

# ALLEGORIES OF COMMEMORATION

by

SARAH BONNEMAISON

B.Sc., Concordia University, 1985

B.Arch., Pratt Institute, 1983

S.M.Arch.S., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1985

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Department of Geography

The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

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## ABSTRACT

In analyzing the 1989 bicentennial in Paris, my point of departure has been that the French government, faced with the cool reception to the memory of the Revolution of 1789, was trying to make revolutionary heritage relevant to contemporary concerns, by using allegorical techniques of spatializing and visualizing history while consequently (yet paradoxically, since it ran against their intentions) effecting a smooth passage for this heritage into the world of commodity and spectacle. To analyze this dilemma, I investigated the mechanisms of representation and the tension between spectacle and politically engaged imagery. Drawing from the work of Walter Benjamin, the thesis proposed to use allegory as a mode of political criticism and redemptive interpretation. The analysis of the programming of events, for example, revealed that it contained a moral tale of sacrifice, and praised the power of the memory of the Revolution to form a community, not based on ethnicity or shared history but on shared ideals. The analysis of the use of collage in the Bastille Day Parade revealed that it reworked Republican notions of 'fraternity' in a post-colonial era to reflect contemporary discussions of *métissage* and take a position on its relationship to democracy.

By looking at this commemoration allegorically, the double meanings inscribed in the bicentennial program, exhibits, monuments and parade can be unpacked. But the allegorical critique is violent, it does not carefully excavate layers of meaning through a gentle and constructive hermeneutic circle, it requires that the objects that are being contemplated be in fragments. As the allegorist reassembles the fragments into new meaningful constellations, the constructions remain open, driven by the impossibility of recovering what has been lost, always pointing to the instability of meaning.

The analysis of the commemoration recognized that commodification and spectacularisation happen, but through reversal it also showed that the 1989 bicentennial draws from a constantly evolving relationship to memory which allows for investment on the part of the public. Because the commemoration is a powerful form of visualizing and spatializing history that occurs in public spaces, many provocative images were taken up by the press and written about, which ultimately reconfigured present-day discussions about democracy and citizenship.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

We live in a society where life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles.<sup>1</sup>

An appreciation of the transience of things, and the concern to redeem them for eternity, is one of the strongest impulses in allegory.<sup>2</sup>

#### Redeeming commemorative spectacles

Between the massive amount of money spent on official spectacles and localized struggles to redeem the past, commemorations remain a highly ambivalent product of the encounter between spectacle and memory. The quotations above from Guy Debord and Walter Benjamin capture the ambivalence structuring much current discussion about spectacles and the landscapes they generate. On the one hand, spectacles have been interpreted within the nexus of power/knowledge as an effective way to make colonial order, capitalism, or religious belief systems visible, based on certain truth claims of progress, economic growth, or the divine word.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, they have been interpreted with a redemptive intent as sites of "pilgrimage to the commodity fetish," popular resistance, social interaction, and utopia.<sup>4</sup> In this thesis, I discuss the questions surrounding spectacles in relation to the Parisian commemoration of the French Revolution in 1989.

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<sup>1</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of Spectacle* (Detroit: Red and Black, 1977), sec. 1-8.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, cited in Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: an Aesthetic of Redemption* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 71.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); David Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); James Duncan, *City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandy Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Paris, capital du XIXème siècle* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1989); Peter Jackson, *Maps of Meaning* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); David Ley and K. Olds, "Landscape as Spectacle: world's fairs and the culture of heroic consumption," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 6 (1988); Stacy Warren, "This heaven gives me migraines; the problems and promise of landscapes of leisure," *Place/culture/representation*, ed. James Duncan and David Ley (London: Routledge, 1993).

To be sure, as Timothy Mitchell argues, spectacles such as the nineteenth century great exhibitions were far more effective in imagining and implementing colonial rule than any other form of colonial propaganda. Mitchell uses letters written by Egyptians visiting Paris to read the exhibition against its grain, to make strange what we would take for granted: the city in miniature, the realism of a reconstructed street, and above all, the western notion of 'spectacle'. Mitchell calls this particular arrangement between the individual and an object-world the 'world-as exhibition'. He does not refer to an exhibition of the world but to the world conceived and grasped as though it were an exhibition. His analysis leads us to an awareness of how the 'world-as-exhibition' was not simply a display of power and industrial progress but a way of seeing and implementing colonialism.

I believe that in the transition to a 'post-colonial' world, the 'world-as-exhibition' has not disappeared but merely adapted to the demands of current global politics. The American media, as Noam Chomsky has forcefully argued, is a powerful player in building consensus on a political situation. Whether the 'world-as-exhibition' is restricted to the media or whether it is a more complicated situation where geopolitical strategies make use of already-existing genres, such as commemorations, there is no doubt that Western nations use culture to make their views known to the rest of the world.<sup>5</sup> In contrast with the less visually oriented strategies of the World Bank, spectacles provide visual material readily incorporated in the flow of the media networks that constantly irrigate the globe.

The spectacles of industrialized countries have consistently drawn from cultures they have construed as exotic, marginal or pre-modern. In the great exhibitions of North America "each large nation has taken arts of its crushed former peoples and erected them as symbols of 'national ethnicity' to distinguish each from the other, and all of them from their European homelands."<sup>6</sup> This practice continues today. The British Columbian pavilion at the 1992 Seville Expo displayed the art of the Native peoples of the West Coast; in Europe, the Scottish tartan, Brittany fiddler, and Basque beret are repeatedly pressed into service as symbols of British and French identity. Spectacles repeatedly reaffirm -- in a way that is vital for localized struggles over memory -- the interconnectedness of

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<sup>5</sup> Note the recent decision of the Canadian House of Commons and Senate Joint Foreign Affairs Committee to make "culture one of the three pillars of Canadian Foreign Policy, the other two being politics and economics."

<sup>6</sup> Nelson H. H. Graburn, *Ethnic and Tourist Arts, Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 29.

global cultures. Indeed, the role played by culture is always growing as electronic media reaches out to ever more remote places of the globe. As Terry Eagleton says, "in the contemporary debates on modernity, modernism and postmodernism, 'culture' would seem a key category for the analysis and understanding of late capitalist society."<sup>7</sup>

What matters here is not so much the differences between the recent commemoration and its predecessor of 1889 (the subject of Mitchell's work), but *how* Mitchell analyses the exhibition. He argues that Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism has led cultural critics to denigrate spectacle as *misrepresentation*, while neglecting to analyse the actual process of representation.

To the mechanism of misrepresentation by which power operates, Marx opposed a representation of the way things intrinsically are, in their transparent and rational reality. The problem with such an explanation was that, in revealing power to work through *misrepresentation*, it left representation itself unquestioned.<sup>8</sup>

For Mitchell, an analysis of spectacles should focus not on how they alienate the visitor from the reality of life, but on how they promise the existence of that reality. This shift in focus from what I call demystification to a Foucauldian analysis of the mechanism of representation (and its effects on colonial life) goes entirely against the grain of most work done on spectacle to date. From the influential writings of Guy Debord (and its extensions in Virilio and Baudrillard) to the work of David Harvey, spectacles have been conceived -- like the whole of the entertainment industry -- as '*misrepresentations*' of a 'reality'.<sup>9</sup> This duality between misrepresentation and reality finds its parallel in the opposition between 'spectacle' and 'festival'. This opposition is most clearly expressed in the work of Henri Lefebvre, where festivals are seen as participatory and spontaneous expressions of popular culture, while spectacle is conceived of as an expression of power of the state, devious and anti-participatory.<sup>10</sup> This duality can be traced back to the philosophy of Jean Jacques Rousseau who advocated the simplicity and naiveté of rural festivals in order to criticize the 'opacity' of the theatrical (and thus false and artificial) spectacles.<sup>11</sup> The work of Mitchell is set in

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<sup>7</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Mitchell, *Colonizing*, 18.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Virilio, *L'espace critique* (Paris: Christian Bourgeois, 1984); Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacre and Simulations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*.

<sup>10</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> For an essay to situate the opposing forces structuring the thoughts of Lefebvre, see Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1994). For the philosophy of Rousseau relying on the opposition between festivals and spectacle see Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).



opposition to this conception of spectacle that I would call 'pre-Foucault,' which focuses on the unveiling of spectacle while neglecting to analyse how the mechanisms of spectacularisation actually operate.<sup>12</sup>

In *Downcast Eyes*, Martin Jay pulls out a thread from French philosophy running from Descartes to Derrida, which, he argues, is characterized by a persistent "denigration of vision". "A great deal of recent French thought in a wide variety of fields is in one way or another imbued with a profound suspicion of vision and its hegemonic role in the modern era."<sup>13</sup> For Jay, the notion of misrepresentation and its criticism, would therefore fall in the "essentially ocularphobic discourse."<sup>14</sup>

At the beginning of his book, Mitchell isolates the major features of the 'world-as-exhibition' which include "the remarkable claim to certainty or truth," the way everything was ordered which "led to a political decisiveness" and the presentation of the "world as a picture" which set up a relation between representations and 'reality' -- a mode of power/knowledge he calls 'enframing.' These mechanisms allow him to show that the same methods are then used to discipline the colonies making them produce goods for the empire in an orderly fashion, ensuring the reproduction of colonial control through subjectivity formation.

I see the focus on the mechanisms of spectacle as a crucial first step in interpreting contemporary commemorations, even if this method carries some limits which need to be discussed. As Derek Gregory remarks, what Mitchell does not explore "is the way the process of enframing constitutes not only its object but also its observer."<sup>15</sup> By focusing solely on the mechanisms of representation and their effects, Mitchell elides the questions surrounding the formation of the modern subject (a theme that occupied Foucault in his later work) which leads him to describe an all-too-perfect colonizing machine. This makes it difficult to imagine how the Egyptians could ever have had the mental resources to fight for their independence. Even though "anti-colonial movements have often derived their organizational forms from the military

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<sup>12</sup> For others who have investigated the *mechanism* of spectacle, see Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women on Top," *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968); Louis Marin, *Le Portrait du Roi* (Paris: Éditions du minuit, 1981); and David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: studies in the history and theory of response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 14.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Gregory, *Imaginations*, 37.

and their methods of discipline and indoctrination from schooling,"<sup>16</sup> Mitchell cannot abandon the image of colonial power as a central authority because it would lead him to conceive of resistance as existing *outside* this power.

Resistance, he says, is formed *within* the organization of the colonial state. But his description of resistance (like the Egyptian fieldworkers who would rather be blinded than leave their village) reinforces the bipolar construction of colonizer and colonized.

In analysing the bicentennial, my question has been: how can we understand the inscription of history in the landscape (the techniques, references, erasures, rhetorical forms) without reducing the events solely to their spectacularization? I decided to investigate the mechanisms of representation in the landscape, but also to draw attention to the uncontrollability of meaning once images circulate in the public realm -- the way, for example, a certain event of the commemoration becomes meaningful through associations with entirely different events, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall or a grass-roots antiracist movement. The very publicness of spectacles predisposes them towards a redemptive interpretation. For once a spectacle is produced, monuments are built, and parades performed in the street, authorities lose their initial control over meaning and, in the manner of a kaleidoscope breaking an image into colorful fragments, possible audience interpretations multiply. By folding one onto the other, I think it is possible to see how a government finds it necessary to publicly commemorate and at the same time, to understand why people like to see commemorations.

The choice of this particular commemoration was no accident. It begs the question of why spectacle should be redeemed, since the event being commemorated is the French Revolution (and, by extension the legacy of the Enlightenment), a period of history which has sustained severe criticism since the publication of Foucault's first book in the 1960s.<sup>17</sup> My aim is not to redeem the ideals of the revolution, but rather to hold in tension that possibility throughout my study in order to find strength to fight the current denigration and dismantling of the welfare state in the West. There seems to be little resistance to governments cutting funds for social programs, and presenting such actions as a goal. This destructive wave, begun under Thatcher and Reagan in the 1980s in the UK and the US, is now hitting France and Canada. One could

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<sup>16</sup> Mitchell, *Colonizing*, xi.

<sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique: une archeologie du regard medical* (Paris: Press Universitaire de France, 1963).

trace it backward to find reasons for its existence, but this is not my intention, rather to search for ideas and arguments to combat this conservative turn.<sup>18</sup>

That the duty of the state is to insure food, housing, health care, education and culture to its population is indeed a bourgeois concept in the most literal sense since it was nurtured in Europe during the Enlightenment and put into practice in France in a forceful way by the Revolution. Terry Eagleton, in his study of aesthetics in modern Western thought says that it is a mistake to reject that period 'en bloc' and it would be wiser to "use what you can" to pursue the task of emancipation which involves "freeing ourselves from ourselves."

From the *Communist Manifesto* onwards, Marxism has never ceased to sing the praises of the bourgeoisie -- to cherish and recollect that in its great revolutionary heritage from which radicals must either enduringly learn, or face the prospect of a closed, illiberal socialist order in the future. Those who have now been correctly programmed to reach for their decentered subjectivities at the very mention of the dread phrase 'liberal humanist' repressively disavow the very history which constitutes them, which is by no means uniformly negative or oppressive. We forget at our political peril the heroic struggles of earlier 'liberal humanists' against the brutal autocracies of feudalistic absolutism. If we can and must be severe critics of Enlightenment, it is Enlightenment which has empowered us to be so.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, throughout the bicentennial there was an underlying polarity, which on the one hand pushed for an image of the French Revolution as a time of violence, intolerance and destruction, and on the other as the foundation of the welfare state and human rights. The socialist government dealt with the situation by reclaiming the origins of welfare institutions as their ancestors of their government -- thereby creating a parental link between the socialist party and the French Revolution. Regarding the dark events of the Revolution such as the Terror and the repression on anti-revolutionaries, the government (and President Mitterand in particular) recognized and acknowledged the suffering, the horror and then, in an operation of reversal, turned the dark aspects of history into a "lesson" about the need for tolerance in our contemporary society and the need for the application of human rights in everyday life.

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<sup>18</sup> For a reference on those who have traced this conservative trend, see Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988).

<sup>19</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 8.

The organizers of the bicentennial commemoration were in an ambiguous situation: they wanted to render the Revolution meaningful to people for a range of reasons (the most obvious being the revolutionary legacy inherited by the Socialist party), but as the bicentennial events entered the public realm, they became caught in the machinery of the media and cultural industries which mercilessly turned revolutionary sentiments into consumer products. Even though the organizers tried to program many 'non-spectacular' events, public opinion agreed that the bicentennial commercialized and debased revolutionary history. It became painfully clear that the state's involvement in creating a spectacle commemorating the French Revolution inescapably resulted in the commodification of culture.

History, in the bicentennial, was turned into a commodity because the state used the same techniques to make the Revolution meaningful today that industry uses to make products desirable -- the cultural industries and media. Furthermore, the state had to address double meanings in order to deal with a complex and contradictory heritage of the Enlightenment and the Revolution -- as sowing the seeds of modern oppression and, at the same time, of modern notions of political criticism and emancipation. As a result, the commemoration tended toward indirect, metaphorical and allegorical modes of representing the past to avoid didactic rhetoric pleading the pros and cons of the revolutionary heritage, which would have led to explosive debates as to whether or not the revolution was a 'good thing'. But the techniques used to bring the revolutionary heritage to life also allowed for its smooth passage into the world of the commodity. The cultural industry and its close cousin, the media, latched on the pictorialization of history, reified it in stereotypes, and diffused it in the form of cultural commodities such as puppets dressed in revolutionary clothes and period films -- all of which were seen as debased spectacle.

To be sure, the organizers hired an ad man, Jean Paul Goude, to design the Bastille Day Parade (the major event of the commemoration), an act that was seen by many as the ultimate 'packaging' of the Revolution for public consumption. Yet Goude proved to be a master allegorist, mining history, grabbing fragments and permutating them with contemporary images in startling ways to make Paris *mean* the French Revolution. Certainly, Goude was familiar with these techniques from advertisement, a practice that functions allegorically. Indeed, advertisement uses all the tricks in the book of allegory from the traditional figuration (placing a young woman next to an olive tree to

advertise virgin olive oil) to the more surprising diachronic juxtaposition of the old and the new (a Marlboro advertisement depicting a stiff from the saddle cowboy riding in a shiny new 'four by four'). But in the context of the commemoration these tropes of advertising were themselves used in a new and more disruptive context.

As Mattei rightly remarked, the television took "the essence of memory" away from the commemoration which not only implies the influence of the media on culture, but more importantly the fragility of that memory, the tenuousness of our links to the past. Indeed, there is a growing concern in the postmodern literature about the ways in which we treat history: a strange mix of worshipping the past while commodifying it. I now turn to this apparent contradiction in order to develop a theoretical handle on the relationship between the pictorialization of the history by the commemoration and the memory associated with the sites of the city where these events took place.

### **History, memory and the crisis of meaning**

In his book on the 'culture of amnesia,' Andreas Huyssen argues that the approach of the end of the twentieth century coupled with the end of the millennium has turned our gaze "backwards ever more frequently in an attempt to take stock and to assess where we stand in the course of time. Simultaneously, however, there is a deepening sense of crisis often articulated in the reproach that our culture is terminally ill with amnesia."<sup>20</sup> The field of architecture has become ever more interested in memory and the dismantling of the 'Iron curtain has brought an urgency to projects such as the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. and Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Extension to the Berlin Museum.<sup>21</sup> The museum and heritage industry is expanding into realms such as vernacular architecture and regional cultural landscapes that would have been thought as unworthy of notice in the past. Anniversaries and commemorations have become one of the organising principles of the cultural industry.

In an unprecedented effort to interpret the past, the observance of cultural anniversaries has become both a cult and an industry. [During the 1980s], between fifty and a hundred major cultural

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<sup>20</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories, Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 4.

<sup>21</sup> For an analysis of Libeskind's museum see Huyssen's "Monuments and Holocaust Memory in a Media Age" in *Twilight*, 249-60.

anniversaries, both individuals and events, have been celebrated each year in the five most anniversary-minded countries, namely Britain, France, Germany, Austria, and Italy.<sup>22</sup>

Anniversaries have become a major feature to dictate timing across the whole gamut of cultural productions and an important source of revenues. The tendency of postmodernism towards "a growing nostalgia for various life forms of the past"<sup>23</sup> is perfectly illustrated by this profusion of commemorations. The way the bicentennial of the Revolution was celebrated, with its disproportionate emphasis on the old, fits squarely with this "nostalgia" of the past.

Thus, we are faced with a seeming contradiction: on the one hand, our relationship with time has broken down, producing a landscape of spectacle where fragments from the past are assembled and history is but one more consumer product; on the other hand, we are so fascinated with the past that 'resurrectionary' enthusiasms mark our era, such as 'historic re-creations,' entire regions volunteering to become 'ecomuseums', and music lovers recreating baroque and even medieval music with an excitement for the past matching that our great-grandparents had for the future. But as Samuel remarks "there is no longer, as there was in the nineteenth century, a historical school of painting. Memory-keeping is a function increasingly assigned to the electronic media, while a new awareness of the artifice of representation casts a cloud of suspicion over the documentation of the past."<sup>24</sup> Samuel is right in pointing to the growing artifice in the way our society conserves the past. The artificiality of the trace creates a "cloud of suspicion" which, I believe was very much present during the commemoration. The availability of information regarding the revolution through Minitel (a form of internet), for example, turns memory into a series of bits of information that ultimately seem arbitrary.

This brings me to the question of why the study of our relationship to the past typifies theoretical inquiry in our era, while cultural *practices* that work with the past to create new cultural objects (such as postmodern architecture, monuments and commemorations), are recognized as irredeemably commodified?

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<sup>22</sup> Johnston adds that in 1983, Franz Kafka received no less than eight centenary conferences held on three continents and during that same year the painter Raphael received at least a dozen 500th anniversary exhibitions in Europe and in America. William Johnston, *Celebrations, The Cult of Anniversaries in Europe and the United States Today* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 4.

<sup>23</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide* (London: MacMillan, 1981), 181.

<sup>24</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory, vol.1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), 25.

A simple but persuasive answer to this question springs from the progressively abstract nature of history and the degradation of *places* of memory. Pierre Nora says that, in the West, people feel history vanishing before their eyes -- that "there are *lieux de memoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de memoire*, real environments of memory."<sup>25</sup> This break originates, he argues, in the disappearance of peasant culture, the repository of collective memory.

*Lieux de memoire* originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory. [...] Modern memory is, above all archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image. [...] The less memory is experienced from the inside the more it exists only through the exterior scaffolding and outward signs -- hence the obsession with the archive that marks our age. [...] No society has ever produced archives as deliberately as our own, not only by volume, not only by new technical means of reproduction and preservation, but also by its superstitious esteem, by its veneration of the trace.<sup>26</sup>

As traditional forms of memory disappear, the need for collecting what remains in the form of images, recordings, and documents increases, as if they will be proofs of our existence at some sort of "tribunal of history." What Nora does not investigate however, is the way technical processes used to document and conserve memory are transforming our relationship to temporality.

