

Masters of La Mode: Representations of Women in the French Fashion Press, 1785-99

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Abstract

This project examines representations of women in the French fashion press from its beginning in 1785 to Napoleon's coup d'état in 1799. During the French Revolution, certain women wore 'masculine' Revolutionary symbols to facilitate their participation in revolutionary processes. Many saw the actions of these women as threats to masculine citizenship and in 1793, the increased controversy surrounding dress forced the National Convention to declare freedom of dress for all citizens and citizenesses. Some historians have contended that Revolutionary legislators granted women freedom in fashion largely as a substitute for genuine political power in the emerging public sphere. This project argues that although revolutionary processes may have granted women freedom of fashion, the male-dominated fashion press attempted to undermine women's authority and assert men's control in an area in which it claimed women possessed legitimate power.

Through the close analysis of 18th-century fashion periodicals, this project determines that while fashion periodicals claimed to venerate women and their talents in the realm of fashion, they employed concepts like the relationship between dress and behaviors to dictate women's dress. Although the fashion press initially celebrated women as the creators and masters of fashion, the fashion press editors later used their professed adoration of women to persuade them to surrender their freedom of dress. By regulating women's consumptive and sartorial habits, the fashion press helped to alleviate contemporaries' concerns about women's participation in the public sphere.

Keywords: fashion press, French Revolution

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Introduction

Historians have debated whether or not women's agency during the French Revolution was as revolutionary as that of men. In her study of the *citoyennes tricoteuses*, Dominique Godineau claims that women's militant actions are proof of their active participation in revolutionary processes.¹ Women's radical actions, like the women's march to Versailles in October 1789 and their participation in armed processions, significantly contributed to the success of republicanism. However, other historians argue that because the Revolution did not grant women the same rights and freedoms that it did men, its promise of equality remained inaccessible to women. For Joan Landes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's call for women's exclusion from the public sphere and restriction to the private realm serves as a primary indicator of the marked shift that took away opportunities from many women. Revolutionary legislators endorsed the Rousseauian belief that women belonged in the domestic spaces of the home and family. During the Revolution, the loss of noblewomen's titles and the closing of the salons, where at least some women could exert influence in the public sphere, took political power away from women.² Consequently, many women exercised more power and freedom prior to the Revolution than they did during or for many years after it.

Nonetheless, certain women continued to fight for their right to participate in the public sphere and made claims for a recognition of the full rights to citizenship. Figures like Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793) and Théroigne de Méricourt (1762-1817) actively participated in the

¹ Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and their French Revolution*, trans. Katherine Streip (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). See Darlene Gay Levy and Harriet B. Applewhite, "Women and Militant Citizenship in Revolutionary Paris," in *Rebel Daughters Women and the French Revolution*, eds. Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

² Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

Revolution and called for other women to do the same. Olympe de Gouges in particular challenged the inequality between men's and women's rights. In her *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of Citizen* (1791), de Gouges explicitly stated that "Woman is born free and remains equal to man in rights."³ Joan Scott has argued that Olympe de Gouges exposed ambiguities and contradictions in the republican definition of citizenship and the 'universal' applications of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*.⁴ However, de Gouges and de Méricourt both became victims of the Revolution; the guillotine silenced de Gouges during the Terror and a brutal attack in 1793 left de Méricourt so traumatized that she remained institutionalized in the Salpêtrière until her death more than twenty years later, in 1817. 19th-century historians depicted these women as victims of their actions and, in de Gouges' case, supposed mental disorders.⁵ Although some women did actively and even enthusiastically participate in revolutionary processes, their radicalism incited fear and legislators made subsequent attempts to restrict women to the domestic sphere.

The declaration of the freedom of dress was one way by which legislators attempted to tame women's radicalism. In October 1793, the republican National Convention declared freedom of dress for all citizens, stating that "no person of either sex may constrain any citizen or citizeness to dress in a particular manner, each individual being free to wear whatever clothing or attire of its sex that pleases him, under pain of being declared suspect."⁶ Historians, such as Aileen Ribeiro and Jennifer Jones, have argued that the National Convention granted women this

³ Olympe de Gouges, "Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen," quoted in John Cole, *Between the Queen and the Cabby: Olympe de Gouges's Rights of Woman* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 31.

⁴ Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 56.

⁵ Jules Michelet, *Histoire de la révolution française* (Paris: Librairie Abel Pilon, n.d.), 8:48.

⁶ *Gazette nationale ou le Moniteur universel*, no. 39 (30 October 1793 [9 Brumaire an II]), recounting the session of 8 Brumaire Year II, quoted in Lynn Hunt, "Freedom of Dress in Revolutionary France," in *From the Royal to the Republican Body: incorporating the political in seventeenth and eighteenth-century France*, eds. Sara E. Melzer and Kathryn Norbery (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 227.

freedom as a consolation prize for legitimate political power and to quell men's concerns about women's participation in the public sphere through the relegation of women's authority to the seemingly unimportant and frivolous domain of fashion.⁷ However, this 'freedom' in fashion enjoyed by women had its limits; Lynn Hunt suggests that women only enjoyed the right to freedom of dress so long as their dress remained adequately 'feminine' and did not attempt to intrude into what was cast as a 'masculine' public realm.⁸ Nonetheless, fantasies of female authority continued to threaten men. Concerned about women's potential freedom in the realm of fashion, men used the French fashion press to undermine women's authority and to place them under men's guidance. The fashion press editors, whose periodicals encouraged women to promenade in public spaces and highlighted women's role as consumers, did not deliberately reinforce the exclusion of women from the public sphere. Their periodicals nonetheless tried to limit women's public influence to a frivolous sphere of fashion. In this way, the editors helped to promote and police notions of 'propriety' in women's appearance and behavior. In other words, the fashion press was more than a mere symptom of the Revolution's patriarchal structures; it helped both to reshape and to reinforce them.

⁷ Aileen Ribeiro, *Fashion in the French Revolution* (New York: Holmes & Meyer, 1988), 88; Jenifer M. Jones, "Repackaging Rousseau: Femininity and Fashion in Old Regime France," *French Historical Studies* 18, no. 4 (1994): 940.

⁸ Hunt, "Freedom of Dress in Revolutionary France," 228.

Fashion Periodicals in 18th-Century France

During the Old Regime in France, royal censorship yoked the domestic press. This was particularly true for periodicals that were dependent on the royal mails to deliver their issues and to receive payments from their subscribers and, therefore, found publishing anonymously problematic.⁹ Consequently, the French domestic press was incapable of commenting freely on political and religious issues. Still, Jeremy Popkin suggests that if editors were willing to avoid discussion of controversial issues, and as long as they had influential connections and could identify an area not yet covered by an existing publication, it was relatively simple to receive the necessary permission to launch a new periodical. Popkin states that between 1751 and 1788, 252 new publications appeared in France.¹⁰ However, fashion periodicals remain curiously absent from many studies of the French press during the latter half of the 18th century.

In 1785, the *Cabinet des modes* became the first periodical in France to regularly cover fashions. Over the next few years, this periodical changed its name twice, existing from 1786-1789 as the *Magasin des modes nouvelles françaises et anglaises* and as the *Journal de la mode et du goût, ou amusemens du salon et de la toilette* from 1790 until April 1793, when financial trouble led to the periodical's demise.¹¹ The editors and publishers of the *Cabinet des modes* founded their periodical to encourage commerce under the guise of providing a chronicle of changes in fashion and encouraging the French to cultivate the taste that the editors deemed them to lack.¹² An issue of the *Cabinet des modes* appeared every two weeks, offering subscribers three colored fashion plates and eight pages of text, which contained descriptions of fashions and

⁹ Jeremy D. Popkin, *Revolutionary News: the Press in France 1789-1799* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 17-8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18-9.

¹¹ Jones, "Repackaging Rousseau," 949-50.

¹² *Cabinet des modes* (Paris: Buisson, 1785-6), 3-6.

anecdotes. From 1786 until 1793, the publication appeared every ten days. With the exception of the *Journal de la mode et du goût*, which identified “M. Le Brun” as its author in the heading on the first page of each issue, these publications failed to decisively identify their editor or name any of their significant contributors beyond the publisher and printer, François Buisson (1753-1815), who was responsible for all three incarnations of the periodical. Accordingly, it is unclear exactly who the principal editors of these publications were. Several studies of the French fashion press have asserted that Jean-Antoin Lebrun-Tossa (1760-1837), a playwright who composed several operas and lyrical dramas, founded and directed the *Cabinet des modes*. Based on a note in the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* that stated that M. de Sauvigny had “read and approved” the preface to the fourth year of publication,¹³ Annemarie Kleinert asserts that the publication’s principal editor was Louis Edmé Billardon de Sauvigny (1736-1812), another aspiring writer. Lebrun-Tossa then returned to the publication’s helm with the *Journal de la mode et du goût*.¹⁴ While there is some disagreement among studies of the French fashion press,¹⁵ the majority agree that these were the periodical’s principal contributors and have especially emphasized Lebrun-Tossa’s involvement.

After the failure of the *Journal de la mode et du goût* in 1793, no periodical in France regularly covered fashions until the founding of the *Journal des dames et des modes* and the

¹³ *Magasin des modes nouvelles françaises et anglaises* (Paris: Buisson, 1786-9), 3:4.

¹⁴ Evelyne Sullerot, *Histoire de la Presse féminine en France* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966), 33. See also Caroline Rimbault, “La presse féminine de langue française au XVIIIème siècle: place de la femme et système de la mode” (thèse du troisième cycle, Ecole des hautes études, 1981).

¹⁵ See Annemarie Kleinert, *Die frühen Modejournale in Frankreich: Studien zur Literatur der Mode von den Anfängen bis 1848* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1980), 73-4. Kleinert identifies M. Allemand as the principle director of the periodical during the first few years of its publication. She bases her claim on announcements in the *Cabinet des modes*, which invited artisans and manufacturers to advise M. Allemand by describing their work creating objects of commodity, utility, and mode. Although she admits that very little is known about him, Kleinert claims that he was an elderly bourgeois, who ran his publication in consultation with MM. Tillet, Desmarests, de Montigny, de Sauvigny, and de Condorcet. She excludes mention of Lebrun-Tossa during the early years of the periodical.

Tableau général du goût, des modes et costumes de Paris in 1797.¹⁶ From 1792 onwards, diversity in the French press steadily decreased. Governmental censorship peaked in 1794, during the Terror, the only period during the Revolution when politics restricted the French press to representing a single viewpoint. In the Terror's aftermath, publications that had previously been suppressed slowly resurfaced and despite the Directory's desire to censor the press, their policies were not nearly as effective as those implemented during the Terror. Nonetheless, journalism continued to be a dangerous profession and journalists recognized that while their job could bring them fame, it could also land them in prison, or worse.¹⁷ The political climate in France was particularly hostile to those associated with the fashion press because of its associations with women and luxury. In particular, Maximilien Robespierre treated all things involving women as suspect and later restrictions under the Directory removed the public sources of inspiration and reference upon which the fashion press editors relied.¹⁸

Inspired by the success of preceding fashion periodicals, Jean-Baptiste Sellèque (1767-1801), a rhetoric teacher who the Revolution forced to abandon his position, and Pierre de La Mésangère (1761-1831), also a rhetoric teacher and former priest, created the *Journal des dames et des modes*. Their shared background in rhetoric suggests that styles of fashion had become linked to styles of communication and that fashion was becoming a legitimate method of conveying behavior and thought. They published their first issue in March 1797, under the title the *Journal des dames*, a nod to the women's literary periodical published between 1759 and

¹⁶ Annemarie Kleinert, *“Journal des Dames et des Modes” ou la Conquête de l’Europe féminine (1797-1839)* (Stuttgart: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2001), 12.

¹⁷ Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, 38-9.

¹⁸ Kleinert, *“Journal des Dames et des Modes,”* 14.

1779 under the same title.¹⁹ From the first few surviving examples of its issues, Kleinert determined that the publication's immediate agenda was to "civilize" humanity.²⁰ As the periodical's title suggests, the editors were especially preoccupied with the education and emancipation of women. However, one should note that although the *Journal des dames et des modes* marketed itself almost exclusively to women, and despite the fact that there were several publications produced by women during this period, the *Journal des dames et des modes* was, at its core, the work of men.²¹ A new *cahier* of the periodical appeared every five days and consisted of fashion plates, corresponding descriptions, poems, and reviews among a myriad of other anecdotes. This publication eventually became, according to Martyn Lyons, "the most successful fashion paper of the Directory" and continued to flourish through January 1839, making it the only Revolutionary fashion periodical to survive through the First Empire and into the Restoration.²²

The *Journal des dames et des modes* was arguably the most successful fashion periodical of its time and although there were competing publications, none of them achieved the same level of success. One competing periodical was the short-lived *Journal des modes et nouveautés*, a monthly publication founded in 1797. Despite being sold at a lower cost, the periodical struggled against its competitors. By the end of its run, the magazine, unable to maintain the necessary rate of production, published fashion plates directly from the pages of the *Journal des dames et des modes*.²³ This periodical ended a few months after its debut when the *Journal des*

¹⁹ Ibid., 18-20. Despite the fact that La Mésangère's name is absent from the cahiers, Kleinert identifies him as a co-editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* and hypothesizes that he remained anonymous because of his status as a former priest. La Mésangère would eventually take on a more overt role after Sellèque's death in 1800.

²⁰ Ibid., 21.

²¹ Sullerot, *Histoire de la Presse féminine en France*, 87.

²² Martyn Lyons, *France under the Directory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 142.

