirms (really creates) a self through its quest for an other; the restriction of imagination to the passive reflection of another's desire then denies (women) the possibility of articulating an independent sense of self. Rousseau's solution acknowledged its own socially contrived nature and hence was open to criticism and revision.

One could grant the connection between desire and imagination abstractly, without making it an exclusively male activity. Taking advantage of the ambiguities, not only in Rousseau but in all these attempts to address the issue of imagination, was exactly what Olympe de Gouges did.

The ambiguity of imagination made it both appealing and risky as a way of justifying one's behavior. On the one hand, Olympe de Gouges claimed imagination to align herself with great creative minds. Her strongest identification was, in fact, with Rousseau, whom she described as her "spiritual father."[36] It also gave her the license (when she ignored Diderot's insistence that women's imagination was only of the passive sort and took literally the ungendered discussions of Voltaire) to demonstrate her abilities, to challenge the limits placed on women by a society increasingly unwilling to appreciate the diversity of their talents. If by exercising active imagination one became autonomous and self-governing, de Gouges would construct herself accordingly. She would win recognition of her capacity for self-representation (and hence of her right to political representation) on the strength of her imagination. On the other hand, the appeal to imagination could be seen as transgressive or, worse, mad. Diderot, after all, ruled out the possibility that women could exercise active imagination; their efforts resulted only in inauthenticity, in the imitation of something they were not. Such imitation constituted a misrepresentation, a betrayal of both referent and sign, as when de Gouges declared that she had made herself a man for the country.[37]

The danger of this kind of misidentification lay in its blurring of the lines of sexual difference, of those boundaries of nature the revolutionaries deemed increasingly important for social organization. If, by the exercise of creative imagination, women could convincingly enact men's characteristics, social roles, or both, then how was one to distinguish between the real or natural and its imitation, how justify the restriction of citizenship to men? The only way was to establish some authority endowed with the ability to recognize and enforce the distinctions that were said to constitute sexual difference. But, as the Jacobins' reign of terror and their punishment of de Gouges demonstrated, rigid enforcement of such distinctions belied the transparency of the differences between public and private, virtue and treason, male and female. For

what was natural about woman's passivity, after all, if the only way to prevent her from exercising an active imagination was to declare her mad and an outlaw and put her to death? Feminists lived and died by exposing such paradox.

Long before the tumultuous days of revolution, Olympe de Gouges was known in Parisian literary circles for her plays, some of which were performed by the Comédie-Française. A flamboyant and outspoken critic of the machinations of the world of the theater, she often attributed her lack of greater success to prejudices held by the *comédiens* against women playwrights. De Gouges rejected (and probably also exemplified) Rousseau's objections to theatrical representation as an artifice associated with the behavior of women. She insisted that the theater was a place where moral teachings and aesthetic pleasure could be combined.[38] In this she continued a tradition of women's criticism of established theatrical productions associated with *Le journal des dames* and its editors, especially Louis-Sébastien Mercier (who helped her publish many of her plays and pamphlets).[39] Many of her plays took up current political themes: one, *Zamore et Mizrah, ou l'esclavage des nègres* (which demonstrates the shared humanity of blacks and whites), was closed after a few performances by the authorities in Paris in 1789 to satisfy an organization of slaveholders who feared it would encourage rebellion in the colonies.[40] In an early suggestion to the National Assembly, she called for the creation of a second national theater, this one for women. She assured those who doubted its potential for success that women had the talent to produce the many plays required to maintain a regular audience. "It is not up to me to reply on behalf of all my sex, but if I am to be the basis for judgment, I can offer thirty plays for consideration."[41]

In 1788 she entered politics with a pamphlet, *Lettre au Peuple, ou projet d'une caisse patriotique,* proposing that the Estates General (which had been summoned but had not yet met) could solve the financial crisis of the kingdom by establishing a patriotic fund consisting of voluntary contributions from all citizens. De Gouges said that she wrote as "a member of the Public"[42] to this same Public, that body

of literate opinion which had emerged during the eighteenth century as an institutional counter to absolute royal authority.[43]

There was nothing unusual about identifying herself as a member of the Public. During the Old Regime, women were very much a part of the opposition to absolutism, and their activity took more and less overtly political forms. The salons, run by elite women, sponsored the discussions that contributed to what became a critical and dissenting "public opinion." This Public included women, but only those of wealth, education, and social grace.[44] De Gouges was not a *salonnière,* and she did not participate in these polite, learned centers of sociability, although they provided one arena for a public role for women. Rather, she was associated with the more activist and reformist circles of journalists whose newspapers appealed to a wider and more disaffected constituency. Nina Gelbart sees this oppositional journalism—exemplified by *Le journal des dames* in its twenty-year history (1759–1778)—as the well-spring not only for de Gouges's demands that women participate in politics, but also for much of the republican feminism of the Revolution.[45]

As she appealed to her membership in the Public, de Gouges was nonetheless conscious of the limited credibility women had to speak about political matters. Their position was, in the later years of the Old Regime and in the early years of the Revolution, at best a matter for debate.[46] De Gouges argued persistently for full emancipation, against those who refused it and those who preferred to delay consideration. "This sex, too weak and too long oppressed, is ready to throw off the yoke of a shameful slavery." And she added, "I have placed myself at its head."[47] She reminded her readers that women were not taken seriously enough, even though, as her own wise suggestions demonstrated, they could be the source of clever and praiseworthy political ideas. Her writing was meant to dispute directly and by contrary example the notion that women were too vague and flighty for the serious business of government. It was true, she acknowledged, that some women were excessively devoted to "luxe," but even beautiful women would reduce the number of their purchases once the patriotic fund opened, "because beauty does not exclude reason and love of country."[48] Here she drew on ideas associated most in this period with

the Girondin faction of republicans and especially with Condorcet, who wrote, "the rights of men result simply from the fact that they are sentient beings, capable of acquiring moral ideas and of reasoning concerning these ideas. Women, having these same qualities, must necessarily possess equal rights."[49] Functional and biological differences between the sexes were irrelevant, he argued, for they did not constitute "a natural difference between men and women which may legitimately serve as a foundation for the deprivation of a right."[50] For Condorcet, politics was an activity engaged in by people with varying identities; one became political, but politics did not define the whole person (man or woman). The political person was, in this sense, an abstract individual.

Condorcet's argument was itself located in what Keith Baker calls "a rationalist discourse of the social," originating with the physiocrats, and "grounded on notions of the rights of man, the division of labor, and the apolitical rule of reason."[51] But the case for the abstract individual contained a paradox: even a fully self-sufficient individual existed as such only in the eyes of an other. In the revolutionaries' rhetoric, the sexual division of labor solved the problem by ruling women out of the public sphere and denying to them the individuality required of citizens. But gender, of course, denied the abstractness (and the self-sufficiency) of the abstract individual.