I am struck by the sense of loss that runs across the discussions of history and memory, from the loss of traditional modes of representations such as history painting to the loss of personal memory to electronic media. The *milieux de memoire* described by Nora were not simply pre-industrial forms of memory, they were communal forms of remembering. From storytelling around the fireplace to people gathering to play and sing in the living room, these *milieux* are vanishing from modern lives to be replaced by abstract form of memory such as taped music and museums. The postmodern forms of memory, for Pierre Nora, relate to present experiences in unequal ways. "Memory could be sensed practically everywhere in a thoroughly traditional society; it would be hard to find anywhere in a consistantly postmodern culture where all past moments would be equidistant, equally available and remote, from the present."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26, (Spring 1989): 7. The literature on memory has many facets. Among them are issues of monuments as memorial icons, the history of memory in literature as in Marcel Proust and other writers, the medical literature on memory and amnesia, the role of women in sustaining memory through oral traditions and the politics of memory in the identity of minority groups and independence movements. The articles in this issue of *Representations* gives a cross-section of this literature and includes many references.

<sup>26</sup> Nora, "Between Memory," 13.

<sup>27</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis paraphrases Nora in her "Introduction," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 3.

Huyssen draws a comparison between our difficult relationship to the past and the end of last century "with its sensibility of decadence, nostalgia, and loss that we deem symptomatic of a fin-de-siècle."<sup>28</sup> Julia Kristeva takes this comparison a step further -- in the postmodern lightness and arbitrary treatment of history, she sees a return of the 'melancholy' strain of modernist literature.<sup>29</sup>

The crisis of meaning that drove modern literature into the secrets of its inner illness now appears as the occasion for a good time; the converse of meaning is no longer 'abyssal' meaninglessness but the pleasures of indeterminacy; the comic dance of representations within the exhilarating space that dead meaning has left behind.<sup>30</sup>

For Kristeva, the 'melancholy' associated with the loss of meaning has been transposed with its alter ego, the buffoon. "Following the winter of discontent comes the artifice of seeming; following the whiteness of boredom, the heartening distraction of parody."<sup>31</sup> Although for Kristeva, postmodern melancholy adopts comical, buffoon-like, aspects, it shares with modernism the horror of meaninglessness (the broken link between words and thing) which is the source of melancholy driven by a sense of loss. It is this melancholic sense of loss of meaning that provides me with a departure point to investigate the *place* of memory in *commemoration*.

For Walter Benjamin, a sense of loss was a result of facing a chaotic world where the relation between word and things has ceased to exist. Through his interpretation of the past, he believed it was possible to restore language to its original richness. As Terry Eagleton explains,

it is part of the mission of philosophy in Benjamin's view to restore to language its occluded symbolic riches, rescue it from its lapse into the impoverishment of cognition so that the word may dance once again, like those angels whose bodies are one burning flame of praise before God. [...] Meaning is ripped from the ruins of the body, from the flayed flesh rather than from the harmonious figure. It is this kind of dismemberment, in the milder form of the shocks and invasions of urban experience, which the flâneur of the arcades project strives to resist.<sup>32</sup>

Benjamin treats images as fragmentary ruins from the past that await the allegorist to become meaningful. "In this chaotic cosmos of desultory,

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<sup>28</sup> Huyssen, *Twilight*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

<sup>30</sup> Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Julia Kristeva, quoted in Pensky, *Melancholy*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Eagleton, *Ideology of Aesthetic*, 335.



miscellaneous fragments, the allegorist alone is sovereign."<sup>33</sup> In fact, the allegorist is entirely at home sitting in the midst of a landscape of ruins, for he strives on combining and recombining the pieces to draw out meaning out of meaningless debris.

If we follow the trajectory set out by Benjamin's project regarding the philosophy of language, we soon reach the work of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and Fredric Jameson, each of whom has turned to psychology to diagnose postmodern western society's 'abnormal relationship to language'. Benjamin, like the postmodernists, accepts that the relation between words and what they designate has been broken. For Benjamin, this takes a religious form: he locates the breakdown in the moment of original sin and the consequent fall from grace.

Before the fall there existed no division between name and thing.

[...] In this sense the utter sinfulness of the creaturely world described in the allegories of the baroque epitomizes a confused, godless condition in which name and thing have become separated, in which objects and their proper meanings no longer coincide. [...] Through the technique of allegory, the writers of the baroque period were able to conjure a relation to meaning in an age that seemed infinitely distanced from all meaning. [...] This view] legitimates the unrestricted license conferred on the allegorist in his extravagant forays into the world of objects and meanings.<sup>34</sup>

Kristeva argues that the theme of meaninglessness (or loss of meaning) reappears in the contours of postmodernism. For Jameson, the rupture between word and meaning takes a psychoanalytic turn, as he looks to Lacan's theory of schizophrenia as a breakdown in language. Jameson applies Lacan's description of schizophrenia as a linguistic disorder to the characteristics of the postmodern personality.

If personal identity is forged through 'a certain temporal unification of the past and future with the present before me,' and if sentences move through the same trajectory, then an inability to unify past, present, and future in the sentence betokens a similar inability to 'unify the past, present and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life.'<sup>35</sup>

The effect of the breakdown in the signifying chain is to reduce experience to "a series of pure and unrelated presents in time." Harvey continues, This experience becomes increasingly vivid. The image, the appearance of the spectacle can be experienced with an intensity (joy

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<sup>33</sup> Benjamin, quoted in Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 67

<sup>34</sup> Wolin, *Walter Benjamin*, 68-69.

<sup>35</sup> Harvey, *Condition*, 53 .

or terror) made possible only by their appreciation as pure and unrelated presents in time.<sup>36</sup>

Basing his interpretation on Jameson, Harvey argues that the breakdown of temporal continuity is giving rise to a peculiar treatment of the past. "Eschewing the idea of progress, postmodernism abandons all sense of historical continuity and memory, while simultaneously developing an incredible ability to plunder history and absorb whatever it finds there as some aspect of the present."<sup>37</sup> For Harvey, the postmodern introduction of historical references<sup>38</sup> into an essentially modernist landscape projects "spectacle and theatricality."<sup>39</sup> In this schema, memory has been uprooted and history is treated as 'portable accessories' that can be combined and recombined into an eclectic mix of styles, historical quotations, a diversity of building materials, and ornaments. All the critics of postmodern landscapes converge on the loss of meaning, whether it be the loss of connection between memory and place or between past and present.

In this critical context, the word 'commemoration' (in its meaning of 'remembering together') recedes into an idyllic past when this was indeed how people remembered. The influence of Lacan has reinforced the rejection of collective forms of memory (investigated earlier by Halbwachs) in favor of unique and personal interpretations of the past. For Halbwachs, "while the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember."<sup>40</sup> It follows that there are as many group memories as there are institutions in a society. Social classes, families, associations, corporations, armies, and trade unions all had distinctive memories that their members have constructed, often over long periods of time. But it seems that we are now at a loss to theorize shared references and alliances across gender and class both in politics and in psychoanalysis. If Lacan had reread Jung instead of Freud we would perhaps be in a better position to theorize collective memories of postmodern mentalities.<sup>41</sup>

Starting from the recognition that meaning has been lost, I treat history as fragments (or ruins, to use Benjamin's words) dispersed in the commemorative

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> For example, Charles Moore's 'Piazza d'Italia' in New Orleans addresses a fictional resident 'Italian community' (long since moved to more upscale neighbourhoods). It was not, and in fact could not be, used for any 'Italian' events, as an Italian piazza would have been. Surrounded by warehouses and office buildings, it *signifies* Italianness and carried with it the hope for eventual redevelopment of a depressed area.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>40</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>41</sup> In the Braudellian sense of *mentalité*.

landscape. These fragments pile up ceaselessly in museums in the form of temporary exhibits and revolutionary heroes 'dressed up' for the occasion like puppets taken out of a closet to perform a show. Even commemorative monuments, like the Grand Arch -- meant to express the state of the art in innovative building technology -- was reviewed by the press in terms of the past; in this case, as an example of Mitterrand's 'Jacobin' taste for planning. Fragments of historic Paris were identified and classified by the heritage commission of eighteenth century buildings and the ministry in charge of the commemorative monuments. Together, they turned Paris into a picture book about the Revolution in which every stone remaining from buildings considered significant to the Revolutionary heritage would be called out and added to a list of sites to be visited. When faced with a landscape filled with fragments, the point is not to remain in a state of melancholy over this treatment of the past on the contrary, it is an invitation for a creative response to assemble the fragments into meaningful constellations.

To do that, I take the reader on a guided tour following my own cognitive map to resist and subvert the all-too-programmed message of the bicentennial: consume French culture. "We are compelled to create new memory walks through the city," Christine Boyer says about her own investigation of the place of history in the contemporary city. In fact, the act of remembering as a way to reconnect memory and place has acquired a sense of urgency. "Remembering and recollection today have achieved new importance as the contemporary metropolis becomes a source of constant exchanges in and relays of information, and represents a physical site in which images and messages seem to swirl about, devoid of a sustaining context."<sup>42</sup> For me, to treat the commemoration as fragments that need to be reassembled like a puzzle is a way to establish a passage between the different layers and strata of the city that were split open into hundreds of crevasses during the commemoration.

Drawing fragments into constellations in order to recover a lost meaning is a critical method derived from the age old tradition of the allegorist. For Benjamin, the allegorical mode of criticism, emerging from a position of melancholy, runs through his entire production. Since I propose to draw from this mode of criticism, it is necessary to take some time and briefly investigate the unique way Benjamin made use of allegories.

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<sup>42</sup> Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory, Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 28.

## Allegory as a critical tool

One might wonder how Benjamin's work with allegories can be appropriate for an analysis of the bicentennial of the French Revolution, an event nurtured by postmodern rather than the modern references investigated by Benjamin.

Earlier, I turned to the work of Julia Kristeva for one way to answer this question. She says that modernist sensibility of melancholia has reappeared in postmodern spectacle. A sense of loss of meaning, according to her, provides a basis to both modern and postmodern forms of melancholia.<sup>43</sup> For this reason, the work of Benjamin is singularly relevant to a study of the commemoration, because it starts from a melancholic reflection on the loss of meaning. I have interpreted the laments that the media and cultural industries have emptied the commemoration of its memory as *melancholia* -- a melancholy over the loss of a meaningful relationship to the past and the ability to remember together/commemorate.

When we realize the central role played by the allegory as a critical tool in Benjamin's writings, it is surprising how little attention has been devoted to this aspect of his work. Susan Buck-Morss, who underlines the political features of his "Arcades Project," dismisses the allegorical mode of interpretation for its potential to "dissolve into idealism and that this philosophical fact underlies the political impoverishment of the melancholy syndrome."<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, Richard Wolin sees in Benjamin's work the redemptive power of the allegory, but seems to miss the complexity of its critical dimension. *Melancholy Dialectics* by Max Pensky is the only analysis I have found, that keeps the complexity of the allegorical mode and yet clearly explains its critical dimension. For this reason I will draw from his work to explain how Benjamin uses allegory critically.

Pensky argues that melancholy, both as a saturnine temperament and as a philosophical position, is at the root of Benjamin's allegorical strategies. In fact, "melancholy occupies the space that separates Benjamin's 'messianic' and 'materialistic' gaze -- it is a space that is carved between the subject and the object by a question concerning the possibility of meaning; a space Benjamin sought his life long to fill with the storehouse of images yielded up to him and

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<sup>43</sup> See Kristeva *Black Sun*

<sup>44</sup> Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 139.

constructed in his shocking, healing writing."<sup>45</sup> What constitutes melancholy? Generally speaking, melancholy can be understood as a 'dialectic of loss and recovery'. For the medieval thinker, loss was symbolized by the Fall. According to Hildegard of Bingen for example, melancholy proceeds as a direct consequence of the Fall.<sup>46</sup> The conception of the loss of meaning as distance from God appears in many of Benjamin's comments about the allegorical way of seeing.

Contemporary cultural critics have recognized the resurgence of allegory as a critical form. For example, Craig Owens, a New York art critic and editor of *October* magazine, has delineated a relationship between Benjamin's allegorical method and the work of postmodern artists.<sup>47</sup> His intent is to show that artists as different as Laurie Anderson, Robert Smithson, and Robert Longo all share a common project he describes as 'allegorical'. But Owens does not make the link between the 'allegorical impulse' and melancholy as a form of disenchantment leading to a creative response and, as a result, his parallel between postmodern art and Benjamin's approach to allegory remains undeveloped. Even if melancholy does not necessarily reach out for an allegorical mode of criticism, allegory, on the other hand, according to Pensky, always emanates from a position of melancholy. And for this reason, he argues, the present-day return to allegory in the arts and literature testifies to the existence of a postmodern melancholia -- identified as such by Kristeva in her book, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*.

The only way to attack the paralysis associated with melancholia is to transform it into its opposite. This leads to the oldest and most fundamental paradox of melancholy.

[Melancholy] is a source of critical reflection that, in its ancient dialectic, empowers the subject with a mode of insight into the structure of the real at the same time as it consigns the subject to mournfulness, misery and despair. The very image of meaninglessness produced from a more hidden conviction, of an originary dimension lost, destroyed, or withheld meaning. Such a dimension is thus cryptically encoded into the very objects of melancholy despair; as objects of contemplation, they become both the key to a secret body of insight and the reminders of the impossibility of recovering what was lost.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>47</sup> Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>48</sup> Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 19.

In my work, I present the bicentennial as a spectacle that has lost its original commemorative meaning, but which carries within it the 'key to a secret body of insight'. There is, in Benjamin's work with allegories, a sense that one can decipher meaning out of the object one is contemplating, as if the meaning was actually there, written in invisible ink. Benjamin's belief that meaning is 'cryptically encoded' into the objects recalls the era of 'signatures' Foucault attributes to the Renaissance, when objects carried the marks, the signatures of a larger divine order.<sup>49</sup> In this way of seeing, meaning is not imposed on the objects, it is drawn *out* of the objects.

But in our time, this sort of deciphering is a constant reminder of the impossibility of recovering what is lost. In effect, one can see the desire to recover meaning, a desire that will necessarily always be frustrated as the essence of imagination. "In a dance of failed or jumbled meanings allegory represents the tension of melancholy itself. It contains within its motion the incessant, stroboscopic alternation of meaninglessness contained in the act of signification. The 'resurrectional jubilation' of assigned significance occurs only within the imaginative space of the object as already dead."<sup>50</sup> For Kristeva, this structural ambiguity or alteration between meaning and meaninglessness, life and death, exaltation and despair, lying at the heart of allegoresis, is nothing other than an insight into the very structure of imagination itself.

For Benjamin, criticism is not contradictory to melancholy, for if melancholy is derived from a subjective inwardness, "Benjamin demands a postsubjective, socially engaged form of thinking and writing."<sup>51</sup> To write a critical text is not to assign meaning to, but to discover it within, fragments -- disclosing "the originary points of encapsulations of messianic memory and anticipation within historical time."<sup>52</sup> The allegorical critique is made possible by establishing a tension between the object one is contemplating (in Benjamin's case, the Trauerspiel) and writing a text about it. The two are essentially distinguished by the arbitrariness of the object of contemplation (the ruin or fragment) and the objectivity of the text. The critical text would then "indicate its relation to redemption by revealing and fulfilling the theological ground upon which the

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<sup>49</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: PantheonBooks, 1970).

<sup>50</sup> Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 28.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

arbitrariness of the former rests."<sup>53</sup> Ultimately, the critical text completes the ruined work. Benjamin's work is unique in its use of an allegorical mode of criticism to draw meaning out of the allegories of German tragic drama. In a sense, Benjamin's "negative dialectics" can be situated in regards to both the writings of Nietzsche and the philosophy of Hegel. "Like Hegel, Benjamin intended to dissolve the rigid Kantian structure of possible experience into the space of history and to show how knowledge and experience were thoroughly historical phenomena."<sup>54</sup> But in order to understand Benjamin's complex mode of allegorical interpretation of history, it might be wise to describe its major movements and to show how I intend to use it in my own work on the bicentennial.

### *The major movements of allegory*

One can identify three major movements in Benjamin's allegorical mode of criticism.<sup>55</sup> The first movement, *devaluation*, is the melancholic recognition of the world which, as we just saw, necessarily precedes the allegorical technique. This is when the "subject beholds a world that has been drained of all its 'inherent' meaning."<sup>56</sup> In this world, the relation between word and things has ceased to exist. The awareness of a crisis of meaning feeds the melancholia. Such melancholia often encourages flight into a place of solitude, an image cherished by the romantic artist, but Benjamin accepts the voyage into the depths of melancholy in order to confront it. In his own words, "for those racked with melancholia, writing about it would have meaning only if writing sprang from that same melancholia."<sup>57</sup> As Pensky remarks, the movement of 'devaluing' the world of appearance has clear affinities to what Marx describes as alienation. "In both cases, the decay of an immediate unproblematic relation to the sensuous world results in a crisis of meaning. In both cases too, a creative response is engendered in which the objectively present features of a concretely structured world interact dialectically with a knowing and feeling subject."<sup>58</sup> The response is not only creative, it also bears a political potential for criticism, stemming from a greater awareness. This is when the allegorist is no longer able to sustain "the mythic illusion of the unproblematic 'objectivity' of meaning in the appearance

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>54</sup> Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 65 Pensky also sees in Benjamin's rejection of neo-Kantian phenomenology and the unwillingness to regard contemplative subjectivity as constitutive of the critical discovery of truth, a shared terrain with both Lukas and Block.

<sup>55</sup> Pensky summarizes the three movement in allegory as outlined in Hans Heinz Holz, "Prismatisches Denken," in *Über Walter Benjamin*, ed. Theodor W. Adorno (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968).

<sup>56</sup> Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 116.

<sup>57</sup> Walter Benjamin, quoted in Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 19.

<sup>58</sup> Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 116.

[of the] world, and recoiling with horror from the emptied world that results from this refusal, transfigures the abyss, reconceptualizes it, and by so doing discovers the actual course of historical happening itself."<sup>59</sup>

The movement from the devaluation of the world of appearances to a creative, critical response leads to the second movement of *fragmentation*. Together, devaluation and fragmentation are prerequisites for the third movement of allegorical construction. Fragmentation, in Benjamin's work, is represented by the petrified landscape, in which allegory emerges as the expression of natural history. As Benjamin explains, "in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hyppocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape. Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face -- or rather, in a death's head."<sup>60</sup> As Benjamin discovered in the Baroque, "if nature has always been subject to the power of death, it is also true that it has always been allegorical. Significance and death both come to fruition in historical development."<sup>61</sup> In this way, allegorical production is based on the vision of depth separating death (symbolized by nature) and meaning.

For the allegorist to reconstruct meaning, the objects of contemplation have to be in fragments, the flesh must be pulled away from the bones so there is no longer any superficial illusion of beauty. The fragments become the material of the allegorical construction which seeks to make a coherent image from them. "This piling up of redeemed but now empty fragments shatters the mythic context of wholeness and completeness in which the fragments were initially presented. But so liberated, they become enigmatic and in this way point even more urgently to the crisis of meaning, the image world of natural history."<sup>62</sup> In this way, nature itself becomes the *landscape* of the allegorist in which piles of fragments and ruins represent the historical catastrophe.<sup>63</sup>

For a cultural geographer to treat the contemporary landscape as a ruin, full of

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>60</sup> Benjamin, quoted in Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 115.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>62</sup> Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 121.

<sup>63</sup> The theme of uncovering layers of meaning in landscape interpretation has been central to the new cultural geography. The work of James Duncan, for example, sees the landscape as multiple texts. The trust of his interpretive method is "to uncover the underlying multivocal codes which makes the landscapes cultural creations." Duncan aims at finding meaning with the certainty that meaning can be uncovered if one uses the tools of hermeneutic interpretation. By contrast, Benjamin attempts to recover the lost meaning but this aim points to the mystery of meaning, away from any certainty of its existence. James Duncan, *The City as Text: The politics of Landscape Interpretation in Kandy Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 184.



disconnected fragments, is to give form to the melancholy expressed by the critics of the postmodernism. In this work, I treat the commemorative landscape as if it were fragments, rescued from the depth of Revolutionary history to be scattered by the commemoration. It is important to see the landscape as a ruin, for it is a prerequisite to the third, *constructive*, movement of the allegorist. If the objects of contemplation are driven by the arbitrariness of the fragment and sorrow, the creative response on the contrary, is not arbitrary, it is directed toward the recovery of meaning.

This third movement is where the fragments of the puzzle are brought together by the allegorist. This happens in the course of critical or creative construction (such as writing or the production of art). Benjamin describes the passage from contemplation of the fragment to the recovery of its meaning in the following manner:

The memory of the pondered holds sway over the disordered mass of dead knowledge. Human knowledge is piecework to it in a particularly pregnant sense: namely as the heaping up of arbitrarily cut pieces, out of which one puts together a puzzle. [...] The allegorist reaches now here, now there, into the chaotic depths that his knowledge places at his disposal, grabs an item out, holds it next to another, and sees whether they fit: the result never lets itself be predicted; for there is no natural mediation between the two.<sup>64</sup>

Unlike other thinkers of his time, Benjamin resolutely refused to integrate the fragmentary insight into a broader ontological vision -- a "'structural totality' as Adorno later called it -- in which the history of melancholia would be transformed into the history of Dasein."<sup>65</sup> By assigning subjective meanings to fragments, construction resists totalities and remains open, always driven by the impossibility to recover what has been lost.

