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Unlikely Citizens?
The Manufacturers of Sèvres Porcelain
and the French Revolution

Emily J. Richardson
PhD Thesis undertaken at University College London,
submitted to the University of London,
November 2007
Abstract:

This thesis aims to reintegrates the history of the manufactory of Sèvres porcelain with that of the French Revolution, in the hope of better understanding them both. Realistically the two cannot be detached, though accounts of this decade in the manufactory's existence often belie this by omitting the events of the period from their narrative. Yet the revolution did not happen at arms-length from the manufactory but in and around it and, as I will argue, the Sèvrian's relationship with events was two-way, involved and dynamic. Thus as well as exploring the impact that the revolution had on the manufactory (precipitating the collapse of the luxury industries and prompting the emigration of their primarily aristocratic clientele), I will examine the strategies deployed by Sèvres' administration to cope with and adapt to changed circumstances. I will also argue that, despite their pedigree as employees of a manufacture royale, Sèvres' workforce met the challenges of the period pro-actively, embracing the revolution in words and actions that will be analysed here. Sèvres' production of (and the market for) revolutionary porcelain will also be discussed at length.

Yet all this precludes that the manufactory survived in the first place, which could not have been assumed. Aside from the financial difficulties the revolution caused them, the intensely hostile climate to all things regal, all things luxurious and privileged could presuppose their swift demise. As such, the manufactory's negotiation of the period is remarkable, and their continued existence under a regime that publicly aspired to Spartan values and aesthetics not untouched by paradox. Why revolutionary governments representing values diametrically opposed to those embodied by Sèvres nevertheless exempted it from annihilation will be questioned. Similarly, the reasons they subsequently supported the manufactory, whose products maintained many of their trademark characteristics and were of little practical use to them, will be investigated.
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Abbreviations:

Arch. M.N.S. Archives of the Manufacture Nationale, Sèvres
BM: The British Museum, London
MC: Musée Carnavalet, Paris
MDAD: Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.
MDL: Musée du Louvre
MNCS: Musée Nationale de Céramique, Sèvres
MRF: Musée de la Révolution Française, Vizille
Photothèque: Photothèque des Musées de la ville de Paris
RMN: Réunion des Musées Nationaux
V&A: Victoria and Albert Museum, London
WC: The Wallace Collection, London

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51 Unknown
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53 Unknown
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56 Unknown
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_**Handless cup and saucer with dancing figures, arabesques and revolutionary symbols**_
Sèvres porcelain, cup h.10cms, saucer d.18.5cms, MC, (photo: photothèque)

90 Jean-Jacques Pierre le jeune (painter), and Henri-François Vincent (gilder)
_**Cup ‘à piédouche’ and saucer with arabesques and revolutionary symbols**_
Sèvres porcelain, dimensions unknown, MC, (photo: photothèque)

91 Jean-Jacques Pierre le jeune
_**Saucer with arabesques and revolutionary symbols**_
Sèvres porcelain, 1794 dimensions unknown, MC, (photo: author)

92 Louis François Lecot (painter)
_**Cup ‘à l’Étrusque’ and saucer**_
Sèvres porcelain, 1794, cup h.8.5cms, saucer d.17.5cms, MC, (photo: photothèque)

93 Jean Chavaux le jeune and Rosalie Chappuis
_**Déjeuner with tricolour ribbons and revolutionary symbols**_
Sèvres porcelain, 1793 – 5, cup h. 7cms, whereabouts unknown (reproduced in Tajan Paris sale catalogue, _Mobilier et Objet d’art de XVIIe, XVIIIe, et XIX siècles_, 17th December 2002, lot 84)

94 Nicolas Henry Jeaurat de Berty
_**Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the symbols of the French Revolution**_
95 Jean-Baptiste Regnault
La Liberté ou la Mort
Oil on canvas, 1794 - 95, dimensions unknown, Kunsthalle, Hambourg
(reproduced in ex. cat., Jacques Réattu, sous le signe de la Révolution, Musée de la Révolution Française, Vizille 2000, p.34).

96 Charles-Nicolas Dodin (painter) and Henry-Martin Prévost (gilder)
Cup with figure of Liberty, after Moitte
Sèvres porcelain, 1793, cup h.7.4cms, MDAD (reproduced in C. Béalu, 'Les Porcelaines Révolutionnaire', in Art et Curiosité, April 1989, no.37)

97 Charles-Nicolas Dodin (painter) and Henry-Martin Prévost (gilder)
Cup with figure of Equality, after Moitte
Sèvres porcelain, 1793, cup h.7.4cms, MDAD, (photo: author)

98 Janinet, after Moitte
Liberté
Aquatint, 1792, 36.5 x 25.7cms, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Coll. Henin

99 Janinet, after Moitte
Égalité
Aquatint, 1793, 36.3 x 27 cms, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Coll. Henin

100 Ambroise Blin (painter), Henri-Martin Prévost (gilder)
Cup and saucer with figure of La Raison and attributes
Sèvres porcelain, 1794, cup h.6.6cms, Bowes Museum, Co. Durham

101 Louis Daris, after Louis-Simon Boizot
La Raison

102 Louis-Gabriel Chulot (painter), Etienne-Gabriel Girard (gilder)
Gobelet ‘à l’Étrusque’ and saucer with designs after Charles-Germain de Saint-Auban’s ‘Essay de papilloneries humaines’
Sèvres porcelain, 1794, cup h.8.1cms, saucer d.16.8cms, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (reproduced in C. Le Corbeiller ‘Whimsy and Sobriety’, Apollo, January 1994, fig.1).

103 Christophe-Ferdinande Caron (painter) and Etienne-Henry Le Guay (gilder)
Cup and saucer with designs after François Boucher

104 Unknown
*Vase ‘Pinforme à fleurs’, with design after Copia*
Sèvres porcelain, 1792, dimensions unknown, MC

105 Copia
*Le Geova des Français*
Engraving, [1793-94?], details unknown.

106 After Louis-Simon Boizot
*La Force guidée par la Raison, ou ‘La Raison’*
Plaster, 1794, dimensions unknown, Arch. M.N.S., (photo: author)

107 S.B. Chapuy after Louis-Simon Boizot
*La Raison*

108 S.B. Chapuy after Louis-Simon Boizot
*La Liberté armée du Sceptre de la Raison foudroye l’Ignorance et le Fanatisme*
Engraving, 1793 – 4, dimensions unknown, whereabouts unknown.

109 After Louis-Simon Boizot?
*Liberté et Égalité*
Plaster, 1794, dimensions unknown, Arch. M.N.S., (photo: author)

110 Unknown
*La Liberté presentant les Vertus Civiques*
Sèvres Porcelain, 1795, dimensions unknown, MC, (photo: author)

111 After Louis-Simon Boizot?
*Fragment of La Constitution (see fig.128)*
Plaster, 1795, dimensions unknown, Arch. M.N.S. (photo: author)

112 Unknown
*The French People Overwhelming the Hydra of Federalism*

113 After Louis-Simon Boizot
*Les Martyrs de la Liberté*
Plaster, 1794, h.33cms, Arch. M.N.S., esier modèle 331, (photo: author)

114 After Jacques Louis David
115 After Joseph Boiston
_Bust of Brutus_
Plaster, 1793, dimensions unknown, Arch. M.N.S., casier modèle 533, (photo: author)

116 After Louis-Simon Boizot
_Les Noirs Libres_
Plaster, 1794, dimensions unknown, Arch. M.N.S., casier modèle 334, (photo: author)

117 Louis-Simon Boizot (del.) and Darcis (sculpt.)
_Moi Libre Aussi_
Engraving, 1794, dimensions unknown, whereabouts unknown.

118 Unknown
_La Liberté ou la Mort (La Fraternité ou la Mort)_
Sèvres porcelain / plaster?, 1794, dimensions unknown, Arch. M.N.S., casier modèle 800.

119 Unknown
_Bust of Chalier_

120.i-ii Auguste Rodin
_The Burghers of Calais; detail of Jean d'Aire_

121 Unknown
_Bust of Le Peletier_
Sèvres porcelain, 1793, dimensions unknown, private collection, (reproduced in _France in the eighteenth century_, ex. cat., Royal Academy of Arts, London, Winter 1968, fig.28)

122 Unknown
_Bust of Barra_
Sèvres porcelain, 1794, dimensions unknown, MC

123 Unknown
_Bust of Viala_
Sèvres porcelain, 1794, dimensions unknown, MC

124 Moi (?)
_Frontispiece: L'interieur d'un comité révolutionnaire ou le Jacobins_
Engraving, 1799 – 1800, 11.1 x 6.7cms, Bibliothèque, Tourneux II, no.9973 (reproduced in *Musée de la Révolution Française: Premières Collections*, ex. cat., Musée de la Révolution Française, Vizille 1985, fig.146).

125 P.G. Berthault
*Fouquier-Tinville before his Judges*

126 Pfeiffer
*Octagonal sun dial*

127 After Louis-Simon Boizot
*La Constitution*
Plaster, 1791, dimensions unknown, MC, (photo: author)

128 After Louis-Simon Boizot?
*La Constitution*
Sèvres porcelain?, 1795, dimensions unknown, whereabouts unknown.

129 Charles-Nicolas Dodin
‘C-vase’ with ‘Cartel Historique’ depicting France Gardant sa Constitution, after L.-S. Boizot
Sèvres porcelain, 1794, 42cms, MC, (photo: photothèque)

130 Charles-Nicolas Dodin
‘C-vase’ with ‘Cartel Historique’ depicting La Force guidée par la Raison, after L.-S. Boizot
Sèvres porcelain, 1794, 42cms, MC, (photo: photothèque)

131 Charles-Nicolas Dodin
Reverse of ‘C-vase’ (fig.128) with a volcanic mountain and floral arrangement
Sèvres porcelain, 1794, 42cms, MC, (photo: photothèque)

132 Charles-Nicolas Dodin
Reverse of ‘C-vase’ (fig.129) with view of the fête de l’Être Suprême and floral arrangement
Sèvres porcelain, 1794, 42cms, MC, (photo: photothèque)

133.i-ii Charles-Eloi Asselin
Arrangement of Sèvres porcelain exhibited at the first exhibition of the products of French Industry, l’an VI (1798), and floor plan
Watercolour, 1798, dimensions unknown, Arch. M.N.S., (photo: author)

134 Anon.
*Les Portraits à la mode*

135 Unknown
*Plate forming part of the 'service arabesque'*

136 After Louis-Simon Boizot
*Bust of General Bonaparte*

137 After Louis-Simon Boizot
*Bust of Bonaparte, First Consul*
Sèvres porcelain, 1800, dimensions unknown, MNCS (reproduced in *Le Biscuit de Sèvres: Directoire, Consulat et Premier Empire*, Paris 1923)

138 After Falconet
*L'Amour Menaçant*

139 Unknown
*Decoration for a ‘Vase Jasmin’*

140 Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart
*Design and decoration of a ‘Vase Jasmin’*

141 Charles-Eloi Asselin
*Design and decoration of a cup ‘Conique à deux anses’ and saucer*
142 Unknown

Decoration for a Plate, called ‘Assiette Unie’
Watercolour and pencil on paper, 1803, 18.1 x 24.6cms, Arch. M.N.S.,

143 Charles-Eloi Asselin

Decoration for a ‘Vase Fuseau’
Watercolour, gouache and pencil on paper, 1804, 39 x 24.3cms, Arch. M.N.S.,

144 Unknown

Vase ‘Jasmine’
Sèvres porcelain, 1800 – 1802, h.22cms, Grand Trianon, (reproduced in M. Brunet and T. Préaud, Sèvres: des origins a nos jours, Switzerland, 1978, pl.LVII).

145 Lagrenée

Lidded vase
Watercolour, gouache and pencil on paper?, 1794?, dimensions unknown,
Arch. M.N.S., dossier Lagrenée, (photo: author)

146 Lagrenée

Lidded vase
Watercolour, gouache and pencil on paper?, 1794, dimensions unknown,
Arch. M.N.S., dossier Lagrenée, (photo: author)

147 Lagrenée

Lidded vase
Watercolour, gouache and pencil on paper?, 1794, dimensions unknown,
Arch. M.N.S., dossier Lagrenée, (photo: author)

148 Charles-Eloi Asselin

Page of designs and motifs
Watercolour and pencil on paper?, all 1800 with exception of bottom row (1801) and middle centre, (1801), various dimensions, Arch. M.N.S., Armoir 6, dossier RIV, (photo: author)

149 Charles-Eloi Asselin

Page of designs and motifs
Watercolour and pencil on paper?, 1802, various dimensions, Arch. M.N.S., Armoir 6, dossier RIV, (photo: author)

150 Charles-Eloi Asselin

Page of designs and motifs
Watercolour and pencil on paper?, all 1800 with exception of bottom centre cup: 1801, various dimensions, Arch. M.N.S., Armoir 6, dossier RIV, (photo: author)

151 Charles-Eloi Asselin  
*Page of designs and motifs*  
Watercolour and pencil on paper?, 1804, various dimensions, Arch. M.N.S., Armoir 6, dossier RIV, (photo: author)

152 Unknown  
*Letter head in use at the manufactory of Sévres*  

153 Charles Percier and Pierre Léonard Fontaine  
*The Dining room at Malmaison, decorated with Pompeian dancers and vases painted by Louis Lafitte after Percier*  

154.i-ii Gillet and Le Lievre  
*Lidded crucible and ‘fromage’ [stand]*  
Pen on paper, 1795, dimensions unknown, Arch. M.N.S., H7 liasse 1, (photo: author)

155 Charles Percier and Jean-Baptiste Isabey  
*Table des Maréchaux*  
Sèvres porcelain, 1810, dimensions unknown, Châteaux de Malmaison et de Bois Préau, (photo: RMN)

156 L.B. Parant  
*Table des Grands Capitaines de l’Antiquité*  
Sèvres porcelain, 1810, dimensions unknown, The Collection of her Majesty the Queen, Buckingham Palace (reproduced in J. Harris, G. de Bellaigue, O. Miller, *Buckingham Palace*, 1968, pl.145).

157 George Rouget  
*Napoléon reçoit à Saint-Cloud le sénatus-consulte qui le proclame Empereur des Française, 18 mai 1804*  

158 Francesco Guiseppe Canova  
*Le Banquet du Mariage de Napoléon 1er et de Marie-Louise, donné dans la salle de spectacle du Palais des Tuileries, 2 avril 1810*  
Oil on canvas, 1812, 1490 x 2360cm, Château de Fontainbleau, (photo: RMN)

159 J.F.J. Swebach des Fontaines (painter) and Micault (gilder)  
*Plate from the Egyptian Service, ‘Le Sphynx près les Pyramides’*  
Sèvres porcelain, 1810 – 12, dimensions unknown, Apsley House
160 Unknown
Section of centrepiece from the Egyptian Service showing the Pylon figures and Sacred rams modelled on those at Karnak

161 JeanGeorget after Jacques-Louis David
‘Vase Fuseau’ with cartel depicting Napoleon crossing the pass of Saint Bernard
Sèvres porcelain, date and dimensions unknown, MDL, (photo: RMN)

162 JeanGeorget after François Gérard
‘Vase Fuseau’ with cartel depicting the Emperor Napoleon in his Coronation Robes

163 Unknown
Le Vase ‘d’Austerlitz’
Sèvres porcelain, 1806, dimensions unknown, Châteaux de Malmaison et de Bois Préau

164.i-ii Antoine Béranger
*Vase Étrusque à Rouleaux and detail of the Laocoon*
Sèvres porcelain, 1813, h.120cms, MNCS, (photo: RMN)

165 Robert Jean François
*Plate from the Service Particulier de l’Empereur, ‘Vue de Malmaison’*
Sèvres porcelain, 1808, d.24cms, Malmaison, Châteaux de Bois-Préau (photo: RMN)

166 Unknown
*Plate from the Service Particulier de l’Empereur, ‘Route de Simplon par les rochers de Meillerie’*
Sèvres porcelain, date unknown, c.24cms, Musée Napoléon Ier, Château de Fontainbleau (photo: RMN)

167 Christophe-Ferdinand Caron
*Plate from the Service Particulier de l’Empereur, ‘l’Ibis’*
Sèvres porcelain, date unknown, c.24cms, MNCS, (photo: RMN)

168 Pierre-Joseph Petit
*The Rue de Rivoli along the Tuileries*
Unknown

*Plate from the Service Particulier de l'Empereur, ‘rue de Rivoli’*

Sevres porcelain, 1811 - 1814, d.23.4cms, Musée Napoleon Ier, Château de Fontainbleau, (photo: RMN)
Introduction:

As anyone who has visited the top-floor of the Musée Carnavalet will know, the French Revolution left little within the rubric of visual culture untouched during the 1790s, and alongside the paintings, prints, and sculptures that are usually the subject of art historical enquiry sit ‘revolutionary’ buttons, buckles and banknotes, all similarly marked by the politics of the age. ‘Patriotic’ clocks, coins, furniture and faïence, inkwells, playing cards and certificates pass beneath the gaze of the visitor as they make their way through the galleries to the stairwell at the end, at which point, if they looked to their right, they would see a case of ‘revolutionary’ Sèvres porcelain. Yet as someone who has spent a considerable amount of time in front of that cabinet, I can vouch for the fact that it rarely attracts the attention of the passer-by, now on their way out for a restorative café. On the occasions they do look to their right, the attention the pieces win tends to be fleeting: perhaps unsurprisingly they seem not to merit the same consideration as the objects housed within the gallery proper. Located in a corridor they are, at best, an afterthought for the visitor.

I draw attention to this particular phenomenon, (which cannot be deemed typical or atypical given the lack of similar displays elsewhere against which to measure it), as it is both catalytic and symptomatic of several trends. Firstly of a general lack of awareness that the manufactory continued to produce during the revolutionary decade, and secondly of a tendency to isolate and decontextualise the porcelain made during the period. It is a goal of this thesis to highlight and rehabilitate the porcelain made at the manufactory of Sèvres during the 1790s and to see it rightfully (re)-placed amongst the artefacts and ephemera that survived the period – artefacts and ephemera from which they cannot logically be separated. As the visitor who did stop to look more closely at the Sèvres on display there would have noted, the signs and symbols found repeatedly on the objects within Carnavalet’s collection are here once more replicated in brilliant colours. As such it is my contention that Sèvres porcelain from the period covered by my thesis should not – cannot – be isolated from these and other objects made concurrently, and that their isolation, or de-contextualisation is as misleading as it is limiting to an understanding of both Sèvres porcelain, and the revolutionary visual culture of which it formed a part. I hope to establish that the
relationship between Sèvres and the wider visual and political culture of revolutionary France was in fact two-way, involved, and dynamic.

Yet the instinct to isolate is easily understood – logical even – in light of a number of problems inherent in Sèvres’ participation in the shared visual culture of the French Revolution. Glossy, sumptuous, and notoriously expensive, Sèvres porcelain cuts an unlikely figure in an age that loudly eschewed personal luxury and aggressively promoted a Spartan aesthetic for life and for living. Not surprisingly, the manufactory’s contribution to the visual culture of the 1790s through the deployment of the symbols of liberty, equality, and fraternity on its surfaces soon becomes compromised. How could the canary yellow cup and saucer now in the Wallace Collection, celebrate these values when it could be considered an emblem of exclusivity? (fig.1) More pointedly, how could the victory of the poor over the rich possibly be represented on the Sèvres porcelain sugar bowl that formed part of a lavish Déjeuner Tête à Tête when it could only be bought by someone of considerable wealth? (fig.2.i-ii) The paradox in both these instances is immediately apparent, as is the irony of the Sèvres-buying sans-culotte: on the déjeuner’s jug we see a mountain spitting out thunderbolts, a symbol of the Jacobins, the radical political group to which most sans-culotte belonged (fig.2.iii). These are of course ironies and anachronisms shared by much within the revolutionary culture of the 1790s, but nonetheless fascinating for that, nor, I would argue, less worthy of investigation as a result.

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It was a surprise to learn that a project of this sort had not yet been undertaken especially because, of all European porcelain manufactories, Sèvres is by far the most heavily researched and documented. This is thanks in part to the rich archival resources available to the scholar, but also a result of the widely held belief that the porcelain made there represents the pinnacle of achievement in this branch of the ceramic arts. And of all their porcelains, it would seem that those produced during the first forty-five years of the manufactory’s existence still has the greatest capacity to captivate the eye, and as importantly, the imagination of the viewer. The manufactory’s pedigree (it is often promoted as a lovechild of Louis XV and Madame
de Pompadour), and the apocryphal stories and lively anecdotes surrounding it, the vivid colours employed, and their bold rococo designs, perfectly evoke the age of its inception, one notorious for its sensual and material extravagance. Sèvres and its wares have long been loved (or loathed) accordingly. Yet it is at the very moment when Louis XVI (who later took over ownership of the manufactory) was made to relinquish his possession of it, and Sèvres’ workforce was placed at the mercy of men unsympathetic to their royal roots and luxurious products, that my interest is aroused. How did the manufactory negotiate a period ostensibly hostile to all things luxurious and privileged? How might the change in regime impact on their production? Where would the workers place their alliance? How could they surmount the financial difficulties circumstances occasioned without the assistance of the king, (by then cit-devant), on whom they had always relied?

However mine is clearly a minority interest and I have yet to locate more than one doctoral study and half a dozen or so articles and book chapters expressly concerned with the period covered by my thesis. And even within this relatively limited historiography, the manufactory and its production during the 1790s is in need of some rehabilitation. The cluster of scholars, amateurs, and manufactory administrators writing at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, for instance, appear to have had a complex relationship with their subject. Indeed if Champfleury, (later curator of the Musée National de Céramique and associate director of the manufactory), is to be believed, the very sight of a liberty bonnet adorning the surface of a piece of Sèvres was enough to make the amateur shudder: ‘ils les font frissoner’, he writes.1 It is probable that by so saying, Champfleury was trying to differentiate himself and his attitude towards the objects of his study (revolutionary faïence) from that of his, by implication snobbish, conservative colleagues dealing with the ‘grander’ of the two ceramic types. Yet there does appear to have been some grounding to his claim and the bristling prose of Ernest Auscher, the head of fabrication at the manufactory between 1877 and 1889, is surely a case in point:

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Champfleury’s positions within the manufactory and museum, and those held by some of the other writers named here, were conveyed to me by Tamara Préaud in an email of 20th July 2006.
Auscher's is a particularly acerbic attack, but his sentiments are found echoed elsewhere. Indeed in this passage (which I have only quoted in part) he quite directly paraphrases a complaint powerfully delivered by Henry Havard and Marius Vachon, writing thirteen years earlier in 1889. Revolutionary Sèvres porcelain, it would seem, did not always inspire thought and contemplation, but reaction and dismay.

Clearly these writers were painfully aware of the problems and paradoxes inherent in revolutionary Sèvres, yet their essential antipathy towards the period, both in terms of the internal workings of the manufactory, and the porcelain made there, often prevented them from taking a more critically balanced approach to it. With regards production, a tendency to disparage its 'revolutionary' work as substandard versions of its celebrated *ancien régime* oeuvre is prevalent, and the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critic typically considered Sèvres to have reduced both artistically and technically to a shadow of their former selves during the 1790s. As Le Chevalier Chevignard (then administrative secretary of Sèvres) wrote of the manufactory's revolutionary output, 'À les considerer dans leur ensemble, ces dix années ne presentent aucun progrès, aucun effort nouveau; bien au contraire, elles portent tous les stigmates d'une décadence profonde de la valeur artistique comme de la main-d'oeuvre'. In so saying, he echoes the conclusions reached by Comte Xavier de Chavagnac and Grollier writing two years previously in 1906:

> 'Mais arrêtons-nous dans cette nomenclature, les extrait cités sont suffisants pour nous montrer qu'il n'y avait rien de nouveau, et que sous la République tout se passait à la manufacture comme sous la monarchie, sauf que les

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produits étaient moins beaux, les acheteurs plus rares et que l'argent faisait défaut.\textsuperscript{5}

The approach of these three authors, although valuable for the stress put on continuity of production between regimes, (although I would strongly contest the accuracy of Chavagnac and Grollier’s claim that \textit{nothing} changed), has the unfortunate effect of denying Sèvres porcelain produced during the 1790s any real autonomy. One is given little sense of their revolutionary wares being a group of works unique to a specific period, meeting particular requirements, and following a style peculiar and relevant to a cultural moment. This denial of autonomy is furthermore inherent in the tendency to isolate the manufactory’s products from those made in the revolutionary world beyond their walls, effectively denying them the historical specificity so essential for understanding their patriotic porcelains. For these writers, the only point of reference and comparison is the manufactory’s back-catalogue, in relation to which, by their reckoning, they fare extremely badly.

Similarly, little attempt is made by them to situate the politics and events that occurred at the manufactory (which to their credit they often treat in some detail, making use of the primary documents available) within the frame of the French Revolution. One could easily be left with the impression that the manufactory alone was in a state of revolt, destroying itself from the inside out, and for little apparent reason. Certainly no noble or uniting precepts, no rallying cry of \textit{liberté, égalité, fraternité} are accorded the ‘rebels’, and as a result, their actions appear anarchic and opportunistic.

Several reasons might be tentatively suggested to explain such authors’ negative feelings. Firstly, the revolution’s legacy often complicated or frustrated the job of scholars, connoisseurs, and administrators of Sèvres working in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, as a result of iconoclastic incidents within the manufactory, prize pieces of Sèvres’ ancien régime output that might otherwise have graced private collections or those of the Musée Nationale de Céramique, were lost. Similarly, the manufactory’s habit during the revolution of recycling the gilding from pieces in their stores for re-application to newly fired porcelains, ruined otherwise

\textsuperscript{5} Comte Xavier de Chavagnac and M. de Grollier, \textit{Histoires des Manufactures Française de}
good pieces. This course of action had been necessitated in the first place by the manufactory’s desperate lack of funds with which to buy new reserves of gold, leading them to seek out ways of easing their predicament, selling off their stocks of white, undecorated wares for example. Many of these were bought up by chambrelans and subsequently passed off as genuine Sèvres porcelain (which in many respects they were), clouding the scent for the connoisseur and putting the collector and curator at risk of being ‘duped’. And in addition to the manufactory’s ‘vandalistic’ credentials during the revolution, might their betrayal of the foundations on which they had been established and of the regime that engendered their success, (and indeed of the very kings who had nurtured the manufactory over two generations), have alienated these writers? Might the spectacle of administrative chaos and of the systematic harassment of the men in the manufactory’s administrative posts have grated?

More recent scholarship is uniformly more positive in its approach to the pieces produced at the manufactory during the 1790s, recognising the quality of their design, decoration and execution. Christian Béalu’s article published in Art et Curiosité in time for the bicentennial celebrations is especially notable on this account. A dealer on the boulevard St Germain, Béalu draws our attention to a number of pieces, some from his own collection which, save for his well illustrated and meticulously researched piece, might otherwise remain unknown to a wider public. Yet in dramatic contrast to the articles already discussed, his is a de-politicised, neutralised account of their production during the revolution, one that gives the impression that Sèvres was almost entirely unruffled by events taking place around it. In fact his only reference to the turbulent state that the manufactory was in is his observation that the registers from the period were irregularly kept: ‘ce laisser-aller nous rappelle que la manufacture était le siège d’une agitation révolutionnaire importante’ he writes. The same tendency to avoid political engagement with the period can be found in an article written for Apollo by Claire Le Corbeiller, then a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Her subtitle, ‘A Sèvres cup and saucer in the museum’s collection

8 Ibid., p.17.
appears to sound a note of light-heartedness at the height of the Terror’, is promising, yet she fails to mention the revolutionary context in which the cup and saucer were made, ever again.

By going to the other extreme – that of an apparent neutrality – both writers miss, in my view, perhaps the most fascinating point, namely that during the 1790s Sèvres should have existed at all. A manufactory that had made perfect sense under the ancien régime, Sèvres becomes riddled with paradox during the revolution. It is, for example, quite remarkable that revolutionary governments representing values diametrically opposed to those reputedly embodied by the manufactory nevertheless exempted Sèvres from annihilation for example, this despite it being an establishment in many ways inseparable from the regime then being violently dismantled. That they subsequently, whilst openly aspiring to Spartan values and aesthetics, funded the manufactory whose products maintained many of their trademark characteristics and were of little practical use to them, demands still more attention. Is these writers’ neglect of these questions once more symptomatic of a deeper antipathy with the period, this time fuelled by the desire to keep porcelain ‘pure’ and untainted by the bloody politics of the revolution? Or is it simply a result of the limits of connoisseurship, its concerns, interests, and questions? Certainly this has been the primary methodology applied to the study of porcelain in recent decades and one, I would argue, totally unsuited to understanding the problems posed by and inherent in the paradox that is ‘revolutionary Sèvres’. However, this is not to disparage the work undertaken by either Béalu or Corbeillé – neither, after all, set out to write anything more than they did. Indeed, it is carefully researched articles such as theirs that have prepared the groundwork and laid the foundations from which I hope to be able to draw my own conclusions.

In so doing, I find myself in good company and it is significant that over the past few years the methodological approaches to porcelain have begun to expand. Publications such as Sarah Richard’s Eighteenth-century Ceramics: Products for a Civilised Society and Moira Vincentelli’s Women and Ceramics: Gendered Vessels, for instance, have opened up the subject and the frame of our understanding of the ceramic arts, demonstrating the gains that can be made by an interdisciplinary
approach to the subject. New approaches have also been encouraged by the inclusion of sessions dedicated to the exploration of porcelain and the decorative arts at recent and forthcoming international art historical conferences, including that of the College Art Association. And all this is in turn a direct reflection of a more general rehabilitation of the so-called ‘decorative arts’ within the discipline of art history. Until recently, its practitioners, with few exceptions, had simply dismissed ancien régime examples as by-products of an aristocratic way of life, considering them reprehensible reminders of the grotesque inequalities that have historically divided society, and as guilty by association. These are exciting times, for now that such mental blocks are being broken down, a new repository of objects has become accessible to more challenging lines of enquiry than connoisseurialism could ever have accommodated. Moreover, I anticipate that in the near future these objects will not simply be understood as ‘decorative arts’, a term that to me denotes passivity and semantic vapidity, but as active agents capable of forming and challenging the identities of their makers, their owners, and onlookers. It is to this methodology that I hope to contribute through my study of revolutionary Sèvres.

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The only doctoral thesis to tackle this period in the manufactory’s history is Anne Billon’s three-volume work *La Sculpture à la Manufacture de Sèvres à la fin du XVIIIe siècle (1770 – 1800)*, completed in 1999. There is much about her work that

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12 See Katie Scott, ‘Introduction: image-object-space’, in *Art History*, vol. 28, no. 2, April 2005, p.137. Eunice Lipton has commented on the guilt she felt as a result of her (initially unthinking) attraction towards the ‘fluff of the eighteenth century’ (aka, François Boucher) in the Frick Collection, fearing that in the minds of her Marxists and feminists colleagues it made her in some way complicit with the less than noble aspirations of their coke and steel industrialist owner, and indeed with those of Frick’s heroes, ‘those well-known champions of social justice, the French Bourbons’. See ‘Women, Pleasure and Painting (e.g., Boucher)’, in *Genders* 7, 1990, p.70.

aligns it with the dominant trends in recent scholarship, both in terms of her positivist approach to the period, and the depth of her archival research. Yet Billon’s account is distinguished by the fact that she begins to address the relationships between the pieces she documents and their relationship with and reference to the revolution, drawing tantalising links between them. Yet she is hampered by the constrictive arrangement of her thesis, which is essentially a thematically organised catalogue, an arrangement that allows her little scope for lateral thinking. I hope to avoid this pitfall by giving my own thesis very different methodological and organisational principles. In terms of the former, I will employ a cross-disciplinary, social historical methodology, drawing not only on archival sources and decorative and art historical literature, but also on economic, political and labour history, the history of science, arms and industry in order to write a suitably integrated account of this period in the manufactory’s history. As will become apparent, throughout the thesis both continuities and changes in Sèvres’ oeuvre, outlook, management, and workforce are in question. Such binary trajectories are, I would argue, best served by and most easily plotted through a chronological arrangement.

As the title of my thesis suggests however, it is as much the manufacturers that are the subject of my thesis as the porcelains they made. The manufactory’s workforce has been very crudely treated, if treated at all, in the historiography discussed thus far. In fact those who have written about the employees of Sèvres are rarely scholars of the decorative arts at all, but local historians concerned with this period in the town’s history. It is unsurprising that the manufactory’s workforce features very heavily in their accounts for, as it will be argued, the workers were disproportionately influential members of their community. The manufactory too, given its enormous size and centrality, became a focal point for activities during the period – for meetings and festivities – and it thus necessarily features heavily in accounts of life in the bourg de Sèvres. Our knowledge of the workforce has been hugely supplemented as a result of the research undertaken by these few historians.\textsuperscript{14}

Most notable perhaps is the work of Pierre Mercier who, significantly, is always careful to contextualise the Sevrian's actions and reactions in wider revolutionary trends. His approach stands in marked contrast to the treatment given the workforce by earlier writers who are swifter to blame than to understand the part they played in propagating republican ideologies within the walls of the manufactory. As he writes:

‘La quasi-totalité des historiens de la Manufacture, qui s'intéressent seulement à l'histoire de l'art, ont blâmé la conduite du personnel ouvrier. Celui-ci place ‘le civisme révolutionnaire au dessus de l’art et du travail’; ‘L’anarchie règne, les ouvriers veulent devenir chefs’; ‘Les ouvriers, poussés par quelques meneurs, se montrent chaque jour plus arrogants’, car ce personnel ‘prend les habitudes que donne le désœuvrement’ et les frères Chanou et Martelet ‘ne cessent de chercher à nuire à leurs chefs, hommes simples et bons, qui se dépensaient sans compter’, ‘L’odieux le dispute parfois au bouffon’, ce qui conduit au ‘gâchis administratif le plus complet’.15

It should be noted however, that Mercier has his own agenda, viewing his protagonists through distinctly rose-tinted spectacles. He continues: ‘On ne peut nier le civisme du personnel, son désintérêtement, sa générosité envers les pauvres et les malades, ses engagements dans les armées républicaines, sa participation à l’effort de guerre...’.

Yet there is still a casualty with this approach: Sèvres’ employees become dislocated from their labour, and one is left with little sense that the bulk of their time was spent making that most luxurious of commodities, porcelain, for sale to rich Frenchmen and foreigners, (only a small fraction of which was decorated with ‘patriotic’ emblems). This negates an interesting relationship – that between an active, radicalised workforce on the one hand and the products of their labour on the other, which, until as late as July 1793, were still being branded with the manufactory’s mark – the crossed L’s of Louis XVI’s cipher.

This brings me back to the display-case in Carnavalet and the pieces contained within it. The manufactory of Sèvres porcelain was evidently a functioning, productive manufactory during the revolutionary decade and not simply a ‘meeting place’ for

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patriots, an impression one is sometimes left with by Mercier. Porcelains were produced there, porcelains that, for all their incongruities engaged with contemporary artistic trends. Artists and artisans must have been there to make it, people to fund it, and presumably, people to buy it. The evidence is right before us, if we choose to look-right. These pieces cannot be sidelined to the corridor anymore: our viewpoint needs shifting and 'marginalia' needs to be given the centre stage rather than being left on the periphery.

Chapter I: The Ancien Régime

Introduction:

The year 1756 saw the transfer of the porcelain works of Vincennes to new, custom-built premises at Sèvres, a small town bordering the Seine on the outskirts of Paris from which the manufactory would henceforth take its name. Built against the steep incline of the valley wall, Lindet and Perronet's massive and grandiose façade declared it to be an establishment of considerable importance, something that provoked the scorn of the Marquis D'Argenson, who commented on the building then under construction, in a journal entry of 13th January 1755:

'J’ai vu en passant à Sèvres la magnifique folie d’une nouvelle manufacture pour la porcelaine française, façon Saxe. C’est un bâtiment immence et presque aussi grand que l’hôtel des Invalides. Il n’est bâti qu’en moellons, et déjà il commencé à tomber avant que d’être achevé.'

His evaluation of the building’s durability (in fact widely held) is proven unfounded by its continued existence at Sèvres today (fig.3.i-ii). However, it was perhaps less the structural unsoundness of the manufactory that so needled him than the decision to undertake such a lavish venture in the first place, something he attributes in part to the pernicious influence of Madame de Pompadour on her royal lover. His likening of the manufactory of Sèvres to the recently built Hôtel des Invalides adds vitriol to his condemnation, the worthy purpose of one underlining the frivolity that the other represents. Others surveying the newly finished building in the following year might well have found themselves in agreement with D’Argenson in light of France’s recent entry into the Seven Years War (1756-1763). Given the circumstances, it must have seemed an indulgent and extravagant enterprise.

D’Argenson would not have been surprised to learn that as a result of the colossal expense of building and equipping the manufactory of Sèvres porcelain, (which amounted to 989,000 livres, i.e., considerably more than the company’s capital), the newly relocated venture looked set for collapse under its then administration. And

2 See George Le Chevalier Chevignard, La Manufacture de Porcelaine de Sèvres, Paris, 1908, p.36.
despite the gift of 100,000 *livres* in cash from the king, in October 1759 the management was forced to call upon him for further financial assistance.\(^3\) Louis XV’s interest in the manufactory, now in production for approximately fourteen years, had long been proven, not least by his becoming the largest shareholder in the company in 1752, so he might be safely relied upon for help. His terms were that he would buy the venture outright.

Bearing in mind that owing to the war, other cultural expenditures were put on hold, it might seem quite extraordinary that at this of all times, Louis XV should commit himself to what had thus far proven a commercially non-viable enterprise, according it to the *Bâtiments du Roi*.\(^4\) Yet such skewed priorities were all too typical of a king renowned for taking shelter from the world through the pursuit of pleasurable distractions, of which Sèvres might be just another. Typical, perhaps – but to leave it at that would be to do an injustice to a decision founded on a range of factors, not all of which can be branded purely selfish. To better evaluate his extravagant act of patronage, it is crucial to understand the significance of the ownership of a porcelain manufactory at that moment in time, and not only for that proprietor, who would have gained considerable credibility in the eyes of other European potentates. For the host nation too, such investment in a growth industry could prove beneficial providing not only employment and training for those directly involved with the manufactory, but generating an income from which the national economy might profit. Furthermore I would argue that only when armed with this knowledge can we truly comprehend and contextualise the manufactory’s treatment a little over thirty years later at the hands of a revolutionary government, which might not have been so naturally predisposed to come to their assistance as Louis XV had been. This chapter then, which will act as a prelude to those focusing on the Revolution, seeks to evaluate the economic and, equally important, the *cultural* significance of the manufactory of Sèvres porcelain, factors that would in time inform and influence the revolutionary government’s attitude towards it. The government were not left to make their decisions on their own however, but were prompted and petitioned on this and on other aspects of the


manufactory's existence by its workforce, which will also be introduced here. An awareness of their makeup and motivations, their relationships with each other, their superiors, and with the employees of other manufactories during the ancien régime is, I would argue, fundamental to our understanding of the course of events at the manufactory during the Revolution.

Porcelain: fitting for kings

It is easy to forget that in Europe, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, porcelain was considered a material of great financial value and symbolic significance. Initially it made the voyage overland from China, where it had been in production since AD 600, carried on the back of pack animals along the silk route to Egypt from where it was bought and distributed. Few pieces appear to have survived the long journey westwards – only three examples are known to have existed in European collections prior to 1500 – but stories about these mysterious vessels travelled well, embellished even by their epic voyages from a land still shrouded in mystery. Jennifer Chen, co-author of Porcelain Stories, writes of thirteenth-century European travellers returning from Asia with tales of white, thinly potted and translucent ceramics ‘unlike anything they had ever seen’.\(^5\) Marco Polo too would bring home tales of azure tinted porcelain bowls of ‘incomparable beauty’, which he describes briefly in his Description of the World.\(^6\) And even three hundred years later in 1596 (six years before the first cargo of porcelain arrived in the Netherlands), the Dutchman Jan van Linschoten wrote in his Itinerario that ‘to tell of the porcelains made [in China] is not to be believed’\(^7\).

Adding further lustre to these gleaming wares were legends of a Chinese God of porcelain, a once unfortunate mortal who killed himself in despair whilst working on

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\(^7\) T. Volker, Porcelain and the Dutch East India Company, Leiden, 1971, p.21
an impossible commission from the Emperor.⁸ And the idea that blood and sweat might have gone into the creation of these seemingly miraculous virginal-white vessels was further suggested by the myth that ground human bone was added to Japanese clays, presumably to attain the desired degree of whiteness.⁹ Porcelain, then, could be construed as the product of a perversely alluring Oriental despotism, leaving it open to the Romanticising tendencies of Europeans, intrigued and enchanted by a world beyond their horizons, artefacts from which they avidly selected for their Kunstkammers. For them, porcelain would have evoked mystery and exoticism in equal measures, earning it a place not only in the cabinets and later on the tables and walls of their occidental owners, but in their imaginations. It is safe to assume then that when Vasco da Gama returned to Lisbon from India in 1499, the porcelain trophies he brought for Manuel I were an immensely alluring, exotic commodity: a fitting gift for a king. And so they would remain right through to the end of the period covered by this thesis. Even in September 1792, Antoine Régnier, then director of Sèvres, would, for reasons explained in chapter III, reel off a list of recent regal clients for whom their porcelains were, in the words of one of them, ‘le plus beau trésor et le plus beau bijou de l’Europe.’¹⁰

*   *   *   *

The collecting of Chinese and later Japanese porcelain was an enduring interest, obsession even, in many European courts from the moment it was introduced to the West by the Portuguese in the early sixteenth century until that interest peaked in the late eighteenth. Following the regularisation of deliveries of porcelain to Europe in 1522, a number of collections were put together in earnest by those with sufficient means. The Medici’s for example, inventoried just thirty-one years later was especially impressive, containing some 400 pieces.¹¹ But it was soon eclipsed by the collection belonging to Philip II: having annexed Portugal in 1581, the Spanish king was best placed to acquire choice examples, and during his reign he amassed a total of

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⁹ ibid, p.36.
¹⁰ So said Joseph, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Arch. M.N.S., B4, Mémoire Historique sur la Manufacture royale de porcelaine de Sèvres par M. Régnier, directeur.
3,000 pieces. The bids successfully placed by Kings Henri IV and James I at an auction of porcelain held in the Netherlandish town of Middelburg in 1604 shows that interest had spread north, and it is here that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries some of the most lavish collections were established. Surely the most extravagant manifestation of these collecting habits were the rooms furnished entirely with porcelain that could be found in many European palaces, the best known of which was Augustus II of Saxony’s magnificent Japanese Palace, complete with its own porcelain menagerie (fig. 4).

Porcelain clearly held an allure that cannot be explained simply by its origins in a distant land, or by its intrinsic qualities, special though they were; equally porcelain became an object of contest among powerful figures, reflecting their wealth and power. Not even the flooding of the European market with porcelain by the Dutch, who had, by the mid-seventeenth century, outstripped the Portuguese in the battle for primacy in trade with Asia, seems to have devalued it in their eyes. It is important to stress the amount of kraack-porselein, the name given oriental porcelain carried to Europe on board Dutch carracks, arriving on a regular basis in Amsterdam from 1610 and from where it was distributed across Europe. Unlike the Portuguese who used porcelain primarily as a bartering tool in Asia, the Dutch realised how great the demand for porcelain was in Europe and between 1604 and 1657 they imported over three-million pieces, which by all accounts were highly sought after. By mid-century, the sale of kraack ware was given an additional boost by the introduction (also by the Dutch) of tea to the West, generating a large market for vessels suitable to the preparation and consumption of that fashionable drink.

Inevitably the sheer volume of kraack ware available led to some amount of democratisation of porcelain and, as Volker notes, from having been a ware to simply marvel at, ‘it became a merchandise in strong demand in Western Europe, a well known article in near daily use.’ This is suggested by its frequent inclusion in Dutch

13 Volker cites this figure, but notes that it may constitute a rather conservative estimate of total imports, op. cit., p.59.
still life painting where it almost always features as a functional object, filled with fruits or other consumables that, as often as not, obscure much of the dish itself. This denotes a certain naturalisation of porcelain for use and abuse, (they are often seen tipped up, precariously balanced and in grave danger in light of their fragility) at the table (fig.5). Yet the fact that they feature predominantly in rich still lives (*pronk Stilleven*) alongside other items or foodstuffs of value, suggests that for all their naturalisation, they were still prized possessions able to signify wealth and, as Willem Kalf’s celebrated *Still Life with Nautilus Cup* suggests, the exotic (fig.6). Circling the Nautilus shell mounted to appear like a mythical sea monster ridden by Neptune are the fruits of Dutch world-trade: citruses from Spain; glass from Venice: a Persian rug; a porcelain bowl from China, possibly containing sugar from the Americas. The whole world is compacted into the space of this one frame.

Even though by the closing years of the century the market for Oriental Kraak porcelain began to weaken due to years of mass-importation by the Dutch, and to the apparently falling quality of those imports, it had by then created enough of a sensation ‘to make imitation profitable’ within Europe. As Volker writes, their introduction to the West of a commodity, which formerly had only been an object of exchange within Asia, ‘was the primary impulse which led to the manufacturing of porcelain in Europe two centuries later.’

* * *

The ambition to manufacture porcelain in Europe was kick-started by the promise of profitability and prestige, the former being a particularly powerful motivator. Concern was then being widely expressed about the money being spent on porcelain which, thanks to its mass-importation, was no longer solely the preserve of the royal houses of Europe but increasingly available to a broader demographic. In England for example, Daniel Defoe was able to lampoon his fellow countrymen and women whose taste for porcelain and their desire to imitate the floor-to-ceiling displays of Queen Mary was proving ruinous:

15 ibid.
‘The Queen brought in the custom or humour, as I may call it, of furnishing Houses with Chinaware, which increased to a strange degree afterwards, piling their China upon the tops of Cabinets, Scitoires, and every Chymney-piece, to the tops of the Ceilings, and even setting up Shelves for their China-ware, where they are wanted for such places, till it became a grievance in the expense of it, and even injurious to their Families and Estates.’

These worries were exacerbated by the trend towards mercantilism, an economic system that discouraged the import of foreign goods in the belief that it would tip ‘the balance of trade’ in the favour of their exporters. And working under the (mistaken) belief that the amount of trade up for grabs by competing nations was finite, one country’s gain, they argued, was another’s loss. As such Count Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus, a scientist and councillor in the court of Augustus II of Saxony, to whom he advocated mercantilist policies, may have punned that ‘China had become the bleeding bowl of Saxony’, but it was no laughing matter. Augustus was by far the worst offender, spending vast amounts on porcelains with which to furnish his palace. And to exacerbate matters, his subjects – the Germans – were the biggest consumers of tea and coffee in Europe. The most obvious solution would be to begin to produce porcelain in Saxony, something doubly appealing in that not only would money spent on porcelain by Augustus and his subjects be fed back into the Saxon economy, but it would be a commodity they could export, tipping the balance back in their favour.

Tschirnhaus was not the first to have pinned hope on this and many attempts had been made during the proceeding centuries to reproduce this precious material in the West. It was not until as late as 1712, (in fact after the formula had been replicated in Europe) that the closely guarded secrets of the Chinese manufactories became known in the West, conveyed by the Jesuit missionary, François Xavier, Père d’Entrecoles. Prior to this, the arcanum was entirely unknown and potters, scientists and their sponsors were forced to work according to a process of trial and error akin to alchemy. Unbeknownst to them however, all their experiments were inevitably flawed by the absence of a key ingredient, kaolin – an aluminium silicate essential for

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porcelain's plasticity. Kaolin was abundant in China, but found only limited regions in Europe.

Their repeated failures stemming from the omission of this vital ingredient, must have made the porcelain arriving in Europe seem all the more miraculous and the uncovering of its secrets all the more alluring. Not, it should be stressed, that these 'failures' were always regarded as being of no intrinsic quality, worth or interest in their own right both in their time as in ours. For example the Medici porcelain manufactory, extant in Florence between 1575 and 1587, was highly esteemed in its day, winning Francis I much credibility among his fellow potentates, this despite the fact that the compositional make-up of its wares differed from that of Chinese porcelain. Ultimately it was to Tschirnhausen and his colleague, Johann Friedrich Böttger, that the prize of being the first to produce 'true' porcelain was awarded, and to Augustus II that the considerable prestige of ownership of the venture fell. Convinced that Saxony’s material prosperity lay in the manipulation of the country’s rich mineral deposits (another central tenant of mercantilism), Tschirhhausen had begun to conduct experiments testing the properties of different substances under intense heat. He soon realised the significance of the samples of kaolin experimented on in 1675, so when deposits of the white chalky clay were found at Colditz in 1700, he took heart that the arcanum was within reach. It was Böttger though who fully realised the material’s potential, successfully firing red porcelain for the first time in 1707 and white in 1708.

By the time the royal manufactory opened in Dresden in 1710 it was already long anticipated, for Augustus had been quick to advertise their discoveries.18 In March 1709 he posted notices translated into four languages on church doors across his domain, informing parishioners and passers-by about the forthcoming opening of a porcelain manufactory 'that would use the natural resources of the realm for the general prosperity' (thus keeping in with the mercantilist rationale). Augustus was also keen to promote the fledgling manufactory outside of his domain, sending announcements heralding its opening to European courts:

18 Coutts, op. cit., p.87.
'We are assured of being able to make a porcelain that for its transparency and its other qualities will be able to rival that of the East Indies, and we have every reason to think that in handling this white material judiciously we shall be able to surpass it, not only in beauty and quality, but also in diversity of forms and in the fabrication of large, massive pieces such as statues, columns, services…'"19

As Tobias Burg notes, the announcement clearly signalled the Saxon prince elector’s intention ‘to utilise the Meissen porcelain to amplify his reputation in Europe’.

Burg’s essay, Porcelain and Politics: Saxon-Russian relations in the 18th Century as Reflected in Diplomatic gifts, fluently plots the strategic deployment of gifts of Meissen by Augustus II and his successor in their bid to maintain sound relationships with the Russian Imperial court. Although, he writes, porcelain would not have been the only gift given on these occasions, it was a particularly significant inclusion: ‘[i]f one considers the significance of porcelain for European courts in those days – until then an exclusive import article from East Asia – it becomes clear that Saxony thus held a remarkable trump card within the diplomacy of gifts.’20

Meissen porcelain was not disseminated solely via a process of strategic exchange but was actively sought by the wealthy of Europe who ordered pieces direct from the manufactory or through the numerous travelling agents that Augustus appointed in his bid to dominate the European market. So appealing were their wares, crafted in the Rococo style by artists and sculptors still revered today, that the monopoly was soon his. True to Tschirnhaus’s prediction then, materials natural to Saxony were central to its enrichment and, (in relative terms), to the impoverishment of neighbouring territories. Meissen’s immediate success caused some alarm among kings and courtiers of other nations who were aware of Augustus’ advantage over them, especially when the initiative is passed to his heir, August III’s agent, Comte Bruhl, who put the emphasis on the production of marketable wares, cranking-up porcelain fever to a new pitch.

19 Dauterman, op. cit., p. 5.
Augustus’ spectacular coup upped the stakes for other ambitious potentates, statesmen and entrepreneurs hoping to enrich their territory through the naturalisation of this industry. And to reiterate, they sought not only the economic benefits it offered: as Carl Eugene of Wurttemberg wrote in the founding decree of his manufactory at Ludwigsberg in 1758, a porcelain manufactory is ‘the necessary attribute of the glory and dignity of a prince’.21 And if every self-respecting nobleman would wish to support or own outright a porcelain venture natural to his own land, my thesis will argue that so too would an ambitious revolutionary government which, the evidence would suggest, was no less attuned to the benefits offered by patronage. But if Sèvres would in many ways appear an advantageous addition to their portfolio of State industries, might its royal credentials, by that point long ingrained, threaten to compromise, and even undermine its potential?

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This brief contextual background, plotting the introduction of porcelain to Europe and the spread of its popularity there is critical to our understanding of why it was that Louis XV bought the manufactory of Sèvres in 1759. It also helps explain why it was so doggedly maintained by Louis XVI, even in his most troubled hours and why, in time, a revolutionary government might take his place as patron of the manufactory. I hope it has also introduced the idea that it might not have been an entirely selfish purchase, good only for his personal image, but one made in light of the advantages it would offer the French nation, which had many times turned the luxury arts to their profit. After all, to paraphrase Colbert, ‘Fashion [was] to France what the gold mines of Peru [were] to the Spanish’.22 Neo-Colbertian defences for the manufactory were in fact quickly mounted, in accordance with which it was argued that the production of superior porcelain in France would not only prevent precious livres from being spent abroad, but would reverse the current situation – namely, the import of considerable quantities of porcelain from Saxony and Holland. Certainly they were ambitious and, as the Duc de Luynes recorded in his memoirs, of the 7 – 800,000 livres worth of merchandise that Vincennes were intent on producing, they anticipated only 300,000 worth would be purchased by the French. The remaining 4 – 500,000 livres worth

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21 Quoted by Coutts, op. cit., p.124, my emphasis.
would be sold abroad. Clearly they felt confident from the outset that the superiority of their porcelains would be internationally recognised. Remarkably this argument was still being upheld long after it had ceased to be relevant, and moreover as will later be discussed, long after it could be construed as a red rag to other aspiring manufacturers who wished to represent France in this industry.

Initially however, such economic justifications were not only current but, according to contemporary logic, sound and in 1759 Sévres was perfectly poised to realise a mercantilist’s dream, for, as Eriksen and de Bellaigue note,

‘...if not a gold mine, it was nevertheless Europe’s most flourishing manufactory, a ready made manufacture in full swing and endowed to excess with technical and artistic resources such as were pre-eminently suitable for the making of prestige articles of a pronounced luxury character.’

With the promise of stability and increased financial investment in the manufactory as a result of its support and eventual acquisition by the State, it must have seemed only a matter of time before they stole back the initiative from the Germanic states which had usurped their crown as arbiter of all things luxurious.

From the outset the manufactory had an ambitious brief – to take on the market leader: Meissen. In 1745, (i.e., approximately five years after work had begun at Vincennes, and perhaps three or four after they had successfully produced their first porcelains) the company’s shareholders applied to the conseil d'État for the exclusive right to produce ‘porcelaine façon de Saxe’, namely ‘peinte et dorée, à figures humaines’. Their application, submitted under the name of Charles Adam, (believed to have been the valet of one of the seven original shareholders) was passed in July of that year on the following terms: the company of Charles Adam is granted the patent ‘de fabriques en France, des porcelaines de la même qualité que celles qui se font en Saxe, pour dispenser les consommateurs de ce royaume de faire passer leurs fonds dans les pays étrangers.’ These terms, as Dauterman notes, ‘fairly sums up the

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24 Eriksen and Bellaigue, op. cit., p.37.
technical and economic aims of all experimental attempts to make porcelain in France.'

In fact the manufactory not only fulfilled but exceeded its early promise and over the next forty years established itself as the premiere European ‘brand’ of porcelain, one that Mimi Hellman singles out as instantly recognisable to informed eighteenth-century viewers. It remains for me to investigate further just how that brand name resonated with the French, an appreciation of which will prove vital to our understanding of the manufactory’s fate at the hands of a revolutionary government, and later still, Napoleon. Just as Michael Sonnenscher singled out the Martin brothers, vernisseurs du Roi and their imitators, as the producers of items ‘endowed with almost metaphorical connotations’, denotative of fickle fashion, wealth and luxurious excess, so I would argue that Sèvres became a multi-faceted symbol — and not only for those who could consume it, but also for those who could not. An important distinction to make between the two however is that whereas vernis Martin became a generic term for a type of lacquered chinoiserie produced by a number of workshops, the exclusivity of the type of porcelain made at Sèvres was aggressively protected by agents of the king against imitation. For good or for bad then, if Sèvres was a symbol, it was one inextricably tied to the royal household.

From the outset, connections between the manufactory of Vincennes/Sèvres and the centres of power in France — both monarchical and governmental — were made. And as such there might have been some truth in Jean Hellot’s evaluation of the commitment made to the manufactory by the fermier général Jean-François Verdu de Monchiroux, who bought nine of the twenty-one shares available in it. His purchase had little to do with an interest in or love of its porcelain, believed Hellot, an academician charged with scientific research and experimentation at the manufactory: Verdu was a philistine whose only motivation was ‘de faire sa cour à M. de Machault et Mme de Pompadour’. Whether accurate or not, this assumption suggests just how personally Vincennes was beginning to be taken in the highest

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circles. Granted, Jean-Baptiste de Machault d'Arnouville was committed to Vincennes, as to other French manufactories by dint of his office as *controleur général des finances*, but the king's mistress was involved as a result of a genuine love of the porcelain produced there. Madame de Pompadour's name has long been associated with the manufactory of Vincennes/Sèvres, and rightly so. Not only was she a prolific patron of their wares but tirelessly promoted the fledgling manufactory's cause, becoming closely associated with it as a result. Verdun, by demonstrating his commitment to the manufactory then might very well have hoped to attract the attentions of the favourite.