When de Gouges argued for women's inclusion in politics on the grounds of their individuality, she ran up against the self/other problem. In the political discourse of her time, the independent individual was being constituted as the antithesis of the dependent female. Condorcet's notion of the abstract individual did not provide a full enough answer for de Gouges.[52] How in the end would de Gouges secure the individuality of woman? Was symmetry possible in the self/other, man/woman opposition, or would the equality of women somehow deprive men of the individuality conferred by an other by making everyone the same? Could others simply be other selves (male or female), with gender making no difference, or would the absence of gender confuse the boundaries in a self-regarding narcissism? These were the nagging questions that Condorcet's call for an equality based on shared human reason did not address. His writing nonetheless fueled de Gouges's arguments and her actions.

De Gouges crafted an identity as a member of the Public from available ideas about women, reason, and public opinion (all of which were matters of controversy). In the heated atmosphere of the Revolution, with many definitions of appropriate behavior open to reinterpretation, she imagined herself—and became—a political figure of some visibility. She did this not by reproducing the role of politically active men, but by appropriating political action for women. For every designation of herself as "a man of state," for every invocation of her "beneficent genius," there is a reference to her femininity.[53] "It is a woman who dares to show herself so strong and courageous for her King and her country."[54] "Oh people, unhappy citizens, listen to the voice of a just and feeling woman."[55] One of her pamphlets was titled *Le cri d'un sage: Par une femme.* When she put herself forward to defend Louis XVI during his trial she suggested both that sex ought not to be a consideration ("leave aside my sex") and that it should be ("Heroism and generosity are also women's portion, and the Revolution offers more than one example of it").[56] The point was not to establish women's likeness to men in order to qualify for citizenship, but to refute the prevailing equation of active citizenship with masculinity, to make sexual difference irrelevant for politics *and,* at the same time, to associate women—explicitly as women—with the notion of the "active" subject. But when the active citizen was already defined as a male individual, how could she make the case for women?

The apparent contradiction—between the irrelevance and relevance of sexual difference, between equality and difference—was at the heart of the feminist project of making women political subjects. The attempt to achieve this project involved an act of self-creation, in which a woman defining herself as a woman enacted the public/political role usually performed by men. "She made herself a man for the country."[57] But this led de Gouges, inevitably, to the paradoxical "logic of semblance." To the extent that her imitation was successful, it pointed up the difference she sought to overcome, a difference she constantly remarked on with a kind of wonder and joy (look, her references to herself proclaim, here is a woman making herself a Man!). To the extent that the difference of Woman then evoked the active/passive distinction, the resemblance she had achieved established not autonomy, but its antithesis. De Gouges assumed the role reserved for men instrumen-

tally, in order to make it available to women. This enactment challenged received understandings of feminine and masculine qualities by exposing the necessarily contradictory nature of the exclusive association of "Man" and active "Citizen," but it also could be read (as it was in 1793) as inauthentic because it was a misidentification, and thus as confirmation of the grounds for exclusion.

For de Gouges the active imagination led to, literally produced, active citizenship. Indeed, in her use of the one to attain the other, de Gouges reveals something of the connection between them. In both terms, "active" connotes independence and productivity, the workings of reason in the exercise of individual initiative. Those who had an active imagination, in Voltaire's definition of it, were self-governing. They had the ability to produce the ideas, images, and, by extension, institutions and laws that ordered and changed societies. Theirs was the work of art and science, but also of law and politics. Thus the Abbé de Sieyès described active citizens in 1789 as those with sufficient education and reason to participate in the creative work of the nation.[58] Only autonomous, self-creating men were qualified, he argued, to represent themselves in the exercise of the vote. (This representation was reliable because sign and referent were one.) De Gouges's insistence on the imaginative basis for her own thought and action was meant to establish her autonomy, her ability to produce an authentic self (not a copy of anything else)—to be what she claimed to be—and so her eligibility for the franchise.

By taking the stance of an active citizen, de Gouges challenged the Revolution's continuing definition of women as passive citizens, expanding a debate that focused almost entirely on men's rights, to include those of women. The distinction between active and passive citizens rested on contrasting theories of natural rights that were developed long before 1789. Those who enjoyed active rights were considered individual agents, capable of making moral choices, exercising liberty, and speaking on their own behalf (literally, representing themselves). It was they whose common interest as propertyholders enabled them to realize the social interest—the basis on which a unified nation could rest. Those who enjoyed passive rights were, in a functional division of labor, protected or taken care of by others; they had "the right to be given or allowed something by someone else."[59] (This

definition echoes Diderot's equation of women and passivity: they were taken over, inhabited by passion, molded by the impressions of others.)

Historians of natural rights theories usually describe active and passive rights as antithetical systems of law that cannot prevail at the same time. But this does not reckon with the ingenuity of the French revolutionaries, who, in their first effort at constitution-making in 1791, reconciled their fear of democracy and their commitment to liberty by establishing two categories of citizen—the active and the passive. Nor does it take account of how gender operates within the universal languages of political theory.

In the Assembly's debate on the constitution of 1791, the minority position (one de Gouges supported) was articulated by deputy Camille Desmoulins: "The active citizens," he told his colleagues, "are those who took the Bastille."[60] The majority that prevailed, however, refused the notion that political action established citizenship and defined instead two categories of citizenship. Active citizens were men over twenty-five who were independent (they could not be domestic servants) and who possessed measurable wealth (they had to pay a direct tax equivalent to three days of labor). The prerequisite was property in the forms of land, money, and the self. After the fall of the monarchy in 1792, a more inclusive interpretation of citizenship prevailed: all men over twenty-one and self-supporting were granted the vote, and women were explicitly denied it. But the active/passive distinction did not entirely disappear, even if it was no longer mentioned in official political documents. The theory of representation on which it was based—one that derived unity from a social division of labor and a shared social interest—endured. It differentiated between those entitled to select representatives (literally, to be represented in and as the nation) and those denied that right, those capable of self-representation and those who could only be represented, those with and without autonomy.[61] These latter were largely, though not exclusively, women.