### *The role of images in allegory*

In the field of the allegorical construction, fragments are conceived of as images. In fact, the very act of writing bears with it the gap between the emblem and the act of inscription; it replicates the gap "between deathly nature (Being) and meaning, between whose poles the allegorical intention tirelessly travels."<sup>66</sup> The realm of the allegorist is filled with images seen as enigmatic emblems. The images are waiting to receive an assigned allegorical meaning by getting attached to moral qualities, to people or places, or to other fragments. The power of

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<sup>64</sup> Benjamin, quoted in Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing*, 241.

<sup>65</sup> Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 117.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

redemption comes from the lack of natural connection between the different fragments brought together into a constellation.

For Benjamin, history is recalled in the form of images. "Only this [...] ongoing purgative labor which 'mortifies' the past can reveal those few images that might have a positive effect in the present."<sup>67</sup> Benjamin wrote about all sorts of images, from the 'magic lantern' slides ('phantasmagoria') to the rotating images of the panorama which were experienced in the arcades. As Derek Gregory explains, images are central to Benjamin's excavation of modernity,

Benjamin uses the phantasmagoria as an allegory of modern culture, which explains both his insistence on seeing commodity culture as a projection -- not a reflection -- of the economy, as its mediated (even mediatized) representation, and also its interest in the visual, optical 'spectacular' inscriptions of modernity. Indeed, Benjamin was one of the earliest commentators to understand the centrality, the constitutive force of the image within modernity. What he proposed to do, in effect, to harness the latent energy of the modern image, to turn it back on itself and thereby use that image as 'a critique of reason'.<sup>68</sup>

I have adopted Benjamin's technique of bringing images into constellations and see in their diachronic juxtapositions a critical force that can be harnessed to shed light on contemporary culture. The commemoration excavated the depths of revolutionary history for images or fragments that would bring the past to life, yet this method of juxtaposing images rendered effortless their passage into the world of the commodity. To interpret the commemorative landscape, it is not enough to analyse the image, the critic must interpret the association of images.

During the bicentennial, Paris was filled with images from the past: images of and from the Revolution, the 1889 centennial and other commemorations proliferated in the form of postcards, guidebooks, posters, pins, and in press articles. Diachronic juxtapositions between old and new were abundant, especially in shop window decorations and commercial advertisements riding the wave of the bicentennial year. I view the bicentennial as an accumulation (in Benjamin's words, a 'trash heap') of these images waiting to be deciphered. In this, I avoid explaining the images through their filiation, as is done traditionally in art history. I do not, for example, explain the allegory of Liberty

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<sup>67</sup> Michael W. Jennings, *Dialectical Images: Walter Benjamin's Theory of Literary Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 38.

<sup>68</sup> Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations*, 233.

as performed by Jessye Norman on Bastille Day by looking at the history of black singers in France or the evolution of republican imagery in order to place a black Marianne (symbol of a free nation) within an evolution of images. I bring historical references that particular image draws upon in conjunction with other images circulating at the same time showing, for example, how the image of a black Liberty is inscribed first with the biblical imagery of the Exodus and then, when brought into a constellation with the figure of Toussaint Louverture (a Haitian revolutionary) acquires an additional meaning.

*The spatialization of history in allegory*

In the allegorical construction, images get attached to moral qualities, people, places, or other fragments. Attaching images rescued from the past to *places* is one of the most important operations of the commemoration. This aspect of the construction is the spatialization of history -- evident in nature in geological strata. The spatialization of time might well be the most intriguing aspect of allegory, yet is often left unnoticed -- showing once again, how space tends to be taken for granted.

In the modern novel, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues, the allegorical form is not only visual, it is spatial. Its shorthand definition would be "a spatialization directed toward a meta-semantic system of signification. [...] I mean by 'spatializing,' a language that emphasizes the metaphor of space and describes icons, rather than emphasizing the metaphor of time and describing processes."<sup>69</sup> Spivak's analysis of modern and contemporary novels such as those by Claude Simon, brings her to *The Rainbow* by D.H. Lawrence (1915) to show a "construction of an iconic dictionary for the dissemination of psychological and historical significance."<sup>70</sup> In the opening sequence, Lawrence converts history into a handful of images by describing, in the manner of a panorama, the village where the story of a family through four generations will unfold. The spatialization of history "is a product of that generalizing tendency that we identify as a basic characteristic of 'allegory'. What the reader is provided with in fact is a visual sign for centuries of a historic panorama...."<sup>71</sup> Seen in this way, the visual aspect of allegory is undeniably intertwined with the act of converting history into space.

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<sup>69</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Thoughts on the principle of allegory," *Genre* 4, (Oct. 1972): 327-352, 351.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

The spatializing aspect of allegory is crucial to my analysis of the commemorative landscape. The commemoration re-read the urban landscape in such a way as to underline places of Revolutionary heritage. It also built new monuments and in so doing drew from the history of each site in order to make Paris *mean* the French Revolution. Lastly, the ephemeral events like concerts and parades not only spoke about history, they often necessitated temporary architecture which gave the event its "historical dimension" -- to use the words of the organizers. Events took place in public spaces in front of monuments which functioned like landscapes in allegorical paintings: they might be in the background, but without them one cannot decipher their allegorical meaning.

The desire of the allegorist is to make familiar places appear strange. "The landscape, so intimately familiar, known in every detail, suddenly looks inextricably wrong."<sup>72</sup> All the pieces of the landscape seem out of place, as though "arranged by some unnatural force" and what seemed related by logic now appears as fragments, ruins scattered around in an arbitrary manner. But in the eyes of the allegorist, the world as shattered and meaningless is truer, it is seen as a higher truth about the nature of things than what was concealed before by an illusionary order.

In the end, for Benjamin, "allegory goes away empty-handed" and the allegory turns upon itself to reach a greater awareness of the existence of God.<sup>73</sup> Yet for me, the investigation into the commemorative landscape is a secular investigation. My intent is to redeem spectacle by creating constellations of images from the fragments excavated by the bicentennial. Like Benjamin, I use the allegorical technique on allegories put forth by the commemoration. In order to treat these allegories allegorically, it is first necessary to break them apart into fragments and then recombine them with places, people and even other fragments. I will not follow the three movements as described by Pensky for to do so, would be to turn the analysis into a formula and remove the element of surprise necessary for the allegory to become meaningful to the reader. The recovery of meaning is the driving force behind all the chapters and, like Benjamin, my intent is not to find all the answers but rather to point to the mystery of meaning and leave the magic of interpretation open.

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<sup>72</sup> Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, page number.

<sup>73</sup> Gershom Scholem explains, "melancholia as (dialectically) both hypertrophied subjectivity and messianic consciousness [...] touches upon one of the deepest and strongest impulses in the messianic tradition in Judaism, the vision of the *Tikkun*, which restores the originary flaw, ends the metaphysical *Galut*, and reveals that in the end, all creation was God's creation, all evil was deviation from God's mind." Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 133.

## Description of chapters

My overall argument is that the government, by trying to make revolutionary heritage mean something to people today, used allegorical techniques of spatializing and visualizing history,<sup>74</sup> and consequently effected a smooth passage for this heritage into the world of commodity and spectacle. To analyze both sides of this dilemma, I shuttle back and forth between Mitchell's analysis of the "world-as-exhibition" and Benjamin's redemptive interpretation of the commodity. I use the first as a theoretical basis to investigate the mechanisms of representation and the ways the organizers attempted to make Paris *mean* the revolution. I use the second to explore the openness to interpretation by the public by bringing images into constellations with a redemptive intent. The juxtaposition of images from the past and the present should not be 'explained', there is no 'therefore'. Each image is both irreducible and keeps its full grandeur as it is juxtaposed with the others. The links woven between them do not belong to the deductive mode but to the allegorical one which leaves open the magic of interpretation. Like perspective lines which are needed to structure a painting, but cannot be seen once the work is complete, I have used the formal qualities of allegory as an underlying organization for the thesis chapters.

One of the characteristics of allegory is its ability to carry a double meaning, of which the hidden one makes a political, moral or philosophical argument. This is the *ænigma*. The moral *ænigma*, for example, is used by preachers who want to transmit their message through biblical stories. In the bicentennial, the program of commemorative events can be seen as a moral *ænigma*. It was more than a simple matter of organising the events of the year, the program set up a "paysage moralisé" -- to use the words of W.H. Auden. The organizers sought to communicate the *moral* dimension of the commemoration through the content and sequence of the events. In Chapter Two, I investigate the introductory statement of the program, written by the head of the Bicentennial Commission as a moral *ænigma* -- I read it as a moral tale of origin, community and the principles of heritage.

In Chapter Three, I investigate the tendency of allegory to contemplate the ceaseless accumulation of fragments from the past. As Owens says, "allegory is

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<sup>74</sup> With reference to Boyer's "pictorialization of space and time," Spivak's "spatialization of history," and Foucault's "making statements visible."

constantly attracted to the fragmentary, the imperfect, the incomplete."<sup>75</sup> This could be seen most clearly in the disproportionately large number of exhibitions mounted to display objects from the revolutionary period. The largest of these exhibits, which took place at the Grand Palais, surprised art critics with its lack of direction and curatorial commentary. I treat this exhibit as an accumulation of fragments that need to be deciphered, and I create constellations of images drawn from the exhibit to create different stories about history.

The aspect of allegory that I call the spatialization of history is explored in both chapter four and six. In Chapter Four, I bring three images into a constellation in order to recover the meaning of a temporary monument built on Place de la Concorde for the Bastille Day Parade. The diachronic juxtaposition of these images with the architecture show that the original meaning of the monument has been entirely reversed. In Chapter Six, on the other hand, I explore the spatialization of history through three major monuments built for the commemoration: the Grand Arche, the renovation of the Louvre around the central motif of the Pyramid, and the Bastille Opera. Their placement in the Parisian landscape reshaped the historical narrative associated with the history of the axis which links them.

In Chapter Five, I look at one of the best known and most traditional forms of allegory, as the personification of abstract ideas such as liberty or equality. In the bicentennial, this was noticeably accomplished by the choice of a black American opera singer to personify Liberty and the Nation. I also investigate the reverse of personification, when historical figures are treated in a formulaic way so that they become 'walking ideas' -- in allegory, this is called *figura*. I investigate this in the figure of Toussaint Louverture, a real person, who was taken up by the commemoration to represent the idea of 'equality'.

Lastly, certain allegories group enigmatic emblems in an 'unnatural' manner, with no apparent rational interrelation. Surrealist painters, exploring ways to depict the landscapes of the Freudian unconscious, used this technique. In Paul de Man's view, the apparent irrationality of allegories simply underlines the metaphorical aspects of language.

"[He] recognises the interference of two distinct levels or usage of language, literal and rhetorical (metaphoric), one of which denies precisely what the other affirms. [...] Yet because literal language is

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<sup>75</sup> Owens, *Beyond Recognition*, 55.

itself rhetorical, the product of metaphoric substitutions and reversals, such readings are inevitably implicated in what they set out to expose, and the result is allegory."<sup>76</sup>

The Bastille Day Parade, designed by Goude, falls in this category. In Chapter Seven, I investigate how the parade brought together images with no apparent logic in order to tap into the imaginary. But it also had an allegorical meaning, one that would be deciphered by some but not all: the parade spoke of localized struggles for cultural identity and the interconnectedness of culture throughout the world. In treating the parade allegorically, I can show how the same image was interpreted in opposite manners by different audiences, which points to the instability of meaning but also finally, to its redemptive potential.

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<sup>76</sup> Paul de Man, quoted in Owens, *Beyond Recognition*, 83.

## THE PROGRAMME AS A MORAL FABLE

The programme of the commemoration is a volume of over 300 pages listing all the events planned for the 1989 commemoration of the French Revolution, not only in France but throughout the world. The events include exhibitions, plays, musical performances, outdoor events, colloquia, television debates and films. Out of the 7,000 events listed, 5,000 were directly sponsored by the government, the other 2,000 came from corporate or private initiatives. The published programme costs 40 francs and could be bought at a number of information centres.

The programme is introduced by Jean-Noel Jeanneney, the president of the 'Mission du Bicentenaire', the name given to the temporary organization responsible for planning and executing the bicentennial celebrations.<sup>1</sup> The printed version of the programme is introduced by Jean-Noel Jeanneney,

Here it is, made available to everyone, the definitive programme of the commemoration -- not carved in stone since the unexpected will surely continue to intervene, but still, it is now fixed according to clear lines of action. I am ready to bet that the publication of this portrait of the commemoration as we have constituted it in its full richness, by bringing us into the era of realization, will contribute to dissipate the last skeptics.

The reader will especially appreciate the implication of this profusion in terms of the French Revolution's impact on so many hearts and minds that still exists today: initiatives to honor its memory appeared from everywhere.

A commemoration solely focused on France would be absurd. As we hoped, foreign countries are participating wonderfully. Over the past few months, I have gone through many countries: I have been struck by both the enthusiasm of those who act, as the

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<sup>1</sup> The full name of the organization is "La Mission du Bicentenaire de la Révolution Française et des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen."



bicentennial takes on different colors depending on the type of Nation it is and its particular history. On top of the list is North America, Japan, various Latin American countries, Senegal, and quite a few of our European partners: Italy, Germany and Belgium are in the front row. But everywhere, as we will discover by browsing through the list of events printed in these pages, a multiplicity of intentions has bloomed.

In France as well, different regions organize themselves according to different imaginations and passions: the Revolution's history offers, in itself, the explanation. But in general, the rich panorama of projects -- also reflected by the information accessible by Minitel for the public -- will reassure those who feared that things were organized in too centralized a fashion, too Parisian.

Nevertheless the events of the capital will contribute before all others to give character to the celebrations: a natural thing, when we know the chronicle of the historic events. Even if the point is not to recall the entire Revolution, the major dates of 1789 will be the structuring markers. If we flip through these pages, by going back and forth between these markers and the dense framework of all the other events, we will see, I think, that the events prepared by the Mission [...] will succeed quite well to confer to the commemoration both its moral and civic dimension.

When it comes to the National significance of what we will build together, I cannot do better than to offer to re-read Victor Hugo's text that the *Mission* has published in all the national newspapers on the first day of the year. It dates from 1875, but we find it quite current. "All histories are about the past. [...] The history of the revolution is the history of the future. The Revolution has been the conquest of what is ahead. [...] It has brought us even more promised land than gained territory; and as one of these promises will be realized, a new aspect of the Revolution will be revealed. [...] When will this be whole? When will the phenomena be finished, that is, when the French Revolution will become [...] first a European Revolution, then a human Revolution; when utopia will be consolidated into progress, when the sketch will become a masterpiece; the coalition of kings will have been succeeded by the creation of a federation of people, and war among all, by peace for all. Impossible, unless one adds a dream, to complete from today onwards what will be completed tomorrow, and to conclude history with an unfinished gesture, especially when this gesture is full of so many rich future events. [...] Nothing more immense. The Terror is a crater, the Convention a summit. All the future is growing in these depths... <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jeanneney, Jean-Noël, ed., *Programme des manifestations du Bicentenaire de la Révolution Française*, 2<sup>e</sup> édition (Paris: Mission du Bicentenaire de la Révolution Française et des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen/Mundoprint, 1989), 2-3.

The introduction ends with this lyrical text by Victor Hugo.<sup>3</sup> The introduction to the programme does more than present the schedule of 7,000 events structured around a "chronicle of the historic events" and explain why the important events (the "markers") take place in Paris. The programme carries another intention: to speak about the *moral value* of national heritage.

There is in this introduction a powerful moral tale at work. Jeanenney is "ready to bet" this commemoration will "dissipate the last skeptics" and will show the "French Revolution's impact on so many hearts and minds [...] today." He is confident that the programme of events for the year will "confer to the commemoration its moral and civic dimension." What is more, this moral tale is not a personal lesson, but acquires a messianic dimension in his assertions that "the history of the Revolution is the history of the future," "utopia will be consolidated into progress", and "the sketch will become a masterpiece". It has universal aspirations, as "foreign countries are participating wonderfully," "a multiplicity of intentions is blooming," and his statement that the commemoration is about "first, a European Revolution, then a human Revolution." If we consider these quotes from the introductory text as fragments, they can be gathered into a constellation organized around a moral lesson. They speak of the moral dimension of the memory of the French Revolution, and its "impact on so many hearts and minds today."

The choice of what is commemorated in the body of the programme reinforces that there is a moral to this story of the Revolution. The historical "markers" emphasize the "good" revolution over other more disturbing aspects of Revolutionary history and what is more, events that commemorate the darker side of the Revolution are presented as an opportunity for a moral lesson.<sup>4</sup> Jeannenay is quite clear on this point. Striking a balance between gain and sacrifice, Jeannenay defends the choice of 'positive' dates for the programme. He says that,

we have tried, throughout the commemoration, to celebrate the [revolutionary] principles without concealing the moments when they were violated by the revolutionaries themselves: moments that the heirs of the victims can legitimately commemorate, but that the State should neither hide nor -- of course -- include in the celebration. [...] Do not think that putting a plaque for Condorcet at

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<sup>3</sup> Taken from *Actes et Paroles*, 1875.

<sup>4</sup> The speech delivered by president François Mitterrand for pantheonization of Condorcet to the Pantheon explicitly turns the memory of his life and his writings into a 'lesson' for moral conduct in present day France -- I will come back to this later in the chapter.

the Pantheon -- an exceptional gesture since there will be no transfer of ashes -- was a choice taken by chance or thoughtlessly. It will be an opportunity to speak not only about the contribution of Condorcet to the Revolution, but also what caused his dramatic death.<sup>5</sup> [...] We have tried to serve, within the strict limits of our political and social function, what you [might] call the intelligence of the past.<sup>6</sup>

We see in the programme one of the oldest characteristics of allegory: its ability to carry a double meaning, of which the hidden one is a moral argument. This is the *ænigma*. Generally, allegories proceed from obscurity toward clarity, even if they keep the enigma (the mystery) until the very end. Bertolt Brecht's poem "The Stone Fisherman" is an example of an enigma with a political meaning.

The big fisherman has appeared again. He sits in his rotted boat and fishes from the time when the first lamps flare up early in the morning until the last one is put out in the evening.

The villagers sit on the gravel of the embankment and watch him, grinning. He fishes for herring but he pulls up nothing but stones.

They all laugh. The men slap their sides, the women hold on to their bellies, the children leap high into the air with laughter.

When the big fisherman raises his torn net high and the stones in it, he does not hide them but reaches far out with his strong brown arms, seizes the stone, holds it high and shows it to the unlucky ones.<sup>7</sup>

The meaning of this parable, in which "the leader does not give his people what they need, but instead gives them 'stones'," becomes clear only as the reader pieces together the puzzle at the last line.

I will interpret the programme not as a political enigma but as a moral one. The moral enigma is traditionally associated with a preacher at the pulpit who draws from biblical stories to speak about present situations. The preacher's parables are *moralitas*, referring to hidden but intentional moral meanings. It is no accident that the organizers of the bicentennial had to turn to the tools of the

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<sup>5</sup> Arrested as a moderate, Condorcet committed suicide in prison, after which his body deposited in a common grave -- the reason why there are no ashes to be placed in the Pantheon. Jeannenay adds, "we have never tried to hide the violations of the principles behind the principles themselves; no more than we have concealed the fact that those who, since the beginning of the process, have totally and deeply rejected the principles also carry a heavy part of the responsibility in the bloody aberrations that occurred later." Jean-Noël Jeannenay, "Après coup. Reflexions d'un commémorateur," *Le Débat, histoire, politique, société* 57 (Nov.-Dec. 1989): 194.

<sup>6</sup> Jeannenay, "Après coup," 194.

<sup>7</sup> Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964), 32.

religious world to communicate their message of the moral value of a secular and rational state. In fact, the relationship between Christianity and the revolution is as old as the revolution itself. The revolutionaries wanted to replace religious faith by a faith in rationality. To do so however, they used many techniques which had evolved in a Christian culture. Aware of the pitfalls, they constantly attempted to keep these two worlds separate and set up a war against the church. Over the ensuing two hundred years, the two realms have remained relatively distinct in law and in state education.<sup>8</sup> Yet as scholars investigate contemporary civic rituals, the religious underpinnings of secular rituals soon come to light.<sup>9</sup> I would like to propose that the moral tale of the programme uses Christian references and that an allegorical interpretation of the programme as a moral fable is essential to understand how the necessary political and symbolic dimension was given to the bicentennial commemoration. I propose that the moral enigma presented in the programme taps into the depths of Christianity -- in particular the desire to form communities of believers at work in bettering life on earth, a morality based primarily on tolerance of the other (a theme that will appear time and time again in numerous events of the programme) and the concept of self-sacrifice.