In her role as a consumer Pompadour's importance can hardly be underestimated and between 1747 and 1763, she purchased vast quantities of Vincennes/Sèvres porcelain for the decoration and equipping of her numerous residencies. The fact that she is recorded as having acquired pieces as early as 1747 shows that she patronised the manufactory before it became fashionable to do so. Indeed it was Pompadour who helped initiate the vogue for their porcelains, which would later put the manufactory in a position of market dominance. As Posner writes in his revisionist take on Pompadour's role as patron of the arts, her purchases of Sèvres porcelain, most often bought from the *marchand-mercier* Lazare Duvaux, would have stimulated others to buy. Undoubtedly, the manufactory's decision to name several models after her – the *pot-pourri Pompadour* and the *urne Pompadour* for example – was a direct reflection of her ability to set trends: a nominal association with her might well generate additional sales of an item to style-conscious consumers (fig.7). When choosing items for herself, Pompadour was pioneering in her taste and in the

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30 Of the 3,000 items of porcelain in her collection and inventoried following her death, c.2,500 were Vincennes / Sèvres. See Marie-Laure de Rochebrune 'La passion de Madame de Pompadour pour la porcelaine', in *Madame de Pompadour et les Arts*, ex. cat., Versailles, 2002 and Rosalind Savill, 'Madame de Pompadour et Vincennes/Sèvres: chronologie d'une passion', in *Dossier de l'Art*, no. 83, February 2002, for details of her purchases.
32 To distinguish their merchandise, Parisian shopkeepers and manufacturers would, wherever possible, make allusions to any regal or prestigious clientele on their books, either as in this instance, by naming a product after them, or as Rose Bertin did, by displaying their portraits. It might realistically be hoped that such referents would encourage others to buy safe in the knowledge that the item in question had the seal of approval of an acknowledged trend-setter. See Carolyn Sargenton, *Merchants and Luxury Markets: The Marchands Merciers of Eighteenth-century Paris*, London, 1996, pp.124 – 125; Natacha Coquery, 'The Language of Success: Marketing and Distributing Semi-Luxurious Goods in Eighteenth-century Paris', in *Journal of Design*, vol.17, no.1, 2004.
The manufactory’s sales records she is several times listed as the first to have purchased a particular model.\(^{33}\) Her receptiveness to new lines and styles, including unglazed (biscuit) porcelain, (which represented a radical departure from the traditions of porcelain sculpture), must have seemed invaluable to the manufactory’s administration which, in December 1755, made her a gift of nineteen figures of *Madame de Pompadour in the guise of friendship*, known simply as *L’Amitié*, modelled by Falconet (fig.8).\(^{34}\)

The most significant and far-reaching result of her support of the manufactory is often assumed to have been her introduction of it to her lover. The manufactory must indeed have seemed the perfect pet-project with which to distract the notoriously melancholy Louis XV. To ensure he took the bait, she is said to have rigged a charming trick, arranging for beds of scented porcelain to be ‘planted’ in the gardens of Versailles, upon which the couple should chance whilst out walking. Such a story is in all likelihood apocryphal,\(^{35}\) and in any case I believe Posner correctly surmises that no intervention would have been necessary to pique the king’s imagination: ‘[f]or a man who dabbled in chemistry and enjoyed making things with his hands, the problems and processes of fabricating porcelain must have held a considerable fascination.’\(^{36}\) Rather Posner suggests that the manufactory and its productions were something they could enjoy together, a shared passion, and one based on more than the desire simply to accumulate.\(^{37}\)

The manufactory would naturally appeal to a man of his interests, and especially, for reasons already explained, to a head-of-state with his interests and in fact *his*...

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\(^{33}\) de Rochebrune, op. cit., p.410.


\(^{35}\) Significantly, Davillier notes that the episode was recorded in Soulavie’s *Mémoires de Richelieu* published in 1792, at which point it would have been readily construed as symptomatic of the decadence of the French monarchy. Sèvres might well have found itself incriminated by virtue of the fact that they helped facilitate such frivolous set pieces, so evocative of the fallen regime. Le Baron C. Davillier, *Les Porcelaines de Sèvres de Mme du Barry, d’après les mémoires de la Manufacture Royale*, Paris, 1870, p.37.

\(^{36}\) Donald Posner, op. cit., p.87.

\(^{37}\) For example the manufactory’s head of kilns, Millot, recounts Pompadour’s experiments on porcelains of different manufactories. Singling out the resilience of porcelain to intense heat as the subject of her enquiry, she is said to have engineered tests that could be carried out in her salon, presumably in front of an assembled audience of similarly interested individuals, among whom numbered the king. Millot *Origin de la Manufacture des Porcelaines du Roi en 1740*, M.N.S. Arch Y-
involvement with the manufactory pre-dates Pompadour’s. The king first awarded Vincennes the right to set up workshops in his Château, providing it with a 10,000 livres loan from his privy purse as early as 1740. He continued to grant the company valuable privileges throughout its early years, confirming on it the exclusive right to produce porcelain in the Saxon style on 24th July 1745. His involvement with the manufactory though was not limited to the domain of legal rulings or financial transactions and his interest seems to have been much more personal and involved. In 1751 Louis appointed Dominique-Jacques de Barbarie, Marquis de Courteilles to the post of Commissaire du roi at Vincennes in order that he were kept informed of events and developments there. And for the occasions when he should want to witness proceedings at first hand, he had a royal apartment factored into the plans for the new manufactory buildings when they were drawn up in February 1752: the royal wing connected directly with a room where new products were mounted for his inspection. Jean-Jacques Bachelier’s comment in his mémoire that the king took interest in all of the manufactory’s operations then seems well founded.

Critically for the manufactory’s fortunes, the king did not keep his interest a private matter but actively promoted what he saw there both at home and abroad. He was their best salesperson – literally! In 1759 Louis XV hosted the first sale of Sèvres in his private apartments at Versailles during which his courtiers were invited to purchase wares from that year’s production. This would become an annual fixture in the manufactory’s calendar, which was only curtailed in January 1792 (having relocated to the Tuileries in 1789/90) due to poor sales. The king appears to have played an active role in the running of these sales, over which he presided in person:

‘Le Roi lui-même présidant à la manufacture de Sèvres, étalant dans son Palais les galantes productions de ce lieu… Au jour de l’an, on a apporté dans la galerie de Versailles les porcelaines de Sèvres le plus belles, et S.M. en fait la distribution aux Seigneurs pour leur argent. Elle fixe le prix elle-même, qui n’est pas à bon marché.’

38 See Eriksen and de Bellaigue, op. cit., pp.35, 102 – 3
40 See Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 4, letters of 9th January and 13th January for details concerning the early closure of that year’s exhibition.
In a courtly culture that abhorred anything resembling work, and especially commercial transactions, the king's personal involvement with the mechanisms of the sale of porcelain is remarkable. That he was prepared to roll up his sleeves where his porcelains were concerned is also illustrated by the occasion when he enlisted the help of his courtiers to help him unpack his latest acquisition. 'Il nous occupa à deballer son beau service bleu, blanc et or, de Vincennes, que l'on venait de renvoyer de Paris, où on l'avait étalé aux yeux des connoisseurs' noted the duc de Croÿ in a journal entry of February 1753.

As this quotation would suggest in addition to the annual sale of Sèvres held each year at Versailles (a tradition which in 1753 had yet to be established) Louis XV, and later his grandson intermittently mounted exhibitions of the manufactory's wares for the enjoyment of the public. Anna Francesca Craddock, an English tourist in Paris records visiting one such exhibition, from which she 'returned enthusiastic', in June 1784. The exhibition in question was that of the service given to the king of Sweden by Louis XVI, prior to its dispatch (fig.9). Only naturally that opportunities were sought for the display of the grands services, as they represented the manufactory's most ambitious and celebrated productions which won them considerable fame. And even if their public display did not always translate directly into the sale of other porcelains from Sèvres (on account of their formidable price) it might generate precious hearsay. Such an exhibition could prove an invaluable opportunity to raise their profile and generate hype and interest around the Porcelaines de France, as Sèvres was alternatively known. And they were vitally important for the manufactory's cause, for they allowed its products to gain the public profile they might otherwise have lacked, given that their usual destinations were the private homes of the wealthy. As it will become apparent later in this chapter, Sèvres porcelain was a known, talked about commodity, even within circles that were not directly targeted by the manufactory.

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41 Quoted from 'L'Espion Anglais', 2nd January 1774, by Le Baron Ch. Davillier, op. cit., p.6.
42 As Leora Auslander notes, 'for nobles, investing in wholesale trade was an acceptable activity whereas participation in either retail trade or manual labor was a cause for derogation of their status', Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France, Berkeley, Los Angeles London, 1996, p.99. Some consideration was given to this fact and among the listed privileges accorded Charles Adam in July 1745 was one addressed at its noble or officer-class shareholders, who were granted the right to continue in their involvement with the manufactory 'sans deroger à leur noblesse ne à leur état.' Arch. Nat., O1 2059, Arrêt du Conseil d'État du Roy.
Other exhibitions, such as the ones continually mounted in the manufactory’s showroom or that mentioned in the registre des délibérations of 1746, had more flagrantly promotional ambitions. On this occasion, the manufactory’s director, Jacques-René Boileau was instructed to exhibit at the manufactory a number of porcelain bouquets ‘suffisante pour garnir un dessert, de façon à montrer au public l’usage de fleurs en porcelaine’.\(^4\)\(^5\) The display was prompted by a need to show the wealthy public how best to employ Sèvres porcelain accessories, for it must not be forgotten that these were still very novel items and of unaccustomed usage. Even Sèvres’ regular service-ware might require some demonstration to prospective clients, for silver had yet to be displaced as the material of choice for the tableware used in the vast majority of wealthy households.\(^4\)\(^6\) The scope of porcelain’s functional and decorative potential, especially in the hands of Sèvres’ skilled and inventive creative team, might realistically have been unknown to many.

To a great extent the manufactory’s future was dependent on its ability to drive through this shift in customs, a goal which it soon at least partially accomplished with the help of Louis XV, who used his own table to showcase their output. Surely the sight of his porcelains laid out in all their glory, complete with an elaborate biscuit surtout, would have made an impact on the rounds of men and women, French and foreign, who dined with him, and on the audiences who might gather to watch the repast take place? (fig.10) But it was Louis’ and his heir’s habit of giving vast and magnificent services as diplomatic gifts that is often credited with spreading the fashion for Sèvres porcelain across Europe. Here, on the tables of foreign potentates, they would have gained a new audience, one equally attuned to the significance of the porcelain’s provenance as their French counterparts were. And by virtue of their proximity to the distinguished recipient, such an audience would, in all likelihood, have had the financial clout to act on instinct and to place an order of their own with the manufactory. Sèvres, then, might hope for some return from these gifts, so costly to the State, and indeed they soon acquired an international clientele who sought out their wares in the showrooms of Paris’ marchand merciers and at the manufactory itself, which proved a popular attraction for visitors to the city. The English were

\(^{45}\) Quoted by Le Chevalier Chevignard, op. cit., p.20.
\(^{46}\) Coutts, op. cit., p.116.
among Sèvres most devoted foreign clients, this despite the fact that they had a quite healthy porcelain industry at home. It is hardly surprising then that many English manufactories, such as Chelsea, sought to imitate Sèvres’ quite distinctive ‘look’.

‘Pretty things that will always be thought so’

It is a somewhat futile act to try and sum up their production, which at any one point was exceptionally varied, shifting constantly in line with changes in taste and fashion and as new items were added to their repertoire. Indeed, variety of production was, according to Sèvres’ artistic advisor, Enrick van Hulst, no less than the key to their success:

‘Diversity of styles is the guardian angel of a manufactory that makes a living from non-essential objects. What does not please one person will please others. Especially when it comes to porcelain, the strangest and most fanciful designs often prevail over the most elegant and well-reasoned designs. If we shun what is heavy and coarse, and provide what is light, fine, new, and varied, then success is assured.’

Variety aside, some attempt to pin down the essential qualities of their production should be made here in order to contextualise both changes and continuities in their oeuvre during the revolutionary decade.

Jean-Jacques Bachelier, who joined the manufactory in 1748 and was appointed its artistic director in 1751 (a position he retained until 1793), was partly responsible for accomplishing Hulst’s goals. His memoir, written in 1781 for Comte d’Angiviller, Directeur-général des Bâtiments du Roi, and published in 1796, records that at the time of his arrival satisfactory progress was being made in all departments with the exception of the painting studio, then producing substandard imitations of Japanese and Saxon porcelain. It was his job to try and initiate change, and to this end he began supplying the factory with fresh material in the hope of offering new directions to its

47 Letter from Hulst to Boileau, October 26th 1751, quoted by Ulrich Leben, Object Design in the Age of Enlightenment: The history of the royal free drawing school in Paris, Los Angeles, 2004, p.37. Hulst’s advice with regards the importance of ‘novelty’ was in fact perfectly in tune with then widely held commercial theories.
artists. The folios of prints, drawings and little paintings that he provided greatly pleased Hulst and the manufactory’s director, Jean-René Boileau, who wrote to his colleague that they were amassing quite a collection of ‘pretty things that would always be thought so.’48 His confident statement, which does not take into account the possibility that taste might change, will be tested by this thesis. In the first instance however, Bachelier’s drawings were of limited use, for few of the manufactory’s employees were able to reproduce the designs on porcelain to the necessary standard. Frustrated, Bachelier opened a school of design within the manufactory to train their painters and implement a house style, one that would in fact prove extremely enduring.

It was not instigated by Bachelier alone however, but resulted from the combined efforts of a number of individuals whose own unique contributions to the manufactory’s artistic program, orchestrated by Hulst, blended seamlessly to create a look that was identifiably Sèvres’ own. The artist most readily identifiable, if not synonymous with Vincennes/Sèvres style was François Boucher whose designs proved immensely popular with the manufactory’s clientele. It is debatable whether Boucher would ever have required Bachelier to intercede on his behalf in order to gain employment at Sèvres, as is sometimes assumed, for in any case he was a natural choice for a manufactory trying to differentiate itself from their competitors and to forge a look that was modern, modish, and quintessentially French.49 The popularity of his figures, which from the mid-1750s began to dominate all aspects of the manufactory’s output, can easily be understood. Bright, fun, fanciful and already sweetly stylised, they lent themselves perfectly to being sculpted in or painted on porcelain, (see figures 11 – 13). Soon the enfants Boucher began to turn the tables on their competitors, who were now taking their lead from Sèvres.

Equally distinctive were the porcelain bodies designed by Jean-Claude Duplessis, orfèvre du roi, on which Boucher’s designs might appear. Duplessis was charged with the invention of new shapes and models and with overseeing their production by the

48 Ibid.
manufactory’s *tourneurs* and *repaireurs* (responsible, in turn, for throwing and shaping vessels on the wheel, and for piecing together the moulded components of an article before chasing and refining the whole). He is perhaps best known for his use of exuberant, often baroque forms such as those of his celebrated *vase à tête d’éléphant* and his *pot-pourri vaisseau* which bare witness to his training in the studio of Meissonier (figs.14-15). Yet simultaneously Duplessis created an archive of enduring and timeless models for the manufactory, which, due to their measured and harmonious proportions were still in use at the close of the century, long after the termination of his employment there.\(^5\)

One last member warrants a mention for his role in the creation of a signature look. The highly respected chemist, Jean Hellot was appointed head of Sèvres chemistry department in 1751, taking over responsibility for the development of the manufactory’s range of colours. Given that in many cases the bulk of an item would be filled with an uninterrupted expanse of ground colour, work on this area was central to the aesthetic then being formulated. During his tenure of the post, he perfected and extended the range of colours which, by his death in 1766, included their celebrated pink (only latterly known as *rose Pompadour*) and a wide rage of blues, among them *Bleu Lapis*, *Bleu Celeste* and *Bleu Nouveau*, occasionally referred to in their records as *Bleu de Roi*. (Where this is the case, one sometimes finds that the ‘de Roi’ has been scribbled out, undoubtedly during the revolution when people were highly sensitive to such regal references). The saturating, jewel-like intensity of these colours and the flawlessness of their application, which can still be appreciated today, set their wares apart from the competition, which, in accordance with Sèvres’ privileged status, was forced to use monochrome (figs.16-17).

All these developments converged within the space of a few years and resulted in the formulation of a style that was definitively their own and, importantly, quintessentially French, moving the manufactory away from the influences of Saxony, China and Japan. Dauterman’s claim that the pieces made between the mid-1750s and -1760s belong to the manufactory’s ‘greatest creative moment’ then seems well founded.\(^5\) During this decade the manufactory consolidated a house-style that would

\(^5\) See Eriksen and Bellaigue, op. cit., p.81 – 82.
\(^5\) Dautermann, op. cit., p.162.
prove extremely popular with their clientele, who to an extent remained impervious to some of the manufactory’s attempts to initiate change through their employment of distinct artistic personalities. Thus it is that even in the 1790s we encounter pieces that have little to distinguish them from the manufactory’s output during its heyday. Even Etienne Falconet, during his directorship of the sculpture studio between July 1757 and September 1766 initially found it difficult to impress his own artistic imprint on their output, required as he was to satisfy the demands of the manufactory’s clientele: ‘C’est que Boucher était Boucher et qu’il y eut des ordres supérieurs’, he would later recall. Ultimately he did managed to assert his own aesthetic sensibilities, and during his tenure initiated trends in the production of biscuit sculpture that would in turn prove enduring, providing a point of departure for his successor in the sculpture department, Louis-Simon Boizot. Most notably Falconet introduced a gentle, lilting neo-classicism characteristic of his oeuvre (much of which was reproduced at Sèvres) which would inform their output from thenceforth, reaching its purest manifestation under Boizot’s directorship during the Revolution (figs.18-19). Robert Rosenblum traced just such a ‘retrogressive evolution’ in his book, *Transformations in late Eighteenth-Century Art*, identifying it as a Europe-wide trend. In this respect then, Sèvres continued to have its finger on the pulse.

Falconet was specifically charged with overseeing work in the sculpture studio, but it is likely that he was also responsible for introducing a neo-classical tone to their decorative pieces, and in particular to their range of vases, whose designs began to manifest a greater regularity of form and decoration and to deploy ornaments of classical derivation (figs.20-21). Yet the antique simply provided a starting point or spring-board for Sèvres’ oeuvre and as Svend Eriksen notes, although ‘the forms are of classical inspiration and classical ornament is used logically [...] each type is a new creation in its own right.’ Thus despite adoption of the *goût antique* (which differed fundamentally from the Rococo style in which they had worked so far), such items were still identifiably Sèvres’ own, manifesting the same extravagance and flamboyance of design and intensity of colour. Certainly such items are proof, should

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proof be needed, of René Saisslin’s point that to sponsor the neo-classical style, did not require one to make sacrifices in the name of austerity or sobriety, nor where sheer visual panache was concerned.²⁴ The art of pleasing, in fact the title of a recent exhibition of Falconet’s work at Sèvres at the Musée National de Céramique, was always at the top of their agenda and the fanciful prevailed. It is therefore perhaps hardly surprising that, to cite D’Angiviller, ‘la porcelaine [de Sèvres] un peu décorée est bien souvent plus objet de décoration que d’usage journalier.’²⁵

**Porcelain props: performing pedigree and power**

Sèvres porcelain must have seemed so fresh and fashionable that there was no competition. Even today they still have the ability to provoke strong reactions, although opinions tend to be polarised: their brilliant colours and fantastical forms can as easily alienate the modern viewer, jaded as he or she might be by bad, chocolate-boxy imitations of Sèvres and its aesthetic. Yet a second look at the originals soon reveals them to be the extraordinary creations they are. Gaudy and brash they might sometimes seem, but so too are they harmonious and organic, and so utterly flawless that one wonders if they were ‘made’ at all. In their shiny perfection, they seem to deflect the taint of human agency in their creation, as they seem to do *meaning* and as Mimi Hellman notes, ‘it is all too easy to assume perhaps, that the refined elegance and apparently unproblematic nature of eighteenth-century adornment indicates a poverty of meaning.’²⁶ Yet this was far from the case and for the men and women who bought or coveted them, they were extremely meaningful, potent and multivalent status symbols denotative in the first instance, of great wealth.

Curiously, porcelain had an edge on gold and other precious metals when it came to flaunting one’s ability to consume conspicuously, this despite its being in essence, a simple white clay which gained value only, as Jacques Necker recognised, when

²⁵ Arch. M.N.S., H3 liasse 2, letter from D’Angiviller to Régnier, 21st July 1784.
²⁶ Hellman, op. cit., p.417.
subjected to the attention of artists and designers. Gold and silver were ostentatious signs of wealth for sure, but their capacity to be repeatedly melted downs to a bullion state, or remoulded as fashion dictated meant they might not only signify financial security, but insecurity. As Louis Dermigny wrote:

‘Couverts et vaisselle d’argent sont depuis longtemps le signe classique de la promotion sociale parce que témoignage de richesse et de respectabilité, mais d’une richesse contenue et encore empreinte des limitations et des peurs d’un monde ancien, fréquemment secoué par les mutations ou les famines monétaires; forme de thésaurisation autant que marque d’ostentation, ils sont un luxe, bien sûr, mais avec une utilité, une réserve à envoyer à la fonte et à monnayer au sens propre en cas de besoin…’

In contrast, he continues, porcelain represented ‘la richesse débarrassée des ses prudences et de ses timidités, le luxe affranchi de la tyrannie de l’utile et sans arrière-pensée.’ The purchase of expensive porcelain then, offered the rich an opportunity to show off their carefree abandon where their finances were concerned, the significance of which should not be underestimated.

For any self-respecting eighteenth-century aristocrat, or aspiring courtier, the now tongue-in-cheek maxim, ‘I shop therefore I am’, was deadly serious and intricately bound up with matters of identity and honour. As Natascha Coquery writes, ‘C’est par sa prodigalité, ses dépenses démesurées, que l’aristocrate affirme sa prééminence, plus encore son être même.’ Theirs was, after all, a society that placed great importance on the appearance of things, a society in which, without consuming over and above one’s need – and refreshing one’s purchases regularly through, for example, the refurbishment of one’s hôtel or wardrobe – you risked social death. For all that the luxury debate may have raged back and forth between enlightened and conservative thinkers, for a courtier, there was no question: they must consume conspicuously. And for this social group Sèvres offered the ultimate in consumables. Not only were their fragile wares irreparable if broken, but in being so modish, if they were not the

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59 Ibid.
victim of clumsiness, then they would soon fall prey to the vagaries of fashion. Their life span was therefore – refreshingly – comparatively short. Furthermore the sheer range of objects created at the manufactory catered for every occasion and ‘need’, even the most bodily. The fabrication of porcelain pots de chambres, painted and gilded with the same attention to detail as their wares for more public usage, for example, suggests that the discerning aristocrat or financier’s wife need not be without luxury, even whilst relieving herself! (fig.22)

Another distinguishing quality of Sèvres porcelain was its exorbitant price, which in itself became a talking point: few writers seem able to conclude any mention of the manufactory or its wares without some reference to cost. The Reverend William Cole for example recounted with some amazement the fact that he saw his companion, Horace Walpole, hand over ‘10 louis or guineas for a single coffee cup, saucer and a little square sort of soucoup or under-saucer to set them on.’ Similarly, the newly married Madame de la Tour de Pin could not resist recording the cost of a gift composed in part of Sèvres porcelain given to her by Madame de Henin: ‘Her gift was the one which gave me the greatest of pleasure. I believe it cost 6,000 francs’, she writes. As a point of comparison, Boucher’s The Return from the Hunt, painted for the king’s dining room at Fontainebleau cost 600 livres, a little below the average price for a small painting in this format by the artist. Even taking into consideration the matter of inflation, this affords one an idea of just how expensive Sèvres porcelain could be.

La Tour du Pin’s guessing at its price cannot simply be attributed to girlish excitement for it would appear that this was in fact a widely practised activity, one that would easily (and, given the amount of hype surrounding Sèvres’ cost), perhaps inevitably result in extra noughts being added. Accordingly the Directeur-général des Bâtiments du Roi, D’Angiviller, decided not to advertise the magnificent toilette set given by the king to the Comtesse du Nord and on display at the manufactory in June 1782, even

though it might attract visitors and generate additional sales, for fear of provoking exaggerated speculations about its cost:

‘...en effet il n’est point de la dignité du Roy qu’aussitôt qu’il vient de faire un présent à un prince étranger il ensuite fait annonce dans un journal. Ce la pourrait donner lieu de penser qu’on cherche a donner un très grand prix à ce présent.’

However, if such speculation might not have been to the advantage of a government increasingly vulnerable to public criticism over the excesses of their spending, it would be for a private owner, who could be sure that their expenditure would register in the minds of others. That the cost of Sèvres porcelain might remain a talking point during the Revolution is suggested by a journal entry of Viscount Palmerston who visited the manufactory in July 1791: ‘The things [at Sèvres] are beautiful but [...] dearer than I could have imagined’, he writes. In an age in which considerable hostility was shown towards the wealthy, this was certainly no longer to Sèvres’ advantage, nor to that of the buyer. Spending money on luxuries such as porcelain might still single you out, but for hostility, not admiration, for it could be used as evidence of aristocratic sentiments or of having taken advantage of the poverty of others. Such a case is mounted against a butcher from the Montagne Sainte Geneviève whose purchase of a porcelain service for 1,000 écus incites the anger of his anonymous denouncer: ‘cela n’est-il pas criante?’ he asks. And the penalties for such injustices could be severe. Little wonder then that Sèvres would see their sales figures drop considerably with the onset of Revolution!

Sèvres porcelain was recognised for its quality and modishness, marking its owner out as someone of taste, refinement and importantly, pedigree. As Leora Auslander argues, the French crown was still hegemonic in their regulation of the production and distribution of goods, using the invention of style and access to it to consolidate their

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65 Arch. M.N.S., H2 liasse 3, letter from D’Angiviller to Régnier, 13th June 1782.
68 Les Crimes de l’Assemblée Nationale, Paris 1790, p.7. I would like to thank Richard Taws for bringing this source to my attention.
position. The possibilities for emulating courtly style were therefore limited, and permitted at all only insofar as it was understood to be ‘helpful to the court’s prestige’. This was eminently the case with porcelaine de Sèvres where broader emulation of royal style was restricted by the imposition of regulations preventing other manufactories creating potentially cheaper versions of their wares. If you wanted porcelain in the Sèvres style (read: regal style), in theory, you had to buy Sèvres, a fact that automatically excluded whole swathes of aspirational shoppers by virtue of its price. As Bachelier protested, ‘En general, la porcelaine de Sèvres est trop chère; elle ne doit pas être seulement à l’usage des rois et des grands; le débit en seroit trop borné...’. In fact Sèvres was bought by a wider demographic than Bachelier suggests and, as already discussed, it was popular with well-to-do foreigners visiting Paris, as well as with wealthy (although not necessarily aristocratic) French men and women. Ownership of Sèvres could single out men and women as especially privy to royal style, a fact that would inevitably prove a powerful lure. It is, argues Auslander, crucial therefore to understand the use of objects and their display in ancien-régime France as political, allowing one to occupy a position, rather than assert oneself as an individual, (this paradigmatic shift in relations between people and goods only took place in the nineteenth century). In this vein, and adopting a phrase from the sociologist, R.S. Perinbanayagam, ‘furnishings’, notes Mimi Hellman, allowed elite consumers ‘to do self with things’.

The history of elite goods as social signifiers is, she observes, increasingly well rehearsed by a core group of historians of consumer culture, the importance of whose

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69 Auslander, op. cit., p.164.
70 ibid., p.58.
71 The rules governing the production of porcelain by other manufactories are set out in the Arrest du Conseil d’Etat du Roi of 19th August 1753, see Arch. Nat., O1 2059
72 In reality however, these restrictions were often flouted by the increasing number of workshops working illegally or under the protection of other powerful protectors.
74 Aileen Dawson, ‘Who bought Sèvres porcelain? New light on the factory’s clientele in the 18th century’, unpublished paper delivered at the two-day symposium held by The French Porcelain Society, The Wallace Collection, 9th - 10th September 2005
75 Ibid., p.61
work she is quick to stress. However, inherent in their writings are limitations that she hopes to redress:

'This essay will suggest that decorative objects conveyed meaning not simply through possession [which she identifies as a locust point of the aforementioned methodology] but also through usage, through a spatial and temporal complicity with the cultivated body that produced the appearance of leisured, sociable ease. The practice of consumption, I will argue, was visual and kinetic; objects were not simply owned, but indeed performed.'

What follows is a fascinating account of the ways in which furnishings and ornamental accessories when correctly used, orchestrated the body's movement in line with the complex codes of social behaviour outlined in courtesy books. The mastery of their usage – not always simple in an age of mechanical furniture of remarkable intricacy – could have the power of sorting the effortlessly aristocratic from the awkward, and were therefore eagerly integrated into the act of performing one's social standing. She freely admits that the scenarios she describes, such as one's performance whilst sinking into or arising from an overstuffed armchair for instance, or whilst at the gaming table are speculative, yet they gain considerable weight from their juxtaposition to primary quotations. For example Hellman cites Pierre-Joseph Boudier de Villemert’s description of the charming vignettes that might be created whilst at the toilette table:

'One refastens a bracelet to expose a lovely arm; one readjusts yet again a necklace or a nosegay to draw attention to the whiteness of the neck; one laughs to show off beautiful teeth; one makes a false move, one changes the position of a face-patch, one alters one's pose each moment to inspire men with renewed feelings of admiration.'

There can be little doubt that items of Sèvres porcelain might facilitate the choreographed display of the body. What a heady impression might one make for


78 Ibid., p.417, my emphasis.

79 Quoted from L'ami des femmes, 1758, ibid., p.428.
example, by the deceptively simple act of watering bulbs planted in a fabulous \textit{vase hollondaise} with a Sèvres porcelain \textit{arrosoir}, before bending to smell their fragrant blooms? (figs.23-24) And how charming might the fleeting glimpse of a youthful \textit{décolletage} be as you artfully lent forward to pour tea for a guest, the sugaring of which allowed for the display of a finely turned wrist (fig.25). Moreover, Sèvres was not only a perfect prop for the strategic display of feminine charms or indeed, of \textit{honnesteté}, but could be instrumental in the creation of a sense of intimacy between the actress/actor and their audience, intimacy being a prerequisite for the performance of these quintessentially \textit{ancien-régime} rôles.

Sèvres porcelain then allowed for the acting out of a specifically aristocratic, leisurely mode of being, the importance of which has been outlined by Thomas Crow.\textsuperscript{80} The implications of this for my thesis are considerable, for if the use of Sèvres porcelain helped construct a particular identity – that of an aristocrat or rich, aspirational bourgeois – then how would it implicate its owners during the revolution, when such a display culture was vilified? As noted in my introduction, the Sèvres-buying, tea-drinking sans-culotte was surely an oxymoron.

‘...[W]hilst the bakers make the bread, the bread makes the bakers...’

I have argued that ownership of Sèvres porcelain helped one inhabit a particular identity: could the same be said for the act of making it? Pieces of Sèvres porcelain were not in fact, as I earlier suggested, naturally begotten, but made – the result of the labour of a large number of individuals who had honed their craft to such perfection that they almost efface their own authorship. The question I now want to ask is whether the act of fabricating these luxurious goods proved in any way self-defining. Might we usefully reapply Daniel Bertaux and Isabelle Bertaux-Wianme’s neat turn of phrase, ‘\textit{So it may be said that whilst the bakers make the bread, the bread makes the bakers}’ to the workers at Sèvres?\textsuperscript{81} And if so, what mould would the workers have been cast as a result of their employment there?

\textsuperscript{80} Thomas Crow, op. cit., chapter 2, especially pp.65 – 74.
\textsuperscript{81} Quoted by Auslander, op. cit.,p.122
These are questions asked of those working in the furniture trades by Auslander whose book, she writes, '...worries a great deal about identity: about what the concept means, and about how the making and buying of goods were at certain conjunctions important means of inventing the self [...]'. Or is this assuming too much? In light of the fact that workers at Sèvres, like those in many furnishing trades, were essentially part of what we might now recognise as a 'production line', should our conclusions be weighted towards the latter of the two options posited by Auslander? She continues: '[...] at other moments one or the other of those activities [making and buying goods] were quite irrelevant to the process of self-creation.' Might artisanal man, working in a system in which he is once-removed from the end product of his labour, render him '...less able to produce [himself] through creative work, as [his] labour becomes fractured and divided'? These are complex and un-resolvable questions but which, regardless, warrant some consideration. After all these are the workers, or the mothers and fathers of the workers who would in time grind the pigments, work the kilns, burnish the gold as employees of the manufacture nationale of Sèvres porcelain. How they reacted to the exigencies of the revolutionary regime might to some degree be logically conditioned by or refracted through how they related to themselves, each other, the world beyond the manufactory walls and their work as employees of the then manufacture royale. In short, it is not enough simply to understand what they did, but how they might have felt about doing it. As Michael Sonenscher writes of his case study – hatters:

‘In a sense work never tells its own story. Like the genetic codes transmitted in the reproduction of living organisms, work carries images and aphorisms of the wider nexus of social life within its own cadences and rhythms. The reason why work was done in certain ways in different times and places does not belong entirely to the techniques deployed in the work itself. To understand what happened when people made hats in 18th century France, the essential prerequisites to an understanding of a trade – materials and skills, costs and profits, products and markets – needs to be placed within a wider context of meaning.’

82 Ibid., p.17.
83 Ibid., p.21
How might employment at the manufactory have been invested with meaning? One can of course only speculate, but I would suggest that Sévres’ peculiar capacity to shape its employees’ sense of self was strongly rooted in its status as a manufacture royale and that this was an identity which not only distinguished its patrons as somehow special. In the world of work, the Sèvrians too were privileged individuals. Whether their status worked in their favour or to their detriment, however, is a moot point and one especially pertinent during the revolutionary decade.

Perhaps the first thing to note is the scale of the manufactory workforce, which trebled within the space of twenty-seven years, (growing from 110 employees in 1750 to 338 by 1777). At a time when most businesses were on a ‘family scale’, this was something that would have set the Sèvrian workforce apart. Despite the numbers employed and their inevitably varied backgrounds and life experiences, the impression often given is that all bedded down with some amount of facility to create an extended family of sorts. Tamara Préaud, archivist at the manufactory of Sèvres suggests that there were minimal tensions between those employed in the different studios housed under the one roof. This might in part be explicable by the particular hierarchical organisation of the manufactory, i.e., discounting the senior management, there was no cohesive or overarching hierarchy governing the whole manufactory. Rather, it was fragmented across different ateliers: as such, as Préaud observes, ‘[u]n bon façonnier était manifestement mieux payé et considérer qu’un peintre médiocre.’ This could have meant that tensions that might naturally arise within such a workplace could be more easily diffused within the small space of a particular studio, rather than being allowed to build up across the whole manufactory. It also

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85 The numbers began to drop during the 1780s and 1790s: in 1783 there were 283 workers employed at Sèvres; in 1792, there were 205. These figures are quoted by (in order) Le Chevalier Chevignard, op. cit., p.16; Jacques Farges, ‘Population et métiers à Sèvres à la veille de la Révolution, in Sèvres à l’époque de la Révolution, unpublished conference proceeding, Archives de Sèvres, 1992; Comte X. Chavagnac and M. Grollier, Histoires des Manufactures Françaises de Porcelaines, 1906, p.190; Document (without title), Arch. Nat., F12 1495 II: Personnel.

86 Most statistics concerning the numbers employed in eighteenth century French businesses appear to have been calculated according to the mean average, resulting in estimates of between 15 and 17. However, because the likes of Sèvres, Oberkampf, Gobelins, Révellion, Saint Gobain and other large manufactories inevitably distort the figures, I have employed the modal average. For figures calculated according to the mean, see Daniel Roche, who estimates the average workshop’s employment numbered 15 workers, or Albert Soboul, 16 or 17, Daniel Roche, Le peuple de Paris: Essai sur la culture populaire au XVIIIe siècle, Paris, 1998, p.97; Albert Soboul, Understanding the French Revolution, London, 1988, p.89.

meant that every worker would stand a chance of rising up the ranks of his studio to become a respected member of the manufactory by dint of hard work and merit. The *Registres Matricules des Peintures* for example, records Charles-Nicolas Dodin’s rise up the manufactory’s pay scale as he perfected his talent for figure painting. That theirs was an aspirational model, accessible to those with ability is also illustrated by the career trajectory of one *manœuvre*, Maillet, who, on finding he had a gift for painting delicate arabesques was transferred to the appropriate studio so as to maximise on his skills for the manufactory’s benefit. If elsewhere the guild system limited people’s mobility within the work market, here there were fewer restrictions or prejudice inherent, encouraging ambition.

‘En outre’, continues Préaud, ‘les registres paroissiaux manifestent une forte coherence de tout le personnel de la manufacture, sans clivage réel entre d’éventuelles ‘classes sociales’. She is referring no doubt to the numerous marriages that took place between the workers at Sèvres. The couples in question were usually employed in the same studio: Etienne-François Bouillat, a painter working at the manufactory between 1758 and 1810 for example, married Geneviève-Louise née Thévenet, who belonged to a family of painters working at Sèvres, where she was also employed as a painter between 1777 and 1798. In 1784 a Mlle Bouillat is registered in the painting studio of the manufactory where, in 1786, she is joined by Bouillat *fils*. Presumably they are the children of Etienne-François and Geneviève-Louise.

Marriages were not always contracted between men and women from the same studio however: Marie-Josèphe Ganeau, née Chanou was, for example, a *brunisseur* who married an *aide des ateliers de peinture*; Madame Grémont, née Viennot, a *fabricant des fleurs* who married a *tourneur, repareur*. Both couples had children working at the manufactory – the Grémont’s son and daughter were employed as painters and gilders respectively. In the next generation then we see the boundaries between

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88 Dautermann, op. cit., p.169.
89 Arch. M.N.S., H4, liasse 1, letter from D’Angiviller to Régnier, 6th September 1787.
91 Préaud, op. cit., 1992, p.67. This reinforces Sonenscher’s point that the still pervasive notion that class is the factor determining relations between workers and between workers and their masters is not only teleological but obstructive to an understanding of workplace relationships, op. cit. 1989, p.245.
92 All information appertaining to the names of workers employed at Sèvres and the dates of their employment has been taken from Marcelle Brunet and Tamara Préaud, Sèvres: Des origines à nos jours, Switzerland, 1978, pp.354 – 383.
different studios broken down through inter-studio family ties. Families could be quite dispersed across the manufactory as in the case of the Davignon family:

Davignon (père): *Manoeuvre*, 1763 – 1782  
Davignon (jeune): *touneur*, 1770 – 1776; 1778 – 1781  
Davignon (neveu, François-Jean): *repareur*, 1776 – 1798  
Davignon (père?): *à la couverte en encastage*, 1782 – 1785  
Davignon (jeune) *repareur*, 1784 – 1791

Upward mobility within the manufactory was evidently possible. Especially noteworthy and suggestive of a meritocratic culture existent at the manufactory are the Raux family in which the father was employed as a *manoeuvre*, and his eldest son a painter. Likewise Auger père was employed as a *manoeuvre*, his son a sculptor. This breaks down the divisions we might have assumed there to have been between manual workers and artists. Such relationships, we can only suppose, created strong bonds of kinship, friendship and networks of support where we might have expected, if not animosity, then indifference or differentiation. The significance of this will later become apparent: as we shall see, bonds between the members of different studies allowed the workers at Sèvres to unite together during the Revolution, often in huge numbers and to powerful effect. Certainly familial relationships and fraternal friendships must have encouraged cohesion within the manufactory, which might well have seemed their whole world. Self-sufficiency would also have resulted from the fact that many employees lived rent-free within the grounds of the manufactory and some amongst them were even provisioned with a small plot of land as a reward for good service. Additionally, the manufactory housed a chapel where they could worship and employed a physician who would attend to the sick amongst them.\(^9\)

Were they akin to one massive family living under the paternal protection of the king, their father, and if so, would his removal in August 1792 prove destabilising? This hypothesis will be tested in chapter III. Certainly a ‘family model’ would parallel modes of artisanal employment under the corporatist system, in which apprentices and
journeymen lived under the same roof as their master with whom they shared their bread. Sonenscher's essay, 'Journeymen's migrations and workshop organisation in eighteenth-century France', investigates the bonds of intimacy that are believed to have formed between masters and their employees as a result. He argues though that, rather than being a natural consequence of cohabitation, intimacy was in fact carefully cultivated to negate the actual impermanence of relationships between different parties: most employers had to contend with a rapid turnover of their workforce. In contrast, brevity of employment was rarely an issue at Sèvres, where many worked for years at a time, if not for their whole lives. Additionally the scale on which the manufactory was built might have made what was elsewhere a socially stabilising strategy, an unforced reality for many. As I have suggested, it housed a community of sorts amongst which one might find a partner and later, perhaps, employment for the offspring: the number of family units at Sèvres surely substantiates this.

One further factor had the potential to reinforce bonds formed between workers, namely their isolation from the world beyond their walls. This was less a result of actual, geographically dictated conditions for Sèvres, (which by the late eighteenth century was home to a not insubstantial population), was situated on a busy highway between Versailles and Paris, both of which were within easy reach by foot. Indeed, as we shall see, their location would in fact prove particularly significant to their formation as active and engaged political citizens during the Revolution. Rather, their isolation was dictated by the rule of law.

The workers at Sèvres were privileged by dint of their employment in a manufacture royale (something that might also have proved socially stabilising, ironing out differences between individuals working in the manufactory, for all had equal claim on the same privileges). Specifically, after six months of employment there, they were exempted from being called up for conscription, from being obliged to house soldiers, and from paying taxes, making employment at Sèvres a particularly attractive

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95 See Jacques Farges, op. cit.
prospect for those looking for work in the industry. These privileges were not without conditions however and as Deyon and Guignet note, State manufactories like Sèvres imposed an ‘almost military or monastic discipline [...] on its workers, under threat of sanctions on pay or imprisonment.’ Specifically, upon entering the manufactory, they forfeited their right to come and go as they pleased: Sèvres’ employees were forbidden to leave the manufactory, even for a day, without permission from the management. And when terminating their employment with the manufactory, an application period of six months was required. This contrasts extremely unfavourably with the corresponding time necessary to end a contract elsewhere. In Paris for example, workers were obliged to give a fortnight’s notice, and even this was routinely resisted, leading to much antagonism between employers and employees. If granted leave, Sèvres’ hold over that individual did not end there however, for it was only ever given on the condition that he or she should not seek out employment in another workshop or manufactory where ceramics were produced either in France or elsewhere in Europe. Essentially, they could not put into practice the trade they had learned whilst employed at Sèvres. And these were not empty threats: flouting the regulations would risk incurring not only massive fines but imprisonment. Punishments would also be meted out to the men who offered employment to a former employee of the manufacture royale.

Generally speaking, the world of work in eighteenth-century France was highly regulated and governed by rules and restrictions imposed by law. Yet those to which

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96 See article XIV, Arrest du Conseil d’État du Roi qui accorde à Eloi Bricard le privilège de la Manufacture royale de Porcelaine, établie à Vincennes, 19 Août 1753, Arch. Nat., O1 2059.
98 This time period is specified in a memoir dated 10th July 1774: ‘La manufacture de porcelaine du Roy a de plus le privilège que tous ouvriers qui venu en sorti lui dois 6 mois de travail & compte du jour où il demande son congé.’ Arch. M.N.S., D1, dossier Lemaire, ouvrier, 1774.
100 Should a worker absent himself without leave a fine would be levied against him, calculated at double his pay per day for the first few days of absence, after which it was increased to a fine of fifty livres and a stint (of unspecified duration) in prison. If during their absence they were employed in a rival manufactory then they would have to pay a thousand livres in compensation to Vincennes/Sèvres: failure to do so would incur a three year prison sentence.
101 Anyone found guilty of employing a former Sèvrian, would be liable for a thousand livres fine, article IX of Arrest du Conseil d’État du Roi qui accorde à Eloi Bricard le privilège de la Manufacture royale de Porcelaine, établie à Vincennes, 19 Août 1753, Arch. Nat., O1 2059. This fine was later raised to three-thousand livres, see article VI of Arrêt du Conseil d’État du Roi, Confirmant les
the Sèvrians were subject were especially notable for their draconian nature and long reaching application, and for the vigour with which infringement was pursued by the relevant authorities. There are several reasons that might explain why the manufactory so jealously guarded its employees, first among which being the investment that each one represented. All their employees – not just the painters whose schooling has already been mentioned – required the appropriate training in order to carry out their role in the chain of production, into which they must seamlessly slip. Additionally, porcelain production was a precision art, and Sèvres’ management demanded absolute perfection of their workforce: any blemish or fault apparent on an item would result in its rejection. Yet as a result of that schooling, each now highly skilled employee was rendered a potential liability for the manufactory, which closely guarded the formulas and secrets upon which their production was dependent. Although it was unlikely that any one worker would know the production processes start to finish, they might possess the trade secrets central to the successful firing of a particular colour, or have access to the latest models and design innovations intended to distinguish Sèvres from the competition. It would appear that some employees knew exactly the street-value of the secrets invested in them, secrets that – alongside more tangible goods – they were prepared to sell on the black market.

It is easy to imagine that by demanding life-long loyalty from their workforce the manufactory administration provoked reactions against their rules, and Sèvres, (like many extended families) had its own rebel core. An undated document in the Archives Nationales, entitled ‘Observations pour Monsieur le Lieutenant Général de Police’, for example, lists crimes recently committed by a number of Sèvres employees and the punishments to which they were subjected. The first named is the sculptor, Perrotin, guilty of selling a pastoral group that he had stolen from the manufactory. Colluding with him was one D’Albret, a kiln worker, who took the said sculptural group to the Faubourg St Denis, presumably to its purchaser, who was perhaps intent on copying it. D’Albrect’s predecessor in the kiln department, Gérard, described here as ‘délinquant et infidèle’, was also found guilty of procuring

Privilèges de la Manufacture royale des Porcelaines de France et portant Règlement sur la fabrication des autres Manufactures de Porcelaine, du 16 Mai 1784, Arch. Nat., O1 2061.

102 Eriksen and Bellaigue, op. cit., p.38.
103 Ibid., p.61.
104 Arch Nat., O1 2061.
models for private entrepreneurs and for helping facilitate their experiments using the kilns at Sèvres, a crime for which he spent several days in l'hôtel de la force. The document informs us that he was at that moment employed in a workshop in the Faubourg Saint-Denis, rendering the contract he signed upon being discharged from prison swearing not to seek out work in the profession, null and void. Every day, reads the memoir,

‘...les ouvriers les plus utiles, comme peintres, sculpteurs, repareurs, employés aux different fours etc etc, prennent datte pour obtenir leurs congés, et sont débauchés par les promesses excessives des directeurs et entrepreneurs des manufactures particuliers.’

One Sieur Coteau, temporarily employed at Sèvres to work on the toilette given in 1782 to the Comtesse du Nord, is here denounced for being in the pay of other manufacturers, for whom he worked as ‘le principal embaucher des ouvriers de la manufacture du Roi’.106 The insider information that he gleaned whilst working there made him a dangerous agent: ‘il a été à même de connaître le plus ou moins de talent et capacité de chacun, par ses entrées familières dans tous les ateliers et fours, lorsqu’il y a été employé.’

These were not new trends for the manufactory administration to contend with – on the contrary, worker insubordination was a longstanding problem at Sèvres. As early as August 1747, the decree setting out their rules and regulations, passed just two years previously had to be reissued as a result of the disuse into which it had already fallen:

‘...quelques-uns des ouvriers dans l'espérance de trouver ailleurs des conditions plus avantageuses [...] se seroient absentez de ladite manufacture, ou pour se procurer la liberté d'aller ailleurs, ils auroient par leur peu de régularité dans leur travail et leur mauvaise conduite, forcé ledit entrepreneur à les renvoyer: que même quelques-uns qui sont encore dans les ateliers, ont fait des tentatives pour engager de leurs camarades à prendre parti ailleurs, pour se procurer des avantages plus considérables en travaillant pour leur propre comte, ou celui des quelques particuliers avides de profiter de ce que lesdits ouvriers avoient appris dans ladite manufacture, sur la composition des matières sur la main d’oeuvre à laquelle ils avoient été employez, pour former

105 This example also serves as a further indication that bonds might be built between employees working in different ateliers.
106 This detail helps us date the document to the mid-1780s.
Clearly many were intent upon freeing themselves from the tyrannical hold of the manufactory whose terms of employment, although in many respects very advantageous, conflicted with their notions of their rights as individuals, and, moreover, probably reflects badly on their pay! These examples suggest that the world of work was in fact more permeable than the dominant ivory tower construction of Sèvres would allow, and that some of their employees were familiar enough with their Parisian counterparts to strike up deals, conspiring to their mutual benefit. Given that their contacts in the city belonged to a class that would soon form the backbone of the sans-culotterie, such relationships gain added significance in the context of this thesis.

Steven Kaplan notes that ‘[n]othing troubled masters more than the problem of worker discipline. Virtually everyone who observed the world of work in the eighteenth century had the impression that insubordination was on the rise.’ The strict rules governing employment at Sèvres was perhaps a logical result of those shared anxieties. And well might Sèvres’ administration worry, for among their employees were men who evidently believed themselves part of the world of work in its wider sense, and who were in tune with current debates and campaigns being fought, and familiar with the language used to fight them. Sonenscher, for instance, recounts a declaration made in 1755 by the manufactory employee responsible for managing the painting and gilding studio at Sèvres, provoked by the implementation of new rules fixing their working hours. Matters concerning working hours were always contentious and his denunciation of changes made to them cannot be deemed unique but rather in keeping with widely held debates. ‘En France’, he writes, ‘il n’y avait point d’esclavage et …de quelque façon qui l’on s’y prit, l’on ne trouverait jamais en lui un homme qui se laisser mener comme un enfant …On aurait à faire à un homme et non à un morveaux.’ It is interesting that he has made recourse to the family metaphor, comparing his treatment by the manufactory to that of a brat guided by unwieldy and un-wielding hands. He feels himself a man reduced to a child by

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their authoritarian structuring of his day. Undermined and infantalised, he is primed to rebel against the father figure.

*Esclavage* was a word often employed by workers during the eighteenth-century for whom it was particularly resonant and, as Sonenscher notes, ‘invested with a powerful rhetorical charge’. This was a direct result of the belief maintained in the then prevailing philosophical arguments that liberty was *un droit naturel*, enshrined in civil law: its violation was therefore a reason for protest. How might our Sèvrian worker have become familiar with this loaded term? I have already suggested that there were men among them who were friendly with individuals in the near by capital where such debates were vigorously argued. This theory assumes that there was some amount of discourse or ideological exchange between the two worker groups. Later, in 1783, the establishment of a Masonic lodge at Sèvres would provide another venue for the participation in debates, in which the language of rights might well have been deployed as a consequence of freemasonry’s concern with what Colin Jones has called the ‘ethic of humanitarian egalitarianism’.

The local historian, Pierre Mercier, numbers ‘au moins’ twenty-nine employees of Sèvres, all of them painters or sculptors among the membership of *Les Cœurs Unis*, as Sèvres’ club was titled.

Yet the rebellious sub-current that ran through the ateliers appears to have been relatively contained, or at least contain-able, for it was not only the showroom that was deemed fitting for the reception of visitors – even of the highest rank – but the workspace too. The manufactory, like other commercial spaces throughout France’s metropolitan hubs, became a place of tourism and was routinely included on the itineraries of visiting foreigners and Frenchmen alike. Of less concern here are the huge numbers of men and women who made the trip to Sèvres, disrupting production

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100 Ibid., see chapter 2 ‘Images of Artisans’, especially pp.49-50.
112 Alain Bihan’s index of membership to the lodges of Paris and its environs, *Francs-Maçons Parisiens du Grand Orient de France: Fin du XVIIIe siècle*, (Paris, 1966), only lists nineteen employees of the manufactory: fourteen painters and five sculptors. We must assume that this discrepancy is the result of new material having been brought to light during the interval of twenty-three years between Bihan’s publication and Mercier’s presentation of his research. Pierre Mercier, ‘Un “Espace” Révolutionnaire: La Manufacture de Sèvres (1789 – 1794), in *Les Éspaces Révolutionnaires: Actes du 114e Congrès National des Sociétés Savantes*, (Paris, 1989), Paris, 1990, p.172. It is significant, but unsurprising, that only artists and sculptors numbered among its membership for, even though by contemporary standards the masons were extraordinarily inclusive, they were not open to all and social and financial factors would determine your eligibility. This suggests that, even if Sèvres was a close knit community, distinction did exist between the men employed in the different studios.
and in Bachelier’s opinion, putting pieces at risk as a result of their exposure to dust raised by the constant sweep of garments as the curieux passed by. More pertinent for my point are the visits made by European and eastern royalty, (for whom the manufactory was a source of considerable interest), who were usually honoured with a guided tour of the manufactory concluding in the presentation of gifts. Understandably, such visits received considerable advance planning from Sèvres administration, concerned with promoting the manufactory in the best possible light. Correspondence concerning these noteworthy events suggests that they believed their best ambassadors were none other than their workforce. On the occasion of the visit made in June 1782 by Paul I, heir to the Russian throne and his wife, Maria Feodorovna, (travelling by the name of the Comte et Comtesse du Nord) for example, D’Angiviller took the opportunity to point out to the manufactory’s director, Antoine Régnier, his habit of curtailing his employees’ responses to questions put to them by visitors. After all, it was they who were best placed to answer them satisfactorily and most deserving of the opportunity to do so:

‘Il n’est pas juste [...] que les artistes et les savans à qui la manufacture doit en partie ses progrès et sa supériorité, soient privés l’honneur qui doit leur en revenir, et n’ayant pas la satisfait de s’expliquer sur les objets qu’ils entendent mieux que personne. Mon intention est lors de la visite de M. le Comte du Nord, de les présenter au Prince et de lui faire connoître les travaux dont ils sont chargé dans la manufacture. Je vous recommande de leur ressort la liberté de repondre aux questions de le Prince et de lui donner les éclairissemens qu’il sera dans le cas de demander.’

The interest in their skilful productions, and the praise they won for it might conceivably have fostered a certain pride in their work for the manufactory, the importance of which Auslander refuses to take for granted in her account of the furnishing trades. ‘Unlike most labour histories, [her] book assumes that workers may have been as concerned with the objects they made as with the labour processes, wages, and working conditions.’ Collectively, the Sèvrians were celebrated artists

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114 Arch. M.N.S., H2, liasse 3, letter from D’Angiviller to Régnier, 26th March 1782. Exactly which studios were visited remains unspecified. Certainly on occasions the spaces in which manual, physical work was carried out were included in the itinerary. Bachelier notes, for example, that the visits made to the kiln by many people had resulted in increasing number of accidents within the manufactory, ibid.
and their achievements were not only mounted on display but also reported nationally in the press and for example the biscuit centrepiece made at Sèvres for the Dauphin's wedding banquet attracted the attention of writers for *L'Avant-Coureur* and *Le Mercure de France*. The correspondent for the *Mercure* opened his four page description of the sculptures made for the occasion with a declaration that 'Le Banquet royal a fourni à la manufacture de Sèves (sic) l’occasion de montrer ce que le zèle et les talents réunis peuvent produire.' That the manufactory had put the town of Sèvres on the map is suggested in Louis-Marie Prudhomme's guide to Paris and its environs, written in 1807:

‘Ce bourg situé au bout du parc de St-Cloud, est célèbre pour sa superbe manufacture de porcelaine, ci-devant royale, aujourd’hui impériale. Cette manufacture a acquis la plus grande réputation dans toutes les parties du monde par la beauté de son biscuit, la richesse de ses ornemens, et la delicatesse de ses peintures...’

The prestige and notice that the employees of the manufactory had won the *bourg* of Sèvres had long been recognised within their own community. In February 1790, when the manufactory employees appealed to the municipal council that they be accorded the status of active citizens (an event that will be dealt with in full in chapter II), their request is looked upon favourably in light of this fact that:

‘...la manufacture étant incontestablement le centre des talents les plus disintingués et l’asile du génie, la paroisse agirait contre ses propres intérêts si elle refusait d’admettre dans son sein, ceux qui portent son nom jusqu’aux extrémités de la terre...’

Arguably it was in part the respect that the manufactory employees had earned locally through the skilful exercise of their profession that would allow them to take up positions of responsibility during the revolution, the importance of which will become apparent in chapters II and III.

**One man’s privilege is a prejudice against another:**
Only naturally, just as Sèvres could help perform privilege (of both buyer and maker), so it could be taken for a negative index of values. This is a key point upon which this chapter turns.

To recap on the arguments made for Sèvres and other protected manufactories, it could be constructed as a venture that would pay back any initial investment – and the returns would not only be financial. True to expectations Vincennes/Sèvres, by perfecting the fledgling art of porcelain making and decoration, had won not only commissions from, but the respect and admiration of buyers, both French and foreign, the latter often preferring their products to those of their own native manufactories. The manufactory then, was a key player in helping France keep its grip on its empire of fashion and was consequently an object of considerable pride. As D’Angiviller wrote in a memoir to the king requesting that their privileges be renewed ‘[l]a porcelaine de France s’est placée à côté de la Bijouterie, des glaces et des autres ouvrages d’art qui distingues dans tous les cours de l’Europe ce qui sont de la main des Français’. As a result of their success he continues, foreign competition had been triumphantly overcome: ‘La Porcelaine de la Chine n’a plus dans le Royaume cette supériorité exclusive qui nous ruinois et nous morifion.’117 His use of strong, emotional language suggests the importance of their success for a nation whose economy and pride depended on their exportation of the luxury arts.