²³ Kleinert, "Journal des Dames et des Modes," 31-2

dames et des modes absorbed it in 1797.²⁴ The *Tableau général du goût, des modes et costumes de Paris* was another competing publication that the *Journal des dames et des modes* eventually absorbed. Founders Francesco Bonafide, an Italian who was living in Paris, and an engraver only known as Guyot, having had an idea similar to that of Sellèque and La Mésengère, published the first issue of the *Tableau général du goût* in 1797, a month or two after the start of the *Journal des dames et des modes*.²⁵ Each issue contained thirty-two pages and two colored, finely detailed fashion plates. It initially appeared bimonthly and eventually increased its frequency to two times per ten-day period, while reducing its page count to sixteen.²⁶ In March 1799, the periodical changed its title to *La Correspondance des dames*, and in July 1799, again changed it to *l'Arlequin*. This title, which invokes associations with the vibrant, multi-colored costumes worn by the eponymous theatrical character, persisted until the publication's end. When La Mésengère absorbed *l'Arlequin* into the *Journal des dames et des modes* in October 1799, he created a monopoly on the French fashion press.²⁷

Although these periodicals provide insight into late 18th-century fashion and culture and have been used by many historians to determine the fashions of the period, they do have limitations. One such limitation is authorship; even when one is able to identify the editors of these publications, it remains difficult, if not impossible, to determine the authorship of the individual articles and anecdotes found within them. The *Cabinet des modes* and its successors identified authors only when they quoted directly from the work that they were reviewing, leaving the actual reviews, in addition to the descriptions and anecdotes, anonymous. The *Journal des dames et des modes* provided, if not the contributor's full name, their initials beneath

²⁴ Sullerot, *Histoire de la Presse féminine en France*, 71.

²⁵ Kleinert, "Journal des Dames et des Modes," 12.

²⁶ Sullerot, *Histoire de la Presse féminine en France*, 72.

²⁷ Kleinert, "Journal des Dames et des Modes," 66.

the work in question; however, even in those instances, it is often impossible to ascertain more details about the person. The periodicals frequently solicited and published responses and observations from their readers, welcoming the work of citizen journalists.²⁸ In instances where the periodicals named authors, one should retain some skepticism, as male staff writers often posed as women in print.²⁹ Furthermore, fashion periodicals often reprinted anecdotes and reviews from other publications, making it difficult to determine original authorship. Nonetheless, the editors consciously decided which plates, descriptions, and anecdotes went into each issue; therefore, regardless of individual authorship, fashion periodicals reflect their editors' and publishers' attitudes.

It is equally impossible to determine who subscribed to the fashion periodicals. The *Cabinet des modes* and its successors were primarily intended for people who lived in the provinces and abroad and who desired knowledge of the latest Parisian fashions. The publisher distributed 60,000 pamphlets across Europe to approximately 1,000 subscribers.³⁰ However, figures aid little in determining the exact readership of the publications. Even if one knows the precise number of copies of a periodical that circulated, one copy could have had, and likely did have, several readers.³¹ However, it is fair to say that the French fashion periodicals were popular enterprises. Within its inaugural year, the *Cabinet des modes* had already inspired the creation of both *The Fashionable Magazine* in Britain and *Das Journal des Luxus und der Moden* in what is today Germany.³² Its successor, the *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, found 'contrefacteurs' to be worrisome enough to justify changing the style by which they produced fashion plates.

²⁸ *Journal des dames et des modes* (Paris: Sellèque, 1798-9), 3:494.

²⁹ See Sullerot, *Histoire de la Presse féminine en France*.

³⁰ Annemarie Kleinert, "La Révolution et le premier journal illustré paru en France (1785 à 1793)," *Dix-huitième Siècle* 21, no. 1 (1989): 286.

³¹ Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, 84.

³² Kleinert, "La Révolution et le premier journal illustré paru en France," 309.

Beginning November 10, 1786, the journal presented its three plates on one, uncut sheet of copper, believing that “c’est le moyen d’arrêter les contrefaçons, parce qu’il sera impossible aux contrefacteurs, qui doivent imiter notre manière, de donner avant un mois & demi après nous.”³³

Figures and estimates of the publications’ popularity, while useful, fail to reveal any details regarding the composition of the readership. Historians have very little information to precisely describe subscribers. While various types of people constituted their readership, these periodicals marketed themselves primarily towards women by unevenly covering men’s and women’s fashions. The periodicals claimed to cater to members of the nobility, the bourgeoisie, sellers, designers and working class women, under the premise that fashions were “for all the classes.” However, through the analysis of catalogs of sales of books between 1765 and 1780, Caroline Rimbault determined that bourgeois and provincial women were more likely to subscribe to less expensive women’s journals, like the *Cabinet des modes*, than Parisian noblewomen who tended to subscribe to more costly journals with their husbands.³⁴ Despite the central role of working class women in the textile industry and the periodicals’ claims that fashion was for all classes, fashion periodicals promoted bourgeois values and marketed themselves and the fashions that they presented primarily to bourgeois women.

Numerous studies of late 18th-century French fashions have examined these sources with the intention of determining the popular fashions of the time, but it is impossible to know the prevalence of the fashions reported by the fashion press or the influence that the fashion press exerted on contemporary fashions. Jennifer Jones proposes that the fashions described within the context of the fashion press were not meant to accurately portray those popular among Parisians.

³³ *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, 1:283. “it is the means of stopping counterfeits because it will be impossible for counterfeiters, who must imitate our style, to publish sooner than a month and a half after us.” Unless otherwise noted, all translations from French are my own.

³⁴ Jones, “Repackaging Rousseau,” 951.

She argues that “[Lebrun and Sauvigny] created an imaginary world in which *la mode* and women reigned supreme.”³⁵ Imaginary or not, the journalists of these periodicals presented fashions as though they were real styles that they had seen elegant Parisians wear while promenading in the Tuileries Garden, along the Champs-Élysées, while attending the theater, or meandering in other public spaces. The *Journal des dames et des modes* in particular insisted that its fashion plates were ‘*dessiné d’après nature*,’ or real-to-life drawings. When subscribers submitted requests to see a specific style or article of clothing, the editor responded that he could not accommodate them because “nous peignons ce qui est et non ce qui pourrait être . . . ce ne sont pas des tableaux, mais des portraits que nous donnons.”³⁶ Like Jones, Kleinert regards their claim with suspicion, commenting that “il serait aussi intéressant de savoir comment les talents les plus affirmés ont réussi à combiner le besoin de décrire ou de peindre le costume modern réel et celui de créer une œuvre d’art idéalisée, car on a longtemps été persuadé que c’était impossible.”³⁷

Although these publications claimed that their readers followed the fashions presented in the journals, whether they were being truthful or were simply promoting their business is unknown. Possessing a high level of sway over one’s readership was integral to attracting merchants and other advertisers. The *Cabinet des modes*, for example, touted to merchants that “Les Marchands qui nous ont fait passer quelques détails, s’en sont déjà bien trouvés, par la vente de plusieurs articles, qui peut-être n’auroit pas eu lieu sans notre annonce.”³⁸ As a

³⁵ Ibid., 950-1.

³⁶ *Journal des dames et des modes*, 4:42. “we depict what is and not what could be . . . these are not paintings, but pictures that we produce.”

³⁷ Kleinert, “*Journal des Dames et des Modes*,” 301. “it would also be interesting to know how the most affirmed talents have managed to combine the need to describe or depict the real modern costume and that of creating an idealized work of art, because one has long been convinced that it was impossible.”

³⁸ *Cabinet des modes*, 47-8. “The Merchants who have given us some details, have already found themselves well-served by the sale of several articles, which perhaps would not have taken place without our announcement.”

business, the fashion press had a vested interest not only in preserving its readership, but in attracting new subscribers as well. Kleinert asserts that regardless of whether these publications accurately portrayed contemporary fashions or not, female readers had great confidence in the periodicals and relied on their male editors to guide them to a state of elegance and propriety.³⁹ Despite the editors' marked desire to possess that degree of control over their female readers, there is no irrefutable evidence to support Kleinert's claim. Nonetheless, despite its limitations, analysis of these periodicals provides insight into contemporary opinions on a number of subjects, especially the question of women's involvement in the public sphere.

³⁹ Kleinert, *Journal des Dames et des Modes*, 64.

Imitation and Imagination under the Old Regime, 1785-89

Under the Old Regime, the French fashion press detailed to their readers what they considered to be appropriate behaviors and dress for both men and women. Yet, the fashion press policed women's behaviors more than men's. Jennifer Jones argues that by connecting fashion and femininity and by dismissing it as a woman's concern, the editors aspired to tame fashions.⁴⁰ In their quest to tame fashion, the editors also sought to tame women. According to the *Cabinet des modes*, other than reports on the latest fashions, “. . . si quelque chose d'étranger pouvoit entrer dans cet Ouvrage, ce seroit, tout au plus, les Poésies légères, ou les Anecdotes plaisantes, ou les Contes facétieux & décens . . . Mais la science, mais l'érudition! jamais, peut-être, on n'auroit réuni deux choses aussi contraires.”⁴¹ The journal consequently reinforced the exclusion of women from discussion of topics that the editors deemed to be too serious for and in direct contradiction to women's supposed natural tendency toward levity. Anecdotes and advertisements likewise provided readers with clear examples of what constituted proper and improper behavior, demonstrating both how women should behave in public, and how they should conduct themselves in private, as wives and mothers.

From its debut in November 1785 until the beginning of the Revolution in 1789, one of the French fashion press's primary goals was to feed commerce by cultivating subscribers' interest in novelties.⁴² By presenting subscribers with commodities and advertisements that merchants had provided to the editors, the fashion press functioned as a mediator between sellers and consumers. Although the editors of the fashion press considered fashion to move “presque

⁴⁰ Jones, “Repackaging Rousseau,” 949.

⁴¹ *Cabinet des modes*, 163. “. . . if something foreign could enter in this Work, it would be, at the most, light Poems, or pleasant Anecdotes, or mischievous and proper tales . . . But science, but erudition! Joining two things so contrary might well be impossible.”

⁴² *Ibid.*, 3-6.

toujours dans un cercle, ou dans une chaîne sans fin,⁴³ the importance of variety to French commerce created an incentive for French fashions to change much more rapidly than those of other countries. *The Fashionable Magazine* commented in 1786 that “[French fashion] keeps one continual whirl like the fliers of a jack.”⁴⁴ Compared to French fashions, British fashions seemed to shift at a considerably slower rate. Although *The Fashionable Magazine* diligently covered French fashions, its editors believed that the rapid shifts in French fashions had a tendency to create “fashionable absurdities” with which the editors amused themselves. They wrote, “. . . our restless neighbours will abundantly supply us with new modes for our amusement or observation, though they have happily ceased, in a great measure, to be objects of our imitation.”⁴⁵ To defend the constant change in French fashions against foreign criticisms and to explain what they perceived to be British disdain for variety, the editor of the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* remarked,

[Les anglais] ont prouvé que, pour donner de la vie à leur commerce, ils n’ont pas besoin de cette diversité continuelle que nos Marchands donnent à leurs marchandises, à qui elle est très-nécessaire. Ils ont acquis la perfection dans toutes leurs manufactures; ils ne veulent vendre que des marchandises parfaites, & ils s’en tiennent à ce qu’ils ont produit. Pour varier, il faudroit mille essais; les essais ne peuvent pas avoir la perfection, & ils y renoncent. Notre légèreté nous fait adopter tous les essais, & nous nous en contentons. La perfection nous ennuiroit sans doute.⁴⁶

They argued that if French fashions were at times absurd, it was because the levity of French national character encouraged experimentation with and the advancement of fashions. The British, by contrast, possessed a rigid desire for perfection that constrained their progress.

⁴³ *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, 3:41. “almost always in a circle or in an endless chain.”

⁴⁴ *The Fashionable Magazine or Lady’s and gentleman’s repository of taste, elegance, and novelty* (London, 1786), 83.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 83-4.

⁴⁶ *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, 3:75-6. “[The English] proved that, to provide life to their commerce, they do not need this continual diversity that our Merchants give to their goods, to whom it is very necessary. They acquired perfection in all their manufactures; they only want to sell perfect goods, and they stick to what they produced. Variation requires a thousand tries; the attempts cannot be perfect, and they renounce them. Our levity makes us adopt all the attempts and we are content with them. Perfection would undoubtedly bore us.”

Although neither the *Cabinet des modes* nor the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* exclusively appealed to women, the editor of the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* admitted that the periodical needed to be “plus particulièrement destiné pour elles” and that “nous avons dû penser à les [les femmes] satisfaire premièrement.”⁴⁷ Often, two of the three plates in an issue represented women’s fashions. Moreover, the first plate that the *Cabinet des modes* published depicted a woman. These periodicals unevenly covered women’s fashions at least in part because they considered French women to be especially talented and more eager to participate in that realm. The editor of the *Cabinet des modes* justified his coverage of a fashion, claiming that “l’élégance & le goût qui brillent dans chacune des Parures de nos Dames, justifieroient notre attention à les faire toutes connoître.”⁴⁸ Fashion press editors proposed that fashion and taste were innate qualities that certain people were more inclined to possess than others. They claimed that the French possessed taste “au plus haut degré,”⁴⁹ that women possessed it more than men because men were “moins inventif en ce genre,”⁵⁰ and that some women were more elegant and tasteful than others. Although French women frequently did not originate fashions, the periodical claimed they “savent imiter & s’approprier même les Costumes de toutes les Nations.”⁵¹ By February 1788, a fashionable outfit for women could incorporate pieces inspired from seven or eight different countries.⁵² By imitating and perfecting upon others’ fashions, in a way, French women themselves became creators. The *Magasin des modes nouvelles* noted,

Il est vrai qu’elles [les françaises] rendent des espèces bien meilleures que celles qu’elles ont reçues; & même, à parler exactement, elles n’empruntent que les noms, & elles donnent les choses. Quand elles copient, elles corrigent, elles embellissent. Quand elles

⁴⁷ Ibid., 1:145. “especially intended for them;” “we had to think of satisfying [women] first.”

⁴⁸ *Cabinet des modes*, 57. “the elegance and the taste that shines in each of our lady’s dress would justify our attention to making them all known.”