A number of anthropologists and psychologists have investigated the continuity between societies culturally dominated by religion and those dominated by secularism. In psychology, Freud drew analogies between three kinds of obsessive neurosis and three kinds of religious rituals in "Totem and Taboo." In the United States in the 1940s and '50s, Otto Rank further investigated the relation between the Freudian unconscious and ritual as he collected from folklore the necessary materials to bear out this analogy. "The so-called 'true symbols' of the dream (what we would call 'Freudian symbols') were indeed found to be present in a wide variety of mythological vocabularies."<sup>10</sup> In addition, Jung and his followers have inspired innumerable mythic interpretations of literary works. In anthropology, Victor Turner remains a major influence on those who investigate the ritual and spiritual aspects of

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<sup>8</sup> In the current literature on popular images, the Christian roots of the revolution has been analyzed by Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au Combat: l'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1789 à 1880* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979) and "La Mairie, liberté, égalité, fraternité," *Les Lieux de Mémoire I: La République*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1984); Raoul Girardet, "Les trois couleurs, ni blanc ni rouge," *Les Lieux de Mémoire I: La République*; Thierry Gasnier, "Le local, une et divisible," *Les Lieux de Mémoire III: Les France, vol. 2., Traditions*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1992); Antoine de Baecque, *Le Corps de l'histoire, métaphores et politique, 1770-1800* (Mesnil-sur-Estrée: Calmann-Lévy, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> For an investigation into the strong Christian influence in conservative intellectual and political circles in the first half of the twentieth century, see Herman Lebovics, *True France The Wars over Cultural Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Fletcher, *Allegory*, 285.

contemporary industrialized societies.<sup>11</sup> For Turner, the notions of "liminality" and "communitas" traverse most traditional expressions of Christianity from pilgrimages in modern Ireland or Mexico to alternative lifestyles such as hippie communes and rock concerts such as Woodstock. The width of his concept is has shown to be useful to many different kinds of investigations from theatre to art history and when carefully applied to specific, historically bound situations it can lead to remarkable analyses.<sup>12</sup>

### **Sacrifice for the Nation**

Jeanneney's introduction to the programme speaks of "honoring the memory" of the Revolution, of making clear the "national significance of what we will build together." What is the memory that is being honored here? Not all the events of the Revolution, but only those that "confer to the commemoration both its moral and civic dimension." What is being honored is the sacrifice that has been made for the good of the Nation. This is not the sacrifice of the Ancien Regime, or the body of the king, so the new order could be created. It is the civic sacrifice in which everyone must participate.

An analysis of the cover of the programme can shed some light on this civic sacrifice (fig. 2.1). It is a detail from a painting depicting the departure of the National Guard from Paris as they join the army in 1792. The scene is located on the Pont Neuf, across from the royal residence of the Louvre. Here, the Guard are at the moment of leaving, prepared to make the supreme sacrifice for a cause clearly greater than France itself -- for the Revolution and the ensuing redemption of Mankind, and legitimating the beginning of a new Republican era. If this seems to be overstating the import of the image, we return to Hugo's text, "It has brought us even more promised land than gained territory; and as soon as these promises will be realized, a new aspect of the Revolution will be revealed [...] when the French Revolution will become [...] a human Revolution; when utopia will be consolidated into progress, when the sketch will become a masterpiece; the coalition of kings will have been succeeded by the creation of a federation of people, and war among all, by peace for all." This historical sacrifice

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<sup>11</sup> See Carol Duncan's analysis of the MOMA in New York which uses Turner's theory of liminality to decipher the 'script' inscribed in the sequence of rooms of the museum. Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual: an iconographic analysis," *Marxist Perspectives* (Winter 1978): 28-51.

<sup>12</sup> See Richard Schechner, "Ramlila in Ramnagar and America's Oberammergau: two celebratory ritual dramas," *Celebrations*, ed. Victor Turner (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984), 89-108.



Figure 2.1  
"THE NATIONAL GUARD OF PARIS LEAVES TO JOIN THE ARMY" BY LÉON  
COGNIET, 1792

The white frame indicates the portion used for the cover of the published programme of events, *Programme des manifestations du bicentenaire de la Révolution Française*. ed. Jean-Noël Jeannenay (Paris: Mission du Bicentenaire/Mundoprint, 1989).

has been constructed over the past two centuries as uniquely symbolizing the foundation/origin of French democratic republican government.

Michel Foucault discusses the relationship between the construction of the civic sacrifice as a fundamental premise of the democratic republican state and the development of the apparatus of rational governmentality during the Revolution. In the 1780s, for example, five volumes were published to layout a systematic program of public health for the modern state.

It indicates with a lot of detail what an administration has to do to insure the wholesome food, good housing, health care, and medical institutions which the population needs to remain healthy, in short to foster life of individuals. Through this book we can see that the care for individual life is becoming at this moment a duty of the state. At that same moment the French Revolution gives the signal for the great national wars of our days, involving national armies and meeting their conclusion or their climax in huge mass slaughters. I think that you can see a similar phenomenon during the second world war. In all history it would be hard to find such butchery as in World War II, and it is precisely this period, this moment, when the great welfare, public health, and medical assistance programs were instigated. [...] One could symbolize such a coincidence by a slogan: go get slaughtered and we promise you a long and pleasant life. Life insurance is connected with a death command.<sup>13</sup>

Here Foucault establishes a relationship between the demand for young men to enlist in the army, to sacrifice themselves for the Nation, and the notion that the government is responsible for the welfare of citizens.<sup>14</sup> Seen from this point of view, the painting chosen for the cover of the program reinforces the link between the birth of the Republic (as a government) and the sacrifice of men for the Nation.

### **Distanciation from the 'social drama'**

In the introduction to the programme, Jeanennay does not speak of people reliving the revolution -- "the point is not to recall the entire revolution," but for the "events prepared by the Mission to succeed [... in] confer[ring] to the commemoration [...] its moral and civic dimension." In fact, for the

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<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Political Technologies of Individuals," *Technologies of the Self*, ed. Luther Martin, Hugh Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 147.

<sup>14</sup> The National Guard is departing for the battle of Valmy against the Prussian army. Their victory on 22 September 1792 was the first victory by the army of the Nation (joining the regular army) against a foreign power.

commemoration to be successful in this, it must *remove* the emotional charge of the revolutionary events and structure its remembering so that its moral lesson can be *reflected* upon. The program represents the structure given to the commemorative ritual which organizes a potentially chaotic celebration and emphasize its moral dimension.

The public life of the republic is organized around highly structured rituals like inaugurations, the taking of the presidential oath, state funerals, and so forth; yet, in the case of this commemoration, the commemorative ritual refers to time of 'anti-structure,' a time when everything seemed 'between and betwixt.'

Victor Turner calls such a time "social drama."<sup>15</sup> As Jean Davallon says,

the commemoration refers to the social drama as something that belongs to another time, to a time of disorder that is present in all transitions from one order to another. [The commemoration is the opposite of anti-structure] since, as in all rituals, it aims at establishing regularities, preventing crises, repairing accidents, explaining difference.<sup>16</sup>

If the commemoration evokes too powerfully the moment of the 'social drama', the public might respond in unexpected and uncontrollable ways -- rather, the organizers want people to draw the appropriate civic and moral lesson from it. Parades, fireworks, musical performances and other attributes of commemorative rituals regulate the disorder of anti-structure in the public realm. They represent a shared sense of order and a common language. They secure the potentially explosive differences of the 'social drama' within the margins of convention and the structure of the ceremonies.<sup>17</sup>

But the event also promises wonder. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett says, "a key to the appeal of many festivals, with their promise of sensory saturation and thrilling strangeness, is an insatiable and promiscuous appetite for wonder."<sup>18</sup> A

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<sup>15</sup> See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), especially chapter 3, "Liminality and Communitas." What Turner calls 'liminal' and 'liminoid' corresponds here to the commemorative ritual and the anti-structural aspects of the historical events.

<sup>16</sup> Jean Davallon, "La commémoration: une pratique symbolique politique", *Politique de la mémoire* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1993), 205.

<sup>17</sup> The distance created by the programme was further orchestrated by modern technology which made its content accessible to the public through the Minitel network. Minitel is a personal computer accessed through telephone lines which allows anyone in France to obtain information such as phone numbers, train schedules, showtimes for theatrical performances and to communicate through writing. By typing 3615, followed by the code B 89, at a Minitel terminal, anyone could access over 5,000 entries regarding the bicentennial -- an information that was updated weekly.

One could also reach into the depths of the revolutionary past by accessing historical files. For example, the original text of the *cahier des doléances* (a questionnaire done during 1789 asking people what they were unhappy about) had been copied into one the files of accessible by Minitel. Anyone could find out what had been recorded in the *cahier* in a certain village, town or city in France by reading a transcript. Accessing such powerful, and often emotional, historical material by simply typing on a Minitel keyboard, made the past more more accessible and yet, at the same time, also more structured, more organized.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," *Exhibiting Cultures: the poetics and politics of museum display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 428.



thrill of strangeness and the structure of ritual commemoration are not contradictory, on the contrary, one depends on the other. The form of the ritual secures the symbolic meaning of the event, in order for 'sensory saturation', 'the thrilling strangeness' and wonder to exist within its borders.

### *Reflection on the 'lessons of the Revolution'*

Reflecting on his work of organizing the commemoration, Jeannenay speaks of the moral lessons contained within it,

the commemoration offered, particularly to the younger generations, an opportunity to reflect on the fragility of the [revolutionary] gain and on the sacrifices it had required, [...] with an opportunity to breathe life into the analyses and the ambitions of the revolutionaries, particularly in the line of Condorcet, by focusing especially on attitudes towards those that are excluded, [such as] the poor and the immigrants.<sup>19</sup>

This *reflection* on the lessons of history is perhaps the most powerful way that the symbolic meaning of the commemoration is secured. Many events in the programme invited such a meditation on 'meaning' of the revolutionary heritage. Reflection on poverty, for example was the subject of an exhibit housed in a thirty foot high elephant called 'L'éléphant de la mémoire' (the elephant of memory). On entering the body of the elephant, visitors saw a slide show about poverty during the revolution (fig. 2.2). The elephant is believed to be the animal with the largest memory and during the revolution, it came to symbolize the memory of the poor. The slide show drew from the story of Gavroche, the hero of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, who slept inside the elephant that stood on Place de la Bastille.<sup>20</sup> By recalling a well-known story, the exhibit invited audiences to reflect on poverty today.

Reflection took a therapeutic function during the commemoration of the Jeu de Paume (the Tennis Court Oath) on June 20, the day when revolutionaries from all three orders swore to stay united. The therapeutic function of reflection

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Drawing from semiotics, Davallon remarks that the sense of distance, structured by the conventions of rituals and performances, tends to favor the human body over language. He argues that in order to be effective, regulating disorder needs to exist outside of language. For Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "ritual searches to establish regularity where there was none [...] and its symbolism takes over at a time when language can no longer frame the event" (Ibid., 417).

Nowhere was the sense of distance better illustrated than in live performances in museums about the revolution. The museum can be considered "a form of environmental theater – visitors moving through experience a *mis-en-scène* visually and kinesthetically" (Ibid., 415). A key to the appeal of performances in museums is the contrast between live performing bodies and the dead objects surrounding them. "Performance oriented approaches to [past] culture place a premium on the particularities of human actions, on language spoken and ritual performed" (Ibid.). Such approaches grapple well with large and complex historical events and present them to relatively small groups of people in the intimate setting of the museum.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>20</sup> In 1808, a papier-mâché sculpture of the elephant was built on place de la Bastille to honor one of the revolutionary projects, then it was left to decay. This gave Victor Hugo the idea to make it a refuge for his character Gavroche.

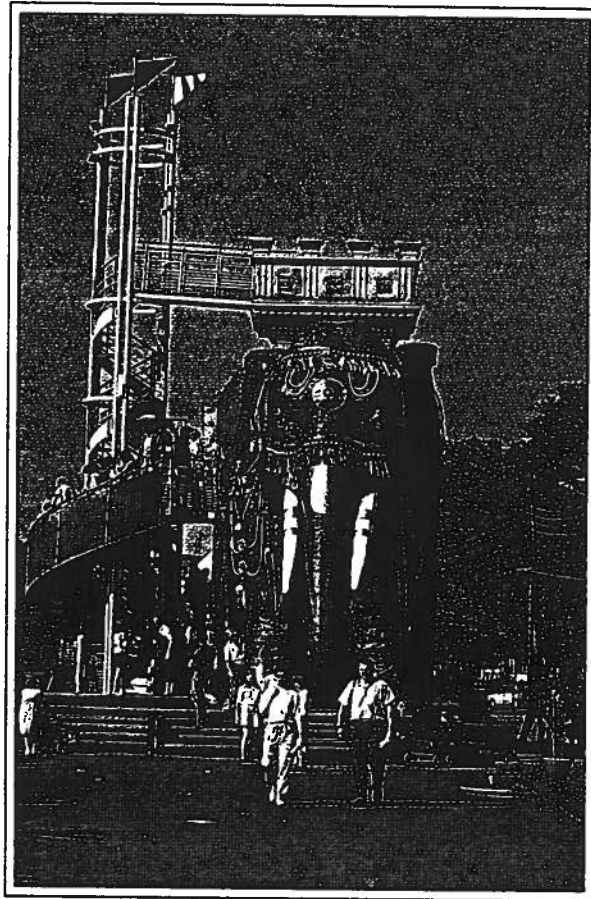


Figure 2.2  
RECONSTRUCTION OF THE ELEPHANT OF MEMORY IN LILLE, 1989

Photograph reproduced from 89, *Le Livre du Bicentenaire*, ed. Claire Andrieu (Paris: Le Chêne-Hachette, 1990), 108.

became clear in the speech given by the President on that occasion. As Dominique Julia argues, "the discourse called on the very old rhetorical exercise of the *magistra vitae*, which consists in reflecting upon history to derive a moral value."<sup>21</sup> Mitterand argued for assuming the *entire* heritage, including the painful memories of the massacres and not to erase the harshness, not to retain only what is convenient. He was quite explicit in his account of the Terror, "the ghastly images of Nantes, Lyon, the Carmes, the September prisons, the list is long. [...] The exercise of the Terror has made crime blasé just like strong liqueurs numb the palate, the Revolution is chilled."<sup>22</sup> The intention of such an analysis is to reintegrate in the heart of the commemoration what is impossible to commemorate. Through the act of speaking out, by saying the unspeakable, what tore people apart in the past became what linked them together -- that was the therapeutic function of this reflection.

Yet for the organizers, reflection on the past was most often coupled with an intention to provoke a reflection on the present. In the words of Jeannenay, "what is most disturbing is what remains to be conquered."<sup>23</sup> One of the present-day moral lessons intended by the programme is tolerance, especially towards those treated by others as less than equal. Many programmed events were intended to entice participants to spread notions of tolerance. The Bastille Day parade for example, was, according to Jeannenay, designed "to incite a lot of people to fight with more vigor to understand the Other and to fight for tolerance on a day-to-day basis."<sup>24</sup>

Other events as well focused on tolerance. The installation of three revolutionary personalities -- Condorcet, Abbé Gregoire and Gaspard Monge -- at the Pantheon was intended "to focus on the attitudes towards those that are excluded, the poor the immigrants...".<sup>25</sup> Condorcet was a philosopher and an aristocrat, politically a moderate, whose wife ran a salon influential in revolutionary circles. He was a vigorous advocate of educating and informing a voting public and establishing a free public education system. He was against slavery and a strong advocate of the rights of women. Abbé Grégoire was an elected representative to the Third Estate and a crucial link between the 'lower

<sup>21</sup> Dominique Julia, "Les évêques et le Bicentenaire," *Le Débat: histoire, politique, société* 57 (Nov.-Dec. 1989), 197.

<sup>22</sup> François Mitterand, speech published in *Le Monde* on June 22, 1989. "Les images atroces de Nantes, de Lyon, des Carmes, des prisons de septembre, la liste est longue. [...] L'exercice de la Terreur a blasé le crime comme les liqueurs fortes blasent le palais, la Révolution est glacée."

<sup>23</sup> Jeannenay, "Après coup," 187.

<sup>24</sup> Jeannenay, "Après coup," 197.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

(working) clergy' and the revolutionaries. He was a defender of minority rights, especially of the Jews and 'coloured peoples.' In 1790, he was elected president of the 'Société des Amis des Noirs.' By pantheonizing defenders of the rights of blacks, Jews and women, the government invited reflection on contemporary forms of exclusion and, implicitly, on work that remains to be done in that area.

Lastly, Gaspard Monge, a symbol of the patriotic professor, the creator of the scientific establishments, was chosen to reflect on the links between science and ethics. By choosing to highlight revolutionary ideas that correspond to contemporary concerns, the government programmed reflection on "what remains to be conquered," from freedom of access to information, to racism and human rights, and to the ethics of biological research.

#### *Commemoration as a rite of re-enactment*

Like any ritual, the commemoration is based on repetition. If there is a national heritage to speak of, it is because it has been repeatedly reinscribed through different civic rituals such as Bastille Day balls, oaths of office, and public parades.<sup>26</sup> Repetition is there to secure the fleeting meaning of the commemorative act.

Mona Ozouf calls this insistence on repetition "la logique du même" (the logic of the same), that is, the logic that pushes programmers of commemorations to repeat the same acts, in the same place, on the same dates. As Ozouf says, in past commemorations, "to change sites or to commemorate the 'wrong' date was always felt as a waste of sacral energy."<sup>27</sup> Ideally, the commemoration would reenact all the events of the revolution, one by one, in the actual places where the events took place. In the bicentennial programme, the site of the Champ de Mars (the traditional place for the revolutionary commemorations) was programmed by the mayor of Paris for an event celebrating the centenary of the Eiffel Tower, not a revolutionary event. This was seen as a transgression, as a politically childish act that prevented the parade from taking place in its traditional site.<sup>28</sup> As a result the parade was moved to the Champs Élysées, a site

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<sup>26</sup> The history of rituals commemorating the French Revolution is discontinuous, since each time the monarchy returned to power republican celebrations were stopped. Fourteenth of July balls for example, were only reinstituted in 1880. But this only shows to what extent traditions are presented as if they have a long and continuous history. For an analysis of this phenomena, see Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>27</sup> Mona Ozouf, "Peut-on commémorer la Révolution Française?" *Le Débat, histoire, politique, société* 26 (Sept. 1983): 163.

<sup>28</sup> See interviews of visitors to the exhibit at the Beaubourg Museum during 1989 for people's reaction to the local politics surrounding the choices of bicentennial in Patrick Garcia, Jacques Lévy, Marie-Flore Mattei, (eds.), *Revolutions, fin et suite* (Paris: EspacesTemps/Centre Georges Pompidou, 1991), especially pp. 147-164.

which had up to then been associated with military parades and not revolutionary events. For Maurice Halbwachs, the physical presence of the site where the event occurred is central to the principle of collective remembering. For those who want to believe in the greater significance of what they are commemorating,

they have to be confident that they are seeing and touching the very places where the facts subsequently transformed into dogma had happened. [...] If a truth is to be settled in a memory of a group, it needs to be presented in the concrete form of an event, of a personality, or of a locality. A purely abstract truth is not a recollection; a recollection refers us to the past. An abstract truth by contrast, has no hold on the succession of events; it is of the order of a wish or of an aspiration.<sup>29</sup>

In that regard, the commemorative act is for participants to feel linked to the revolutionaries, not only to feel the same as them, but the same among themselves. Ozouf argues that "the festive programmes, the planning of parades, the projects for monuments and the speeches assert the following affirmations: those who we honor are the same (between themselves), we are all the same (between ourselves), we are still the same as back then, we remain the same."<sup>30</sup> As an example of "we are the same as back then," in 1889, the Bastille was entirely rebuilt as a stage set in order to reenact its storming on July 14th 1789, after which it was symbolically demolished just as it was a hundred years earlier. Likewise, during the bicentennial in 1989, the planting of liberty trees throughout the country was recognized as one such reenactment of the past. The programme referred to the month of March as *l'enracinement* (taking roots) because on the 21st (the vernal equinox), 36,000 liberty trees would be planted throughout the country; reenacting one of the few revolutionary ceremonies which emanated from popular culture. One of these celebrations recalled and honored the participation of the church during the revolution in the presence of President Mitterand. As Dominique Julia says, "the Evêque of Poitier came (dressed in civil clothes) to plant a red oak from America in Saint Gaudent to replicate the gesture done in May 1790 by a patriot priest called Norbert Pressac."<sup>31</sup>

The calendar of the bicentennial year was structured around the major "good" historical dates of the French revolution. These were the Opening of General

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<sup>29</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 200.

<sup>30</sup> Ozouf, "Commémorer," 162.

<sup>31</sup> Julia, "Les évêques," 198. The inclusion of the church in the official celebrations of the bicentennial was, in general, resisted by the Catholic authorities, but the government's attempt to do so was still significant. I will talk about that in the section on "reflection" below.