The Marquise de Pompadour had been among the most vocal exponents of the gains to be made by supporting Sèvres, which she situated in a neo-Colbertian framework, arguing that if the flow of money leaving French boarders for the domain of Saxony, could be reversed then the French economy would be reinvigorated by the money set circulating as a result. The effect of this would be felt widely as a result of the employment it would create, and not only for those employed directly at the manufactory, but for its suppliers all of whose families would benefit from the income generated by that manufactory. Pompadour then, could feel positively philanthropic about each purchase she made for they fed ‘...so many paupers. I get much more pleasure out of distributing gold than out of hoarding it’, she wrote to the Comtesse de

Brezé\textsuperscript{118} There was in fact a sound eco-theoretical grounding to her argument and one can find her beliefs echoed in the pro-luxe discourse that was vigorously argued in the nation's seats of learning and in the popular press. Voltaire's \textit{La Défense du Mondain} perhaps argued her point most eloquently, viewing the commissioning of luxury articles – porcelain included – in part through the lens of the employment it provides:

\begin{verbatim}
La Porcelaine et la frèle beauté
De cet Email à la Chine empâtè
Par mille mains fut pour vous préparée,
Cuite, recuite, et peinte, et diaprée;\textsuperscript{119}
\end{verbatim}

Although Pompadour's love of Vincennes/Sèvres appears to have stemmed from a genuine appreciation of their porcelains, she was quick to realise the political implications of her preference and the uses to which it could be put. To her, consumption was not a neutral affair: purchasing and having herself portrayed alongside specifically \textit{French} goods was a way of demonstrating her commitment to national interests.\textsuperscript{120} However, the benefits offered by her patronage of Sèvres were not always appreciated by the very Frenchmen it was meant to assist. The development of and investment in the manufactory at a time when the State's resources were already stretched to breaking point as a result of the war was, wrote the Marquis d'Argenson, a great imprudence, insulting a public then suffering under the burden of taxes. He recorded the reaction to news that Louis XV had spent 800,000 \textit{livres} on Vincennes' porcelain flowers in vases for his country houses: 'On ne parle que de cela dans Paris, et veritablement ce luxe inouï scandalisé beaucoup.'\textsuperscript{121} As Davillier notes, D’Argenson’s estimate was in fact hugely exaggerated. This would suggest that in the public’s imagination, royal expenditure of Sèvres porcelain had taken on near mythical and immoral proportions and that it was symbolic of the worst excesses of the French aristocracy.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{117} Arch Nat O1 2059, Compte Rendu au comité des finances, concernant la Manufacture Royale des Porcelaines de France, par M. le Director General des Bâtiments du Roi, 28\textsuperscript{th} August 1783.
\textsuperscript{118} Quoted in Moira Vincentelli, \textit{Women and Ceramics: gendered vessels}, Manchester, 2000, p.167. The exact date of letter unspecified, but as it was written in relation to Pompadour’s decoration of the Hôtel d'Evreux, we can assume it was penned at some point in the mid-1750s.
\textsuperscript{120} Colin Jones, op. cit., 2002, pp.103-104.
\textsuperscript{121} Journal entry of 11\textsuperscript{th} July 1750, D’Argenson, op. cit., vol. 6, p.222.
\textsuperscript{122} Davillier, op. cit., p.39.
That this view was in fact widespread is suggested (although not shared) by Arthur Young in his account of his travels through France, during which he plays through a line of conversation shared with the people on his way, apparently provoked by the mention of an extravagant piece of Sèvres porcelain, *Le guéridon de madame du Barry* (fig.26). In Louveciennes, he writes,

‘...[t]here is a little table formed of Seve (sic) porcelain, exquisitely done. I forget how many thousand louis d'ors it cost. The French, to whom I spoke of Luise (sic), exclaimed against mistresses and extravagance with more violence than reason in my opinion. Who, in common sense, would deny a king that amusement of a mistress, provided he did not make business of his plaything? *Mais Frédéric Le Grand, avoit-il une maîtresse, lui faisait-il bâtir des pavillons, et les meublait-il de tables de porcelaine?* No: but he had that which was fifty times worse; a king had better make love to a handsome woman than to one of his neighbour's provinces.'

Young might not have seen the harm in equipping a royal mistress with luxury homes and furnishings of this type, but it would appear that those with whom he conversed did. To 'the French' to whom he spoke, it was symptomatic of the decadence of courtly society and, more specifically, of the enervation of Louis XV who suffers by their comparison of him with the virile warrior king, Fredric the Great. The exasperation of Young's respondents is palpable: for them, porcelain tables and pavilions encapsulated the useless leisure enjoyed at their expense by the king and his courtiers.

Despite his high birth, D'Argenson shared their sentiments and throughout his journal he mocked the philosophical and charitable façade Pompadour constructed to defend her outrageous expenditure at Sèvres. Recounting a supper taken with the king, he reveals the full extent of what he perceives to be her backwards values, skewed perception and blind hypocrisy where her beloved manufactory was concerned:

‘La marquise de Pompadour ne fait autres chose que prêcher le grand avantage qu'il y a pour l'État à être parvenu à faire de belle porcelaine façon de Saxe, et même à l'avoir surpassée. [...] Aux soupers chez le Roi, la marquise dit que ce n'est pas être citoyen de ne pas acheter de cette porcelaine autant qu'on a de l'argent. Quelqu'un répondit: 'mais, pendant que le Roi a répandu tant de libéralités pour encourager cette manufacture, on abandonne celles de Charlesville et de Saint-Étienne pour la fabrique des armes, qui nous est bien

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Buying Sèvres porcelain was the embodiment of citizenship patriotism and good economy à la Pompadour. Her respondent’s retort would have resonated powerfully during the 1790s!

Another exposé of the hypocrisy endemic in the manufactory’s practice was their active suppression of the work of other potters and porcelain enterprises, in accordance with Sèvres having been granted exclusive privileges to produce porcelain. For many a manufacturer, their first encounter with the Porcelaines de France, would have been the notice they found pinned on their door, informing them of these rules now regulating their production. Any infringement of the regulations would result in a visit from the police charged with enforcing them and any manufactory caught disobeying the law was in jeopardy of not only being fined but of having his kiln broken, effectively paralysing his business. This fact jars uncomfortably with the claims that Sèvres were simultaneously trying to maintain – i.e., that they were trying to stem the flow of money leaving France for Saxon coffers – a goal that surely could be more easily accomplished if there were several manufactories all producing top quality ceramics. Certainly the administration of Sèvres was aware of the gains that could be made through collaboration with others – in the 1760s it loosened the restrictions on other manufactories in order to stimulate the search for the still elusive kaolin in France, only to shore them up once this had been successfully accomplished. As such, in light of the fact that ceramics became a growth industry during the second half of the eighteenth century, Sèvres soon became a hindrance to the very expansion of a trade which, according to their rhetoric, they sought to promote.

This totally undermines the mercantilist model they used to reinforce their defences against their detractors. The granting of ‘privileges’ were of course central to Colbert’s theories, but they were only ever intended as temporary crutches to help an industry which might one day flourish nationally, become established. The ceramic industry, it would seem, was in fact now poised to expand, meaning that the relevance of Sèvres’

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privileges were by then outdated and counter productive to the mercantilist goal. To quote from one memoir submitted to the minister of the interior by what appears to be a coalition of unnamed workshop proprietors keen to contribute to the national enrichment through the production of quality porcelain:

‘La consommation de la porcelain s’étant considérablement multipliée en France depuis quelques années, la fabrication s’en est accrue dans une proportion au moins égal, et les entrepreneurs des établissements qui se sont formé les ont dirigés avec intelligence et le goût pour faire préférer pour la consommation du Royaume leur ouvrages à ceux qui jusqu’a présent s’étoient tirer de l’Étranger. Ce genre de fabrication fait même aujourd’hui un objet d’exportation qui commence à devenir interessant pour le commerce nationale. Le progrès de ces entrepreneurs eussent été plus rapides s’ils n’avoient pas toujours été génér par les privileges qui ont été accorder dans l’origine à la manufacture royale de porcelaines de France. En effet ces privileges restraingoient tellement leur industrie qu’il ne pouvient fabriquer que de le porcelaine de basse qualite et a 1 ‘imitation des porcelains les plus inferieur de la Chine.[...] Ce principal objet du gouvernement devoit être pour lors a former un établissement qui peut luter avec avantage contre celui qui existoit en Saxe et qui approvisionnoit tout la royaume de porcelaine de qualité supérieure...’

Here then, we see others laying claim (with equal legitimacy) to the same justifications for their support by the State as those simultaneously mounted by Sèvres.

In fact the 1780s proved difficult for Sèvres specifically on account of the mounting strength of competition from Parisian manufactories and their increasingly emboldened neglect of the impositions Sèvres dictated in their capacity as Manufacture Royale. On May 16th 1784 notices were posted on the doors of their metropolitan competitors informing them of the conditions of their existence henceforth. Sèvres would now allow their production of works of a medium type intended for use at the table or for general domestic application, to apply gilt, but to the rim only, and to paint upon them flowers in all shades of colour, but on the condition that they remove themselves fifteen leagues from Paris. Although seemingly generous in allowing them to extend their formerly monochrome palette

125 See Pierre Deyon and Philippe Guignet, op. cit.
and to use a limited amount of gilt, something previously denied, and gracious in the
three year time period given for relocation, the conditions Sévres imposed were harsh.
Away from the urban market, many would not survive – neither party was under any
illusions about this. In a letter dated 31st January 1785, Jean-Jacques Hettlinger, co-
director of Sévres, dismisses the idea of forcibly making the manufactory of Sieur le
Boeuf (which represented a threat to their own) extinct, noting that it would simply
expire alongside the other Parisian manufactories:

‘En attendant le sentiment de M. de Mauroy, il me semble d’autre avantage
pour la manufacture royale que celui d’operer l’extinction d’une manufacture
de particulier, qui probablement subira ce sort d’elle même, ainsi que les autres
existentes dans Paris et aux environs, genées comme elles vont être par
l’exécution de l’arrêt du conseil de mai dernier, et encore plus par le
perspective de devoir dans deux ans s’éloigner à quinze lieue de la capitale.’

Hettlinger’s arrogant self-assurance however was premature: the decree was resisted,
and to the distress of the Comte D’Angiviller, Sévres was forced to make still more
concessions to the Parisians in 1787, rendering the most artistically-gifted factories
their near equals in terms of production rights. A letter dated 12th January 1787
from D’Angiviller to the Minister of Finances, Charles-Alexandre Calonne, explains
the problems that the defiant competition presented:

‘J’ai l’honneur de vous addresser et je vous prie de vouloir bien lire avec toute
l’attention que merite cet objet; il ne peut être plus important qu’il est puis qu’il
s’agit d’un Établissement qui a coûté au Roi des sommes considérables, et qui
est, en vérité, menacé d’une certaine ruine si les manufacturiers particuliers
obtiennes la liberté illimitée à la quelle ils aspirent.

Sévres would be unable to survive if the private factories obtained the liberty they
sought. I need hardly stress the problems they would encounter during the Revolution,
with its rallying cry of Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, as a result of this! Not only might
the competition drown them when ‘privilege’ came under attack on August 4th 1789
leaving Sévres defenceless, but having readily identified themselves as a royal
institution that bullied private manufacturers, they would be placed in a dangerous

128 Arch. Nat., O1 206, recipient unspecified (in all probability it was addressed to D’Angiviller).
129 See ‘Arrêt du Conseil d’État du Roi, Concernant la Manufacture royale de Porcelaine de France &
portant Règlement pour les autres Manufactures de porcelaines établis dans le Royaume. Du 17 Janvier
130 Arch. Nat., F12 1494.
position when the Bastille fell on July 14th sounding the beginning of the end of such abusive practices.

Sèvres was an industrial Bastille of sorts, one that had long cast its shadow over the French ceramics industry. To cite Édouard Garnier, writing in 1891,

‘Les privilèges […] avaient, depuis de longues années, soulevé contre elle, de la part des fabricants, une animosité que l’administration n’avait jamais rien fait pour calmer, au contraire. Loin de comprendre, en effet qu’il serait plus habile de leur part, surtout dans les circonstances présentes, de chercher à venir en aide aux manufactures particulières qui, dans aucun cas, ne pouvaient lui porter ombrage, ses directeurs poursuivaient, par tous les moyens possibles, […] la stricte exécution de l’arrêt de 1784, qui renfermait la fabrication et la décoration des porcelaines dans les règles étroites.’ 

‘Cette lutte’, wrote Chauvisé, ‘est un épisode de la bataille qui se livra à la fin du XVIIIème siècle entre le principe d’autorité et celui de liberté.’ I do not wish to imply that the manufactory would be the next target of the conquerors of the Bastille, but I do want to stress the likelihood that Sèvres would not outlive the Bastille by long on account of their former practices which were so recognisably akin to those being dismantled. When the Revolution broke out, Sèvres found itself in an untenable position, unable to survive without the protection of privilege yet unable to retain these same privileges without threat of annihilation by a regime that opposed such prejudice.

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Introduction:

The impression often given by monographs on the manufactory of Sèvres is that during the 1790s, it was so reduced in terms of cultural importance and output as to be insignificant. And considering the collapse of the French luxury industries following the mass emigration of the nation’s aristocratic and moneyed classes that formed the backbone of their clientele, it might seem reasonable to arrive at this assumption. The administrators of Sèvres certainly believed that the manufactory’s ruin would be the result of the exodus, quickened by the fact that few of their clients had settled their outstanding bills before departing. Worse still, with few new commissions being placed, the manufactory administration was unable to pay its own bills, let alone its approximately 280 employees.

Correspondence exchanged between the administrators of the manufactory over the course of 1789 stresses fear of insolvency above all other anxieties. A letter written on the eve of the Bastille’s fall by the mathematician Jean-Etienne de Montucla, first clerk of the Bâtiments du Roi, to Sèvres’ director in residence, Antoine Régnier for example, is typical in this regard, conveying the alarm felt by the administration for the future of the manufactory, (and for his own self preservation):

Enfin, je vous le dirai franchement, je ne vois pas de quelle[?] bois faire flèches; personne ne paye l’ancien, on n’achète presque pas en ce moment; j’ai tous les créanciers (ou du moins une bonne partie) de la manufacture sur le corps; je serai bientôt obligé de m’absentir ou de me cacher.¹

Perceiving the problem to be financial, the threat of their ideological incompatibility with the emerging regime that I find so striking does not yet appear to have expressly entered his consciousness, although Montucla’s letter to Régnier of 8th September is intriguing in this regard: ‘Paris s’anéantit peu à peu. Voilà la maison d’Artois flambée pour longtemps. Il y aura des fortes réformes chez le roi, chez la reine, chez monsieur.

¹ Arch. M.N.S., H4, letter from Montucla to Régnier, 13th July 1789.
Les seigneurs de la cour sont ruinés.12 His use of violent and vivid imagery is particularly interesting: ‘Voilà la maison d’Artois flambée pour longtemps…’, intended to express the financial difficulties resulting from the emigration of their clientele, might equally have described the purge that would follow regime change, the threat of which if not yet imminent, cast a long shadow of foreboding over the royal household, its entourage and dependants. Similarly his ‘Les seigneurs de la cour sont ruinés’, intended to express their financial difficulties, might as easily be read as anticipatory of the collapse of an old order in the face of revolutionary violence.

The aggression with which revolutionary bodies had begun to dismantle ancien régime ones and the terrifying irreversibility of that process registers again in a letter written to Régnier six months later, this time describing the collapse of the luxury industries. ‘Les ventes [at the manufactory] sont au dessous des dépenses ordinaries, et les coups de massue que vient de recevoir le luxe et des gens de la cour et des gens riches de Paris est la principale cause de sa détresse.’13 Montucla’s specification that the weapon indirectly deployed against them was a club is significant for historically, the most famous club-bearer of classical mythology was Hercules who, according to French mythic lore, wielded it on behalf of the monarchy whom he signified by virtue of his might. Yet it would appear to Montucla that it was now controlled by another power, as yet obscure to him: in so saying he was being (perhaps unwittingly) astute for during the revolution Hercules changed camp, becoming champion of le peuple. 4

Does Montucla’s fleeting acknowledgement of a violent, and from his point of view, disturbing reality suggest another anxiety at the back of his mind? He would have been right to worry for Sèvres’ safety on account of the manufactory’s ideological incompatibility with the emerging regime: this, I would argue, became as likely a reason for their demise as bankruptcy. Sèvres’ ties with the ancien régime were manifold and intimate and in an age that keenly sought out analogies between the cultural manifestations of the old regime and its social and political decrepitude, the very material, porcelain, could easily have been considered a metaphor for the

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2 Arch. M.N.S., H4, letter from Montucla to Régnier, 8th September 1789.
3 Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 1, letter from Montucla to Régnier, 10th March 1790.
aristocratic clientele for whom Sèvres worked. Its painful fragility was evocative of the fragility of the regime that had engendered it; its excessive cost, the frivolity of their patrons. The huge workforce needed to produce porcelain spoke of the enslavement of the French people to the whims of the court, and its branding with the interlaced L’s of Louis’s cipher, the imposed subjection of the French. And just as a passing storm would, as a result of the atmospheric changes it caused, unsettle a firing, destroying the contents of the kiln, so the summer lightening of 1789 threatened to devastate that brittle privileged class. Certainly for Prince Charles de Clary-et-Aldringham, porcelain, by virtue of its inherent qualities could, in certain circumstances, provoke thoughts on the temporal nature of worldly power and privilege. Returning from a visit to Sèvres on April 14th 1810 where he had seen busts of the recently dethroned Josephine de Beauharnais waiting for disposal, he was moved to write that ‘Le sort de cette pauvre femme fut aussi fragile que son image en porcelain. Elle pourrait faire graver sur son cachet une bulle de savon avec comme légende: Vanitas Vanitatis.’

Yet parallels with a fallen regime existed not only on a symbolic level: as the concluding section of my first chapter illustrated, the administrators of Sèvres exercised the powers accorded to the privileged as vehemently as their patron had over his subjects. Certainly, the manufactory’s patronage by Louis XVI was another potential obstacle blocking its transition into a new political clime. In Utopia’s Garden, Emma Spary identifies the tradition of patronage by any (necessarily influential, wealthy) individual as being especially problematic during the Revolution: ‘The rapidity with which the locus of power could change made such practices not only ineffective but even, in some cases, dangerous’, she writes. Her argument is eminently applicable to Sèvres, for not only would their patron be dislodged following shifts in power structures, but the subsequent vilification of all things connected with the Bourbon regime greatly compromised the manufactory’s safety. The identification of Sèvres with the ci-devant tyran proved a difficult legacy to handle both for the internal administration of the manufactory and for the State, which would struggle to

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6 E.C. Spary, Utopia’s Garden: French Natural History from Old Regime to Revolution, Chicago, 2000, p.182
find grounds on which to justify their maintenance of it. As chapter I will have made clear, few brands were weighed down with as much baggage as Sèvres.

During the period covered by this chapter however, the king remained on the throne and continued to extend his patronage to the manufactory, albeit on a strictly limited financial basis. It is therefore important at this stage to identify a possible evolution in attitudes towards the king's patronage or ownership of domains that might otherwise have been sold or nationalised. Certainly the publication of the *Livre rouge* in March 1790 which exposed the extent of monarchical patronage of a favoured few, provided fuel for those attacking the crown on the grounds of its profligacy. Yet the view was upheld by the National Assembly that, as the recognised head of state, Louis XVI should be brilliantly equipped and surrounded with the usual trappings of monarchical glory. Consequently he was granted a civil list to the value of 25 million livres, in addition to the costs involved in the upkeep of his parks, domains and forests. After all, as Bertrand Barère declared to those gathered in the National Assembly to debate the matter, 'il [the king] représente en quelque sorte la dignité nationale; il faut donc l'entourer d'objets qui appellent les hommages publics.'

The good will implicit in the National Assembly having granted the king such a generous civil list (which Barère presents as being a gift from an enthusiastic public to their constitutional head) was, within the month, jeopardised by Louis' failed attempt to flee France. His capture at Varennes on 21st June 1791 was for the king a disastrous episode that irreparably damaged his 'popularity' with the people and his credibility as the head of State, forcing questions concerning the legitimacy of the monarchy into the open. Tensions began to mount, with explosive consequences. On July 17th the National Guard under the command of La Fayette opened fire on the men and women who had gathered on the Champs de Mars to petition publicly for the establishment of a Republic. Yet for all the fall-out from Varennes, the National Assembly did not

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7 Hence the offence taken by one anonymous writer at the decision to paper the walls of the apartments serving the royal family in the Tuileries Palace rather than cover them in the costly silks and tapestries to which they would be accustomed: 'In royal residences such décor is only suitable for the lodgings of domestics.' Quoted by Bernard Jacque, 'Wallpaper in the Royal Apartments at the Tuileries, 1789 – 1792', in *Decorative Arts: The Bard Graduate Centre for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design and Culture*, vol. XIII, no.1, fall/winter 2005/6, p.3.
8 Archives Parlementaire, vol 26, p. 470.
overturn their decision regarding the costly civil list on which the manufactory of Sèvres was itemised. And so it remained property of the king.

**The administration of the manufactory: steering Sèvres through rocky waters:**

The fullest resource with which to study the early years of the revolution at Sèvres is the correspondence written by members of the external administration of the manufactory, Montucla, D’Angiviller, and later, Arnauld de La Porte to Régnier. The predominant feeling that emerges from them is despair in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulties precipitated by the events in French politics and their repercussions. How could they survive them? After all, as Montucla realised,

> ‘Dans une calamité publique comme la circonstance actuelle la première chose qu’on le retranche ce sont les objets de luxe. Tous les gens opulents ont décampé, ou vont être à la gêne [de?] payer un quart de leur revenu sans préjudice des impositions courantes – achètera-t-on de la porcelaine?’

The tone of Montucla’s letters is often alarmist, yet he cannot be charged with paranoia or over-reaction: the landscape was very bleak for those involved in the production of expensive goods as a result of the severe downturn in the market for luxury goods. Yet rather than being fatalistic, resigning himself to the manufactory’s imminent collapse, he is the first to try and initiate reform. The manufactory must, he argued, adapt to this downturn in demand for their wares by reducing their production levels by a good third. This in turn would result in a proportional reduction in expenditure on raw materials.

At this point it would appear that Montucla alone was alert to the threat of market collapse. Consequently, and to his considerable frustration, his plans, formed on the basis that the reform of the manufactory was urgently required, were not followed through on account of Régnier’s own location of the problem in the dishonesty of their accountant, Barreau – against whom his energies were targeted. And Régnier was, it would seem, beyond Montucla’s powers of persuasion:

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10 Arch. M.N.S., H4, letter from Montucla to Régnier, 13th October 1789.
Je vois d’abord avec chagrin où il me semble voir que tous les détails où je suis entré avec vous sur l’impossibilité de soutenir dans la manufacture les dépenses sur le pied où elles sont ne vous persuadent point, et sans doute cela vient de l’idée que vous avez que M. Barreau a des fonds.11

A man, by all accounts, of an arrogant and generally disagreeable nature, Barreau had the unenviable task of paying the workers at a time when money was short – and not only as a result of few commissions being placed within the manufactory. His job was made still more impossible by the fact that, despite his efforts, he could not extract payments owed the manufactory by former clients for items long-since purchased on credit.12 This was interpreted as a sign of his sympathy for the debtors, something that tainted his reputation among the manufactory’s workforce, putting him in very real danger of retribution.13 In fact, this was a problem that actually predated the Revolution and one which would more accurately be attributed to the collapse of court finances. On 18th December 1788 D’Angiviller noted in a letter to Régnier that Barreau was unable to collect the money owed them, citing the reason given by their debtors thus: ‘...chacun se retranchant à dire que le roi ne payant pas il ne peut payer lui même.’14 The potential pit-falls of a system where the king was the sole dispenser of favour and cash becomes clear. If he were to go bankrupt so might his courtiers, who had long since been coerced into abandoning their own interests and native provinces in order to join the pecking order at Versailles. For those employed in the luxury industries, the bankruptcy of the Bourbons would therefore have a disproportionately detrimental effect, bordering on the cataclysmic. And their situation was exacerbated by the predominance of the credit system. In the event of a fiscal crisis such as that at the close of the 1780s, luxury workers would be left with years, if not decades worth of unpaid bills whose eventual settlement they depended on to keep trading.

In the first instance and under the assumption that Barreau was deliberately withholding funds, a dummy representing him was strung up from a lamppost by the

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11 Arch. M.N.S., H4, letter from Montucla to Régnier, 30th October 1789
12 See Arch. M.N.S., A5, Relève des sommes dues à la Manufacture Nationale des Porcelaines de Sèvres à l’époque de la destitution du C. Barreau ci devant caissier de la dite manufacture [date unknown].
13 See document dated 2nd Brumaire an 2 (October 23rd 1793), Arch. Nat., O2 913.
14 Arch. M.N.S., H4, liasse 2.
workers to scare him.\textsuperscript{15} This incident suggests that, unlike the administration, obsessed with the teetering market, the workers and perhaps at this stage Régnier too, assumed that the difficulties they were encountering were the result of ancien régime practices within the manufactory. Their actual shortfall, for which Barreau cannot realistically be held accountable, seems only to have been forced upon Régnier when Montucla made him responsible for the choice between paying for the completion of an ambitious piece of mounted porcelain or payment of the workers, stressing that they had money for one only.\textsuperscript{16} Surely it is not coincidental that, having faced the dilemma Barreau confronted daily, Régnier began to make suggestions on how their financial situation might be improved by positive action.\textsuperscript{17}

Montucla had also to overcome D'Angiviller's lethargic reaction to events and to the changes in the market that they precipitated, struggling to make him comprehend that the expensive items of a type that made 'plus d'honneur que de profit' for the manufactory, such as the grands vases or the service made for the queen's dairy at Rambouillet, were no longer viable products. D'Angiviller's reluctance to abandon Sèvres' more ambitious projects given their longstanding importance to the manufactory's reputation is certainly understandable, but telling nonetheless, suggesting his unwillingness to acknowledge the changed circumstances under which they were working. Montucla is forced to enlist Regnier's assistance to help undeceive D'Angiviller, writing to him that: 'Quoiqu'il en soit, monsieur, quand le vaisseau est sur le point de péir ce n'est pas le moment où les officiers et matelots du vaisseau peuvent être en dessention.'\textsuperscript{18} Once more Montucla's vivid use of language evokes a manufactory very nearly on the rocks.

Only after a slow start then, did the administrative team commence their fight against circumstances by trying to streamline the unwieldy manufactory, and not only in terms of production. In February 1790 the provision of a carriage to transport the academic artists and chemists between Paris, where they resided, and Sèvres was ended, and from July 4\textsuperscript{th} 1790, the allowances of wood, oil and wax that employees

\textsuperscript{15} The incident is first reported in a letter from Montucla to Régnier dated 13\textsuperscript{th} October 1789, but presumably took place several days previously and within days of the October women having passed through, a fact which is perhaps not coincidental. Arch. M.N.S., H4.

\textsuperscript{16} Arch. M.N.S., H4, letter from Montucla to Régnier, 8\textsuperscript{th} November 1789.

\textsuperscript{17} See Arch. M.N.S., H4, letter from Montucla to Régnier, 10th November 1789.
received at the expense of the manufactory was stopped.\(^{19}\) And whereas in the past cash-gifts had been given to numerous personages, a small piece of porcelain now sufficed to convey thanks where necessary. Yet despite the fact that, to quote D'Angiviller's letter of the 4th July, 'les circonstances rendent absolument necessaire' the implementation of restrictions on the use of materials always provided gratis by the manufactory, by the 19th, under pressure from those who had long enjoyed this privilege, he makes concessions to his rule. The director and inspector of the manufactory and even the reform-obsessed Montucla are allowed to continue in their use of such materials at the manufactory's expense, and it is left to their discretion whether another five named employees – Bailly, Gass, Durosey, Pithou, and Salmon – should also share in the provisions.\(^{20}\) This climb-down by D'Angiviller highlights a lack of consistency in their policies that could leave the administration vulnerable to accusations of favouritism or of being self-serving.

The number of employees at Sèvres also came under scrutiny and was judged excessive in light of the scarcity of commissions and the poverty of resources. In a report of 1st July 1790 it is stated that ideally worker numbers should be reduced by as much as a third. Two factors however are identified as obstructing the implementation of this reform: firstly, were they not bound by the ties of a common humanity to support their workforce in difficult times?

‘...comment dans le temps d'une disette cruelle et allarmante renvoyer tout à coup une centaine d'hommes, la plupart ayans femmes et enfans et n'ayans pour subsister qu'un talens de Luxe fort peu de mise dans les circonstances actuelles où les manufactures même de première nécessité éprouvent de grands embarras?’

The extent to which their continued maintenance of their workforce was a philanthropic gesture, indicative of an active social conscience on the part of the manufactory administrators and due to a sense of responsibility towards their employees is, however, thrown into some doubt by the second reason stated for their reluctance to make redundancies:

\(^{18}\) Arch. M.N.S., H5, letter from Montucla to Régnier, 10th March 1790.
\(^{19}\) Arch. M.N.S., H5, letter from D'Angiviller to Régnier, 4th July 1790.
\(^{20}\) Arch. M.N.S., H5, letter from D'Angiviller to Régnier, 19th July 1790. Bailly and Gass both worked in the manufactory's laboratories, Durosey was the manufactory's 'garde de ustensiles', and Salmon either its 1ère or 2ème commis depending on whether reference is made to Salmon senior or junior.
'Le second motif a été la crainte d’une insurrection parmi les ouvriers. Car dans toutes les grandes manufactures il s’établie un corps qui en lier pour ainsi dire tous les sujets les uns avec les autres et leurs donne un intérêt commun. Quelques mots lâchées sur la partie qu’on seroit peut être obligé de prendre de réformes, quelques ouvriers avoient excité dans la manufacture une fermentation qu’il a fallu se hatter de calmer...'21

Clearly their workforce required careful handling for, as this report suggests, they were liable to rise up against their employers should their collective interests, (closely monitored by a clique amongst themselves) be challenged. Examples of worker rebellion at Sèvres prior to the Revolution have already been cited. We can only assume that such incidents became more frequent and more ferocious in character during the 1790s, for the Revolution provided a structure, context, and rationale for dissenting against individuals who violated its values. And although article 19 of the law of 19th July specifically set out to protect masters by making a crime against them a more severe offence than against anyone else, they were still in a vulnerable position in relation to their employees.22

It is implied then that they – the workers – had gained the upper hand where issues surrounding their labour were concerned, a position strengthened by virtue of their numbers. In general, the revolutionary authorities found large groupings to be exceedingly difficult to handle, believing them a threat to public order. According to one former policeman: ‘Politically, it is often a dangerous strategy to assemble a massive number of men deprived of property, thus conferring upon them the kind of independence that almost always accompanies the sense of force.’23 Additionally, where those people grouped themselves around a common-interest, added to the threat their numbers represented was that of the revived spirit of corporatism, widely perceived as an affront to national liberty and the values upheld by the Constitution. On 14th June 1791 the Le Chapelier law was introduced specifically with the intention of halting the development of coalitions that were routinely forming within the workspace, (as the author of Sèvres’ report noted, such troublesome bodies existed in

all the large manufactories), but with limited success: certainly they continued to exist at Sèvres. 24

By reputation at least, those employed in the royal manufactories were especially forceful among worker groups. As Daniel Roche writes with reference to the workers of Gobelins,

‘Si à la veille de 89 ils souffrent de la crise (les finances royales endettées rognant sur tout), ils n’en sont pas moins privilégiés dans le monde laborieux. Ce qui leur confère une capacité évidente à l’expression d’un mécontentement général, une ‘indépendence d’esprit’ redoutée des autorités.’ 25

It is hardly surprising then that at Sèvres, staff-reductions were initially achieved by non-aggressive means: when workers died at the manufactory or left of their own choice, they were simply not replaced. A document in the manufactory archives lists all such cases (totalling forty) and the savings their decease or departure represented (27,588 livres). 26 Yet they had little control over which workers handed in their notice, and a letter dated 15th October 1791 informs us that they were losing their most skilled employees, (this is hardly surprising given that they would be best placed to obtain work elsewhere). To stem this trend, Régnier proposed that incentives in the form of pay-increases be offered to employees they wanted to keep – and in so doing, perhaps played further into the hands of his workforce. As Haim Burstin notes in his article, Problèmes du Travail à Paris sous la Révolution, ‘en période de raréfaction des effectifs disponibles, la menace de quitter le travail constitue un argument efficace dans la négociation salariale.’ 27 Thus the policy had a limited impact on their outlay on wages, which Arnauld La Porte, Intendant of the Civil List would later want limited to just 12,000 livres a month. 28 Régnier had in fact previously successfully

26 Arch. Nat., O1 2061, État des ouvriers décédés et sortis depuis le mois de juin 1789 et dont le Directeur n’a fait aucun remplacement, jusqu’au 15 mai 1791.
27 In Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine, 44-4, October-December, 1997, p. 668. On Régnier’s proposal see Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 2 and 3, letters from La Porte to Régnier, dated 15th, 21st and 30th October 1791 and 13th June 1792. The letter of the 30th October suggests that he mistakenly offered raises to a large number of workers, rather than to just the most promising individuals amongst them. La Porte fears that such carelessness might result in ‘une commotion universelle dans la manufacture’, unless the promise was honoured.
28 Already 1,500 from this sum was set aside for the payment of five members of the managerial team, leaving a meagre 10,500 to be shared out among everyone else. The earnings of the directorial team are
argued for more assertive policies. In May 1790 he wrote to D’Angiviller to propose that a number of the women who worked for Sèvres from home be made redundant. Bearing in mind that these women would in all likelihood have been the mothers, wives, or daughters of others employed within the manufactory, in so doing he risked mobilising the whole workforce. Unsurprisingly D’Angiviller reacted nervously to the idea and urges Régnier to proceed only with caution for fear of provoking just such an insurrection: ‘...il faut donc [...] se conduire avec grande circonspection et tenter, pour ainsi dire, le terrain.’

The administrative team – and in particular, Barreau – were especially vulnerable to pressure and threat from their employees on pay-days, and for reasons easily understood. Although a letter of 9th May 1790 from D’Angiviller specifies that thus far the management had always been paid on time and in full, this was not the case for their workforce who were routinely subjected to delays to or cuts in their pay-packet. The situation provoked bitter complaint from Sèvres’ employees, whose behaviour Montucla found ‘ominous’, ‘alarming’, and exasperating. ‘Est-il possible que des gens soient assez déraisonnables pour vouloir dans des circonstances telles que les circonstances actuelles être payés à peine à la cheance’, he wrote to Régnier. Moreover, such conduct he feared

‘...pourroit amener peu à peu le roi à se dégoûter d’une manufacture pour laquelle on fait tant de sacrifices, et à la supprimer totalement ou l’abîmer, on l’assommoir dans lequel cas tout le monde feront beau jeu avec les nouveaux propriétaires ou fermiers.’

Interestingly, Burstin notes that the minister of the interior, Jean-Marie Roland de La Platière, would levy the same threat against the Gobelins’ notoriously militant employees on 1st September 1792. He notes however, that there was in fact little substance to the threat on that occasion, which was extended specifically in the hope that it would encourage better, more compliant behaviour on the part of that workforce. ‘Rolland profita de la menace de suppression de la manufacture’, he

listed in Arch. Nat., O1 2061, États des appointements due aux principaux emplois de la Manufacture Royale de Porcelaines de France pendant le quartier d’avril 1790.

29 Arch. M.N.S., H5, Letter from D’Angiviller to Régnier, 11th May 1790. A letter of 21st May informs us that on this occasion there were no violent responses to the redundancies made.

30 Arch. M.N.S., H5

31 Arch. M.N.S., H5, letter from Montucla to Régnier, 4th April 1790.
writes. In the case of Sèvres, however a change in proprietorship was perhaps less of an empty threat, for despite the seeming unfeasibility of a luxury porcelain venture during the French Revolution, the manufactory was a going concern and of interest to entrepreneurs. Indeed a memoir submitted to the Bureau des Arts in Year VII (1798/99) by Joseph Leon Julien, son of the manager of the Mennecy porcelain manufactory, specifies that the number of porcelain manufactories in Paris had greatly increased during the previous ten years. This would certainly suggest that porcelain was in demand and that our belief about the market for ‘luxury goods’ during the 1790s needs re-evaluating. Such a task is beyond the scope of this thesis, yet it should be noted that the new liberal economic climate can be given credit for this unlikely flourishing. The establishment of these ventures, I might also add, proves the extent to which restrictions previously imposed by those protecting Sèvres’ interests, had stunted the growth of the very branch of the ceramics industry they claimed to promote.

The king was soon given the chance to show his disposition towards Sèvres when in August 1790 he was required to affirm D’Angiviller’s response to questions put to him about the manufactory by Armand-Gaston Camus’s Comité des Pensions. It becomes evident from D’Angiviller’s memorandum composed for the occasion that the premise, or at least a central concern of the questions, was to pinpoint the possible grounds for the manufactory’s continued maintenance, which D’Angiviller justifies as being three-fold. Firstly, the manufactory’s existence should be assured so as to conserve in France an art that does it honour and that brings in revenue from abroad, a reason that of course recalls the arguments routinely posited in defence of Sèvres and its privileges. Secondly it should be maintained so as to secure the livelihood of 200 to 300 workers. Finally, and put simply, if the manufactory were put up for sale now, it would not realise its true value and would result in an immense loss. The very fact that he felt compelled to state this suggests that its sale was at least under

33 Cited by Régine de Plinival de Guillebon, Paris Porcelain, trans. Robert Charleston, London 1972, p.32. A list of the manufactories can be found on p.34.
consideration and as D'Angiviller concedes, '[s]ans doute s'il s'agissait de vendre, on trouverai des acquéreurs...'.

All thoughts of this however, were for the moment halted by Louis XVI whose statement, added to the document prior to its return to the comité, opened with the oft-quoted declaration, 'Je garde la Manufacture de Sèvres à mes frais.' His support though, was conditional – firstly on the reduction of expenditures, which should not exceed 100,000 écus per annum, of which no more than 12,000 livres should be reserved for the payment of the workforce. Secondly, debts contracted by the manufactory should be paid with money raised through sales, whilst provisions from his civil list would cover new costs.

Flaws in this tidy scheme soon became evident to D'Angiviller. Firstly the almost total cessation of sales at the manufactory meant it would be unable to pay off its considerable debts through revenue raised in this manner. And the fact that its expenses were almost as high as ever made the 100,000 écus impossible to survive on. He felt obliged to present this 'alarming' situation to the king once more so that his majesty could make an informed decision about the fate of Sèvres. Yet Louis' plans remained unchanged: a note of 2nd November simply states that the king wishes to continue his patronage of the manufactory 'sur le même pied'. This response would certainly appear to be symptomatic of his renowned inability to respond adequately to a difficult reality, but it might also be read as a measure of just how much the manufactory meant to him and how blind his dedication to it was.

Although this might have been of limited assurance to D'Angiviller, who had argued that the current 'footing' was inadequate to their needs, nor to the creditors who by this system of funding risked going unpaid, the king's continued financial sponsorship of the manufactory did ultimately save it from immediate collapse. In maintaining his patronage of Sèvres, then, financially speaking he secured its existence. All the

34 Arch. Nat., O1 2061, Mémoire, August 1790.
35 There remains some confusion regarding the amounts set aside to pay the workers: elsewhere La Porte states that it should be limited to 12,000# a month. This figure, although still ambitious, is considerably more realistic. See Arch. M.N.S. H5, letter from La Porte to Régnier, 21st October 1791.
36 The archives teem with letters from creditors soliciting the payment of money owed them by the manufactory.
37 Arch. M.N.S., H5, letter from D'Angiviller to Régnier, 29th October 1790.

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adjustments that Sèvres had made had proved a drop in the ocean and without his support they would have been forced to file for bankruptcy or sold to the highest bidder, which in all probability would have amounted to the same thing. When on 26th May 1791, the National Assembly announced that the manufactory would not be disposed of alongside the other national properties under consideration, but charged to his civil list according to the king’s wishes, it was exactly because they believed only he could support a venture of its size, the manufactory being beyond the funds and abilities of any entrepreneur, no matter how ambitious:

La manufacture de Sèvres, qui a introduit en France une nouvelle branche d'industrie, peut demeurer dans les mains du roi; il soutiendra cet établissement qui peut-être serait détérioré ou anéanti si les bâtiments immenses consacrés à ce genre d'industrie et de travaux étaient vendus commes les autres biens nationaux.39

This closely followed D’Angiviller’s opinion addressed to the Comité de Pensions. There was little doubt, he had argued, that there were entrepreneurs interested in purchasing the manufactory outright, but if such a bid were accepted, the manufactory’s fate would be sealed: ‘…un établissement porté au point où est celui dont il s’agit, n’a pu devoir son existence qu’à la puissance royale, et qu’il la perdrais rapidement en des mains particulières qu’il serait impossible de contraindre à payer.’

This rightly suggests that the manufactory was not a viable enterprise by normal standards, i.e., able to sustain itself in a free-market economy, (like the one from which it was for the moment saved by Louis XVI). Under its current set-up, Sèvres was totally reliant on the king’s generous patronage: should he withdraw it, or be forced to withdraw it, where else would support come from? The possibility of private ownership by an entrepreneur had already been dismissed, and the increasingly cash-strapped, radicalising government certainly looked like an unlikely champion of its cause. The future looked bleak – even the resourceful Montucla looked defeated: ‘Je crains fort que tout ceci ne soit le coup mortel porté à la manufacture’, he wrote to Régnier on the 15th August 1792, five days after the fall of the monarchy.40

38 Arch. M.N.S., H5, letter, writer and recipient unspecified.
39 Archives Parlementaires, vol. 26, p.470
40 Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 3.
Rococo to revolution? Changes and continuities in Sèvres' oeuvre:

Certainly they could not expect a sympathetic reception from the *enragé* journalist, Jean-Paul Marat, who wrote scathingly of Sèvres in his popular journal *L'Ami du Peuple*. Such a manufactory, he believed, was a peculiarly French irregularity – a by-product of absolutism and the unchecked rise of courtly culture under its banner.

‘On n’a nulle idée chez l’étranger d’établissements relatifs aux Beaux-Arts ou plutôt de manufactures à charge à l’État. L’honneur de cette invention était réservé à la France. Tels sont, dans le nombre, les manufactures de Sèvres et des Gobelins. La première coûte au public plus de deux cent mille livres annuellement pour quelques services de porcelaine, dont le roi fait des présents aux ambassadeurs; la dernière lui coute cent mille écus annuellement. On ne sait pas trop pourquoi, si ce n’est pour enrichir des fripons et des intrigants…’

For Marat, Sèvres epitomised the frippery of princes. In his rush to condemn it as such, he does not stop to consider Bernard Mandeville’s maxim (nationalised and popularised by Melon, Voltaire and other theorists), that private vices (the purchase of luxury goods) could generate public benefits – in this instance, stimulating the national economy and providing employment. His omission is hardly surprising however for Marat was never one to consider the niceties of a case from a balanced point of view. Rather, in Sèvres he was looking for, and found another stick with which to beat the courtly culture of France’s recent past.

Should Marat’s argument have been correct, then come the Revolution, when diplomatic ties with other European nations were cut, Sèvres would simply have been left without a raison d’être. Yet, as my first chapter has suggested, although the provision of State gifts was an important role fulfilled by the manufactory, it produced for and sold to a wider demographic than that acknowledged by Marat. That they had diversified, at least to an extent – for they always catered to the high-end of the luxury

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market – selling to tourists who, like Walpole might purchase a single coffee cup and saucer, and wealthy aspirational bourgeoisie – would now prove their saving grace.

The existence of a market for porcelain during the 1790s has already been noted with reference to the establishment of new manufactories, and having successfully convinced D’Angiviller of the need to cut back on the grand state commissions that Sèvres excelled at, the manufactory attempted to play it to its advantage. Adapting their wares to be less costly, it appealed to people who might never have been able to buy Sèvres porcelain before – most notably through their vastly increased production of medallions, of which more will be said later. Speaking generally, (for there are numerous and notable exceptions), its ouevre bares witness to the adoption of more readily commercial principals at the manufactory. 43 Through reducing the complexity of their models (or at least reducing the number of complex models undertaken), simplifying its decorative schemes so as to be quicker and easier to produce and restricting the use of gold on all but specified commissions, Sèvres porcelain became a more viable product for the 1790s. 44 Inevitably however, the expense of producing Sèvres porcelain could not be overcome – an inherently costly, highly finished, labour intensive medium, it could realistically be bought only by the wealthy. As such, the ceiling dividing those who could and could not buy Sèvres porcelain remained largely in place: indeed, as Montucla realised, of those who could buy their wares, fewer would. 45

The scarcity of commissions has already been noted: yet correspondence from the first half of 1792 contains several letters congratulating Régnier on commissions taken, suggesting that, if things were dire between the years 1789 – 1791, they had begun to pick up. On 12th April, La Porte wrote to Régnier that sales were satisfactory, giving him hope that the manufactory would surmount the obstacles that

43 As Préaud notes, this process of simplification was in fact begun in the 1780s as a result of a decline in orders from the nobility, whose source of income – the king – was becoming increasingly unreliable. Tamara Préaud, 'Competition from Sèvres Porcelain', in Derby Porcelain International Society Journal, no. 4 ed. V. Baynton, 2000, p.39. See also Chauvisé, Le Cinquantenaire de l'École de Sèvres, 1881 – 1931, 1931, p.39.
44 As a result of the rarity and expense of gold, Régnier removed four doreurs from their atelier, presumably relocating them within the manufactory. See letter from La Porte to Régnier, 16th February 1792, Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 3.
45 I refer the reader back to an extract from his correspondence reproduced on page 89.
circumstances occasioned. On 20th September 1792, after the fall of the monarchy, Montucla remarks wistfully that ‘[t]outes les dettes de la manufacture sont à peu de chose près payées jusqu’à l’époque de 1792’, by which he meant specifically, August 10th.

The archival records furnish us with some knowledge of those who continued to purchase Sèvres porcelain during the opening years of the revolution. The names of members of the royal family including the Mesdames, Madame Adélaïde and Madame Victoire, the Comtesse d’Artois and even the little Dauphin are, for example, found listed at regular intervals in the sales records between 1789 and 1792. Unsurprisingly however it was Louis who was the biggest spender, making regular purchases from the manufactory and leaving outstanding payments totalling 33,387 livres after his death, (debts that were subsequently liquidated by the State). This huge total included the payment due for the porcelain made for the queen’s dairy at Rambouillet and which amounted to 23,648 livres, and for purchases made from the manufactory between December 1791 and July 1792, totalling 9,739 livres. Members of his court are also regularly named in the records in addition to the occasional ambassador, the Venetian Doge, the Spanish royal family, and several French bankers. Alongside them, however, are as many clients who remain anonymous in the sales records or whose names have long since become obscure. Given the irregularities and vagaries of the sales records, an evaluation of the pieces to have survived the period are as useful a guide of what was consumed and by whom, leading us to believe that their patrons were men and women of varying tastes, incomes, and politics.

The manufactory administration had also been looking abroad for potential sales. The English had long admired its wares, and the journals of those who visited Paris suggest that a trip to the city would be incomplete without visiting Sèvres or a showroom selling its porcelain. Thus London had seemed a natural place to establish an outlet, and in 1788 the marchand-mercier, Daguerre, installed himself there on the

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46 Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 3.
47 Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 3, letter from Montucla to Régnier, 10th September 1792.
48 Arch Nat., F12 1496, letter from Barreau to Coqueau, 11th January 1794; Arch. Nat., O2 913, letter from Clavière to Régnier, 21st March 1793
The venture was not entirely successful, but in the light of these difficulties in Paris, they came to rely heavily upon it. ‘M. Daguerre et la vente à Londres est en quelque sorte notre unique esperance’ wrote Montucla to Regnier in March 1790. Yet to its credit, it would appear that Sèvres managed to end their dependency on money generated in England. On 20th April 1792, Arnauld de la Porte, intendant of the civil list, wrote to Régnier that: ‘Je ne puis que voir avec plaisir cette continuité de demandes qui me font esperer que la manufacture cessera d’avoir besoin de secours étranger.’

The manufactory continued to produce ranges whose decoration marks a general continuity of design and modelling from wares produced during the ancien régime. These plates – figures 27-29, for example – all dating to 1791, hark back to a design-type current at Sèvres during the 1780s employing natural and stylised floral arrangements and geometric patterns. Other examples from Sèvres’ oeuvre of the 1790s illustrate an even more direct continuity of aesthetic from the ancien régime, and for example a number of items were made for addition to the large services commissioned prior to the Bastille’s fall by the French crown. The Louis XVI service (as it is now known), was commissioned from the manufactory in 1780, yet it was so ambitious in terms of its scale and decoration, that it was not scheduled for completion until 1803 (later put back to 1805). As such, work continued on items for inclusion in it until mid-1792, during which twenty-three pieces were completed (figs.30-31). Only at this point was the project terminated.

Similarly, work also continued uninterrupted on a number of service types for the open market, among them the service decorated with birds from Comte George-Louis Leclerc de Buffon’s Histoire Naturelle des Oiseaux, first produced at Sèvres in 1774 (fig.32.i). Of all their service ware designs it must have seemed especially suited to reproduction during the 1790s, for despite his aristocratic status, the late Buffon was

50 Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 1.
51 Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 3.
52 For the history of the service see Geoffrey de Bellaigue, Sèvres Porcelain in the Collection of her Majesty the Queen: The Louis XVI Service, Cambridge, 1986.
greatly revered during the revolutionary decade, and not just by the French naturalist community of which he had formed a part. The political community too held him in the highest regard, hailing him as the 'philosophe who had painted nature for the glory of the French Nation.' As Spary writes,

‘Even in 1793, the naturalist’s reputation was politically intact to the point that he could plausibly be ranked alongside prominent Jacobin heroes. In this year the secretary of the popular and Republican society of Avre-Libre, […] would celebrate in verse the inauguration of a bust of Buffon along with those of other Republican ‘great men’ in the meeting chamber: Rousseau, Voltaire, Franklin, Lepelletier, and Marat.’

The quality that particularly distinguished Buffon was his emphasis on the morally educative potential inherent in the study of natural history. It was therefore quite fitting that didacticism should have informed Sévres’ own rendering of the prints accompanying Buffon’s publication on their tea, coffee and dinner services. Each bird, rendered in immaculate detail, is clearly differentiated from its neighbour by the careful delineation of its own ornithological qualities. Turn the vessel over, and on the reverse one finds the name of the bird in question (fig.32.ii). Such labelling lent the service a pedagogic, quasi-scientific seriousness – a quality that would not only have been well received by those initiated into the ‘cult of Buffon’. More generally they were qualities that would have served the pieces well during the revolutionary decade as they help distinguish and differentiate them from the purely ‘decorative’ type for which the manufactory was best known, but which became less palatable as attacks on the rococo began to mount. In essence this service range would be able to make an easier transition to the very different artistic and cultural clime of the 1790s than perhaps others could have done.

Yet for all that the Rococo may have been vilified for its vivid evocation of the unearned pleasure of a privileged few, there was evidently still a market for works in this style among the manufactory’s clientele. The cup and saucer belonging to the

53 Doumeau, quoted by Emma Spary, op. cit., p.168.
54 Ibid.
55 As Melissa Hyde argues that the rococo was a more persistent style than the usual art historical narrative allows: ‘[T]he taste for rococo style and subjects was not in fact eradicated by neoclassicism or the Revolution. The rococo was still very much in demand by art lovers and collectors well into the 1780s and 1790s…’, Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and his Critics Los Angeles, 2006, p.19.
V&A, featuring two enfants Boucher types set in a pastoral setting and framed by elaborate gilding looks, for example, like a quintessential, even magnificent example of their rococo oeuvre from the 1760s (fig.33.i). It is therefore a surprise upon examining its reverse to find the letter-date PP: 1792 (fig.33.ii).\(^5\) Given the extraordinary gilded surround and the temporal investment that its figurative decoration represents, we might assume that it was specifically commissioned and one-off. Possibly; yet this item cannot be described as an anomaly among its output for there are other examples dating to the 1790s which see Sèvres drawing on the art of the then heavily vilified arch rococoist. Their existence is a measure of how enduring the taste for its works in le goût de Boucher was among the manufactory’s patrons.

These examples would suggest that the manufactory continued to look to its long established core clientele who in all likelihood, would be familiar with these ranges, or to new buyers knowledgeable of Sèvres signature look, discussed in chapter I. Yet wisely, given their depleting numbers, Sèvres also tried to broaden the market for its wares and, taking advantage of a split in the market began to produce a comparatively small number of pieces to meet the demand for revolutionary memorabilia. The transition from one market to the other was not always straightforward or absolute however, and a few items attempted to straddle the ever-widening bifurcation, manifesting a remarkably split personality as a result. An example with just such a schizophrenic decorative scheme is this goblet Litron et soucoupe dating to 1791 (fig.34). Its figurative designs, drawn from illustrations for Ovid’s Metamorphoses by Boucher and Charles Monnet respectively, are quintessentially rococo. Yet subtly integrated into their designs are symbolic inclusions that bring the items right up to date: Venus and Adonis are dressed and garlanded in the red white and blue of the French tricolour for example. And on the deep rim of the saucer, wound among the gilded arabesques, are two fasces. The fasces’ symbolic meaning – strength in unity – has no resonance in the context of the story of Thesis and Proteus illustrated, leading me to assume that their inclusion was a nod towards the values of the Revolution. The subtlety of these inclusions which makes them eminently miss-able, is again notable in a revolutionary medallion belonging to the British Museum (fig.35). It appears at first to be decorated with a dense tangle of high rococo arabesques: only upon closer

\(^5\) For Sèvres’ system of dating, see David Peters Decorator and Date Marks on C18th Vincennes and Sèvres Porcelain, London, 1997.
examination does it become apparent that the tangle is in fact a series of letters semi-
superimposed upon one another, spelling out the word, *Liberté*. Such is the
incoherence of the medallion however that no sooner have our eyes grasped the
presence of the word, than it returns to abstract, decorative pattern.

The people of France were all conscious that they were witnessing and participating in
history in the making, and before the dust settled on the successive events that rocked
Paris, souvenirs were being sold in commemoration. The fall of the Bastille is just one
example: its imposing image appeared on every surface imaginable, including a Sèvres
porcelain sugar bowl and teacup (figs.36-37). Certificates were issued to its
conquerors; its metal bars locks and keys were melted down and moulded into shoe-
buckles; and its very stones transformed into inkwells and jewellery pendants. A wide-
ranging market of Bastille memorabilia sprang up instantaneously with the prison’s
fall, a process that was repeated time and again as the revolutionary *journées*
multiplied. Despite its elevated status as a *manufacture Royale*, Sèvres did not distance
itself from the growing market for memorabilia since, like the other producers for a
once booming French luxury industry, it could hardly afford to ignore market trends.
Following the emigration of the majority of their primarily aristocratic clientele,
Sèvres found itself in a desperate situation, and not just financially. For a manufactory
so closely identified with the king and *ancien-régime* privilege, these were dangerous
times. The production of pieces which would appeal to a new, patriotic clientele would
therefore not only provide another financial avenue for Sèvres to exploit, but might
also help re-identify it along more pro-revolutionary lines and protect it against
accusations of aristocracy.

The manufactory archives are frustratingly vague about the appearance of their
revolutionary wares and only a few coherent series are noted in the painters’ register,
among them a series of thirty-eight cups and saucers decorated with national
(tricolour) ribbons. We must assume that the two examples owned by the Musée
Carnavalet were among this series (figs.38-39). Whether there were another thirty-six
variations on this composition produced, or whether the records might also allude to a
more general use of the tricolour is unknown however. The tricolour was certainly
dominant in their decorative schemes, as attested by numerous examples both
‘revolutionary’, and ‘neutral’ (figs.40-41). In the latter category we can count a wine-
cooler destined for Louis XVI's service, in which a smiling cupid is seen tied to a tree with tricolour ribbons by two maidens dressed in red, white and blue (fig. 42).

The 'series' decorated with tricolour ribbons appears to have been exceptional however, and brief glance through the surviving examples of painted Sèvres porcelain from the period 1789 – 1792 suggests that there was little coherence in their production, revealing a range of approaches to the problem of creating 'revolutionary' porcelain. The fact that there was no in-house tradition for Sèvres' artists to draw on, so to speak, is probably significant in this respect. And the possible overlap with the faïenciers then producing huge quantities of revolutionary earthenware that could possibly have served as a model might also at first glance seem limited. Yet although the latter is characterised by the use of white grounds, limited pallet, and a childish, naïve graphic-style, a common ground shared between them was their use of revolutionary symbols (fig. 43). Certainly the Sèvrians were as highly literate in this complex pictorial vocabulary, which they integrated into their work with great fluency and without compromising their house-style – a point that shall be stressed in chapter III.

Their fluency is illustrated by two examples dated 1789 and painted by Bouillat fils, who makes good use of the symbolic language then being deployed by artists in France. The first is dominated by an altar on which a flame burns, inscribed *Libertas Auguste Ex*, 'Liberty produced it in August', a reference to the abolition of privileges on the night of the 4th (fig. 44). As well as the tricolour ribbons that form a wavy band around both cup and saucer, are cocades, oak branches symbolising endurance, and, in the centre of the saucer a military flourish in tricolour colours like those worn by the soldiers pictured in figure 45. Worked into the blue reserves on the saucer, a cat and a *bonnet rouge* on a pike symbolise the liberty that resulted from that momentous night. These two iconographic references can also be found framed by tricolour ribbons (that are themselves framed by laurel branches denotative of victory) on the second cup where they sit alongside a flag and sceptre (fig. 46). The latter symbol reminds us that monarchy was not yet considered incompatible with the values of the fledgling regime.

by all but the most radicalised: the two could therefore appear side by side as in this instance. It is perhaps significant however, that the liberty bonnet is the predominant symbolic inclusion, standing proud of the other two by virtue of its central position and height.