⁴⁹ Ibid., 5-6. “at the highest level.”

⁵⁰ *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, 1:146. “less creative in this area.”

⁵¹ *Cabinet des modes*, 34. “know to imitate and adapt fashions from all nations.”

⁵² *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, 2:83.

imitent, elles créent. D'une imagination trop inventive, trop féconde pour s'attacher servilement à leurs modèles, elles s'en emparent, elles les forment. Elles deviennent, en un mot, les *maîtres* de leurs auteurs.⁵³

The editors claimed that instead of slavishly following others' styles, French women, through the imitation and refinement of fashion, became the 'masters' of their source material. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Edmund Burke suggested that the pleasure that a painting or poem invokes could be less the effect of the imitated object's power than the skill of the imitator. He ventured, "When the object represented in poetry or painting is such, as we could have no desire of seeing in the reality; then I may be sure that its power in poetry or painting is owing to the power of imitation, and to no cause operating in the thing itself."⁵⁴ The fashion press likewise maintained that imitations could be more pleasurable than their originals. Through the imitation, refinement, and embellishment of others' styles, women not only attempted to master fashion, but also seized ownership away from the style's originator, granting themselves a higher degree of creative authority as perfectors of fashion.

The editors of the French fashion press considered French women, with their ability to perfect others' fashions, to be superior to women of other countries. According to the *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, when a French woman wears a dress 'à la Turquie,' she "remporte des triomphes plus sûrs & plus agréables que ceux d'une Georgienne ou Circassienne dans les Harems de Constantinople. Il n'est pas même de Sultane qui ne fût jalouse de son élégance, de sa

⁵³ Ibid., 1:41-2. "It is true that they [French women] make pieces much better than those that they received; and even, to speak precisely, they only borrow the names, and they produce things. When they copy, they correct, they embellish. When they imitate, they create. From an overly inventive imagination, too fertile to slavishly attach themselves to their models, they take possession of them, they form them. They become, in one word, the *masters* of their originators."

⁵⁴ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. J.T. Boulton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 49.

grace, & des hommages qu'on lui rend."⁵⁵ Women's superiority in dress became an argument used in editors' nationalist discourses; editors of the French fashion press often presented 'their' women as more fashionable and better studied in the arts of *la mode* than their foreign counterparts. This practice was not unique to the French; *The Fashionable Magazine* similarly celebrated English women's fashions as superior, dismissing French fashions either as imitations or absurdities.⁵⁶ To the French fashion press editors, the change documented in their publications served as proof to all other nations that "leur imagination [l'imagination des femmes] ne se repose guère."⁵⁷ Burke had recognized imagination as a creative power to which "belongs whatever is called wit, fancy, invention, and the like." He had noted, "it must be observed, that this power of the imagination is incapable of producing any thing absolutely new; it can only vary the disposition of those ideas which it has received from the senses."⁵⁸ However, the fashion press did not believe women's imagination and their consequent imitation of fashions to be negative. Unlike the counterfeiters who maliciously stole and sold cheap and inaccurate reproductions of the periodical's *cahiers*, French women's imitations more closely mirrored the flattering, emulative behaviors of *The Fashionable Magazine* and *Das Journal des Luxus und der Moden*. The editors did not believe that women imitated others to be malicious, but suggested that women copied because of their simple desire to possess the latest fashions. The periodical proudly admitted that French women imitated others and, when they could, the editors attempted to credit the original creators of fashions, naming the fashion after its source of origin or mentioning the creators in the fashion plate's description.

⁵⁵ *Cabinet des modes*, 34. "triumphs more surely and more agreeably than a Georgian or Circassian in the Harems of Constantinople. There is not a single Sultana who is not envious of her elegance, her grace, and the homage rendered her."

⁵⁶ *The Fashionable Magazine*, 84.

⁵⁷ *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, 3:3. "their [women's] imagination hardly rests."

⁵⁸ Burke, *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, 16-7.

When women imitated men's dress, however, men did not always view their imitative nature as an asset. In June 1787, the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* professed, "à l'exception des habits qui ne remplacent point encore les robes, & des culottes qui ne remplacent point encore les jupons, les habillemens des femmes sont les mêmes que ceux des hommes, tant pour la coupe que pour la couleur."⁵⁹ In August of the same year, the editor claimed, "J'imagine que nous aurons souvent lieu d'observer que les femmes cherchent à se rapprocher autant qu'elles le peuvent des manières des hommes, qu'elles cherchent à les imiter. Ce mal est bien moindre que celui dont les hommes se rendoient coupables autrefois, en cherchant à imiter les femmes dans leurs parures, & quelque peu dans leur effémination, dans leur mollesse."⁶⁰ Although women imitating men was a '*mal*' to be discouraged, it was less of one than in cases where men imitated women and the editors contradicted themselves by continuing to encourage women's adoption of men's styles. When the *Cabinet des modes* reported that they had seen a woman at the Palais Royal wearing a redingote with a vest and a necktie in the style of men, they confessed that "cette nouvelle manière de se vêtir nous a plû infiniment."⁶¹ However, there were concerns that women's imitation of masculine dress was indicative of female intrusion into other realms that were typically reserved for men. The editor of the *Cabinet des modes* stated, ". . . les femmes se rapprochent le plus qu'elles peuvent de nos usages. Elles portent actuellement les habits, comme elles se livrent aux occupations des hommes; avec cette différence pourtant qu'elles semblent

⁵⁹ *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, 1:161. "with the exception of coat and tails which have definitely not yet replaced dresses, or breeches which have certainly definitely not replaced petticoats, women's and men's clothes are the same, in terms of cut as well as color."

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:225-6. "I imagine that we will often observe that women seek to approach as much as they can the ways of men, that they seek to imitate them. It is a considerably lesser evil than the one men made themselves guilty of in the past by attempting to imitate women in their adornments, and somewhat in their effemination, in their softness."

⁶¹ *Cabinet des modes*, 120. "we greatly liked this new style of dressing."

n'adopter que tels habits ou telles manières que les hommes ont quittés."⁶² Because women only adopted the former fashions and interests of men, the fashion press not only tolerated, but encouraged their behaviors; variations in dress became an acceptable 'science' for women to master.⁶³

Though it simultaneously glorified and marginalized woman's talent for fashion as imitative, the fashion press nonetheless gave women ownership of their fashions. Editors lauded elegant women of taste as the creators of new fashions, especially recognizing the exquisite taste of actresses as the genesis point of certain fashions. According to them, the women who copied actresses' styles did so because they hoped to emulate them. In one instance, the *Magasin des modes* proposed that women adopted a fashion inspired by Louise Contat (1760-1813), a famous actress of the Comédie-Française, because they "se sont persuadées qu'elles feroient des conquêtes aussi éclatantes, ou du moins qu'elles auroient l'air séduisant de Mademoiselle Contat."⁶⁴ When the editors did not know the origins of a new fashion, they hypothesized that "il faut qu'elle soit de simple invention, de pure fantaisie de quelque femme de goût."⁶⁵

The editors also frequently attributed new fashions to female fashion merchants. The relationship between the press and merchants was not new; fashion periodicals regularly directed readers interested in acquiring the latest fashions to and received guidance from merchants of both sexes. Clare Haru Crowston suggests that the press's emphasis on the minute alterations and additions to fashions that the merchants specialized in "help explain why fashion merchants

⁶² Ibid., 145. "women bring themselves as close as they can to our customs. They currently wear the clothes, like they engage in the occupations of men; with the difference however that they appear only to adopt the clothes and customs that men abandoned."

⁶³ *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, 1:261.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 1:3. "they persuaded themselves that they would make conquests as brilliant, or at least they would have Mademoiselle Contat's seductive appearance."

⁶⁵ Ibid., 1:284. "it must be the simple invention, the pure fantasy of some woman of taste."

succeed in occupying such a central role in Parisian commerce.”⁶⁶ According to Jennifer Jones, despite initial concerns about women’s work in the garment trades, by the second half of the 18th century, enlightened writers like Louis-Sébastien Mercier, Rousseau, and Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais advocated for women’s exclusive natural right to work in the clothing trades, believing that it would protect women from poverty and prostitution.⁶⁷ The argument of morality was a common justification for women’s right to make their living in certain trades. In a 1789 grievance petition, Parisian flower merchants, members of a woman-dominated trade, used the argument of morality to emphasize the importance of limiting competition in their trade so that they could earn a livable wage. They stated,

Today, when everyone can sell flowers and make bouquets, their modest profits are divided up to the point of no longer giving the means to subsist.

The lure of these earnings, however, limited as they are, and even more a strong propensity to idleness, encourages a crowd of young people of the fair sex to practice the profession of the supplicants; since their profession cannot feed them, they seek the resources they lack in licentiousness and the most shameful debauchery.⁶⁸

The merchants argued that if women were unable to sustain themselves with their wages, they would turn to prostitution to supplement their funds. In addition to their belief that the exclusive right to work in the clothing trades would protect women from prostitution, enlightenment writers argued that women were naturally suited to sewing and selling clothes, both sedentary activities, and that men’s participation in the clothing trade was inappropriate. The perceived effeminacy of male fashion merchants, tailors, and hairdressers made them victims of ridicule.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Clare Haru Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex: Economies of Regard in Old Regime France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 158.

⁶⁷ Jennifer Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 98.

⁶⁸ “Doléances particulières des marchandes bouquetières fleuristes chapelières en fleurs de la ville et faubourgs de Paris,” in Charles-Louis Chassin, *Les Élections et les cahiers de Paris en 1789*, 4 vols (Paris, 1888–9), 2:534–7, in Philip Dwyer and Peter McPhee eds. *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 14.

⁶⁹ Jones, *Sexing La Mode*, 98.

By November 1788, the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* began to attribute new fashions specifically to the *marchandes de modes* instead of to the *marchands*, events, or other external influences.⁷⁰ Jones argues that this new phenomena emerged from the journal's desire to placate women by "[detaching] *la mode* from political and cultural events and [placing] it squarely in feminine hands."⁷¹ She argues that through this process, the editors rendered the *marchande de mode* a personification of *la mode*.⁷² Through the regular use of images of women in their depictions of fashionable dress and behaviors, the editors had already used women to personify fashion. In one issue, the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* turned women into *la mode*, describing medallions decorated with images of fashionable women taken from previous issues of their journal.⁷³ By attributing new fashions to the *marchandes de mode*, the editors tore ownership of fashions away from the majority of women, granting creative power to a select few while preserving their control over the rest.

As Jones notes, female fashion merchants' claims that they produced *la mode*, and not mere clothing, also underlined concerns regarding women's participation in the production and culture of fashion.⁷⁴ Although they were willing to recognize women's power as creators and imitators of new styles, the fashion press editors did not believe that women could control fashion. The fashion press portrayed *la mode* as an untamable, somewhat sentient force that did as it pleased and moved wherever it desired. The editors presented themselves as the guides that women needed in order to gracefully navigate the potentially confusing vicissitudes of *la mode*, suggesting that they believed themselves more capable of mastering fashion than the women

⁷⁰ *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, 2:246.

⁷¹ Jones, "Repackaging Rousseau," 957-8.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, 1:203-7.

⁷⁴ Jones, *Sexing La Mode*, 81.

who they claimed possessed a natural talent for it. They did not trust women's ability to distinguish between good and bad fashions. When the editors did not approve of a new fashion, they continued to fulfill their obligation to report it to their subscribers, but they made their disapproval evident, claiming that it was their duty to save women from ridiculous mistakes. In one case, after describing a women's fashion adapted from a 'ridiculous' fashion that was popular among young men, the editor of the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* stated, "Nous ne pensons nullement être en reste avec nos Souscripteurs, lorsque nous ne leur annonçons pas quelques modes par trop périlleuses, & par trop ridicules, qui naissent & meurent à de très-petites distances: nous croyons, au contraire, leur rendre une sorte de services, parce qu'il se pourroit que plusieurs fussent tentés d'imiter toutes les modes, quelles qu'elles fussent."⁷⁵ According to the *Cabinet des modes*, "une Femme, à sa toilette, a toujours besoin de quelqu'un qu'elle puisse consulter pour savoir si telle Coëffure, tel Bonnet, tel Chapeau, telle Robe lui sied bien, & si elle peut se montrer ainsi avec avantage dans les Promenades ou autres lieux publics."⁷⁶ By appointing themselves to this role, the editors suggested that a woman, despite her supposed expertise in the realm of fashion, was not capable of making her own decisions without the advice of a man. They expected women to turn to them not only for guidance during special occasions, but even for their everyday dress.

Through the use of the fashion plates and their accompanying descriptions, editors not only showed women how they expected a fashionable, elegant woman to present herself, but also

⁷⁵ *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, 1:244. "We by no means think we are shortchanging our subscribers when we do not announce to them some fashions that are much too dangerous and much too ridiculous that are born and die after a very short time, we believe on the contrary to provide them a sort of service because several might be tempted to imitate all fashions, whatever they may be."

⁷⁶ *Cabinet des modes*, 113. "a Woman, getting ready, always needs someone who she can consult to know if this Hairstyle, this Bonnet, this Hat, this Dress suits them well and if she can thus show herself with beauty and grace on the Promenades or in other public places."

demonstrated their ideas about the relationship between women's dress and their behaviors. By giving fashions names such as 'à la Janséniste,' 'à la Turque,' and 'à la Conseillère,' the editors proposed a link between fashions and the characters of the women who wore them. In one incidence, the editor of the *Cabinet des modes* claimed to have seen a woman who represented the "the idea of a perfect Woman" in the Tuileries Garden. He described more than just her clothing, connecting her clothing with her comportments, attitudes, and mannerisms.⁷⁷ According to him, her kindness, elegance, and taste brought her others' profound respect and admiration. Despite the jealousy that he claimed she inspired in other women, her relaxed demeanor led the editor to assert that "elle ignoroit sans doute . . . les impressions qu'elle produisoit, ou au moins elle sembloit les ignorer."⁷⁸ The editors conveyed to women the ways that they should aspire to appear and behave in order to conform to men's expectations of feminine perfection. Edmund Burke had advised against the attribution of beauty to virtue, stating,

The general application of this quality [beauty] to virtue, has a strong tendency to confound our ideas of things; and it has given rise to an infinite deal of whimsical theory; as the affixing the name of beauty to proportion, congruity and perfection, as well as to qualities of things yet more remote from our natural ideas of it, and from one another, has tended to confound our ideas of beauty, and left us no standard or rule to judge by, that was not even more uncertain and fallacious than our own fancies.⁷⁹

However, the fashion press frequently connected the concept of beauty to virtues and behaviors.