Estates (May 5, 1789), the birth of the National Assembly (June 20, 1789), the storming of the Bastille (July 14, 1789), the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (August 26, 1789) and the victory at Valmy (September 20-22 1792). Through these few dates, one can see that the first part of the revolution is favored over the period known as the 'Terror' (1793-94), the death of the king (January 20, 1793) is omitted and the "night of August 4, 1789," when the abolition of all privileges was voted, recedes in the background. The only date that refers to an event after 1789 is the battle of Valmy, an event associated with the birth of the nation as a Republic. As the programme says, on that date "the course of history was altered by the Nation joining the regular army, which led to the institution of the Republic."<sup>32</sup>

The French historian Michel Vovelle comments on the choice of dates which favor the portrayal of a 'good' revolution.

In 1989, one chose to celebrate the year 1789, conceived as the privileged frame of the 'good' revolution, the one of freedom, and the one of the Rights of Man. This was a way to avoid pushing further to 1793 and 1794, or even to the break of August 10, 1792 [the storming of the Tuileries palace]. This political choice that is understandable and can be justified in terms of searching for a minimal consensus -- after all, the storming of the Bastille and the Declaration of the Rights of Man [...] are no futile objects!<sup>33</sup>

The question of choice is central to commemorations: 'what do we choose to celebrate, what do we omit?' These are the questions awaiting the organizers of any commemoration.

In her analysis of the correspondence between the political parties and choices of dates to commemorate in the Revolution, Ozouf says that the officials responsible for the celebrations that were politically located in the center, both in 1889, in 1939, and in 1989 recognized that there were *many* revolutions. Their choice of dates from 1789 was not only emblematic and strategic, but analytical, as a consequence of a conscious selection. It is revealing that in 1989, one of the official presentations insisted that the Revolution was not one block. "For me, I do not accept to say that the Revolution is one block. The hatred between men has stood in the way of ideas."<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, in the commemorations of the moderate-left, "the French Revolution can be commemorated not as a promise but as a gain."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jeanneney, *Programme des manifestations*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Michel Vovelle, *Combat pour la révolution* (Paris: Éditions la découverte/Société des études robespierristes, 1993), 85.

<sup>34</sup> Herriot quoted by Ozouf, "Peut-on commémorer," 168.

<sup>35</sup> Ozouf, "Peut-on commémorer," 169.

By contrast, in the celebrations put on by the extreme left either during 1889 and more clearly during the communist festivities of 1939, there is a desire for homogeneity. All the major actors of the revolution are commemorated, one after the other along the progression of time, all the way to Thermidor (when Robespierre lost power). There is no discrimination. "What distinguishes these commemorations from the official ones is their extraordinary capacity of absorption, to digest and abolish the contradictions existing in the patrimony."<sup>36</sup> But among the most radical believers in the Robespierrist government of 1793; no one, Ozouf remarks, has thought to commemorate the death of Robespierre or, as for the terror, no one has paraded a guillotine. For the extreme left, the Revolution is not over. In 1939 the Workers Party protests against the term "The Ancient Revolution" and say that in reality "the revolution is permanent. It is of an eternal actuality. Our fathers saw the beginning, we would not even see the middle. Because the causes that produced it are, for centuries to come, in the heart of people."<sup>37</sup> By contrast, on the side of the reformists, the Revolution is definitely finished, or should be. For the moderate left, Ozouf explains, by 1939 the Revolution no longer appears as a promise but as a gain.

In 1989, the program established by the Mission shared the 'centrist' tradition of official commemorations which recognized the plurality of the revolution but like the ones of the moderate left it attempted to recognize the gains even if they arose from confronting the dark sides of the past in order to draw out a moral lesson.

On the one hand, we have a position represented by Michel Vovelle that says that *all* dates should be commemorated, and on the other, a position that says that only the dates relevant to our situation should be celebrated. In between the two, we find discussions about the type of assumptions involved in choosing. The weakness of the argument for commemorating all the dates, says Mona Ozouf, "is to confuse commemoration with history. We could nearly sustain that these two activities are contradictory. An historian who would occlude the 'September massacres' would be undignified. On the other hand, to me, a commemoration that does is dignified."<sup>38</sup> Commemoration, for Ozouf, is

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>38</sup> Mona Ozouf, "A l'aise dans la commémoration," *Forum de la Révolution*, Special edition of *Le monde de la Révolution française*, Special edition for the exhibition Forum at Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou/Le Monde, 1989), p. 2.

generated by a desire to bring people together, not distance them; that is why commemorations do not need exactitude, she says, but "euphoria and poetry." That the program insisted on the year 1789 and the site of Paris shows more than a search for "euphoria and poetry," it reveals what Halbwachs calls a process of concentration. Landmarks are chosen, he argues, for the power associated with these places *before* the events took place.

In collective memory there are in general particular figures, dates and periods of a time that acquire an extraordinary salience. These attract to themselves other figures and events that happened at other moments. A whole period is concentrated so to speak, in one year, just as a series of actions and events, about which one has forgotten its varying actors and diverse conditions, gathers together in one man and is attributed to him alone.<sup>39</sup>

As if following this analysis, the major dates of the program were clustered around events which took place during the year of 1789, and favoring Paris -- traditionally the seat of power -- over other cities. For Halbwachs, rituals deliberately pursue the physical concentration of memories in places "so that, without moving, [an] assembly of believers could evoke them simultaneously and embrace them in a single act of adoration."<sup>40</sup>

In the text, one reads that "the rich panorama of projects [...] will reassure those who feared that things were organized in too centralized a fashion, too Parisian." This "rich panorama" is offered by the Mission as a cure to over-centralization on Paris. But the emphasis on differences and diversity does not imply, according to Jeanneney, that Paris is unimportant -- on the contrary, he states that "the capital will contribute before all other places to give *character* to the celebrations." In other words, Paris is the part that represents the whole of France, just like the crown represents the king. In that logic, Jeanneney argues "[it is a natural thing] when we know the chronicle of the historic events" implying that most of the revolutionary events occurred in Paris. Thus, the commemorative ritual is spatially recentered and the memory of the revolution radiates from there to touch people's "hearts and minds" throughout the world and gather them for the commemorative ritual.

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<sup>39</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 222.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.



The mapping out of the commemorative events is a construction. The Mission clearly wanted to make Paris the centre of the bicentennial, since it had been the theatre of the establishment of the Republican government. What was retained above all from the stories of the Revolution were the major steps leading to the establishment of a government that would vote the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. By placing the Declaration on centre stage, the programme insists on the gains of the revolution. "The month of August is dominated by the celebration of the fundamental *oeuvre* of the French Revolution: it is a time for homage."<sup>41</sup> The Declaration, therefore, was constructed as *the* good event *par excellence* for its proven success, as it has flowered worldwide in the rise of organizations promoting of human rights.

The choice of certain dates over others (since a choice is necessary) calls on one of the fundamental aspects of morality: the discrimination between good and bad actions. Such a discrimination is based on a set of standards by which a particular group of people decides to regulate its behaviour -- to distinguish between what is legitimate or acceptable in pursuit of their aims from what is not.

### **A symbolic society, visible and invisible**

The opening statement of the introduction, "Here it is", uses a rhetorical device usually practiced in public speeches. It calls out to the audience and metaphorically points to the real presence of the object (the programme), which is the subject of the speech. This device makes the reader aware that he or she is part of a larger group of people who are also becoming acquainted with the document. By enunciating the real and visible qualities of the programme, the statement "Here it is, made available to everyone" refers to a symbolic society of participants in the commemorative ritual.

Jeannenay's emphasis on "what we will build together" goads the reader to become an active participant in the commemoration. But there is also the sense that the symbolic society is surrounded by potential non-believers. A statement such as: "[the programme] is not carved in stone and I am ready to bet that the publication [...] will contribute to disperse the last sceptics" acknowledges the

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<sup>41</sup> Jeanneney, ed., *Programme*, 6.

existence of sceptics. Jeanneney shows that he is well informed of the cool reception indicated by opinion polls while at the same time, telling those who persist in their skepticism that they are insensitive to the 'richness' of the Revolutionary heritage and its Charter of Human Rights.

Once the "symbolic society" is established, the next step is to speak of the powerful radiance of that society. The Mission was the name given to the organization responsible for the programming of the bicentennial, it seems that such a choice invites some comments. "The Mission" is a profoundly Christian term that has been claimed for a governmental organization that, in principle, is entirely secular. To be on a mission is to be one sent, a messenger proclaiming a greater message and, in Christian tradition, sent universally, herein a beginning to the sacralization of the Revolution.

Jeanneney's introduction presents the memory of the revolution as having 'converted' people world-wide, suggesting the power of its radiance. Yet these converts celebrate the commemoration in different ways: "the bicentennial takes on different colors depending on the type of Nation it is." This is because the 'converts' draw their value from the fact that they are commemorating differently -- they have taken the heritage of the revolution into their own lives. In honoring its memory, the revolution has gone 'native' and these differences are presented by the Mission as proof of its intrinsic power. Similarly to the ritual of communion, which is about including more and more people in its society of believers, the introduction has the zeal of the missionary for multiplication. The statement "a commemoration solely focused on France would be absurd" underlines the inclusive nature of the revolution throughout the world. To restrict the commemoration to the French territory would be turning the bicentennial into a nationalistic celebration, rather the statement brings the event into the realm of the global, the international society comprised of all those who want to share the commemorative 'ritual'. The exhibit of posters announcing the bicentennial in countries outside of France shows the desire for participation elsewhere. The colloquium on the image of the French Revolution which gathered scholars from around the world is another example of making visible a 'society' that would otherwise be invisible.

In order to speak of the symbolic qualities of the event that are being commemorated (the sacrificial body), Jeanneney praises the French Revolution with traditional rhetorical forms found in panegyric speeches. If he were to say

how important the commemoration is, he would be praising his own work; therefore, he praises other people's genuine enthusiasm for the celebration, indirectly showing the importance of what is being commemorated. The phrases "struck by enthusiasm," "a multiplicity of intentions have bloomed," "countries are participating wonderfully," and "the revolution's impact on the hearts and minds of so many people" all point to interest of others to actively participate in the celebration of the commemoration.

This rhetorical device of praising other people's interest in your own work also suggests an "ever growing crowd" of believers. More and more people from "other countries" are participating "wonderfully": they are adding to the number of participants. As Louis Marin remarked, these people form a "society" that is (in the New Testament Pauline language) "both visible and invisible." The "society" become visible as it finds its way into representations, either on television during the coverage of the events of the bicentennial, or in crowds of visitors in museums, public conferences and in colloquium. The community of believers in the Revolution is constantly being reaffirmed through celebrations in and around the real and visible marks of the revolutionary heritage. These visible marks include the celebration of late eighteenth century architecture with guided tours and exhibitions of architectural drawings; the display of books and printed documents; even the posing of the descendants of famous revolutionaries to have their photographs taken the café Procope (fig. 2.3). By using the words "promised land," Hugo clearly makes an allusion to the famous biblical phrase. The desire for the "human revolution" to follow "the European revolution" is striving for perfection "when the sketch will become a masterpiece." But the overall sense is one of control over history: "to conclude history with an unfinished gesture, especially when this gesture is full of rich future events. [...] Nothing more immense." The sense of history as progress, telos is also a reference to the Biblical view of fulfillment in the 'end times', tending towards an "utopia". The words "nothing more immense" is the final point to the rhetorical praise of the French Revolution: nothing can be as grand, nothing can equate it.

The success of the commemoration depended on the union between the political strategies of the government and the symbolic strategies of distance, reflection and repetition I uncovered in the programme. As a political strategy, the government scheduled the Summit meeting that was taking place in France that year on the days preceding the most important event, the Bastille Day Parade. In

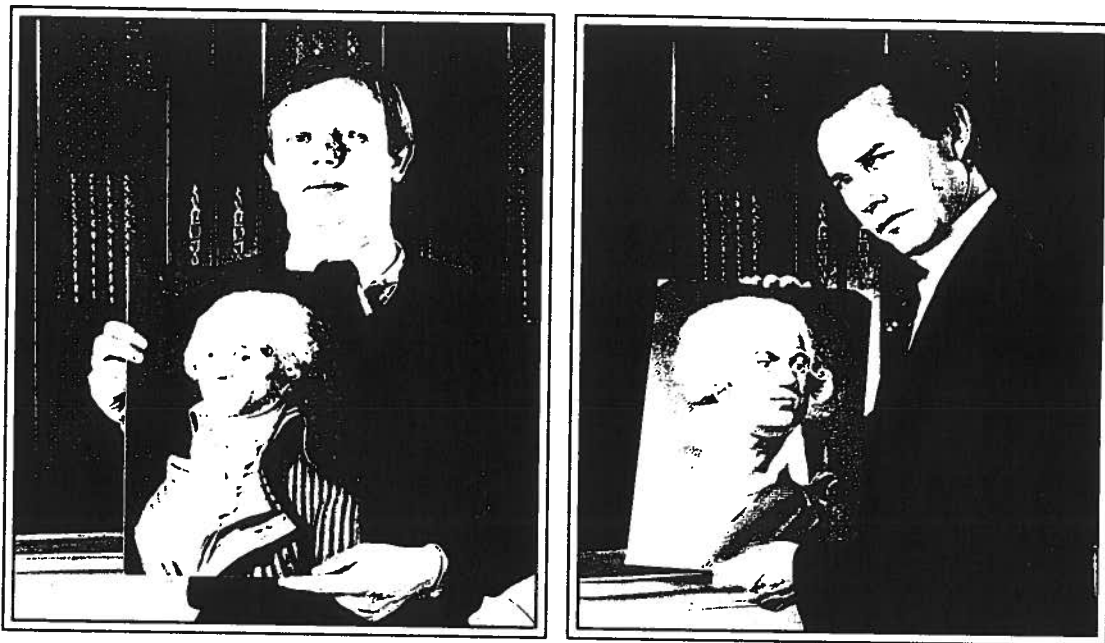


Figure 2.3  
THE DESCENDANTS OF THE REVOLUTIONARIES HOLD IMAGES OF THEIR  
ANCESTORS AT LE PROCOPE

On the left A. Dusquene, a descendant of Robespierre, and on the right C. Arnoux, a descendant of Danton. Photograph reproduced from 89, ed. Andrieu, 49.

addition the counter Summit of the poorest countries invited over thirty presidents from third-world nations. By scheduling these three events, two political and the other symbolic, at the same time, the political and symbolic dimensions could work on each other.<sup>42</sup>

To read the programme as a moral enigma is to recognize that the union between the symbolic and political operates within certain references that are specific to the history of rituals performed by and for the French government. Even though we are far removed from the power of the 'roi thématurge' kings that so fascinated Kantorowicz, civic rituals tap into these age-old structures when needed.<sup>43</sup> And 1989 was such a situation. As many scholars have commented, the bicentennial could not have begun under worse auspices. The very concept of 'revolution' only brought out cynicism and at the time, saw no great threat to human rights in Europe. People were more interested in day to day rights than in the great ideals of the Revolution.

Finally, the notion of reflection is perhaps the distinctive mark of the moral dimension of the bicentennial program. The organizers were so keen on the meditative aspects of the commemoration that, once it was over, Jeannenay said "maybe I have illusions: it seems to me that the collective reflection substantially outgrew the celebration of the gains [of the revolution]."<sup>44</sup> "Our conviction put forth was that the Revolutionary heritage, on the condition to choose (and why not?) what fits our present notion of progress, would allow [us] to better incarnate in everyday life a number of values, in particular brotherhood."<sup>45</sup>

In Chapter Seven, I will investigate the Bastille Day Parade as an allegory to speak of tolerance, one that works with the irreverent and surprising form of the carnivalesque. Now I would like to move in the rooms of the commemorative exhibitions that brought together so many art objects that no one knew what to say about them. Their sheer accumulation seemed significant, but an allegorical critique of this insatiable accumulation will draw out stories about the ways the exhibition invoked history.

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<sup>42</sup> This process is investigated fully in Chapter Six, "Cosmopolitan Tribes."

<sup>43</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies, A Study in Medieval Political Theology*. Princeton: University of Princeton, 1957.

<sup>44</sup> "Peut-être me fais je des illusions: il me semble que la réflexion collective a largement débordé la seule célébration de l'aquis." Jeannenay, "Après coup," 187.

<sup>45</sup> "Notre conviction affichée était que l'héritage de la Révolution, à condition de choisir, (et pourquoi pas?) ce qui convenait à notre actualité d'hommes de progrès, permettait encore de faire mieux s'incarner au quotidien un certain nombre de valeurs, en particulier la fraternité." Jeannenay, "Après coup," 79.

## REVOLUTION AND NARRATION

As we have seen in the previous chapter, exhibits formed a major part of the bicentennial program organized by the Mission. From children's toys of the late eighteenth century to scientific discoveries, the French revolution was narrated, interpreted, "put into representation" as Louis Marin would say, with an impressive array of objects and documents that were, until then, hidden in the back rooms of museums and the archival vaults of libraries.

Most of these exhibits were traditional in scope. Focused either on an artist (such as Jean Louis David) or a subject (for example, revolutionary architecture), they were organized according to themes and/or chronologies. What retains my attention here, is the major bicentennial exhibition: "La Revolution et l'Europe" at the Grand Palais. It was by far the most ambitious and certainly largest one, with more than 1,100 works gathered from nearly 300 different sources. But the curators decided to simply let the works "speak for themselves" without providing any guidance to the visitor. A number of reviewers such as Linda Nochlin and Philippe Bordes have rightly criticized this decision. Philippe Bordes suggests that it might have been caused by a fear to stir up the divergent interpretations of the Revolution. He says that, "given the passionate political polemics of France today, the organizers have evidently preferred to steer a safe course."<sup>1</sup> As a result, the exhibit had an enormous quantity of objects strung along a chronology of revolutionary events, which left the visitor to either turn to the weighty catalogue or rely on their own knowledge.

With the existing context of new historical methods to analyze images and the current debates about exhibit curating, there was a great deal of expectations regarding the show. The "reality-effect" of history displayed at the centennial

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<sup>1</sup> Philippe Bordes, "Exhibition Review," *The Burlington Magazine* 131, no. 1035 (June 1989): 441.

analyzed by Mitchell, whether it be in the exhibition on the history of dwellings<sup>2</sup> (fig. 3.1) or the reconstruction of the Bastille, embodied everything that French historians, starting with the *Annales School* onwards, have reacted against and attempted to replace. The *Annales* historians (Braudel, Furet, Le Goff, Le Roy-Ladurie and others) "regarded narrative history as a non-scientific, even ideological representational strategy, the extirpation of which was necessary for the transformation of historical studies into a genuine science."<sup>3</sup> The more semiologically oriented literary theorists and philosophers (Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, Todorov, Kristeva, Benevise, Genette and Eco) "have studied narrative in all of its manifestations and viewed it as simply one discursive "code" among others, which might or might not be appropriate for the representation of reality."<sup>4</sup> Finally, the hermeneutically oriented philosophers, such as Gadamer and Ricoeur, "have viewed narrative as the manifestation in discourse of a specific kind of time-consciousness or structure of time."<sup>5</sup>

With all the new approaches for studying history and theories regarding historical narrative, one would have hoped to see the fruits of these changes in the major bicentennial exhibition.

Since the five major commemorative exhibitions held between 1889 and 1939 (these appear to have been swamped with print and clutter) that this exhibition might reasonably have been expected to provide an intense visual experience -- the thrill of seeing a whole world redeemed by 20th century art history from oblivion. The world is there to see, but the light trained on it is remarkably dim.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, there is a remarkable similitude between the five commemorative exhibits after 1889, that were "swamped with print and clutter" and this one, described as "enormous" and "unintelligible." It seems that, when it comes to displaying art, all these commemorative exhibits insist on accumulation. Burton Benedict compares this desire for accumulation to the native "potlatch" as he describes the ways Western nations strive to impress one another by a "massive display" of objects. Seen in this manner, "symbols are used flagrantly to impress

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<sup>2</sup> The architect Charles Garnier (and a group of collaborators) designed a special exhibit to show the history of dwellings from the Roman house to nomadic tents. For an analysis of the exhibition, see Alexandre Labat, "Charles Garnier et l'exposition de 1889 l'histoire de l'habitation," in *1889, La Tour Eiffel et l'Exposition Universelle*, ed. Caroline Mathieu (Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Orsay Museum, Paris: Édition de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1989), 130-161.

<sup>3</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: narrative discourse and historical representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1987), 31.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Bordes, "Exhibition Review," 442.