Perhaps Bouillat was also assigned the execution of this bowl as a result of his recent contribution to the Asturies service on which he painted numerous small vignettes of paysage scenes akin to those on this remarkable example (fig.47). What is so notable is the fact that it depicts what appears to be a burning manor house, which must surely relate to the iconography for the provincial uprisings that wracked France. This was in fact an iconography to which he returned when working on a remarkable Déjeuner Tête à Tête, registered in the painters’ records under his name on 4 Thermidor an 2 (22nd July 1794). Several items within the Déjeuner, among which we must count figures 1.ii and 48 depict burned out castles that, by virtue of their juxtaposition with rosy cottages, symbolise the victory of the poor over the rich, the humble over the grand. Of all the iconographic schemes upon which he could have drawn, this one strikes me as by far the most problematic, for it could only be purchased by someone with considerable wealth. More on the paradoxical aspect inherent in all ‘revolutionary’ Sèvres porcelain will be said in chapter III.

Figurative decorations such as that on the Vizille déjeuner are relatively rare among Sèvres’ revolutionary oeuvre (although not, as my illustrations for chapter I would have suggested, in their pre-revolutionary work). Another exception to this rule however is a cup and saucer painted by Etienne-Charles Le Guay in 1789 or 1790, probably to commemorate the establishment of the National Guard in July 1789 or to celebrate the Festival of Federation which took place on the Champs de Mars the following year (fig.37). On the saucer stands a battalion of petit patriots, neatly lined up on the training ground of the Ecole Militaire. Together they raise their hats on high in a patriotic salute to a wreath held by their leader who, in his other hand, also supports a tricolour flag, surmounted by a bonnet rouge, inscribed with the word Liberté. On the cup, the same group of boys, some now striking poses which recall David’s Horatii warriors, (but which would have been more widely understood as the appropriate gesture for the swearing of oaths), reach for a wreath this time held by a particularly regal figure of France. Crowned and draped in ermine she sits before the
ruined (but not yet demolished) Bastille. Perhaps the inclusion of their fallen comrade at her feet suggests that these young boys are grasping at the wreath of immortality, won only by fighting to the death in the defence of the revolution and its values.

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However, the commemorative cup would have presented problems to a commercially minded manufacturer. Due to the superior quality of its hand painting and gilding it would have been an expensive object, requiring months of work, and if not unique, only a handful could possibly have been made. Cost, production time and the impossibility of mass production all preclude this object, and other tea ware by Sèvres from entering the market for mass memorabilia. These are problems that would not be encountered to the same extend in the production of biscuit porcelain, and in particular of medallions, and indeed the years 1789 to 1794 appear to have been uniquely conducive to their production and purchase. The demand for them, which is accentuated by their comparatively lacklustre sale in 1788 and the virtual end to their purchase in the period immediately following Robespierre’s fall in July 1794, cannot be arbitrary, and leads me to suggest that in their production of these small bas-relief medallions, Sèvres was responding to a need felt by a public in the grip of revolution.58

To illustrate the sudden rise in demand for them, one need look no further than the sale of Sèvres porcelain held annually over the New Year period at Versailles and transferred in December 1789 to the Tuileries Palace where Louis XVI then had his court. In December 1788 / January 1799, among the 1, 572 pieces sold, 127 were medallions, accounting for approximately one in twelve of their sales. The sale of December 1789 / January 1790 saw no less than a fourfold increase in their purchase: of 926 pieces sold, medallions accounted for just under one in three sales (281). This rate was almost matched the following year when of 929 pieces sold, 242 were medallions – roughly a quarter. Why were these medallions so popular during the first five years of the revolution?

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The coinciding of the Estates General with the first surge in the sale of biscuit medallions in June 1789 was surely not coincidental. Of the two months across which it stretched, June was of unparalleled excitement, witnessing the formation of the National Assembly born of the dissatisfaction of the representatives of the Third Estate with the status quo. On the daily journey between Paris and Versailles undertaken by scores of representatives of the Three Estates, some must have interrupted their thoughts to look at the commanding edifice of the manufactory of Sèvres when they passed it en route. A few might even have stopped their carriages to purchase a souvenir of the momentous times in which they lived. This may sound like a crass presumption considering the high-mindedness of their task and the oft perceived triviality of souvenir shopping, but the fact that seventy-one medallions were purchased from Sèvres in June, more than had been sold collectively in February (eleven), March (zero), April (twenty-six) and May (twenty-two) warrants explanation. And even if it were not the representatives themselves who bought them, I believe the Estates General would have occasioned a relative rush on Sèvres' medallions in any case. Unsurprisingly it seems the manufactory anticipated that their best-seller would be a medallion depicting Jacques Necker, the immensely popular pro-reform director-general of finances who had first recommended the summoning of the Estates General to the king. During May and June 1789, sixty-three portrait medallions of him were fired, a number unequalled by any other figure.

Little is known about the processes by which these medallions were made, but with reference to Sèvres' kiln records, we can assume that even by modern standards, they were mass producible. Between May and December 1791, 1,359 découper medallions (i.e., bas-relief busts truncated below the neck, see figure 49) left their kilns, whilst between December 1791 and April 1792, 3,108 were fired. The summary nature of these figures, which do not allow one to establish how many firings were required to arrive at this total, can be attributed to the failings of one of Sèvres' most prominent employees during the revolution, Jean-Baptiste Chanou, chemist with responsibility for pastes, head of kilns, and later mayor of the municipality of Sèvres, of whom more

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59 Pierre Mercier suggests that the manufactory continued to attract a passing trade during this period just as they had always done from the courtiers between Versailles and Paris, 'Présentation de Sèvres à
shall be said in chapter III. We read in the manufactory archives that between 14th May and 16th December 1791, 'Mr. Chanoux (sic) chargé d'écrire la sculpture sortant du four n'en a rien fait.' However the fact that surrounding these dates, a continuous stream of other medallions were fired, thirty, fifty, sometimes one hundred at a time, amply suggests the manufactory's capacity to produce in bulk quantities. On 16 Thermidor an VII (4th August 1799) for example, 336 were made in single firing.

The depiction of contemporary personages on medallions in bas-relief, at a moment when men usually remained in the spotlight for short periods of time, suggests the manufactory felt confident in their speed of production to take advantage of the short windows of opportunity available to market contemporary personalities. Alongside allegorical depictions of contemporary ideas such as Liberté et Égalité, La Patrie and La République Française, all of which would have had a relatively long shelf life, we find representations of Necker, La Fayette, Mirabeau, Pétion, and later Dumouriez, Le Peletier de Saint-Fargeau, and Marat, all of whom fell from grace during the Revolution or in its aftermath (figs.50-53).

As well as being both speedily and mass producible, the prices at which they were sold were suited to the souvenir market. Prices started high at around 48 livres each, equivalent to the cost of a year's subscription to Marat's L'Ami du Peuple (which, as Edelstein notes, was a considerable sum, certainly enough to put it beyond the reach of 'the urban menu peuple'). But the majority were sold for less than one livre, the equivalent in March 1791 to the cost of hiring the services of a porter or, in August 1792, the price of three ice-creams. These are random references, but serve to

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61 A window which, much to his distress, Josiah Wedgwood almost missed on the occasion of Kepple's acquittal by court martial which had given the colonel a great celebrity, celebrity which he could have exploited to sell portrait medallions. 'Oh Kepple, Kepple, why did you not send me a Kepple', he wrote to his partner, Thomas Bentley in February 1779. 'I am persuaded that if we had our wits about us as we ought to have had two or three months ago since, we might have sold £1000 worth of this gentleman's head in various ways, and I am persuaded that it would still be worth while to dispose of them every way in our power.' Quoted in ex. cat., Mr Wedgwood: an exhibition, Nottingham Castle Museum, Nottingham, 1975, pp.44 – 45.
illustrate the potential accessibility of medallions at this price. Establishing the demographics of their clientele however is complicated by the fact that in many cases medallions were bought from the manufactory by the dozen, if not hundreds in single transactions. This suggests that middlemen became involved and that the medallions would have been introduced into Paris and other cities via different avenues, perhaps subject to alteration and adaptation on the way. The aforementioned Liberté medallion for example was probably intended for mounting on a snuffbox lid (fig.35).

It is equally hard to pinpoint the intended use of Sèvres' biscuit medallions by private citizens, but I would question whether they had a single application. The range in prices at which they could be bought suggests they varied greatly in size, complexity and intricacy of detail. Few examples remain for our scrutiny, but the majority of these are of a size suited to being framed and hung on a wall or mounted in furniture, from whence they would display the political allegiances of their owner, for these were on no account neutral objects. We need only recall the reaction elicited by Sèvres' brief production of the abolitionist emblem in April 1789, emblazoned with the provocative question Ne suis-je pas un homme? Un frère?, which D'Angiviller was swift to ban (fig.54). The distribution of such medallions might, he feared, directly result in uprisings in their colonies. On no account should any be produced at Sèvres. D'Angiviller had good reason to fear the possible distribution of these medallions in light of the pervasiveness of Wedgwood's abolitionist medallion, on which Sèvres' was based. Thomas Clarkson, himself a recipient of five-hundred examples donated by Josiah Wedgwood, recalled that 'they to whom they were sent, did not lay them in cabinets, but gave them away likewise. They were soon, like the Negro's complaint, in different parts of the kingdom.' These medallions were powerful objects, campaign buttons of sorts.

65 Arch. M.N.S., H4, letter from Montucla to Antoine Régnier, 8th April 1789
66 It should be noted that at least one such medallion escaped detection as evinced by the example belonging to the Musée Adrien Dubouché, Limoges.
'Campaign button' is a fitting description of another type of object that I have encompassed within my research on Sévres' biscuit medallion ware, its cameos and buttons, pieces intended to mark the body, not the home (figs.55-56). Their appearance in the sales records are relatively rare, but I would argue that many of the découper medallions, (like the examples belonging to the British Museum, to which I have tentatively attached the price of one livre due to their tiny size and mass-produced look), might be transformed elsewhere into pendants (fig.57). In a marble bust by Felix Le Comte (1783), Marie Antoinette is shown wearing a cameo pendant of a type that one could imagine might correspond to those made in Sévres porcelain (fig.58). Strung on a ribbon it depicts Louis XVI and serves to identify her with the king, her husband. Might the medallion have been modelled after one of those actually bought from Sévres by the royal jeweller, Pierre-François Drais in 1782 or 1783? The portrait of the duchesse d'Orléans painted in 1789 by Elizabeth-Louise Vigée Le Brun suggests porcelain was worn about one's person (fig.59). The panels of her lacy redingote are artfully drawn back to direct our attention to a Wedgwood plaque mounted on her belt, depicting poor Maria, a character from Stern's A Sentimental Journey. The Comtesse's coy demeanour and melancholic eyes brimming over with sensibilité suggest the artist meant to convey her patron's desired affinity to this romantic character. The Marquise de Fresne d'Agusseau was also depicted wearing the same belt by Vigée Le Brun in 1789, although her bolder facial expression and colourful patterned dress suggest that it was here intended to convey the sitter's fashionable appearance rather than any melancholic internal state (fig.60).

By producing jewellery, the manufactory of Sévres would have found a market with great potential. During the Revolution it was very à la mode to donate precious jewellery to the government in order to help fund its campaigns, a trend started by a delegation of eleven artists' wives, among whom numbered Mesdames David, Peyron, Vien, and Moitte. Dressed in white and bedecked only with tricolour ribbons, they presented themselves before the National Assembly on 7th September 1789 to

68 The kiln records include pieces that appear to have been intended to serve as campaign buttons: in Brumaire an II (October/November 1793), forty-five buttons depicting a bonnet de la liberté were fired, followed by a further twenty pour mettre au col. It is interesting to note that Mirabeau is depicted wearing buttons decorated with bas-relief liberty bonnets in a bust submitted to the competition organised by the Jacobins in April 1791 by the sculptor, Tessier. It is on display at Musée Carnavalet.

69 Drais' purchases have been noted by Dawson, op. cit., 1982, p.100.
donate their jewels, an act which self-consciously recalled that of the Roman women who thus helped realise Camillus's pledge of a golden bowl for Apollo in celebration of a victory over the Veii.\textsuperscript{71} It would also have evoked the virtues of another female role model of the French Revolution, Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi brothers who preferred to dedicate herself to raising her two sons in the tradition of the republic than to her own personal adornment. Yet unlike Cornelia, we can hardly imagine that French women who could afford such a patriotic gesture would have actually given up all forms of self-adornment and it would be naïve to believe they sought no alternatives. Perhaps one can draw a parallel with a situation that arose during the Seven Years War when Madame de Pompadour was said to have set an example by donating her expensive silver to help the war effort, furnishing her table with Sèvres porcelain instead.\textsuperscript{72} A tradition of exchanging gold and silver for ceramics in times of war stretches back to the seventeenth-century. As Marie-Laure de Rochebrune notes, ‘...following the edicts issued by Louis XIV ordering the melting down of plate to finance the wars of 1689 and 1709, the whole of France suddenly began using tableware made of tin-glazed earthenware’.\textsuperscript{73}

Might \textit{les citoyennes} of the French Revolution have swapped their precious jewels for porcelain for the sake of \textit{la patrie}? Aileen Ribeiro has noted in her book on French revolutionary fashion that women sought alternatives to traditional jewellery, choosing ‘non precious jewels, often with political significance’.\textsuperscript{74} Sèvres medallion and cameo ware would fit these requirements exactly, and, as they met the popular neo-classical aesthetic, would also have been a fashionable way of serving one’s country. A gouache by Le Sueur entitled \textit{Mode Féminin}, which follows a fashion plate format, underlines the fact that by wearing such an item one self-consciously conformed to a style then in vogue (fig.61). One of the six women illustrated, (each of

\textsuperscript{70} Sèvres also produced such accessories. In Ventôse an II (February/March 1794), a little plaque for a buckle was fired and in Fructidor an II (August / September 1794) six cameos for a belt were sold.


\textsuperscript{72} Nancy Mitford, \textit{Madame du Pompadour}, London, 1995, p.243. As I argued in chapter I, purchasing Sèvres could in itself could be construed as patriotic.


\textsuperscript{74} Aileen Ribeiro, \textit{Fashion in the French Revolution}, London, 1988, p.60. It was certainly the case that in England porcelain medallions with political significance became fashionable. Thomas Clarkson records the popularity of bracelets and hairpins inlaid with Wedgwood’s abolitionist emblem: ‘At length, the taste for wearing them became general; and this fashion, which usually confines itself to the
whom is differently dressed and accessorised), leans artfully on a truncated column, her white robes gathered at her waist by a belt with a prominent buckle whose colouring instantly betrays it as being of a type made by both Sèvres and Wedgwood. The caption beneath her, which identifies her ‘look’, reads: ‘Jeune fille vêtue à la Grecque’. Even if the manufactory did not produce pieces prêt à porter, their mass production of découper medallions suggests they made the component parts ready for setting by those in the appropriate trades.  

Two portraits of Marie Antoinette and her daughter show the women wearing medallions that might have born a resemblance to those produced at Sèvres. Painted by the Marquise de Brehan, (date unknown), Marie Antoinette, a prisoner in the Conciergerie, wears a relief portrait medallion depicting her two children, who had by then been taken from her (fig.62). Conversely Madame Royale, painted in miniature by the studio of Heinrich Friedrich Füger, wears a similar medallion but with profile portraits of her parents (fig.63). In the contexts of these two sitters’ situations, the portrait medallions they wear carry the weighty significance of memorials to loved ones, a function again accommodated by their classical aesthetic.

Throughout the Revolution the manufactory aimed to meet the needs of a public in a continual state of mourning by producing posthumous portraits of several revolutionary heroes, Marat among them (somewhat ironically, given his opinion of the manufactory!) But perhaps no group patronised Sèvres’ efforts more than those who hoped for the restoration of the monarchy, and as Tamara Préaud has noted, effigies of the royal family sold well up until the last minute. As late as 30th September 1791, Louis-Simon Boizot, head of the sculpture department at Sèvres,
asked for and was granted a sitting with the Dauphin so that he could execute a medallion of the young boy (fig. 64). It is impossible to determine whether the medallion on display at Musée Carnavalet was the result of that session or whether it is in fact an earlier model. However the child’s age and his air of vulnerability suggest that it is indeed the model dating from 1791, perhaps even one of the ten fired on 24th December of that year.

The substantial drop in the sales of medallions following the deposition of the king on August 10th 1792, the day Sèvres would have had to end their reproduction of his likeness and those of his family, suggests that, until then, the bulk of their medallions had been produced for – and patronised by – a counter-revolutionary market. One might conclude that this is not surprising, considering Sèvres was, at this point, still owned and funded by the king himself. Yet the allegiance the manufactory owed its patron played little part in dictating its production. Rather, the manufactory maintained commercial priorities, producing biscuit medallions that would have appealed to the political sensibilities of both royalists and revolutionaries in order to maximise the possible market for their wares. Sèvres, then, remained apolitical in this respect. Returning to the 1,369 medallions which left the kilns between May and December 1791, alongside depictions of the king, queen, dauphin and madame royale, sat Mirabeau, La Fayette, Washington, Franklin and Rousseau: monarchs together with those challenging absolute monarchy. Whilst they would have served a deep-seated and very personal need in their purchasers for the celebration or commemoration of an ongoing Revolution, at the same time, for a struggling manufactory, they were a way into a mass market.

In answer to the question, why, if produced in such quantities, have so few survived until today, one might propose that the biscuit medallions made during the Revolution served their purpose too well. In being invested by their purchasers with political significance, as regimes changed, they were unlikely to survive the transition. Préaud has suggested that the medallions were the primary targets of the iconoclasts who attacked Sèvres’ stockroom on 9th August 1793 with the intention of ridding the

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78 A letter of 30th September 1791 from La Porte to Régnier conveys the king’s permission and invites Boizot to visit the Tuileries palace the following Monday morning. MNS Arch., H5.
79 Arch. M.N.S., Vc’3.
manufactory of all reminders of the past regime. The fate of the biscuit medallions conveying pro-revolutionary sentiments would have been little better. Whereas patriotically decorated service ware could have their offending revolutionary attributes painted over or scratched off, as several examples in the Musée Carnavalet testify, there could be no selective editing where the medallions were concerned (fig.65). Complete destruction would have been the only option open to their repentant owners. But this violent end only affirmed that they were inherently and intentionally transient objects and that their purpose in life was as tokens of political allegiance - cheap, mass-produced, commemorating passing moments in history.

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Between 1789 and the summer of 1792, Sèvres also created free-standing sculptural representations of some of these same personages – Necker, Bailly, La Fayette and Mirabeau. However because they would have represented a considerably greater financial investment to their purchaser on account of their size and because of the complexity of their modelling, they were made in much smaller numbers. Of the four busts named, I have only been able to locate a surviving example of Mirabeau’s (fig.66). This is particularly disappointing given that this model, like those which were made later in the revolution and which will be analysed in chapter III, suggest that the manufactory was developing new modes of representation – ones reflective of the values of the time. In Mirabeau’s case, particularly noteworthy is the fact that, far from being beautified, as had inevitably been the practice at Sèvres where portraiture was concerned, his countenance is rendered with a documentary veracity which, although dignified, is very far from being flattering. Puffy and pockmarked, Mirabeau’s face is set far apart by its ugliness.

It might seem doubtful whether Sèvres had any choice but to represent him thus, after all his appearance was famous and by all accounts, hypnotic. Everyone, writes Simon Schama, strained their necks to get a glimpse of him, including Mme de Stael who

81 Mark Jones records the decision made by the medallist, Benjamin Duvivier, to have the dies of his medal of Lafayette destroyed in the wake of the general’s fall in popularity, employing none other than the public executioner to carry out this iconoclastic act. His decision was applauded by the Commune on 25th August 1792. Medals of the French Revolution, London, 1977, p.4.
‘although she had no reason to appreciate a man who had publicly calumniated her father […], confessed that it was impossible to take her eyes off this apparition once it had been beheld.’\(^{82}\) Simply to neglect the scars that helped set him apart from the crowd of men similarly dressed in the sober black uniforms of the Third Estate might be seen as too blatant an omission to be allowed. But although some graphic artists carefully delineated each pockmark and pustule, the fact that others omitted them suggests that the sculptors and \textit{repareurs} at Sèvres had some license in their choice of how to represent their subject. That they chose to go against their in-house conventions on this occasion is significant and suggests not only a commitment to the appearance of their subject, but his character, for the two were often seen as entwined by contemporaries of the great orator.

Mirabeau’s ungainly body and blighted countenance were apparent from birth, (the midwife took the precaution of forewarning his father before introducing him to his newly born son), and later exacerbated by the administration of a herbal remedy which, far from curing the child’s smallpox, only enflamed them more. These facts are not unimportant, for not only did his disfigurement alienate his father but made participation in the courtly society which was by birth his, less attainable. On this last point, Chaussinard-Nogaret notes,

‘De tous les fantasmes nés à l’idéologie nobiltaire, un des plus tenaces et des plus subtils est la mythologie du corps. Un gentilhomme est beau, fin, délié, élégant; il a la voix agréable et l’ésprit bien placé. Être bien né c’est aussi d’être \textit{bien} de sa personne. Dans une société comme celle du XVIIIe siècle, où les différences de culture s’effacent, seuls la distinction des traits, le raffinement du costume, les rites sociaux et toute une manière de paraître, distinguent l’aristocratie du commun des mortels.’\(^{83}\)

For Mirabeau, the experience of rejection in his formative years proved character forming and indirectly led to the young Gabriel’s deliberate cultivation of characteristics that would further assure that he was barred from polite society. ‘Tout déclassé Mirabeau’, writes Chaussinard-Nogaret by, ‘grossièreté de traits, négligence du costume, rusticité de manières et […] une énorme, une scandaleuse familiarité’.

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Yet, come 1789 it was exactly these qualities that helped him stand out from the Second Estate as a man of the Third – his championing of which represented the ultimate and irreversible crossing of class boundaries. Now his scars, far from being a source of his exclusion became, metaphorically speaking, a badge of belonging to an Estate into which he was not born but suffered to belonged. This analogy was recognised, and just as his wiry, uncontrollable hair that stood-up on end, increasing his already bulky silhouette, prompted some to compare him with Samson who drew strength from his locks, so his ungainly appearance became a visual tag of his newfound alliance with *le peuple*. Such ideas, we must assume, cannot have been far from the surface where artists chose to represent the ‘the father of the people’, warts and all.

Certainly we might argue this to have been the case for the sculptors at Sèvres who were directly involved in the manufacture of his bust, for many amongst the manufactory’s workforce appear to have been initiated into the cult that sprang up around the deputy from Aix. Henry-Victor Roguier, a sculptor at the manufactory, was certainly not immune to Mirabeau’s myth, holding him in the highest reverence, as evinced by the eulogy he wrote and delivered (at the request of his ‘brothers’) in Mirabeau’s memory, and which was subsequently published.⁸⁴ This remarkable document, which has thus far gone un-noted, reveals Roguier to have been an extremely eloquent writer, familiar with and comfortable in the use of various literary conventions common to oration during the revolution. At one point, for example, he vividly imagines Mirabeau’s last words and dying moments, pleading with death to spare so precious a man and take him instead, by then a well rehearsed cliché for mourning the Revolution’s fallen heroes.

‘Je le vois lorsqu’ayant perdu presque toutes les facultés, il trace encore quelques mots d’une main incertaine ... il se ranime ... je l’entends parler ... mon cœur se dilate ... je suis étonné de sa force et de son éloquence ... l’espérance se fait jour dans mon âme ... je crois qu’il va être rendu à l’ardeur de nos vœux ... Ô transition affreuse. Ainsi qu’une lampe qui jette un dernier éclat de lueur pour s’éteindre ... il succombe! Et l’impitoyable mort apparaît à mes regards ... Arrête, barbare, s’il te faut une victime, je m’offre, frappe et respecte l’homme utile, l’homme précieux dont rien ne peut réparer la perte...’

⁸⁴ Roguier, *Éloge de Mirabeau*, prononcé le 8 mai 1791 à la cérémonie des honneurs funèbres rendus à sa mémoire par la Société des Amis de la Constitution, les Municipaux et la Garde Nationale de
The document also suggests the extent to which Roguier was knowledgeable about the intricacies of the deputy’s life and the criticisms levied against him – which he confidently counters. By any measure it is an insightful speech and suggests he was not only politically aware, but politically astute.

As to whether Roguier is representative of, or unique among his colleagues, the evidence would suggest that although his oratory skills may have been singular, the sentiments he expressed were widely shared. His eulogy was in fact first presented as part of the ceremony held on 8th May 1791 in the municipality of Sèvres to commemorate Mirabeau’s death, a ceremony that also harnessed the talents of his colleagues. The municipal archives record that ‘MM. les artistes ont bien voulu témoigner de l’énergie de leur talent pour honorer le grand homme’ through the creation of a colossal monument – thirty feet high and eighteen wide – in his memory. Inevitably, this formed a focal point for the day’s solemn festivities. A description of the monument suggests that its creators were equally as adept in their area of expertise as Roguier was in his, and it conjures up the accounts of numerous other ceremonial structures made for the nearby capital:

Un autel en tombeau posé sur les griffes d’un lion, un socle, une estrade composé de deux marches; l’autel et son gradin, appuyé sur un massif, surmonté d’un dais, sur lequel figure la France assise, s’appuyant sur l’urne renfermant les cendres de Mirabeau, éplorée considérant son médaillon. Différens accessoires de législature accompagnent, derrière la statue, un socle de la même étendue que le massif intérieur, sur lequel s’élevait une pyramide, au dessous de laquelle était un vase funéraire décoré de guirlandes de cyprès dont les chutes tombaient latéralement. Sur la pyramide était l’inscription suivant: ‘Aux mânes de Gabriel-Henri-Riquetti Mirabeau qui, tant de fois, triomphe dans la tribune legislative pour la liberté et le bonheur du peuple.’ Aux deux côtés du massif, deux panneaux surmontés de deux cassolettes fumantes; sur l’une était inscrite sa réponse à M. de Brèze; sur l’autre sa réponse au contre gauche de l’Assemblée.

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Sèvres, departement de Seine-et-Oise par M. Roguier, president de la société et Grenadier volontaire dudit lieu

85 Interestingly, alongside Marat, Mirabeau is found listed among the manufactory’s dead on a scrappy document in the manufactory archives, something that suggests a very literal level of connection with the deputy. Clearly, however, his memory was not inviolable and added to that entry, presumably at a later date, is the summary condemnation: ‘Étoit un traite de la nation’. Arch. M.N.S. D3.

86 Arch. Municipales de Sèvres, délibérations 12-8-1787, 4-2-1793, also cited in full in Fritsch, La Révolution dans le Canton de Sèvres, 1789 – 1802, Versailles, 1911, p.142.
The construction of such monuments would not have been an entirely foreign task undertaken by employees of the manufactory and on several occasions we see them grappling with the challenge of building a large temporary structure. In 1788, celebrations were held at the manufactory to mark Régnier’s receipt of the order of Saint Michel. A gouache of the evening’s festivities by the manufactory painter Charles-Eloi Asselin depicts the splendid scene (fig.67). Its centrepiece was a large fluted column bearing Régnier’s cipher, inscribed at the base with the words ‘Ce nom couronné par la gloire était dans tous les cœurs’ and surmounted by a flame. It rises several stories high from a pool of water around which the party, attended by the employees of the manufactory, took place.87

The Revolution gave more occasions and much greater scope for the development of this kind of free-standing sculptural type. At Sèvres this is well illustrated by their creation of a monument in memory of Mirabeau, which was considerably more ambitious in size, symbolic complexity, and decorative inclusions – the incorporation of figures for example – than its predecessor. On one remarkable, and thus far undocumented occasion, we see the transfer of this talent, gained whilst working at the manufactory, to Paris. In July 1791, Claude Bouvet, a sculptor at Sèvres submitted an entry to the competition held to design a monument to be built on the ruins of the Bastille.88 And the following year he saw another commemorative opportunity following the death on 13th June 1792 at the hands of the enemy of Jean-Baptiste de Gouvion, major-general de la garde nationale. Bouvet acted quickly and just five days later he presented to the National Assembly a model of a pyramid that he believed should be raised in Gouvion’s memory, and for which he was awarded the honours of the séance. The model itself was forwarded to the Comité de Instruction Publique.89

Bouvet, who by day would have worked alongside his colleagues in the sculpture department at Sèvres, cannot have been alone in his knowledge of the artistic competitions periodically launched in Paris. And even if he was the only one among

87 See Chauvise, op. cit., pp.46 – 47.
them actually to submit entries to these specific events (with the exception of Louis-
Simon Boizot, chef d’atelier), he was not alone in being more generally attuned to the
gauntlets thrown down by revolutionary governments to the nation’s artists. As
evidence of this we might cite their biscuit entitled L’Éducation du Citoyen, which
takes up the theme of pedagogy then foremost on the government’s agenda (fig.68).
Men and women who had long defined themselves as subjects, it was realised, would
not simply wake up as citizens on July 15th: they needed to be taught a new mindset, a
new core of values and expectations appropriate to the age: regeneration required re-
education. An artist’s supreme goal was thus, to quote Jacques LeBrun, a member of
the Société populaire et républicaine des arts, ‘d’être philosophe; leur premier devoir
est de choisir des sujets qui tendent à instuire, à régénérer les mœurs, à inspirer
l’amour de la patrie, et l’enthousiasme de la liberté.’90

Sèvres did not shy away from this brief and L’Éducation du Citoyen demands from its
viewers not just an aesthetic but an intellectual response. It is not just the little boy
being schooled in the values of the Revolution: in the act of beholding this small
allegorical statuette we too are expected to do our homework and interpret the slab of
revolutionary hieroglyphics that the stern Minerva figure supports on her knee. Her
cool immobility and the absence of any of the distracting details common to pre-
revolutionary Sèvres figurines allows the lesson to be communicated with the utmost
clarity. Nevertheless, should our attention stray, then her pointing hand guides our
attention back.

Their production of revolutionary personifications, the range of which we will see
greatly extended after 1792 suggests a commitment to the new ideal. Manifestly
didactic in intent, these ideologically loaded works appeal, through the employment of
a symbolic vocabulary, to the mind – the seat of reason of the beholder. Yet, perhaps
as a result of these changes in modes of representation, or because an audience had not
yet evolved for their ‘revolutionary’ sculpture, in November 1791 La Porte requested
that the number of sculptors employed at Sèvres were reduced to six or seven. The
reason was simple: their work was not selling. Whereas their creations once won

90 Séance of 18th June 1792, Archives Parlementaire, vol. 45, p.352.
90 Quoted by James A. Leith, The idea of Art as Propaganda in France, 1750 – 1799, Toronto 1965,
p.96.
honour for the king, now they had fallen from the buying public’s favour he writes: ‘cette branche autrefois si précieuse de son debit est presque anéantie.’ Yet I am loath to characterise this period as a failure. The sculptors were, after all, forced to diversify in order to keep pace with new aesthetic requirements, and in doing so created several distinctive trends that reach their full fruition under the Terror and which will warrant extensive discussion in chapter III.

**Breaking the mould: workers as revolutionaries / revolutionary workers**

In the meantime, the manufactory had had to address the question of its identity, which was now a potential liability in the age of liberty on which France was self-consciously embarking. The importance of ‘re-branding’ had been taken on board in the studios, now producing pieces with patriotic décor, but we look in vain for signs of a public-relations rethink in the correspondences on which I have drawn so far, finding only reinforcements of their prejudices. The idea of Liberté had first been challenged by D’Angiviller when he banned the production of the abolitionist emblem, believing its provocative slogan to be incendiary. Similarly the precepts of Égalité and Fraternité had not taken hold within the manufactory’s upper administration and in a letter of 11th December 1790, Montucla firmly scolded Régnier for having ‘débutez avec lui [D’Angiviller] comme avec votre égal’, the implication being, firmly, that he was not. (Clearly then, the use of ‘tutoyez’ had not yet caught on!) It seems the initiative came not from the top of the hierarchy, but from the workforce which, in contrast to the management’s financial preoccupations, concerned itself with the eradication of remnants of ‘aristocratic’ behaviour within the manufactory. We cannot easily trace their movements in the correspondence for, as so often, such working men

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91 Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 2, letter from La Porte to Régnier, 5th November, 1791. The situation in the sculpture department is contrasted by that in the atelier de peinture where some of employees were working overtime in order to meet the demand for their products, See Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 3, letter from La Port to Régnier, 24th March 1792.

92 Tension between Régnier and D’Angiviller dated back to at least January 1788, when Montucla was forced to reprimand him for the same offence, namely of having been discourteous: ‘Je vous dirai qu’il [D’Angiviller] a été indisposé de la manière dont vous lui avez répliqué pour vous justifier sur l’affaire de M. Parker Forth [a dissatisfied customer]. En effet je crois vous y auriez pu employer un autre ton. On ne se défend pas de cette manière vis à vis un supérieur…’ Arch. M.N.S., H4, liasse 2, letter from Montucla to Régnier, 29th January 1788.
and women are the victims of the selective memories and prejudices of their social superiors. However the letters can be supplemented by other sources – the records contained within the local municipal archives of Sèvres and the numerous *procès-verbaux* published since the Revolution.

In *Work and Wages* Michael Sonenscher writes that few working men would have lived their professional lives without having experienced at least one major trade-conflict prior to 1789, and that consequently, most would already be familiar with ‘the vocabulary of legal argument and everyday political negotiation’. This was demonstrably, but not exclusively the case for head of the painting studio (quoted on page 74): as my first chapter suggested many of the manufactory’s employees fell foul of the regulations imposed on them, colliding with the law as a result. Sonenscher’s point is given further substantiation by Haïm Burstin who notes that, come the Revolution the members of many professions realigned their identity with the new age with an ease that would suggest familiarity with modes of speech and rhetoric. But, he continues, this was not the universal experience and in fact many professional groupings experienced difficulty in assimilating these modes of expression into their working lives:

‘De larges secteurs de la population, enfin, suivent un parcours heurté, hésitant, tentant de s’adapter mais sans y parvenir totalement, et restent ainsi comme à mi-chemin. Ce sont là autant de figures hybrides, au plan idéologique, dont le comportement reste contradictoire: tout en tentant d’adapter le langage révolutionnaire à leur propre conception du travail et du marché et au rôle qu’ils prétendent y jouer, ces personnages demeurent des hommes d’Ancien Régime, profondément accrochés à sa mentalité.’

Burstin singles out servants as one ‘group’ in this bind. Another that we might suspect to be similarly compromised would be those involved in the luxury industries, especially, but by no means exclusively, court artisans, or employees of the *manufactures royales*. In common with domestic servants, their livelihood depended closely upon their understanding of the whims and wants of a wealthy, possibly aristocratic clientele with whom they had direct contact. Indeed, Richard Cobb writes that

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95 Ibid.
‘...revolutionary opinion was extremely suspicious – and not without reason – of all those whose living had depended on the favour or the custom of the ci-devants. Could such persons be relied upon to serve faithfully a regime that had brought them loss of custom and grave economic hardship? Many revolutionaries did not think so, but at the same time it was natural that men in this group, thrown out of work by the decline of the luxury trades, should have eagerly sought paid employment under the new revolutionary bureaucracy and should also have attempted to assuage suspicions attaching to their former state by making a great show of revolutionary ardour.’

This suggests that a cynicism might underlie a revolutionary position where adopted by those in the luxury trades. Can the revolutionary stance ostensibly maintained by many amongst the Sèvrians be so described? It is of course impossible to be conclusive, but I see no reason why their position might not be genuinely held – after all the workers at Gobelins, in many respects a parallel case, were notoriously radicalised. As I argued in chapter I, although the Sèvrians’ status as employees of a manufacture royale privileged them, it also presented disadvantages that were particularly resonant during the Revolution – namely, the denial of their liberty. Others employed alongside them, however, had a less antagonistic relationship with the system and as such it would be reductive to consider Sèvres workforce as a group following one or the other of the paths set out – acceptance or feigned acceptance of the revolution. Rather we must assume that there were degrees of ideological alignment within the manufactory studios, ranging from the retrograde to the radical. Certainly it is conceivable that the manufactory was a microcosm of contemporary attitudes and opinions given the different backgrounds from which its employees came and the range of tasks on which they were engaged, but we cannot be formulaic about the points of fracture, the fault-lines between the potential political positioning of their employees. An engraving from Comte de Milly’s L’Art de Porcelaine published in 1771 might for example suggest to the viewer that the man grinding pigments, sleeves rolled up, wearing a cap that bears an uncanny (but coincidental) resemblance to a phrygian bonnet, would have more to gain from a revolution than his co-worker, the richly dressed sculptor whose work would adorn the table of an elegant salon (fig.69). Pierre Mercier would certainly have argued that this print was reflective of reality:

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'Cette coupure, entre artistes et ouvriers, s'explique: les premiers, ayant réputation et situation dédaignent les seconds; ils ont des sympathies pour l’ancienne royauté, élégante et généreuse, qui a fait la grandeur de leur travail. Les ouvriers, au contraire, peu payés, sans droits, mettent dans la Révolution toutes leurs espérances. Inévitablement, la rivalité professionnelle surgit sur les terrains politique et économique.'

However I would contest Mercier’s conclusions for, as I have argued, such divisions would not have been as straightforward or absolute and the space dividing the different studios was in fact more permeable than he allows. Additionally, the evidence suggests that the heads of the different departments, and Sèvres’ skilled employees – the painters and sculptors, the *tourneurs* and *repaireurs* – played very prominent roles in activities that might be branded ‘political’. This pattern is also observable in the nearby manufactory of printed textiles at Jouy, directed by Christophe Oberkampf. Here politicisation (measured by attendance of local revolutionary clubs) was, according to Serge Chassagne’s analysis, most prevalent among employees ‘moins prolétaires’, something he attributes in part to the fee that membership entailed. Certainly the cost of 20 sous for a month’s membership to Sèvres’ local société populaire might be a deterrent for the lowest paid workers. Yet I would also suggest other factors conspired to allow the *chefs d’atelier* and skilled workers to take the initiative in a way that their less skilled, less paid concitoyens could not.

Most obviously, with reference to the *chefs d’atelier*, their ability to order and command others in their charge, talents they would inevitably have acquired on the job, were transferable and would have had multiple applications post 1789. It is small wonder therefore that many took the lead at this point, playing prominent roles in revolutionary bodies. The more highly skilled, creatively engaged amongst their workforce – the painters and sculptors especially – would also be at a natural

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100 As a point of comparison, in 1793-4, a pound of bread cost 3 sous in Paris. As a worker would apparently feel unsatisfied with less than two pounds a day, this seemingly slight figure of 20 sous would in fact equate to a little over three day’s bread rations each month. See George Lefebvre, *The Thermidorians*, trans. Robert Baldick, London 1965, p.75. Recorded in the minutes of the society’s meeting of 13 Prarial an 2 (1st June 1794) is the fact that not all their members had yet paid their fee, ‘...cette rétribution indispensable et à laquelle tout bons patriots et vrais Républiquains ne devroit se refuser...’. Arch. Société Populaire, procès-verbaux, an II 1 Floréal – An III 17 Pluviôse
advantage over their colleagues. Firstly, and at a basic level, it was exactly their artistic training that on occasions allowed them to take centre-stage in local revolutionary journées: I refer back to the artist’s fabrication of the monument to Mirabeau for which they were publicly recognised and praised. Events such as this would give them a public profile and identify them with the cause. The desire and ability to respond to events might also be a natural consequence of their life experiences gained prior to the 1790s. Mercier, for example, is surely correct to assume that their favourable reception of the Revolution derived from the experiences gained by some artists in the local Masonic lodge, as discussed in chapter I.

But those in positions of leadership would not have had exclusive claim to the status as patriots and it would be a mistake to suggest that those employees who were not singled out by name during events were therefore not committed to the same cause. If, on 1st February 1791 the painters Pierre-Joseph Rosset, Jacques Fontaine, and their chef d’atelier, Louis-Gabriel Chulot alone presented the request that manufactory employees be granted the status of active citizens, they did so on behalf of their colleagues who they state are united in their dedication to the Revolution, towards which they are prepared to make a financial contribution, ‘...chacun proportionnellement à ses moyens.’

Equally, and by virtue of their location on the road between Paris and Versailles, all the Sévriens found themselves on a frontline in the opening months of the Revolution. And not only were they witnesses to the daily commute of deputies and interested bystanders heading to and from the Estates General, from whom they would have been kept informed of events as they unfolded, they also played the reluctant hosts to the military battalions who set up camp there in response to that same event which, in the minds of the king’s advisors, had taken a worrying turn. As relations between the Estates soured at Versailles, tension mounted and the subsequent garrisoning of troops in huge numbers, (Mirabeau estimated there to be 35,000 between Paris and Versailles), was all-too-naturally taken as a worrying harbinger signalling that

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101 Archives de Sèvres, 1D1, 12 août 1787 – 7 février 1790. For the same request made to the National Assembly see ‘Pétition des ouvriers de la Manufacture de porcelaine à Sèvres aux - - - d’être admis aux droits de Citoyen actif’, Arch Nat., DIV 60: E IV. On the requirements imposed on active citizens, see William Sewell, Work and Revolution in France: The language of labour from the Old Regime to 1848, Cambridge, 1997, pp.136 – 7.
preparations were being made for civil war. The manufactory employees would not have been deaf to the news and hearsay that reached them from Versailles, nor would they have been immune to the menace that their new neighbours represented: in his eulogy Roguier recalled that their presence had been ‘oppressive’, and not without reason. The threat would have been brought home to them as a result of their being forced to house a large number of Swiss Guards within the manufactory. Clearly this provoked discontent within the ateliers and two employees are reported to have attacked their occupiers, pelting them with stones, thereby provoking the soldiers, who pursued them, ‘le sabre nud’. In October 1789 the manufactory once more found itself on the frontline, this time witnessing the march of the Parisian market women to Versailles, escorted by the National Guard under the command of La Fayette. They seemed to Régnier ‘un monde infini’, an impression backed up by Prieur’s print illustrating the event included in his Tableaux Historiques (fig.70). The text accompanying the print confirms that having reached Sèvres and tired from the journey, they stopped for refreshments. There remains some confusion regarding the nature of their welcome (or lack of one) at the manufactory where some went to request les vivres, and on 10th August 1794, Régnier was put on trial for, among other things, having called out upon sight of their approach: ‘Ah la belle équipée! Fermer vos croisées!’ a charge he strenuously denied. On the contrary, he claimed, ‘il [Régnier] les approuva et fraterniser avec eux et leurs fit donner tout le pain qui étoit chez lui.’

As will become apparent in chapter III, Régnier was all too often the subject of the slanderous talk of his radicalised employees, (his accusers), who were working towards the attainment of their own goal – the assumption of managerial posts within

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104 Arch. M.N.S. B4, Tableau de la conduite du Citoyen Antoine Régnier depuis le 1er Mai 1789, 23 Thermidor an II (10th August 1794).
105 Claudette Hould, La Révolution par l’Écriture: les tableaux de la Révolution Française, Vizille, 2005, p.301.
106 Arch M.N.S. B4, Tableau de la Conduite du Citoyen Antoine Régnier, depuis 1ere Mai 1789, report dated 23 Thermidor an 2, (10th August 1794). He was also charged with having welcomed the occupation of the manufactory by the king’s guard and of having firmly told his workforce that the first to insult them would be brought to justice by himself. Once more Régnier denied the charges, arguing
the manufactory. A barrier blocking their successful take-over was of course Régnier himself, who they sought to expel by fair means or foul. In light of their grudge against him, I am inclined to favour Régnier’s version of events which, even if they are rose-tinted, suggest that the manufactory briefly played host to the October women. This would have accorded their workers ample opportunity to fraternise with them. To what extent however, the women’s cause – (a cause they shared, for bread was also scarce at Sèvres) – was overshadowed by their apparent refusal to pay for the food and drink they were given remains a moot point. Similarly, we can only speculate as to what their feelings may have been at the sight of the women’s return the next day in the company of the king – their patron – and his family. Certainly at this point, and for some time yet, love and respect for the king was not incompatible with the maintenance of pro-revolutionary sentiments, and for example, their celebration of his convalescence in March 1791 was in keeping with the mood among the public. The Te Deum held at Sèvres on 27th March to give thanks for Louis’ recovery was one of thousands that took place throughout the country.

These are of course events of a particular magnitude rather than everyday occurrences but more generally and for sometime after the centre of events had shifted to Paris where the royal family were ensconced, the manufactory might still be considered to have had a front-row seat. Indeed the route remained so busy that, whereas it had been suggested on 19th October 1789 that the number of streetlights illuminating the route be reduced for economy’s sake, in May 1790, it was decided that they be kept lit ‘en raison des mouvements populaires’ in the area.

Employees of the manufactory would not simply have been an audience at events but actors too, and from the earliest days of the Revolution. For example, among the twenty-nine men responsible for drawing up the parish’s cahier de doléance on April 16th there were no less than four manufactory employees: the painters Fontain, Levé, Rosset, and Caton. The latter two were also among the eight elected to present their

that on the contrary, he had stepped in to defend his two employees, putting his own life in danger to protect them. 

107 See Ad. Fritsch, La Révolution dans le Canton de Sèvres, 1789–1802, Versailles, 1911, p.10.
108 Ibid. p.39.
109 See Micheal Fitzsimmons, The Remaking of France, New York, 1994, p.223. I would like to thank the author for drawing my attention to this source.
completed *cahier* to the magistrate at Versailles.\textsuperscript{111} Manufactory employees were often very well represented in the parish’s patriotic organisations, thus playing a disproportionately large role in the progress of revolutionary ideas within the town, which Fritsch claims to have remained quite conservative for the time, especially with regards organised religion.\textsuperscript{112} Their hanging of a dummy of Barreau from a lamppost as early as October 1789 certainly suggests a radical alignment on their part, as does their attempted attack on Comte Henri-François de Virieu on the 10\textsuperscript{th} October. His fellow deputy, the Marquis de Cocherel, reported his carriage being stopped by the manufactory personnel searching for Virieu, whose throat they wanted to slit (‘*pour égorge*’).\textsuperscript{113} It is unclear why Virieu was singled out: perhaps his membership of the centre-right Club des Impartieux, which routinely made attacks on the Breton club (the forerunner of the Jacobin club) made him a target? These two examples suggest that the Sèvrians were in tune with models of protest tested elsewhere. Yet it should be noted that these appear to have been relatively isolated incidents and that their initial steps towards political awareness and empowerment were perhaps more tentative than those of their metropolitan neighbours.

Even before having become active citizens they were involved in events, taking up positions of responsibility within the community. Their participation *en masse* in the local national guard was, for example, noted by Rosset to help reinforce his claim that his colleagues were deserving of the status of active citizens: ‘tous ses membres faisaient partie de la garde nationale’, he states. This appears to have been no exaggeration: certainly members of the manufactory were very well represented among the commanding officers of each of the twelve battalions that made up the *Garde de Sèvres*. As Mercier notes, making reference to Perrot’s short article *Artistes de Sèvres incorporés dans la Garde Nationale en 1790*, five of the twelve company captains were employees of the manufactory; five of the twelve were lieutenants; and eight of the twelve, sergeant majors.\textsuperscript{114} The men were drawn from a

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\textsuperscript{110} Tuetey, *Histoire Général des Sources Manuscrites de l’histoire de Paris pendant la Révolution Française*, vol. 3, p.245

\textsuperscript{111} See Mercier, op. cit., 1990, p.172; See Mercier op. cit., 1992, p.25. For a transcript of their cahier de doléance, see Thenard, *Bailliages de Versailles et Meudon. Les cahiers des paroisses*, 1889.

\textsuperscript{112} Fritsch, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{113} Episode recorded by Mercier, op. cit. 1992, p.38.

\textsuperscript{114} See M. Perrot, ‘*Artistes de Sèvres incorporés dans la Garde Nationale en 1790*’, in *Nouvelles Archives de l’Art Français*, 1897, pp.85 – 86; Pierre Mercier, op. cit., 1992, p.31-32. Mercier states that
number of different studios and among them can be counted painters and sculptors, répareurs and tourneurs — all skilled employees. Among the high command (État Major), to which presumably the twelve companies reported, can be counted the painters Pithou and Nouailhiers, acting as Aide Majors, Hettlinger, as Porte-drapeau, and in the roles of Secrétaire and Vice-Secrétaire, the painter Rosset and the sculptor Roguier. Mercier was correct to note that there were no ouvriers amongst the commanding officers, however we must assume that very many amongst them served as common soldiers. As members of the National Guard, they would all have played central roles in the civic festivities that were regularly held at Sèvres.\(^1\)\(^5\) But their role was not only ceremonial and they would regularly have been called upon to carry out the usual duties of surveillance and patrol. The flight of the mesdames on the 19\(^{th}\) February 1791 would have brought Sèvres’ National Guard briefly into the limelight, for the château de Bellevue where the king’s sisters lived, neighboured Sèvres. In light of their proximity, they had been instructed by the directors of the department of Seine-et-Oise to collect information on the plot being hatched there, and charged with preventing its execution.\(^1\)\(^6\) The women’s evasion of the Sèvrians and their escape across the Italian boarder caused widespread consternation in France and was much discussed.

Workers also became involved in a number of revolutionary and municipal committees. When Roguier spoke at the ceremony commemorating Mirabeau’s death for example, it was in his capacity as president of the Société des Amis de la Constitution, a society, which would later become known as the Jacobins, and would in all likelihood have counted a number of his colleagues among its membership. Others became directly involved in the local municipal committees in various capacities, a subject that will warrant further discussion in chapter III. These activities — their participation in civic ceremonies in which oaths were sworn and great men commemorated, their inclusion in the National Guard, and their membership to local societies and committees might all contribute to their progressive politicisation. In addition, the increasingly hardship they were experiencing in a manufactory which

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\(^1\)\(^5\) See Fritsch, op. cit.
\(^1\)\(^6\) Tuetey, op. cit., vol. 1. See also Mercier, op. cit., 1990, p.179.
put the needs of production over those of its personnel, could logically result in their radicalisation.

Soon they appear to be acting and reacting in synchrony with the Parisians. In May 1792 Marie Antoinette’s First Lady of the Bedchamber, Madame Campin, noted in her journal a remark made by the queen that 180 of the 200 workers at the manufactory were Jacobins. Of course, just because the queen said it does not necessarily mean that it was true and although, as will become apparent in chapter III, there appears to have been a solid core of active revolutionaries among Sèvres’ employees, 90% is perhaps an exaggeration. However, this very act of exaggerating is suggestive of the fear that was almost endemic where groups of politically mobilised workers were concerned.

The remark had been occasioned in the first place by the royal couple’s discovery of the stupidity of La Porte, Intendant of the civil list. Entrusted by the king with three cartloads of libellous pamphlets attacking Marie Antoinette, written by the infamous Madame de la Motte, a protagonist in the diamond necklace affair, he had decided that the best way to dispose of them was to burn them in the kilns at Sèvres, in broad daylight. Unsurprisingly, this did not go unnoticed within the manufactory and the incident was reported to the National Assembly, who in the first instance assumed the material to have been the archives of the Austrian committee. ‘The Assembly has been very occupied with a denunciation made by the workers of the manufactory of Sèvres’, she writes, quoting her friend Le Baron d’Aubier.

The point on which I wish to conclude this chapter, is that by May 1792, three months before the monarchy fell, the Sèvrians were a confident, predominantly radical group of a formidable size who, able to express themselves politically, were prepared to denounce their employers if given cause. When the monarchy fell, they had all that was needed to become political actors, freed of the restraints that their position on the payroll of the King might have caused. Indeed the ferocity with which the workers

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118 For an account of the accusations levied against La Porte and the cross-examination of others involved, see séance of 28th May 1792, Archives Parlementaires, vol.44, pp.192 – 292.
then attacked the infrastructure of the manufactory immediately after the suspension of the monarchy suggests that, until then, they had handled themselves with restraint.
Chapter III: August 10th 1792 – Thermidor an 2

Introduction:

The spectacular collapse of the monarchy on 10th August 1792 and the royal family’s subsequent imprisonment in the Temple sounded a death-knell for the manufactory. Presuming that Sèvres weathered the increasingly iconoclastic tendencies of the sans-culottes, their financial straits would, in the absence of Louis XVI’s patronage, once more incur their bankruptcy. Their survival was again in question, dependant now not on the decision of a king who had long felt attached to his ‘men of Sèvres’ and taken pride in their achievements, but on a revolutionary government openly hostile to luxury and privilege. Despite their record of patriotic behaviour the Sèvrians might well have felt threatened by the developing situation and, having lost their patron, vulnerable to attack, pillage, and conspiratorial plot. Would they have met this political juncture – one that could have such huge implications for their place of work – with confidence or fear? When considering this question, it is perhaps pertinent to refer to a curious incident that took place there on the 14th August when all the papers containing the secrets appertaining to the fabrication of porcelain were sealed by the manufacturers, locked in a cupboard and guarded around the clock. In light of the fact that, as Tamara Préaud notes, such actions were primarily symbolic (by then everyone knew how to make porcelain) they would appear to denote paranoia and distrust. Yet immediately afterwards, the manufactory employees summoned the procurer of Sèvres in order that their arrangements (now described as provisional) be made official and legal by a repeat performance in the presence of a Juge de la Paix.1 The voluntary submission of their request to a local office is, I would argue, an unambiguous expression of their confidence in the new regime and in its administration. Implicit is their belief that the authorities would recognise Sèvres as a privileged manufactory, for it was exactly in the protection of their ‘secrets’ that Sèvres’ special status had in part always resided. Whether their confidence in revolutionary authorities would be repaid will be discussed in this chapter.

1 Arch. M.N.S., B4, ‘Procès-verbal des Scellés apposés sur les papiers de la manufacture des porcelaines de Sèvres’.

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According to Chavignac and Grollier, by a twist of fate, another monarch stepped into the breach, saving the manufactory by paying the last instalment due on an immense order placed at Sèvres as long ago as 1776. The 90,000 livres payment from Empress Catherine of Russia, they write, appeared to the minister of finances like manna in the desert, convincing him of the need to maintain the manufactory, perhaps in the hope of a second windfall. This anecdote has only recently been refuted by Préaud in the light of archival evidence and in the knowledge that Catherine would not have made the payment to a government she detested. Préaud notes that her article ‘is intended to clarify an important point, and so to do justice to the Russian sovereign’ who had completed payment for the cameo service as long ago as 1781. I would argue that, inadvertently, it also does credit to the revolutionary government which, even without the financial incentive, took over as patron of the manufactory of Sèvres porcelain. As early as 12th August 1792, days after the chaotic events at the Tuileries, the National Assembly had ruled that the manufactory should be made the responsibility of Étienne Clavière, ministre des contributions publiques. He in turn appointed André Haudry de Soucy to visit Sèvres ‘pour constater la situation’ and report back all that might interest his administration.

The speed with which Sèvres and its sister-manufactories, Les Gobelins and La Savonnerie were accommodated might well strike us as remarkable given the immensity of the shake-up wrought on French politics and society by events just two days past, yet Clavière was keen that they experience no interruption to their work. This fact could logically lead us to assume that he hoped that the three manufactories could make a smooth transition from monarchical to republican ownership and that, in terms of production and management, continuity were preserved. Yet surely the radicalisation of the revolution and the consequent change in cultural and political policy was too great to allow for the maintenance of a status quo, or even to accommodate the desire for it, especially where formerly manufacture royales were concerned?

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It was decided that Sèvres, like Les Gobelins, and La Savonnerie would be best administered by the Ministry of the Interior. On 29th November 1792 it was officially placed under the charge of Rolland who had by then commissioned a comprehensive report, again undertaken by Haudry, (now titled commissaire de la manufacture), from which he would draw his conclusions about its merit. At this point the question as to whether Sèvres should be maintained at the expense of the nation still remained unanswered, making Haudry’s evaluation especially critical. At first glance, his prognosis appears good: if the manufactory’s costs were reduced, prosperity, he believed, awaited – if, that is, ‘notre situation politique ne s’y oppose pas.’

But taking into consideration the period in which Haudry was writing, this was a big if, and he was right to anticipate that life in an increasingly radicalised France might prove obstructive. Just days after Haudry submitted his report, the September massacres commenced, sparked by rumours of the Austrian army’s impending arrival in Paris and resulting in the death of between 1,000 and 1,500 men and women convicted, often on the slightest evidence, of harbouring royalist sympathies. Surely the stage was not well set for a show of governmental support for Sèvres? Additionally, in the run-up to September the visual reminders of the former regime had raised the ire of the radical revolutionaries, provoking a spate of iconoclastic attacks in Paris. For the first (but certainly not the last) time, public pressure forced the National Assembly to act and to sanction such behaviour. On the 10th August the following decree was published: ‘The Assembly, considering it the manifest will of the people that no public monument should any longer exist which recalls the reign of despotism declares a state of urgency’.6

Sèvres might not fit the description as a ‘public monument’, but the question is still raised, how, in the midst of such a closely scrutinised visual culture could a manufactory that still marked its wares with the crossed Ls of Louis XVI’s cipher have escaped official censure or attack by vigilante groups? After all, the self-appointed police of visual culture did not exclusively target the Parisian landmarks

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5 Arch. Nat., Fl2 1496, letter from Haudry to Régnier, 28th August 1792.
such as the equestrian statues and the gallery of kings as documented in Richard Clay’s recent thesis, but cast their eyes widely, considering even the smallest reminders of a despised regime an assault on patriots. In his essay ‘The Revolutionary Mentality in France’ Richard Cobb, for example, notes an occasion when a patriotic meal among friends was turned upside-down by the realisation of those partaking that their plates were marked with ‘feudal emblems’.

‘The publican was called for and was asked to remove the offending plates, but this he refused to do, adding that if the citizens were so ticklish in their Republican sentiments, they could eat off the table without plates. This they proceeded to do, but not without first smashing 180 of the offending plates which they later refused to pay for.’