In March 1788, the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* published three plates in which women represented 'innocence,' 'vice' and 'virtue.'⁸⁰ Madeline Gutwirth notes that allegory in France was largely female because "the abstract French nouns it represents are, on the first and overt

⁷⁷ Ibid., 153. "l'idée d'une Femme parfaite."

⁷⁸ Ibid., 154. "she undoubtedly did not know . . . the feelings that she produced, or at least she appeared to be unaware of them."

⁷⁹ Burke, *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, 112.

⁸⁰ *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, 2:105-7.

level, feminine in gender.”⁸¹ Despite this innocent explanation, for Gutwirth and others, the use of women in allegory in late 18th-century France was problematic because it allowed men to project their fantasies onto women’s bodies. Fears that women would conflict with the ideals and fantasies that they represented also provided further justification for women’s exclusion from the public sphere.⁸² In this case, notwithstanding the first line of each plate description in which the editor revealed to his reader which quality each woman represented, the editor provided no explanation as to why he considered the women’s ensembles to be characteristic of those attributes. The women’s dress differed little from those depicted in previous issues. The woman representing ‘vice’ was depicted wearing a pink redingote with purple trimmings and a linen skirt decorated with gold buttons. Her hairstyle was extravagant; her hair was curled into a pile on top her head, where it sat beneath a colorful bonnet embellished with feathers and ribbon. This extravagance was typical of the women depicted in the fashion press during this period, when big hair and large hats and bonnets were fashionable. She was shown facing ‘innocence’ with one index finger lifted as if to accentuate a point; otherwise, her posture was unremarkable. Whether the engraver intended her pose to be commentary on the nature of vice is unclear. The woman was posed similarly to women depicted in previous issues and the corresponding plate descriptions did not speculate about the woman’s behaviors, suggesting that her dress alone made her representative of ‘vice.’⁸³ In her study of fashion under the reign Louis XVI, Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell argues that “fashions in dress” did not become inseparable from “fashions in ideas” until the Revolution, which she claims legitimized the transformation of ‘*la mode*’ into ‘*le*

⁸¹ Madeline Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 255. While ‘innocence’ and ‘virtu’ are feminine words, ‘vice’ is not.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 256. See Lynn Hunt “The Political Psychology of Revolutionary Caricatures” and Marina Warner, *Of Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (New York: Antheneum, 1985).

⁸³ *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, 2:105-7.

mode.⁸⁴ However, it is evident that this process had already started prior to 1789 and that dress had already been linked to characters and morals.

The fashion press may not have tamed fashions, but Jones argues that it did succeed in domesticating the women who consumed them. She suggests that women's increased concern with their appearance to please the opposite sex and their awareness of their role as consumers of fashion "improved domestic harmony by simultaneously pleasing her husband and symbolizing her care for her family."⁸⁵ Not only did the French fashion press alleviate men's fears of women's participation in the public sphere by relegating women to their roles as wives and mothers, but because the male fashion press editors regulated women's consumptive habits, it also assuaged concerns about women as consumers. Jones, however, argues that the male anxieties created by the relationship between women and fashion were not 'solved' until after 1789, when women's fickleness and fashion thrived in conjunction with, and were more easily regulated by, the rapid and incessant changes of the Revolution.⁸⁶ Women's relationship with fashion continued to be problematic through the Revolution and although the male fashion press editors recognized, and in some cases venerated, women's talents in fashion, they continued attempts to undermine women's authority.

⁸⁴ Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims: Dress at the Court of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 318.

⁸⁵ Jones, "Repackaging Rousseau," 965.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 949.

The '*femme patriote*' in her New Uniform, 1789-93

Kleinert divides the periodical's response to the Revolution into four parts: 1) a short period of two months after July 14, 1789 when the editors hoped to return to the way things had been before, 2) a period of three months where the editors begrudgingly accepted the new situation, 3) a period of fervent enthusiasm and patriotism from February-October 1790 when it operated under the new title, the *Journal de la mode et du goût*, and 4) a final period from October 1790-April 1793, when the editor, disappointed by the unfulfilled promises of the Revolution, avoided discussion of politics.⁸⁷ After the fall of the Bastille, the periodical entered a period of depression when the editor, critical of popular action, did his best to avoid any mention of the events. In their first issue published after the events of the July 14 weekend, the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* apologized for not releasing it on July 22, as they had initially intended; the editor told his subscribers that "les circonstances trop fameuses & trop mal heureuses où Paris s'est trouvé" had prevented the publication from doing so and that the fashions presented in that issue were those from 20-25 days before the "catastrophes funestes qui nous sont arrivées."⁸⁸ The editor did not specify the events to which he was referring until several months later, in November 1789.⁸⁹

For the first time, the periodical recycled anecdotes that it had previously published. Despite the *Magasin des modes nouvelles's* titular promise, the fashions presented within its pages were often not new because the Revolution had temporarily stagnated fashions. Explaining the delivery delays caused by the Revolution, the editor of the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* placated subscribers, writing, "... les modes ne varient pas comme elles varioient auparavant nos

⁸⁷ Kleinert, "La Révolution et le premier journal illustré paru en France," 287.

⁸⁸ *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, 3:185. "the too famous and unfortunate circumstances in which Paris found itself;" "disastrous catastrophes that have happened to us."

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 3:257.

malheurs. Nos Souscripteurs . . . ne perdent pas extrêmement, ou plutôt ne perdent rien, puisque la mode n'a presque pas changé, & qu'ils voient le changement pour peu qu'il y en ait."⁹⁰ After the death of the dauphin in June, the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* did not present a woman in mourning dress until early August because "la mode n'a rien produit qui variât ce deuil."⁹¹ In September, when a number of women continued to wear black outfits "comme s'ils étoient à la mode," the editor noted, "Nous ne savons si le deuil porté à l'occasion de la mort du Dauphin auroit fait prendre le goût du noir, ou si ce ne seroit pas plutôt le goût des bonnets de gaze noire qui auroit donné celui des habits."⁹² Uninspired, the editor no longer imagined the origins of new fashions and lamented the simplicity of the militarized dress popular among French men. He recognized it as the current style, but expressed hope that it "se passera avant peu, par notre habitude à changer, & par notre habitude à voir notre état actuel sans l'étonnement qu'a pu nous causer cette nouveauté" and that ". . . bientôt, comme nous venons de le dire, par notre habitude à changer, ils ne le porteront plus que pour leur service, & la Mode reprendra tout son empire comme auparavant."⁹³ Overall, the editor of the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* conveyed a sense of disillusionment with fashion. Uninspired fashion plate descriptions provided only the essential details of an outfit and speculations on the origins of fashions or the characters of fashionable women were absent.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 3:201. ". . . fashions do not vary as they varied before our misfortunes. Our Subscribers . . . do not lose much, or rather lose nothing, since fashion has hardly changed, and they see the change for what little there is."

⁹¹ Ibid., 3:188. "fashion did not produce anything that varied this mourning."

⁹² Ibid., 3:219. "as if they were fashionable;" "We do not know if the mourning carried for the occasion of the Dauphin's death would have given rise to the taste for black or whether it was rather the taste for bonnets of black gauze that would have given that of clothes."

⁹³ Ibid., 3:217-8. "will pass before long, by our habit of changing, and by our habit of seeing our current state without the surprise that this innovation gave us;" ". . . soon, as we have just said, by our habit of changing, they will no longer wear it but for their service, and Fashion will resume its whole empire as like before."

By the end of September 1789, the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* began to report on new fashions inspired by the Revolution with the hope that there would be more to come. Discussing a “bonnet aux trois ordres réunis ou confondu,” the editor wrote,

Cette réunion ou cette confusion des trois Ordres eût sûrement été mieux prononcée dans un habillement entier que dans un simple bonnet; mais il falloit s'essayer. Il n'y a que les commencemens en tout qui soient difficiles. Cette origine nous promet une longue suite de modes nouvelles, surtout si, à augurer par cette nouveauté, on retrace chaque point essentiel de la Constitution établie & décrétée.⁹⁴

That the editor could not decide whether to describe the changes in the three orders as a ‘joining’ or a ‘confusion’ highlights his early uncertainty about the Revolution. However, he recognized that the Revolution was still at its beginning and that its rapid political changes guaranteed novelty and the creation of new styles. In October 1789, the editor of the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* encouraged his readers to continue their pursuit of taste and fashion in the face of political unrest, declaring that,

La situation de nos affaires, qui n'est point encore satisfaisante, & qui occupe presque tous les esprits des hommes, les méchans, pour y jeter le trouble, les bons & honnêtes pour y mettre le calme & achever la révolution, cette situation n'empeche pas que les jeunes personnes ne poursuivent leur goût pour la parure, ou leur desir de plaire, & n'inventent sans cesse de nouveaux habits ou de nouvelles coëffures.⁹⁵

In the face of the Revolution’s unsatisfactory and worrisome progress, the editor proposed to his readers the use of new fashions to cope with and distract themselves from their reservations.

Despite the return of new fashions, the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* temporarily deprived women of their status and power as masters of *la mode*. In the immediate aftermath of

⁹⁴ Ibid., 3:228. “This joining or confusion of the three Orders would certainly have been better pronounced in an entire dress than in a simple bonnet; but one needed to try. It is only the beginnings in all which are difficult. This origin promises us a long series of new fashions, especially if, to augur by this novelty, one retraces every essential established and decreed point of the Constitution.”

⁹⁵ Ibid., 3:241-2. “The situation of our affairs, which is not yet satisfactory, and which occupies the minds of almost everyone, the wicked, to make trouble, the good and honest, to calm and complete the revolution, does not prevent young people from pursuing their taste for adornment, or their desire to please, and from incessantly inventing new clothes or coiffures.”

the storming of the Bastille, the periodical began to cover male and female fashions more evenly and frequently provided lengthier commentaries for men's fashions than it did for women's. The editor no longer praised women's creative force in every plate description. When the editor did comment on women's natural talent in fashion, it was only a brief mention, usually about how women were imitating men to facilitate their participation in revolutionary processes. For example, in October 1789, the editor noted that women wore fabrics with stripes because they had taken inspiration from men's *Rubans nationaux*.⁹⁶ In December of the same year, they suggested that women had again popularized redingotes because "cet accoutrement rentre autant qu'il est possible dans l'uniforme national."⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the editor's overall opinion was that women were uncharacteristically slow to adapt their fashions to the events. In a report on a *bonnet à la Bastille*, the editor expressed surprise that the taking of the Bastille had not inspired *marchandes de mode* to create any new fashions, remarking that "Il est extraordinaire que les Orfevres ayent devancé les Marchandes de Modes en célébration de faits nouveaux aussi remarquables."⁹⁸ However, the threat to female fashion merchants' authority in the realm of fashion quickly passed; in the following issue, the editor effectively returned to female fashion merchants their status as the creators of *la mode*.⁹⁹

Under the direction of Lebrun-Tossa, the *Journal de la mode et du goût* appeared to champion women's causes; anecdotes supported female-friendly stances on social issues, like women's right to divorce, and the periodical published letters to the editor that women purportedly wrote in support of other women. The journal focused little on the area in which it

⁹⁶ Ibid., 3:260.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 3:282. "this outfit fits as closely as possible to the national uniform."

⁹⁸ Ibid., 3:267. "It is extraordinary that the craftsman beat the female fashion merchants in celebrating such new as well as remarkable events."

⁹⁹ Ibid., 3:273-4.

considered women to be the most gifted: clothing fashion, preferring to emphasize style and taste in other aspects of its subscribers' lives. The number of fashion plates decreased from three to two and, frequently, the editor allotted fewer than two pages to fashion coverage per ten-page issue. When the editor did discuss fashions, ideas of taste and elegance replaced emphasis on luxury, which had become entangled with fears of aristocratic privilege, social corruption, and emasculation.¹⁰⁰ Sarah Maza suggests that prior to the Revolution, luxury had already become a moral disease that blurred the line between the rising bourgeoisie and the nobility and was responsible for selfishness and sterility. According to Maza, those who fell victim to luxury exhibited a physical *mollesse*, which invoked connotations of feminine “weakness, softness, and flaccidity” and bore the blame for issues like depopulation and lack of male virility.¹⁰¹ She argues that in addition to blurring class lines, “luxury . . . transformed virile Frenchmen into effeminate freaks.”¹⁰² In June 1790, the editor noted this change, proclaiming,

Le luxe tombe, s'écrient les marchands; déjà l'or et l'argent ne sont plus employés dans la parure; l'on ne porte plus que de l'*uni* . . . Le luxe d'ailleurs, quelque idée qu'on lui attache, n'existe que par le *superflu*, et nous aurons toujours plus qu'aucune autre nation; seulement ce *superflu*, au lieu d'être concentré dans un petit nombre de mains, sera répandu sur l'universalité des citoyens. Alors le luxe ne consistera plus que dans l'aisance, la propreté et l'élégance des formes.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Although the editor never directly detailed to subscribers his own understanding of taste, the ideas promulgated by the anecdotes can provide insight into the editor's opinions. A “Discourse on Music,” that appeared in its 5 September 1791 issue, asserted that there were two types of *goût*: natural and artificial; artificial taste was an external quality that one could acquire, while natural taste was something with which one needed to be born and which one needed to cultivate through work and study. Much like its previous incarnations, the *Journal de la mode et du goût* believed that it was its duty to help its subscribers cultivate *goût* by differentiating between good and bad taste.