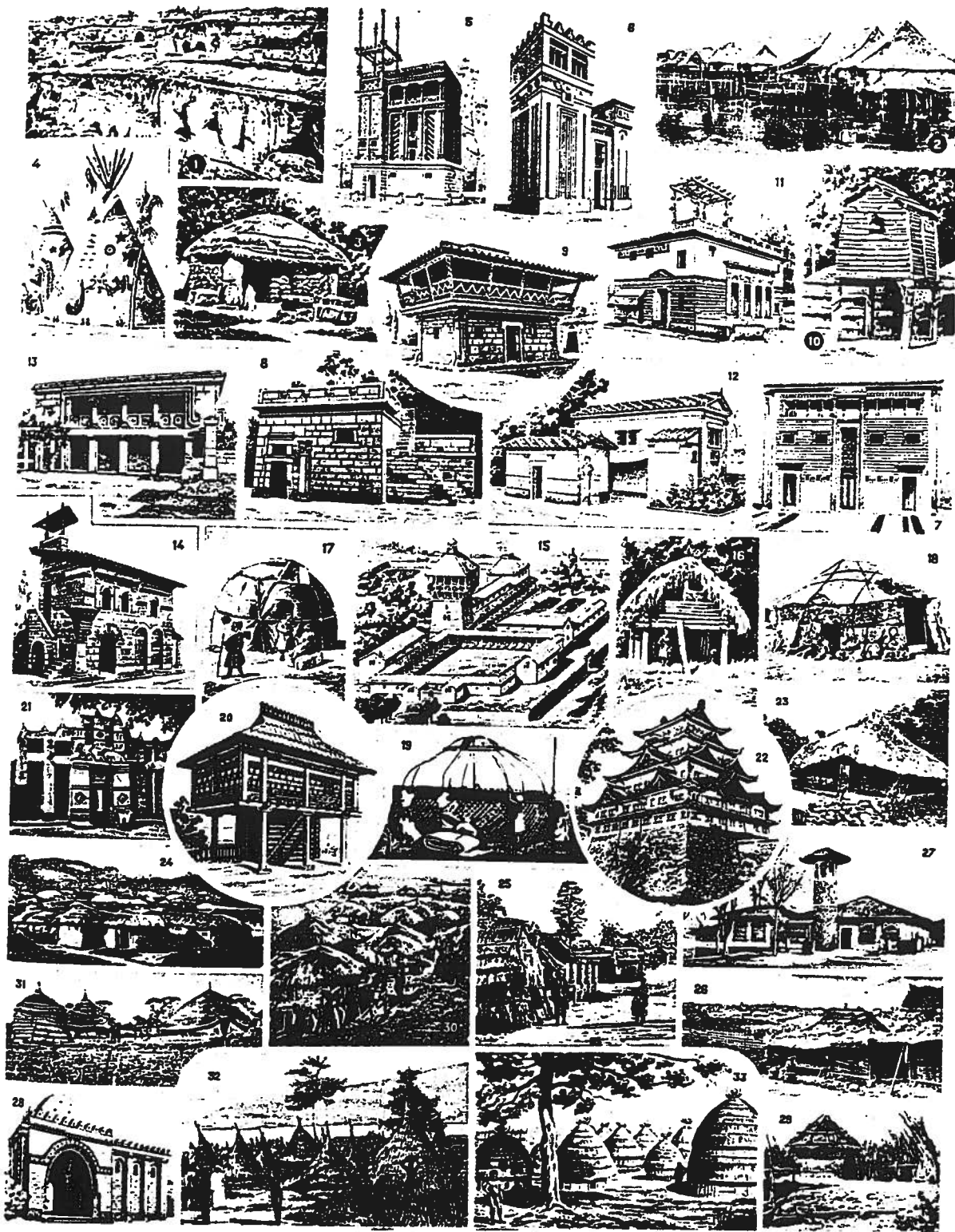


Figure 3.1  
 "HABITATION" FROM *LAROUSSE DU XXEME SIÈCLE*

Figures 3, 5, 20 and 28 reproduce the constructions built for the exhibit on the history of human habitation, designed by Charles Garnier for the Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1889. Reproduced in 1889 *La Tour Eiffel et L'Exposition Universelle*, ed. Caroline Mathieu (Catalogue of the exhibition at the Orsay Museum, Paris: Edition de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1989), 144.



rivals and the general public, for the rivalry would lose its points without public acclaim for the winners."<sup>7</sup>

But in order to find a way to interpret this commemorative exhibit, I find that I must return to the sense of disappointment voiced by its critics. If we look at the exhibit allegorically, this disappointment is an expression of melancholy over the fragmentary. I see, on the other hand, the ceaseless accumulation of fragments from the past pointing to their own allegorical rescue. Indeed, allegory is consistently attracted to the fragmentary, the imperfect, the incomplete -- an affinity which finds its most comprehensive expression in the ruin, which Benjamin identified as the allegorical emblem par excellence."<sup>8</sup> For the ruin was once a building and is now returning to nature, being reabsorbed into the landscape; in that sense the ruins stands for history as an "irreversible process of dissolution and decay, a progressive distancing from origin."<sup>9</sup>

I therefore propose to conceive the bicentennial exhibit as an accumulation of fragments of the revolutionary period that can be gathered in meaningful constellations. Like pieces of a puzzle which come together to create an image, these constellations gather around the notion of "historical narrative." The historical narratives I draw out of the exhibit comprise a Marxist narrative, the concept of scientific history put forth by the Annales School and a story about fragments itself. These three constellations will shed light on the ways in which the exhibit was putting history into representation.

But before embarking on these allegorical constellations, it is necessary to put the exhibit in context both historically and in the specificity of its Parisian site: the Grand Palais. Natalie Zemon Davis says that "whenever memory is invoked we should be asking ourselves: by whom, where, in which context, against what?"<sup>10</sup> I will take the questions one at a time. *Who* organized the exhibit leads us to realize that the story of the French Revolution was turned into a European story; the question of context attracts our attention on the connection between commemoration and the idea of showing art to the public, *where* the exhibition took place becomes significant when we realize that the building was constructed

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<sup>7</sup> Burton Benedict, *The Anthropology of World's Fairs: the San Francisco Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915* (London and Berkeley: Scholar Press, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition, Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 55.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, "Introduction," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 2.

for the centennial Universal Exhibition of 1889; and *against what* is most directly answered by looking at the contemporary criticism of museography.

### "La Revolution Française et l'Europe"

In a sense, the entire program of the bicentennial was structured around the idea of recalling what happened during the revolution. But the exhibits had the mandate to actually 'tell the story,' to narrate the revolution as a way to distance the 'social drama' of the events of 1789 through storytelling. As I answer the questions of who organized the exhibit, in which context and where, my investigation focuses on what it was that the curators seemed to react against.

In the current debate about the role of narrative in the telling of history,<sup>11</sup> I think we can agree with Natalie Zemon Davis that post-structuralist criticism has broken down the opposition between a supposedly "organic" flow of memory that gives either unvarnished truth or, inversely, tells uncritical tales, and the historian's more or less calculated accounts of the past. "Collapse the nature-culture distinction," she says, "and both memory and history look like heavily constructed narratives, with only institutionally regulated differences between them."<sup>12</sup> I want to underline this last point. The idea that history is equally constructed whether it is in a museum or a biography escapes authors like Carol Duncan who tend to regard public museums as places where historical "truth" is more distorted than in other more marginal, personal or popular sites of memory.<sup>13</sup> It is important to investigate all sites of collective memory with the same attention, not assume that publicly funded exhibits will manipulate the past *more* than private collections because the latter are personal and simply "reflect" the individual taste of the collector.

#### *Who organized the exhibit?*

"La revolution française et l'Europe" was the largest of all the exhibits and thus, one might argue, it would be the closest to a *comprehensive* exhibit of the revolution. It was organized by the Conseil de l'Europe, as the twentieth in a

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<sup>11</sup> See Hayden White, "The value of narrativity in the representation of reality," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (Autumn 1980): 5-27.

<sup>12</sup> Zemon Davis, "Introduction," 2.

<sup>13</sup> Carol Duncan regards public museums as places where historical "truth" is more distorted than in other more marginal, personal or popular sites of memory. See her "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship," *Exhibiting Cultures: the Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 89-104.

series of exhibits held in the various countries of the European Community, which means that exhibit was supported, financially and politically, by most of the countries of Europe. As a result, the goal of "La révolution française et l'Europe" was to "place a period of a country's history in its European context."<sup>14</sup> A total of 1,143 paintings, drawings, engravings, posters, sculptures, manuscripts, furniture and objects were borrowed from fifteen European countries. The geography covered by the exhibit needs comment for it is exceptional that the narration of the Revolution is not centered on the French nation and thus raises questions about the positioning of France in the European context.

It might seem that it would pass without comment that an exhibit put on by the Conseil de l'Europe would display art objects from all member countries of the European Community. But in his preface to the catalogue, the Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, justifies the European nature of the exhibit by contrasting the present political context to those of the past two commemorations.

In spite of the popular appeal of the centennial, the 1889 commemoration was ignored by the other countries of a Europe that was just as monarchist as at the end of the eighteenth century. The situation was even worse during the 150th anniversary [1939], that coincided with the eve of the second world war, the triumph of the dictatorships...<sup>15</sup>

Today, the situation is quite the opposite -- although several have maintained monarchies in name, all the European countries have elected governments, universal suffrage, and a constitution, and are in no way threatened by the 'republican' content of the commemoration.<sup>16</sup> The bicentennial exhibition is therefore presented as a celebration of European concord and consensus on the value of a republican form of government.

The uniqueness of the present situation is cited in the exhibit catalogue as a reason to transform the traditional narration of the French Revolution into a story of Europe at that period. "Even if the relations between the different countries (with a few exceptions) were violent and bloody," the French Revolution is placed within "its historical process, linked to the entire context," in order to shed light on both "its necessity and its contradictions."<sup>17</sup> As a result,

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in *L'Express*, 21 April 1989, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> Jack Lang, "Preface," *La Révolution française et l'Europe 1789-1799*, vol.1, ed. Jean-René Gaborit (Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Grand Palais, Paris: Edition de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1989), xvii.

<sup>16</sup> Some invited countries, such as Saudi Arabia, refused to participate in the commemoration of a historical event they deplore. This information was reported to me by Catherine Greenblatt, who worked at the Mission du Bicentenaire in Paris.

<sup>17</sup> Lang, "Preface," xvii.

the narration acquires two levels: one about the commonalties linking Europe into a "context" for the revolution, and another about the contradictions which pulled people apart. The first level included issues such as how the European royalty exercised and maintained power, rural and urban life, the modernization of industry, and the intellectuals of the Enlightenment throughout Europe. A most vivid example of this commonalty was the section called "The Eve of the Revolution," which showed a Europe essentially agrarian, from the North Sea to the Mediterranean. The second level dealt with the way the revolution divided people. The "necessity" of revolution was most evident in the section called "The Revolutionary Event" which showed a country split by internal and external forces. That these divisions held "contradictions" was visible in the third and last part of the show, "The Creative Revolution", which showed the results of artists' attempts to give an image to revolutionary ideals such as republicanism, citizenship, liberty and the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

The list of contributors to the catalogue reflects the European nature of the project. Interpretations of the images are written by authors from all over Europe, setting it apart from the usual practice in which one writer links all the images into a narrative. Both the catalogue and the show insist on telling the story of the French Revolution through a panorama of all European countries before and during the revolution. The story is no longer one of nationalism but of a set of nations contained within the border of Europe.

The show no longer defines the subject as a citizen who inherits the principles of the French revolution which are equated with the origin of the modern state, but as a citizen of Europe who is part of a complex and evolving historical process. Citizenship is extended across national borders to include all of Europe and in that sense, if nations exist, they are inscribed in their plural form. This insistence on the European nature of the Enlightenment and the revolution reworks the commemorative narrative into a European one against, in a sense, the rest of the world. The founding principles of the French Revolution, like the Declaration of the Rights of Man and republicanism, still hold their central role but they are expressly diffused within a European narrative through a process of contextualization.

*Where was the exhibit?*

The exhibit took place in the Grand Palais, a large iron and glass pavilion built for the centennial commemoration and universal exposition of 1889. In that

year, the story of the revolution was physically as well as narratively pushed to the margins of the exhibition. The major narrative of the centennial exposition was the story of colonial capitalism and this story was told through exotic pavilions from the colonies and shows about western art, technology and machines. The history of the French Revolution on the other hand, was told *hors les murs*, beyond the boundaries of the exposition grounds. There, a complete reconstruction of the Bastille prison and entire boulevards operated as a set for re-enactments of the storming of the Bastille and other events that occurred in the Saint Antoine quarter, on avenue Suffren and in the Vieux Temple <sup>18</sup> (fig. 3.2). Built like a stage set, it created a believable and safe environment for theatrical re-enactments. The buildings from different locations were reproduced at a smaller scale and brought together on one site, creating its own sense of place. The square formed by the "Bastille" and a section of the "Faubourg Saint Antoine", for example "looks forward" to the urbanism of Disneyland where world geography is compressed into a landscape of fantasy. The detailed realism of the construction was just as attentive and carefully executed as the "Street of Cairo" inside the grounds of the exhibition analyzed by Timothy Mitchell. What Mitchell calls the "reality-effect" of these reconstructions was the remarkable claim to certainty, to truth: "the apparent certainty with which everything seems ordered and organized, calculated and rendered unambiguous - ultimately, what seems its political decidedness."<sup>19</sup>

The emergence of an historicized framework at these world exhibitions was an innovation, but not an isolated one. As Tony Bennett shows, the development of the "historical frame" was concurrent with other practices, such as new practices of history writing (whether the historical novel or the development of history as an empirical discipline), which aimed at the life-like reproduction of an authenticated past as a series of stages leading to the present.<sup>20</sup> Alexandre du Sommerard's Hôtel de Cluny of the 1830s for example, is relevant in this development of museum practices for it aimed at "an integrative construction of historical totalities, creating the impression of a historically authentic milieu by suggesting an essential and organic connection between artifacts displayed in rooms classified by period."<sup>21</sup> For Bennett, the two principles elaborated by du

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<sup>18</sup> Caroline Mathieu, "L'invitation au voyage"1889, *La Tour Eiffel et l'Exposition Universelle*, ed. Carole Mathieu (Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Orsay Museum, Paris: Édition de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1989), 105.

<sup>19</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988),102-129, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *Culture/Power/History, A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley and Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 139.

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984),85.



Figure 3.2  
RECONSTRUCTION OF THE BASTILLE AND THE FAUBOURG SAINT-  
ANTOINE FOR THE EXPOSITION UNIVERSELLE, PARIS, 1889

Photograph reproduced in 1889, ed. Mathieu, 105.

Sommerard, the *galleria progressiva* and the period room constitute "the distinctive poetics of the modern historical museum."<sup>22</sup> But it is important to add that this discourse on history was linked in more ways than one to the development of the nation-state. Museums of science and technology, heirs to the rhetoric of progress in national and international exhibitions, completed the evolutionary picture in representing the history of industry and manufacture as a series of progressive innovations leading up to the contemporary triumphs of industrial capitalism.<sup>23</sup>

When the bicentennial exhibit "La révolution française et l'Europe" took over the Grand Palais of 1889, it operated a re-reading of the centennial. The largest exhibit would not be housed in a new building speaking about technological progress (like the Grande Arche) but in one that was built for the last major commemoration. As a result, the 1889 discourse about progress which presented itself as a break from the past, was replaced by a discourse on heritage and commemorative tradition. If the centennial built perfect replicas, the bicentennial, by contrast, was keen on preservation and heritage. Continuity with the past was also made visible by the content of the exhibit: there were all originals from the eighteenth century such as common objects, paintings, documents, and furniture, as if, through the marks of wear and tear, the visitor came in true contact with the past. I propose that the claim to certainty, or truth, embodied in the exact replicas at the centennial was replaced by a search for authenticity.<sup>24</sup>

*In which context did the exhibit take place?*

Today, public exhibits can still be seen as an instrument of government to educate its citizens. That schools continue to bring children for museum visits attests to the importance of the museum in establishing common cultural references and in forming children into like-minded citizens. The notion of the museum as an open "public space" was one of the driving forces behind the design of the Beaubourg Museum for example.<sup>25</sup> Yet, since the mid-1980s, an increasing number of academics have looked at museums and the process of collecting with a critical eye. These analyses drew curating into the current

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<sup>22</sup> Bennett, "Exhibitionary Complex," 140.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>24</sup> I will come back to this point in the section "Narration through originals." For a reference on the search for authenticity when people visit museums or other cultural sites, see Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken, 1976).

<sup>25</sup> For a critical analysis on the notion of the "public" in Beaubourg see Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, "Counting the Public or the Public that Counts," *The Museum Time Machine*, ed. Robert Lumley (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

criticisms of public institutions and their conservative view of culture and cultural production. Feminist artists, critics and art historians drew attention to the neglect of women artists and to the stereotyped views of women's art. Many books were published which made accessible the names and works of hundred of women artists from all periods of the history of art.<sup>26</sup> Cross-disciplinary explorations between anthropology and history provided additional tools for a critical analysis of museum studies.

Carlo Ginzburg sees the common area of research between history and anthropology as a result of two crises: "the end of the structured, self-confident notion of history and the growing consciousness among anthropologists that the presumed native cultures were themselves a historical product. Both crises are connected to the end of [a] world colonial system, and to the collapse of the related unlinear notion of history."<sup>27</sup> As a result, cultural anthropology has influenced both historians and curators by taking a critical look at ethnographic collections of native American and "exotic" cultures.<sup>28</sup>

In North America, the *voice* emerged as a crucial issue in the design of exhibitions. *Whose* voice is heard when a curator works through an established genre of exhibition became a recurring question. Moving between anthropology and art history, Sally Price attacked the cultural arrogance implicit in western appropriation of non-western art in her book, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, while James Clifford's influential article, "On Collecting Art and Culture", was published in 1988. More recently, two edited volumes of articles -- *Exhibiting Cultures* and *Museums and Communities, the Politics of Public Culture* -- examined the often-controversial interactions between museums in North America and the communities they profess to represent and serve.<sup>29</sup> The essays illustrate struggles and collaborations among museums and communities which, in the past were seen as peripheral to the main currents of national history. For the moment, the issue of the *voice* has been largely restricted to the North American context, and in that regard will not be directly useful for my

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<sup>26</sup> See Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

<sup>27</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, "A Comment," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 12, no. 2 (Autumn 1981): 278.

<sup>28</sup> One of the first was Victor Turner and Edward Bruner, eds., *The Anthropology of Experience* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

<sup>29</sup> Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989); James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); and Ivan Karp, Christine Muller Kreamer and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Museums and Communities: the Politics of Public Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).



own analysis. What, on the other hand, has found a warm reception across the Atlantic, is an interest in telling the stories of those who have been excluded from official history, such as women and the poor.<sup>30</sup> Along with historians focusing on social history, these concerns have led to a number of exhibitions attempting to put events in a socio-political perspective.

Critical theory, inherited from Adorno and the Frankfurt School was, and still is, shaping most of the investigations into the "publicness" of European museums. The museum's exclusionary practices were first investigated by Pierre Bourdieu in *L'amour de l'art* published in 1969. Through interviews with visitors in 21 museums, Bourdieu and his team showed that, despite policies initiated since 1959 by the Ministry of Culture under André Malraux<sup>31</sup> to increase access to museums, in the late 1960s, 45% of museum visitors came from the upper classes, 23% from white-collar backgrounds and only 4% from the working class.<sup>32</sup> For Bourdieu, museums are places that confirm one's social position by inviting in those who are already "initiated" to the "saintly sites" of culture and excluding those who are not. As in the previous chapter, we see how blurry the line separating the realm of religion from official culture really is in France.

Museums reveal, in their most minute details of morphology and organization, their real function, which is to reinforce the feeling of belonging in some people and the feeling of exclusion in others. Everything in these saintly sites, where the bourgeois society gather reliquaries inherited from a past that is not their own, ancient palaces or large historical houses to which was added imposing buildings in the nineteenth century, often built in the greco-roman style of civic sanctuaries, reaffirms that the world of art is opposed to the world of everyday life, just like the sacred to the profane: objects are untouchable, a religious silence is imposed on visitors, the equipment is of a puritan asceticism, seats are rare and uncomfortable, there is a quasi-systematic refusal of any didactic, the decorum is solemn, colonnades, vast galleries, painted ceilings, monumental staircases, everything seems to be there to remind the visitor that the passage from the world of the profane to the sacred asks for, as Durkheim says, 'a true metamorphosis'.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The work of Ferdinand Braudel and the Annales School provided a "basis" from which the new generations of historians worked on cultural and social histories. For an account of this development see Roger Chartier, "Le monde comme représentation," *Annales Economie Sociétés Civilisations* 44, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 1989): 1505-1519.

<sup>31</sup> About cultural development as a goal of national politics in France, see J. Dumazedier and A. Ripert, *Sociologie de la culture et de l'état* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1966).

<sup>32</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *L'amour de l'art, les musées d'art européens et leur public* (Paris: Édition de minuit, 1969), 7.