‘The Jacobins and the Tribunals scrutinised dress, diet and décor with an attentiveness that verged on the obsessional’, writes Rebecca Spang, illustrating her point with further examples: ‘In 1793, the Commune of Paris suggested that ‘men who wear checked clothes’ should not be trusted; meanwhile, section militants carefully inspected pastries for telltale signs of monarchist sympathies.’ Such extraordinary thoroughness however, is most vividly borne witness to by Abbé Gregoire’s ‘long list’, itemising the iconoclastic acts carried out on a massive scale in the name of the Republic.

Sèvres was home to an iconoclastic spree of its own, although it did not arise spontaneously. In late July/early August 1793 (precise date unknown), the Minister of the Interior, Dominique-Joseph Garat, gave the command that all moulds and porcelains in the manufactory’s possession that ‘retraced’ the image of fallen kings and their families be destroyed, alongside those of traitors such as Lafayette and Dumouriez. How such inflammatory pieces had survived so long without inciting action from professed revolutionaries amongst the manufactory’s workforce, or the roving bands that patrolled the environs of Paris is remarkable – as was Régnier’s failure to act on instructions when they finally came. On the 9th August Garat was to

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7 Ibid.
write to him that 'J'apprends avec peine et surprise que vous n'en avez rien fait.'

Régnier's reply, scribbled on the reverse of Garat's letter later that same day, reassures him that the task was in hand, seven men being currently engaged on the task: 'J'espère que demain matin, après avoir fait la plus scrupuleuse recherche avec les chefs, Le Riche, Roguier, et Chanou, il ne restera plus rien.' However this statement is immediately followed by the following question put to the minister:

‘J'observe au Citoyen Ministre:

1) Qu'il existe à la Manufacture la statue équestre du roy de Prusse, dernier mort, qui est un objet de détail et de vente. Faut-il détruire cet objet?

2) Il existe les grands hommes, au nombre de 23, dont plusieurs portent les ordres de l'ancien régime. Faut-il détruire ceux qui portent ces ordres?’

Régnier's request for a reprieve of these works on account of their exceptional artistic and financial value might strike us as incongruous with the otherwise assertive tone of his letter. Yet his hesitation is easily understood in light of the episode's timing, (the following day the doors to the Louvre, dedicated to the conservation of the nation's treasures – including twenty Sèvres vases – would be finally thrown open to the public), and of governmental policy elsewhere expressed. This chapter will consider the debate that existed about whether to make an example of potentially contentious objects through their preservation or their destruction, the outcome of which would have huge repercussions for the manufactory.

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11 Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 4.
12 In this instance clemency may have been granted some pieces in question. An example of their biscuit statue of Molé (one of the *Grands Hommes*) in the Fine Arts Museum, Boston, has just had its offending symbols removed (the *fleur de lys* that decorate the coffer on which his left hand rests) leaving the body of the sculpture intact. But not everything was so carefully or sensitively handled. A report written by the Commission d'Agriculture et des Arts for the comité d'agriculture et des arts de la convention nationale, in Germinal an 3 (March/April 1795) notes: 'Nous dirons avec douleur que le vandalisme a détruit beaucoup des models en tout genres même des porcelaines fines qu'un léger changement pouvait faire conserver ou vendre à l'étranger.' Arch. Nat., F12 1495.
Conservation by the State: (conflicting) motivations for the preservation of Sèvres

Rolland must certainly have anticipated ideological objections to the maintenance of such a manufactory by the government when he finally delivered his report to the National Convention on 9th January 1793, one week before theing would be condemned to death by it. It is a lengthy and detailed document that remarkably has not yet attracted the attention of scholars. The minister, (then much browbeaten as a result of his allegiance to the Girondin party), did not shy away from the ideological objections that a Republican government might all too logically have in supporting a manufactory with Sèvres’ history, from which he cites several incidents that could only serve to confirm their worst fears. One such was the story of Parent, a former director of the manufactory who, having bankrupted it during his administration was imprisoned in the Bastille ‘comme si le succès d’une manufacture qui amusait les caprices de la Cour, eut été un crime d’État.’ He is open and frank about the fact that Sèvres’ raison d’être had been the satisfaction of the whims and fancies of a morally bankrupt clientele, and of its having worked exclusively in the service of luxury and frivolity, words ‘odieux sans doute, a juste titre, à des oreilles républicaines.’ All these are points that could only serve to strengthen the resolve of an upstanding republican government to annihilate the manufactory along with its ci-devant proprietor, their prisoner. Yet, he continues, positing a counter argument, what had not served that odious regime? ‘Nos arts, nos sciences, nos métiers, notre commerce, notre industrie, notre culture même, tout cédait parmi nous au dérèglement de nos mœurs serviles; et faudra-t-il tout détruire parce que rien n’avait échappé à cette contagion funeste?’

Answering his own question, he states that it would be nothing short of sacrilège to destroy all that had catered to the excesses of the ancien régime, when in fact a change in morals, such as that which had taken place in France, would organically instigate the reform of these corrupted domains: ‘C’en serait un [sacrilège] que de penser que ces arts ne soient pas destinés à changer de ton et d’emploi, lorsque nous aurons changé de mœurs.’ As such the Convention could conserve Sèvres, La Savonnerie and Les Gobelins (also under consideration) without compromising their

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principles. And not only could they, they should on two counts: firstly these manufactories were ‘monuments précieux de l'industrie française’, and as such ‘...concouvé à la gloire de nos arts et à la réputation, si ce n'est à la prospérité de notre commerce. La nécessité seule et l'impossibilité de les soutenir pourraient contraindre à les sacrifier...’. Unsurprisingly, given his career prior to the revolution, (he was Inspector General of Manufactories for the province of Picardy, and author of several volumes on the mechanical production of cotton), Rolland reveals a much more balanced appreciation of the pros and cons of maintaining Sèvres than Marat. Refusing to be swayed purely by ideological impediments he clearly perceives that Sèvres might offer the same benefits to a French Republic as it had to a monarchical State. Indeed those benefits could be multiplied if the ‘absurde’ and illogical administration of the manufactory, which he identifies as impeding its progress, was substituted (the acquisition of the title Manufacture royale, he writes ‘ajoute encore aux principes anti-éconmiques qui avaient présidé à son existence’).

The potential inherent in such a manufactory, whose history he briefly narrates, was there but owing to its royal ownership, it had never been tapped (‘...ce seul mot [royal] suppose tout ce qu'il comportait de faste onéreux et inutile’). By contrast under a robust and reforming republican administration Sèvres could become remunerative and useful. Plotting the profits made annually at the manufactory between 1786 and 1791, Rolland makes clear that the manufactory, once in recession (reaching its lowest point in 1790), was now in a steady state of recovery, a process that with changes to their production could be accelerated:

‘...personne ne doutera pas que cette recette puisse s'accroître encore, en réduisant le nombre des productions d'un luxe extraordinaire, et en augmentant celui des productions plus généralement usuelles, plus généralement à portée de la fortune des simples citoyens.’

Implicit in this is a radical overhaul of its production, which (save for its medallions) had always been geared towards the luxury market. A contradiction that seems to have escaped Rolland however is the fact that so altering their output would potentially undermine his first reason given for Sèvres preservation: la gloire de nos arts. The manufactory’s artistic reputation had in the past rested on their production of pieces unlike those made elsewhere in Europe. In focusing on the production of pieces
aimed at a wider market, they risked jeopardising that very reputation built up over fifty years, the very one that, he argued, could be so valuable for the Republic.14

Interestingly Jean-Jacques Hettlinger was keenly aware of the impossibility of initiating this shift towards commercial viability and, when asked to respond to Rolland’s report a year later, he was forced to concede that Sèvres would never become profitable. In essence, he writes, it is a luxury manufactory:

‘...elle ne fleurissoit point par le debit multiplié d’objets usuels et de prix modique, mais de ses ouvrages riches, consacrés à l’opulente vanité et qui souvent étoient payés cinq, six fois au dessus de la fraix de fabrication. [...] Si on veut une Manufacture Nationale qui donne du bénéfice, il faut renoncer à Sèvres...’

If the manufactory is to be preserved, he argues it should be on the grounds that it is an academy of the art of porcelain production, a ‘nursery’ for those in the industry. ‘C’est sous ce point de vue qu’il est de la dignité et même de l’utilité nationale de la maintenir.’

I have been unable to locate the Convention’s response to Rolland’s report on the manufactory of Sèvres, but it must be assumed that they ruled in its favour, deciding to maintain it as a Manufacture nationale. What exact form their support took is unclear but one might assume that they made a financial commitment to the manufactory, regularly transferring the necessary funds to them in the same way their predecessor had done. Yet a memorandum written in June 1793 states that at some point financial assistance was withdrawn from Sèvres, resulting in a build-up of debts and the dilapidation of the manufactory’s buildings.15 Was the government involved at an administrative level only? Rolland did make several urgent requests for money for the manufactory to the National Convention, but we must assume that any resultant payments were at best spasmodic and inadequate to their needs.

What were the government’s reasons for conserving Sèvres under their administration? Certainly the grounds suggested by Rolland – the glory of their arts and the reputation of their commerce – would have seemed attractive to a government sensitive to the accusations of barbarity being levied against them by counter-revolutionaries at home and abroad. The events of 10th August and the massacres in September had only served to increase the volume and ferocity of such accusations, which of course the government denied. As Baczko notes, far from being a destructive force, they strenuously argued that the Revolution’s ‘objectives and its work were essentially constructive. If the regeneration of the nation passed through destruction, it was precisely because the past was ‘barbaric’…’.

Nevertheless, the bloody spectre of September’s terrible events and the wave of iconoclastic action taking place openly in the streets and squares of Paris meant that their ‘vandalistic’ credentials inevitably became a source of anxiety and the subject of increasingly paranoid debate. As Clay has argued, whilst the government, in order to confirm the legitimacy of their rule, had little choice but to conform to the demands made by the increasingly radical sections (i.e., that all monuments to, or insignia of monarchy, feudalism or Catholicism be obliterated), they were simultaneously keen to implement a policy of preservation for the nation’s artistic treasures. Indeed, as Richard Wrigley writes, ‘worries about destructive ‘ravages’ [of French cultural heritage] gave impetus to official attempts to stem indiscriminate acts of vandalism, and to the elaboration of a policy of conservation’. Committees were therefore established to oversee the conservation of the paintings and artefacts held in nationalised properties and deemed worthy of protection as a result of their artistic merit or historical importance. France’s treasures therefore were not uniformly heaped on bonfires of vanities but responsibly conserved, collected, catalogued, and the prize pieces eventually presented to the public when the Louvre opened on 10th August 1793. The brilliant display in the Grand Gallerie was intended to be a decisive rebuff to the nation’s critics and to undermine widely held beliefs that the Revolution represented a threat to civilisation as known. On the contrary, it promoted the image

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16 Baczko, op. cit., 1994, p.193, my emphasis.
17 Clay, op. cit.
of a responsible Republic that extended a protective arm to cultural artefacts deemed exceptional (among them a collection of twenty Sèvres vases) and which owed their survival to its clemency.\textsuperscript{19} To quote Andrew McClellan: 'Through the museum Garat hoped to forge a link in the public eye, both at home and abroad, between the conservation and display of universally esteemed works of art and the perception of responsible republican government.'\textsuperscript{20}

The reasons dictating the Convention’s preservation of Sèvres can be considered on similar grounds. The manufactory’s achievement in the ceramic arts was one of France’s proudest artistic and technical achievements of that century. As I argued in chapter I, Sèvres was held in extremely high regard across Europe and its products regularly chosen by foreign monarchs and their courtiers, even in preference to those of their own national manufactories. For the revolutionary government simply to close Sèvres down would signal to the international community the depths of cultural degradation to which the French had sunk whilst pursuing their Revolution. It is a contention of this thesis that, paradoxically, it was exactly Sèvres’ pedigree and the respect in which it was held by foreign potentates, (by definition enemies of the Republic) that determined that the manufactory was preserved. For if its destruction would be a powerful symbolic act at home, so too would it be abroad. More resonant than their destruction of Sèvres could be its preservation and re-signification under new colours, which might convey a strong message about the regeneration of France brought about by the Revolution.

The extent to which the Convention could be swayed by Sèvres’ client base becomes startlingly evident in a memorandum submitted to the comité du commerce by Régnier on 22\textsuperscript{nd} September 1792, the day following the establishment of the Republic.\textsuperscript{21} In light of this fact, the terms in which Régnier couched his report, (ultimately a request that a room at the Tuileries be made permanently available for display of Sèvres porcelain taken from nationalised properties) is remarkable. After having given a brief historical introduction to the establishment of the manufactory

\textsuperscript{19} Catalogue des Objects Contenus dans la Galerie du Museum Francaise, décreté par la Convention Nationale, l’an seconde de la République Française, Paris 1793.

and its accomplishments, Régnier turns his attention to its distinguished clientele. Kienlong, Emperor of China, the Empress Catherine of Russia and her son and daughter-in-law the Comte and Comtesse du Nord, Marie Antoinette’s brother, Emperor Joseph of Austria, and the Kings of Sweden and Prussia, Gustave IV and Frederic, are all listed here as great admirers of Sèvres, to which several of them had paid visits. These would have been dangerous credentials and not ones to promote in September 1792, indeed Régnier’s boast could have been extremely incriminating for the formerly royal manufactory. Yet it was exactly these credentials that the Republic could take advantage of, argued Régnier. The distribution of their porcelain via ‘Potentats, Princes, Souverains, Ambassadeurs & co’, had carried its renown far and wide, and not only across Europe, but, he modestly writes, l’univers. So influential had it been on the populations of those countries that ‘les étrangers de toutes les classes qui viennent en France ont pour but de voir cet établissement et la réunion de ses productions.’ Thus, should his request for a space in which to display their wares be granted, it would become a powerful means of conveying to hoards of visitors, (drawn by Sèvres’ fame), the magnanimity and grace of the revolutionary government, the manufactory’s protector. He concludes:

‘Si les augustes représentants de la nation veulent bien accorder une grande pièce en face, outre près de l’assemblée, l’exposition des porcelaines durerait toute l’année, cela ferait le bonheur de la manufacture, et prouverait aux citoyens et aux étrangers combien les législateurs s’occupent d’étendre leur félicité et leur plaisir.’

To recapitulate, the glory and reputation that Sèvres might accrue as a result of its regal provenance could, if preserved under the wing of the Convention and presented to the public, help secure the Republic’s fragile reputation.

Yet the manufactory’s raison d’être and the government’s motivation for supporting it never seem entirely resolved and other conflicting grounds for its conservation by the State are also proposed. Rolland’s belief that Sèvres could generate financial returns through the production of more widely marketable wares for instance risked compromising the very reputation of the manufactory in which he hoped the Republic might bask. The impossibility of simultaneously sustaining its glorious reputation

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21 Arch. M.N.S., B4, Mémoire Historique sur la Manufacture royale de Porcelaine de Sèvres par M. Régnier, directeur, Septembre 1792. Note pour le comité du commerce.
through the production of extraordinary pieces, and its profitability during a period in which monarchical support had been supplanted by that of a cash-strapped State, is made explicit in correspondence between Garat and Régnier concerning the production of *Despotisme Renversé*. The description of this free-standing biscuit sculpture, which will be discussed at length later in this chapter, suggests that in size and complexity of modelling it was a hugely ambitious piece, of a type that had long earned Sèvres its reputation as the most skilled manufactory of porcelain. Certainly Régnier was delighted that this *opus magnum* was being undertaken at Sèvres and he was at pains to convey its magnificence to Garat, who, we might assume, would share in his enthusiasm. Yet Garat was left cold: bothered by its blatantly un-commercial premise he questions whether such a towering construction is really necessary for what he believed is essentially an inkwell (at its base sit four vases to hold ink and places to rest a quill). Given what is known about Garat, it is unlikely that his lacklustre response stemmed from a lack of sympathy for the arts or to aesthetic insensibility. He was a friend of Diderot and an aspiring poet – indeed this interest informs his portrait by Johann Friedrich Dryander (1794), in which he is depicted in a rural setting, book in hand, propped against a bust of Voltaire (fig.71). Yet he was employed at Sèvres in the capacity of an administrator: his primary concern was seeing the manufactory become productive, a goal from which *Despotisme Renversé* might only distract, wasting time and materials.22

Yet, when faced with the requirements imposed on the manufactory by another administrative level (for he was answerable to the National Convention), he too has to change tack. In a remarkable letter of 24th June 1793, Garat writes to Régnier that the decision to suspend the jobs of a number of women artists once employed at Sèvres, be reversed:

‘Dans les circonstances du moment, il s’agit moins de soutenir l’ouvrage que l’ouvrier et la manufacture que les individus dont l’existence y est attaché. Telle est, citoyen, l’intention de secours accordés par la Convention Nationale à ces établissements et notre devoir comme est de nous y conformer...’23

22 Several of his letters to Régnier appertain to his philosophies on the sound administration of the manufactory. See Arch. M.N.S., H5 Liasse 4, letter from Garat to Régnier, 16th April 1793.
Now it is the worker, not the work that is to be prioritised: the manufactory exists only to provide a living for those employed under its roof. This represents a significant reversal of policy by the management of the manufactory which until recently had tried to streamline its workforce in light of falling sales and the need to reduce expenditure. Although in this instance, notions of the injustice done to the women is said to inform the decision, more generally it might be read in line with the Convention’s utilisation of new and existing manufactories to accommodate the dispossessed, of whom, even after the army had recruited all fit young men, there were many.24 Leaving such numbers in a state of unemployment and inactivity was believed a potential threat to civil order (although conversely, so was the clustering of large groups of workers).25

In conclusion, Sèvres was by no means an easy fit in the landscape of revolutionary France, and the reasons stated for its maintenance soon come into conflict with each other or collapse in on themselves in the face of political and social realities. This resulted all too naturally in a confusion of the manufactory’s identity and purpose, which was further exacerbated by the number of people from different governmental offices who were assigned administrative and managerial roles there. Between 1792 and '94, Rolland (who had effectively succeeded D’Angiviller) was in turn replaced by Garat; Haudry by the représentants en mission, Yves-Marie Audran and Jean-César Battelier; and Régnier by Chanou. In addition, other administrators claimed to have some authority over the management of the manufactory. On 10th September 1792, Régnier received a letter from Citoyen Couturier informing him that, as Régisseur général des Domaines de Versailles, Marly, Meudon et dependances ‘Vous n’aurez dorenavant d’ordres à recevoir que de moi...’.26 Little wonder Régnier, still nominally ‘director’, was left confused and uncertain of what was expected of him in

24 The expectation that Sèvres should provide employment to those who found themselves without work is made explicit in a request from deputy Barras that the manufactory offer a job to citoyen Merlot. A former employee of a porcelain manufactory (not Sèvres), Merlot was no longer physically in a condition to carry out his duties, but might usefully occupy the post of caretaker at Sèvres. Although Salmon acknowledges Merlot’s right to some form of ‘recompense nationale’, he rejects Barras’ suggestion on the grounds that such posts are reserved for their own employees, Arch. Nat., F12 1495, letter from the Commission and Comité d’Agriculture et des Arts, 15 Pluviôse an 3 (3rd February 1795). In another letter concerning the same matter Salmon suggests that a state pension might be a more suitable means of supporting this worker, who, it is now specified, was injured in battle, Arch. Nat., F12 1496, III 10.

his role, and about how to prioritise tasks. On occasions he sought advice or permission to act on an idea from people in governmental departments, something for which he was gently reprimanded. After having answered one such enquiry regarding the re-use of gilding from old stock, Garat ends his letter by noting 'je vous observe que ces détails minutieux sont entièrement du remort / remet[??] de votre direction [...] dont je confie l'exécution à votre intelligence.'

Evidently Régnier felt insecure about acting on his instincts, which is understandable in light of the goalposts being regularly shifted. Yet even when he was provided with detailed instructions, it appears he wanted further advice and reassurance, advice and reassurante that, remarks Claude-Philibert Coqueau, chef de division in the ministry of the interior, Garat is not able to provide being as busy as he is with 'affaires générales'. 'C'est tout dire et il faut bien, à cet égard, que vous ayez quelques étendues de responsabilité, ne fut ce que pour avoir l'occasion de prouver que vous savez administrateur, comme directeur, la partie qui vous est confié.'

This might well have provoked an ironic laugh from Régnier if, that is, he had not felt so demoralised: his leadership had been all but eroded since August 1792, leaving him director in name only. And not only had Régnier lost control of his workforce, worse still, it had won control over him.

An inversion of the hierarchy: workers become masters

A short extract from a lengthy memorandum written by Hettlinger to Coqueau in May 1793 would appear to answer in the affirmative a question posed in chapter I: would the removal of the paternal figure of the king prove destabilising at the manufactory?

'Un petit nombre d'ouvriers de cette maison, qui se sont coalisés, qui en imposent aux autres par leur morgue, qui croyent savoir beaucoup précisément parce qu'ils savent peu, et qui probablement voudroient gouverner, se sont procurés accès auprès de quelques députés, et je crois

27 Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 4, letter from Garat to Régnier, 26th May 1793.
28 Arch Nat., O2 913, letter from Coqueau to Régnier, 7th April 1793.
aussi auprès de vous et du citoyen Faipoul. D’après l’ouïdire je juge qu’ils se vantent, que pourvu, qu’on jette la régie actuelle dans la rue, et qu’on adopte leurs idées, cette manufacture redeviendra plus florissante que jamais, et donnera un grand bénéfice à la nation.’

Louis XVI’s removal marked the beginning of a power struggle within Sèvres among its band of brothers (for if the king was their father, then its employees were brothers and sisters), eventually leading to the administrative order being overturned and forcefully replaced by men within the manufactory. This is not to say however, that democratic equality or fraternal unity now reigned amongst them.

Hettlinger, for one, was painfully aware that in writing the above, he was jeopardising his own safety, and asked Coqueau to keep the letter secret: if its contents were discovered, ‘Dieu scait comme on m’en payeroit.’ The men who so intimidated Hettlinger remain numberless and anonymous in his report, with the exception of their ringleader, Jean-Baptiste Chanou, recently appointed to the post of head of chemistry and kilns at the manufactory. It was a job, notes Hettlinger, that he won not through merit, but through having forcefully expelled its former occupant, Gass (against whom Chanou had a history of insubordination). This fact adds substance to the suggestion (immediately implicit in Hettlinger’s fear) that a regime based not on democracy or consensus, but Terror was in place at the manufactory, perhaps even, given the relationship with other deputies, a local branch of the one operating in Paris.

This idea is further suggested by a tantalising fragment ripped from an unidentified letter and found today in the middle of a microfilm reel in the Archives Nationales. It reads simply: ‘c’est Channou (sic), un des satellites de Robespiere (sic) et du Commité Révolutionnaire de Sèvres’. Does this scrap describe a personal relationship between Chanou and the Incorruptible, or simply that he was on the local comité de surveillance? After all members of these committees, writes Baczko, were often denounced as ‘little Robespierres’ in the post-Thermidorian backlash against the Terror that they had helped enforce in towns and villages across France. Certainly George Duval in his Souvenirs Thermidoriens claimed that he, Robespierre and Saint-

30 See Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 3, letter from La Porte to Régnier, May 1792.
31 Arch. Nat., F12 1496.
32 Baczko, op. cit., p.211.
Just had visited the manufactory together where they were met by Chanou, but his description, published perhaps fifty years after the event, has many hallmarks of satire. Interestingly, he targets Sèvres’ status as a regal plaything and entertainer of kings, origins quickly and clumsily forgotten at the sight of their Republican replacements. Robespierre does not escape the joke either, but is mocked for having ineptly taken on the rôle of his predecessors, whose mantle sits uncomfortably on his shoulders:

‘On ne se prostère pas avec plus de souplesse devant les fastueux monarques de l’Orient que Chanou et ses collègues se prosternèrent devant la face de Robespierre: et aussi le sénat ne recevait pas avec plus de hauteur les rois qui demandaient à entrer dans l’alliance du peuple romain, que Robespierre ceux des manufacturiers de Sèvres. Chanou, qui n’était pas aussi bon orateur que bon patriote, lui adressa, ainsi qu’à Saint-Just, quelques phrases assez plates sur l’honneur insigne et inattendu ... que la manufacture allait recevoir en ce beau jour; ce à quoi Robespierre ayant répondu deux ou trois paroles insignifiantes, continua son chemin...’

In fact Duval’s account cannot be entirely discounted, for Robespierre was a regular guest at the nearby Hôtel du Château de Belleville and so would have passed through the neighbourhood many times. As such, this could well be a caricatural account of an event that actually took place.

But even if Chanou and Robespierre were not on close personal terms, it can be verified that Chanou was friendly with a number of deputies and représentants en mission. Hettlinger names Coqueau and Guillaume-Charles Faipoult, secrétaire général in Rolland’s ministry, and Haudry as intimates of Chanou. Clearly he was an effective networker and keen to forge ties with people in positions of power and influence from whom he might gain. Specifically it would appear that Chanou used the powers of flattery to facilitate his climb up the greasy pole and for example Hettlinger recalls that Haudry had been puffed up – soufflé – by Chanou when he decided to have Gass replaced by him. Similarly, Chanou’s purchase of two busts of Jean-César Battelier, appointed représentant en mission à Sévres on 16th September 1793, might be considered in the same light – as a way of soliciting favour through flattery. The acquaintance that he struck up with that deputy would prove the most

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33 George Duval, Souvenirs Thermidoriens, Paris, 1843, pp.204 – 205.
34 Ad. Fritsch, La Révolution dans le Canton de Sèvres, 1789 – 1802, Versailles 1911, p.11.
formative to his career for in Brumaire an II (October/November 1793) Battelier appointed him provisional director of the manufactory, a post in which he received a generous wage of 600 livres a year:

‘Le Représentative du Peuple à Sèvres considerant qu’il est du plus grand intérêt de la manufacture des porcelaines d’avoir à sa tête un citoyen instruit dans tous les général des travaux pour qu’il puisse diriger facilement et avec avantage les différents ateliers, nommé provisoirement à la place d’inspecteur de la manufacture. Le Citoyen Chanou, lère chef des fours et chimiste dont le civisme et les talents sont attestés par tout les artistes et employés à cette manufacture et partout les bons citoyens de Sèvres.’

Not everyone however was convinced by Chanou’s supposed qualifications and as the sculptors Le Riche and Gerard would recall, the manufactory’s administration was composed of ‘…des chefs d’ateliers et d’un nombre ad hoc de leur confrères, et qui tous sentent leur incompétence.’ In fact, Chanou would prove singularly unqualified for the post, both intellectually, and, it would transpire, morally, for he was later found guilty of having taken candles ‘et autres objets de consommation’ from the manufactory’s supplies for his own use. Similarly, an employee, who chose to remain anonymous, complained that Chanou had requisitioned four acres of land with excellent soil and some fruit trees belonging to the manufactory which might be better shared among them. It would appear that his kin also benefited from his promotion and on 23rd November 1793, citoyenne Fontelliot, an employee of the burnishing studio, was unjustly dismissed and replaced by Chanou’s sister, Joséphene.

The shift in power structures at the manufactory that would eventually lead to a Terror of sorts, and eventually to the imprisonment of Régnier and his replacement, began in the immediate wake of the events of August 10th. Although I have found no evidence that Sèvres’ employees participated in the events of that day it was undoubtedly a

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35 Arch. Nat., O2 913, letter from Chanou to unknown recipient, second dècada de Brumaire an II (November 1793).
37 Arch. Nat., F12 1496, letter from the Commission d’Arts et d’Agriculture to Chanou, 18 Nivôse an 3 (7th January 1795).
38 Arch. Nat., F12 1496, letter from anon to the Commission d’Arts et d’Agriculture, 20 Frimaire an 3 (10th December 1794).
39 Arch. Nat., F12 1495, this is reported in a letter from Salmon and Hettlinger to the Commission d’Agriculture et des Arts, 13 Prarial an 3 (2nd June 1795).
defining moment for them in their working, social, and political lives.\footnote{Their National Guard was instructed to assemble at St Cloud alongside other battalions from Meudon, Versailles and the surrounding area. Here they were to await instruction from the National Assembly. Arch. Municipales de Sèvres, Deliberations 12-8-1787, 4-2-1793, entry of 10\textsuperscript{th} August 1792.} Within a fortnight they had travelled to Paris to take the stand at the legislative assembly no less than three times. During their first visit they promised troops to fight against Lafayette, the second they asked for the manufactory to be reorganised, and the third they donated a sum of 232 livres to those widowed or orphaned by the recent events, money that would formerly have been used to celebrate the feast of St Louis.\footnote{Séances of 19\textsuperscript{th}, 22\textsuperscript{nd} and 24\textsuperscript{th} August 1792, Archives Parlementaires, vol. XLVIII, pp.388, 617, and 675.}

Governmental representatives were made immediately available to oversee the implementation of the second of their requests, yet the Sèvrians proved perfectly capable of enacting the reforms they desired. They focused their energies first on the thorny question of the continued employment of the manufactory’s artistic and scientific advisors – Cadet, Darcet and Desmarets, Bachelier, Boizot and Lagrenee. Accounts of the episode, which resulted in all six being forced to resign, suggest it became extremely heated, ‘poussé jusqu’au point d[e les] insulter gravement.’ Garat, writing in August 1793 would recall that the movement had, ‘comme tous mouvements populaires une première base de mécontentement poussé trop loin, mais fondée neanmoins sur l’inutilité de quelques uns de cet places.’\footnote{Arch. Nat., 02 913, liasse 1, letter from Garat to comité de la aliénation, 20\textsuperscript{th} August 1793.}

Collectively the wages earned by the academicians amounted to 8,700 livres annually, money that those involved believed hugely disproportionate to the jobs they undertook, and which could be put to better use elsewhere.\footnote{This figure is taken from Rolland breakdown of the manufactory’s expenses from his report to the National Convention, 9\textsuperscript{th} January 1793, op. cit., p.655.} And members of Sèvres’ administration would be similarly targeted on account of the costs they occasioned and the superfluity of their posts.\footnote{The fact that Boizot was expelled suggests that the insurgents did not take their revolutionary credentials into consideration, for his activism was recognized and proven. As evidence we might cite the fact that Boizot was granted the first presidency of the Société Populaire et Républicaine des Arts in October 1793, a society to which only proven republicans were admitted.} Ironically then, the very policies of making redundancies in order to reduce the manufactory’s running costs and streamlining non-profitable studios, once practised with relative impunity by its administration, were now turned against them by their workforce, against whom they were powerless
to defend themselves. In a letter of 17th October 1793, Barreau vainly contests his and Régnier’s dismissal from the manufactory on the grounds of the non-essential nature of their posts and the saving of 30,000 livres that their suspension represented for the Republic, a figure he claims was grossly exaggerated. Barreau might well have felt there was cause for complaint, for we recall that the grudge against him was longstanding and that the revolution provided opportunities for vendettas to be carried out openly and legitimately. He certainly suspected malice on the part of some Sévrians whom he claims had knowingly denounced him to the Convention for not having paid them, when in fact they were all on the point of receiving their wages. The first he learned of their complaint was from reading the Mercure Universel where he found the incident reported! Such behaviour was not exceptional and for example Quatremère de Quincy bemoaned the inversion of order among the workforce he employed at the Panthéon:

“Par une parodie absurde du gouvernement ils regardent leurs travaux comme leur propriété […] et croient en conséquence qu’il leur appartient de se nommer leurs chefs, leurs inspecteurs, et de distribuer arbitrairement les travaux.”

The inversion of the hierarchy at Sévres was also encouraged by Chanou’s friend commissaire Haudry. On 6th October 1792 he wrote a long letter, loaded with military analogies and revolutionary sound bites, to Regnier, concerning the need to enact the economic reform of the manufactory. Their success lay, he wrote, in the mobilisation not only of the administrative team but also their employees to the cause: ‘ce sont eux qui assurerons nos succès, comme nos frères d’armes assurèrent eux de nos combats.’ Through them, not only was their porcelain made, but order assured and the use of materials restricted:

“Vous voyez, citoyen Directeur, que je regarde les ateliers comme le champ précieux qu’il s’agit de cultiver et où il faut savoir faire prospérer les semence d’une bonne moisson. Apellons donc ces bons citoyens à notre aide, consultons les, agissons avec eux, et par eux; regardons les commes l’âme de ce corps de manufacture dont nous sommes que les membres. […] En un mot, nous avons

45 Arch. Nat., O2 913.
46 Arch. Nat., F12 1494, letter from Barreau to unknown recipient, 23rd December 1792; The complaint made to the Convention by a deputation of workers from the manufactory is recorded in the Archives Parlementaires, séance of 17th December 1792, vol.55, p.123.
47 Quoted by Haïm Burstin, op. cit., p.674.
48 Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 3.
six ateliers et nous devons les regarder comme six frères que nous adoptons
pour cherir avec nous notre verteuex père Roland, et notre bonne mère, Patrie.'

Undoubtedly, this is an energetic and empowering letter and its proposal is grounded
on sound principles of collaborative effort to ward off financial ruin. Yet it must have
filled its recipient with some trepidation given that it effectively weakened his
position in relation to his workforce still further: in light of the tensions already
present at the manufactory, this could prove extremely divisive. Still more worrying
would have been Haudry’s proposal, made in the same letter, that a ‘police’ be set up
within the manufactory, consisting of employees elected from the different studios.
They were to meet, he wrote, each Monday to present the thoughts and complaints of
their colleagues to the management with the aim that ‘chaque atelier concours ainsi au
bon ordre et à nos succès.’ Yet given the existence of an aggressive clique at the
manufactory Régnier might well worry that such a police could exceed the bounds of
its stated mission within the manufactory and be turned against him personally.

Ultimately it was not a police headquartered within the manufactory that would call
for Régnier’s arrest on 16th September 1793, alongside that of his colleagues Salmon
l’aîné, Hettlinger and Caron, chef de peinture, but one active within the wider
community, identified in the Archives Parlementaires as being the Sèvrian comité de
sûreté générale et de surveillance. Their arrest was a consequence of having been
refused certificates of civism during a meeting held on 10th April 1793 by the Conseil
Général de la Commune. Yet the remarkable fact that of the ten who signed the
warrant for his arrest, nine were Régnier’s own employees, and the fact that the
crimes of which he stood accused were all committed at the manufactory, suggests
that Régnier’s fears were justified. The centrality of the manufactory in local politics,
serving as a venue for meetings and events, meant that its police would inevitably
converge with local surveillance committees and through them with the state judiciary
that sentenced Régnier to jail on 16th September 1793. His first term, served at St
Pelagie was short – just two days – as a result of deputy Audrein’s intrusion into the

49 Séance of 18th September 1793, Archives Parlementaire, vol.74, p.279.
50 Sèvres, Deliberations 23-2-1793.
matter.\textsuperscript{51} Yves-Marie Audrein, briefly \textit{en commission} at Sèvres had worried that their internment would jeopardise the efficient running of the manufactory, calling for their release.\textsuperscript{52} The return of Régnier to the manufactory, where he was kept under house arrest, aggravated the local committees who condemned Audrein's intrusion, believing it illegitimate and beyond his mandate.\textsuperscript{53}

This episode raises an important point, for if the paradox would seem to have been solved by the fact that, by all appearances, the manufactory was simply a republican strong-house, it reminds us that, all this time, it was in fact a working manufactory producing luxury porcelain. The men and women who performed their patriotic duties with such assiduity would only have done so after a day's work on the production of that most luxurious of products destined for use at the tables of France's wealthier citizens. The potential conflict of interests that this created, (for the sans-culottes were notoriously hostile towards wealthy individuals), throws up interesting questions and challenges our assumptions about who the sans-culottes were and about the nature of their rhetoric.\textsuperscript{54}

Worker involvement in local patriotic clubs and the military

A brief consultation of the \textit{procès-verbaux} held in Sèvres' local municipal archive certainly suggests that a number of the manufactory's employees combined their position at Sèvres with others in local clubs, or in the \textit{Conseil Général de la Commune}, on which several of them served as \textit{officiers municipaux} or \textit{notables.} Among the latter was the talented painter Nicolas-Pierre Pithou, whose republican baptism of his son, Guillaume Tell, was recorded in the minutes of their meeting held on 17\textsuperscript{th} October 1792. Other employees several times elected to the council include

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{51} Régnier would serve a much longer second sentence, being arrested at the end of 1793 on the orders of the Comités Révolutionnaire, and detained for twenty-one months, see Arch. Nat., O2 916, Rapport au Ministre by Régnier, 27 Nivôse an 9 (16\textsuperscript{th} January 1801).
\textsuperscript{52} Arch. M.N.S., B4, V1, letter from Audrien to unnamed recipient, 16\textsuperscript{th} September 1793. Audrein was charged with the surveillance of Sèvres only between August and 16\textsuperscript{th} September 1793.  
\textsuperscript{53} Sèvres, Deliberations 23-2-1793. 
\textsuperscript{54} See Albert Soboul, who notes that lower class hostility towards 'riches and commerce was not without certain contradictions, even to the extent that sans-culottes themselves sometimes owned a workshop or store.' \textit{The Sans-Culottes}, trans. Remy Inglis Hall, Princeton, 1980, p.20.
\end{footnotesize}
Troyon, Deparis and Rosset. Others served one term, among them: Feuché, Chartier, Wavasseur and Caron. Interestingly in December 1793 seven municipal officers were dismissed for misuse of the Republic's resources (they stood accused of having stolen wine) and for having slowed down the revolutionary cause through half-heartedness. Whether their treatment was warranted however, or whether they were the victims of another coup staged by Chanou, is unknown. A document in the national archives records that Battelier, after having gathered the opinions of proven republicans nominates Chanou to the post of mayor, which he was to retain for several years. In a letter to Sèvres' directors dated 8th Pluviôse an 7 (28th January 1799), he still styles himself *Président de l'administration municipale du Canton de Sèvres*.

The deliberations of Sèvres' *société populaire*, whose establishment under the roof of the manufactory was proposed in September 1793, provide detailed accounts of the meetings that regularly took place at intervals of only a day or two, and were widely attended by men, women and children. In fact so loud was the noise from the audiences, which often threatened to drown out that day's business, that one member demanded that the 'inspecteurs [de la salle]' carry a pike surmounted with a liberty bonnet in the hope that 'ce signe les fasse reconnaître des membres et surtout les enfants bruyants.' Clearly the symbols of the Revolution were held in respect by its members who maintained a firm belief in their power to control unruly crowds. This is further illustrated by the fact that in the *séance* of 1st Floréal an II (April 20th 1794, the first meeting recorded in the surviving archives) and, in accordance with a decision made at their last meeting, a barrier consisting of a tricolour ribbon was erected to close off the space in which the society met. A watercolour in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale depicting the interior of the meeting rooms of the *Comité de Salut Public* suggests that the erection of such a flimsy barrier was a trusted means of crowd control, for it successfully separates those participating in the meeting from those who have gathered to watch it take place (fig.72).

57 Sèvres, Deliberations 23-2-1793, entry of 24 Floréal an II.
58 Richard Wrigley also cites other examples where the tricolour ribbon was successfully put to the same use, i.e., restraining crowds, see *The Politics of Appearances: Representation of Dress in Revolutionary France*, Oxford, New York 2002, p.115.
The meetings themselves would routinely start with a patriotic hymn being sung before a reading from the edited highlights selected from that day's journals – usually (though not exclusively) from the *journal du soir* or the *journal de la Montagne*. Further readings, sometimes taken from letters (on several occasion written by Sèvrians fighting on the front line), sometimes from war reports, material from the *amis de la Liberté et de l'Égalité*, or from Robespierre's discourses might follow, ensuring that members of the *société populaire* were kept up to date not only about events but political philosophies then circulating. Because of the sheer volume of written material available and the limited time they had to present it, a commission was appointed to receive correspondence and to pick out the indispensable extracts which would be read out at meetings. Claude-Charles Gerard, Guilaume Dupressoir, Martin-Antoine Liancé and Vandé, all employees of the manufactory were entrusted with the task.59

Manufactory employees are regularly found listed in the committees nominated to carry out tasks in their community and in neighbouring towns and villages (whether they were elected to do so, or whether they volunteered is unspecified). For example, in the séance of 4th Floréal an II (23rd April 1794), the nine-strong commission appointed to assist in the distribution of bread at bakeries included three employees of the manufactory – the sculptor Roguier, and the painters Buteux and Pierre. In the following séance, three more painters from the manufactory were among the nine men elected to the 'commission nommé pour le pain'. Given the centrality of bread to the fortunes of the Revolution at home – (as George Rudé has illustrated, a lack of it could mobilise people like nothing else) – these would have been potentially challenging roles.60 The almost constant shortage of bread at Sèvres could easily turn a visit to the bakers into a fraught and potentially violent outing, and those charged with overseeing its distribution would have to be able to maintain order and command the respect of their fellow citizens.

59 In addition, the *Bulletin de la Convention Nationale* was (irregularly) forwarded to the manufactory by Grandjean Fouché, *chef du 4eme division de la Ministre de l'Interieur*. He requested that it be left somewhere accessible so that 'les citoyens employés dans les ateliers soient à portée de le lire.' Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 3, letter from Grandjean Fouché to Régnier, 20th October 1792.
The fact that the manufactory employees did have the respect of other Sévrians, and were considered good representatives of the société populaire is further suggested by the fact that they were frequently among those selected to represent the town abroad. Asselin (painter) and Mexeant (toureur or repareur) were made responsible for striking up an affiliation with the neighbouring société populaire of Versailles for example. Likewise, Bolvry jeune (chef des tourneurs et repareurs) was one of two men charged with overseeing an affiliation between Sèvres’ société populaire and La société Républicaine de la Franciade, which had requested fraternal links be established between the two clubs. Finally, perhaps the most talented figure painter at the manufactory, Charles-Nicolas Dodin, was asked to lead a deputation of five painters from the manufactory to visit their ‘brothers’ at la société populaire of Vaucresson where he would present the entry card and stamp that he had designed for them. Whilst there, ‘ces membres sont chargés de fraterniser avec eux, leur donner tous les renseignements dont ils pourroient avoir besoin, et leur indiqueront les artistes graveurs par leur carte et cachet.’ Membership of a revolutionary club allowed people to move beyond the bounds of their town or village in their capacity as patriots, something that would naturally result in the feeling that they were part of a wider revolutionary community, potentially an immensely empowering realisation.

Although the historian David Garrioch would deny that there was such a thing as a ‘textbook’ example of a société populaire, a comparative reading of the deliberations of Sèvres’ procès-verbal and of William Sewell’s description of the activities engaged in by comparable sectional assemblies (for which he drew on Markov and Soboul’s compilation of minutes from assembly meetings), suggests that it was an exemplary instance of a committed revolutionary body. And the Sévriens were active not only when it came to events in their locality, but they also made generous contributions to the revolutionary efforts being co-ordinated in Paris. They donated more saltpetre to the National Convention than they were required to, for instance, an achievement they

51 On the significance of fraternisation see F. E. Baumann, Fraternity and Politics: Choosing one’s Brothers, Westport and London 1998.
hoped to repeat. In light of the diminishing stocks at Sèvres, they asked permission to start collecting deposits from neighbouring villages as well as from their own.

Their commitment to this important cause, which was intimately tied with national defence, is made explicit during a visit of a deputation of the sans-culottes and members of the société populaire of Sèvres to the Convention on 5\textsuperscript{th} Germinal an 2, (25\textsuperscript{th} March 1794) to present the saltpetre they had harvested.\textsuperscript{63} They preface their donation with a rousing speech in praise of the heroic and indefatigable efforts of the Convention and its sub-committees (of surveillance, public safety and general security), and lastly of their Parisian brothers.\textsuperscript{64}

‘...Restez à votre poste, intrepides Montagnards; achevez le grand édifice dont vous avez posé les bases; continuez à rendre des décrets qui atterrent les ennemis de la liberté et de l’égalité. Les amis de la République soutiendront avec force la colonne inébranlè que vous avez élevée; les sans-culottes se trouveront partout pour écraser les conjures; la surveillance et le salpêtre sont, à Sèvres, à l’ordre du jour. Nous vous en présentons un échantillon semblable aux 546 livres portées où le dernier des tyrans avoit pris naissance. Vive la République. Vive la Montagne.’\textsuperscript{65}

Their praise is immediately returned by the president of the Convention in a speech that suggests the Sèvrians commitment had been proven by other acts undertaken alongside the Parisian sections, and was openly recognised by the Convention

‘Dans tous les circonstances difficiles de la révolution on a toujours vu la commune de Sèvres se réunir à celle de Paris pour défendre la liberté en péril. Continuez à extraire le salpêtre qui doit anéantir les tyrans; il sera remise dans des mains qui en feront bon usage. Retournez dans vos foyers, et annoncez à vos concitoyens que hier le glaive vengeur de lois a fait justice à ceux qui avoient conspiré contre la patrie.’\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{63} On the importance accorded to the collection of saltpeter (the principal ingredient in gunpowder) by the government, see Valerie Mainz, \textquote{Aux armes et aux arts! Blacksmiths at the National Convention}, in \textit{Work and the Image}, ed., Valerie Mainz and Griselda Pollock, Aldershot, 2000, 2 vols, vol 1. Mainz also names parallel visits to the Convention by citizens from the Paris sections of Gardes-Françaises, and later (ten days prior to the Sèvrian’s own deputation), by recent graduates from the new school for instruction in the processing of saltpeter and the fabrication of armaments.

\textsuperscript{64} For more on the rhetorically loaded addresses made to the Convention by scores of local clubs and societies and their typical format (which the Sèvrians follow), see Emmet Kennedy, \textit{A Cultural History of the French Revolution}, New York, 1989, pp.303 – 308.

\textsuperscript{65} Of the twenty-five signants listed, seven names coincide with those of employees then engaged at the manufactory: J.B. Chanou (maire), Caron and Chartier, Levavasseur, Martelet (president du comité révolutionnaire), Collet (membre du comité), Chartier and Marmin.

\textsuperscript{66} Séance of 5\textsuperscript{th} Germinal an II (25\textsuperscript{th} March 1794) \textit{Archives Parlementaires}, vol.87, p.345.
A few months later, in Messidor an 2 (June/July 1794) the members of the *société populaire* again went before the convention, this time to present them with a mounted cavalry, *le cavalier Jacobin*, whose equipping they had paid for through donations raised locally.\(^6^7\) This time the *société* was there *en masse*, their journey already having been once postponed to a *décardi* day so as to allow as many people as possible to attend. Once more two employees of the manufactory were chosen to address the convention: Salmon *jeune* and Gérard. The deputation and their gift, note the minutes of *séance* of 11\(^{th}\) Messidor, were very well received and the *société populaire* accorded the honours of the *séance*.\(^6^8\) Two days later the mounted cavalry departed for the Vendée to a chorus of *Vive la République* from their fellow Sèvriens, who had escorted them as far as the Bois de Boulogne. On the 15\(^{th}\) a letter from Hubert, one of the cavaliers (not an employee of the manufactory), was read out in their society meeting: they had reached Breteuil where they were fighting ‘jusqu’à la dernière goutte de son sang les tyrans coalisés.’

On 20\(^{th}\) September 1792, Montucla had written that he presumed some of their men had left for the frontier. He was certainly correct to assume so (Régnier would later recall that ‘il a parti en 1792 plusieurs ouvriers pour aller servir la Patrie’)\(^6^9\), however it is difficult to construct an accurate picture of manufactory employees’ enrolment in the military. One list of workers in dossier *D*3 in the manufactory archives names thirteen employees, where they were posted and in what capacity, however it cannot be taken as being definitive and very occasionally other workers are named elsewhere as having served in the army. The picture is further obscured by the fact that, in accordance with the law of 11\(^{th}\) March, their jobs were held until their return, prompting a slightly confusing coming-and-going that the manufactory administration found hard to regulate. Other workers, it was suspected, left the manufactory for reasons other than joining the military, yet claimed to have served in order to gain their readmission on the favourable terms set out by that law. It will never be known what percentage fought in the Republican armies, but out of those employees who

\(^{6^7}\) See séances of 7 Floréal and 7 Messidor an II, Arch. Municipales de Sèvres, Société Populaire, Procès-verbaux, an II 1 Floréal – An III 17 Pluviôse.

\(^{6^8}\) See séance of 10\(^{th}\) Messidor an 2 (28\(^{th}\) June 1794), *Archives Parlementaires*, vol.92, p.242.

\(^{6^9}\) Arch. Nat. F12 1495, Memoir from Régnier to Rolland, 14\(^{th}\) January 1792.
were eligible to fight (age, sex, and marital status being determinants), the numbers of those who did cannot have been inconsiderable.\(^{70}\)

Naturally the loss of talented, useful employees to the army had an impact on production, and the administration would later request that a few of its most skilled men be granted permanent leave from the military in order to recommence their duties at Sèvres.\(^{71}\) These incidents once more illustrate the potential conflict created by the workers being both patriots and working for the production of porcelain: they were expected to be both committed workers producing porcelains from which the Republic would profit, and committed revolutionaries, fighting for their fatherland. Yet the co-ordination and alignment of the different personality traits that the two rôles required – on the one hand, outgoing, brave, intrepid, aggressive, and on the other, quiet, concentrated, still – must have presented a challenge, as would the simple logistics of time management. Auslander, for example, notes the disruption caused to the furnishing trades as a result of artisans employed within the industry ‘turning to politics rather than furniture design during the revolutionary years.’\(^{72}\)

This confusion of identity and perhaps loyalty is further suggested by the fact that, although one gets the impression of the workers being swept along by an exultant revolutionary rhetoric which instilled value and grit in those who adopted it as their personal mantra, life – survival – would prove hard as a result of the very Revolution in which they invested. And although, on 13\(^{th}\) August 1792, a number of workers, ‘par délicatesse et esprit de subordination’, refused wage-increases for the good of the State,\(^{73}\) they were soon campaigning to the same authorities for financial aid.\(^{74}\) Garat

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70 Specifically men aged between 18 and 40 who were either widowed, or single and childless were called upon to take up arms for la patrie.
71 See Arch. Nat., F12 1495, letter (unspecified writer and recipient) of 5\(^{th}\) Fructidor an 4 (22\(^{nd}\) August 1795) and letter to Citoyen de la Garde, secrétaire gal [?] du Directoire Exécutif, 11\(^{th}\) Fructidor an 4, (28\(^{th}\) August).
72 Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1996, p.148. A document in the manufactory archives dated May 1793 gives us a window into levels of absenteeism at Sèvres during that month, listing a total of 32 workers and the number of days they were not at work. The periods of absence range between half a day (6 workers) and one month (one worker), but whether or not their absence was as result of revolutionary duties, or fulfilling other commitments is not specified however. Arch. Nat., O2 913, ‘Absences en la manufacture des porcelaines national de Sèvres dans le courant du mois de mai 1793’.
73 Arch. Nat., F12 1496, ‘État des chefs et ouvriers qui par délicatesse, et esprit de subordination ne se sont pas donné des augmentations le 13 août 1792.
74 See Arch. Nat., O2 913, *Présentation de la Demande à titre de Secours provisionnel pour les ouvriers de la Manufacture de Sèvres, le 7 Juin, an II de la République Française une et indivisible*. The
readily admits that their current wages, (which he specifies were just sixty to eighty livres a month for the highest paid, and for the rest, a meagre thirty to forty livres), were inadequate to their needs, especially given that most were supporting dependants. Indeed this compares unfavourably with wages received by many workers in Paris. Haïm Burstin notes for example, that in February 1794 garçons maçons and carpenters demanded no less than 6 livres a day, which would amount to roughly 120 livres a month (accounting for 20 full days’ work). Even manœuvres insisted on 3 livres a day, which over the same period would amount to 60, i.e., significantly more than the 30 to 40 livres received by their equivalents at Sèvres.75

On 24th June 1793 Garat presented the manufactory employees’ case before the National Convention, arguing they be awarded a rise in line with those then being handed out in private ateliers.76 Interestingly, he notes that the Sèvrians were probably pushing him for an increase to their wages having learned about rises accorded a neighbouring manufactory, perhaps Obercampf’s. It is likely that the Sèvrians came into direct contact with the Obercampf employees working in neighbouring Versailles, as a result of having fraternised with their société populaire.

Revolutionary Sèvres porcelain and its inherent problems and paradoxes

We learn from a letter dated 24th September 1794 that in the recent past an order had been given that all work leaving Sèvres’ studios should from thenceforth be marked with the attributes of liberty: ‘Les employés ont ordre de ne rien faire sans y mettre les attributs de la liberté’.77 The material evidence would suggest however, that at no point was an absolute programme of revolutionary décor launched at the manufactory and there exists a number of neutrally decorated pieces that date to the period. Yet

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75 Haïm Burstin, op. cit., 1997, p.668.
76 See O2 913, letter from le ministre de l’Intérieur au Président de la Convention Nationale.
77 Arch. Nat., F12 1495, letter from Empaytaz to the Commission d’Agriculture et des Arts. This quotation would appear to contradict Leora Auslander’s claim that the workers at Sèvres were not given any ‘positive program’ to follow during the revolutionary period, ‘Regeneration through the Everyday? Clothing Architecture and Furniture in Revolutionary Paris’, in Art History, 28.2, April 2005, p.238.
these coexisted alongside a considerable number of items either subtly embellished or more conspicuously emblazoned with the appropriate attributes, suggesting that Sèvres was in fact increasingly committed to the production of revolutionary goods for a ‘patriotic’ clientele. It is difficult to draw exact conclusions about the ratio of ‘revolutionary’ to ‘non-revolutionary’ items however, due to lack of specificity in the available records. Items with patriotic décor, described variously as ‘guirlands et rubans tricolours’, ‘groupes et attributes’, ‘alleg[ories] patriotiques’ or ‘attributes et arabesques’ for example, only appear with any regularity as late as March 1794. Yet we know of the existence of many examples prior to that date, which we must surmise were simply grouped under the same titles as non-revolutionary items according to whether they contained flowers, figures and so on: as such they are impossible to distinguish or single out.

The largest number, by a considerable margin, of surviving ‘revolutionary’ pieces are of an identifiable type: their revolutionary symbols, alone or in combination, are prominently displayed, framed in individual roundels or cartouches, surrounded by attention-grabbing (sometimes polka-dotted or striped) ground colours and festooned with garlands and arabesques (figs.73-78). Surely there have been few more vivid and pleasing homages paid to the values of the Revolution! Nor perhaps more heartfelt ones? An analysis of the minutes from meetings held by Sèvres’ local revolutionary clubs made it clear that these were symbols in whose meanings their creators were not only literate, but in which they had invested personally.

Certainly the painters would have been fluent in the language of symbols that they were expected to deploy. However, if Pithou’s and Boizot’s drawings suggest the origins of the designs of their wares lay with the artists, this might not always have been the case (figs.79-81). Hettlinger records that it was Salmon who distributed different assignments to painters and gilders, taking into consideration their skills and specialization’s: ‘Il aime à faire le Sous Directeur, à distribuer les ouvrages aux Peintres, à assortir les services, et donne souvent de bonnes idées pour l’arrangement

78 Both Boizot and Lagrenée were re-appointed to their post at Sèvres in August 1793 by Garat, Arch. Nat., O2 913, letter from Minister of the Interior to the comité d’aliénation, 20th August 1793.
Whether Salmon drew from a revolutionary ‘pattern book’ (none exist in the manufactory archives today), or from the range of source material then available is unknown. Certainly the arrangements of symbols on their cups and saucers often bear a close resemblance to exactly the kind of headers that featured on the official correspondences he received. However, revolutionary signs and symbols were all-pervasive during the period, and they could have been taken from a range of sources. For example, some of the species of flowers that play such a major part in their revolutionary decorative schemes had a particular pertinence in revolutionary France: the palms and laurels that often feature denote victory, and oak leaves, strength. Yet there existed alongside these, other types of flora – cornflower, roses, poppies and nasturtiums that had no iconographic resonance for revolutionaries (figs.82-83). Perhaps they were chosen for their colour-match to the blue and red of the tricolour flag? Certainly tricolour garlands of unidentifiable types are a common feature of many of their items of service ware. As flower-symbolism was not a major feature of revolutionary iconography this can be more easily related to Sèvres’ own historically established decorative conventions than to any specific to 1790s France. Flowers had always formed a major decorative component in their oeuvre, the rose in particular having a lengthy provenance.

A more thorough analysis of these pieces, taking into consideration branding and style in the context of revolutionary France however, complicates a straightforward reading of these dainty cups and saucers, one premised on their being successful items of revolutionary propaganda. The fact, for example, that until as late as 17th July 1793 the manufacturers still marked their wares with Louis XVI’s cipher is particularly significant (we can hazard that such a mark would have been totally unacceptable to Cobb’s diners!) Yet the way in which Garat couched his order to Régnier that the crossed Ls should be removed suggests there was more to the brand than their brand mark, and that even after their removal, the body of Sèvres porcelain could be a highly contestable space.

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79 Arch Nat., F12 1496. A letter dated 28th March from Salmon to Coqueau describes the process by which, in his capacity as Garde-Magasin General, he distributes work among the manufactory employees. Arch MNS, O2 913, Liasse 1. We cannot discount the possibility that various designs were authored by the painters themselves however as, in the past, blank items had been given them for the application of their own designs. It was hoped that the manufactory would profit from their talents: ‘il en peut resulter des nouveautés heureuses’. Arch. M.N.S., H3, liasse 4, letter from D’Angiviller to Régnier, 11th February 1786.
Their now offensive mark had to be changed, replaced with RF, (*République Française*), but not so their *signature style*, developed under and for *ancien régime* patronage (fig.84). Even during the Revolution, it is implied, they needed to maintain their identifying characteristics – luxurious quality, glossiness and stylistic excess – all surface qualities and identifiably those of a now fallen regime. Taking a second look at these pieces, they do maintain essentially decorative priorities. Unlike on the patriotic faience, their featured revolutionary emblems, although prominent, are but one aspect of a highly wrought decorative scheme. Neither aspect is subordinate to the other but there is a coexistence of ornamental flourishes and political attributes, each one compromising the other’s integrity.