Unlike distinctions of wealth, those of gender were deemed natural and so outside the legislative arena. Since constitutions and legal decrees dealt, for the most part, with the rules of (active) political participation, references to passive rights were dropped. But invisibility did not mean absence. The terms *citoyen* and *citoyenne* carried the active/passive contrast, and from time to time it was clearly invoked—

by the exasperated Chaumette, for example, who, as he denounced Olympe de Gouges to a group of women protesting the closing of their political clubs in 1793, shouted (I imagine), "Impudent women who want to become men, aren't you well enough provided for? What else do you need?"[62]

De Gouges took up Desmoulins's definition of active citizenship and jumped into the fray. She moved with "public opinion" into print, the streets, and the forum of the National Assembly. She rented lodgings adjacent to the Assembly to facilitate her attendance at its sessions. She spoke from the podium at meetings of various clubs and at least once rushed to the rostrum in the Assembly; her proclamations on everything from the abolition of slavery and the rights of illegitimate children to the royal veto and maternity hospitals often covered the walls of the city of Paris. She conceived plans for a huge funeral cortège for a hero of the nation in 1792 in order to demonstrate women's support for and importance to the Revolution, and she agitated among officials until it was carried out. In 1791, acting as a self-appointed legislator, she wrote a *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen* that she urged be adopted as a supplement to the constitution. Even when, as in this instance, her projects were ignored, she behaved as a person charged with shaping the future of France.

Although de Gouges's spoken eloquence was admired by her contemporaries, for herself it was writing that constituted the most important form of political action. This writing is the more striking because she apparently accomplished it with great difficulty, dictating her texts to a secretary. She felt it was worth the expense and the effort, however, since writing, unlike speech, was a way of communicating her ideas in lasting form, of maintaining what was otherwise a transient relationship between herself and her auditors. Whereas speech required a physical audience, the written word could be transmitted to a vast public, the variety and number of whose members was limited only by her imagination.[63]

De Gouges enacted Rousseau's anxiety that writing was a less authentic means of expression than speech, that its marks imperfectly stood in for an absent speaker. She used writing to establish her identity, just as Rousseau had. She exploited the paradox in the philosopher's position: writing may have been merely a supplement to speech, but it was

the means he regularly chose to present his ideas, to demonstrate the consciousness identified by the signature "J.-J. Rousseau." And that signature, although it only substituted for the real man, also established his existence. This surely was the implication of de Gouges's repeated comparisons of herself with Rousseau and of her insistence on recognition of her standing as an author. Her emulation of him in both respects exposed the fact that, in his case as in hers, the existence of the man was the effect, rather than the origin, of his signature.[64]

For de Gouges, writing, signing, and publishing demonstrated, for her contemporaries and for posterity, what the law erased: the fact that women could be, already were, authors. Under revolutionary legislation women did not have the rights of authors, of individuals who possessed their intellectual property, because they did not have the rights of active citizens. To be recognized as an author, then, meant for de Gouges recognition as an individual and a citizen. Referring to her plays, which she argued proved that gender was no bar to talent, she called them her "property," the results of productive, creative labor. "Isn't it my asset? isn't it my property?" she asked rhetorically.[65] She considered the loss of the possibility of writing equivalent to the loss of life, as this oath to the veracity of her opinions in the 1788 *Lettre au Peuple* makes clear: "Oh, sublime truth, you who have always guided me, who uphold my opinions, take away the means of writing if ever I betray my conscience, which is illuminated by your light."[66] She described herself as irresistibly driven to write, as compelled by her "itch [*démangeaison*] to write."[67] "I had a craze to write, a craze to have myself published."[68] To have herself published ("de me faire imprimer") meant not only to see her work in print, but literally to have herself imprinted, to be the source of her own representation, to be established as an author, and so to secure her very identity.

Writing required, depended upon, the imagination of the author. And so de Gouges attributed her abilities, such as they were, to her imagination. She likened herself to the great thinkers of the age, not in her command of philosophy and political theory, but in her ability to "dream": "But don't expect to see me discuss these matters in political and philosophical discourses; only in dreams have I been able to pursue them."[69] By appealing to the imagination, de Gouges evoked notions of direct inspiration and disinterestedness that did not require educa-

tion to be effective. In fact, education could be an obstacle to clear vision, she maintained, using Rousseau against himself to claim that her version of the story of man's social origins was more plausible than his. The philosopher was probably too brilliant, she argued, to imagine the true character of early man. ("Jean-Jacques was too enlightened for his genius to carry too far . . .") Whereas, she, de Gouges, "who feel the effects of this first ignorance, and who am placed and displaced at the same time in this enlightened century, my opinions may be taken to be more correct than his."[70] Here a similar innocence gives de Gouges the ability to make an imaginary identification with early humans, or at least makes her invented story more realistic. Imagination is a thinking process unmediated by erudition; it thus transmits images that are closer to nature and to truth. "I am, in my writings, a student of nature; I should be, like her, irregular, even bizarre, but also always true, always simple."[71]

This Romantic (Rousseauian) conception of imagination comes perilously close to rejecting the discipline of reason entirely. It is described as almost purely reflective, the passive imagination's reproduction of nature itself. In de Gouges's account nature has nothing of the hierarchy men create; it is characterized instead by anarchic but harmonious confusion: "Look, search, and then distinguish if you can, the sexes in the administration of nature. Everywhere you will find them mixed up [*confondus*], everywhere they cooperate harmoniously in this immortal masterpiece."[72] Similarly, on the question of color, de Gouges argued that nature provided no model for the distinctions that men invent: "Man's color is nuanced, like all the animals that nature has produced, as well as the plants and minerals. Why doesn't the night rival the day, the sun the moon, and the stars the firmament? All is varied, and that is the beauty of nature. Why then destroy her work?"[73] But while de Gouges claimed that nature proved her points, she also insisted that her readings were more than simple reflections. Her projects might take their lead from nature, but they were productive arrangements, extensions to human society of what she had seen. In this sense, her imagination was active, not passive: considered thought acting on transparent truth.

When it came to imagination, de Gouges refused to accept the limits of gender. Like Condorcet, she argued that reason and the capacity to

imagine knew no boundaries of sex. She offered evidence of her own self-regulating abilities when she attributed a mistaken judgment she had made (about the King's good intentions toward the National Assembly) to the temporary loss of bearings of her imagination (my imagination "wandered," she explained). The acknowledgment of this loss was itself a correction, an exemplary instance of her capacity for self-control.[74]

For de Gouges imagination offered a good way of escaping the restrictive boundaries of gender and of demonstrating new and contrary kinds of relevance for it. In *Séance royale,* subtitled *Les songes patriotiques,* dedicated to the Duc d'Orléans in 1789, de Gouges envisioned a royal session in which first the Duke and then the King spoke, reasserting the need for the royal veto (which the Assembly wanted to abolish). De Gouges spoke in several voices to make her point. First, in her own, she dedicated the pamphlet to the Duke, and reminded him of the need for recognition for women authors as well as of his promise to help secure a commission for her son. She linked her particular situation to the needs of her sex: "it is dreadful that women don't have the same advantages as men for the advancement of their children." Then she spoke as the Duke, proposing her plan to the king. "Well, Sir, a woman, an ignorant being, a visionary spirit . . . has the courage to alert her King to the sole means that can save France." Then she took the voice of the King, insisting on the royal prerogative in the name of his paternal duties to his people, the Nation. Then Orléans spoke again, proposing as articles for the constitution, along with the veto, divorce and the rights of illegitimate children to equal standing in society.[75] (De Gouges was particularly adept at inserting feminist demands into other political agendas. When she wrote the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman,* she dedicated it to Marie-Antoinette, holding out the promise that if the Queen supported it, she would regain the adulation of her subjects.)

