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Week 9-

I admit I don't really understand the "new" cultural history. Having read Hunt's *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, I don't feel that I am any better able to explain it. It seems to me that while Hunt is recasting the French Revolution in Oedipal terms (with a perverted twist of hating the mother rather than loving her), she has produced a work of sociology rather than history. My questions are going to be brief because I am having a difficult time internalizing her methodologies. She relies heavily on modern theory and attempts to read them back into the narrative of the French Revolution. It left me with the feeling that any time there was a reference to family in a primary source, she appropriated it to support her arguments. To what extent was she being hyper-selective in her culling of sources to fit her preconceived notions?

At a more fundamental level, she is trying to narrate the history of the subconscious through conscious behavior. She defends her focus on the "political unconscious" by saying the results "bring previously overlooked evidence into clearer focus and because it raises important questions about the meanings of modern politics." Is the resulting narrative ever falsifiable?

Hunt makes much of the role of the novel in the period leading up to and during the Revolution. Many of the characters are depicted in terms of family relations. How widespread were these novels? She gives publication figures, but she fails to present any sort of context for them. Assuming we accept the fundamental premises of her arguments, how pervasive were these anti-paternal feelings in society at large? Were the sans-culottes reading Sade in their spare time? Hunt focuses on a narrow segment of the available literature (a small number of speeches, a handful of books, a some newspaper accounts). Can we reasonably expand her analysis to French society at large or has she merely picked up on an undercurrent that applies to a small segment?

A final question about terminology: Hunt devotes an entire chapter to Sade. She notes the proliferation of pornography in France in the 1790s. Is Sade truly pornographic? He is undoubtedly explicit (as Hunt has been so kind to demonstrate in her selection of reproduced images), but is it pornographic? If "La Philosophie dans la boudoire" is really a philosophical treatise using a *reductio ad absurdum* method to lay bare (wink, wink) the underlying tensions in revolutionary ideology, does its intent rescue it from the pornographic label? Conversely, once Hunt attaches Oedipal meaning to other aspects of the Revolution, should the images of Louis's execution be considered pornographic as well?