The co-existence of contrary values on the one body is suggested by the fact that at some point numerous pieces were subjected to partial iconoclasm, the revolutionary emblems painted over or scratched off to reveal the scarred surface of the porcelain beneath (figs.65 and 85). Significantly, rather than destroying the piece outright, just the offending attribute was removed in order to reclaim or rehabilitate it. The revolutionary symbolism therefore did not pollute the whole surface but existed like an island of republicanism afloat on a surface that maintained its inherited stylistic qualities, denotative of the *ancien régime*. Interestingly, more often it was liberty bonnets that were removed, adapted, or over-painted: the slightly clumsy over-gilding here transforms one into a Roman helmet (fig.86), and because of the usual juxtaposition of emblems signifying liberty and equality, we can hazard that underneath this over-painted *paysage* scene lies a bonnet (fig.87). The ‘red cap of liberty’, explains Jennifer Harris, had become intimately connected with the sans-culottes and consequently ‘fell into considerable disfavor after Thermidor’.  

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would explain why its removal was privileged over that of other symbols – the triangular spirit level for example, which might be redefined along Masonic lines.

Notable amongst their revolutionary oeuvre are a small number of examples whose ostensibly ‘revolutionary’ qualifications are startlingly undermined by the fact that ornamental concerns seem almost to outweigh patriotic ones. In figures 88–92, far from asserting their presence as in other pieces already illustrated, their symbols are sacrificed to an overall decorative scheme. For example, despite its gilded frame the liberty bonnet crowned with laurel on this teapot is easily lost among the irregularly scattered poppies (fig.88). Not only are they painted in the same colours, the poppies’ shapes echo that of the bonnet itself, and their two-toned centres the cocade pinned to it. From a distance the poppies and bonnet become almost indistinguishable from one another. Likewise one is required to look hard in order to locate the liberty bonnets among the dancing figures on this handle-less cup, and the way in which the symbols are here woven into a tangle of arabesques makes it hard for the eye to settle comfortably on them (figs.89-91). Once more the viewer is disorientated and the symbols lost in this *tasse à l’étrusque* and saucer, its multiple motifs, gilded one on another creating a confusing and messy silhouette from which it is difficult to extract autonomous and meaningful symbols (fig.92).

Certainly the transformation of powerful, resonant symbols into decorative components in ornamental patterns, made to repeat and overlap in the interest of symmetry or harmony, as is arguably the case in these and other examples illustrated, could be regarded as aesthetically dubious at a time when emphasis was put on transparency of communication (fig.93). Where artists did deploy symbols, legibility was to be sought above all other qualities so that the viewer would stand the greatest chance of correctly identifying them and interpreting their meaning. On occasions this might result in a lack of compositional unity or aesthetic subtlety that lends to much French revolutionary art a dry, sermonizing quality often unappealing to modern eyes (figs.94-95). But so much the better: subtlety, or to employ their favored term, *dissimulation*, was widely perceived to be a tool of counter-revolution and was not to be trusted. By prioritizing form over function, were the revolutionary meanings of the symbols that spot these porcelains not undermined or at least compromised by counter-revolutionary inflection?
Further problems might be located in the manner in which their wares are painted, for there is some truth in Le Chevalier Chevignard’s comment that ‘il y a lieu de remarquer ici combien peu les artistes de Sèvres assimilèrent la formule de l’art contemporaine’.  

This is not an unimportant point, for in the wider revolutionary world the old codes of representation with which these cups and saucers can roughly be aligned, had been ostensibly overthrown, vilified along with the regime they had catered for. In its place, a new vigorous, virile and masculine style had been forged, one believed uniquely suitable to the production of revolutionary art. In light of this it is surprising that despite the appointment in January 1794 of Jean-Baptiste Wicar, a student of David and a radical revolutionary of the most acerbic kind, to a post at the manufactory, overseeing work in the painting studio (an appointment that is in itself remarkable), little change appears to have been initiated in their style. Would it have been too much to ask that artists who had worked according to an established house-style for, in some instances, decades, alter their working methods now? Possibly, yet they were by training copyists and it might not have been unreasonable to expect them to have rendered their signs and symbols with vigour, as indeed they do in the following examples.

The problematical nature of the pieces discussed might seem to have been at least partially resolved by a small number of existent pieces that display an arguably more revolutionary aesthetic. For example, in figures 96–97 not only does their rendering of Moitte’s celebrated depictions of Liberty and Equality, engraved by Janinet in 1792 (figs.98-99), respect the severe demeanour of their source and its monochrome palette, but they have chosen to omit any of the decorative flourishes typical of Sèvres’ revolutionary oeuvre. A similar restraint is demonstrated in the instance of a cup which takes as its starting point a print after Boizot and in which, true to its source, the figure of La Raison, is set against a sober black ground (figs.100-101). Her attributes, which appear on the saucer, also manifest a severity of execution, and a tone of austerity is lent the whole piece by the use of a ground that imitates rock-hard

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81 Le Chevalier Chevignard, La Manufacture de Porcelaine de Sèvres, Paris 1908, p.127.
82 As Andrew McClellan has written, ‘The experience of revolution was so different from what had gone before, the break with the past so radical that a new artistic style was called for to characterize in visual terms the magnitude and nature of the upheaval.’ Accordingly, the Convention sought to bring
granite. Yet despite this, and in common with the aforementioned pieces, they are, I would argue, compromised by the degree of luxury that they represented at the point of purchase.

It has of course been indulgent and misleading to think about these pieces only in relation to themselves, for to a large extent the market would have determined the character of their production. Clearly, they are testimony to the existence of clients who were prepared to part with a considerable sum of money for a cup and saucer made at the manufactory. Salmon was well aware of the limits of this market however, as illustrated by his reservations regarding Régnier’s plan to sell off their old stocks of porcelain at the Parisian dealership of Daguerre and Lignereux. He worried that the immense sale planned would have a dangerous side-effect for the manufactory, ‘et pourroit produire dans Paris une satiété de porcelaine qui ôteroit tout moyen de placer celle nouvelle fabriquée.’ However, for the purposes of an examination of the sales of revolutionary wares, we can largely ignore these repercussions: the sale of old stocks would not impact upon the market for these porcelains, the choice of which we can only assume to have been very specific. Throughout the Revolution, the manufactory was producing new, non-revolutionary porcelain for purchase, including pieces that differed little in decorative motifs from their predecessors of the 1750s and 1760s (fig.102-103). To choose specifically revolutionary wares in preference for their established œuvre was to make a statement – although I would argue that the implications of the statement are not always clear.

It should be noted that, with the exception of a series of plates ornamented with oak-leaf borders and the occasional sauceboat, their production with revolutionary emblems was confined exclusively to tea or coffee wares and the exceptional vase.

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83 ‘Note: Ventes de la Porcelaine dans les circonstances actuelles’, written in a letter from Salmon to Coqueau, 28th March 1793, Arch Nat., O2 913. It is interesting that Salmon makes an alternative suggestion regarding for the distribution of their stocks of porcelain: ‘Serait il possible d’en faire passer sur des vaisseaux neutre en Angleterre ou autres royaumes? Les changes si fructueux pour nos voisins tournoient au profit de la vente; la solde en metal couvrroit les pertes qu’il faudras essuyes.’ Tamara Préaud records the arrival at English auction houses of pieces of Sèvres via neutral territory, ‘Competition from Sèvres porcelain’, in *Derby Porcelaine Internationale Society Journal: 4*, ed. V. Baynton, 2000, p.42.
This suggests there was no demand for whole dinner services, which would represent a vast financial investment, but only for a revolutionary ‘souvenir’. The sales records afford very few details about who was buying revolutionary tea or coffee ware, but we can assume that they were wealthy (this point representing the failure of Rolland’s dream for Sèvres’ wide availability) and we can be sure they were French: Empaytaz noted that such political production had alienated foreign buyers. Additionally they would either have been former clients of the manufactory, 
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with the purchase of luxury goods, or, inherent in the choice of ‘Sèvres’ above all other brands, aspirational shoppers. It is at this point, the point of ownership, that I would argue that the paradox implicit in much of Sèvres’ revolutionary production becomes explicit for, to return to a question raised in my introduction, is the painting of the figure of Liberty and Equality not undermined by the fact that it embodies outrageous difference on the part of the buyer? Could the virtue of buying a revolutionary souvenir not be compromised by the expense of doing so? And what was it to use Sèvres porcelain at the dining or tea table? After all, in an age that demanded republican simplicity in all matters, elegant eating could easily be construed as aristocratic. The good patriot should dine frugally on a simple meal of bread washed down with wine which, moreover, should be enjoyed in the company of his compatriots at a fraternal repast, or in the bosom of his family. The intimacy of tea-for-two would reek of secrecy and dissimulation, conflicting with republican notions of openness. This might sound overstated, but as Rebecca Spang writes:

‘The sorts of questions that pre-occupied revolutionaries – debates about fairness and equality, questions about finance and food, problems of fraternity and Frenchness – could be (and were) easily mapped out onto the dinner table. The development and circulation of new models of table-based sociability, new arguments about the association of taste with virtue, new notions of the relation of individual appetite to social cohesion: all marked profound interrogations of the meaning, function and status of the shared meal. Site of frugal repast or decadent feast, the table became a material and symbolic battleground, as important as street names, festivals, and the tricolour patriotic cockade.’ 84

Buying Sèvres porcelain for use at the table was an inescapably loaded act that would single the purchaser out for attention, which, even if the manufactory had been nationalised, might not always be favorable.

The political engagement of and uses for Sèvres’ sculptural production

Their biscuit had at least the potential to appear less blatantly problematic or paradoxical as a result of its inherent aesthetic qualities. Its smooth matt surface and white anonymity perfectly suited the Spartan look then being promoted and could allow their sculptors to engage more fully with the contemporary artistic trends in all their severity. And it would seem that the sculptors at Sèvres did keep pace with developments in the arts, seeming most in tune with a look forged by the contemporary engravers Moitte, Copia and Boizot himself, all of whom worked in the same classicising style that would define Sèvres’ sculptural production. As these vessels with figures after the first two artists suggest, the manufactory owned examples of their work (figs.96-99; 104-105). And it is not unrealistic to imagine that their sculptors were as well acquainted with the prints after Boizot produced for the open market. Certainly it would appear his prints often provided a springboard for Sèvres’ own biscuit models. Their figure, La Force guidée par la Raison is, for example both a translation of an engraved figure by Boizot, and a conflation of two figures that feature in Boizot’s design for La Liberté armée du Sceptre de la Raison foudroyé l’Ignorance et le Fanatisme, engraved by Chapuy (figs.106-108). Her unbending, inexpressive demeanour is characteristic of the small number of revolutionary deities produced at Sèvres during the period, as is her elemental, neoclassical purity, which, I would argue, instils in her an eerily disembodied air of authority. Characteristically austere – stark even – she is made in the mould of Sparta (figs.109-111).

As well as taking cues from artistic trends, the sculptors drew directly on a range of contemporary sources, among them the revolutionary festivals. Their biscuit group, Le Peuple Français terrassant l’hydre du fédéralisme, of which no example remains, was modeled after the 4th station of the festival of Unity (10th August 1793, fig.112), and their Les Martyrs de la Liberté after one ‘act’ in the unrealized ceremony honoring the young heroes Barra and Viala (fig.113). Similarly, they appear to have been familiar with David’s illustrations of military and civil uniforms: Le Républicain, dating to 1794, is dressed as a student of the École de Mars, as imagined by the artist (fig.114). Interestingly the manufacturers also applied directly to the Convention for permission to borrow models – the busts of les grands hommes from the museum for example and
that of Brutus from the salle des séances – in order to execute them in porcelain (fig.115). Their requests were granted, and it is likely that their bust of Brutus was based on the one Joseph Boiston presented to the National Assembly on 1st September 1792. I have found no evidence to substantiate Robert Herbert’s claim that the Convention had commissioned Sèvres to reproduce Brutus’s likeness in order that it be more widely disseminated, and rather it seems to have been done on the manufactory’s own initiative.85

Interestingly, their request attracted the attention, and backing of Barère, who vocally supported them, presenting the manufactory to his colleagues in the Convention in the following terms: ‘Cet établissement est régénére. Les artists qui y sont employés ne s’occupe plus que de créer des monuments en l’honneur de la liberté.’86 Such an accolade from someone of his political stature, widely reported in the press, could certainly be taken as confirmation that Sèvres had mined biscuit’s potential to work for the Republic.87 Yet looking at the kiln records, it seems misleading, for in fact this was a quite a singular proposal put forth by the sculptors. Although some revolutionary items are listed leaving the kilns in the months preceding Barère’s speech, they made up a very small proportion of their total output when measured against the numbers of pieces of a light, neutral neo-classical type. Names such as Les Oies du Père Philippe, les Trois Graces, l’Offrand à l’Amour, and Les Nymphes à la Corbeille occur much more frequently than any with political pretensions. And those revolutionary biscuits that were fired, were all models invented pre August-10th 1792: in fact only one new revolutionary models had been designed at the manufactory between then and 1794 – that is, Despotisme Renversé. Not until February 1794 would ‘revolutionary’ sculpture come to play a predominant part in their oeuvre through the creation of a series of politically engaged pieces.

The close-timing between the proportional increase in Sèvres’ revolutionary sculpture in the Spring of 1794, with an apparently similar shift in production in their painting studio, leads me to suggest that it was at this moment that the order for all their pieces

86 Séance of 5th Nivôse (25th December 1793), Archives Parlementaire, vol. 82, p.39.
be marked with the stamp of liberty was implemented. It is even tempting to posit whether, save for that order, the proportion of revolutionary to non-revolutionary sculpture made there would have remained static, weighed heavily in favor of the latter. However, that question will always remain unanswered and, having made the important point about the late start they made in the production revolutionary sculpture, and the fact that the shift might have resulted from an outside command, it is worth moving on to a discussion of what they did produce in this category during the first half of 1794. In fact their output, made over the course of those seven short months, forms a remarkable body of work, and one all the more important to the art historian in light of the dearth of sculptural remnants to have survived the period. (It is no small irony that they should be left us by Sèvres, of all places!) It is in these pieces that the manufactory achieved its fullest realization of the revolutionary aesthetic and their interpretation of the role of the patriot artist appears both purposeful and resourceful and reveals their sculptors to have had a sophisticated understanding of the revolution, its events, personages and symbols.

One such example is *Les Noirs Libres*, a sculpture occasioned by the abolition of slavery in February 1794 (fig. 116). The abolitionist movement was a political concern that the sculptors at Sèvres had already broached through their brief production of the abolitionist emblem, censored in 1789. If the ruling of 4th February, by which the Convention finally put an end to slavery in their colonies, represented the accomplishment of the campaign mounted by the *Société des Amis des Noirs*, so Sèvres’ free-standing sculpture represents a resolution for the predicament of the enchained slave depicted in their earlier medallion. There has been some discussion regarding the extent that the kneeling figure of the medallion might be considered, if not empowered, then powerful, able to throw off his shackles: as Jean Fagin Yellin writes, ‘[...] his right toes are curved underneath like those of a runner ready to rise’. The sculptor Thomas Ball, who would later model a figure on Wedgwood’s original design, also noted this, describing the slave as ‘just rising from the earth’, exerting his own strength to free himself.’ 

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87 The motion proposed by Barère was reported ‘par divers journaux de l’époque’, including the *Journal des débats et des décrets*, Nivôse an 2, no. 463, p.77, the *Mercure Universel* of 6 Nivôse an 2, and by *Les Annales patriotiques et Litteraires*, no.359, du 6 Nivôse an 2.

Sèvres’ eventual realisation of the now-liberated slaves in freestanding form had taken as its starting point two prints by Boizot (fig.117). However, cut off just above the elbow, they could only ever provide the sculptors at Sèvres with a springboard for their eventual full-length design. The pose they arrived at for the two figures seems to me to be very significant, their muscular legs being so arranged as to take on the position one would when rising from a kneeling position. In Sèvres’ later model then, the slaves have been able to realise the power implicit in their former representation and so to act out the real-life narrative and its joyous resolution. They further enact their liberation through gesture: their unchained hands rather than clasped in a gesture of suppliance, are similarly empowered, pointing to the symbols representing their new found status under French law: free and equal.\textsuperscript{89} Equally, whereas the slave once posed a rhetorical question, he now makes a statement about his equality: running along the sculpture’s base is the caption: MOI ÉGAL À TOI, MOI LIBRE AUSSI.

\textit{Les Noirs Libres} is of a type similar to Sèvres’ earlier model, \textit{L’Éducation du Citoyen}, which I argued, made not just aesthetic but intellectual demands on its viewers. These two figures command our attention, indeed such is the urgency of their communication, that their forward thrust might even risk their dislodgment from the simple block on which they perch. We should not be surprised to learn that Sèvres also undertook two more models – \textit{La Liberté ou La Mort}, and \textit{Liberté et Égalité} – which deployed the same pedagogic tactics, drawing attention to the symbols that they hold aloft (figs.118 and 109). To reiterate a point made in chapter II, it was through the role of the educator that an artist was believed best able to serve \textit{la Patrie}.

Jacques-Louis David though was a firm believer in art’s capacity to instruct by appealing not to man’s calculating head, but to his heart: if one could enflame the soul and kindle therein a love of the fatherland, then regeneration would follow naturally, he argued. Sèvres seems to have been responsive to this philosophy as illustrated by their bust of Chalier, one of a series of martyr portraits undertaken at the manufactory (fig.119). The viewer is not spared any discomfort when confronted by him, a man looking death head on, every nerve in his face, every muscle in his sinewy neck taut
with tension. It is a remarkable and harrowing representation of martyrdom that elicits a strong sense of empathy from the beholder: one cannot remain unmoved in his presence. Relating this piece to busts produced under the ancien régime, it becomes apparent that, like other pieces made during the course of 1794 it represents a radical re-conceptualisation of the purpose of Sèvres porcelain. Before 1789 it was not meant to unsettle, disturb, sermonise or excite – nor to presume to monopolize the viewer’s attention as its revolutionary works undoubtedly do. As the title of the recent exhibition of Falconet’s work at Sèvres L’Art de Plaire suggests, theirs had been a different goal. Rather than looking to their back-catalogue of models, the bust of Chalier is unlike anything made at the manufactory: if anything if anticipates by a hundred years the emotive sculpture of Rodin, sharing a particularly strong physical resemblance with the men portrayed in his Burghers of Calais (figs.120.i-ii). Might the sculptor have seen Chalier whilst working at the manufactory between 1879 and 1882?

Just as Les Noirs Libres dramatized their freedom through pose and gesture, so did Sèvres’ martyrs dramatize the denial of theirs through the only means available to the format: expression. The bravery with which Chalier was said to meet his fate, safe in the knowledge that a glorious afterlife awaited him as a martyr to the fatherland, is written plainly across his features, bringing to mind his last words as reported by the radical press: ‘Why are you crying? Death is nothing to fear for those whose intentions are right and conscience is clear.’ The same point applies to their bust of Le Peletier: his deeply incised eyes, magnificently framed by his arching eyebrows look through the viewer, as if contemplating a fate that we do not share (fig.121). It is surely no exaggeration to suggest that this rarely-seen example is one of Sèvres’ most accomplished and exhilarating busts, which strongly conveys not only the appearance, but the strength of character of its model, murdered for having voted for the death of the king. The strength of Bara and Viala’s characters also inform Brachard’s models of the young heroes (figs.122-123). The two boys’ bravery when faced with their murderers is made apparent in the case of Viala by his steady stare and jutting chin, which bespeaks a resoluteness to do his duty for la patrie that cannot be overcome by a mere threat to personal safety. The portrayal of Bara’s mouth as open would recall

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89 Please note that in my illustration of this biscuit, the arm of the female slave has been snapped off at
to a contemporary viewer his apparent last words spoken to the men trying to steal the horses he was guarding. In both instances, their raised eyes add extra poignancy to their portrayal, suggesting their small size and vulnerability in the face of their looming adult aggressors, who, although absent from the scene, are consequently constructed as being especially brutal and merciless in light of the youth of their victims.

We can imagine that there would have been a considerable market for such sculptural representations of the Revolution’s heroes both with the general public, and its governing bodies, for whom such pieces could fulfil important official functions. For example, in a report to the Comité de Salut Public concerning the embellishment of the Palais Nationale and gardens, the architect Auguste Hubert proposed among other things that the rooms routinely used by citizens waiting to see their governmental representatives be redecorated. Reminders of the building’s 230-year history as the Tuileries palace, intermittently inhabited by generations of Bourbons, were everywhere in evidence, and proximity to the remnants of a now fallen regime, even for a short time, he feared might be corruptive. The danger, however, could be easily avoided if here, as in all national establishments a salon du peuple was built in which only things capable of elevating the soul and instructing the mind were exhibited.90 Moreover, the sculptural busts of heroic figures past and present that he advocated for inclusion in these rooms, should reflect the role of the office it housed: military committees might therefore include a bust of, say, General Dampierre; judiciary offices, a bust of Brutus, and so on.

Today, the use of prints after paintings by Hubert’s brother-in-law, David – his Le Serment du Jeu de Paume, and Barra – are perhaps better known examples of the strategic deployment of works of art to re-signify spaces, educating and elevating their inhabitants through the illustration of moments in the lives and deaths of great men and boys. Yet it appears that more often, sculptures were the instrument through which spaces, indoors and out, were made ready for use in a revolutionary world. Prints depicting the meeting halls of revolutionary councils and committees for

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90 Rapport sur l’embellissement du Palais et du Jardin National, du pont et de la place de la Révolution, présenté au comité de salut public par Hubert, Architect, 20 Floréal an II (9th May 1794).
example routinely include busts of revolutionary heroes overseeing proceedings and although these cannot be taken as reportage, written accounts would appear to corroborate them (figs. 124-125). Where reference is made to sculptures included in meeting rooms, we can deduce that their role was indeed similar to that assumed by Hubert: to inspire and instruct those in attendance. The sculptor Charles Antoine Callamar was, for example, quick to stress the didactic purpose of the bust of General Dampierre, which he presented to the National Convention on 16th June 1793. His hope was that, after encountering the likeness of this military hero, recently killed on the battlefield, 'Tous diront comme lui: Il est beau de mourir pour sa patrie: ce n’est pas d’un seul homme que dépend le salut de la République.' Collot d’Herbois, presiding over that séance, after having thanked the sculptor, talked of the inspiration it would ignite in others: ‘En multiplier l’image des hommes qui ont bien mérité de la patrie, c’est contribuer à leur créer des imitateurs. Tous les soldats voudraient mourir comme Dampierre…’

Sculpture was believed to possess one major advantage over painting and engraving with regards to its potential to re-educate and motivate the public, namely that, rather than presenting a fictional two-dimensional space inaccessible to its viewers, sculpture occupied the same space as its audience. A sculpture could be reached out to and touched, (as Robert Herbert notes ‘Orators sometimes swore ‘on the head of Brutus’), something that gave it a particular immediacy and agency. This becomes startlingly apparent on the occasion when a bust of Brutus was introduced to a session at the Jacobin society convened on August 22nd. ‘Gentlemen, here is Brutus, who will remind you at every turn that in order to be a citizen, it is always necessary to be ready to sacrifice everything, even your children, to the welfare of your country’, declared M. Manuel, who conjured up Brutus as physically present amongst them. The sculpted bust is accorded the role of witness to their subsequent actions, one that will hold them to account if they fail in their duties, even when the greatest sacrifice is demanded of them.

91 Séance of June 16th 1793, Archives Parlementaires, vol.66 p.558. For a parallel example involving the bust of Le Peletier submitted to the Convention by Felix Le Peletier see séance of 22nd February 1793, Archives Parlementaires, vol.59, p.69. Upon receiving the bust, the president proclaimed, ‘Citoyens, si jamais les représentants du peuple s’écartaient de leurs devoirs, le buste de Michel de Lepeletier, placé au milieu d’eux, les rappellerait et leur ferait souvenir qu’entre sacrifier les intérêts du peuple et la mort, il n’y a point à balancer.’
92 Herbert, op. cit., pp.89–90.
Lenain, the bust’s maker, offered its reproduction at a modest cost, an offer accepted by the Jacobin society: each member group would thus be supplied with an example, engraved with the legend “The Mother society has taken Brutus as its patron.”

But, stresses Herbert, who recounts Manuel’s address, the presence of similar busts was not restricted to public chambers: they pervaded streets and homes too. Indeed, the prevalence of busts of Marat, singled out by Herbert as the most frequently represented contemporary hero, is in part confirmed by reports of their being smashed in quantities in all the sections of Paris in February 1795, after l’ami du peuple had fallen from favour. This presupposes that many individuals owned such representations in the first place.

Such a widespread demand for sculptural representations of revolutionary heroes though would not have translated into frenzied attacks on France’s marble quarries nor in overtime for their bronze foundries, despite these being perhaps the most commonly used sculptural materials by those with academic credentials or aspirations. In this instance, neither medium would have been equipped to meet this sudden demand. Marble would have been particularly disadvantaged as a result of the expense of the material and the time needed to work it, two factors that Falconet singled out as having long beset the sculptor. Additionally its weight would have been too heavy to meet the diverse demands that might be made on it by its owner. The potential mobility of a sculptural representation would have been an important consideration at a time when it might be brought out into the open air for inclusion in a procession or festivity. The journal of Célestin de Floriban provides us with several examples that suggest the importance of sculpture’s versatility: during a processional held on 30th Brumaire, jour du décade, an II, for example, he describes a great number of citizens carrying busts of Marat, Lepeletier and Mucius Scaevola ‘sous les bras’. Finally, unlike bronze, marble was not re-producible through the use of moulds, meaning a sculptor, Lenain included, could not hope to keep up with even a fraction of the demand using this medium. These factors conspired against marble playing

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93 Ibid., p.90.
anything more than an aside in the revolutionary art world. Similarly, although bronze had the potential for production in multiples through the use of a cast, this advantage was cancelled out for the same reasons (weight and expense), in addition to the fact that elsewhere, it was being requisitioned and recycled to make arms. It would add an unfortunate element of irony to a bronze sculpture commemorating a military hero such as Dampierre, as that metal might otherwise have been used to fabricate the canon ball used to avenge his death.

Media such as wax, plaster, and ceramic were better suited to the challenge of producing sculpture for revolutionary France. Yet these too were far from ideal: fragile and impermanent, they might be regarded as conveying an unfortunate message about the durability of the republic's legacy. Thus on 5th January 1794, after having thanked Nicolas Pierre Beauvallet for his generous gift of a plaster bust of Chalier, Charles Gilbert Romme turned to address his fellow Conventionels, declaring his surprise that all the monuments of the Revolution are made of plaster: 'Puisque la République a été fondée par le bronze, il faut que le bronze transmette à la postérité les monuments de la République'. In theory, his suggestion that from henceforth, all monuments should be made of bronze was accepted 'au milieu des plus vifs applaudissements', yet in practice for the reasons explained above, the republic needed to make-do with substitute materials.

Sèvres porcelain had a distinct advantage over other materials because of the close resemblance it bore to marble, a legitimate sculptural medium. Yet it could access the market through mass production, a fact already illustrated by my discussion of their medallions in chapter II. Sèvres' sculpture was mass-producible to the point of infinity, so long as the master-mould, taken from an original model, survived intact. From this, the working moulds would be cast, each of which would be good for approximately ten models. The number of finished biscuits would therefore only depend on how many working-moulds were in action at any one time. However, this account of the production process belies its complexity and negates the fact that, as a result of the extensive finishing procedures executed by a répareur, the production of a single biscuit from a mould would still be a laborious process whose time-

96 Archives Parlementaire, vol. 83, p.9-10
consuming nature was, notes Aileen Dawson, reflected in its price. Likewise, the high percentage of pieces needing to be passed through the kilns for a second time highlights the hit-and-miss nature of firing these delicate items at temperatures up to 1050°C for periods lasting up to ninety hours.

If Sévres had been prepared to compromise on their standards then no doubt the manufactory could have produced cheaper and therefore more competitive wares. Yet the consultation of an account of the sculpture department written by Le Riche, chef d’atelier in 1792, suggests this was not an option for a studio deeply committed to maintaining the standards for which it had become famed:

‘L’atelier de sculpture seroit peut-être considérer comme un des moins essentiels de la manufacture, si l’on faisoit attention qu’à la quantité de travaux qu’il fournit, ou à celle vendue, comparativement aux ateliers où se fabriquent les objets de service. Mais il est d’une utilité incontestable par la brillante réputation qu’il attire à cet établissement puisqu’il est de toute évidence que la qualité des groupes, figures, basreliefs en tous genres, sortir des mains des artistes composants cet atelier, a eu depuis des années l’assentiment général des citoyens dont le goût et les connaissances, sont le thermomètre qui détermine l’opinion de ceux qui, moins connoisseur, achètent de confiance des travaux de cette manufacture dans la persuasion (merité) qu’ils sont mieux faits qu’ailleurs.’

No drop in standards, it is implied, could be allowed for fear of damaging Sévres brilliant reputation as producers of sculpture better made than elsewhere. If this were to happen, those citizens of renowned taste whose patronage of Sévres had long given the less experienced amateurs the confidence to make a purchase themselves would take their business elsewhere. The manufactory must not then, appeal to the lowest common denominator, but to the highest. Despite being so well placed with a product that would have been greatly in demand to a broad demographic, Sévres’ commitment to the mass market is left in doubt. This distinctly elitist approach undermines that which Rolland had imagined, namely, the democratisation of Sévres porcelain, ensuring that it remained the preserve of a wealthy and socially aspiring clientele such as that for which they had always worked.

98 Arch Nat., F12 1495
Exact calculations of how many examples of different models were fired at Sèvres, are thwarted by the occasional entry in the kiln records specifying that, for example, '24 petits bustes Marat, Le Peletier, Brutus, et autres' were fired (9 Prarial an 2), or even more confusingly, as on 22 Thermidor an 2, that '32 petits bustes différents', were made. To this confusion is added the fact that many listings in fact refer to an item making a second appearance in the kiln records, having already passed through the kiln once but in need of a further firing for one reason or another. However, taking this into consideration we can still make an estimate that in the region of 26 busts of Chalier emerged from the kilns, 26 of Le Peletier, approximately 36 of Marat, and c.38 busts of Brutus, for example.

It is equally hard to pin retail prices on the different models, given that in most instances, they are listed in the sales records simply as ‘buste’, ‘figure’, or ‘groupe’ making it impossible to establish the prices of individual sculptures. As a general rule, the only pieces given titles are those of a non-political type: those with a revolutionary subject matter are very rarely mentioned by name. We can be fairly confident that this was not simply denotative of the fact that such pieces did not sell, for if they had no market, why else would the manufactory continue to fire groups or busts of a revolutionary type over a short, but not insignificant period? Rather, we must conclude that at least some of the ‘busts’ listed in their sales records, were in fact those of Chalier or Le Peletier, and the ‘groups’, Liberté et Égalité and Les Noirs Libres. Occasionally pieces are mentioned by name and price and these provide a guide: on 29 Fructidor an 2 for example, citoyenne Bellegarde purchases one group, la France Gardant sa Constitution for 120 livres. The next month the same model sells to citoyen Gerard ‘pour le cit. Jonty’, for 110 livres. On 19 Messidor an 2 (7th July 1794), six busts of ‘Marat &’ (the & presumably indicating a second model sold alongside it, Le Peletier perhaps) are sold at 60 livres each to citoyen Bondeux, who might also be the buyer of two busts of La Liberté sold on the same day for 48# each. Elsewhere a bust of La Liberté is bought for 30 livres. No less than three different prices are listed for busts of Brutus sold on different days: 36, 30 and 27 livres. The range of prices rightly suggests that Sèvres might produce the same sculpture in several sizes.
Once more, the names of their buyers are rarely recognizable, with a few exceptions – the most significant of which is the small number of deputies listed among their clientele. These include deputies Baudin, who bought a sculpture of Racine on 19th July 1793, and Battelier, who, ever on site, was regularly tempted into making a purchase. He even commissioned a small number of pieces, including a magnificent (and unique) Sèvres sundial that marked out time in both the new ten-hour and twelve-hour clocks (fig.126). In addition, deputies Duval, Clement and Moyse Bayle made purchases, the latter (a member of the comité de sûreté général) buying service ware to the sum of 1,367 livres! One can only speculate, but it is probable that they were all first-time buyers who, as a result of their positions in the government, were inclined to purchase porcelain appropriate to their newfound status and possibly with newfound wealth. (It should be remembered that, if a lot of people became poorer during the revolution, others made their fortune). The biscuit model of Racine ordered from the manufactory by député Baudin would certainly appear to have been a first purchase, for he proves himself most anxious and unsure about how to order and take delivery of his purchase. ‘Il n’est difficile de me défendre de quelques inquiétudes’, he wrote to Régnier. ‘Je crains les méprises d’adresse, les maladroits qui cassent, et surtout les curieux qui veulent voir. Rendez moi le service de me rassurer.’99 (One cannot help but wonder whether the curieux he fears were his neighbours who might by accident take receipt of the parcel addressed to him, or perhaps his colleagues in the Comité d’Instruction Publique, who might view his purchase of an article from Sèvres for a considerable 180 livres unfavorably).

Yet not all of their revolutionary sculpture was bought from Sèvres: some were given as gifts from the manufactory. On 16 Nivôse an 2 (5th January 1794), Battelier reported to the committee of public safety that the manufactory had sent him a Liberty leaning on the Constitutional Arc, perhaps the model now known simply as La Constitution (fig.127). More works, he is assured, will follow as their execution proceeds. Thus, as well as borrowing sculptures from governmental meeting halls, they displayed pieces there too.100 We know for certain that La Raison (fig.106)

99 Arch. M.N.S., H5, liasse 4, letter of 17th July 1793 (see also his letter of 11th July).
100 Sèvres’ painted porcelain would also have been represented in the Convention hall in the form of nine inkwells, five described in the manufactory kiln records simply as ‘écritoires nouvelle pour la Convention’ and fired on 18th September 1793 (MNS Arch., Vc’3), four as ‘allegorie fond rouge’ and fired on 15th April 1794, (MNS Arch. V1’3 238).
would come to sit alongside *La Constitution* from a letter dating to April/May 1798 sent by the minister of finances, Ramel-Nogaret to Salmon, which makes reference to figures of *La République Française* and *de la Raison* in the governments’ possession. The models had suffered much damage during their time on display, he notes.\(^{101}\)

Another model destined for display in the Convention Hall might have been *Despotisme Renversé*. No example of this biscuit survives, but a lengthy description of it that does gives us an idea of its extraordinary nature. Represented on the principal side is a thin armed, fat bellied figure – Despotism himself, who having fallen from his pedestal on high, crushes beneath him a crowd of armour-clad men symbolizing nobility. From the ground, the grossly deformed Despotism cowers from the sight of Truth and Liberty who stand on a cloud now atop the pedestal. In line with contemporary iconographical traditions, Truth holds a mirror so that despotism might recognize himself, and Liberty a spear, from which hangs a phrygian bonnet in one hand and a shield emblazoned with a cockerel in the other. Joining the fray are figures representing the conquerors of the Bastille who, armed with pikes, attack the base of the pedestal. Beside them, as if to illustrate the impact of these events on all humanity, are an elderly couple who give thanks to the Divinities for releasing them from their bondage, and a child which, alarmed by the commotion, seeks refuge in his mother’s lap. Round its base winds a string of 84 shields bound together by a garland of oak, each engraved with the name of a department. All this is sat on an acajou base, set with relief cameos representing ‘the most remarkable acts of the revolution’, and the whole sculpture is mounted on a massive wooden plinth. The account ends by specifying that at each of its four corners sit decorated porcelain vases that will serve as inkwells, between them, are places to rest a pen.\(^{102}\)

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\(^{101}\) Arch. M.N.S., H7 liasse 4.

\(^{102}\) Tamara Préaud expresses some doubt regarding whether *Despotisme Renversé* was ever in fact successfully fired, suggesting that in the first instance it failed and was later revived under the title *Le Peuple Français terrassant l’hydre du fédéralisme*, another model listed in their kiln records. Préaud, ‘La Manufacture de Porcelaine de Sévres pendant la Révolution: Histoire et Production’, in *Sévres à l’époque de la Révolution*, unpublished conference proceedings, issued by the Archives de Sévres, Sévres, 1992, p.76. I would contest this on three counts: firstly the iconographical program described is very specific to the subject of the fall of despotism and would not fit with that of her suggested title. Secondly, at a time when no other revolutionary models were apparently being made, what else could it have been that Régnier referred to as ‘le groupe de la Révolution’ and which he was so proud to show in the summer of 1793? And finally, as the description of *Despotisme Renversé* would seem to bear some resemblance to the successfully completed ‘Apotheosis of Catherine’ in which a large number of figures are arranged around the base of a column, we might conclude that it was not beyond the bounds of possibility that the hugely complex *Despotisme Renversé* could be successfully completed.
Magnificent, certainly, although Garat’s unenthusiastic reaction to it has already been noted. We can well imagine Régnier’s annoyance at Garat’s stubborn misunderstanding of such a patently remarkable piece, one whose practical function as an inkwell (which Garat singles out as its raison d’etre) is quite clearly of secondary importance to the object itself and what it represents, both in terms of an allegory of the revolution, and in terms of the achievement by their sculptors. Several nineteenth-century authorities have stated that it was intended for display in the Convention Hall and although I have found no documentary evidence to substantiate this, it is easy to imagine that Despotisme might at least have been conceived with its display there in mind. Certainly the symbolism of the piece – especially the disks running around its periphery, each engraved with the name of a department – would function perfectly in the Convention, conferring the authority of the whole nation, the will of the people, on the man holding the pen.

In the event it could not be removed from the manufactory, (presumably on account of its fragility) and in August 1793 it was installed in their showroom where people visited it in situ. Its function there is slightly ambiguous, for surely Régnier was not counting on a random visitor having just the right spot for it back home. Rather one imagines it acted as an installation piece, showcasing the talents and ambitions of their workers and promoting their commitment to the Revolution, and their ability to work within its terms. That the manufactory was still on the ‘tourist map’, is suggested by a report, written in August 1793 by Boizot, (acting in the capacity as a commissaire for the commission for monuments), concerning the removal of pieces from the manufactory to the recently opened Louvre museum. Some examples, he notes, should be left at Sèvres to satisfy the curiosity of the citizens who continue to visit the manufactory on a daily basis.103

103 30th August 1793 (the same month Despotisme Renversé was put on display at the manufactory), Arch. Nat., O1 2061, doc no.463. Furthermore, the manufactory appears to have still been a site of official visits for prominent people, as under the old regime. A letter from Battelier, dated 9th December 1793 to an anonymous colleague at the Convention notes that he has given orders that tomorrow, despite it being the décadre, the painting kiln will be fired in order to procure the maximum enjoyment for the citoyennes, presumably planning a visit that day. He requests that citoyen Carnot and his wife be informed of this. Arch Nat., AF II, 142.
It is harder to draw conclusions about the display of its smaller, more ostensibly ‘domestic’ sculptures. I would hazard though that despite their new austerity of look and function, they would not automatically have been discounted from display at the table. For all, say, *La Constitution*’s unsmiling severity, it does retain an essentially decorative quality and would have looked magnificent ranged on a table – not that its display there necessarily undermined its pedagogic potential or rendered it purely ornamental (fig. 128). Quite the opposite: at the table, Sèvres’ revolutionary biscuit would have had a literally ‘captive’ audience who might well have had some difficulty mentally disengaging from them and the ideas they promote. They are demanding and insistent, so much so that one wonders whether their presence might have tempered the (presumably) lavish suppers held by Moïse Bayle by their recollection of the guiding principles of the Revolution. After all, if the stern Brutus could be called upon to witness proceedings, why should not they?

The dining table would not have been the only space available for their display however and one imagines their look and agenda would have allowed them to make the transition from table to bureau to pedestal with relative ease. The determining factor concerning their display would perhaps have been their size, the range of sizes in which some models were made lending them an element of versatility. Given the fact that the traditional use of biscuit sculpture at the table was endangered by the lack of opportunities for dining grandly, and indeed by the risks of doing so, such flexibility was perhaps essential for biscuits’ survival during the Revolution. Additionally, the fact that Sèvres would in all likelihood have attracted new buyers perhaps unaccustomed in the first place to the usual deployment of biscuit at the table, meant that its availability to multiple display options and uses was vital.

The period of the Terror was an age in which the use of luxury porcelain had arguably outlived its relevance. The fact that, although the manufactory’s sales were significantly down, they continued to produce and sell porcelain – both biscuit sculpture and tea, coffee, decorative and service wares – makes Sèvres a rich case-study for the art historian, for it helps us separate the Revolution’s blanket, all-embracing Spartan rhetoric from a reality in which a high-end consumer-culture survived, albeit in an altered, limited form.
Chapter IV: Thermidor, Directoire, Consulat.

Introduction:

In the months following 9 Thermidor 1794, a regime that condemned as suspect and contrary to the national interest any private pursuit of pleasure by its citizens, gave way to one in which the personal enjoyment (both sensual and material) became a major preoccupation for the French. Certainly this period is most popularly known for the re-emergence of a *beau monde* populated by a *nouveau riche* that had made their fortunes during the French Revolution, and who were now free to dispose of them in whatever way they saw fit without risk to their persons or properties. The radical U-turn from the policies of their revolutionary forbears is illustrated by the fact that the thermidorian, directional and consular governments endorsed these trends in the interest of reinvigorating the sluggish French economy. In 1800, the consular government even passed a law *guaranteeing* that which was by then the lived reality for many, namely, ‘the liberty of pleasure’ of its citizens.¹ And pleasure, writes Rebecca Spang was most avidly pursued and most easily satisfied through the mechanism of consumption:

‘Contemporaneous accounts of Directorial frivolity were intimately entwined with descriptions of buying and selling and largely silent on matters amatory or conversational. [...] French light-heartedness, that is, seemingly no longer manifested itself in witty retorts or dangerous liaisons. Instead, it described a relationship between people and goods.’²

The many foreign visitors to Paris who recorded their thoughts, were unanimous in the belief that it was once more the hedonistic city they knew of old, recognising in its inhabitants the traits of their forebears. Eager to make up for the lost time that the Revolution represented in terms of pleasure seeking, their Parisian hosts by their accounts, lived, enjoyed, and consumed to the full, packing out the public spaces built to cater to their desires, the re-vamped boulevards and stocked-up shops, the restaurants, ice-cream parlours and *tivoli*. In Paris, wrote Lord Swinburne, ‘Le plaisir

et la dissipation conservent leur Empire. And as Johan Gerog Heinzmann noted: 'L’ostentation, l’étalage, le luxe, les distinguent dans leurs maisons, dans leurs équipages, dans leurs vêtements; la sensualité, les jouissances en tout genre les caractérisent.' We see their impressions borne out in the light genre paintings and contemporary caricatures in which men and women dressed in the fashions of the day enjoy life on the boulevards or in their newly redecorated and furnished apartments, in which porcelains in the latest styles once more proliferate.

The period covered by this chapter then, we might naturally assume was one in which Sèvres re-gained a foothold in the market – for it would seem that there was once more a demand for luxury products. And not only might their potential clientele consist of the general public, but members of the ruling parties – the government, who had adopted magnificent lifestyles appropriate to their station. These men in turn, by extending the hand of diplomacy to new allies of the Republic, generated a third market for luxury goods through their embrace of the lavish diplomatic gift as integral to the process of forging and cementing ties. Sèvres, we might logically assume, could gain from these three different clienteles (for whom they had so successfully worked in the past), setting the stage for a return to form for the manufactory and the restoration of happier patterns in sales and production.

Other factors too might have had restorative effects on the manufactory’s fortunes, including the arrest of The Incorruptible and the disbanding of his followers. The Thermidorian government had lost no time in ‘sweeping away wholesale’ the local revolutionary committees especially those concerned with surveillance that had carried out Robespierre’s policies. This instantly undermined the authority of Jean-Baptiste Chanou and his clique, who, with the backing of Battelier, an agent of the Convention, had forcefully assumed power at the manufactory. Although Chanou in fact remained in the post of director throughout Thermidor, he was now working under the scrutiny of Alexandre Besson, agent de la commission d'Agriculture et des Arts, who, aware of his fraudulent behaviour, launched an investigation into Chanou’s

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2 Ibid., p.118.
3 Swinburne, La France et Paris sous le Directoire: Lettres d'une voyageuse Anglaise suivi d'extraits des lettres de Swinburne (1796 – 1797), translated and annotated by Albert Babeau, Paris, 1888, p.66.
time as director. Illustrative of Chanou’s inability to exercise his power in this period, is the return to the manufactory of men arrested as a result of his campaign against them and whose reinstatement he was now asked to oversee. On 11 Pluviôse an III (30th January 1795), Besson proposed that Hettlinger and Salmon, men who formerly held senior administrative roles at the manufactory before being denounced by the most hardened revolutionary factions at the manufactory, should be instated as its co-directors. Although their governance did not formally commence until January 1795, the knowledge of their impending leadership must have drastically limited Chanou’s authority during the remaining months of the Thermidorian regime. Whether Chanou’s victims felt avenged for injustices done them is unknown. Certainly Christophe Oberkampf, expelled from his manufactory by a clique within it led by Voêt, (whose behaviour in many respects parallels Chanou’s), felt that his reinstatement to his commanding position was in itself a fitting revenge: ‘S’il a réellement pu vouloir ma mort, il sera assez puni en me voyant tous les jours vivant’, he wrote. Additionally, the three painters Antoine Caton, Jacques Fontaine and Louis-Gabriel Chulot, arrested and incarcerated by the Chanou-led comité de surveillance for (if they are to be believed), having opposed the ‘pillage’ of the manufactory, were all granted their posts back and compensated for their losses. We might conclude then that with the former administration for the most part reappointed, calm would be re-established and some normality resumed.

The re-establishment of a (post-Terror) calm would seem to be evoked by the décor of the pair of ‘C’ vases belonging to Musée Carnavalet – probably those registered in the kiln records on 1st Frimaire an II (November 21st 1794) and described as ‘vases beau bleu par cit. Dodin, cartel historiques’ (figs.129-130). On the one we see an allegorical representation of Force guided by Reason, on the other, France guarding her Constitution. Both figures and the identifying attributes that accompany them are familiar from biscuits already made at the manufactory (figs.127; 106). Of more

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6 Arch. M.N.S., A5, liasse 5, letter from Bertholet to Commission d’Agriculture et des Arts 3rd Nivôse an III (24th December 1795).
8 The earliest petition asking for justice that I have found dates to 7 Brumaire an 3 (29th October 1795). Letter from Caton, Fontaine and Chulot, to the Commission d’Arts et Manufactures, Arch. Nat., F12 1495. As well as this collective petition, all three artists sent their own reclamations, several of which are supported by a number of their concitoyens, whose signatures follow their own.
interest to me however, are the large painted cartouches on the reverse of each vase, whose scale and detail presupposes that they were intended to be displayed on a mantle piece and in front of a mirror so that both sides would be visible simultaneously (figs.131-132). Both depict Robespierist monuments of the Revolution, real and imagined – the temporary constructions built for the \textit{Fête de l'Être Suprême} on the one, and the Jacobin mountain spitting out thunderbolts on the other. Yet both ‘monuments’ are confined to the background of each cartouche in which they are dwarfed, almost \textit{obscured}, by unlikely arrangements of tricolour coloured flowers that grow abundantly from the earth. This act of the obliteration of now-tainted symbols with flowers, rich with pastoral, peaceable associations is, I would argue, especially significant and suggestive of the superimposing and replacement of a past, and now distant reality, with a new more bountiful one.

Yet it would seem that this vision of renewal and revitalisation was not born out by experience in the manufactory, nor, for that matter, nationally. France had in many respects been thrown from the frying pan into the fire: not only did their war with Europe rumble ever on, but widespread famine and the White Terror now claimed many victims. In fact the manufactory of Sèvres, rather than enjoying a period of renewed peace and activity with all the benefits attached, experienced a period of agitation and intense difficulty for reasons that will be explored in this chapter. Firstly, the manufactory did not regain a foothold in the market: two factors might be cited to explain this fact. It would seem that the manufactory’s location on the road to Versailles, once so advantageous to them, was now very detrimental to their success. Whereas it was once packed with courtiers travelling between Paris and Versailles, there was now little passing traffic – the centre of activity had passed to Paris, in which, at the opening of the period covered by this chapter, the manufactory had no retail outlet.

More fundamentally though, even when their wares were put on public display in the city, as they were on the occasion of the first exhibition of the products of French Industry held on the Champs de Mars between 19\textsuperscript{th} September and 1\textsuperscript{st} October 1798, next to the competition, they fared badly. ‘Tout le monde a vu au Champ de Mars les morceaux qu’ont exposé les citoyen Guérhard et Dihl, et l’on ne peut se dissimuler que ces morceaux ont soutenu la comparaison [with Sèvres] avec avantage’ wrote Louis
Costaz, member of the commission of arts and manufacturers, in a report to the Minister of the Interior in April 1800.\(^{10}\) Although a watercolour sketch of the manufactory's stand would suggest that their display — dominated by vases — was respectable enough, it would appear that this opinion was widely shared, and that the manufactory of Guérrard and Dihl became the one to frequent and to purchase from (fig.133.i-ii).\(^ {11}\) As Frederic Jean Laurent Meyer, a Hamburg lawyer, wrote in his account of his visit to the city, first published in 1798, the manufacture of Guérrard and Dihl not only rivalled but actually surpassed Sévres. He proceeds to list the points of superiority of the former over the latter, encompassing matters artistic and entrepreneurial, concluding: 'Depuis que les privilèges de la manufacture de Sévres, qui était pour le compte du roi sont anéantis, celle de Dihl s’est beaucoup augmentée et perfectionnée.'\(^ {12}\)

In so saying, Meyer hits squarely upon a reason behind the difficulties Sévres was facing in a post-privilege age, namely that the manufactory was now forced to stand on equal ground with its competitors. Since privilege had been outlawed, other manufacturers had been able to establish themselves in Paris without hindrance from the authorities, leaving them struggling in their wake. Sévres’ predicament was clearly recognised by contemporary observers, and as another visitor to Paris, Johann-Friedrich Reicharat wrote, 'La manufacture des porcelaines est encombrée de marchandises; la vente est peu active, depuis que des fabriques nouvellement établies à Paris font concurrence à l’ancienne manufacture royale'.\(^ {13}\) During this period we see the consolidation and growth of a number of manufactories established in the last decades of the ancien régime and during the Revolution and in this respect, the rise of Guérrard and Dihl although stellar, was not exceptional. In fact, according to Régine de Plinival de Guillebon, between the years 1798 and 1815, Paris was home to at least

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\(^{10}\) Arch. Nat., O2 915, 'Rapport présenté au Ministre de l’interieur: Projet de réorganisation de la manufacture des porcelaines de Sévres', 9 Floréal, an VIII.

\(^{11}\) During the exhibition of industrial products, Guérrard and Dihl were one of twelve exhibitors to be awarded a distinction for their porcelain paintings. Strictly, Sévres was unable to compete, for like the other State manufactory represented there (the manufactory of arms, Versailles), it was excluded from the competition because it already received encouragement from the government. See Amaury Lefebure, 'La Première Exposition des Produits de l’Industrie Française en l’An VI (1798)', in La Révolution Française et l’Europe, 1789 – 1799, ex. cat., Galaries Nationales du Grand Palais, Paris 1989, vol. 3, pp.908-909.

187 manufacturers, decorators and sellers of porcelain. ‘Tous n’ont pas exercé leur activités simultanément’, she writes, ‘mais il n’en demeure pas moins que leur travail et leur commerce se trouvent en bonne place dans la vie économique de la capitale.’ Among the twenty-eight verifiable ‘fabricants’ of porcelain included in the total, several were renowned for the extremely high quality and modishness of their wares, which they sold to a style-conscious clientele. Among the other manufactories that flourished during this period were Dagoty, (which would win the patronage of Joséphine Bonaparte), Darté Frères (by 1807 employing 150 workers), and Nast, who, in the exposition industrielle of 1806, would win a gold medal in recognition of the excellence of its work.

Even taking into consideration the fact that Sèvres now shared the market for fine porcelain, their sales to all but the government were frighteningly low, virtually non-existent by some accounts, leaving them in an impossible bind. Without the money to pay the suppliers, the manufactory was left without the basic material to make the porcelain which could help turn around the manufactory’s fortunes. Furthermore the lack of income as a result of a drop in sales led to prolonged delays in the payment of wages to their employees, reducing the manufactory’s 280-strong workforce to a state of extreme poverty. These difficulties effectively sustained the revolutionary tendencies within the manufactory: thus once more worker rebellion will be a subject under discussion here.

Correspondence from these years often makes for depressing reading. Gone is the energy once derived from an exultant rhetoric, which carried the manufactory through the period of the Terror. That powerful wave that so altered the landscape of France had now crested, leaving Sèvres to pick up the pieces of a business fractured by its force: the practical business of survival was now top priority. And yet, although the manufactory cannot be described as ‘dynamic’ in the immediate aftermath of the Terror, it did, under the tutelage of the thermidorian, directorial, and consular governments, find new ways of becoming relevant to the regime and its public, and of

14 Régine Plinival de Guillebon, La Porcelaine à Paris sous le Consulat et l’Empire, Geneva, 1985, p.6. Drawing on material in the Archives Nationales, she numbers the Parisian workforce involved with
adapting to the time. The men charged with the governing of France warrant some recognition for their role in sustaining a manufactory that in many respects seemed to have outlived its relevance as a State institution. In particular, the consular minister of the interior, Lucien Bonaparte’s gamble on Alexandre Brongniart, appointed director of the manufactory on 8 Prairial an VIII (25th May 1800), although risky (Brongniart was only thirty years old at the time) proved inspired. In him they had at last found a man with the knowledge, the strength of leadership, and the courage to implement the meaningful (if sometimes painful) reforms that were urgently required to save Sèvres, and to remarket the manufactory for a new regime.\(^{15}\) Thus, as well as examining the state of penury of the period in more detail, which is itself significant, not least for its prolongation of the worker movement within the manufactory, this chapter will explore the manufactory’s efforts to adapt its infrastructure and production to suit a post-Terror France. This period then, rather than being solely one of degeneration and collapse has its own local colour, its own specific points of reference and interest for the scholar.

**Desperation and hunger fuels rebellion at Sèvres**

The first thing to address is the idea that the re-emergence of a moneyed populace which was lavish in its expenditure, resulted in a return to normality for all the French luxury industries of old. It is a logical conclusion perhaps, but not one borne out in practice and thus sets up a slightly false premise for understanding Sèvres’ struggles during the thermidorian and directorial periods. It is important to appreciate that in fact it was not just this manufactory that suffered: large swathes of French industries were in a similar bind.\(^{16}\) Certainly there were many entrepreneurs and artisans who profited from the reinvigorated market for luxury commodities and services, however many more had sustained much damage to their infrastructure over the past five years and

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\(^{15}\) For more on Brongniart’s background and tutelage of the manufactory during his forty-seven years there, see Derek E. Ostergard (ed.) *The Sèvres Porcelain Manufactory: Alexandre Brongniart and the Triumph of Art and Industry, 1800 – 1847* ex. cat., The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, New York, 1997.
had seen their workforces hugely reduced by mass emigration. Henri Meister, writing in 1795, notes that Paris had been stripped of three-quarters of its domestic servants and *ouvriers de luxe*: the latter being predominantly of foreign (and specifically Germanic) origins had returned to their native lands to wait out the storm. For sure, he writes, many new workers have been attracted to Paris during the same period, ‘mais cette nouvelle population, quelque forte qu’on puisse la supposer, est fort instable, et n’a sûrement pas remplacé, même à beaucoup près, les vides de l’ancienne.’

The war also took its toll on the city’s reserve of able young men as a result of their forced conscription, which further reduced the pool of workers available for hire. The chances of success for M. Olivier’s porcelain factory on the Faubourg St Antoine for example, were waning as a result of this situation, and as Meyer writes, ‘Il lui manque les moyens d’être en pleine activité. Les travaux commandés vont extrêmement lentement, faute d’ouvriers.’

Additionally, because of the unstable environment that the war created, the market for goods too was seriously disturbed, hindering the solid re-establishment of businesses. Two years after Meister had left, Meyer was still able to write that:

Les manufactures en France ressemblent aux ruines d’un magnifique bâtiment, dont les fondements ont manqué et qui s’est écroulé sur lui-même. On voit dans l’intérieur du pays et dans ses villes jadis les plus florissantes les secousses de la révolution et les suites de la guerre la plus sensible et la plus acharnée qui jamais ait désolé la France: partout [...] les manufactures sont abattues sans espoir de se relever. [...] Toutes les entreprises [...] ne sont réellement que des essais, qui donnent des espérances pour l’avenir, mais qui languissent sous une multitude de besoins.’

Much of the artisanal population of France had been reduced to a state of unbearable poverty. Certainly this is implied by the engraver of the anonymous print entitled *Les Portraits à la Mode* (c.1795), in which an artistan, tools of his trade lying idly by, numbers among the destitute men, women and children depicted (fig.134). Behind him, the door of a small derelict building – identified as an atelier – sits locked, good

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18 Meyer, pp. cit., p.240. Interestingly he notes that he observed no such shortage of employees at Dihl’s when he visited that manufactory.
19 Auslander, op. cit., p.148.
20 Meyer, op. cit., p.238-9. Also, see Rudé, op. cit., p.145
only for propping up a famished couple who seek shelter there and as a surface on which to paste *affiches*. The delightful events the flyers advertise – among them a *tivoli*, and a theatrical comedy – throw the poverty of the young couple into stark relief with the implied wealth of others who have not only the financial means, but the leisure to enjoy such entertainment. The engraver’s subtle inclusion of phrygian bonnets, (one surmounts the pike on the atelier’s roof), and a triangular spirit level (among the artisan’s tools) reflects ironically on the legacy of the Revolution which, far from instigating an age of liberty and equality for all proved financially and socially beneficial to the few, and extremely prejudicial for the rest. The stark coexistence of wealth and poverty on the streets of Paris was immediately apparent to visitors: certainly the distressing scene here depicted was one encountered by Meister on his rambles around the city. He records one encounter on the rue du Bac with a woman who had clearly seen better times:

‘Ah! Monsieur, venez à mon secours... Je ne suis point une miserable, j’ai des talents... Vous avez pu voir de mes ouvrages au Salon; mais depuis deux jours je n’ai rien à manger, et j’enrage de faim!’