¹⁰¹ Sarah Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 56.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Journal de la mode et du goût*, no. 14 (25 June 1790), 1-2. “Luxury is past, exclaim the merchants; already gold and silver are no longer used in finery; all that one wears is monochrome . . . Incidentally luxury, whatever idea one attaches to it, only exists through the superfluous, and we will always have more than any other nation; only this superfluity, instead of being concentrated in a small number of hands, will be diffused over the universality of the citizens. Then luxury will only consist of the ease, cleanliness and elegance of forms.” At the time, ‘uni’ meant monochrome and without ornamentation (CNRTL “uni”).

In 1786, the *Cabinet des modes* had already declared that “la Mode [était] *une*” for all ages.¹⁰⁴ In 1790, by distancing luxury from fashion and disseminating it among all citizens, the fashion press reinforced the idea that fashion was ‘one’ for all and alleviated the effects of luxury’s negative associations on any one group or person.

Despite having decreased its coverage of fashions, the *Journal de la mode et du goût* continued its predecessors’ tradition of presenting itself as a guide for, and regulating force over, women. Jennifer Jones argues that to the journal’s editors, the Revolution “[offered] conclusive evidence that women’s interest in fashion was innately rooted in their femininity rather than in social etiquette and aristocratic privilege.”¹⁰⁵ Perhaps, this was an attempt to save fashion by distancing it from its associations with Old Regime practices and aristocracy. During the Revolution, the relationship between dress, character, and associations, became dangerous for fashion. In his study of the sans-culottes, Albert Soboul wrote, “The sans-culottes often estimated a person’s worth by external appearance, deducing character from costume and political convictions from character; everything that jarred their sense of equality was suspect of being ‘aristocratic.’”¹⁰⁶ The link between clothing and character begun during the Old Regime had become entwined during the Revolution and associations between costume and political affiliations had become dangerous. Fervent revolutionaries suspected wearers of extravagant and luxurious fashions of harboring counterrevolutionary sentiments. If fashion had retained its aristocratic associations, it would have been impossible for it to survive the Revolution.

Despite the initial stagnation of fashion at the start of the Revolution, fashion not only survived, but thrived in conjunction with the Revolution’s instability. The *Journal de la mode et*

¹⁰⁴ *Cabinet des modes*, 138. “Fashion [was] *one*.”

¹⁰⁵ Jones, “Repackaging Rousseau,” 955.

¹⁰⁶ Albert Soboul, *The Sans-Culottes: The Popular Movement and Revolutionary Government 1793-1794*, trans. Remy Inglis Hall (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972), 3.

du goût believed that the later incessant changes in fashions particularly suited women's natural desire to please men. Lebrun-Tossa remarked,

Les couleurs, la forme des habillements, des bonnets, des chapeaux, varient avec une rapidité inconcevable; tout suit la révolution, et se ressent de l'inquiétude générale; cependant le bouleversement dans lequel nous vivons, bien loin de nuire au beau sexe, le rend encore plus aimable; chaque jour une femme vous paroît nouvelle, et l'on peut dire, de toutes celles qui ont du goût, ce que Titus disoit de Bérénice: . . . Chaque jour je la vois, Et je la vois toujours pour la première fois.¹⁰⁷

The journal reminded women that to satiate their innate need to please men, they needed to constantly and rapidly revolutionize their dress, upholding the behaviors necessary to drive fashion's *telos* while avoiding the pitfalls of *luxé*. In November 1790, Lebrun-Tossa warned women that periods of little variation in dress would make her "toujours la même, et quelque belle qu'elle fût, elle ne seroit piquante que la première fois; l'uniformité jointe à la jouissance, engendreroit bientôt l'ennui et le dégoût. Aussi, quoique nos mœurs commencement à s'épurer que le luxe tombe, la mode et l'élégance dans les formes se soutiennent toujours."¹⁰⁸ The next year, Lebrun-Tossa commented that "Il faut avouer que l'émulation des femmes redouble, et qu'elles employent aujourd'hui une recherche et des graces inconnues à leurs ayeules."¹⁰⁹ The *Journal de la mode et du goût* encouraged women to emulate men's fashions, providing women an unimportant and non-threatening way to participate in revolutionary processes. Lebrun-Tossa noted that by incorporating the national colors into their dress, women "se montrent patriotes."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ *Journal de la mode et du goût*, no. 20 (5 September 1790), 1. "Colors, the form of clothes, bonnets, hats, vary with inconceivable rapidity; all follow the revolution, and feel the general anxiety; however the upheaval in which we live, far from harming the fair sex, renders it even more amiable; every day a woman appears new to you, and one can say, of all those who have taste, what Titus said of Berenice. . . . Every day I see her, And I always see her for the first time."

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 26 (5 November 1790), 1-2. "always the same, and however beautiful she was, she would only be piquant the first time; uniformity combined with pleasure, would soon produce boredom and disgust. Thus, although our behaviors are beginning to become more refined, so that luxury is abandoned, fashion and the elegance of forms continue."

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 30 (15 December 1791), 2. "One must confess that women's emulation increases, and that they employ today meticulousness and graces unknown to their ancestors."

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 2 (5 March 1790), 1. "show themselves to be patriots."

In addition to the *couleurs nationales*, the journal reported that women adopted short hairstyles reminiscent of soldiers' helmets, wore cockades, and redingotes; the accompanying descriptions either referred to the women portrayed wearing these apparels as '*patriotes*' or they identified the style with a name inspired from some aspect of the Revolution like '*à la constitution*' or '*à la contre-révolution*.'

Unlike its predecessors, the *Journal de la mode et du goût* did not celebrate women's achievements as creators of fashions, preferring to portray fashion as a crutch upon which women were dependent. For example, the *Journal de la mode et du goût* advertised a myriad of fashions and beautifying products, such as powders and pomades for hair loss and vegetable waters to preserve skin's youthful freshness, for women to use to hide and repair their imperfections. The journal emphasized that women needed to incorporate taste into their routines, declaring that "les ajustemens les plus simples ne sont pas ceux qui vont le moins bien à une jolie femme; mais il faut absolument qu'elle soit jolie et fraîche; car la laideur et les appas usés ont besoin d'une toilette recherchée, qui répare les défauts de la nature et les flétrissures de l'âge; encore faut-il que le goût préside à cette toilette . . ." ¹¹¹ To preserve their beauty, the journal insisted that women, even those who they already deemed beautiful, needed to incorporate good taste into their outfits.

The journal also accused women of using fashions to be deceitful and hide their imperfections. The editor suggested that women popularized '*fichus très-bouffant*,' also referred to as '*fichus menteurs*,' which one can translate literally to lying scarfs, in part because they had the ability to "cacher bien les difformités." ¹¹² In another instance where he described women's

¹¹¹ Ibid., no. 28 (25 November 1791), 1. "the simplest dress is not the most unbecoming to a pretty woman; but it is essential that she be pretty and fresh; for ugliness and faded beauty require a refined outfit, which can repair the defects of nature and the withering effects of age; it is also important that taste govern the dress. . . ."

¹¹² Ibid., no. 13 (25 June 1790), 2. "hide deformities well."

‘*deshabilles*,’ Lebrun-Tossa explained that “les femmes puissantes sont amincies par cet habillement, et paroissent avoir une stature plus libre et plus élevée.”¹¹³ Lebrun-Tossa only suspected women of wanting to hide their physical appearance and did not suggest that he believed women’s deceptions threatened public morality. Compared to Rousseau’s comments on dissimulation in the theater, the journal’s concerns were superficial. In his *Letter to d’Alembert on the Theater*, Rousseau, claiming that poets and authors manipulated the portrayal of relations in their pieces to accommodate public tastes, commented that “it [was] an error . . . to hope that the true relations of things [would] be faithfully presented in the theater.”¹¹⁴ He warned,

But of what importance is the truth of the imitation, provided the illusion is there? The only object is to excite the curiosity of the public. These productions of wit and craft, like most others, have for their end only applause. When the Author receives it and the Actors share in it, the play has reached its goal, and no other advantage is sought. Now, if the benefit is nonexistent, the harm remains; and since the latter is indisputable, the issue seems to me to be settled.¹¹⁵

For Rousseau, the theater manipulated truth to achieve its immediate goal of pleasing the audience with little regard to, what he perceived to be, dire social and moral consequences associated with misrepresentation of human relations. While the *Journal de la mode et du goût* mentioned women’s potential use of fashions to be deceptive, it was unconcerned with the moral effects of women’s dishonesty and encouraged women to remedy their ugliness through the use of the beautifying products and fashions that it advertised in its issues. Using the promise of concealing flaws to influence women’s consumptive habits, the periodical encouraged women to use consumerism as a way to participate in the public sphere. This notion directly conflicted with

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, no. 5 (5 April 1791), 1. “large women are thinned by this outfit and appear more willowy and taller.”

¹¹⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Letter to d’Alembert on the Theater*, ed. Allan Bloom and Christopher Kelly, trans. Allan Bloom, in *Letter to d’Alembert and Writings for the Theater*, eds. Allan Bloom, Charles Butterworth and Christopher Kelly (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2004), 270.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the Rousseauian idea that women belonged in the home. In his *Letter to d'Alembert*, Rousseau had asserted,

Is there a sight in the world so touching, so respectable, as that of a Mother surrounded by her children, directing the work of her domestics, procuring a happy life for her husband and prudently governing the home? It is here that she shows herself in all the dignity of a decent woman; it is here that she really commands respect, and beauty shares with honor the homages rendered to virtue. A home whose mistress is absent is a body without a soul which soon falls into corruption; a woman outside of her home loses her greatest luster, and, despoiled of her real ornaments, she displays herself indecently.¹¹⁶

Although it did so in a trivial way, by its nature, the fashion press reinforced women's presence outside of the home; it advertised fashions to women with the promise that certain styles would make them stand out in public spaces.

Although all women could manipulate fashions to suit their purposes, by June 1790, the journal believed that aristocratic women, in particular, needed their superiority in fashion as a consolation prize after the fall of luxury and the loss of their titles to the Revolution. As the *Journal de la mode et du goût* remarked, "Parmi les gens de qualité, ce sont les femmes qui perdent le plus à la révolution: éloignées, par leur sexe, de tous les emplois; plus de noms, plus de titres imposans, et ne partageant point avec leurs maris les honneurs des places qu'ils occupent" and,¹¹⁷ consequently, "des femmes ne peuvent plus se distinguer que par une continuelle variété dans leurs ajustemens."¹¹⁸ In response to having supposedly seen otherwise charming women "réduit au désespoir" by the loss of their status, Lebrun-Tossa suggested that it would be best to leave the women alone to wallow in their sorrow and that the journal did not need to intervene because, eventually, "la coquetterie, le besoin de plaire, ne tarderont pas à les

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 315.

¹¹⁷ *Journal de la mode et du goût*, no.6 (16 April 1791), 1. "Among the nobles, it is women who lose the most to the revolution: apart by their sex, from all jobs; no more names, no more imposed titles, and do not share with their husbands the honors from the posts that they occupy."

¹¹⁸ Ibid., no. 17 (5 August 1790), 2. "women can no longer distinguish themselves but by a continual variety in their adjustments."

ramener à la recherche des modes nouvelles.”¹¹⁹ He expected that no woman could resist the temptations of *la mode* in the long term.

Even though early enthusiasm for the Revolution eventually inspired an array of new fashions, the Revolution’s unfulfilled promises quickly left Lebrun-Tossa disenchanted and uninspired. At the end of February 1792, Buisson disassociated himself from the periodical and Lebrun-Tossa alone was responsible for securing the journal’s finances. Financial troubles combined with Lebrun-Tossa’s lost interest resulted in the *Journal de la mode et du goût*’s failure in April 1793. As Kleinert remarks, “Un magazine de mode ayant perdu l’ambition de promouvoir sans cesse de nouveaux modèles de vêtements est condamné à périr.”¹²⁰ While elsewhere in Europe fashion periodicals continued to flourish, the Revolution’s tense political climate restricted the press. This was especially true for the women’s press during the Terror, when men who followed Rousseau’s philosophy and, accordingly, believed that women belonged in the home seized power. In addition to the rise of leaders who were already antifeminists, men who had previously supported initiatives to increase women’s involvement in the public sphere, like women’s access to education, adopted antifeminist ideology. The Revolutionary governments passed legislation which specifically targeted women’s clubs and the women’s press to bar women from participating in the public sphere and restrict them to domestic areas.¹²¹ The political climate of the Terror also severely restricted fashion. As Soboul noted, “During the Terror, numbers of moderates and aristocrats concealed their innermost

¹¹⁹ Ibid., no. 14 (25 June 1790), 2. “reduced to despair;” “vanity, the need to please, will not delay in bringing them back to the search for new fashions.”

¹²⁰ Kleinert, “La Révolution et le premier journal illustré paru en France,” 287, 308. “A fashion magazine having lost the ambition to constantly promote new styles of clothing is doomed to perish.”

¹²¹ Sullerot, *Histoire de la presse féminine en France*, 62. See Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, “Robespierre, Old Regime Feminist? Gender, the Late Eighteenth Century, and the French Revolution Revisited,” *The Journal of Modern History* 82, no. 1 (2010): 1-29.

thoughts behind the costume of the sans-culotte and the general behavior of the militant.”¹²²

Many people wore patriotic symbols and costumes, like baggy trousers and red caps, to protect themselves against accusations of counterrevolutionary or aristocratic sympathies. Consequently, the French fashion press did not return until 1797, when, inspired by the *Journal de la mode et du goût* and its predecessors, Sellèque and La Mésengère created the *Journal des dames et des modes*. The success of their periodical quickly gave rise to several competing publications, reinvigorating the French fashion press.¹²³

¹²² Soboul, *The Sans-Culottes*, 228.