In one reading, *Les songes patriotiques* is like a play with three long monologues; it is undeniable that de Gouges used the form with which she was familiar to advance her political ideas. But, in another reading, the pamphlet is an example of the political potential of dreamwork; dreaming (which was synonymous with imagining) permitted an extraordinary mobility both for de Gouges, who assumed at least three

identities (two of them male), and for the characters she invented. The Duc d'Orléans became an ardent supporter of feminist claims as he defended monarchical power; a dream perhaps, but its appearance in print might influence the real Duke's thinking, de Gouges suggested coyly, and so "will, perhaps, come close to reality."[76]

As dreams called into question, and even renegotiated, the boundary between fiction and reality, so they also tampered with established lines of sexual difference. De Gouges's repeated descriptions of herself as a "man" might be taken by some readers today as an example of a transgressive sexuality.[77] But I do not think that was the issue for her. If anything, she sought to eliminate the question of sexual identity from discussions of politics, all the while assuming the importance of heterosexual attraction in human social relationships. She did not advocate that women become men physically or psychically, and she thought that desire for the opposite sex played a role in the construction of the self. She wanted to produce a political identity for women that at once appropriated those (supposedly masculine) qualities required to assert individuality and incorporated them into a definably female subject. It was emulation—the drive to acquire for oneself the moral virtues of an idealized figure—that was at stake.[78] Emulation was not the acquisition of the fixed traits of masculinity; rather it was the enactment of the continuing process of self-construction then reserved for men. But where was the affirmation of the self to come from? In the economy of heterosexual attraction it had to come from woman's other: man.

De Gouges seems to have taken heterosexuality for granted in her own life and as a social force, much as Rousseau did in his visions of politics. But there was a twist to her imaginings. Although she often described her dreams as realizable because of women's ability to inspire desire in men, she also explained her actions as the result of her own desire. "Only the well-being of my country and the love and respect I have for my King, only these have excited my verve." She sought to inspire similar imagination in others, "to inflame them with the love of country that I feel penetrates me."[79] The statement has a familiar hyperbolic ring, but it does assume female agency.

De Gouges accepted Rousseau's notion that woman was somehow responsible for provoking man's desire, but this was only half the story. Love and marriage were based on the "reciprocal leanings" of the

couple. In *Le bonheur primitif de l'homme,* she attributed to adultery the transition from a harmonious large family to a more complex society: bored with his own wife and with the uniformity of life around him, one of the sons of the first father coveted his neighbor's wife and eventually seduced her. De Gouges described the woman as "weak and more guilty than her lover," presumably because she failed to control his desire, but also because she failed to control her own: "The same vice, the same tendency, subjugated her reason and her virtue."[80]

For Rousseau, the gentle feeling of love meant its contradiction: man's desire for the unique possession of the love object led to the discord and jealousy that animated society and politics. For de Gouges, in contrast, love and desire could be disruptive, but this disruption was not inevitable. Social institutions rendered desire good or bad, and these were changeable human constructions. To secure change she campaigned for the rights of illegitimate children and drew up a prototype for a new kind of marriage contract in which each parent recognized offspring as legitimate "from whatever bed they come."[81] She insisted, in the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman,* that the right of free speech entailed the right of women to reveal the identity of the fathers of their children ("without being forced by barbarous prejudice to hide the truth"). These proposals all accepted the inevitability of men's and women's desire and sought to render its social and personal outcomes innocuous. In effect, de Gouges denied that male possessiveness was a necessary accompaniment of love, instead suggesting greater fluidity for the imaginative projections that constituted this emotion. If she believed that women could stir men to action (she boasted once that "nothing can resist our seductive organ"),[82] she had none of Rousseau's misogynist fantasies that this was a power that could totally engulf any man. Rather female sexual desire was an equal component in the construction of the heterosexual couple and of the selfhood of each partner. It was the result not of men's objectification of women, but of women's own desire for another, the expression of a woman's willing self.

De Gouges actively sought alternatives to women's political subordination. When she claimed the rights of Man for women, she sought to realize woman's individuality, not by rejecting sexual difference, but by equalizing its operations. For her, the imaginative identification of

Woman with Man involved not the restructuring of sexual identity itself, but the enlargement of its social and political possibility.

The *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen* was a step in that direction. In it, she sought to provide the grounds on which active citizenship for women could be granted. Her *Declaration*'s seventeen articles exactly paralleled those of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, most often replacing the singular "Man" with the phrase "Woman and Man," but also making a particularly strong case for the recognition of women's right to speech as the key to their freedom. The document is both compensatory—adding women where they have been left out—and a critical challenge to the universality of the term "Man." Simply by pluralizing the reference, de Gouges indicates that "Man" alone does not represent humanity. If Woman is not specified, she is excluded; her inclusion requires that her difference from Man be acknowledged in order to be rendered irrelevant from the point of view of political rights.[83] That surely is the meaning of the stunning assertion that concludes the preamble to the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman:* "the sex superior in beauty as in courage during childbirth recognizes and declares, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of woman and citizen."

In articles X and XI, de Gouges restated the Revolution's guarantees of freedom of opinion and of the free expression of ideas, but she added explicit reasons for acknowledging that these rights also belonged to women. "Woman has the right to mount to the scaffold; she ought equally to have the right to mount to the tribune."[84] "Monter à la tribune" meant not only to speak in public, but specifically to address the assembled delegates of the nation. If women were subject to the coercive power of the law, de Gouges argued here, they ought also to be subjects of the law, that is, active participants in its formulation.