Lorsqu’au milieu de scènes si lugubres et si douloureuses, je vois encore tant de luxe et tant d’orgueil, tant d’extravagance et tant de frivolité, je ne puis m’empêcher de me représenter quelquefois tout le peuple de cette immense cité, sous l’emblème de ce misérable Marseillaise qu’on voyait alors partout, et que je ne reconnaiss jamais sans une nouvelle surprise.’21

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To the bystander, the manufactory of Sèvres must have looked to be doing comparatively well from the new political regime, and cartloads of their porcelains were carried from the manufactory to Palais du Luxembourg for use by the Directoire Exécutif and other ministries. The amounts delivered to the government, which will be discussed in greater detail, were so high as even to threaten the Sèvres stock rooms with exhaustion.22 However, extracting payment for items delivered proved no easier than it had done under the *ancien régime* and in the short-term, the workers at Sèvres benefited very little from such deliveries, remaining dependant on governmental hand-outs to sustain them. What should have given them hope induced only despair and frustration. As Martin and Evans, employees of the painting studio wrote in a petition

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submitted to the minister of the interior on behalf of their fellow employees: 'Le magazin se vuide tous les jours de ce qu’il y a de plus précieux, c’était sur lui que nous fondions nos espérances, mais aujourd’hui nous n’avons plus de ressources qu’en votre justice.'

At Sèvres, as in Paris, the employees at the manufactory were living in very real poverty which is presented in the bleakest possible terms in the dozens of petitions they submitted to the relevant governmental representatives asking for help. Where help was granted in response, it was usually in the form of handouts of the basic necessities – rations of bread and meat, plus the occasional financial advance. Yet these were but short-term measures and did little to improve the lot of the workers in their suffering. It is unsurprising then that they were, by the accounts of the administration, de-motivated and depressed, nor is it surprising that revolutionary sub-currents rumbled on there, fuelled without doubt by the terrible conditions they endured. Assistance, wrote Salmon to Dubois, was needed urgently, ‘...non seulement pour l’intérêt de la manufacture, dont le travaux sont paralysés par l’effet du découragement général, mais sous le rapport même de la tranquilité publique, intéressé à ne pas mettre au désespoir une population de 300 ouvriers.’ The workers then, were as big a threat as ever.

The manufactory was in fact still the designated meeting place for the local revolutionary committees, in which Sèvres’ employees formed an active contingent. However, in common with Parisian crowds, who unsuccessfully mounted insurrections in the city, culminating with the events of Germinal-Prarial an III and Vendémiaire an IV, it was perhaps not so much politics as hunger that now fuelled their discontentment. As one observer wrote in August 1795: ‘Le public ... ne s’occupe ni de lois, ni de la Constitution; que ce n’est que du pain qu’il demande.’ The cost of living had risen hugely during the Thermidorian and Directoire period putting even the

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22 Arch. Nat., F12 1495, letter from Citoyen La Garde to the Directoire Executif, 16 Floreal an IV (May 1796).
23 Arch. Nat., O2 916, letter from 'Les ouvriers de la manufacture nationale' to the Minister of the Interior, 8th Germinal an VIII (28th March 1800).
24 See Arch. Nat., O2 913, dossier Vendémiaire an V (September/October 1796).
most basic necessities beyond the reach of much of Paris’s working population. In November 1794 the average wage at the manufactory was listed in a report compiled by the Commission des Arts et Agriculture as 80 livres a month, the maximum monthly pay being 200 livres, awarded to the chefs d’atelier, the minimum being 9 livres 12 sous. It is a moot point however whether many were earning more than they had done in 1793, when Garat noted that the majority of workers earned between 30 – 40 livres, and the most skilled, 60 – 80 livres, for surely the inclusion of the chef’s wages in their calculations pushed the average up considerably, distorting the figure. Furthermore their wages would have bought them considerably less in the autumn of 1794 / spring of 1795 than it could have done in 1793, due to the total collapse of the assignat. Lefebvre cites the extraordinary example of meat that in January 1795 would have cost ‘no more than 40 sous’, being priced at 7 livres 20 sous that April! Similarly, bread that cost 25 sous a pound in March 1795 cost a massive 16 livres just seven weeks later. This represents a twelve-fold increase in price! With these figures in mind, it is easy to see how their wages would not be enough to survive on. Arguably however, their listed wages are almost immaterial at this point given that the workers struggled to collect their earnings, often going unpaid for months on end. Most, having exhausted their credit with local bakers were forced to live on the meagre governmental handouts, which by all accounts were barely fit for human consumption. Little wonder then that tension would sometimes break through the veneer of calm at the manufactory, the workers demonstrating forcefully to their superiors both in Paris, where they were regularly received by governmental committees, and to the administration resident at the manufactory.

28 Arch. Nat., F12 1496, report from the Commission d’Agriculture et des Arts to their parent committee, the Comité d’Agriculture et des Arts, 14 Brumaire an III (4th November 1794).
29 Lefebvre, op. cit., p.92.
31 See for example, Arch. Nat., F12 1495, letter from Salmon and Hettlinger to the Commission d’Agriculture et des Arts, 27 Fructidor an III (13 September 1795) presenting this injustice done the workers, who were working without pay.
32 See Arch. Nat., O2 913, dossier Vendémiaire an 5, letter from Salmon and Hettlinger to unknown recipient, 9 Vendémiaire an V (30th September 1796). For a breakdown of their rations in October 1796, see Arch. M.N.S., H7 liasse 2, letter from Mayen Cadet (?) to Salmon and Hettlinger, 5 Brumaire an 4, (27th October 1796). Each man employed there was to receive a pound and a half of bread and a half pound of meat a day, each woman, a pound of bread, and each child in their care, a half pound.
Such an instance occurred 21 Frimaire an VII (10th December 1798) when a number of tourneurs and répareurs presented themselves to Salmon to complain about the fact that they had not been paid in two months. Salmon did all he could to calm and reassure the workers that funds would shortly be made available, yet to little avail. A lengthy account of the incident suggests that it quickly spiralled out of his control, one worker even turning violent and verbally abusing him:

‘Le Citoyen Davignon neveu, tourneur à l’atelier de pâte tendre le même qui injuriat, il est un temps, le Citoyen Bougon son chef, […] le même dont le chef depuis à porté a la direction plainte des malhonnêté insolences réitérés à l’outragé et insulté le citoyen Salmon de la manière la plus affreuse…’

It would appear that Davignon crossed a line that his comrades were not prepared to cross with him, yet it is safe to assume that all of those present had come with the intention of flexing their muscles, forcing an issue through intimidation. And Salmon’s apparent inability to withstand such an attack, feared the Directoire Exécutif, would only result in further outrages.

‘Le citoyen Salmon […] n’a point montré dans cette occasion la fermeté qu’elle exigeait […]. Il a eu la faiblesse de pleurer devant ces ouvrier, soulevé contre son autorité. Cette faiblesse peut donner lieu à de nouvelles scènes, d’autant plus que dans cet atelier où se trouvent les hommes qui se sont montré les plus exaltés et les plus faciles à entrainer dans des mesures violentes et illegales pendant les temps orageux de la révolution’

Correspondence from the period covered by this chapter sometimes furnishes us with windows into the recent: on this occasion for example, correspondence generated by the incident clarifies the history of revolutionary activity of workers employed in these departments, as well as providing a case study of one employee singled out for his actions – Louis-Henry Davignon, one of several of the same family employed at Sèvres (see chapter I). Following the incident, a letter from the minister of the interior, François de Neufchâtel to the Directors of Sèvres, fills us in on Davignon’s personal history of misdemeanours, which, he writes, span the era of the Revolution. ‘J’ai reconnu que cet ouvrier, déjà signalé par les plaintes de ses chefs, et dont le nom figure sur toutes les adresses séditieuses que vous m’avez denoncées à differens
époques, avoit trouble d'une manière scandaleuse l'ordre de la manufacture.' It is perhaps interesting to note that I have not found any commentary on Davignon's behaviour prior to this incident, despite his history, in all probability because the documents have not survived. This begs the question, how many other individuals had similar track records of rebellious behavior of which we are not currently aware?

As it stands, however, this eruption appears particularly: more often rebellion against the management was enacted through mass rejection of the terms of their employment as set. One such example was their reclamation of the seventh day of the decade as a day of rest, an action that they justify on account of physical rather than religious need (although it is perhaps significant that they first presented their demand to the management on 5 Nivôse – December 25th). Having only one day off in ten was, they argued, a threat both to their health and to the quality of their work. For me, less important here is the reason for their actions, but rather the real cross-departmental co-ordination with which it was implemented in defiance of their superiors. On Sunday 27th Nivôse an IV (16th January 1796), two days after having presented another petition to the management, only 107 out of 225 turned up for work, ignoring the ringing of the bell to summon them (described now as a 'sonnerie de comédie' in the Goncourt's account of events at Sèvres). The biggest absences were recorded in the studios of the painters, gliders and burnishers. By 12 Floréal an IV (1st May 1796), all but twenty employees were reported absent without leave on the seventh day of the decade, turning out in full on the tenth. Their arrival en masse on the decadi reinforces the fact that, where working hours were concerned, they wanted to restore the pre-revolutionary status quo, a sentiment apparently quite widely shared. To the distress of the government, the decadi had fallen into general disuse: in this respect the Sèvrians were in step with worker sentiment.

As further evidence of this, we might cite the fact that in this instance, not only do we have an apparent co-ordination of workers across different studios, but different

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34 Arch. Nat., 02 915, letter from the Commissaire du Directoire exécutif près l'administration du departemens de Seine et Oise to unknown recipient, 28th Frimaire an VII (17th December 1798).
36 See correspondence in Arch. Nat., F12 1495.
37 Edmund and Jules de Goncourt, Histoire de la société Française pendant le Directoire, Paris, MDCCCLV, p.201.
manufactories. A letter from Salmon to Dubois, *Chef de la Quatrième division des Bureaux du Ministre de l'Intérieur*, dated 28th Nivôse an IV (17th January 1796), informs us that many of their employees spent their Sunday with those of the manufactory of Gobelins, who had taken similar steps. The Sèvrians were also able to cite the example of all other national manufactories, the manufactories of arms at Versailles 'et autres' in bolstering their case. There was certainly some amount of correspondence between the workforce of Sèvres and Gobelins, as evinced by a letter written by the employees of the tapestry manufactory in response to one sent by the Sèvrians, which had contained an invitation to pass the day with them in fraternal union. As a natural result of their correspondance, the Sèvrians were well acquainted with governmental interventions at the Gobelins, knowledge of which, on occasions, gave them extra leverage when trying to improve their own conditions. As they write in a petition to the Commission d'Agriculture et des Arts,

‘Instruit que nos frères de la Savonnerie et des Gobelins sont en instance pour obtenir une acquisition de salaire, nous demandons que la commission veuille bien ne pas nous séparer d'eux dans ce travail, et fasse marcher au pair pour la jouissance d'une augmentation.’

The apparent co-ordination of the workers across the different studios acting independently of the administration, to whom their announcement that they will take their Sundays back comes as something of a shock, can be read as an indication that some form of worker-coalition existed at Sèvres. It is difficult to access with any amount of coherence in the archival material available – however the occasional episode or letter lets us observe its existence, if only fleetingly. One such occasion is the letter written by the Minister of the Interior to the directors of Sèvres in Brumaire an VIII (October/November 1799) with regards to a petition he had received from the workers:

‘J'ai du être surpris de voir, au bas de leur pétition un petit nombre de signatures prendre le titre de commission nommé par la manufacture. Il en peut et ne doit exister dans un établissement bien gouverné d'autre autorité que

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38 Arch. Nat., F12 1495, letter to Dubois.
39 Arch. Nat., F12 1495, letter from Salmon and Hettlinger to Dubois, 28th Nivôse an IV.
40 Arch. M.N.S., H6, liasse 2, letter from 'les ouvriers et tapissiers et employez' of Gobelins to 'nos frères et soeurs de la manufacture de Sèvres’, 10 Nivôse an II, (31st December 1794).
41 Arch. Nat., F12 1496, please note that although the document is undated, it has been filed alongside a number of documents written in Brumaire an III (October/November 1794). The petition is signed with the names of 65 workers.
What is so significant about this is that it effectively represents an open breach of the Le Chapelier law. Passed on 14th June 1791, the Le Chapelier law, as discussed in chapter II, was expressly designed to prevent coalitions forming amongst workers who shared a common interest: such groupings, it was feared, would keep the spirit of corporation alive in France. It would appear in this instance that despite the clear statement that workers at Sèvres had acted contrary to the law, forming a committee to represent their interests, they were not subject to the punishment accorded that offence, the suspension of their rights as citizens for the period of one year, and the payment of a fine.

The management, headed by Salmon and Hettlinger, had tried to keep a lid on the general discontent of their employees, (identified as the impetus for their rebellions), by ‘indulging’ the workers, sending off petitions on their behalf in the belief that the false-hope this might give would settle them in the meantime. The fact that they were forwarding their requests simply to pacify the workers is stated in a letter from Salmon jeune to Dubois: ‘Mon frère vous remet une lettre que la direction croit nécessaire, au moins utile, pour calmer les mouvements qui dans ce moment s’élevront dans tous les ateliers.’ He proceeds to express pity for the minister forced to receive such petitions, and for the distress that they might cause him, given that he was already doing the best he could for them. Interestingly, Brongniart would take a very different attitude towards the government’s very reception of each and every petition sent their way by his employees, believing that in so doing, they not only detracted from his authority (so necessary for managing an extended group of men), but wasted their own time! Brongniart was by any measure a more successful manager of the manufactory than his predecessors had been, perhaps in part because he would not allow himself to be coerced by his workforce.

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42 Arch. M.N.S., T1, liasse 1, letter from the Minister of the Interior to Salmon and Hettlinger, 14 Brumaire an VIII (5th November 1799).
44 See ibid, pp. 88 – 91. See also Arch. Nat., F12 1496 for a mention of another in-manufactory ‘committee’ established during the administration of Battelier.
45 Arch Nat., O2 915, letter from Salmon to Dubois, Floréal an VII.(April/May 1799).
Certainly the volume of petitions sent the minister and his colleagues was huge for they survive in large numbers in the Archives Nationales and in the archives of the manufactory. Evidently, the demands made in them taxed, and on occasions annoyed their recipients. ‘Je n’ai pas cru devoir mettre cette pétition sous les yeux du ministre, dans la crainte d’affoiblir la bonne opinion qu’il doit avoir du zèle et de l’activité des artistes de la manufacture’ wrote Dubois in one instance. And it was an exasperated Neufchâtel who, upon receiving a particularly acerbic reclamation from the tourneurs of the soft paste studio, wrote to the directors that ‘...la manufacture de Sèvres, la mieux traitée des manufactures nationales est toujours la première à se plaindre.’ As my thesis will have suggested, the workers had had some practice at asserting their rights, and some success, so they can hardly be blamed for keeping up their campaign given the dire predicament in which many of them found themselves. Indeed, in light of this, Neufchâtel’s illtempered remark smacks of calousness!

**Governmental usage of Sèvres Porcelain:**

The government might well have felt frustrated with such aggressive reclamations given that their all too limited funds were stretched to breaking point by demands made on them, not just by the national manufactories, but by whole sectors of French industry. Leora Auslander notes, for instance that in year IV (1795/6), given the crisis in the furnishing trades, ‘nearly everyone in the faubourg St-Antoine received some kind of government aid.’ Yet the government seemed in little doubt about the need to support and sustain the manufacture nationale of Sèvres in particular, on account of its

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46 Arch. Nat., O2 916, letter from Brongniart to the Minister of the Interior, 21 Brumaire an IX (11th November 1800).
47 Arch M.N.S. H7, liasse 5, letter from Dubois to Salmon and Hettlinger, 17 Ventôse an V (7th March 1798).
48 Arch. M.N.S., H7, liasse 7, 17 Vendémiaire an VII (7th October 1799). His complaint is echoed in a letter from Dubois dated 9 Frimaire an 6 (30th October 1797) to Salmon and Hettlinger, in which he writes that ‘Vous savez malgré les privations imposées aux artistes de Sèvres, et qui sont bien connue du ministre, cet établissement est encore le mieux trait des établissements nationaux soumis à sa surveillance.’ Arch. Nat., H7, liasse 5.
49 Auslander, op. cit., p.147.

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value as a school of excellence, an ‘ecole nationale des porcelaines’. It was, claimed the Commission d’Agriculture et des Arts

‘...une pépinière d’excellens artistes, qui se répandant dans les autres manufactures y portent des connaissances et des pratiques précieuses. Qu’elle offre enfin un nouveau moyen de perfection pour les arts, alors tout idée d’une supression vandalique doit être écarter ...’.50

To withdraw support from Sèvres, wrote an anonymous member of the Commission d’Agriculture et des Arts, would be akin to vandalism, a word heavy with connotations of barbarism, and at that point, Robespierrism.51 It was the Directoire government’s duty to maintain and reform the manufactory, and not just for Sèvres’ own sake, nor for that of other manufactories who might learn from its example, but for the national economy as a whole. In a startling revival of arguments already familiar, it is suggested that if Sèvres were lost, French citizens would simply start to buy their porcelains abroad, or to import foreign brands, resulting in the potential loss of that most valuable branch of French industry.

Yet, owing to the progress made by other porcelain manufactories in France, this last reason, posited to justify the government’s maintenance of Sèvres, had effectively been rendered redundant. French citizens wishing to make a purchase, could now choose between a number of excellent French manufactories whose wares might compete internationally:

‘Depuis qu’il s’est établi de nombreuses manufactures l’on ne peut même se dissimuler que quelques unes ne semblent à certains égards éclipser la gloire de cet établissement. Ainsi l’on doit regarder ce genre d’industrie comme parfaitement établi et comme pouvrant se passer des secours du gouvernement.’ 52

In addition, one might conclude that, given the widely recognised equality or superiority even of other brands, Sèvres’ rôle as école would now also be defunct. As

50 ‘Rapport au Comité d’Agriculture et des Arts de la Convention Nationale pour le Commission d’Agriculture et des Arts. Sur le projet d’organisation de la Direction en Gestion de la Manufacture Nationale de Porcelaines de Sèvres, 11 Pluviôse an III (31st January 1795), Arch Nat., F12 1495. Interestingly, this wording echoes Hettlinger’s response to Rolland’s report as discussed in chapter II.
Costaz would put it bluntly in January 1801, ‘...Sèvres, en un mot, fuiroit pas n’avoir aucun avantage sur les manufactures particulières, et alors il ne conviendroit plus au Gouvernement de la faire administré pour son compte.’

Yet, and returning to the rapport of 9th Floréal an VIII quoted above, the Thermidorian and Directoire government persisted in their support of Sèvres for reasons that are immediately striking. Despite the widely recognised equality, superiority even, of the new manufactories to Sèvres, according to this report, the latter was still a source of emulation for them. Should Sèvres be lost, others would also loose their orientation:

‘Mais ce que les fabriques particulières produisent de parfait, on le doit au désir qu’elles ont de rivaliser avec Sèvres. Ainsi, en supprimer tout à fait la fabrication qui à lieu dans cet établissement, il seroit à craindre qu’elle ne se relâchassent et finissent par ne produire que des morceaux d’une exécution mediocre: ce qui entraîneroit tôt ou tard la ruine d’une industrie que nous n’avons naturalisée qu’a grands frais et avec beaucoup de peine.’

This reasoning, I believe, illustrates the resilience of Sèvres’ reputation to changes not only in political regimes but also to the growth of the ceramic industry. Sèvres then was still able to trade on its status as garnered under its glory days of the ancien régime when, by virtue of its privileges, it stood head and shoulders above the ‘competition’ who, hands tied, could only look enviously upwards. The continuing emulation of and rivalling of Sèvres was perhaps in part habit, but also assured by the government’s choice of Sèvres porcelain above other brands for use at their own tables and for giving as diplomatic gifts. (This was despite the fact that, simultaneously, members of the government administration acknowledged the superiority of other brands!) Their choice of Sèvres is significant, suggesting at once their desire to emulate traditions of patronage, and of grand dining more recently repudiated in favor of the fraternal repast, and their association of Sèvres with that tradition. To reiterate my claim made in chapter two, arguably it was exactly because of Sèvres’ history – its ownership by the king, and its use on the tables of the ruling classes – that it was once more preserved by a new regime. There seemed little question of it simply being abandoned and instead, the government furnished the manufactory with some of the funds needed for its running.

The directors of Sèvres were well aware of their indebtedness to the government and
of their responsibilities to it, first among which was to furnish it with the porcelain
they requested for their personal use and for the lavish diplomatic gifts offered the
allies of the Republic. On 11 Floréal an III (30th April 1795) the administration of
Sèvres was instructed by the commission des revenus nationaux to compile a list of
pieces suitable for the latter purpose, porcelains ‘dont la rareté, la fraîcheur, et la
beauté puissent flatter les étrangers, et conserver à la République l’honneur des arts.’

The list of pieces held in store and available for immediate use by the foreign minister
included a dozen ‘lots’ of porcelain amounting in value to 213,100 livres. Among
them numbered a collection of biscuit sculptures suitable for the creation of a beautiful
surtout (valued at 30,000 livres) and the service arabesque (140,000 livres). As well as
being extremely richly executed, the latter was believed to have the great advantage of
being absolutely unique, and would thus give to foreigners ‘une idée advantageuse du
génie et des talents variés de vos artistes’ (fig.135). It is interesting to note that all
the porcelains listed had ancien régime provenance – which possibly denotes the fact
that the manufactory simply had had neither the time nor the resources to embark on
the production of pieces of the requisit magnificence. (We can only speculate whether
or not the receipt of a masterpiece of ‘old’ Sèvres porcelain – such as the service
arabesque, originally ordered from the manufactory by Louis XVI for Marie
Antoinette – from a revolutionary government would have raised an eyebrow. Perhaps,
but quite probably the pleasure derived from the gift would expunge all thoughts of
irony!)

Items from this list were subsequently offered to a number of foreign ambassadors and
diplomats, among them Monsieur de Waitz, who negotiated the peace with Land-
Grave de Hesse Cassel (Nivôse an 4) and who was awarded Sèvres porcelain of the

54 Arch. Nat., F12 1495, letter from La Commission des Revenus Nationaux to the Commission
d’Agriculture et des Arts, signed Bochez.
55 Arch. Nat., F12 1495, letter from the Commission d’Agriculture et des Arts to the Commission des
Revenus Nationaux, 16 Floréal an 3 (5th May 1795).
richest kind to the value of 24,014 livres. The government was more generous still in allotting porcelain to be offered the Monsieur le Prince de la Paix, who had negotiated and signed the treaty of alliance between the French Republic and the Spanish Crown: his present was valued at 36,169 livres. These were extraordinarily generous gifts, and ones that would have sent a powerful message about the (continued) superiority of French arts and, by association, the French State. Interestingly, a letter of 22 Floréal an V (11th May 1797) informs us that all of the porcelain intended for Spain had been transported to the home of the minister of foreign relations where they were on display in his private apartments. The purpose for this detour was to give him the means

‘...de faire connaitre aux divers ambassadeurs du ministère étrangère et à tous autres citoyens et amateurs qui ont des relations particuliers avec lui, la richesse, et la beauté du présent, et particulièrement l’art manufacturiel de cet établissement nationale, et le produit des talents qui le composent.’

Clearly the government was aware of the international renown that Sèvres might win for France, and encouraged its Foreign Office to promote the manufactory’s products by taking items with them on their postings abroad: ambassadors were even allowed a 25% discount on pieces from Sèvres in order to encourage them to buy from the manufactory. It would appear that at least several of them did take advantage of the offer extended to them, and the archives mention pieces dispatched to the ambassadors of Constantinople, Naples and Prussia. Of course, the use of diplomatic gifts to promote the manufactory and, by association, France abroad, dates back to the ancien

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56 Arch Nat., F12 1495, ‘État des porcelaines que la Direction de la Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres a livré pour remplir le présent que Gouvernement destiné au Ministre du Landgrave de Hesse-Cassel’.
57 Arch. Nat., F12 1495, Porcelaines que propose au Gouvernement la Direction de la Manufacture Nationale des Porcelaines de Sèvres, pour le Present qu’il destine au Prince de la Paix. A list of the objects comprising their gift can be found in the same dossier, dated 5 Primaire an 5 (26th November 1796)
58 Among other gifts made by the French government are those given to Prince de Belmont Pignatelly, ministre plénipotentiaire à sa majesté Sicilienne and his staff, and to Monsieur Vincent Spinola, Ministre plénipotentiaire de la République de Genoa. Their gifts, awarded on the 13th and 15th Nivôse an V, were worth 24,000# and 6,000# respectively, and would be chosen from the manufactory stocks by the recipients themselves. In the case of the Prince de Belmont Pignatelly, it is specified that his visit will be supervised, to ensure that his choices do not exceed the bounds of the French government’s generosity. Porcelains worth 24,000# are also awarded the Prussian minister on 1st Floréal an V (April 20th 1797), and on 25th Germinal (14th April) the ambassador of Turin is given a Cabaret fond Bleu Céleste valued at 600#. Arch. Nat., F12 1495.
59 Arch. Nat., F12 1495, letter from Direction of Sèvres to Dubois.
60 Arch. M.N.S., T1, liasse 5, letter from Brongniart to the Minister of the Interior.
61 In the first instance, see Arch M.N.S., H7, liasse 1, letter from Bénézet, minister of the Interior to Salmon and Hettlinger, 12 Germinal an 4 (2nd April 1796), in the latter two, see H7 liasse 3, letter from head of the fourth division of the Minister of the Interior to Salmon and Hettlinger, 19 Floréal an 5 (2nd May 1798).
régime. As such, this represents the re-establishment of a tradition after several-years in which all diplomatic ties with other nations had been severed.

The Directoire government was no less restrained when it came to choosing pieces to furnish its needs and wants, and a huge volume of Sèvres porcelain was purchased for use by the Directoire Exécutif as a collective and on behalf of individuals within it. So big were their orders that the manufactory administration worried that they would soon be unable to fulfil their responsibilities to their benefactors as a result of their rapidly emptying stockrooms:

‘La direction a observé d’ailleurs, que les livraisons, qu’elle a faites depuis quelque temps, par ordre du gouvernement tant au directoire exécutif lui-même, que divers ministres et négocianteurs de puissances étrangers, ont occasionné un vide considérable dans les magasins, notamment parmi les pièces de sculpture, et que tout l’activité des ouvriers de cette partie devient insuffisante pour les remplacer.’

‘[C]omment pourra t’elle [the manufactory] rendre au Gouvernement les services qu’il a droit d’attendre et de demander?’, worried Salmon and Hettlinger. The first documented big delivery to the Luxembourg palace dates to 29 Brumaire an V (19th November 1796) and comprised porcelains totalling 38,404 livres in 1789 monetary terms, (or, if calculated in assignats, 2,304,240). Its delivery was staggered across six days, presumably on account of its size. Tea, coffee and desert service ware made up the bulk of this order, which also included six inkwells. We are fortunate in that the surviving documents itemise the contents of the delivery in some amount of detail, even specifying the nature of their decoration. A notable feature is the number of items identified as having some form of patriotic décor, among them: 6 ‘tasses étrusques fond beau bleu guirlandes de chêne enlacées d’un ruban tricolore attributs patriotiques’ at 120 livres each (calculated according to 1789 values); ‘1 tasse litron, 2ème grandeur, bleu céleste, ruban tricolore, guirlandes de roses’, 54 livres; ‘1 tasse Baudeau, fond rouge, ruban tricolore et attributs’, 96 livres; ‘1 écrivitoire fond porphire

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62 Arch. Nat., F12 1495, letter from Citoyen La Garde, secrétaire général du Directoire Exécutif, 16th Floréal an IV (5th May 1796).
63 Arch. Nat., F12 1495, letter from Salmon and Hettlinger to the Commission d’Agriculture et des Arts, 5 Floreal an IV (25th April 1796).
64 Arch. Nat., F12 1495, ‘Facture des Porcelaines livrées par la Manufacture Nationale des Porcelaines de Sèvres, pour le service du Directoire Exécutif d’après l’autorisation qui en a été donnée à la Direction de la dite Manufacture par le Ministre de l’Intérieur, par lettre du 29 Brumaire an IV.'
cartel attributs patriotiques, riche en or, 84 livres’. Comparatively however, these pieces make up a very small proportion of those ordered and neutral decorative schemes variously described predominated: ‘Fond d’or et fleurs de première mérite’; ‘fond bleu paysages’; ‘fond porphire enrichi de têtes antiques, et de riches arabesques en or’ etc.

This was not an isolated commission from the Directoire Exécutif and more items were ordered for use at the Luxembourg palace on 11 Frimaire an IV (1st December 1795) and on 27 Pluviôse an IV (17th February 1796). The second of the two, for a surtout de table, was, wrote Bénézet, Minister of the Interior, urgently required: ‘Le repast que, dans différentes circonstances les membres du Directoire peuvent se trouver dans le cas de donner en commune, exigeront un grand service en porcelaine avec tous les accessoires.’ A subsequent letter thanking Salmon for the ‘zèle’ with which he met this request provides further details about the order, which, it is specified, was destined for a table of fifty covers. This goes some way to establishing the scale on which government entertaining might take place!

Individual members of the Directoire Exécutif were also active in commissioning services for their own use. On 16 Nivôse an V (5th January 1796), Barras registered an order with Bénézet for a large delivery of service ware from Sévres. Included among the 190 items were thirty-six goblets à glace for the dainty presentation of a delicacy that has since become almost emblematic of directorial frivolity and ‘moral bankruptcy.’ If, as Rebecca Spang writes, ‘...strawberry ices are not as terrifying as the guillotines and revolutionary tribunals of year II, they have nonetheless been considered just as damning.’ Certainly one is given cause to wonder what thoughts passed through the minds of a hungry, unpaid workforce as they set about meeting this order, (for which they might, or might not, receive payment in full).

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65 See F12 1495, letter from Salmon and Hettlinger to Dubois, and Arch. M.N.S., H7, liasse 1. Please note that this is very far from being an exhaustive list of deliveries made to the Luxembourg palace or to individuals within the government.
67 Arch. M.N.S., H7, liasse 3, letter from Barras to Bénézet, 16th Nivôse an V, (5th January 1797). Barras’s order however, is dwarfed by one placed by another director, Treilhard, which was large enough to meet the ‘needs’ of 35-40 covers. Arch. Nat., O2 915, letter from Salmon and Hettlinger to Dubois, 19 Nivôse an VII (8th January 1799).
68 Spang, op. cit., p. 111.
The Directoire and Consular governments were particularly lavish in their purchase of biscuit busts of French military heroes, both living (Napoleon, fig.136), and those who had recently joined the ranks of martyrs to the Republic (Desaix, Kleber, and Latour d'Auvergne). These effigies were regularly acquired by the Ministry of the Interior, for distribution to the families of the soldiers depicted, and to the offices within their different ministries where it was hoped that their display would have a salutary effect on all who beheld them.\(^6\) Sèvres, in facilitating the distribution of such models was, in Lucien Bonaparte's opinion, fulfilling their highest calling. 'Citoyen', he wrote to Salmon on 4\(^{th}\) jour complémentaire an VII (20\(^{th}\) Sept 1799)

‘...les arts dans une république ne peuvent avoir le plus bel emploi que celui de conserver à la postérité les traits des grands hommes et le souvenir des grands notions et de multiplier les uns par les autres par l’influence tout puissant de l’exemple.’\(^7\)

Six months later, Brongniart would argue Sèvres was indeed eminently placed to fulfil this elevated and honourable task because of their ability to reproduce figures more cheaply than could be done in marble, and, importantly, in multiples.\(^7\) The manufactory had certainly taken advantage of their ability to produce multiples in this instance. The first bust of Bonaparte as 1er Consul is listed in the kiln records of 6\(^{th}\) Germinal an VI (27\(^{th}\) March 1800) when eight examples are listed, alongside 45 medallions of him (fig.137). They became regular and often prolific inclusions in firings, something that suggests there was demand for sculptural representations of France’s most esteemed heroes which, the archival records suggest, extended beyond ministerial circles.\(^7\)\(^2\)

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\(^6\) Even before their first bust of General Bonaparte was exhibited for sale, the Minister of the Interior, Letoussiens requested from Salmon and Hettlinger that seven examples be made available for presentation to the members of the Directoire Exécutif, and to Bonaparte himself. These were the first of very many acquired by the minister of the interior on behalf of a range of recipients. Arch. M.N.S. H7, liasse 5, letter from Minister of the Interior, Letoussiens to Salmon and Hettlinger, 15\(^{th}\) Germinal an VI (4\(^{th}\) April 1798).

\(^7\) Arch. M.N.S. H7 Liasse 6.

\(^7\) Arch. M.N.S. T1 Liasse 2, letter from Brongniart to the minister of the interior, 9 Ventose an IX (10\(^{th}\) March 1801). His claim that Sèvres’s busts would have the added advantage of durability in comparison to marble is more spurious however.

\(^7\) Arch. M.N.S., VY10. For the widespread popularity of portraits of the consul and other military heroes see Tony Halliday, \textit{Facing the Public: Portraiture in the aftermath of the French Revolution}, Manchester 2000.
One imagines that Sèvres profited greatly from this steady stream of large commissions and purchases from the government yet they were slow to pay for porcelains bought and rarely seem to have paid in full. In Brumaire an IX (October 1800) when Brongniart, newly appointed to the post of director, compiled an account of the money owed Sèvres by the government, he calculated that they still owed 120,558fr 91c for purchases made during the previous three years. One is left with the sense that members of the government simply took what they wanted without having considered how or when they would pay, something that proved extremely detrimental to the manufactory’s capacity to function commercially.

**Governmental administration and reform of the Manufactory of Sèvres**

If the commercial potential of the manufactory in post *ancien régime* France has not yet been mentioned it was none the less a factor at play in determining the fate of Sèvres which, it was hoped, could finally become a viable enterprise. This was certainly ambitious, for at no point in its history could the manufactory be described as ‘self-sufficient’. The challenge was all the more profound given that the manufactory inherited by the directorial government was in essence very little different to that administered by D’Angiviller, illogical and inefficient in its management and organisation. As such, a priority for the governmental deputies charged with responsibility for Sèvres was enacting reforms that would help transform the lumbering establishment that it was into the streamlined and productive venture it needed to become in a competitive world.

As early as Brumaire an III (October/November 1794) members of the commission d’Agriculture et des Arts, led by Besson, visited Sèvres to assess what support the Republic should offer the manufactory, but also with a mind to making it a more efficient venture, less dependent on their support. At the heart of Besson’s overhaul of the manufactory was the reform of the post of director. The recent abuse of this

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73 Arch. Nat., O2 916, ‘Bordereau des porcelaines livrées au Gouvernement et ministres par la manufacture nationale de Sèvres pendant les années cinq, six, sept, et huit de la République, et les
position by Régnier and his successor, Chanou, was, he believed, the origin of the rot, a ‘langeur déplorable’, which had set in at all levels in the manufactory. In both instances, he writes, the successful candidates were singularly unqualified for the post of director, unskilled, and lacking the necessary knowledge, winning their appointments solely on account of their personal favour with ministers and mistresses, (a sly, if anachronistic, reference back to the guiding hand of Madame de Pompadour).

And not only were they unable to make any positive contribution to the running of the manufactory but their moral deficiencies resulted in their shameless abuse of the manufactory’s resources. However, if the management of Sèvres could be the source of the manufactory’s sickness, the worm in its bud, so it could also be the remedy. In Besson’s view, the revitalisation of Sèvres depended solely on the employment of a man, or men with the appropriate skills and impeccable character: the rest following on spontaneously.

‘Nos premières soins doivent tendre à confier à des mains habiles et exercés la direction de cet établissement. Ce ne sera que lorsque des chefs connus par leur moralité, leur civisme et leurs talent attireront la confiance et commanderont la subordination, qu’on verra fleurir cette branche d’industrie qui fait honneur aux arts français.’ 74

He names three men who combine these qualities as co-directors: Salmon, Hettlinger, who were already experienced in the administration of the manufactory, and François Meyer, a scientist. Their administration officially commenced in January 1795, at which point Chanou was firmly informed that his ‘provisional’ directorship was over and that he must not interfere further in the affairs of the manufactory. 75

This chapter has demonstrated how idealistic Besson was in assuming that the personal virtue of Sèvres’ directors was the key to the subordination of its workforce and to increased and improved productivity. Certainly for Salmon, personal uprightness was no guarantee of respect from his (hungry, unpaid) employees, nor was it protection against attack by them. In fact, Besson’s whole premise for reform was

sommes versés à la caisse de la ditte manufacture par le trésor nationale dont le cours des dites années,’ 21 Brumaire an IX (11th November 1800).
ineffective and insubstantial and barely represented any change at all in the logistics of management. When Meyer resigned on 13th Prairial an III (1st June 1795) on account of his lacking the necessary confidence and abilities to fulfil the demanding role of director, its former management, minus Régnier, once more ran Sèvres.76

Sèvres in fact would have to wait another five and a half years for meaningful reform, which on 9 Floréal an VIII (April 29th 1800) was presented to Salmon and Hettlinger in stark and unapologetic terms by Lucien Bonaparte, Minister of the Interior.77 Driving the reforms proposed was the simple fact that the money raised from sales at the manufactory (estimated here at 80,000 fr) went little way to meeting their annual expenditures (estimated at approximately 300,000 fr), a huge imbalance requiring urgent redress. To bring the two into line the number of employees currently engaged at Sèvres was slashed on his instruction from 216 to 57, a huge loss of manpower, but one which would also represent a significant saving for the manufactory.78 I have found little evidence of any violent reaction by the workers made redundant by this ruling, implemented at the end of Floréal an VIII (May 1800), although several appealed for justice. The blow was softened for the most vulnerable – the elderly – by the implementation of a pensions scheme available to those over the age of sixty who had worked at the manufactory for at least twenty years. In addition to the financial support they would be granted the maintainance of their lodgings and the use of any gardens they might have owned whilst employed there. As for the rest, perhaps there is some truth in Costaz’ claim that, given the fact that they had not been paid in fifteen months, ‘la détresse de la plupart d’entre’eux est telle qu’ils sollicitent leur suppression comme une faveur insigne.’79

He was of course aware of the knock-on effect such mass redundancy would have on production, but the reductions in output that would inevitably result also fitted neatly into his scheme for the manufactory’s reform. As it stood Sèvres was not producing porcelains that set it apart from the competition. They should concentrate on producing

76 Arch. Nat., F12 1495.
78 The number of employees are in fact allowed to rise again following this ruling, 5th Pluviôse an IX (January 25th 1801), minister of the interior sets the ceiling on numbers at 90. To employ in excess of 90, Brongniart is instructed to consult the minister.
fewer pieces, and what they did produce should be exceptional, helping to re-establish
its identity and purpose as a school on firm ground and justify government support. To
achieve this he had to tackle a whole culture at the manufactory and the structuring of
its studios, which were not currently organised to get the best out of their employees.
As it stood for example, (and perhaps in accordance with beliefs upheld during the
Terror), age was revered and rewarded over talent, something identified as totally
backward, resulting in the least productive employees of the manufactory being better
paid and lodged than their more able, younger colleagues, a policy which in time
would have dire consequences:

'On conçoit qu'avec ce régime, cinquante années suffisent pour faire de la
manufacture un hospice d'invalides, c'est ce qui est arrivé. Les cent meilleures
places sont aujourd'hui occupées par les individus qui lui rendent le moins de
services. Encore quelques années et la manufacture sans avoir en rien réduit ses
dépenses, n'aure plus de produits à présenter.'

In short, the manufactory was carrying a lot of excess baggage that hindered its ability
to function smoothly and efficiently in directorial France. The minister took drastic
measures to streamline it with the aim of making it a productive self-sustaining
enterprise, worthy of the name manufacture nationale and of the governmental
sponsorship they could be accorded in that capacity. The achievement of these goals
was entrusted to Alexandre Brongniart, who accepted the directorship of Sèvres on 8th
Prarial an VIII (25th May 1800).

It is an enduring irony that the government itself impeded the implementation of these
reforms, and those initiated by Brongniart by their stubborn refusal to pay the huge
sums outstanding on their orders of porcelains. As it stood Sèvres simply did not have
the capital to make a fresh start and to re-launch itself onto the market from which,
without a depot in Paris, it had been absent for several years. It lacked the funds to buy
the materials and to pay the workers in order to produce the porcelain that would
generate an income. Brongniart was not shy about presenting this 'catch 22' to the
government, writing to them that he had done all that could be expected of him to get
the manufactory into shape – the studios were busy, forms being developed, moulds

79 Arch. Nat., O2 915, Rapport demande par le Ministre de l'Intérieur, signed Costaz, 16 Messidor an
VIII (29th June 1800).
re-made, commercial relations with foreign agents set up. But if money was not made available to pay the employees, all his efforts will all have been in vain: ‘...tut ce que j’ai fait va être perdu’. The amounts given by the government were simply not enough to cover their deficit, and Brongniart was insistent in asking for more money to be made available. Requesting a further 20,000fr to be added to the 15,000fr given by the minister of the interior in Brumaire an IX, he boldly points out that the aid he asks for should simply be looked upon as the payment of a debt which the government has contracted with the manufactory. ‘C’est qu’il ne peut accuser cette manufacture de lui être onéreuse puisqu’elle lui a fourni depuis l’an IV pour plus de porcelaine qu’elle n’en a reçu d’argent.’ He includes a breakdown of the money still owed them.

All this will strike the reader as being no way to re-establish a business or to plan for its future. The manufactory was extremely unstable, beset with problems that had at their root a lack of synchronicity in terms of aims and expectations, obligations and responsibilities between the manufactory and its sponsoring body – the government. Despite the reasonableness of Brongniart’s reclamations (to obtain what was by right Sevres’), they seem to have exceeded what the government felt to be the limit of its responsibility towards the manufactory (at least this is suggested by their reluctance to pay). Thus, in Thermidor an X, the line demarcating where their responsibilities to Sevres started and finished was re-clarified. From henceforth, wrote the Minister of the Interior to Brongniart on 15th (3rd August 1802), work would be divided between two ateliers, one dedicated to the creation of objects for general sale, the other towards the perfection of the ceramic art. The latter should produce only pieces of exceptional and luxurious quality and would be funded by the government at the rate of 6,000 livres a month: the pieces made during this time were to be put at their disposal. If however, the output of the atelier de perfectionnement should not live up to its name that support would be withdrawn: ‘Surtout pénétrer vous de l’idée, qu’une manufacture qui va être, sous les yeux immédiats du Gouvernement cesserait de

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81 Arch. Nat., O2 916, letter from Brongniart to ‘Citoyen Minister’ [of the interior], 6th Germinal an IX (26th March 1801).
82 Arch. M.N.S., T1 liasse 2, Letter from Brongniart to the Minister of the Interior, 21 Brumaire an IX (11th November 1800)
meriter sa protection du jour même où toute autre pourrait le disputer en perfection.’ The government’s contribution to the running of Sèvres would end there: ‘Il ne sera fait à l’avenir, aucun fonds pour la fabrication des produits ordinaires qu’on livre au commerce.’ All other funds needed to cover the costs of supplies and workers were to come from sales.

Soliciting trade: making Sèvres porcelain marketable in a new (post Terror) age

Covering their costs (suppliers and wages) through sales was a tall order. If the government had not hesitated in making Sèvres their brand of choice, the French people were not so easily persuaded – not least because Sèvres had few means of persuasion at their disposal. Whereas once their massive showroom in the manufactory had been regularly visited – the object of an outing with a specific purchase in mind or a spontaneous stop-off on the way between Paris and Versailles – few people now passed by that way. The centre of ‘courtly’ culture and entertainment had shifted to Paris, where every amusement imaginable was proffered, leaving little reason for journeying to the environs. According to Brongniart, writing in 1801, for the past five years, Sèvres had been deserted, save for the occasional curieux, perhaps on their way back from the palace of Versailles, a destination savoured for the frisson with the ‘terrible’ events in France’s recent past that its faded glory provoked. A visit to the manufactory was a fitting conclusion to such an excursion, for its stockroom was dominated by works gathering dust that dated to the ancien régime and recalled the distinct aesthetic of that now defunct age. Porcelain executed in line with modern taste was little in evidence as a result of the bulk buying by the government and merchants, leaving a void that the manufactory, with its depleted reserves, could not fill.

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83 Arch. M.N.S. T1, Liasse 3, letter from the minister of the interior to Brongniart. Brongniart sets out the organisation of the atelier de perfectionement in a letter to the minister dated 10 Fructidor an X (28th August 1802), Arch. M.N.S., T1, lissae 3.
84 Arch. M.N.S., T1, liasse 3, ‘Extrait des Registres des Deliberations des Consul de la République, 4 Thermidor an X (22nd July 1802).
Establishing a depot in Paris would seem the obvious way to present their porcelain to the public, and on 2 Vendémiare an II (23rd Sept 1794), Charles-Eloi Asselin, a painter at the manufactory, compiled a report on the necessity of establishing an outlet selling their wares, suggesting the Louvre as a possible venue. His proposal was promptly rejected on the grounds of it being impossible to execute. To open such a showroom it was argued, Sèvres would have to be confident that the most spectacular, lavish and varied display of all the manufactories could be mounted and maintained, one that would guarantee the manufactory's reputation as producer of the best porcelain. Yet the government, specifies the report, has lifted the totality of Sèvres’ service ware and all their important vases from their stockrooms, items which cannot simply be replaced given the lack of wood to fire new pieces. As it was, given the dearth of wares in the modern taste and of sufficient quality, the manufactory was simply not in the position to proceed with the project. They would be well advised to wait for happier times, lest they should inadvertently do damage to the manufactory’s good name by displaying second rate items.

Only naturally, Sevres’ administration wished to sell off their dated wares in order to generate extra income, and so they were granted permission to exhibit and sell a large quantity of porcelain at the château de St Cloud to coincide with a fête being held there. A fifteen-sided document in the manufactory archives lists pieces transported to the neighbouring château in some detail, inventorying much of the sculpture by name. From this list we can see that it included ten Grands Hommes (unspecified) and numerous mythological characters including 21 ‘Divinités’, and groups depicting Apollo and Daphne, Diana and Endymion, and Venus at her toilette. Among the light neo-classical figures that feature in some numbers can be found several examples of La beauté couronnée, l'offrand à l'amour, and of Falconet’s celebrated sculpture, first translated into porcelain in 1756, l'Amour Menaçant (fig.138). Despite (or perhaps because of) the inclusion of examples of biscuit popular in the ancien régime, the sale was unsuccessful, raising, according to Salmon and Hettlinger, a measly 1000 francs.

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88 Arch Nat., F12 1495, anonymous memorandum, Vendémiare an III, (September/October 1794).
89 Arch. M.N.S., 14, État des porcelaines portées à St Cloud par ordre du Ministre de l’interieur, en Thermidor an cinq [July/August 1797] de la République à l’effet d’embellir et orner les appartements du château où se donnerons des fêtes; la quantité vendu dans le temps des fêtes, celles mises en loterie,
not even enough to cover their expenses. (It should be noted however that their calculations mismatch that quoted in the inventory’s récapitulation des ventes, namely, a slightly more respectable 6,432 francs). Worse still, according to them there had been no visitors to the manufactory since, and sales had almost entirely ceased. In a last bid to profit from the exhibition, they had asked permission to distribute the remaining porcelain by a lottery, but were refused by the Minister on the grounds of it being ill fitting to the dignity of the manufactory.

‘En général, le public est accoutumé à ne voir mettre en loterie que la marchandise d’une mauvaise qualité, et dont on ne peut se défaire par la voie du commerce ce seroit faire perdre à la manufacture la haute réputation dont elle jouit, et donner l’éveil sur sa détresse.’

In fact, a lottery of Sèvres porcelain did take place at St Cloud. Whether it resulted from a change of heart by the minister or from an uncharacteristic show of independence by the administration of Sèvres is impossible to say, but it seems the minister’s original advice might have been sound. Not enough money was raised to risk putting the stately manufactory through the public spectacle of a lottery with tickets drawn from ‘un roue de fortune’ by a minister called on for the occasion. In the event most of the porcelain simply made the return journey to the manufactory stock rooms from whence it came, only for Brongniart to try his hand at disposing of it a few years later. Writing in Messidor an VIII (June/July 1800), Brongniart argued for their auction not only on the grounds of the precious funds they might raise, but also because the very presence of these old, outmoded pieces in the manufactory

celles cassées, et celle rentrées dans les magasin de la manufacture, en vendémiaire an VI [September/October 1797] de la République Française.’

90 Arch. M.N.S., H7, lissse 5, Letter from Minister of the Interior, Letoussseux to Salmon and Hettlinger, 24th Vendémiaire an VI, (14th October 1797).

91 Arch. M.N.S., 14, Procès-verbaux des opérations relatives à la loterie des porcelaines de la manufacture nationale de Sèvres, établi dans l’intérieur du Château de St Cloud, Vendémiaire an VI, (September/October 1797).

92 At the same moment as the unsuccessful sale at St Cloud took place, pieces acquired by the Louvre in 1793 were also sold off. The lack of interest shown in Sèvres porcelain at St Cloud might suggests that the Louvre were selling the bulk of their collection (nearly all vases) because of their low cultural capital (meaning that they would not be missed), rather than because they were of high monetary value, although this is impossible to determine conclusively. Archives du Louvre, M4, dossier 1, ‘État des objets existants au musée proposer par l’administration pour être conformément à l’intention du ministre des finances communes par le directeur général de l’instruction publique vendus au profit de l’établissement du museum, 6 Brumaire an VII (28th October 1797).
showroom suggested to visitors that they were still engaged in the production of ‘gottiques’ porcelains.93

In fact the manufactory had long been trying to adapt their wares for post-Terror France, and as early as Germinal an III (March/April 1795), had applied for the artistic resources – paintings and prints – to be made available to their painters and sculptors in order to modernise and vary their output. As it stood, the antique was the dominant model in use at the manufactory, the artists being able to consult a reserve of antique vases excavated at Herculaneum and bought from Vivant Denon by Louis XVI who loaned them to the manufactory in 1786.94 The antique was, by the reckoning of the Commission d’Agriculture et des Arts who presented the manufactory’s request to their parent committee in Germinal an III, the superior model available, its simple, pure and elegant forms pleasing to both the connoisseur and the artistically uninitiated. Yet the manufactory, they argued, must have recourse to other styles so as to broaden their appeal: ‘Il ne faut pas avoir une seule forme de vase, et un seul goût de décoration, quoique bien choisi, il faut aussi consulter le goût général et dominant du public, non seulement des français, mais aussi celui des étrangers.’95 If people have shown a preference for the products of Sèvres, he continues, ‘…c’est parceque le génie inépuisable de nos artistes sciait créer toujours de nouvelles choses aussi riches que bien ordonnées pour l’ensemble.’ In so saying, he echoes Van Hulst’s call for variety among Sèvres oeuvre, made some forty years previously! The folios of prints and paintings chosen by the direction of Sèvres from those held in the national depots included pieces of topographical interest, pieces that might be bracketed under natural history – referencing the world of flora and fauna – and those illustrating the pinnacles of artistic achievement across the centuries.96

93 Arch. M.N.S. T1, liasse 1. It would appear that this auction was approved: a short letter from the Minister of the Interior dated 5 Fructidor an VIII (19th August 1800) specifies that a room will be made available in the Louvre in which the auction of old porcelains could take place. In another letter, dated 26 Fructidor (12th September), Brongniart is keen to point out to the minister that even the most optimistic estimate of the amount that could be raised (20,000) makes only a small dent in the actual debt of the manufactory (100,000fr), i.e., not enough to cover the government’s outstanding debt. Arch. Nat., O2 916.
96 The list contained 16 series: 1) Voyage pittoresque de la Suisse, par la Borde; 2) Voyage pittoresque de l’Italie par Je[n]on; 3) Voyage de la grèce par Choiseul Gouffier; 4) Les vases étrusques par d’Ancarville; 5) Les antiquités d’herculaneum; 6) histoire naturelle de la Caroline par Calestri; 7) les
Brongniart would also stake much importance on variety choosing in its interest to terminate the posts of the artist *en chef* then held by Boizot and Lagrenee, who had resumed their employment there in the summer of 1793. To employ such men on a fixed appointment he believed risked gradual artistic stagnation at Sèvres. As the Minister of the Interior wrote to Brongniart, (precisely echoing the director’s own advice):

> 'En supposant que le choix de ces artistes ait été bien fait, les morceaux qu’ils produisent sont toujours dans le même genre, et il import que les productions d’un Établissement seroient aussi variés que la caprice des acheteurs. Si l'on s’est trompé dans ce choix ou si l'on n’a pas pris ceux dont le goût et le talent ont le plus de faveur, un manufacture est condamné à n'avoir que des objets d'une exécution mediocre; ce qui finit par la décréder et en amener la ruine.'  

To keep the manufactory permanently in tune with public taste with all its fluctuations and bifurcations, and to ensure that their output was varied, different artists then in fashion would be employed on a fixed contract to undertake specified commissions for Sèvres, or to provide the manufactory with models. Thus in Frimaire an X, Brongniart informed the Minister of the Interior of his intention to obtain from Claudet and Cartelier copies of the figures of *Oedipus* and *La Pudeur*, sculptures crowned at that year’s Salon.98 Other well known artists who furnished Sèvres with designs for specific pieces – both sculptural and painted – include Jean-Baptiste Isabey, François Gérard (whom Brongniart often consulted on matters artistic), Alexandre-Evariste Fragonard, Carl Vernet and Martin Drolling.99 Furthermore Brongniart assembled at the manufactory a number of highly skilled figure painters who not only proved themselves eminently capable of executing the designs of others to a very high

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97 Letter from minister of Interior to Brongniart, 12 Frimaire an IX, Arch. M.N.S. T1, liasse 2.
98 Arch. M.N.S., T1, Liasse 3.
99 Of these artists Isabey must be singled out for the fact that not only did he author designs for Sèvres, but on several occasions he executed them too, proving himself extremely skilled in the art of painting on porcelain.
Brongniart took a wide range of factors into consideration and applied a systematic approach to the problem of making Sèvres porcelain marketable to the public. He began by asking himself the pertinent question, was there anything about Sèvres in particular which made it so unprofitable an enterprise, or were its difficulties in fact in tune with those experienced by others in the industry of porcelain production? On consideration, he drew out several factors which he believed put Sèvres at a disadvantage in relation to the competition, first among which was the price of their products. So exorbitant were they that the porcelain dealers whom Brongniart consulted singled this out as the biggest deterrent in stocking their wares as they were almost impossible to sell on at a profit. The reduction in price that he claims to have already implemented at the manufactory in line with these recommendations was having a good effect on sales and especially sales to dealers, both French and foreign. One change that may have allowed him to reduce the prices of their wares was his employment of workers who could legitimately be paid badly: women and children. ‘Il est reconnu que les enfants et les femmes employées dans les fabriques y sont tous utiles en faisant à bas prix des travaux faciles qui deviendront trop chers executés par des ouvriers plus habiles.’ In light of this he asks the Minister of the Interior for the authorisation necessary to engage a number of women and apprentices, who can be paid little or nothing at all, depending on the task undertaken. The saving, he states, can be passed onto the public.

Brongniart also saw the absence of a depot in Paris dedicated to their porcelain as central to their failure thus far, and appealed for a locale to be provided as swiftly as possible: every month that passed was, after all, a month in which the Parisian manufactories had the advantage. ‘Les porcelaines étalées de toutes parts dans Paris

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101 Arch. M.N.S., T1, liasse 1, letter from Brongniart to the minister of the interior, 9 Messidor an VIII (28th June 1800).
102 Arch. M.N.S., T1, letter from Brongniart to the minister of the interior, 6th Brumaire an IX (October 27th 1800).
103 Arch. M.N.S., T1, liasse 1, letter from Brongniart to the Minister of the Interior, 15 Thermidor an VIII (3rd August 1800). The minister of the interior approves of Brongniart’s idea in a letter dated 23 Thermidor an VIII (11th August 1800), Arch. Nat., O2 915.
arrêtent les acquereurs, les empêchent d'aller à Sèvres, connoître et acheter celle de cette manufacture nationale’ he wrote in a letter dated Frimaire an IX. The establishment of a depot dedicated to Sèvres, Brongniart hoped, would reverse this trend: he suggested a room on the ground floor of the Palais Tribunal, facing the rue de Loi, as the best suited to his plans. Situated in the city centre and in ‘le quartier des arts et du luxe’ such a venue would be forever beneath the eyes of French and foreign buyers. In the event however, the Palais Tribunal was dropped in favour of the marchand mercier Martin Eloi Lignereux’s offer to accommodate them in his showroom on the rue Vivienne. The decision to accept Lignereux’s proposal was reached partly on the grounds that it would entail less expenditure on their part, but also on account of the advantages offered by the latter. His famous showroom already attracted a constant stream of visitors both French and foreign who were drawn to the area by the proliferation of luxury outlets, including those belonging to the porcelain manufacturers Darté Frères and Pouyat. Furthermore, its rich and tasteful décor would ensure that their porcelains were displayed to their best advantage.