¹²³ Kleinert, “*Journal des Dames et des Modes*,” 18-20.

Submitting to the Graces: Neoclassicism, Fashion and the Directory, 1797-99

Although the members of the Directory attempted to censor the French press, their policies never achieved the same effectiveness as those introduced during the Terror.¹²⁴ Journalism, however, continued to be a dangerous profession and subject to government interference. The Directory tripled the tax on the postage of journals and Buisson, the publisher of the *Cabinet des modes* and its successors, cautioned “on se garde bien de ranger les papiers publics dans la classe des choses de luxe.”¹²⁵ In response to threats to its authority, the Directory strengthened its control over the press.¹²⁶ The editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* included several references to the government’s influence on contemporary periodicals in his journal. In one example, he briefly mentioned how the Directory ended one publication. He also published a request from C. Wuiet, the female editor of *La Chrysalide*, in which she stated that “le gouvernement, en faisant lever les scellés apposés sur mes presses, rend à mon journal son ancien titre: le Phénix.”¹²⁷ However, as Sullerot notes, “La presse féminine du Directoire fut en effet bien trop légère et blasée en matière politique pour jamais figurer sur les listes des ennemis du régime.”¹²⁸

The fashion press during the Directorate mostly avoided direct discussion of the ‘serious’ subjects. The periodical claimed that the avoidance of such topics appealed to subscribers; in a letter to the director, one subscriber wrote that his wife had become obsessed with the periodical because, while other publications only talked of blood and war, the *Journal des dames et des*

¹²⁴ Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, 38-9.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Sullerot, *Histoire de la Presse féminine en France*, 68. “one refrains from classifying public papers as luxury items.”

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹²⁷ *Journal des dames et des modes*, 3:250; 3:456. “the government, removing the seals affixed to my presses, returns to my journal its former title: Le Phénix.”

¹²⁸ Sullerot, *Histoire de la Presse féminine en France*, 70. “The women’s press of the Directory was indeed too light and blasé in political matters to ever appear on the lists of the enemies of the regime.”

modes exclusively presented what they claimed to be “les myrthes d’amour.”¹²⁹ Although the journal primarily dedicated itself to the discussion of lighthearted and pleasant topics, fashion, love, and the theater, for example, it also published discrete critiques of society in the form of letters to the editor, tales, and anecdotes. The editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* believed that the journal would become “une denrée de première nécessité” that would provide women with everything that they needed.¹³⁰ When the journal published a new issue every five days, the editor proclaimed to his female subscribers that, “Je vous ferais rire les cinq, pleurer les dix, geler les quinze, suer les vingt, soupirer les vingt-cinq et bâiller les trente.”¹³¹ Therefore, the journal’s aversion to more conventionally weighty subject matter suggests that the editor did not believe that women needed to expose themselves to such topics. The journal’s light nature acted as a filter that protected women from the gore of the Revolution, much like the editor claimed to protect and defend women against their contemporaries.

After detailing reports of spousal violence in August 1798, the *Journal des dames et des modes* declared, “. . . on en pourrait conclure, en général, que les Français ont beaucoup perdu de leur respect pour le beau sexe, et, qu’en conséquence, ils ont fait un pas rétrograde en civilisation.”¹³² Domestic violence directly conflicted with bourgeois familial ideals, which emphasized companionate marriage, loving parents, and family harmony. Maza suggests that cohesion within the nuclear family became a model for the idea of a moralized French nation and uses as evidence the employment of the family model, the idea of *fraternité*, to unify citizens at

¹²⁹ *Journal des dames et des modes*, 3:125.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4:257. “a commodity of the first necessity.”

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 3:506. “I would make you laugh on the fifth [of every month], mourn on the tenth, freeze on the fifteenth, sweat on the twentieth, sigh on the twenty-fifth and yawn on the thirtieth.”

¹³² *Ibid.*, no. XXV (17 August 1798 [30 thermidor an VI]), 2. “one could conclude, in general, that the French have lost a lot of respect for the fairer sex and that consequently, they have taken a step back in civilization.”

the beginning of the Revolution.¹³³ Women, the journal argued, were naturally defenseless against men and, therefore, societal institutions needed to be in place to protect them against men's abuse. To protect the ideal of the nuclear family unit and to prevent the French from becoming less civilized, the editor suggested a return to the ancients' veneration and adoration of women, stating,

Ce fut une institution bien sage, que d'environner d'une espèce de vénération, un sexe faible, qui, par sa nature, n'a aucune défense à opposer à la force du sexe dominateur, et de dédommager, par des égards, l'assujettissement où le réduit sa faiblesse. Si ce frein venait jamais à se briser, bientôt on ne verrait plus, dans les hommes, que des tyrans, que des esclaves dans les femmes. Nos ancêtres sentaient bien la vérité de cette assertion aussi, leur respect pour les dames allait-il jusqu'à une espèce d'adoration.¹³⁴

The National Convention had abolished slavery in 1794, but the editor suggested that French society still needed institutions to protect women and to prevent France from once again falling into the darkness of incivility, in which such unenlightened institutions could persist.

However, a society in which a periodical like the *Journal des dames et des modes* could exist conflicted with the ancients' ideals. In the post-revolutionary era, Benjamin Constant argued that the ancients' concept of liberty, which rendered the individual "a slave in all his private relations" in return for sovereignty in public life, was not suited for a modern commercial society, in which modern individuals desired more freedoms in their private lives.¹³⁵

Consequently, a return to the ancients' system was impossible. In his *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theater*, Rousseau had claimed,

¹³³ Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie*, 67-8.

¹³⁴ *Journal des dames et des modes*, no. XXV (17 August 1798 [30 thermidor an VI]), 2. "This was a wise institution, to surround with a type of veneration, a weak sex, who, by its nature, has no defense against the strength of the dominating sex, and to compensate, by respects, the dependence in which it reduces its weakness. If this brake were ever to fail, soon we would only see tyrants in men, slaves in women. Our ancestors felt the truth of this assertion well too, their respect for women went to a type of adoration."

¹³⁵ Benjamin Constant, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns," in *The Libertarian Reader: Classic and contemporary readings from Lao-tzu to Milton Friedman*, ed. David Boaz (New York: Free Press, 1997), 65-67.

The ancients had, in general, a very great respect for women; but they showed this respect by refraining from exposing them to public judgment, and thought to honor their modesty by keeping quiet about their other virtues. They had as their maxim that the land where morals were purest was the one where they spoke the least of women, and that the most decent woman was the one about whom the least was said . . .¹³⁶

By contrast, he wrote, “with us . . . the most esteemed woman is the one who has the greatest renown, about whom the most is said, who is the most often seen in society . . . who judges, resolves, decides, pronounces, assigns talents, merit, virtues their degrees and places, and whose favor is most ignominiously begged for by humble, learned men.”¹³⁷ The republican values of the ancients were incompatible with the aristocracy of Old Regime France. The fashion periodicals of the late 18th century acted consistently with Rousseau’s characterization of French society. The *Journal des dames et des modes*, and many of its male readers, proclaimed themselves to be adorers of ‘le sexe aimable’ and as adorers of women, they could not help but compliment and defend women’s talents and virtues.¹³⁸ When a moralist suggestively asked where women kept their keys as pockets were no longer fashionable, the editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* declared that he and the journal’s other contributors were “plus justes” and chastised the critic for his attitude, telling him that if he could not notice and understand women’s efforts to please men, “vous ne devez plus vous tourmenter à deviner où nos belles portent leurs clefs, pour les soustraire à l’indiscrete curiosité d’un mari, à la jalouse inquiétude d’un amant. Je vois à leurs bras des sacs à ouvrage.”¹³⁹ While the editor defended women against the critic’s sexual insinuations, he raised another issue regarding men’s concerns that women used fashions to keep secrets from them.

¹³⁶ Rousseau, *Letter to d’Alembert on the Theater*, 286.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Journal des dames et des modes*, 4:52.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, no. XXV (17 August 1798 [30 thermidor an VI]), 7. “You must no longer torment yourself guessing where our beauties keep their keys, to shield them from the indiscrete curiosity of a husband, from the jealous worry of a lover. I see work bags on their arms.”

Like the *Journal de la mode et du goût* in 1792, during the Directory period, men believed that women used fashion to deceive. The fashion periodicals suggested that women kept more than just their keys in their bags; bags became a repository of women's secrets. The *Tableau général du goût* claimed that "On peut quitter un mari, un amant, jamais le sac: c'est le compagnon indivisible de nos belles, le dépositaire fidèle de leurs plus secrètes pensées."¹⁴⁰ The *Journal des dames et des modes* also suggested that women kept their innermost secrets in their bags, stating, "Depuis que l'indiscrétion des Ridicules a trahi les secrets de l'amour, ils n'ont plus le dépôt des billets doux."¹⁴¹ A fashion plate depicting a "couple amoureux à la promenade" showed the man carrying the woman's bag. Although Bonafide, the editor of the *Tableau général du goût*, made no mention of the bag in the accompanying description, the couple's close proximity to one another combined with the statement that they were a couple in love suggests that the woman willingly surrendered her secrets to him.¹⁴²

Veils were another accessory that men suspected women used to hide secrets. Veils were not a new fashion, Bonafide himself admitted that "l'usage du voile est très-ancien;" however, he claimed that the veil that ancient women wore "ne ressemble point au voile dont se servent nos élégantes," remarking that the current veil more closely resembled "[le] mezarò des Italiennes."¹⁴³ Bonafide proposed that veils became fashionable again after an outbreak of smallpox, which according to the *Journal des dames et des modes*, ". . . ne frappe pas à mort; mais, par un raffinement de cruauté, en laissant la vie, elle détruit et enlève tout ce qui peut la

¹⁴⁰ *Tableau général du goût, des modes et costumes de Paris. Costumes de l'an VII* (Paris: Guide, 1799), 1:38. "One can leave a husband, a lover, never the bag: it is the indivisible companion of our beauties, the faithful depository of their most secret thoughts."

¹⁴¹ *Journal des dames et des modes*, 3:288. "Since the indiscreetness of Ridicules [bags] betrayed the secrets of love, they no longer store love letters."

¹⁴² *Tableau général du goût*, 1:193. "couple in love on a walk."

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1:78. "the use of the veil is age-old;" "does not resemble the veil that our elegant women use;" "[the] mezarò of Italian women." The modern spelling of *mezarò* is *mezzarò*.

rendre supportable à bien des femmes, les agréments de la figure, et les douceurs attachées à cet avantage. On ne voit de toutes parts que des visages mouchetés, des charmes troués, des appas maroquinés.”¹⁴⁴ Describing the fashion, he noted, “les laides y gagnent, et les femmes jolies n’y perdent rien.”¹⁴⁵ He believed that ‘ugly’ women could, and readily would, use veils to trick men into thinking that they were beautiful.

The popularity of light, transparent fabrics among women under the Directory offered one solution to the fear that women used styles and accessories to hide their deformities. As *l’Arlequin* noted, transparent fabrics “voilent les formes, ils ne les cachent pas.”¹⁴⁶ However, most men, and most people outside of Paris, were not enthusiastic about this scandalous fashion and women drew criticism from contemporaries for their dress. Because the styles that they published were so revealing, the *Journal des dames et des modes* felt the need to reassure its subscribers in the provinces that “les modes dont nous leur donnons la description, ne sont point prises d’après les filles publiques, comme plusieurs ont paru le soupçonner, mais toujours d’après des femmes estimables et dont le goût pour la parure n’ôte rien à la pureté de leurs mœurs.”¹⁴⁷ The periodical explained non-Parisians’ shock at women’s apparent lack of morality stating, “Si quelquefois leur mise parait fronder les lois de la décence, c’est que les yeux n’y sont point accoutumés. Quant à nous autres parisiens, nous sommes tellement habitues à promener nos regards sur un sein d’albâtre, sur une jambe, un bras dessiné par l’Amour, qu’une vérité cette

¹⁴⁴ *Journal des dames et des modes*, no. XXXII (21 September 1798 [5eme jour comp. an VI]), 1. “. . . does not kill; but, by a subtle cruelty, leaving life, it destroys and removes all that can to make it tolerable to many women, the attractiveness of the figure and the softness attached to this advantage. From all sides, one only sees mottled faces, charms with holes in them, leathery attractions.”

¹⁴⁵ *Tableau général du goût*, 1:78. “ugly women benefit from it and pretty women lose nothing to it.”

¹⁴⁶ *L’Arlequin, journal de pièces et de morceaux Premier Trimestre, du 15 Thermidor, an 7, au 15 Brumaire, an 8*. (Paris: Deferrière, 1799), 41. “veil forms, they do not hide them.”

¹⁴⁷ *Journal des dames et des modes*, 4:13. “the fashions for which we give a description do not take their inspiration from prostitutes, as many seem, but always from estimable women, whose taste for adornment takes nothing away from the purity of their behaviors.”

vue ne nous occasionne pas la plus petite sensation.”¹⁴⁸ This episode highlights the separation between the urban fashions that the fashion press disseminated and the periodicals’ provincial audience.