<sup>33</sup> "Les musées trahissent, dans les moindres détails de leur morphologie et de leur organisation, leur fonction véritable, qui est de renforcer chez les uns le sentiment de l'appartenance et chez les autres le sentiment de l'exclusion. Tout en ces lieux saints de l'art où la société bourgeoise dépose les reliques héritées d'un passé qui n'est pas le sien, palais anciens ou grandes demeures historiques auxquels le 19ème siècle a ajouté des édifices imposants, bâtis souvent dans le style gréco-romain

In fact, a recent survey by *Connaissance des Arts* showed that over half of the respondents associate museums with religious spaces.<sup>34</sup>

The paradoxical situation of modern museums, designed to intensify both access and exclusion, was investigated further by Stephen Greenblatt in his work on the visitor's gaze. Museums put objects on display as treasures but the "fantasy of possession is no longer central to the museum gaze, or rather it has been inverted, so that the object in its essence seems not to be a possession but rather to be itself the possessor of what is most valuable and enduring. What the work possesses is the power to arouse wonder, and that power, in the dominant aesthetic ideology of the West, has been influenced into it by the creative genius of the artist."<sup>35</sup> In Greenblatt's view, we are currently witnessing a shift from the "spectacle of proprietorship to the mystique of the object."<sup>36</sup> His work complicates the inclusion/exclusion model set up by Bourdieu in the late 1960s and introduces a discussion of the irrational (his 'mystique of the object') into what appeared to simply be a discussion about the politics of *access* to the museum. A growing literature on fetishism and the museum object -- as well as the notion of the trace and the ethnographic fragment -- is pushing these types of investigations even further.<sup>37</sup> As I showed in this brief outline, recent work on exhibitions works from within many disciplines, including history, anthropology, and the more inclusive field of cultural studies. Many curators are working with the current theoretical interest in exhibitions and are responding with increasingly more layered and interesting shows. In this aspect of culture, it seems that the loop between critical analysis and production has been creative and quick in its response. In this exciting and creative context, the lack of curatorial guidance in the exhibit "La Revolution française et l'Europe" appeared to be a suspicious silence -- a serious retreat from these discussions.

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des sanctuaires civiques, concourt à indiquer que le monde de l'art s'oppose au monde de la vie quotidienne comme le sacré au profane: l'intouchabilité des objets, le silence religieux qui s'impose aux visiteurs, l'ascétisme puritain des équipements, sièges rares et peu confortables, le refus quasi-systématique de toute didactique, la solennité grandiose du décor et du décorum, colonnades, vastes galeries, plafonds peints, escaliers monumentaux, tout semble fait pour rappeler que le passage du monde profane au monde sacré suppose, comme dit Durkheim, 'une véritable métamorphose'." From Bourdieu and Darbel, *L'amour de l'art*, 166.

<sup>34</sup> "Le nouveau culte des ancêtres?," *Connaissance des Arts*, vol.44, no.3 (1989): 122-132.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," in *Exhibiting Cultures*, 52.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> For a classic work on how objects recall souvenirs, see Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984). For particular ways in which fetishism of artifacts can operate in museums, see Peter Gathercole, "The Fetishism of Artifacts," *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, ed. Susan Pearce (London: Leicester University Press, 1989), 73-82.

## Historical Narratives and the Exhibit

I have outlined the significance of the exhibit site, its sponsor and its context, I am now focusing on the way objects of the exhibit has put history into representation. Since there was no clear curating intent, I treat the exhibit as an accumulation of fragments from the past. Like ruins scatered in a romantic landscape painting in which one has to guess what is the hidden story being presented to the viewer I too must guess what are the hidden narratives. By looking at the objects on exhibits I have put together the fragments three constellations. The first one is a story about an insistence to show *original* art works and the way they acquire meaning as we look through the lens of a Marxist historical narrative. The second is about the notion of "historical context" given to the revolutionary events, and the Annales School's conception of scientific history. These two attitudes toward the past can be read into the exhibit but was also expressed by certain people interviewed during the bicentennial.<sup>38</sup> Thirdly, I fold over the notion of fragments onto itself as I draw together the different aspects of violence on display -- some of which literally were fragments of broken statues that were destroyed during the revolution.

### *Original art objects on display*

In contrast to 1889's reconstruction of the "Bastille" and the "Faubourg Saint Antoine", this bicentennial exhibit narrated the revolution through the display of *original* art works from the period. According to the curators, the exhibition responded to Michel Vovelle's desire to gather a large collection of original images and art objects together in one place "for the public to discover directly -- not through the intermediary of reproductions -- the extraordinary production of historical representation, allegorical or caricatural, that are characteristic of that period."<sup>39</sup> Here the Benjaminian "aura" of the artwork is valued, with the implication that a photographic/televisual reproduction of the same image would not enable the necessary "discovery." But there is more being discovered with narration using originals than the simple "production of historical representation, allegorical or caricatural, that are characteristic of that period."

Vovelle is a historian who has dedicated most of his research to revolutionary images. As a Marxist, he does not study the past in order to construct what

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<sup>38</sup> For an in-depth sociological analysis of visitors' responses, refer to Patrick Garcia, Jacques Lévy and Marie-Flore Mattei, eds., *Révolution fin et suite* (Paris: Espace Temps, 1991).

<sup>39</sup> Jean-René Gaborit, "Avant-propos," *La Revolution française*, vol.1, xviii.

happened in it (in the sense of determining what events occurred at specific times and places), rather he studies history in order to derive laws of historical dynamics. "It is these laws that preside over the systematic changes in social formations, and it is knowledge of these laws (rather than those of structure) that permits [the] Marxist to predict changes likely to occur in any given current social system."<sup>40</sup> In that regard, the presentation of original objects (as opposed to reproductions) is intended to help the visitor to see *in* these objects the "laws of historical dynamics" for themselves and draw their own liberating narrative. This view is based on the conviction that the artifacts of the world can be returned to life and speak to us. It is based on the assumption that the "human adventure is one" and that those artifacts have a place "within the unity of a single great collective story."<sup>41</sup> For Marxism, the great collective story linking everyone (from the past and the present) together, is a meta-narrative about a collective struggle for liberation.

In a novel, the characters are charged with the task of realizing the possibilities of the plot that links the story from beginning to end. Because Marxists conceive of history as a story, a Marxist visitor, who sees the bust for which Robespierre posed or a dish decorated with a revolutionary motto, will invest these artworks with meaning as someone might with characters in a novel. In order to do this, the visitor is "willing backwards" by identifying with the artworks and reading possibilities of change in them.<sup>42</sup> Willing backwards occurs when we rearrange events of the past that have been told a certain way, in order to invest them with a different meaning or to draw from them a different story that will give us reasons to act differently in the future. "It is human culture," White remarks, "that provides human beings with this opportunity to choose a past, retrospectively and as a manner of negating whatever it was from which they had actually descended, and to act as if they were a self-fashioning community rather than epiphenomena of impersonal 'forces'."<sup>43</sup> Willing backwards has great effect when, in the process of revolutionary change, a whole group decides

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<sup>40</sup> White, *The Content*, 150.

<sup>41</sup> Frederic Jameson quoted in White, *The Content*, 148. The master narrative linking us to the artifacts derives its claim to realism and truthfulness by virtue of its adequate representation of the structure (or what amounts to the same thing, the unfinished 'plot'). For Frederic Jameson, "the adequacy of narrative to represent history provides a touchstone for distinguishing less between ideology and truth" (because all representations of reality are ideological in nature) than between "ideologies that conduce to the effort to liberate man from history and those that condemn him to an 'eternal return' of its 'alienating necessities'."

<sup>42</sup> Walter Benjamin has taken this idea of "willing backwards" and elaborated it with other notions of constellation (which juxtaposes images from different times) and the concept of the 'ur-form' (the original form) which re-reads old stories through the eyes of contemporary questions. Both of these ideas were developed in his 'Arcades project,' in which he interprets the arcades of the early nineteenth-century as the 'ur-form' of contemporary consumer society.

<sup>43</sup> White, *The Content*, 149. White links the idea of rewriting the past to Nietzsche's notion of "genealogy" in terms of substituting a genetic past for a self-constructed past.

to rewrite history so that events that were previously regarded as insignificant are now redescribed as "anticipations or prefigurations of the new society to be created by revolutionary action."<sup>44</sup> The concept of willing backwards for launching projects in the future is central to Marxist thought.

A Marxist notion of history insists on the fundamental narrative structure of history. The great story of liberation is seen as an incomplete narrative like an unfinished plot. This is the reason why the notion of willing backwards in order to rewrite history for future action is crucial to this view of history since it is through re-writing history, that we find a way into the future.<sup>45</sup>

If we listen to what one visitor to the exhibit says about the revolution, we can see how history is constantly being rewritten (so to speak) into a larger meta-narrative about liberation. Born in 1917, the woman interviewed is from Les Bouches-du-Rhône, was a worker and then was employed in a store -- she is now retired. Catholic, she does not practice but is a believer, and she has a close relationship to the communist party.

What impressed me the most in the books I have read is the famous flour war. [...] It was in '75 I think, yes in April or May of '75, the author even gives the name of these poor people who were watching a cart full of flour rolling by, and they were dying of hunger, they knifed the bags. They arrested them and hung them right there. They took the names, there were young ones, old ones, there were people of all conditions. They were so desperate, it must have been about ten years before, there was an undercurrent that was feeding 1789. That is how I see it. [...] I know that people were desperately unhappy, they were riddled with taxes. I think that it happened very naturally.

When the first assemblies happened with Robespierre, Danton, Saint-Just, Marat, well, all the bigwigs of that world, because there were hundreds of them, we only know a few, I think there, everything started to tilt over, it must have been an exhilarating time, especially when a man like Robespierre was on the podium [...]. He was quite a refined man, who had a relatively bourgeois upbringing, but not so rich, but still he grew up among religious people, he was very pure [...]. I think that he must have moved the crowds.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 150. The notion of willing backwards is not exclusive to Marxism. The process occurs in religious conversion when a person brought up in one religion (or without one), suddenly "sees the light" and embraces another religion.

<sup>45</sup> Here we see a parallel with ideas developed in chapter two regarding the Christian ethics of the programme; for the Christian equivalent of the story of liberation is the apocalyptic view of history. The closeness of the two have drawn Marxism to insist on the value of working toward liberation on earth in order to distinguish it as much as possible from Christian thought. But the two remain close enough to see strong Communist feels taking roots in a practicing Catholic milieu, like in Poland for example.

I would say that the revolution was absolutely necessary. Of course there might have been errors. But nothing is perfect, we still see it today. I think that it turned the world upside down. [...] Do not forget that when Lenin died he asked to be wrapped in a tricolor flag. [...] I think that the revolution gave an advantage to the bourgeoisie in France, because if the mass of the people were educated like we are today with the media, the books, any worker, if he wants he only has to turn it on and he learns [...] but then the bourgeois class took advantage of the situation and that is why it did not last.<sup>46</sup>

The revolutionary sentiment is clearly very close to her -- "the revolution was absolutely necessary" -- and as a communist, the figure of Robespierre has a central role in her story. She also expresses an emotional closeness with the oppressed, not only in the story of the flour bags but also when she talks about the necessity of the Russian revolution which I did not include here. The image of the people rising up, coming together to uproot the oppressor and changing the course of history are the signposts of the narrative. Through her own reading and personal experiences, she constantly re-writes the past and brings it into the present.

The presence of original art objects in the exhibit allows the Marxist visitor to see them as evidences of the "laws of historical dynamics." These laws drive the great meta-narrative of liberation forward and include class struggle throughout Europe. The struggle for liberation speaks of solidarity across national barriers against the dominant class (e.g. the intermarriage between aristocratic families of Europe and the common oppression of the peasant class). The pan-European character of the exhibit in this view does not emphasize that Europe is made of nations, it stresses that across Europe, class alliances were based on common experiences, common oppression and a shared vision for a revolution. A teleological revolutionary meta-narrative reworks the European story of a bourgeois revolution that occurred first in France, and was theorized in Britain by a German, expanded with the form of the 1848 worker's revolutions across Europe, and was finally put into practice in Russia.

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<sup>46</sup> Interview quoted in Garcia, Lévy and Mattei, *Révolutions, fin et suite*, 154.

### *"Social context" and the Annales School*

After investigating the Marxist notion of historical narrative, I now want to explore the second set of players in the deconstruction of nineteenth century historiography: the *Annales School*. The notion of "social context" is central to the *Annales* historians who argued that the long trends found in demography, economics, and ethnology (which are "impersonal" processes) are the true subjects of history. For the *Annales*, nineteenth century narrative history in the style of Michelet was a "political history conceived as short-term, 'dramatic' conflicts and crises lending themselves to 'novelistic' interpretations, of a more 'literary' than a properly 'scientific' kind."<sup>47</sup> In the view of the *Annales* historians, the "social context" is conceived as neutral, impersonal and scientific. The curators of the exhibit went to great lengths to place the French revolution not only in a European context, but a European *social* context. This took the form of sections such as "the agrarian world", "the administrative organization" and "public instruction". These sections formed a backdrop in front of which the events of the revolution were meant to play their part.

I want to argue that the mixture of common objects and paintings in the exhibit questioned the claim that a social context (as defended by the *Annales*) provides a scientific historical narrative which is neutral and impersonal. The ostensible neutrality of the social context became more difficult to sustain when the exhibit attempted to "describe" the context through artworks depicting life in the Ancien Régime. The average museum-goer would take these images as documentary evidence of a world well-balanced between monarchist power, represented in the series of royal portraits, and the farmers going about their work in the fields with rosy cheeks and healthy-looking children. The documentary qualities were reinforced by the titles given to different sections (e.g. "The Salons," "The Religious War," "Public Instruction"), which led the visitor to expect an "illustration" of this particular aspect of the society. What is shown in fact are painters' representations of life on the farm in the eighteenth century. But no text in the exhibit makes this explicit, and one must look in the catalogue (three volumes which cost 400 francs and weighted ten and a half pounds) for an interpretation, which explains that paintings depicting farmers in the fields have been chosen for the exhibit to show the distance between urban artists and the realities of rural life.<sup>48</sup> That distance was further increased by the fact that

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<sup>47</sup> White, *The Content*, 32.

<sup>48</sup> The curators' decision to narrate the French revolution without explanatory panels was criticized by reviewers like Linda Nochlin and Philippe Bordes who saw this as a way of avoiding the "passionate polemics in France" by steering "a safe course" into an unadventurous exhibit. According to Bordes, "the presentation only rarely contributed to a clear

painters were reading Rousseau, and that there existed at the time an entire discourse about rural life as unspoilt, "natural", etc... which was contrasted (especially in revolutionary circles) to the artificiality and falseness of the court.<sup>49</sup>

For a visitor to see the "distance" between what is painted and what might have been the realities of daily rural life, he or she must be sensitive to the fiction inherent in pictorial representations. I do not mean to say that these depictions are false. In fact, like Natalie Zemon Davis, I use the word fictional in the broader sense of its root *fingere*, its forming, shaping and molding element: the crafting of a narrative.<sup>50</sup> Here, the narrative of social history links the idea of social spheres to the influence of philosophy on artists, it does not however investigate the role played by these paintings as they were exhibited in the salons of European urban centres.

The issue of fiction in the paintings was further complicated by the presence of two enormous ploughs set amongst a flail, sickles, salt mills and other agricultural implements of the time. The juxtaposition of these farm implements and paintings of rural life is startling. But the catalogue is quite straightforward in that regard: the curators wanted to show the different kinds of cultivated landscapes that existed in Europe before the revolution and tools used to work these lands. Following in the footsteps of Vidal de la Blache, paintings of landscapes are organized by region and the objects are meant to represent the diversity of regional cultures. From a critical point of view however, it seems clear that on its own, a salt mill does not "represent" anything, it simply lays there as a mute object; it will acquire meaning only in the context of the other objects in the room and will be brought to life only by the support of words and ideas, which in this case were not easily accessible.

It is precisely because of the unexpected mixture of objects that the model of narrative history is being reworked here. One of the ways this happened was through the visual connections between the artifacts on display and the objects

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understanding of what happened, how it happened, and above all, why it looks the way it does." (Bordes, "Exhibition Review," 442.)

Since there was so little textual guidance in the galleries of the exhibit, I am assuming that visitors had their own attitude about history and knowledge about that period, which would be based (in a loose way) on the current views of history. In most cases their position is not 'worked out' from an academic point of view, but people interviewed after visiting the exhibit at the Beaubourg Museum clearly possessed their own philosophy of history which they are more than willing to explain.

<sup>49</sup>For a discussion on the construction of this opposition see Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984) especially pp.44-46, 72-74

<sup>50</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in 16th century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 3.



depicted in the paintings. The farmer is ploughing the field in one of the paintings and we see different ploughs on display. Another painting depicts life on the farm in the evening, when farmers are gathered around the fireplace and the furniture depicted in the scene (a salt box, a commode) is on display in the next room.

The division between the objective and fictional realms was reinforced by the textual interpretations of the catalogue. In fact, the text attempted to keep the two types of objects apart by using different forms of narratives. The artifacts were set in a "historical" narrative of social history about technical innovations and lineage, very much based on studies of material culture.<sup>51</sup> The paintings on the other hand, were interpreted in a "fictional" narrative telling the reader stories about the people depicted in the paintings, using the fictional devices of a novel: a plot, characters and dramatic events.

The division between "fictional" and "historical" has been under attack by a number of authors,<sup>52</sup> perhaps most clearly by Roland Barthes. In his essay "The Discourse of History" Barthes challenges the idea that traditional historiography is closer to the truth than would be a novel or a play. His attack on traditional historiography underlines the commonality of the narrative form to both fiction and history. He finds it paradoxical that "narrative structure, which was originally developed within the cauldron of fiction (in myths and the first epics), should have become, in traditional historiography, at once the sign and the proof of reality."<sup>53</sup>

As if to illustrate Barthes' point, the distinction between fictional and scientific narratives in the catalogue could not be maintained for long. The narrative structure takes over and turns both types of interpretation into storytelling. In several instances, the story about the plough intersects with stories of the paintings. One of the plows (the swing-plough) is said to have been the same type as the one used by Arthur Young when he won an agricultural competition

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<sup>51</sup> Studies in material culture have influenced museum curators a great deal. For a representative article on the theoretical discussion about material culture and museums, see Susan Pearce, "Objects in Structures" in her edited book *Museum Studies in Material Culture* (London: Leicester University Press, 1989), 1-10.

<sup>52</sup> See Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 55-82; Julia Kristeva, "The Novel as Polylogue," *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon Samuel Roudiez (New York: 1980); and Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Petite économies libidinales d'un dispositif narratif," in his book *Des dispositifs pulsionnel* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1973), 180-184.

<sup>53</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Discourse of History" (published in French in 1967), trans. Stephen Bann in *Comparative Criticism: a Yearbook*, vol. 3, ed. E.S. Scaffer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 18.

in England.<sup>54</sup> Young was a gentleman-traveller who described in detail the different landscapes of France at the end of the eighteenth century. These textual descriptions were used, the curators explain, as a basis for choosing the landscape paintings. In this instance, the story of Arthur Young as a traveller crosses the path of technological innovations in the British plough.

In her review of the exhibit, Linda Nochlin wondered if the presence of real objects, like these ploughs, are transparently meaningful as opposed to paintings that are "representations" and therefore invite interpretation. The plows, she says, "have been inserted without commentary, as though, in their status as real objects from the period, they were self-explanatory. But of course, in the context of an exhibition an object like the plough or a flail ceases to signify as a mere thing or as a useful object; on the contrary, it assumes a powerful role as a representation, or even a symbol of larger values."<sup>55</sup> A symbol of what? Nochlin does not give us an answer. We might also ask what is involved in trying to find the "real story" told by the objects gathered in this room of the exhibition. In this kind of exercise, the viewer attempts to distinguish what is fictional from what is real and moves towards that which is "truer." Even though the techniques of presentation are the same for both and all objects are displayed as if they were valuable, the farm implements were meant to "represent" life on the farm, and the viewer sees them as closer (than the paintings) to the "realities" of eighteenth century life.

#### *Common objects as art(ifacts)*

That common objects can raise questions about issues much larger than themselves was clearly expressed by Marcel Duchamp's exhibition of a mass produced urinal as an art object in the 1920s. The debate generated by this action changed how the role of the artist is viewed in modern society.<sup>56</sup> Would it be fair to see the objects at the Grand Palais as *objet trouvés* of the late eighteenth century? I do not think so, because these particular objects are not alone in the room, they are caught in an interplay with the paintings surrounding them. We might ask, like Meyer Schapiro did of van Gogh's *Old shoes with laces*, "whose are they?" The question: "To whom do these objects belong?" is not entirely rhetorical since the attribution of objects to common people is about reclaiming

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<sup>54</sup> Jean-René Troché, "The agrarian world" *La Révolution Française et l'Europe, 1789-1799*, vol.1, ed. Jean-René Gaborit (Catalogue of the exhibition at the Grand Palais, Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1989), 94.

<sup>55</sup> Linda Nochlin, "Fragments of a Revolution," *Art in America* (October 1989): 158.

<sup>56</sup> Refer to Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. M. Shaw, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

the history of those who have none. Van Gogh confronted this question head on in his painting (fig. 3.3). In different ways, both Martin Heidegger<sup>57</sup> and Meyer Schapiro,<sup>58</sup> and later on Jacques Derrida,<sup>59</sup> were fascinated by the painting -- all three have meditated on the past owner of the shoes.