Article XI called speech women's most precious right and then specified the reason: "The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious rights of woman, since this liberty guarantees that fathers will recognize their children. Any citizen [*citoyenne*] can thus say freely: I am the mother of your child, without being forced by barbarous prejudice to hide the truth . . ." In this formulation, freedom of speech not only leads to shared responsibility for children by both parents; it also undercuts the image of men as purely rational,

by calling attention to them as sexual beings. It gives voice to the oppressed to expose the transgressions of the powerful, to demand enforcement of the obligations on which social cohesion and individual liberty were said to rest. De Gouges's article XI assumes, as Rousseau did not, that women will tell the truth, even about such matters as pregnancy—usually unverifiable by any but themselves. It makes pregnancy an epistemological rather than a natural problem, and it insists that maternity is a social, not a natural function. The article moves between the registers of universality and particularity; it names a specific interest women have in the exercise of the right of speech and a specific interest men have in denying them that right. It thereby vitiates the very idea of universality, showing it to be a cover for a particular (male) interest. The specificity of the article also exposes and refutes the implicit ground for excluding women from the ranks of active citizens: their reproductive role. In de Gouges's *Declaration* women *and* men are agents of reproduction; as such both are entitled to a public voice. De Gouges refused the oppositions—between public and private, productive and reproductive, reasonable and sexual, political and domestic—by which the revolutionaries tried to justify the consignment of women to the ranks of passive citizens. Appealing to the possibility that gender was not a difference that mattered for politics—a possibility still alive in the proposals of Condorcet and some members of the Gironde—she wrote, "The principle of all sovereignty resides in the Nation. It is nothing but the coming together [*la réunion*] of Woman and Man."

She went on, in a postscript to the *Declaration,* to reconceive that joining of Woman and Man in a new form of "social contract." The revolutionaries had included in the constitution of 1791 the statement that marriage was a civil contract, primarily to detach it from control by the church. But the move to laicize marriage in these terms opened the way for the divorce laws of September 1792 (which allowed either partner to dissolve an unsatisfactory or unhappy marriage) and for proposals like de Gouges's, aimed at restating the terms of the contract itself.[85] Designed to replace marriage, "the tomb of love and trust," de Gouges's marital contract declared the complete equality of the spouses. There were, of course, differences between them; otherwise the notion of union would be unnecessary. But these differences implied neither

hierarchy nor the social and political exclusion of women. The couple was "united, but equal in force and virtue"; union neither subordinated one to the other, nor erased the visibility and function of the woman. Instead the partners had individual discretion with regard to transmission of property; children could be given either a father's or a mother's name; and all children were legitimate, whether they were the offspring of the union or of other alliances. Families became units of love and affection that transcended the particular desires of marital partners, which were taken to be inconstant. Above all, de Gouges's "social contract" ended the subordination of women by denying husbands discretionary authority over property and children; patriarchal power was swept away with the elimination of the father's name as the legal signifier of the family.[86]

De Gouges considered her proposals for a reform of marriage to be within the boundaries of the universal law upon which societies were based. In her view they offered a new arrangement of relationships between women and men similar to other new arrangements created by the Revolution. If the hierarchy of estates could be replaced by a National Assembly, if sovereignty could be granted to the people, then why not entertain plans to end slavery and alter the legal bonds of marriage? These plans would not only make French laws conform to the principles of universal law, she argued; they would also improve morals and make women more virtuous.[87]

Although she appealed to law in a straightforward way, however, her notion of it was contradictory. De Gouges accepted the premise that law was a key to coherence in society; but her conception of universal law incorporated a symbolic (masculine) representation that ultimately subverted her plans for reform. This conception was set forth in the story de Gouges told about the origin of society. It began with a family gathered around the bed of its dying father, whose last words pronounced the law that would guide his children in his absence. Although he recognized their tendency to "disobedience and revolt," he knew his children also wanted "to be subordinated" to his law. After recounting the history of his emergence from a savage state (in which observation of a bird's nest gave him ideas about how to shelter himself and his family from the elements), he offered his law. The key to happiness, he said, lay in cooperation, care for the earth, equality, and especially in

the golden rule: "respect absolutely the rights of your brothers, neighbors, and friends." Violators should be driven from the family, excluded from all benefits of society.[88]

This father's law is designed to control the impulses that run counter to equality and happiness. It is through this law that the father creates his family and society; his is not a biological, but a regulatory role. Moreover, there is no first mother in de Gouges's account. Aside from one reference by the father to his "compagne," the mother who presumably gave birth to these children is invisible, absent, irrelevant. Symbolically, the elimination of the mother in this origin story establishes the autonomy of the father (and subsequently of his sons) in social and political matters. Women are one of the things that men ("brothers, neighbors, friends") have individual rights to; even though de Gouges describes marriage as a union of equals based on mutual inclination, women are never associated with the articulation of law or the creation of society. The lawgiver is male. "Brothers, neighbors, and friends" who subject themselves to the law do so by identifying themselves with the father; they in turn become subjects—lawmakers. The "brothers', neighbors', friends'" identification with the father depends on a shared maleness that consists both in the right of uncontested sexual access to a woman and in the exclusion of women from the realms of politics and law. The symbolism of the male lawgiver, in other words, establishes the terms of heterosexual monogamy and the restriction of citizenship to men. This symbolism enacts sexual difference as an asymmetrical relationship in which woman guarantees the individuality of man.[89] It provides some of the meanings that associate women with "natural" functions of childbearing and sex and men with social reproduction and rationality. As such it sits paradoxically with de Gouges's goal to end the subordination of women in political life. It seems that her acceptance of her culture's symbolic construction of sexual difference was fundamentally at odds with de Gouges's practical suggestions for reform of the institution of marriage.

Her symbolic association of law with masculinity led de Gouges to endorse monarchy as the most coherent form of government. (She adjusted her ideas to the behavior of Louis XVI in the course of the Revolution, condemning his flight and treasonable actions in June 1791, but then supporting him after his arrest. In the circumstances of the

Terror she announced that she was "born with a republican character and would die with it," but in her general discussions of government she seems to have preferred monarchy.)[90] De Gouges often referred to the king as "the father of his people," but she considered him more than an ordinary father, and she did not think that male predominance in families followed from a nation's need for a king. For her the king was a wise lawgiver, the embodiment of the law itself. Like the magistrate evoked in the *Encyclopédie*'s entry on "dreams," the king was the external figure responsible for order and rational administration. The presence of the king guaranteed flexibility in the personal relations of his subjects because it established limits for those relations. The extent of these limits depended on the magistrate, the expert charged with maintaining boundaries in the name of reason. According to de Gouges, kings were best suited for the job because they had the most developed capacity for disinterested and benevolent leadership. One of the problems with a republic was that there was no obvious figure to stand above the fray as lawgiver; there were only lawmakers, imperfect, unreliable and conflicting siblings contending for the first father's role. Another problem with the republic was that it was already in the hands of sons, who would not readily share power with their sisters. A king, she felt, would have no stake in establishing a monopoly for his sons; his benevolence would allow him to see the merits of a case made by the likes of de Gouges for the recognition of the political rights of women.[91] De Gouges's endorsement of monarchy thus served as both a critique of and a correction to the exclusionary practices of the republic.