Although many people believed that by dressing indecently, women were rebelling against propriety and societal values, the fashion periodicals were less critical of Parisian women’s revealing fashion choices. Describing a tunic without sleeves, *l’Arlequin* remarked that “. . . ce qu'elle perdit du côté de la modestie, elle le gagna en élégance, et en légèreté.”¹⁴⁹ ‘Légèreté’ in fashion was healthful because it was more natural. In *Émile* (1762), Rousseau had noted that “the present French dress cramps and disables even a man, and is especially injurious to children. It arrests the circulation of the humors; they stagnate from an inaction made worse by sedentary life. This corruption of the humors brings on the scurvy, a disease becoming every day more common among us, but unknown to the ancients, protected from it by their dress and their mode of life.”¹⁵⁰ Fashion periodicals took a similar stance, especially in regards to children. Discussing the merits of dressing children ‘à la Turque,’ *l’Arlequin* noted that “Cet habillement n’étant point serré, ne gêne pas les mouvemens du corps, et laisse toute l’aisance nécessaire à son [un petit enfant] développement.”¹⁵¹ However, they questioned mothers who made their child wear an “énorme et lourd turban” with the ensemble.¹⁵² Aside from its healthful qualities, *légèreté* was also consistent with women’s characters, which were thought to be lighter than those of men. The *Journal des dames et des modes* questioned whether women’s taste for nudity

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4:13-4. “If sometimes their appearance seems to violate the laws of decency, it is that the eyes are not accustomed to it. As for us other Parisians, we are so accustomed to seeing an alabaster breast, a leg, an arm drawn by Love that truthfully this sight does not bring about in us the smallest sensation.”

¹⁴⁹ *L’Arlequin*, 63. “What it lost on the side of modesty, it gained in elegance, and in lightness.”

¹⁵⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile or Concerning Education*, ed. Jules Steeg, trans. Eleanor Worthington (Boston: D.C. Heath & Company, 1889), 93.

¹⁵¹ *L’Arlequin*, 64. “This outfit, not being tight, does not hinder the body’s movements and leaves all the necessary ease to [a small child’s] development.”

¹⁵² *Ibid.* “enormous and heavy turban.”

was an issue; “La vérité est nue,” the editor remarked, “Doit-on leur faire un crime d’approcher le plus près possible de la vérité?”¹⁵³ In the frontispiece of Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*, a 1772 engraving by Bonaventure-Louis Prévost based on Charles-Nicolas Cochin’s 1764 sketch, truth is allegorically represented by a woman wearing a veil; the transparent fabric lightly veils her body, but hides nothing. In the image, the allegorical representations of reason and philosophy attempt to unveil Truth, exposing more of her body, while Imagination attempts to adorn her with a garland of flowers.¹⁵⁴ Truth was naked; therefore, the less clothing a woman wore the more natural and less deceptive her outfit was.

Although the fashion press claimed to support women’s controversial styles, their support was superficial. In response to the popularity of transparent fabrics, the *Tableau général du goût* reminded women that “elles étaient toujours belles, parce qu’elles étaient toujours chastes; aimables et pures, elles commandaient aux hommes le respect.”¹⁵⁵ The editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* also warned women that “. . . il ne suffit pas, pour l’honneur de votre mari, pour mon bonheur et votre tranquillité, que vous soyez honnête femme, épouse fidèle; il faut encore le paraître.”¹⁵⁶ “La réputation! . . . c’est le plus précieux trésor de votre sexe,” he continued, “Vous êtes vertueuse, madame, je le sais. Pourquoi donc voulez-vous renoncer au

¹⁵³ *Journal des dames et des modes*, no. XXX (11 September 1798 [25 fructidor an VI]), 8. “Truth is naked; must one make it a crime to approach the truth as close as possible?”

¹⁵⁴ “Frontispice & Explication” in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2016 Edition), eds. Robert Morrissey and Glenn Roe.

¹⁵⁵ *Tableau général du goût*, 1:138. “they were always beautiful, because they were always chaste; nice and pure, they commanded men’s respect.”

¹⁵⁶ *Journal des dames et des modes*, no. XXIX (6 September 1798 [20 fructidor an VI]), 1. “. . . it is not enough, for the honor of your husband, for my happiness and your tranquility, that you are an honest woman, a faithful wife; You must still appear it.” In the 18th-century, ‘honnête femme’ might have been used to describe a woman who was particularly chaste, virtuous, and modest. See Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel* (The Hague: Chez A. et R. Leers, 1690), 2:269.

plus doux fruit de vos vertus, à l'estime publique!"¹⁵⁷ As Rousseau had remarked, in theory, ". . . every woman without chasteness is guilty and depraved, because she tramples on a sentiment natural to her Sex."¹⁵⁸ In actuality, he had claimed, "In the big cities, chasteness is ignoble and base. It is the only thing for which a well brought up woman would be ashamed. And the honor of having made a decent man blush belongs only to women of the best tone."¹⁵⁹ Contradicting their calls for women to present themselves more virtuously, the fashion press, along with the fashions that they promoted in their issues, helped to elevate an urban culture in which virtues like chastity became increasingly irrelevant. Moreover, although the fashion periodicals cited nature and truth to support women's fashions, both the *Journal des dames et des modes* and the *Tableau général du goût* used the argument of nature to stress that France's climate was not suitable for the light fabrics associated with neoclassical dress and noted that women who dressed lightly did so against medical advice.¹⁶⁰ E. Clare Cage suggests that contemporaries used the argument of nature to control women's dress by emphasizing both the inappropriate and unhealthful qualities of the neoclassical fashions, which Cage argues gave women the power to make themselves artists, art critics, and works of art.¹⁶¹

Neoclassicism did provide women with symbolic power. Neoclassical dress allowed women to emulate the goddesses of antiquity. Styles like 'à la Minerve,' 'à la greque,' and 'à la romaine' transformed women into visions of the past for men to venerate. Neoclassicism also emphasized the importance of education and fine arts for women. The *Journal des dames et des*

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., no. XXIX (6 September 1798 [20 fructidor an VI]), 2. "Reputation . . . it is the most precious treasure of your sex;" "You are virtuous, madame, I know it. Why then do you want to renounce the sweetest fruit of your virtues to public esteem!"

¹⁵⁸ Rousseau, *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theater*, 313-4.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ *Tableau général du goût*, 1:136.

¹⁶¹ E. Clare Cage, "The Sartorial Self: Neoclassical Fashion and Gender Identity in France, 1797-1804," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42, no. 2 (2009): 201, 205.

modes stated that “les Grâces et les Arts sont de la même famille, et se doivent de mutuels secours.”¹⁶² In the *Tableau général du goût*, fashion plates depicted women in neoclassical dress cultivating their art. Examples included a plate depicting a “Jeune femme pinçant de la guitare” and another which depicted a “jeune personne allant au Musée étudier la peinture.”¹⁶³ Describing the latter, the journal claimed that “. . . le goût s’est formé par l’étude des beaux modèles de l’antiquité” and because of her study, the woman depicted in the plate “ressemble à une Muse.”¹⁶⁴ By stating that the woman resembled a goddess, the journal granted her the passive power to inspire men to achieve greatness. Through the style of antiquity, the fashion press claimed that women could cultivate their talents to surpass each other in the art of fashion, which the fashion press editors claimed women possessed a natural desire to accomplish. According to *l’Arlequin*, “La Beauté veut toujours être sans rivale; et la Nature heureusement lui a donné l’instinct de ce qui peut l’embellir encore.”¹⁶⁵ Describing an outfit, one of the benefits that the *Tableau général du goût* underlined was that “La femme qui le portait, quoiqu’elle ne soit pas jolie, se distinguait avantageusement parmi les belles . . .”¹⁶⁶ The fashion press promoted competition among women to reinforce the idea that it was more important for women to pay attention to the way they dressed than to intrude into less frivolous areas of the public sphere. While the fashion press heavily promoted study in fashion and the arts to women, they

¹⁶² *Journal des dames et des modes* 3:218. “the Graces and the Arts are of the same family, and owe each other mutual assistance.”

¹⁶³ *Tableau général du goût*, 1:106, 1:130. “Young woman plucking the guitar;” “Young person going to the Museum to study painting.”

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:130. “. . . the taste formed itself through the study of the beautiful models of antiquity;” “[resembled] a Muse.”

¹⁶⁵ *L’Arlequin*, 209. “Beauty always wants to be without rival; and Nature fortunately gave her the instinct of what can make her more beautiful.”

¹⁶⁶ *Tableau général du goût*, 1:131. “The woman who wore it, although she was not pretty, advantageously distinguished herself among beautiful women.”

recognized women's limited opportunity to study other fields. Discussing women's interest in botany, *l'Arlequin* remarked,

Cependant des écrivains atrabilaires se plaisent à verser le fiel de la satire, sur les femmes qui s'adonnent à cet amusement, aussi ingénieux, qu'innocent et utile. Ils cherchent à ridiculiser leur goût pour la botanique, et trouvent mauvais qu'une femme sache distinguer dans une fleur, le pistil, le calice, les étamines, la corolle, les pétales, etc.; et qu'elle puisse, par forme de conversation, instruire son enfant dans la structure d'un objet qui frappera agréablement ses sens pendant toute sa vie. On permet à la Beauté de se parer de fleurs, et on veut qu'elle en ignore l'ordonnance, la composition, et l'économie.¹⁶⁷

While fashion and fine art were acceptable subjects for women to study, science was not. That women were actively encouraged to engage in the arts, yet discouraged from participation in the sciences demonstrated an emerging distinction between two disciplines. If the editor supported women's right to study subjects like science, economics, and law, it was only because he believed that women should be able to adequately educate their children and fulfill their domestic role as mothers.

Although the French fashion press had always recognized women's talents and authority in fashion, during the Directory period, fashion periodicals presented women's ritual following of fashion and their inherent desire to please men as if it were their devotions. In their defense against the critic who asked where women kept their keys, the editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* asserted, "Nous croyons que ce sexe aimable ne brûle des parfums sur l'autel des Grâces, et dans le temple de leur mère, qu'après avoir rendu à ses dieux Pénates, le culte prescrit par la raison."¹⁶⁸ *Le Mois*, a monthly literary journal that included a fashion section in most of its

¹⁶⁷ *L'Arlequin*, 108. "However, atrabilious writers delight in pouring the venom of satire on the women who devote themselves to this amusement, as clever as innocent and useful. They look to ridicule their taste for botany, and find it bad that a woman knows to distinguish in a flower the pistil, the calyx, the stamens, the corolla, the petals, etc.; And that she can, by form of conversation, instruct her child in the structure of an object which will pleasantly strike her senses throughout her life. Beauty is allowed to adorn itself with flowers, and one desires that it be ignorant of law, composition, and economy."

¹⁶⁸ *Journal des dames et des modes*, no. XXV (17 August 1798 [30 thermidor an VI]), 7. "We believe that this amiable sex burns perfumes on the altar of the Graces, and in the temple of their mother, only after having rendered to the Penates, the worship prescribed by reason."

issues, referred to a female fashion merchant's store as "le temple du goût" and the merchant herself as the temple's "prêtresse."¹⁶⁹ Its editor also speculated that women drove themselves to frequently vary their fashions because of "la nécessité de payer le tribute à la mode."¹⁷⁰ In Rousseau's description of the 'civil religion' in *The Social Contract* (1762), he stated that in addition to its disassociation with the state, "The existence of an omnipotent, intelligent, benevolent divinity that foresees and provides; the life to come; the happiness of the just; the punishment of sinners; the sanctity of the social contract and the law—these are all positive dogmas."¹⁷¹ For the worship of *la mode*, the fashion periodicals described dogmas that were consistent with several of those listed by Rousseau. The fashion periodicals sometimes presented new women's fashions as gifts from the gods; for example, *l'Arlequin* suggested that one fashion came to be because Iris, a messenger of Juno, "y vient consulter le goût des belles pour donner à ses couleurs des nuances inconnues."¹⁷² However, the fashion press more frequently depicted *la mode* as its own entity, a creative force, with flesh, that established its own laws and empire. The editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* remarked, "Je reconnus [la mode], fille du Caprice et de la Folie, sœur cadette de la Fortune. Son pouvoir était immense, à en juger par le nombre des favoris qui composaient sa cour."¹⁷³ Yet, despite the immense power of *la mode* as a creative and influential force, it was not stronger than masculine authority. When fashions conflicted with marital or paternal authority, the editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* advised women to

¹⁶⁹ *Le Mois, journal historique, littéraire et critique, avec figures* (Paris: bureau du journal *Le Mois*, 1799), 1:22; 1:236. "The temple of taste;" "priestess."

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:238. "the need to pay tribute to fashion."

¹⁷¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), 186.

¹⁷² *L'Arlequin*, 19. "came here to consult the taste of beauties to give their colors unknown nuances."

¹⁷³ *Journal des dames et des modes*, no. XXX (11 September 1798 [25 fructidor an VI]), 2. "I recognized [fashion], the daughter of Caprice and Madness, the younger sister of Fortune. Its power was immense, judging by the number of favorites who composed its court."

attempt to find a means to reconcile the two opposing parties.¹⁷⁴ Bonafide also advised subscribers that “. . . les modes ne seront jamais en opposition aux lois, aux bonnes mœurs, aux vertus, au bonheur du corps social.”¹⁷⁵ The editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* likewise insisted that in addition to women’s devotion to *la mode*, “Les devoirs d’amante, d’amie, d’épouse, de mère, lui sont aussi sacrés que le besoin de plaire à la société qu’il embellie.”¹⁷⁶ Women could devote themselves to fashion only so long as their devotions did not conflict with their gendered social obligations: being diligent mothers, daughters, and wives and respecting masculine authority. The periodicals suggested that women who minded this restriction while studying the art of fashion would achieve their purported goal of distinguishing themselves among other women.

Although men asserted their authority over women’s dress, the men presented in the *Journal des dames et des modes* claimed to worship women and their fashions. In a poem titled “Le Ruban,” the poet, a man identified as D. . . s, worshiped a woman’s ribbon. He wrote, “Mais ton Ruban, Elise, me console. / Avant de le place, je le baise toujours” and “Ruban que j’idolâtre, image du bonheur, / Est-tu [sic] pour moi le précurseur / D’une félicité réelle!”¹⁷⁷ Numerous poems and songs published in the *Journal des dames et des modes* either had women as their main subject or were dedicated to them. The editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* suggested that women possessed such great authority that they could accomplish whatever they desired. Contemplating potential reasons for the popularity of helmets among women, they noted

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 3:57.