Brongniart clearly must have felt that a shop was now a viable option for them to stock and maintain, although not all were in agreement about the extent of their success. Writing in March 1802, Miss Berry, an English woman in Paris recorded her thoughts on a visit to their showroom: ‘Lignereuse’s disappointed me. There were fewer things than I had expected; all in the most expensive, and very few, if any, in real good taste.’ Miss Berry might have been underwhelmed, but Sèvres was in fact much better placed to embark on such a venture than previously. According to a report written by Brongniart for Citoyen Lancel on 16 Messidor an X (4th July 1802), the manufactory had all but abandoned work on the ‘grands travaux’ which used to win Sèvres so much fame to direct its energy into the production of porcelain for purchase by the general public. As he reminds the minister,

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104 Arch. M.N.S. T1 liasse 2, letter from Brongniart to membres de la commission des inspecteurs de Tribunat, 7 Frimaire an IX (28th November 1800).
105 Arch. M.N.S., T1 liasse 2, letter from Brongniart to Minister of the Interior, Germinal an IX (March/April 1801).
107 Arch. M.N.S., T1, liasse 2, Letter from Brongniart to Minister of the Interior, Germinal an 9 (March/April 1801).
‘On a [the gov] voulu qu’elle [Sèvres] se soutenir par ses propres forces ce qui a obligé l’administration à employer entièrement les fonds et le peu d’ouvriers habiles qu’elle a à sa disposition à exécuter les commandes nombreuses qu’elle reçoit enfin à s’occuper à satisfaire le public puisque le public devoit bientôt seul la faire vivre.’

To alert the public to their new priorities, Brongniart placed an advertisement in the *Journal du Commerce* in Brumaire an X (October 1801), which stressed their role as a commercial venture. Stated in the first paragraph was the fact that this national manufactory ‘travaille pour le public ainsi que pour le gouvernement’, a specification perhaps intended to correct a misconception or misunderstanding of Sèvres role in Consular France that might logically have resulted from the absence of their wares from all but ministerial circles. The advertisement, placed also in the Journals *de Paris, des débats*, and *du Soir*, the *Publiciste*, and the *Décade philosophique*, included comprehensive information about where Sèvres was sold and in what manner:

‘Outre le magasin de vente existant dans le local même de l’établissement, et où le public est admis tous les jours, même les décardis, le Citoyen Lignereux tient, rue Vivienne, vis-à-vis celle de Colbert, un dépôt de porcelaine, provenant uniquement de cette manufacture. Le prix est marqué sur chaque pièce.

Les négociants, marchands en détail et commissionnaires qui voudront y faire des acquisitions, trouvent tous les avantages et facilités qu’il est au pouvoir de l’administration de leur offrir.’

His advertisement stresses the fantastic quality of every aspect of Sèvres – the beauty of its paste, designs, ornaments, and decoration – and its fashionability noting work was done at Sèvres by the ‘plus habiles artistes en Paris.’

Soliciting trade so directly was a brave move by Brongniart, especially considering that their constant shortage of materials often held up production. The resultant delays might, he feared alienate potential buyers here promised so much: ‘Les retards ont d’ailleurs l’inconvénient de dégoûter les acheteurs, et l’intérêt de la manufacture exige qu’on délivre le plus tôt possible les objets commandés.’ Certainly they were walking a high-wire at this point, especially if we take as true Léon Groër’s statement that

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109 Arch Nat., O2 916.
110 Arch. M.N.S., T1, 1 Brumaire an X (23rd October 1801) from Brongniart to Le Citoyen redacteur du *Journal du Commerce*. 
‘[w]hen any of the governments concerned [with a state porcelain manufactory] decide that [they] [...] should make a profit, then the quality of its product immediately declined’.\textsuperscript{112} And this would of course have resulted in their abandonment by the French government. Groër’s broad claim though does not apply to Sèvres and as Marcelle Brunet and Tamara Préaud write, rather than embracing the industrial methods becoming increasingly available and that would have enabled them to increase production, they chose to remain artisanal in their outlook and to pursue perfection.\textsuperscript{113} Inevitably this limited their possible clientele base which, they write, was largely composed of members of the European royal families, high dignitaries and their representatives, and foreigners (especially the English). This of course represents a point of continuity between their commerce under the old regime and the new.

This limited engagement with commercial principles was in fact inherent in Brongniart’s own approach to production at Sèvres, over which he maintained almost complete control.\textsuperscript{114} In correspondence with the Intendent Général des Biens de la Couronne, he would later specify that he had never pandered to fashion or to the whimsicalities of taste, preferring ‘the pure’.\textsuperscript{115} There was in fact little sacrifice inherent in such a lofty statement however, for this approach did in fact broadly align him with current trends and permitted him to employ artists then popular with the Salon public. It also allowed him to align himself with the Empire style, which took the neo-classical to its extremes both in terms of its form and decoration. This style, known on the one hand for its heaviness, its use of dark tonalities and massive forms, was in fact adopted for the decoration of Sèvres porcelain – and not only for those massive vases and urns later ordered by the State. Miss Berry, for instance, recognised such characteristics in some of their delicate tea, coffee, and decorative wares on sale at Lignereux’s: ‘The new Sèvres china [...] is not in pretty taste: tortoise-shell, steel, and all sorts of odd dark colours form the ground of the cups, with gold borders upon them.’\textsuperscript{116} Another facet of period style at the end of the eighteenth and turn of the nineteenth centuries however derived from the adoption and adaptation of light

\textsuperscript{113} Marcelle Brunet and Tamara Préaud, op. cit., p.246.
\textsuperscript{115} Quoted in Marcelle Brunet and Tamara Préaud, op. cit., p. 242.
decorative modes and motifs from antiquity, and in particular Herculaneum and Etruria. The delicate silhouetted friezes and classically draped figures gracefully suspended against a coloured background typical of this facet of classicism were now also a feature of Sèvres’ oeuvre (fig.139-140). And to remain in tune with this shift towards a more elemental neo-classicism, we see them accordingly employing a less shrill, more muted range of ground colours, prominent amongst them, lilacs and ochre’s, and the earth-red and black of Etruscan design (figs.139-144). We might suppose that works in this vein were more to Miss Berry’s taste, their overall effect being at once serious and learned, and light and pleasing.

It is harder to trace production at Sèvres during the last five years of the eighteenth century however, not least because few pieces of the period survive today. This absence, it might be assumed, could simply have been the logical outcome of the lack of material and human resources at their disposal, resulting in a slower rate of production and of artistic development during these years. There must surely be some truth in this and certainly it was a reported fact that their stock rooms were depleted of all but old pieces. Yet I would not necessarily argue that this was a period of artistic stagnation. The preponderence of outmoded pieces in their stockrooms could of course have been the result of the government having bought up many new productions before they hit the shelves, a habit that could easily have distorted the public’s impression of the manufactory’s state of health. Certainly members of the government were offered their newest products and in August 1796 for example, two déjeuners are put at their disposal so that they could decide which they would like to purchase. The first, decorated with paysage scenes and an elaborate gilded frieze, was distinguished by the newness of its forms; the second, decorated with African scenes, by its singularity.117 Painted African scenes would indeed have represented a departure for the manufactory, which, until then, had only depicted allegorical embodiments of that continent in sculptural form. Only under the Empire would an African landscape, its monuments and people command the attention of Sèvres’ painters for prolonged periods, charged as they were with the transfer of Denon’s illustrations from his 1802 publication, *Voyage dans la Basse de la Haute Egypte*, onto porcelain. One of the two

117 Arch. Nat., F12 1495, letter from Salmon and Hettlinger to Dubois, 10 Fructidor an IV (27th August 1796).
resultant services, the *Service Égyptien*, can be viewed today at Apsley House.\(^{118}\) In conclusion to this point, it is difficult to establish how many innovations in decoration were made during the directoire period, for the archival records do not always specify 'newness'. Yet this is not to say that none were made.

The archival records though are some help in analysing the manufactory's continued production of 'revolutionary' porcelains, which were still in production until 4 Messidor an III (22\(^{nd}\) June 1795). The batch to emerge from the kiln on that day, and in the days following, counted, out of 718 pieces, 58 specified as having 'revolutionary' décor of some sort, including several figurative works by Dodin depicting Liberty and Equality. The most oft sited decorative schemes are listed in this firing, and in that of 2 Frimaire an III (2\(^{nd}\) November 1794, in which 139 of 513 pieces were revolutionary), as 'alleg[ories] patriotiques', 'attribus et arabesques', 'guirlandes allegoriques', 'rubans tricolors', or some other combination of these decorative motifs. Yet all in all these pieces represent a minority aspect of Sèvres' production, and they decreased greatly in proportion to the number of apparently neutrally decorated pieces produced there. The dominant decorative motifs were of a floral or abstract nature, something which might have resulted from the shortage of figures painters employed at the manufactory, which was broached as a subject for concern on 3\(^{rd}\) Brumaire an VII (24\(^{th}\) Oct 1798). Whereas the manufactory employed a number of artists skilled in the painting of flowers and ornament,

‘...[l]a classe des figuristes au contraire n’est plus composée que de quelques peintres, dont les talens ont établi et soutenu la reputation de la manufacture, mais les longs services, l’âge, ont affoiblit ces talents, de jeunes élèves se forment mais ils sont encore loin de remplace les figuristes de la première classe, il faut des années.’\(^{119}\)

In fact, as Régine de Plinival de Guillebon notes, vegetal motifs were very much in fashion at the close of the eighteenth century and during the Empire, just as they had been throughout the *ancien régime*, adding that their use – and especially that of the cornflower and rose – had become classic, almost banal 'comme il est encore de nos


\(^{119}\) Arch. Nat., 02 915, letter from Salmon and Hettlinger to Citoyen Ministre de l’interieur, 3 Brumaire an VII (24\(^{th}\) October 1798).
jours.\textsuperscript{120} The numbers of painters specialising in the reproduction of flowers then, might not be to Sèvres’ disadvantage in the production of marketable wares.

In any case they were not simply ‘making do’ with what they had, but forging new styles that put good use to the artists then employed, styles which would be developed to fuller fruition under Brongniart. This is best illustrated in Lagrenée’s designs for lidded vases, which exhibit a pared down classicism in form and in the latter two instances, decoration (figs.145-147). The first, with its pine-cone knop and acanthus scrolls employs a Roman architectural vocabulary, the latter two are less clear in their origins, and might be best described as a graeco-etruscan hybridisation with Egyptian inflections. The latter traits are recognisable in the leaf and frond motif radiating from the knop in the first instance, and in the leaf-frond shaped join connecting the handles to the body of the vessel in both.

The many watercolours that survive in the manufactory archives by Charles-Eloi Asselin, by then head of the painting studio, demonstrate shared characteristics with those of Lagrenée, and suggest that his idiom was developed at Sèvres and adapted for the decoration of tea and service wares during the consular period. These illustrations, dating between 1800 and 1804, show the extent to which classical motifs of Roman, Greek and Etruscan origins were used there, either as abstracted ornament – refracted and repeated to span the circumference of the vessel – or maintained as figurative wholes (figs.148-151). Interestingly the same aesthetic can be seen in the letterhead devised for the manufactory in circa an X (1801–02, fig.152.). Contained within its diamond shaped cartouche, whose dominant horizontal axis is marked by decorative, Roman-style palmettes, are two profile portraits of their patron deities, Cybele, goddess of caves (from where clay was extracted), and Vulan, the god of the forge. Alongside them are illustrations of the classically-shaped vessels of a type then being made at the manufactory. The somewhat severe aesthetic is tempered by the gently slanted, scrolling typography that spells out the name of the manufactory.

A few of Asselin’s watercolours preserved in the manufactory archives, reveal an additional inflection or variation within the classicist paradigm practised at Sèvres: the

\textsuperscript{120} Plinival de Guillebon, op. cit., p.45 – 46.
use of *tromp l’œil* imitations of marble and semi-precious stones – porphyry, sardonyx and onyx among them. Examples of this type do pre-date the Revolution, but only in 1800 did the style gain momentum, achieving an often-astounding verisimilitude. In her catalogue and collection of essays on Brongniart’s direction of Sèvres, Préaud suggests that the development of this mode of decoration at the manufactory might be explained by the director’s own interest in mineralogy, (he had trained as a geologist). However I would argue that its flourishing was as much the result of trends in interior decoration developing in Paris and which the manufactory closely followed. Taking the example of the illusionistic representation of stone surfaces I turn once more to Miss Berry, recently returned from a visit to Madame mère’s apartments: ‘The beautiful salle à manger en coupole is painted as if incrusted with porphyry and other marbles, which they imitate now at Paris with the greatest perfection.’ It is, I would suggest, the same architect-led trend that informed work at Sèvres. Indeed surely it is not a coincidence that many designs for new models made at the manufactory originated in the minds of some of the most fashionable architects of the time, including Brongniart’s father, Alexandre-Théodore, who designed several popular models for the manufactory, as well as their décor (see figs.139-140; 143).

Also frequently engaged at Sèvres was Charles Percier, then re-writing the rule-book for architecture and providing interior decoration with a new vocabulary that was, writes Serge Grandjean, ‘to acquire the status of a manifesto of European significance’. The fact that we see many of the decorative motifs, developed in collaboration with his partner, Pierre-Léonard Fontaine, and published as *Recueil des decorations interieures* in 1801 (subsequently re-issued in 1812), employed in his designs at Sèvres, is not insignificant but suggestive of their cross-application of the same principles. Generally speaking the decoration of Malmaison, designed and orchestrated by them, is a good example of the aesthetic shared by both Sèvres and new trends in interior decoration. Many of the motifs that ornament the walls, ceilings and furnishings of Josephine’s beloved home – and I would single out the Pompeian dancers painted on the walls of the salle à manger for special attention – are similar to

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those encountered in the manufactory's production of the same period (fig.153). In fact Sèvres porcelain became part of that vocabulary when in October 1801 the two architects commissioned a number of porcelain plaques depicting literary authors from the manufactory to be incorporated into his design for the ceiling of the first Consul's library at St Cloud.\textsuperscript{125} I am unsure whether or not Sèvres ever completed the commission however, for on August 1\textsuperscript{st} 1802 we find an urgent request for their delivery as Sèvres tardiness is holding up the completion of their work.

Sèvres porcelain then, was re-written for a new stylistic era, one that Grandjean refuses to accept as being simply the tail end of the Louis seize style as Louis Réau and others have claimed.\textsuperscript{126} Rather, he argues that it was an autonomous style that evolved to suit a different historic period.\textsuperscript{127} As such, just as examples of Sèvres dating to the ancien régime need to be imagined in their original settings, whose colours and contours they echoed, so the same can be said of their productions of the late thermidorian and consular periods. To turn once more to Grandjean, just as he can write that 'whether simple or grandiose in concept, no piece of Empire furniture can be properly appreciated when divorced from the architectural setting for which it was designed', so the same might be said of Sèvres' output from the period. Thus the manufactory, through collaborative projects with a new generation of artists and designers found ways of reaching out to a specifically modern public. And given that this 'public' would inevitably have been wealthy, we might hazard that they may have commissioned interiors or furnishings in the current style, knowledge of which was widely diffused, and not only in France, but all over Europe. The celebrity of Percier and Fontaine, and the popularity of volumes such as Plans, coupes et élévations des plus belles maisons et des hôtels construits à Paris et dans les environs by the architect J.C. Kraff and engraver, N. Ransonnette (Paris, 1801 – 2), and Charles Normand's Nouveau Recueil en divers genres d'ornemens, et autres objets propres à la décoration (Paris, 1803) had spawned numerous adherants.\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{125} See Arch. M.N.S., T1, liasse 3, letter from Percier and Fontaine, architects du Palais du Gouvernement, to Brongniart, 8 Brumaire an X (21\textsuperscript{st} October 1801).
\textsuperscript{127} Serge Grandjean, op. cit., p.22.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., p.24.
However Brongniart had been assigned a double mission by the government. Not only was he to produce commercially profitable pieces for the public, but to also restart the longstanding tradition, suspended during the years of the Revolution, of producing the exceptional pieces of a type that set them apart from the competition, so justifying their distinction as a *manufacture nationale*. Brongniart willingly concedes that this tradition had fallen into disuse at Sèvres as a result of the loss of sales during the Revolution, which resulted in the manufactory accumulating considerable debts. Secondly, since then, he argues, the manufactory had invested all its energy into the renewal of models and to the building up of their depleted stocks. And finally, because the government now required them to support themselves with money raised through sales, their most skilled workers have been engaged on the production of marketable pieces for general sale. Yet he reassures them that he had not forgotten ‘*le caractère definitif* and principal goal of the manufactory – namely the production of pieces unlike those produced anywhere else, proceeding to itemise four ambitious projects then being undertaken at the manufactory.¹²⁹ The first project listed, a six-foot candelabra, was on the point of being completed, the second, a series of tables three-feet wide, then awaiting decoration, and the third, the model for a six-foot tall vase, was finished (a half-sized test version of it was awaiting the kiln). Interestingly, the final project mentioned was the execution of glass plaques of an unprecedented size at the manufactory. These must number among their first forays into the field of stained-glass as led by Brongniart himself who, later that year, would deliver a lecture on vitrifiable colours to the Institut de France. (Only in 1827 however would a workshop dedicated to painting on glass be established at Sèvres).¹³⁰

A third market for the manufactory’s products lay with an unlikely demographic – experimental scientists, for whom the manufactory produced a range of implements and instruments for use in the State laboratories – the laboratoire du Museum d’histoire naturelle, that of quai Malaquas, the école centrale and école polytechnique. Porcelain’s suitability for use in scientific experiments was in fact already known in England where by 1779 Josiah Wedgwood had perfected the production of items able

¹²⁹ Arch. Nat., O2 916, rough-copy of a report sent by Brongniart to Citoyen Lancel, 16 Messidor an X (4th July 1802).
to withstand the particular demands made on them in the laboratory.\textsuperscript{131} The earliest evidence that I have found concerning Sèvres’ forays into this area of production, date to the spring of 1794. On 8 Ventôse an II (26\textsuperscript{th} February 1794), the Comité de Salut Public offered a number of retorts, evaporating dishes, crucibles ‘et autres ustensils de ce genre’ made at Sèvres to the Museum d’histoire naturelle de Paris, to assist in their important work on salpetre.\textsuperscript{132}

It would appear that just as Wedgwood had experienced some teething problems when developing his range of vessels for use in the laboratory so did Sèvres, and in June 1794 a number of retorts were returned to them on account of the fact that they leaked!\textsuperscript{133} Any problems seem to have been resolved by 1795, during which they received several more orders for a range of instruments, both standard and customised. In the latter category we must include a lidded crucible made to the exact specifications provided by Gillet and Le Lievre, members of the conseil des mines de la République, in January 1796. A large (approximately A3) double-sided drawing of the required vessel – loaded with both visual and verbal information – was also sent to Salmon and Hettlinger to help guide the workers assigned this commission (fig.154.i-ii). It survives to this day in the manufactory archives, giving us a rare insight into this specialised branch of production at the manufactory: unsurprisingly, no actual examples remain for our study.\textsuperscript{134}

The manufactory also played host to a number of visiting scientists, for whom the ateliers were of as much interest as they were to amateurs of the arts. The manufactory’s appeal is easily understood for here, observing the multiple processes involved in the fabrication of porcelain, a scientist would see tried and tested the principles, theories and hypothesis of their discipline, and as importantly, the practical, commercial usages to which they could be put. Thus in February 1796, Dubois conveyed the request of citizen Hassenfratz, a physics teacher at the école

\textsuperscript{133} Arch. M.N.S., H6, liasse 2, letter from Payen (?) to Chanou, 16 Prarial an II (4\textsuperscript{th} June 1794).
\textsuperscript{134} Arch. M.N.S., H7, liasse 1, letter and diagram sent from Gillet and Le Lievre to Salmon and Hettlinger, 22 Nivôse an IV (11\textsuperscript{th} January 1798).
polytechnique, who was eager to gain access to the manufactory’s studios for himself and his students:

‘Le Citoyen Hassenfratz, instructeur de physique à l’école polytechnique désir, citoyen, procurer aux élèves qu’il instruit, le spectacle des arts en activité et joindre ainsi la pratique à la théorie dont il leur développe les principes; il demand au Ministre à être autorisé à conduire ses élèves dans les ateliers et les manufactures qui sont sous sa surveillance’

Only naturally the minister of the interior, to whom Hassenfratz had sent his request approved of the visit. Dubois continues:

‘Le Ministre, voulant seconder le zèle de citoyen Hassenfratz et favoriser les progrès de l’industrie que ce moyen peut seul étendre, vous invite, Citoyen, à ouvrir a cet instituteur et aux jeunes gens qu’il instruit, les ateliers que vous dirigez et à lui donner autant qu’il sera en vous les moyens d’instruction qu’il espère trouver dans les divers genres d’industrie qui sont l’objet de vos travaux.’

* * *

In conclusion I would argue that this unusual example is once again illustrative of their willingness to meet the multiple demands of the regime for whom they were working. If the production of items for use in scientific experiments would appear a marginal aspect of Sèvres’ production, it was nonetheless important from the point of view of helping secure their relationship with the State, to whom it willingly extended its services – and its example – to scientists and other ceramicists. As Brongniart in turn clearly perceived, in a post ancien régime, post courtly world, the manufactory had to be more than an ornament, a jewel in the French State’s crown, passively earning money and prestige through the production of superior porcelain: it also had to be useful. Thus Brongniart realised that it was to their advantage to offer themselves as a school of sorts and make themselves as indispensible as possible. In line with this

135 Arch. M.N.S., H7, liasse 1, letter from Dubois to Salmon and Hettlinger, 25 Pluviôse an IV (15th February 1796). Another request made on behalf of Hassenfratz and his students, dated 18 Pluviôse an 8 (5th August 1800) specifies the value derived from such visits: ‘Citoyen, un des parties de l’enrôlement [...] dont les élèves de l’école polytechnique retirent le plus de fruit en celle dans laquelle, en visitant les ateliers et les manufactures importants, ils recuillent les lumières des hommes précieux et expériences qui les dirigent.’ Letter from Le Directeur de l’école polytechnique to Brongniart, Arch. M.N.S., T1, liasse 1.
perhaps, he even suggested that a ceramics museum be established within the
manufactory:

'Je crois utile aux progrès de l’art de la poterie et à son histoire de rassembler
d’une manière méthodique dans l’établissement national qui a été l’école d’une
branche de cet art, et qui doit être celle de l’art entier, tous les objets d’art et de
science qui peuvent servir à l’histoire de la poterie fine et commune.' 136

Sylvie Millasseau is surely correct to note the careful wording of Brongniart’s
proposal, which effectively reaffirmed the manufactory’s importance for all those
interested in, or engaged in the art and industry of ceramic production in the broadest
terms. 137 All should look to Sèvres.

This reaffirmation of their centrality through the situation of a museum within their
walls was all the more important (— all the more urgent —) given the fact that, despite
his efforts, in 1801 Sèvres was still in a visibly dilapidated state. Cannily Brongniart
planned to situate the museum, (the genisis of the current Musée Nationale de
Céramique), in what was then their in-house showroom. A massive space which they
were unable to fill (especially since having sold off their old stock two years earlier),
currently it only exposed the languishing state in which the manufactory was in. By
contrast, in removing their sale stock to a smaller space, and replacing them with a
museum of sorts, it would convey a much brighter, self-confident impression of their
health, thus putting the manufactory in a much stronger position in its ongoing fight
for survival. After all, as is well known, the French State placed considerable value on
museums as sites of education and recreation for their citizens.

Yet one cannot be entirely cynical about Brongniart’s intentions in proposing the
establishment of a national museum at Sèvres, for his interest in the progress of the
ceramics industry through every means possible was genuine. His commitment to the
collective welfare of French ceramacists — many times proven during his tenure of
Sèvres — represents a major departure from attitudes demonstrated by Hettlinger and
his colleagues under the ancien régime.

136 Arch. M.N.S., T1, liasse 2, letter from Brongniart to the Minister of the Interior, 10 Fructidor an 9
(28th August 1801). My emphasis.
137 Sylvie Millasseau, ‘Brongniart as a Taxonomist and Museologist: The Significance of the Musée
Céramique at Sèvres’, in Derek E. Ostergard, op. cit, p.124.
Chapter V / conclusion: The Empire

Napoleon’s conscription of the high arts in the service of the Empire is well documented, and throughout the period of his reign, the biennial Salon exhibitions held at the recently re-named Musée Napoléon effectively served as another arm of his propaganda machine. The inclusion of two Sèvres porcelain tables at the Salon of 1812, (rather than at a show centred on the products of French industry where one might expect to find them), suggests that under Napoleon, the decorative arts could be elevated to the same stage as high art. And moreover, as a brief glance at these two examples confirms, they might also share the same ideological purpose, namely the glorification of his regime, whether directly or by association.1 The first of the two, the *Table des Maréchaux*, designed and painted by Jean-Baptiste Isabey, depicts eleven of the Empire’s greatest military leaders and two of its highest ranking courtiers, their portraits sitting snugly between the rays cast by the imperial majesty of the Emperor, who sits enthroned in the centre of the composition (fig.155). Each of the thirteen golden rays is engraved with the name of a battle won under his command. The second, the *Table des Grands Capitaines de l'Antiquité* portrays the most celebrated military leaders of antiquity whose profile portraits (rendered as *trompe l'oeil* antique cameos), encircle a medallion depicting Alexander the Great, and around which scrolls a scene of war (fig.156).2 A flattering parallel between the leaders of past and present and the campaigns they led was clearly intended: their display alongside each other and the fact that in formal terms, they share much in common, would have made the allusion hard to miss.

These two extraordinary examples of Sèvres porcelain suggest that, eight years after we last encountered it, the manufactory was in rude health and that ever adaptable, it had found a new, this time Imperial master and patron. Indeed it was struggling to keep up with the official commissions placed at the manufactory by the Emperor, who regularly forwarded (often considerable) orders for pieces to be used in the Imperial households, or to be given as courtly and diplomatic gifts. However, if this would

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2 Both tables are discussed by Serge Grandjean, in ‘Napoleonic Tables from Sèvres’, *The Connoisseur*, May 1959.
seem to bode well for the manufactory, it must not be forgotten that Sèvres had also struggled to keep up with demand for porcelain by the Directoire government, which had emptied their stock room of its newest pieces without adequately recompensing them. As I suggested in chapter IV, the relationship between the manufactory and its governmental administration was at times strained as a result. Interestingly, Salmon and Hettlinger’s worries about the volume of articles being taken by the Directoire government for their use, are quite directly echoed by Brongniart writing ten years later under the First Empire, this time in response to a request for ninety-seven vases for use at the palace of Fontainbleau. Fulfilling such an order would, he wrote to the duc de Cadore, Intendant de la Maison d’Empereur, strip their stockrooms of ‘les pieces les plus remarquables’ and jeopardise their ability to meet subsequent commissions for other imperial residencies. It would also prevent the manufactory from being able to supply them with items of appropriate splendour that might at any moment be required to serve as gifts in the wake of the Emperor’s recent marriage. In addition continues Brongniart, ‘Je ne parlerai pas du tort que cette espèce de nudité peut faire à la manufacture dans l’esprit des étrangers, et des membres du gouvernement qui pourrait venir la visiter à l’époque du couronnement.’ Ever the diplomat however, he is careful to add that ‘Cette consideration est de peu d’importance si la manufacture a rempli son objet principal – qui est a repondre aux demandes du gouvernement…’.

Clearly Brongniart, like his predecessors, felt an obligation to serve the regime then in power as best he could, but the question remained how. This would not necessarily be self-evident and as this thesis has demonstrated, different governmental administrators had varying expectations of Sèvres and varying ideas about what they might gain from it. The only invariable was that they all wanted more than ‘just porcelain’ out of their engagement with the manufactory. Why should Napoleon be any different? And if not, what did the Imperial household want from Sèvres and where should the manufactory’s priorities lie: in the generating of profit or prestige? In the production of porcelain for the market or in the creation of exceptional pieces for the service of the court? These are questions that Brongniart must have asked of (or which were

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3 Arch. M.N.S., T1, liase 6, letter from Brongniart to M. le Intendant de la Maison d’Empereur, 24 Brumaire an XIII (15th November 1805).
anticipated by) Pierre Daru, Intendant Général de la liste civile, who in a letter to the director dated 21 Frimaire an XIV (12th December 1805) specified that:

‘The manufactory that you direct with so much skill should have but a single object: that of being consistently the first of Europe in all respects. ...The Emperor will derive very little profit from the manufactory; but the commerce of France will gain if it meets the perfection of your example, and this view is more noble, more worthy of the Emperor than the calculations of a small profit.’

If this was in part a continuation of policies implemented during the Consulat, which had set up the *atelier de perfectionnement* in order to maintain the superiority of their porcelains, in many respects it represents a narrowing of that agenda – a reversal even. Under the Consulat they had had a double goal, commercial viability being the other requirement placed upon them. Here, by contrast, it is simply specified that Sèvres should inspire *others* to produce pieces for sale, but keep themselves at arms-length from such inglorious considerations as ‘profit’. In this respect, arguably Daru’s priorities recall those of D’Angiviller’s who concentrated much of the manufactory’s resources on the production of pieces that, to recall the words of his first clerk, generated ‘plus d’honneur que de profit’ for the manufactory. It was a policy that Montucla had been compelled to overturn in light of increasingly desperate times brought on by the emigration of the court, which had formed the backbone of its clientele. It remains for me to examine briefly in this concluding chapter whether the re-establishment of a court at the Tuileries resulted in the revival of patterns of patronage and production already encountered, and to question what it was that Napoleon hoped to gain from his patronage of and purchases from Sèvres.

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Napoleon’s interest in the manufactory in fact predates the Empire by several years. He made his first visit to Sèvres, (which was in the same neighbourhood as the

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5 It should be noted however that they did not entirely neglect the production of wards for an open market however, and throughout the Empire period they continued to produce pieces for general sale.

6 Arch. M.N.S., H5, letter from Montucla to Régnier, 10th March 1790.
Château de St Cloud), on 27th June 1802, spending close on an hour examining the studios and their work, ‘qu'il a voulu voir en détail.’ As a report on the visit records:

‘...il a paru satisfait de voir que cette manufacture, qui à créer en France un art dans lequel aucune nation n’a pu l’égaler, s’occupait des grands travaux qui doivent ajouter à la réputation, qu’elle s’est acquise par les morceaux hardis et uniques qu’elle a déjà faits.’

This firmly repudiates Timothy Wilson-Smith’s claim that, of all the duties the Consul performed, that of visiting French manufactories was among the ‘more tedious.’ Far from it: Napoleon was in fact very interested in such manufactories, and not only because of the material benefits they brought – the employment they offered, and the income they generated for the country. The success or failure of French industries also played an important role in his campaign against the English, the export of whose products – a source of wealth and prosperity for their neighbours – he tried to prevent through the Continental Blockade. As Napoleon famously said to the assembled employees of Oberkampf’s manufactory on a visit there in June 1806, ‘Here in your workshops we are waging the best and surest war on the enemy!’ adding, ‘[a]t least it doesn’t cost my people one drop of blood.’ If Sèvres did not dominate the European market for porcelain in the way Oberkampf did with cotton, they still played a vital role in the fight, for it was hoped that their products would provide inspiration for others engaging commercially in the industry. Thus one imagines that the Minister of the Interior was able quickly to dispel the rumours that, in October 1803, Brongniart reported as circulating around Sèvres, namely that the government intended to close them down. Far from it, and as it would soon transpire the First Consul had very different plans for the manufactory. On 28 Floréal an XII (18th May 1804), the same day he became hereditary Emperor of the French, he attached it to his civil list, thereby pledging his support for Sèvres, now re-styled a Manufacture Imperial, and ensuring its (short-term) future.

7 Arch. M.N.S., T1, liasse 3, report (writer and recipient unspecified), 8 Messidor an X (27th June 1802).
8 Timothy Wilson-Smith, Napoleon and his Artists, London 1996, p.95.
9 Quoted by Albert Boime, op. cit., p.22.
10 Arch. M.N.S., T1, liasse 5, letter from Brongniart to the Minister of the Interior, 3 Brumaire an XII, (26th October 1803).
The collective sigh of relief exhaled by Brongniart and his workforce at the prospect of having their finances regularised and supplemented must have been great, for they had by then lived through fifteen years of profound instability and endured prolonged states of extreme poverty. (One might even suppose that the sight of a shiny new livery for their front of house in green and gold emblazoned with the Imperial Eagle would have made them forget their troubled relationship with figures of authority, if it were finally to secure their livelihood!)\(^1\) It is therefore especially significant that a magnificent Sèvres vase with bas-relief biscuit figures, (identifiable as that designed by Boizot in 1783 and known simply as *Le Grand Vase*) should feature so prominently in the background of George Rouget’s representation of the event (fig.157). Towering over the scene, it seems almost to play the role of proud witness to Cambacérès’ delivery of the *sénatus-consulte* proclaiming the establishment of the Empire. Moreover its presence in this painting is perhaps doubly significant in light of the fact that the moment depicted marks the point at which the Republican era gave way to a regime which saw the formal re-establishment of the court. In this respect, the magnificent and visually dominating Sèvres vase functions as a link between France’s regal past and imperial present. Given its provenance – it was specifically made for Louis XVI – the vase casts Napoleon as the successor to the French throne.\(^2\)

Without doubt Napoleon would have been alert to the symbolic connection with the *ancien régime* that Sèvres could create in the minds of others, and to the advantages that this connection could hold for him in authenticating his reign. It was a link that had survived the Revolution unscathed: indeed, as I argued in chapter III, it was exactly this connection that had made Sèvres advantageous to protect, although it necessarily complicated the existence of the *manufacture nationale* and the production of revolutionary porcelain. In an Imperial regime however, the implicit paradox of ‘revolutionary Sèvres porcelain’ could be superseded, for it was an age in which visual splendour was once more avidly and openly sought.

The First Empire would not prove an enduring regime. Neither the establishment of a magnificent court in which *ancien régime* aristocrats mingled with the new military

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\(^1\) Arch. M.N.S., T1 lissae 6, letter from the Intendant Général de la Maison de l’Empereur to Brongniart, 30\(^\text{th}\) Germinal an XIII (20\(^\text{th}\) March 1805).

\(^2\)
and civil elite, nor his marriage to a Habsberg princess and the production of an heir could consolidate or (in the view of many) legitimate it. And neither would the ascension of his family members to thrones across Europe help protect it. This is amply proven by the way that the Empire collapsed overnight following Napoleon’s arrest by the British, and the fact that, in 1814, France was returned to the same borders as those it had possessed in 1789. Yet while it lasted, the Empire was by all accounts spectacular – indeed it rested its foundations not just on military pre-eminence, but on just that: spectacle.

Napoleon had long realised the importance of pomp and circumstance to the maintenance of power in France, and as the Comte de Miot recalled, he was fond of recounting the fact that ‘Rien [...] ne répond mieux aux habitudes que des Français, qui ont toujours aimé l’appareil et la pompe autour du pouvoir. Si la révolution a fait violences à ces habitudes, elle ne les a point détruits et elles renaissent naturellement de toutes parts.’ Napoleon thus cultivated magnificence and spectacle within his court, and encouraged those in his entourage to do likewise. And nothing if not ambitious, he looked to the most lavish court of all for orientation and inspiration: Versailles, even, if Pelet de la Lozère is to be believed, employing a former page of Louis XVI in order ‘to impart the traditions’ of the palace. ‘This gentleman’, he writes, ‘appeared like an oracle who was going to reveal the secrets of past ages, and, as they say, rejoin the links of the past.’ It is in this environment that the stage was set for Sèvres porcelain to assert its value – both as a ‘useful’ object through service at the table, and to play its role in the culture and diplomacy of gift-giving then being vigorously re-energised and accelerated. To summarise, as a result of its pedigree, Sèvres porcelain facilitated the performance of roles not long since enacted with gusto by their Bourbon predecessors.

Central to life at Versailles, (and indeed at any self-respecting court), was the tradition of dining magnificently, and although on a day-to-day basis Napoleon preferred to waste as little time as possible at the table, eating alone and with minimal fuss, he

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understood its importance. As Jean-Pierre Samoyault writes, ‘Soucieux de renouer avec l’ancien régime et de magnifier la grandeur de son pouvoir, l’Empereur considère que les repas font partie de l’étiquette à laquelle il doit se soumettre.’15 A series of splendid banquets were therefore held during his reign, enhancing life at the Tuileries palace.16 And not only did Napoleon understand the importance of feasting, but the necessity of being seen to do so, and if he did not revive the tradition maintained at Versailles of allowing the public in to gawp at a meal taking place (in the imperial court spectators were drawn from amongst their own ranks) he did commission paintings for public exhibition showing such an occasion underway.

Alongside the two Sèvres tables exhibited at the Salon of 1812 hung a large painting by Francesco Guiseppe Casanova depicting the banquet held on 2nd April 1810 to celebrate Napoleon’s marriage to Marie Louise (fig.158). As one visitor to the Salon, François Edmund recorded, this painting was enthusiastically met by the Salon crowd: ‘Je me suis arrêté près d’un groupe qui s’extasiait devant un tableau qu’il trouvait admirable, et moi, je me suis sauvé en y jetant les yeux. Quel dessin! Quel couleur! Et sur-tout, quel composition! C’est pire qu’une enseigne!’17 Given that by anybody’s standards it was a fairly mediocre painting, we must assume that its lure was the view it offered into how the other half lived. By comparing it to a sign, Edmund thus (perhaps unwittingly) struck upon the painting’s primary function, which was to advertise, as a shop sign might, the product it was trying to sell: the Emperor and the regal grandeur in which he and his kin lived. By this criterion Casanova’s painting is a success, for if the rather lurid green canvas lacks in gravitas, it does convey the richness and decadence of the occasion. In line with his brief to convey the splendour of the feast, Casanova is careful to pick out details from the architectural backdrop, the dresses worn, and the table settings, all of which in actuality would have been carefully chosen and orchestrated to create the maximum effect. Thus the painting is also a rare and useful source for those with an interest in ceramics for clearly observable alongside the Emperor’s famous vermeil, are Sèvres flower vases and a series of small white statues that punctuate the curve of the table. These are the biscuit

16 See ibid., p.203.
figures à l'antique made at the manufactory to accompany the Service particulier de l'Empereur (of which more will be said later).

During his ten-year reign, the Emperor was provisioned with many services by the manufactory, indeed each of his palaces was in theory to be equipped with two: one for the first course, and one for the dessert. As Tamara Préaud has noted, this was not always the case however, in part because some of his houses were too infrequently occupied to warrant such an expense, but also because various services in the process of being made for him were requisitioned and used instead for gifts. The significance of gift-giving for Napoleon should not be underestimated for, as François Furet has observed, the distribution of 'rewards, honours and jobs' had traditionally been a royal prerogative, and therefore one that he wished to identify himself with. Napoleon's generosity was (necessarily) on an unprecedented scale however given the huge administration, military and court, that he needed to dignify and indulge, and foreign alliances that he needed to smooth. But this did not have the effect of watering-down his offerings so that they stretched further, and Napoleon was famous not just for giving often, but for giving in quantity. Dinner services were of course a classic princely or diplomatic gift, and during his reign, many diplomats (including Metternich), and European monarchs were presented with Sèvres' latest, grandest productions. Tsar Alexander I was even the beneficiary of two large services within as many years – the Service Olympique in 1807, and in 1808, the extraordinary Service Égyptian (figs.159-160). The latter had been promised him the previous year at the Peace of Tilsit as part of the customary reparation.

Napoleon found opportunities to distribute items to a range of recipients however. His entourage, for example, would always benefit from his generosity when they accompanied him on his annual visits to Sèvres. Such occasions were of great importance for the Emperor, for they not only strengthened the bonds between him and the manufactory but between him and the past, for once more they represented the continuation of a tradition established under the rule of the Bourbons. Often the visits

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17 François Edmund (pseud.), Les Étrennes, ou entretiens des morts sur les nouveautés littéraires, l'Académie Française, le Conservatoire de Musique, le Salon, les Journeaux et les Spectacles, recueillis par un témoin auriculaire revenu ces jours passés des enfers, Paris 1813.
18 Tamara Préaud, 'Les Services de Porcelaine de Sèvres sous le Premier Empire, la Restauration et le Second Empire', in ibid., p.216.
were made in the company of distinguished guests, eager to see the celebrated
manufactory for themselves. On 5th January 1805 following the Emperor’s
coronation, it was the turn of the much-beleaguered Pope to visit: ‘Sa sainteté désire
voir avec detail cet établissement et m’engage à y introduire le moins possible
d’étrangers…’ wrote Brongniart to the Mayor of Sèvres.

Given his interest in the manufactory, one can easily imagine the Pope’s delight upon
receiving a lavish gift of Sèvres porcelain from the Emperor. It included two
candelabra valued at 24,000fr, a déjeuner riche valued at 845fr, a service d’entrée et
de dessert pour une seule personne, at 4,466fr, and an (obligatory) bust of the
Emperor valued at 1,000fr. These items were put on display in the Grande Gallerie of
the Louvre, where they were formally presented to him. Unlike the Bourbons who,
we remember, shied away from displaying the gifts intended for the Comtesse du
Nord for fear of attracting speculations regarding their cost, undermining the dignity
of the gift, Napoleon had no such qualms. In exhibiting his gift thus he was self-
consciously performing (perhaps for the benefit of unbelievers who thought him no
more than a jumped-up general) the privileges of royalty.

New Year celebrations provided another occasion on which the Emperor would
distribute items of Sèvres porcelain, this time to members of his family and to the
ladies of his court. This newly formed tradition would have represented very good
business for the manufactory, for there were often several dozen recipients of these
gifts, which might consist of pieces of considerable value: in 1814, for example, 37
people were presented with items which amounted to a total of 93,130fr. Perhaps it

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19 François Furet, op. cit., p.224.
20 Tamara Préaud, ‘Brongniart as Administrator’, in Derek E. Ostergard, op. cit., p.45.
21 Arch. M.N.S., T1, liasse 6, letter from Brongniart to the Mayor of Sèvres, 14 Nivôse an 13 (4th
January 1805). Among the specially selected and, presumably by their standards, sparse welcoming
party (among whom numbered the local government, the dammes de charité, M. le Juge de Paix), the
local cure was invited on the condition that he did not ‘harangue’ the Pope!
22 Arch. M.N.S., T1, liasse 6, letter from the Intendant de la Maison d’Empereur to Brongniart, 9
Germinal an 13 (30th March 1805).
23 Grand State occasions, such as Napoleon’s coronation at which the Pope had played a pivotal (if
irregular) role were routinely occasions for the presentation of copious amounts of Sèvres porcelain,
along with other treasures to those who had participated in the ceremonies. For details of some of the
gifts made by the Emperor following, in the first instance, his marriage to Marie-Louise, and in the
second, the baptism of their son, see A. Maze-Sencier, Les Fournisseurs de Napoléon 1er et des deux
24 Ibid., pp.239–241. For a sample list of the items offered by Napoleon on 1st January 1811, see
even replaced the income lost since the cessation in 1793 of the New Year sales which
were hosted first by Louis XV and then by his heir at Versailles, and for a short while
during the Revolution, at the Tuileries. Napoleon’s replacement of a sale with an
occasion on which to make gifts however, should not surprise us, for here was another
opportunity to be munificent and to strengthen the dependence of members of the
court on him for the distribution of trinkets and trifles to which they had grown
accustomed.

So great was the scale on which Napoleon bought from the manufactory that one
wonders whether Sèvres could have stayed in business simply through the satisfaction
of orders from the Imperial household. Surely his patronage can to a large extent be
accredited with the fact that, during the Empire period, the manufactory’s turnover
increased roughly fourfold and, whereas in an XII (1803/04), sales totalled 110,794fr,
in 1810, they amounted to 406,775fr.25 Yet Napoleon was in many respects a hard
master to serve, for by nature he was both easy to displease and hard to satisfy. For
example, he was less than impressed with the standards displayed by the pieces
delivered to the Tuileries on 31st December 1811 for distribution the following day,
writing bluntly and with the lack of grace for which he was famous to the Duc de
Cadore that ‘Ces porcelaines sont fort laides; veulliez attendre à ce qu’elle soient plus
belles une autre année’.26 And during the course of a visit to the manufactory on 18th
August 1807, he had even threatened to close them down on account of flaws that he
detected in their colours and because of the poor quality draughtsmanship that he
claimed to observe in some of their work.27 If, as Préaud notes, he was simply being
capricious (his observations did not prevent him from handing out items from their
stocks as usual), these anecdotes nonetheless denote the enormously high standards
that he expected of the manufactory, from which he demanded both ambition and
perfection. These requisites were not always achieved at Sèvres without struggle and
Brongniart sometimes felt as if he had been set impossible tasks, complaining to
Vivant Denon that the Egyptian service, then in the process of fabrication, was
unlikely to survive the firing process. His correspondent met his concerns with

25 Serge Grandjean ‘XIX Siecle’, in Pierre Verlet, Serge Grandjean and Marcelle Brunet, Sèvres, Paris,
1954, p.57.
26 Quoted by A. Maze-Sencier, op. cit., p.238.
sympathy, but resolve, for it was exactly the job of the manufactory to achieve what might otherwise be thought beyond the bounds of possibility:

‘...mais j’en reviens encore à cela qu’il suffit qu’une chose soit faisable pour qu’elle ait été faite à la Manufacture Impériale. Si vous ne faisez rien de ce genre, d’autres feraient tout ce que vous faites et ce ne serait plus la première manufacture de l’Europe. Courage, donc, car j’ai promis à l’Empereur qu’il trouverait le service fait à son retour.’

Whereas during the ancien régime Sévres had been the only manufactory licensed to produce pieces that were in some respect out of the ordinary, there were by then a handful of other French manufactories – all operating freely and without challenge – who could hold their own against Sévres. As a direct consequence of this tough competition, Sévres was forced continuously to push back the boundaries of what was thought possible in the medium of porcelain in order to attain distinction and justify their existence. Of course this alone did not represent a break in policy from that under Directoire or Consulat, the difference being that they were now financially in a position to meet demands made of them, for embarking on such projects was by nature both time consuming and costly. This resulted in the creation of a number of remarkable pieces during the Empire period, among which the Egyptian service and the accompanying surtout must be counted as perhaps its supreme achievement.

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This example like the two tables already discussed at the beginning of this chapter illustrates a distinctive tendency of Napoleonic Sévres porcelain, namely the proliferation of images of the Emperor and scenes from his life and campaigns across its surfaces. If during the ancien régime, the very brilliance of Sévres ground colours, the finesse of their modelling, and the size of their vases was enough to do great honour to kings Louis XV and XVI, by contrast, Napoleon recruited Sévres to glorify him and his regime in a more literal way. Very many items were made between 1804 and 1814 that bear Napoleon’s image or which recalled the breadth of his cultural and military achievements. Notable examples that might be singled out here include the vases ‘fuseau’ onto which were copied portraits of Napoleon after Jacques-Louis

David and François Gérard (figs. 161-162), and the vase ‘a bandeau’ decorated with an allegory of the battle of Austerlitz by Pierre Nolaresque Bezeret (fig. 163). In it the Emperor’s unstoppable chariot, rendered à l’Étrusque, is depicted charging the walls of Vienna and its surrounding towns, whose female personifications offer up their keys to the man they recognise as their victor. Flanked by figures of winged victory and proceeded by an imperial eagle that crushes its Habsberg equivalent between its powerful talons, it is an energetic and triumphal image of Napoleon the conqueror. The spoils of his earlier military campaign in Italy are the subject of Sèvres’ celebrated vase Étrusque à Rouleaux, an example hailed by Brongniart as ‘le plus beau qui soit sorti des ateliers de la manufacture’ (fig. 164).29 Like the vase ‘à bandeau’, its design, painted by Berenger and depicting the entrance into Paris of the convoy bearing among other things, the Laocoön and the Apollo Belvedere, has escaped what Préaud has called ‘the tyranny of the cartouche’, scrolling infinitely around the circumference of the vessel.30 Standing 1.20m tall, it is an epic and heroic creation of a type heretofore unseen at Sèvres.

Indeed, as regards their overtly propagandistic concerns none of the above named pieces, the Egyptian service or the two porcelain tables have any precedent in the manufactory’s oeuvre, a fact that suggests that Napoleon had a quite distinct vision of the role that it might play for him. In answer to the question posed at the beginning of this concluding chapter, what did the Emperor want from Sèvres? it can be argued that not only was it a way of affirming his legitimacy to the French throne, but another means of disseminating his image as widely as possible. Napoleon used Sèvres as a strategist might – with a clear goal in sight – and one gets little sense of his having made the same personal connection with the manufactory and its products as arguably Louis XV and Louis XVI had done. But this has everything to do with the leisure that characterised one regime and the vigour and purposefulness of the other. Napoleon saw exactly how the manufactory could be of use to him as an individual seeking to consolidate his power and to occupy his position on the throne (which of course recalls Leora Auslander’s argument, as discussed in chapter I).

29 Quoted in Marcelle Brunet and Tamara Préaud, Sèvres: Son Origins à Nos Jours, Switzerland, 1978.
If a level of calculation would seem to define his relationship to Sèvres’ production however, it was not at the expense of beautiful porcelain. Nor did it mean he was personally unaware of, or un-amenable to the pleasures that might be proffered by the ownership of a manufactory keen to satisfy his every command. In November 1807 he commissioned a service for his use from them, which should contain none of the usual bombast, being decorated, according to his specifications, not with ‘battles or names of men’, but (unusually) with subjects that made ‘very indirect allusions [that would stir] agreeable memories’. Among the range of subjects chosen can be numbered his different palaces and one time residencies, including Joséphine’s beloved Malmaison; places he had visited; views he had enjoyed whilst on campaign, and the animal species he had encountered there (figs. 165-167). Others depicted urban regeneration projects undertaken during his reign, such as the construction of the rue de Rivoli, named after one of his Italian victories. Note that the street’s immaculate paving, modern drainage system and pedestrian friendliness are stressed in the preparatory drawing for the plate (fig. 168-169). Collectively the service was certainly propagandistic in character, but less overtly so and, for example, few of the landscapes bear any reference to his having been there, remaining as just that: beautiful landscapes filled with memories for him perhaps, but whose significance might be easily missed by others. It seems quite fitting then that the service was known simply as le Service Particulier de l’Empereur and that it should be the one that he took with him to St Helena, where he would finally have the leisure to enjoy it.

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This concluding chapter might appear to endow the thesis with a neat, cyclical feel, bearing witness as it does to the restoration of the manufactory to a position akin to that which it had previously occupied under the Bourbons. Yet this would belie the fact that Sèvres was now working in a very different political, economic and industrial world from the one in which it had first produced porcelain at the château of Vincennes. Inevitably they had been forced to respond to changing times in order to avoid extinction or annihilation by a zealous revolutionary government: thus, if a status quo would appear to have been in many respects resumed, this was only

superficially so and in fact the manufactory under Brongniart’s direction was a very
different machine to that overseen by D’Angiviller. The differences were in part
compelled by the events of the 1790s, which forced its administration to re-think their
relationship with the market, their workforce and the ruling regime. No longer, for
example, could they be passive beneficiaries of royal favour, from which they derived
their authority over their employees and their monopoly over the market. They had to
be active players in their own destiny, proving their worth in an age ostensibly hostile
to the values for which they stood, and in which they had seemed to have outlived
their relevance.

In the first instance the abolition of privileges and the emigration of their established
clientele forced the manufactory to shake off the state of inertia in which they had
languishing throughout the 1780s. Yet, if Montucla set about the manufactory’s reform
with a sense of urgency and purpose, ultimately he did little to increase its viability.
Indeed, as Jean-Jacques Hettlinger was forced to admit, Sévres could probably never
become fit for ‘business’ – certainly not without sacrificing its inherent character as a
producer of artistically invested and highly expensive luxury porcelain. My thesis
would appear to prove him right for, prior to the Empire the manufactory never
entirely overcame its limitations. This was despite the resolve demonstrated by a
succession of administrators and the implementation of a series of reforms – the
dismissal of the academicians, the transfer of the brunisseurs, the cutting-off of goods
supplied to personnel at the manufactory’s expense, to name but three.

Fortunately for the manufactory however, the revolutionary government did not
simply calculate its worth in financial terms, and despite the fact that it was far from
breaking even, let alone producing a profit, support was extended to it. Remarkably
the line of patronage between the State and the manufactory has never once been
broken – even today it exists under the auspices of the French Ministry of the Interior.
As David Cameo, Sévres’ current director, writes in a recently published exhibition
catalogue surveying their production between 1740 and 2006, ‘All [the manufactory’s]
European competitors have had to turn themselves whether they liked it or not, into
organisations run on almost entirely commercial lines. [Sévres] is proud to represent
an idea which has disappeared elsewhere. Yet we should not be tempted to think teleologically about this point of continuity, to assume that, because different regimes always have maintained Sèvres, so would the revolutionary government. Not only is it a backwards approach to a historical problem, but it risks detracting from the remarkable nature of the decision made by a government – then presiding over the Terror – to conserve Sèvres. That they should intervene in the favour of the manufacture royale, even whilst they were debating the fate of its one-time owner was certainly not to be assumed.

A number of reasons (not always compatible) why they offered Sèvres protection at different points in the revolutionary decade have been suggested here. Profit (or lack thereof) aside, they hoped the manufactory would serve as a school of excellence for artists, and of interest for scientists, and that it would provide employment for a large number of skilled citizens in need of work. Additionally Sèvres could provision them with scientific equipment for the national laboratories and, of course, with prestige porcelain for their own use. Once foreign alliances had been re-established Sèvres might also be relied upon to provision them with gifts of requisite standard for presentation to foreign diplomats and dignitaries. Less pragmatically, but more persuasively still was the prestige and glory that Sèvres’ porcelain might win for the French Republic. As Javier Laban Montanes correctly surmises in his introduction to the same catalogue, it was to a large degree the ‘extraordinary quality’ of their wares that enabled Sèvres to survive successive regime changes. Throughout its history, he writes, it maintained itself ‘as a sign of the cultural identity of [the] Gallic nation. Sèvres is a synonym of excellence and a vivid reminder of France’s grandeur.’ This would indeed have weighed heavily in the manufactory’s favour at a point when the government was feeling vulnerable to accusations of having wilfully endangered their universally esteemed patrimoine. The protection and nationalisation of Sèvres would be a powerful way of undermining those attacks, a point made persuasively by Antoine Régnier.

33 Ibid., p.308.
The last word must go (as indeed it usually did) to the employees of Sévres. Above all this thesis has covered a very human drama, one with a complex and varied cast of characters (many of whom arguably left the government with little choice about how to dispose of the manufactory). Collectively, they were more than just makers of Sévres porcelain, but played a decisive role in the re-moulding of the manufactory to accord with the values upheld by the Revolution. If they were sometimes resistant to the initiatives imposed by the administration at their expense, at other times it was they who requested and implemented the manufactory’s reform, often through quite radical measures; moreover, it was they who stringently enforced these policies. In both these aspects their behaviour is informed by their participation in local patriotic clubs and by their knowledge of events and ideological trends in Paris, including the Terror, to which Chanou and his cohorts subscribed, and from which they derived their power. In this sense, the manufacture nationale of Sévres porcelain can be considered very much as a microcosm of the wider revolutionary world with which they interacted.

In answer to the question posed by my title regarding whether or not, given the manufactory’s formerly regal status, they were unlikely citizens, one might surmise that, if the government was not necessarily going to be sympathetic towards their cause, then they might be sympathetic towards the government’s. As I argued in chapter I, although the terms of their employment at the manufactory had been in many respects extremely favourable, it was at the expense of their personal and professional liberty, a fact that clearly angered many amongst them. By the time the Bastille fell, they were primed to react.
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Droth, M., A Fragile Alliance: Porcelain as Sculpture, preliminary talk given in introduction to the session convened by herself and Alison Yarrington for the College Art Association Conference, 18th February 2004, Seattle.

Archival Sources:

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- F12 Commerce et Industrie, cartons, 1493, 1494, 1495, 1496
- F13 Batiments civils, cartons, 505, 719,
- O1, Maison du Roi, cartons 2059, 2060, 2061
- O2 Maison de l'Empereur, cartons 913, 915, 916

Archives de la Manufacture Nationale de Céramique, Sèvres (Arch. M.N.S.):

- Armoir 6
- A5: Archives Antérieures à 1800: Époque Révolutionnaire
- A3: Porcelaines de France, Regie Royale: Contestations avec les manufactures particuliers et arrêts royaux 1780 – 1787
- B4: Administration Intérieur, Révolution
- D1 [File name unknown]
- D3: Personnel de 1785 - 1800
- I4 Ventes Publique et Éxpositions 1750 - 1799
- H2 Correspondence, [?] – 1785
- H3 Correspondence, 1783 – 1786
- H4: Correspondence, 1787 – 1789
- H5: Correspondence, 1790 – 1793
- H6: Lettres des Comités au C. Henri Florentin Chanou, Inspecteur de la Manufacture, an 2 et 3, (1794 – 5)
- H7 Correspondence, an IV – an VII (1796 – 1799)
- RXIII dossier 4
- T1 Correspondence, an VIII – [?], (1800 – [?])
- Vj Registres de peintres
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Archives Municipales de Sèvres:

- Transcription du Registre 1 D 1 du 12 août 1787 au 7 février 1790, rédigée par Franz Jayot, directeur des archives de Sèvres et Mme Balien D. agent administrateur.
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- M4, Dossier 1