De Gouges did not think that male monopolies of political power followed from monarchy. Her writings therefore had the contradictory effect of both reproducing and seeming to undermine the idea of law as the Law of the Father. She conceived of her proposals for marriage reform as a way of challenging women's exclusion from politics, but she did not think them subversive of the very order of her society. Others, however, did. Her early endorsement of kingship was taken as a sign of her disloyalty to the Revolution in the same way as her campaign to extend the rights of Man to women. While support for the monarchy was, in de Gouges's terms, support for the law, others saw her campaign to reform marriage and make women active citizens

as a threat to erase the lines of sexual difference that established the authority of the law. (That they were treated as aspects of the same crime suggests more of a connection between them than de Gouges herself understood.) De Gouges did keep in place a notion of sexual difference, understanding it to be established through mutually experienced heterosexual attraction, but this was ultimately not enough to keep her within the boundaries of the law.

In the early days of the Revolution there was no limit placed on the imagination. Ordinary citizens were free to invent political schemes and to dream of new futures for France, as long as they did not have the power to put them into practice. In this context de Gouges's activity was tolerated; her proposals might be dismissed as wild and improbable, but they seemed to pose no great threat. The consolidation of Jacobin rule from late 1792 on, however, brought with it a tightening of the connection between law, order, masculine virtue, and sexual difference and so an attempt by the state to control the expression, if not the experience, of imagination. Jacobin politics were based on an epistemological view that attributed singular and transparent meaning to physical objects, language, thought, and visual representation.

From this perspective de Gouges's challenges became dangerous. Her calls to imagination implied a wanton disregard for reality, for the established correspondence between ideas and things. In her writings and actions she seemed willfully to obscure clear issues by trafficking in signs whose referents were ambiguous.

Although the issue of women's rights had come up many times in the course of the Revolution, it was repeatedly and directly addressed in 1793. That year, during discussion of a new constitution (which was never implemented), the deputy for Ile-et-Vilaine, Jean Denis Lanjuinais, reported to the Convention that despite several pleas to the contrary, his committee would uphold the denial of the vote to women. Even in the future, he argued, "it is difficult to believe that women will be called to exercise political rights. It is beyond me to think that, taking all into account, men or women would gain anything good from it."[92]

After the execution of Marie-Antoinette on October 16, attacks on women's political role became more vehement. Using the occasion of

a street disturbance between market women and members of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, the Convention outlawed all women's clubs and popular societies, invoking Rousseauian themes to justify its actions. "Should women exercise political rights and meddle in the affairs of government?" asked André Amar, the representative of the Committee on General Security. "In general, we can answer, no."

> Because they would be obliged to sacrifice the more important cares to which nature calls them. The private functions for which women are destined by their very nature are related to the general order of society; this social order results from the differences between man and woman. Each sex is called to the kind of occupation which is fitting for it; its action is circumscribed within this circle which it cannot break through, because nature, which has imposed these limits on man, commands imperiously and receives no law.[93]

An even more explicit articulation of these so-called natural facts came from Chaumette. On behalf of the Commune of Paris he indignantly rejected an appeal for support from female petitioners protesting the Convention's decree: "Since when is it permitted to give up one's sex? Since when is it decent to see women abandoning the pious cares of their households, the cribs of their children, to come to public places, to harangues in the galleries, at the bar of the Senate? Is it to men that nature confided domestic cares? Has she given us breasts to feed our children?"[94]

Like many of his fellow politicians, Chaumette appealed to the rules of nature to justify his vision of social organization. In his understanding, nature was the source of both liberty and sexual difference. Nature and the body were synonymous; in the body one could discern the truths upon which social and political order must rest. Whereas Condorcet (and de Gouges with him) had insisted on a separation between biology and political identity, the Jacobins offered a totalizing vision. Constantin Volney, who had represented the Third Estate of Anjou at the meetings of the Estates General in 1788–89, argued in his catechism of 1793 that virtue and vice "are always ultimately referable to . . . the destruction or preservation of the body." For Volney, questions of health were questions of state; "civic responsibility is health-seeking behavior."[95] Individual illness signified social deterioration; the

failure of a mother to breastfeed her infant constituted a refusal of nature's corporeal design, hence a profoundly antisocial act. The misuse of the body incurred not only individual costs but also social consequences, since the body politic was, for Volney, not a metaphor but a literal description.

The body, of course, was not considered a singular object; sexual difference was taken as a founding principle of the natural, hence the social and political, order. For establishing social and political distinctions between men and women, genital difference made all the difference: masculinity or femininity constituted the entire identity of biological males or females. Dr. Pierre Roussel had earlier articulated the view the Jacobins adopted: "The essence of sex is not confined to a single organ but extends, through more or less perceptible nuances, into every part."[96] And women, in this scheme, were more thoroughly defined by sex than men. The anatomist Dr. Jacques-Louis Moreau offered as his own Rousseau's comment that the location of the genital organs, inside in women, outside in men, determined the extent of their influence: "the internal influence continually recalls women to their sex . . . the male is male only at certain moments, but the female is female throughout her life."[97]

For the Jacobins, women's entire social function could be read literally from her body's reproductive organs, and especially from her breasts (an external organ!). The breast was the synecdoche for woman; it appeared with great frequency in Jacobin speeches and iconography (as Madelyn Gutwirth has so amply demonstrated).[98] The breast had many resonances, since the word *sein* in French means chest, breast, and uterus, but the fixation on the physical breast itself seems significant. It served as a fetish in the Freudian sense, drawing attention away from that which was most troubling to something seemingly more benign. The frenetic preoccupation with the breast, of course, called attention to the entire female body, but it also served to distract from that body's more problematic birth-giving function. Birth could, after all, be understood to be not only natural (and therefore prior to society), but also an act of social creation, part of—because indispensable to—the social contract. Indeed, the depiction in a royalist caricature of a revolutionary giving birth to a constitution (which has issued forth from between his legs) is a commentary on the revolutionaries'

self-conscious usurpation of women's social role. This usurpation was not accomplished, however, by banishing women's bodies. Quite the contrary. The concealment of women's social body was achieved through the proliferation of images of her physical body. As women were definitively excluded from politics, their bodies were represented with obsessive frequency, most typically as nursing mothers.[99] In August 1793, at the fête of Unity and Indivisibility staged by Jacques-Louis David to honor the Republic, this iconography was writ large. The deputies came forward to pledge their loyalty to the nation and then sealed their vows by drinking (water) that was spouting from the breast of a statue of an oversized maternal figure. Underscoring the difference between male and female was a contrast between West and East: the statue was a fertile Egyptian goddess.[100]