¹⁷⁵ *Tableau général du goût*, 1:13. “. . . fashions will never be in opposition to the laws, the morals, the virtues, the happiness of the social body.”

¹⁷⁶ *Journal des dames et des modes*, no. XXV (17 August 1798 [30 thermidor an VI]), 7. “The duties of a lover, a friend, a wife, a mother, are as sacred to her as the need to please the society she embellishes.”

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., no. XXVII (27 August 1798 [10 fructidor an VI]), 13. “But your ribbon, Elise, consoles me. / Before placing it, I always kiss it;” “Ribbon that I idolize, image of happiness, / Are you for me the precursor / Of real bliss!”

that the styles “semblent annoncer le dessein de nous traiter militairement, peut-être même de nous mettre en état de siège. Quels que soient vos projets, vous êtes sûres de réussir. On ne résiste point aux grâces.”¹⁷⁸ Even in a battle against men, the editor of the journal believed that women’s strength and grace would assure their success and he desired to support their plight.

Although the contributors to fashion periodicals claimed to support women, they provided criticisms of women’s behaviors and dress. In one issue, the editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* “wished” for specific qualities that he deemed women to lack. For example, noting that “Une femme-homme est aussi ridicule qu’un homme-femme,” the editor wished that Mlle H..., a woman who wore men’s styles, had had “. . . plus de goût pour les vertus de son sexe, et moins pour les habitudes du notre,” not disclosing what these ‘virtues’ and ‘habits’ were.¹⁷⁹ Rousseau had remarked, “. . . everywhere, there is conviction that in neglecting the ways of their Sex [women] neglect its duties; everywhere, it is seen that, when they take on the masculine and firm assurance of the man and turn it into effrontery, they abase themselves by this odious imitation and dishonor both their sex and ours.”¹⁸⁰ Concerns that women who dressed like men would also adopt the behaviors of men and neglect their duties as mothers and wives in the home led the fashion press editors to be wary of women who appeared to adopt men’s styles. In addition to criticizing women’s taste in beauty and fashion, the editor criticized their choice of friends, lovers, and husbands. To women in general, he wished “. . . une éducation plus soignée, des goûts moins frivoles, des talens plus solides, en un mot autant de vertus qu’il [le beau sexe]

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 3:24. “. . . seem to announce the intention to treat us militarily, perhaps even to put us in a state of siege. Whatever your plans are, you are sure to succeed. One cannot resist graces.”

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 3:3. “a man-woman is as ridiculous as a woman-man;” “more taste for the virtues of her sex, and less for the habits of ours.”

¹⁸⁰ Rousseau, *Letter to d’Alembert on the Theater*, 316.

offre de grâces.”¹⁸¹ Through the attribution of beauty to behaviors and characteristics that they deemed acceptable, the fashion press editors attempted to regulate women’s behaviors and dress.

One style that the fashion press editors despised was ‘à la Titus,’ a controversial short hairstyle, originally popular among men, but that many women under the Directory adopted. To follow this fashion, women sheared their heads. The editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* was critical of the fashion; describing the fashion, he interjected that women could use wigs to hide “les ravages de la mode.”¹⁸² He also suggested that women rejected patriarchal authority to adopt this fashion; describing ‘cheveux à la Titus,’ the editor proclaimed that despite having husbands who “peu complaisant [ont empêché] de se faire tondre,” women wore their hair shorter than ever before.¹⁸³ Although he continued to publish plates and articles depicting the fashion, he despised women’s emulation of men. The *Journal des dames et des modes* published a letter to the editor in which a man proclaimed that he disliked short hair because it “détruisent une grande partie des charmes de ce sexe enchanteur.”¹⁸⁴ Overjoyed at the discovery that the director of the *Juif Errant*, a young woman whose work the editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* had previously praised,¹⁸⁵ shared his opinion, he went to see “cette femme rare.” However, to his surprise, when he saw her, he realized that she too had sacrificed her hair to *la mode*, proving to the journal’s subscribers that all women were susceptible to the ridicules of fashion.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ *Journal des dames et des modes*, 3:3. “a more meticulous education, less frivolous tastes, stronger talents, in a word as many virtues as [le beau sexe does] graces.”

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 3:516. “the ravages of fashion.”

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, no. XXXI (16 September 1798 [30 fructidor an VI]), 10. “not very indulgent, [prevented] them from getting sheared.”

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 4:53. “destroys a large part of the charms of this enchanting sex.”

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 3:599.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 4:52-3.

Women's supposed susceptibility to unflattering fashions reinforced their need for guidance from the fashion periodicals. During the early years of its publication, the *Journal des dames et des modes* suggested that women were becoming increasingly dependent on the periodical. Through letters to the editors, the journal professed women's dependency on the publication and the lengths to which they would go in order to obtain a copy. For example, one letter, purporting to be from a teenage girl desperate for a copy of the journal, proposed to the editor that he provide her with a copy of the journal in exchange for a basket of fruit.¹⁸⁷ By May 1799, advising women was no longer sufficient for the editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes*. He asked his female subscribers in the provinces—his primary audience—to surrender their autonomy in fashion so that he could control their dress. He announced that he had recently established a real *magasin des modes* for the women in the provinces, where “[elles trouveront] tous les objets dont [elles auront] besoin.”¹⁸⁸ He proposed to them,

Oui, Mesdames, ce n'est pas assez pour moi de vous indiquer les nouvelles coiffures: je prétends vous coiffer moi-même. Vous ne devez pas trouver cette disposition étrange de la part d'un homme qui fait profession de vous adorer. Il est si doux d'embellir ce qu'on aime. Qui, mieux que votre amant, d'ailleurs, saura diriger votre toilette? Qui, plus que lui, est intéressé à faire briller les attraits qui l'ont subjugué? Plus il leur donnera d'éclat, plus il lui sera glorieux d'avoir cédé à leur pouvoir. Vous régnez sur mon cœur, Mesdames, c'est un fait incontestable eh bien! permettez-moi de régner sur vos têtes.¹⁸⁹

The editor asked to ‘reign over’ the heads of his female subscribers not unlike the way the king had reigned over his subjects before the end of the monarchy or the way Napoleon would assert his authority over the French people as First Consul and Emperor. Because they were unable to

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 3:533.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 3:520. “[they would find] all the objects that [they would] need.”

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 3:519-20. “Yes, ladies, it is not enough for me to show you the new hairstyles: I aim to do your hair myself. You must not find this disposition strange on the part of a man who has made a profession of you. It is so sweet to embellish what you love. Who, better than your lover, will know to direct your dress? Who, more than he, is interested in making the charms that have captivated him shine? The more radiance he will give them, the more he can pride himself on having given into their power. You reign over my heart, ladies, it is an incontestable fact! permit me to reign over your heads.”

easily access the latest trends in Paris, subscribers in the provinces were dependent on fashion periodicals to remain knowledgeable of the latest fashions. In an era in which the *Journal des dames et des modes* dominated, these women had few alternative options. The editor assured women that their loss of power would benefit them; “je ne serai point un tyran,” he promised, “. . . mon joug aura la douceur du satin, la légèreté de gaze, l’aménité des fleurs. Ce n’est même que par des faveurs que je prétends vous y enchaîner.”¹⁹⁰ The editor proclaimed himself his subscribers’ ‘lover’ and claimed that he only desired to enslave them because he adored them, contradicting his previous claim that the adoration of women would prevent the tyranny of man from enslaving them.¹⁹¹ The editor’s desire to re-enslave women prefigured France’s return to a strong executive rule under Napoleon, who, much like the editor, ‘loved’ his subjects, and the re-imposition of slavery in the colonies just a few years later, in 1802.

Under Napoleon, the French fashion press continued to flourish. *Le Mois* expressed some hope at seeing the end of the Revolution. In their issue from December 1, 1799, *Le Mois* claimed, “Jusqu’ici la stagnation du commerce a paralysé le génie des inventeurs et le zèle des prêtresses.”¹⁹² In their following issue from December 31, 1799, they expressed hope that the new government and the “[l]’heureuse influence du retour des principes libéraux et des lois équitables” that accompanied it would revitalize industry, which they claimed the Revolution had “paralyzed.”¹⁹³ However, in general, the fashion press continued to avoid direct discussion of conventionally weighty subjects; in the *Journal des dames et des modes* the only allusions to the Napoleonic wars and, later, the Restoration were in advertisements for recently published

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. “I will not be a tyrant;” “. . . my yoke will be as soft as satin, as light as gauze, as gracious as flowers. It is only by assistance that I claim to enchain you there.”

¹⁹¹ Ibid., no. XXV (17 August 1798 [30 thermidor an VI]), 2.

¹⁹² *Le Mois*, 3:258. “Until now, the stagnation of commerce paralyzed inventors’ genius and priestesses’ zeal.”

¹⁹³ Ibid., 4:14. “the fortunate influence from the return to liberal principals and fair laws.”

books; the periodical made no mention of political change itself,¹⁹⁴ preferring to focus on lighter subjects.

¹⁹⁴ Sullerot, *Histoire de la presse féminine en France*, 101.

Conclusion

While the fashion plate engravers may have attempted to model their works after real subjects and fashions, the ideas and claims that the fashion press editors promulgated were more imaginary than ‘*dessiné d’après nature*,’ as they claimed. Burke stated that “[words] seem to me to affect us in a manner very different from that in which we are affected by natural objects, or by painting or architecture; yet words have as considerable a share in exciting ideas of beauty and of the sublime as any of those, and sometimes a much greater than any of them.”¹⁹⁵ He argued that images could only affect as much as the objects imitated in them. However, “the most lively and spirited verbal description I can give, raises a very obscure and imperfect *idea* of such objects; but then it is in my power to raise a stronger *emotion* by the description that I could do by the best painting.”¹⁹⁶ Although the posturing of subjects in the fashion plates themselves is significant, it is perhaps the plate descriptions that are the most revealing. The editors spun stories about and projected behaviors onto the characters depicted in the images to facilitate the regulation of both fashion and the individuals who followed it.

When the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* changed the manner by which it made its plates in 1787, its editor remarked, “Un avantage, assez grand, que l’on retirera du parti que nous avons pris de mettre les trois Planches sur une même feuille, sera d’y voir quelques scènes dramatiques, lorsque l’idée nous sera venue d’en représenter.”¹⁹⁷ The journal’s first ‘dramatic scene’ depicted “l’action la plus simple, &, malheureusement, la plus ordinaire . . . la scène d’une femme amante d’un jeune homme qu’elle cherche à captiver, qui l’abandonne, qui la fuit, pour aller séduire une

¹⁹⁵ Burke, *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, 163.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁹⁷ *Magasin des modes nouvelles*, 2:17. “A considerable advantage that we will collect from the part that we have taken from the three Plates on one single sheet, will be to see some dramatic scenes, as soon as the idea to represent them comes to us.”

autre femme, qui l'écoute à peine, mais qui du moins l'écoute assez pour jeter le désespoir dans l'ame de la femme amante."¹⁹⁸ Compared to the editor's story, the plate, which portrayed two women and a man standing on grass, was underwhelming. The story was not only more captivating than the plate, but it was more revealing; the editor indicated that it was normal for women to enthrall men, to experience despair when they failed, and that it was ordinary for men to leave their lovers for other women. While this was the only instance where the editor of the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* described a scene using all three plates, fashion press editors continued to craft stories about the people shown in the plates. Describing a plate of a "Religieuse nouvellement rendue à la society," the editor of the *Journal de la mode et du goût* claimed that the woman appeared modest and austere and stated that "elle n'[était] pas encore familiarisée avec le grand jour, et qu'elle a vécu long-temps dans l'ennui et le désespoir."¹⁹⁹ Having her arms crossed in front of her, the woman in the plate appeared reserved, but it would be impossible to know that she was a nun had the editor not explicitly stated it. Words allowed the editor to manipulate the plate's image in order to demonstrate his disapproval of the National Assembly's treatment of nuns. This disjuncture between image and text is a common thread across French fashion periodicals in the late 18th-century; the fashion press editors manipulated words to project their values and ideals onto the people and fashions depicted in the plates.

Despite the fashion press' attempts to master and regulate *la mode*, fashion continued to be a wild, uncontrollable force. However, as evidenced by the editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes*' request to enchain his female subscribers, the fashion press did succeed in mastering

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 2:18. "the simplest action, and, unfortunately, the most ordinary . . . the scene of a woman lover of a young man who she seeks to captivate, who abandons her, who runs away from her, to go seduce another woman, who barely listens to him, but who at least listens to him enough to throw despair in the soul of the woman lover."

¹⁹⁹ *Journal de la mode et du goût*, no. 4 (25 March 1790), 2-3. "Nun recently released into society;" "she [was] not yet familiar with being in the public eye, and that she lived for a long time in boredom and despair."

the women who consumed fashions. Although the National Convention may have granted women freedom of dress as a replacement for legitimate political power, the fashion press ultimately undermined women's authority, not only by dictating to women their ideas and values regarding 'proper' appearance and behaviors, but also by reducing women's authority in the sphere of fashion. While the *Cabinet des modes* and the *Magasin des mode nouvelles* initially portrayed women as masters of fashion, who wielded their command over *la mode* through the creation and refinement of fashions, by the Directory period, fashion periodicals characterized women as subservient to *la mode*—mere worshipers at the altar of this untamable entity. By pushing women's public influence to areas of slight civil significance and cultural frivolity, the fashion press reinforced the relegation of women to their roles as wives and mothers. This not only alleviated anxieties regarding women's presence in the public sphere, but because the male fashion press editors dictated women's consumption of fashions, it also assuaged growing concerns about women's consumptive and sartorial habits, all of which were conceived as potential threats to domestic harmony. In these ways, the fashion press effectively contributed to the resolution of the Revolution's anxieties regarding the relationship between gender and citizenship.

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