Woman as breast—nurturer, but not creator. Man as citizen—the conqueror of nature. The differences between women and men were taken to be irreducible and fundamental; they existed in nature and therefore could not be corrected by law. The functional complementarity of male and female was considered to be asymmetrical: the association of masculinity with virtue, reason, and politics depended for its realization on a contrast with femininity, defined as devious, sensual, vain, given to artifice and the whims of fashion, and for those reasons necessarily restricted to modest, domestic functions. In fact it can be argued that the opposition between men and women, reason and passion, was a way of displacing the disorderly impulses of sex onto women, impulses that Rousseau had recognized could not be uprooted from the male imagination. His Jacobin followers, however, entertained no sense of irony or ambiguity. As they attributed all political opposition to enemies of the Republic, so they attributed to women the qualities they considered the antithesis of virtue—that virtue, according to Robespierre, which was the fundamental principle of democratic government and which, in time of revolution, drew its potency from terror, "justice prompt, severe and inflexible . . . an emanation of virtue."[101]

Terror was the repression of all that was contrary to virtue; it was the implementation of truth in the face of error. It was driven by those whose virtue enabled them to know the difference between truth and error, nature and its misrepresentations. Truth was transparent to the

virtuous; its meaning was literal and unambiguous. There was no room here for Voltaire's active imagination, that creative recombination that might produce new ideas, but that also might confuse fiction and reality. Instead, ideas must be direct readings of nature; imagination was ruled out of order lest it misrepresent the truth.

In this context de Gouges began to deny that her ideas had anything to do with an active imagination. Earlier, in 1791, she had attributed to the temporary wandering of her imagination a misplaced enthusiasm for the monarchy. In that instance she was eager to demonstrate her ability to distinguish the good and bad workings of her imagination, to put brakes on its disorderly tendencies. In 1793, however, she entirely discounted the influence of imagination. When she predicted a dismal future for the Revolution, she insisted that her thoughts were a reflection of the reality of "the depraved morals" of France's leaders and not the product of her own "exalted imagination."[102] With biting sarcasm she wrote to Robespierre that his discourses on morality had brought her to her senses, making her aware of the need "to repress in myself those stirrings of exaltation that a sensible soul ought always to mistrust, and which the seditious know so well how to exploit."[103] This broadside went on to attack his lack of virtue and his self-interested behavior, and it condemned the excesses of his "misguided patriotism" ("patriotisme égaré") in the name of "truth." At the same time, de Gouges identified herself as "plus homme que femme," unable entirely to dissociate her active imagination from her quest for individuality, even as she claimed only to see and speak the truth.[104]

In any case, her attack on Robespierre only confirmed her fate as a woman whose private fantasies had intruded unacceptably on public life. She was arrested in July 1793, and subsequently sentenced to death, for having placarded the walls of Paris with a poster advertising her brochure, *Les trois urnes, ou Le salut de la patrie,* which advocated federalism (a position associated with the Girondists and their theories of representation).[105] She appealed her sentence by pointing to her patriotism (her philosophical writings, she insisted, had helped to prepare the Revolution) and by claiming first that she was ill and then that she was pregnant. The public prosecutor, Fouquier-Tinville, investigated and reported to the Revolutionary Tribunal that de Gouges had had no opportunity to become pregnant and that the midwife and

doctor called in to verify her condition had been unable to do so. Given these facts, he suggested that de Gouges had "only imagined" an occasion for contact with a man and a subsequent pregnancy in order to postpone or avoid execution.[106] There was a terrible irony in Fouquier-Tinville's reference to de Gouges's imagination at this moment. It was as if her mental disorder had gone so far that even her own attempt to recall the most fundamental aspect of her nature—her womanhood (defined as her ability to reproduce)—must be derided as a figment of her imagination. The sign of woman could have no referent in the monstrous Olympe de Gouges.

It was as a traitor to Jacobin centralism (equated with preservation of the integrity of the Republic) that de Gouges was finally put to death in November. In July, when she was arrested, the danger of national dismemberment threatened, in the form not only of civil war and imminent invasion, but also of gender transgression and personal dissolution. The Jacobin response was to tighten the reins of control and, since political and personal control were equated, to evaluate the one in terms of the other.[107] It is in this light that we can read the report of de Gouges's death carried by *La feuille du salut public:* "Olympe de Gouges, born with an exalted imagination, mistook her delirium for an inspiration of nature. She wanted to be a man of state. She took up the projects of the perfidious people who want to divide France. It seems the law has punished this conspirator for having forgotten the virtues that belong to her sex."[108]

This was a particularly fitting epitaph for the woman who, as she spitefully denounced Robespierre, told him that she was "plus homme que femme" and who sought to exonerate herself by pointing out that she was "un grand homme," while he was a vile slave.[109] But it spoke as well to the perception that de Gouges had deliberately deserted reality, imaginatively departing from the existing social and political conditions of women's lives. In her desire to emulate Man, she had "forgotten the virtues of her sex," literally losing her way. The notion of forgetfulness recalls the loss of bearings of the dreamer, so longingly evoked by Rousseau and echoed by de Gouges ("I want . . . to try to lose myself like the others").[110] This loss was depicted here, however, not as a benign transcendence, but as pathology. The loss of de Gouges's coherent self (her "exalted imagination" overcame reason's

internal regulation; she mistook her delusions for reality) and the adoption of perfidious projects aimed at "dividing France" are connected; indeed they are one and the same. The natural integrity of the self guarantees the natural integrity of the nation; both are compromised by unregulated desire, by the excesses of imagination. The discourse on federalism was produced by an imagination gone astray; and it was figured as a transgression of both geographic and gender boundaries. Only an "imagination exaltée," the product of a divided, incoherent self, could entertain the divisive idea of federalism, an onslaught on what was insistently referred to as the "Republic, one and indivisible."[111] Only such an imagination could have simultaneously generated the threats of political, social, and physical dismemberment—of castration.

In 1793, de Gouges was read as an embodiment of the danger of chaos and unlawfulness that "une imagination exaltée" or "l'imagination des songes" posed for rational social order and for the meanings of masculinity and femininity on which it had come to depend—a danger that for Rousseau, as for his Jacobin interpreters, was synonymous with women.

As with the eighteenth-century attempt to codify "imagination," so with de Gouges's use of it, sharp distinctions were impossible to maintain. Its ambiguity was both the source of her empowerment as an active citizen, even though women were given no such rights in the constitution of 1791, and the sign, for her opponents, of her inability to reason within the terms of the law. As with the notion of imagination itself, it was legal authority, acting in the name of reason, that decided whether and when she had crossed the line.

Some months after de Gouges was sent to the guillotine, her son asked for and was granted a correction of the record. The name of his mother was to be changed in the minutes of the Revolutionary Tribunal from "Marie-Olympe de Gouges, veuve [widow] d'Aubry," to "Marie Gouze, veuve de Louis-Yves Aubry."[112] Pierre Aubry thus sought to restore his mother's identity as a daughter and wife, to set the record straight on her (and his own) genealogy. In fact this gesture changed little, and posterity remembered her by the name Olympe de Gouges had given

herself. Historically, the reality of Olympe de Gouges was, in the best sense, the product of her imagination. And historians do her an injustice to ignore the importance of the performative in the establishment of her self. Whether reviled or revered, she was treated as an independent "woman of letters" whose writings and actions established her reputation.

That reputation had at least two sides, which played off the possibilities seen by Voltaire for the active imagination and spoke to the nineteenth century's increasing emphasis on the inventive definition of imagination.[113] E. Lairtullier, writing in 1840 in *Les femmes célèbres de 1789 à 1795,* referred to her as the fiery or ardent ("la fougueuse") Olympe de Gouges. She was one of the "furies" in his catalogue of types of revolutionary women. And he stressed the double aspect of the "brilliance" of her imagination: "More than once she surprised the most eloquent men of the day by the richness of her imagination and the fecundity of her ideas; and it was, to tell the truth, the brilliant side of celebrity that she did not hesitate to conquer."[114] Imagination for Lairtullier connoted a certain benign inventiveness, but it had another side, expressed through de Gouges's explosive nature, her emotional excesses, her inability to distinguish crude from informed ideas, and her provocative style. Her brilliant imagination seemed inevitably to have emanated from an eccentric and dangerous character.

Subsequent writers were clearer than Lairtullier in their diagnoses of mental disorder. De Gouges had crossed the boundary between reason and fantasy; taking on the role of a man, she had lost her bearings and her sanity. For Michelet, any intrusion by women into politics was dangerous: "all sides are destroyed by women."[115] In his account, de Gouges was "an unfortunate woman, full of generous ideas" who became "the martyr, the plaything of her unstable sensibility [*sa mobile sensibilité*]." Her true feminine nature was revealed, he wrote, when, "softened and wet with tears, she became a woman again [*elle se remit à être femme*], weak, trembling, she was afraid of death." At the guillotine, however, she was courageous (swinging back, he implies, to a more masculine position).[116] "Children of the fatherland," she cried, "you will avenge my death." And the spectators replied (with no irony, it seems), "Vive la République!"[117]

Michelet's characterization of de Gouges as unstable, oscillating between weakness and strength, feminine and masculine, recurs in the writings of the Goncourt brothers, who in their 1864 history of the Revolution labeled her "a heroic madman," using the masculine *fou* instead of the feminine *folle* to designate her malady.[118] The Goncourts' emphasis accorded with an increasing interest in psychiatric questions as defined by medical experts. This interest developed more fully by the end of the century and focused on collective as well as individual pathologies. Writing in 1904, a Dr. Guillois analyzed the records produced during de Gouges's arrest and diagnosed her as a case of revolutionary hysteria. Her abnormal sexuality (caused by excessive menstrual flow), her narcissism (evinced by a predilection for daily baths), and her entire lack of moral sense (proven by her repeated refusal to remarry) constituted the definitive signs of her mental pathology. De Gouges was an example of what happened when women tried to imitate men; driven by abnormal desires, they became courageous, but also more savage and cruel than any man.[119] For Guillois and his contemporaries an imagination gone astray was but a symptom of a defective or abnormal femininity. The problem lay not in the misuse of the mind's ability to imagine, but in a deviant sexuality, a fundamentally abnormal personality.

For nineteenth- and twentieth-century feminists, writing against these accumulating diagnoses of pathology, de Gouges was an entirely different figure, realizing the best of what the active imagination could produce.[120] She was remembered most for articulating the claim that became a motto of the nineteenth-century French feminist movement: "Woman has the right to mount the scaffold; she ought equally to have the right to mount to the tribune." This daring assertion had been made by a woman whose life and death exemplified its relevance. It was preeminently reasonable, taken to be a political adage rather than a fantastic invention. De Gouges's experience, moreover, seemed to figure the recurring fate of feminism: born of the republic, it was repeatedly sentenced to death by that same republic. It was in these terms that Jeanne Deroin (then in exile) reminded her readers of the price she and other feminists had paid for their actions in 1848: "Many, following the example of Olympe de Gouges, have had to pay with their lives for this devotion to Justice and Truth."[121] De Gouges was a martyr, and feminists believed she had died for their cause, the victim not of her

own misdoings or disorders, but of the contradictions inherent in the republicans' definition of citizenship, and of their misapplications of the universal principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The concept of imagination was a condition of agency for Olympe de Gouges; it established her ability to act as a public, political figure. The agency of subsequent generations of feminists was shaped by other concepts, more central to the discursive configurations of their own times. But de Gouges was also incorporated into what might be called the feminist imaginary or the imagined (but for that no less real) feminist tradition. She was read out of her specific context and writ large as an example of courageous action; her words were used to inspire women of very different outlooks and beliefs from her own to take up the feminist cause. She was, in this way, both emulated and appropriated in much the way that she had taken on the role of the (male) active citizen in order to claim active citizenship for women. If the preoccupation with imagination in its relation to reason was specific to de Gouges's time, the process of creative recombination it involved was not. Her exercise of imagination drew on its ambiguities and exposed the contradictions it supported and contained. That this creative engagement was marked by paradox seems to be one of the characteristics of feminism, its way of testing the limits of the possible in the struggle to achieve women's political rights.

3

The Duties of the Citizen: Jeanne Deroin and the Revolution of 1848

During the Revolution of 1848, Jeanne Deroin thought of herself as an heir to Olympe de Gouges's campaign for women's rights. Although her own political formation in the utopian socialist movements of the 1830s and 1840s could not have been more different from the social and political influences on de Gouges, and although the politics of the 1848 revolution provided a different context for feminist struggle, Deroin was inspired by the sheer audacity of de Gouges's actions. To risk one's life for the cause of women's emancipation was an achievement that transcended the details of political engagement.

But details did matter, and they marked the differences between the two women. Deroin emerged, at age forty-three, as a political activist in the context of a new revolution. If de Gouges was a model for her action, the Saint-Simonians and Fourierists were her doctrinal mentors. Deroin's strategies addressed the rapidly unfolding events of the February revolution; in their content and their philosophical presuppositions they were necessarily different from those of 1792. In 1848 the right to work and the right to vote were inextricably intertwined; accordingly, Deroin organized associations of women workers to deal with their economic plight and to mobilize for the vote. In the outburst of journalistic freedom that followed the revolution, she wrote pamphlets and articles analyzing the relationships between social and economic reform and women's rights. She collaborated on *La voix des femmes* (The voice of women), the first feminist newspaper of the new republic, and then launched her own paper, *La politique des femmes.*