For Heidegger, they are a pair of peasant woman's shoes and their painting illustrates the nature of art as a disclosure of truth.

From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stands forth. In the stiffly solid heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field, swept by a raw wind. [...] This equipment belongs to the earth and it is protected in the world of the peasant woman.<sup>60</sup>

Meyer Schapiro says that they are most probably *not* the shoes of a peasant woman since the painting was done in Arles. "These shoes could not express the essence of a peasant woman's shoes and her relation to nature and work. They are the shoes of the artist, by that time a man of the town and city."<sup>61</sup> But even if Heidegger had simply remarked on a pair of shoes (instead of a painting) the problem Schapiro unveils here is the process of description as a subjective action first imagined and then projected into the objects (or the painting). "He [Heidegger] has retained from his encounter with van Gogh's canvas a moving set of associations with peasants and the soil, which are not sustained by the picture itself but are grounded rather in his own social outlook with its heavy pathos of the primordial and earthly."<sup>62</sup>

The objects on display in the exhibition can well function as receptacles for the visitor's projections about the pathos of life on the farm, or inversely, happy community village life. In other words the objects on their own can be drawn into an exercise about "the disclosure of truth" (as Heidegger would say).

Schapiro's criticism of Heidegger's essay is perhaps even more important to us here. He says that Heidegger "missed an important aspect of the painting: the artist's presence in the work."<sup>63</sup> For Schapiro the shoes, as a theme, are a piece of

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<sup>57</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," (from a lecture in 1935-36, and originally published in German in 1950), trans. A. Hofstadter in *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, ed. A. Hofstadter and R. Kuhns (New York: Random House, 1964).

<sup>58</sup> Meyer Schapiro, "The Still Life as a Personal Object -- A Note on Heidegger and van Gogh," *The Reach of the Mind, essays in memory of Kurt Goldstein*, ed. Marianne Simmel (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1968).

<sup>59</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>60</sup> Heidegger, "The Origin," 662-3.

<sup>61</sup> Schapiro, "Still Life," 206.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

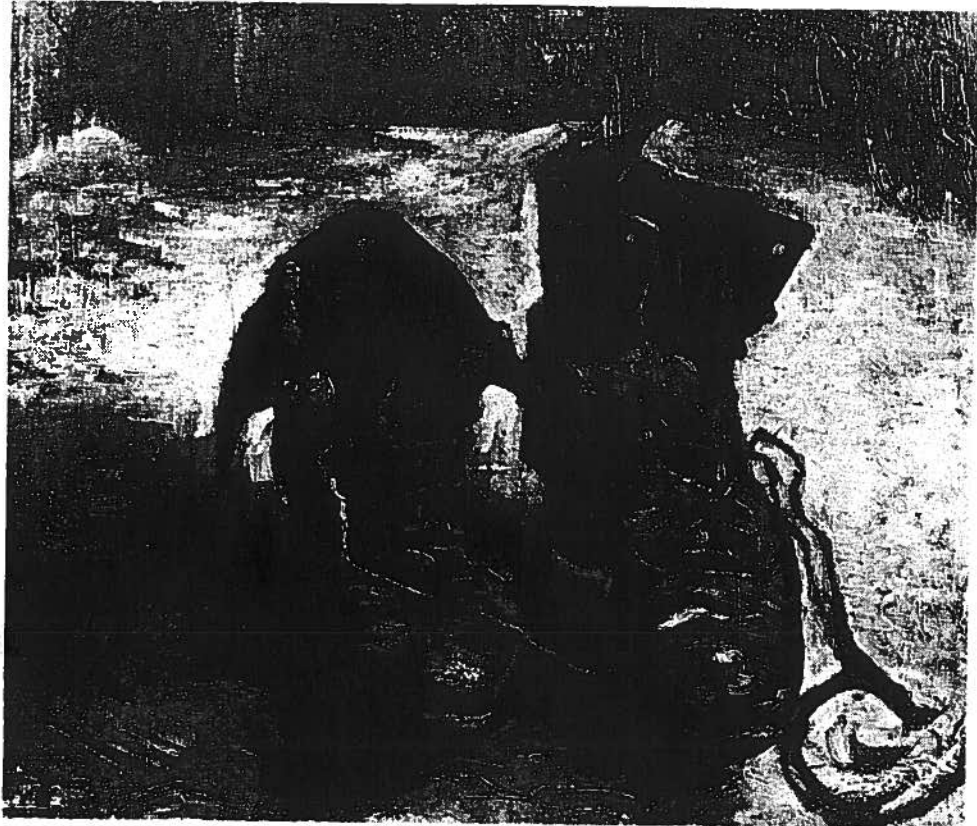


Figure 3.3  
"OLD SHOES WITH LACES" BY VINCENT VAN GOGH

Reproduced in Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 258.

the artist's own life, they are painted as "a portion of the self" which expresses a concern with the fatalities of his social being.<sup>64</sup>

The difference between a painting of shoes by van Gogh and a pair of old shoes, Schapiro insists is the presence of the artist in the painting.<sup>65</sup> Similarly when objects are taken into a museum collection and are turned into an *artifact* they become meaningful like the painting is meaningful. The art of curating is present in the display, the choice of the artifacts. "Museum artifacts" Peter Gathercole argues, "do not possess properties intrinsic to themselves. They are often regarded as evidence *per se* of cultural behaviour, but until this evidence is recognized, they remain, literally speaking, mere objects."<sup>66</sup>

When the artifact is put on display it is transformed with all the tools available to museum technology: special lights, labels, and ropes keeping people from approaching it too closely. On display, the artifact is drawn into a web of meaning created by the other objects in the room, by the institution, its photographic reproduction in the catalogue and in postcards, its textual interpretation by experts and so on. But in order to acquire a new meaning, the object must first shed its private history. For Derrida, the shoes remain haunted: "as soon as these abandoned shoes no longer have any strict relationship with a subject borne or bearing/wearing, they become the anonymous, lightened, voided support (but so much heavier for being abandoned to its opaque inertia) of an absent subject whose name returns to haunt the open form."<sup>67</sup> Like the shoes, the object, in order to become an artifact, must become anonymous, devoid of use -- its symbolic dimension is formed at the expense of losing the meaning it had when still a property of a family. In the context of the farm, the agricultural implement was an instrument of production and, of course had

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<sup>64</sup> At the end of his essay, Schapiro reports that Paul Gauguin, "who shared van Gogh's quarters in Arles in 1888, sensed a personal history behind his friend's painting of a pair of shoes. He has told in his reminiscences of van Gogh a deeply affecting story linked with van Gogh's shoes. 'In the studio was a pair of big hob-nailed shoes, all worn and spotted with mud; [and I asked Vincent about them]. 'My father,' he said, 'was a pastor, and at his urging I pursued theology studies in order to prepare for a future vocation. As a young pastor I left for Belgium one fine morning, without telling the family, to preach the gospel in the factories, not as I had been taught but as I understood it myself. These shoes, as you see, have bravely endured the fatigue of that trip.' Preaching to the miners in the Borinage, Vincent undertook to nurse a victim of a fire in the mine. The man was so badly burned and mutilated that the doctor had no hope for his recovery. Only a miracle, he thought, could save him. Van Gogh tended him for forty days with loving care and saved the miner's life. 'Before leaving Belgium I had, in the presence of this man who bore on his brow a series of scars, a vision of the crown of thorns, a vision of the resurrected Christ.'" (Gauguin quoted by Schapiro, "Still Life," 208.)

<sup>65</sup> I have retraced this discussion about van Gogh's painting in order to show how 'common objects' have been part of a discourse in the art world since the 1930s. Certain visitors coming to see the exhibit at the Grand Palais would know about these debates more or less intimately, but most visitors would be familiar with the work of van Gogh, Duchamp and others who have worked with common objects and would bring this knowledge to their interpretation of the agricultural implements on display.

<sup>66</sup> Gathercole, "Fetishism of Artefacts," 74.

<sup>67</sup> Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, 273.

symbolic and economic properties recognized by the members of the family. Once it is transferred to the museum, it becomes an instrument of representation which curators use to demonstrate their professional knowledge skill within the institution, but Derrida would say that the name of the family "returns to haunt the open form," for it remains open to the imagination of the visitor.

When we see what happens to the common objects as they intersect with the art world, whether as shoes painted by van Gogh or a urinal exhibited by Duchamp, it becomes even more difficult to see these objects as documentary evidence of a social context.<sup>68</sup> If we agree that fictions are spun like a web around each artifact, we should ask ourselves about their power to evoke stories in the context of the exhibition.

Moreover, as Derrida said about the shoes painted by van Gogh, there is "an absent subject whose name returns to haunt the open form."<sup>69</sup> Interpreting the artifact not as documentary evidence of the social context but as a the trace of lost agent recalls the "absent subject whose name returns to haunt" the form of the objects. Some of the visitors seem to have desired calling in the ghosts from the past by trying to imagine the revolutionary events through the eyes of different types of people. An interview with a woman who was born in 1947 is one such example. She lives in Seine-et-Marnes, is heading a publishing house, is a non-practicing catholic and is politically on the right:

Can you have a totally objective opinion about history, according to books you read? [...] There are ideas and in fact the way ideas are presented is very important, and I think that this could be very interesting in an analysis of the French revolution. [...] For me, I would like to see one day a great exhibition like the one at the Grand Palais; in one area we are on the side of the king and we see what happened, how he lived the revolution; in another area we are among the very poor who saw the revolution; in another area we are among the bourgeoisie who saw the revolution; in another area we are among workers but those who were employed by correct people, I mean those who saw the revolution. I expect that from 1789 -- let them take me in all those different places and I get a chance to put my mind in others and really live it.<sup>70</sup>

To such a viewer, the notion of an impersonal and unvarying social context seems scarcely attainable, or desirable.

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<sup>68</sup> See Ingrid Jenkner, *Visual Evidence* (Catalogue of the Exhibition, Regina: Dunlop Art Gallery, 1993).

<sup>69</sup> Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, 268.

<sup>70</sup> Interview no. 1 in Garcia, Lévy and Mattei, *Révolutions, fin et suite*, 147.

This concludes the investigation of the exhibit that I explored through the constellations gathered around the notion of 'historical narrative'. The Marxist belief in a meta-narrative revealed an aspect of the exhibit which opened the door to empathy with the oppressed and a narrative about liberation. The pan-European character of the exhibit, read through a Marxian interpretation, does not emphasize that Europe is made of nations, it stresses a class alliance across Europe based on common experiences, common oppression and a shared vision of revolution. The Annales' belief in scientific history revealed an aspect of the exhibit that I called the 'social context' of the Revolution. The common objects on display were interpreted as a representation of objective reality of everyday life at the end of the eighteenth century. But, as I argued, such an interpretation could not be sustained. The introduction of the concepts of fiction toward old objects eroded the claim of impersonal and objective history present in the social context of the exhibit.

### **Fragments in the Exhibit**

After recovering certain narratives present among the objects of the exhibit I now want to fold the notion of fragment upon itself to show that a story about destruction was being told through in the display of actual broken fragments of statues and in images depicting vandalism. To do that, I will first interpret the presence of fragments in the exhibit as a story about the cyclical nature of destruction and creation. Then I will interpret images depicting mythic events and places of the Revolution (such as the storming of the Bastille) in terms of the political events which occurred in Communist countries before and during the bicentennial year of 1989.

#### *The rhetoric of fragments*

In a rhetorical analysis of museography, the museum is a space for the exchange of objects, where they are "quoted", first in one context and then in another, where they are "re-written" into different stories, cut off from their familiar usage and properties. As Michael Ames puts it, "objects have not a single past but an unbroken sequence of past times leading backward from the present moment. Moreover, there is no ideal spot on the temporal continuum that inherently deserves emphasis. [...] In elevating or admiring one piece of the past, we tend to ignore and devalue others. One reality lives at the expense of

countless others."<sup>71</sup> Art objects, in other words, can be seen as debris that has been collected by museums. As with quotations that appear in different texts, artifacts move from one glass box to another where their story is re-written differently each time.

Nowhere was this shown with greater potency than in the gallery dedicated to the fragments of royal statues. I was well aware of the destruction of royal and religious statues during the 1790s, but I did not think that the pieces would have been saved, let alone shown at the Grand Palais. By putting them on display, the exhibition brought together opposing notions of destruction and creation into one and in the process, it opened the door to a powerful allegorical reading.

The fragments of statues displayed in the exhibit at the Grand Palais were gathered together in one room. The section was called "Destruction of Royal Statues and Signs of Feudality" which, in addition to the fragments of statues showed images depicting revolutionaries in the midst of toppling statues (fig. 3.4) and architects' projects to transform royal ornaments on buildings into republican ones through minimal interventions. Fragments of the mutilated statues of Henri IV, Louis XIV and Louis XV were installed in a giant still life in the centre of the gallery (fig. 3.5). They worked both metonymically (in that each fragment conjured up the presence of the absent whole) and as synecdoche, because their accumulation presented the overwhelming image of the end of the Bourbon monarchy, of absolutism, and of the god-like king. The whole room full of fragments gave an image of the energy of the revolutionary sentiment, as Philippe Bordes says in his review of the exhibit, "fragments of mutilated royal colossi attest to the passing of a terrible storm."<sup>72</sup>

The fragmentation and mutilation of bodies was not restricted to this room but recurred throughout the exhibit. In historical paintings, body parts are shown offered in sacrifice; and in popular engravings about executions with the guillotine (fig. 3.6) or caricatures in which bodies are cut up and eaten, the artfulness of the detached body parts was a recurring narrative device in the show. This narrative undercurrent about fragments should not be interpreted literally but as an allegory of the death, violence and destruction present in ideologically driven revolutions.

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<sup>71</sup> Michael Ames, quoted in Susan Pearce, "Objects in Structures," *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, ed. Susan Pearce (London: Leicester University Press, 1989).

<sup>72</sup> Bordes, "Exhibition Review," 441.



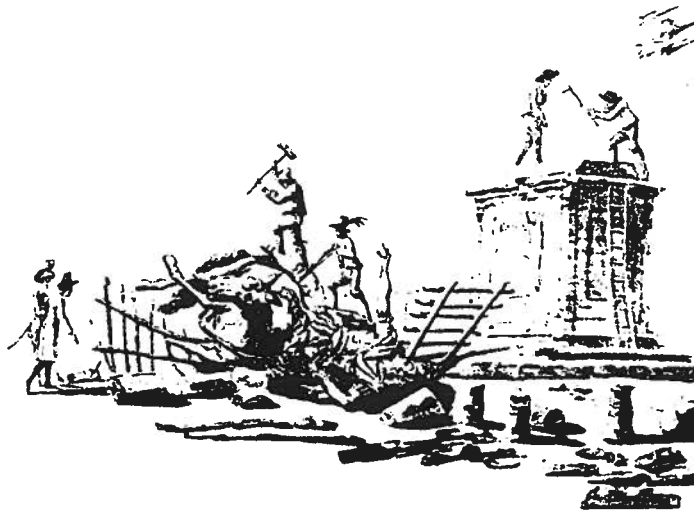


Figure 3.4

"REVOLUTIONARIES TOPPLING A STATUE OF LOUIS XV" BY AUGUSTIN DE SAINT-AUBIN

Reproduced in the catalogue of the exhibition at the Grand Palais, *La Révolution française et l'Europe, 1789-1799*, ed. Jean-René Gaborit (Paris: Édition de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1989), 163.

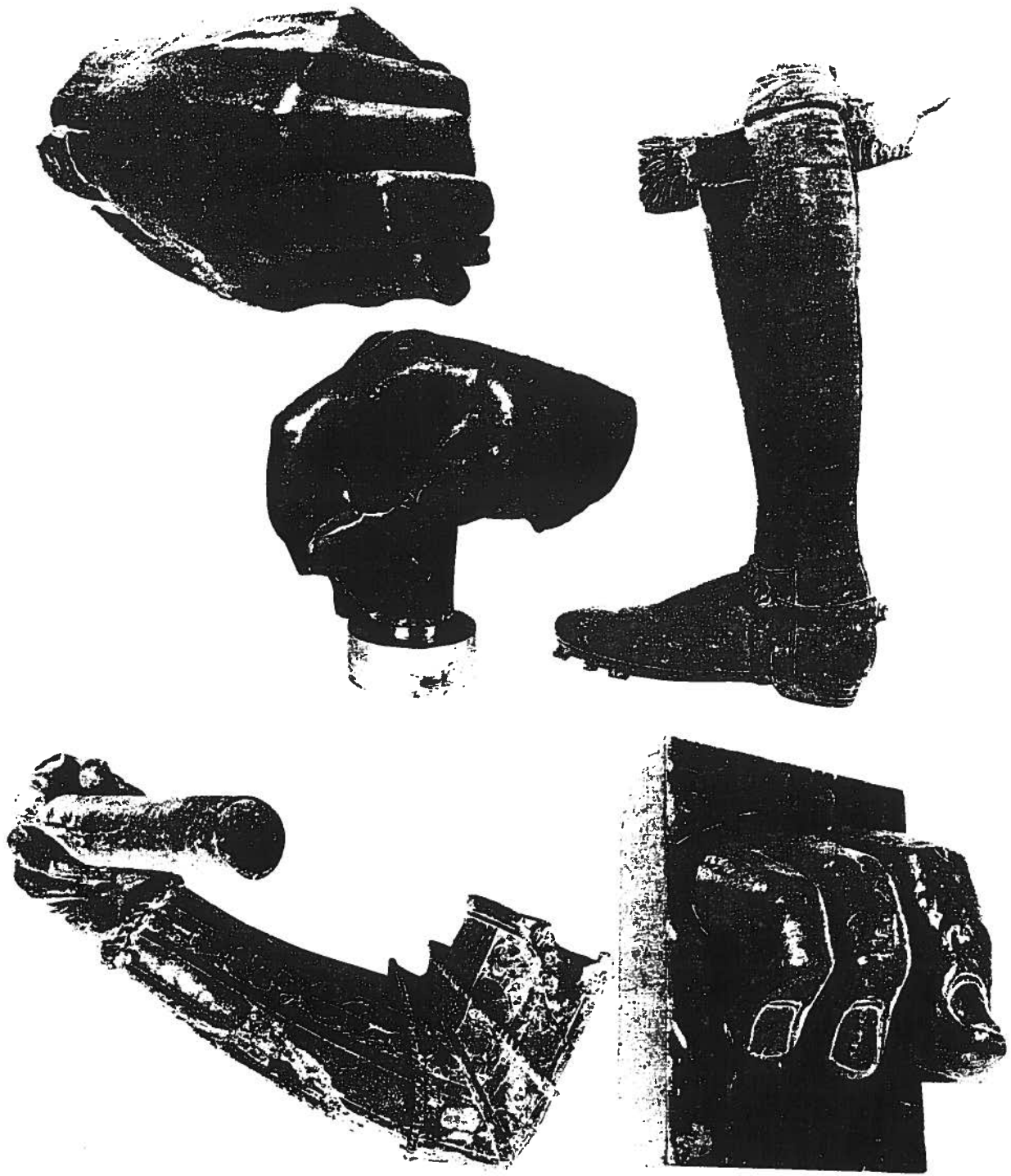


Figure 3.5  
FRAGMENTS OF ROYAL STATUES

Photographed for the catalogue of the Exhibition at the Grand Palais, Paris, 1989.  
Reproduced in Linda Nochlin, "Fragments of a Revolution," *Art in America*  
(Oct 1989): 162-3.

MATIERE A REFLECTION POUR LES JONGLEURS COURONNES



qu'un sang impur abreuve nos sillons.

Lundi 31 Janvier 1793 à six heures un quart du matin sur la place de la révolution et devant appelé Louis  
 XVI le Tron est mis sous le glaive des lois le grand acte de justice a été accompli l'histoire nous en a  
 conservé le souvenir. Nous ne voyons que la République. Il n'y a plus qu'un grand caractère à la convention nationale et la  
 grand digne de la nation des Français.  
 Il est en vain qu'une faction audacieuse et des  
 incalculables du charlatanisme et de la charade le  
 de la convention démontre irréfutable dans ses  
 de la liberté et à l'évidence de la vérité.  
 Rameau de la Convention de Maximilien Robespierre à ces commodes.



A Paris chez l'Imprimeur de la Convention nationale, chez J.B. de la Harpe, au Palais National, au Salon de la Convention.



Figure 3.6  
SEVERED HEAD OF LOUIS XVI

Anonymous engraving, 1793 (cat. 546). Reproduced from the catalogue of the exhibition, *La Révolution française*, ed. Gaborit, 422.

Of course the display of fragments is not new to the museum. The Cabinets of Curiosities in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe reveal a mannerist fondness for the conservation of body parts after anatomical dissections.<sup>73</sup> Later, natural history collections continued to preserve fragments of animals and ethnographic collections fragments of arrows, jewelry and so on. In the late eighteenth century, during the French Revolution, Alexandre Lenoir assembled the monumental fragments he had collected following the destruction of churches and installed them in the Convent of the Petits Augustins in Paris. I am contrasting the museum set up by Lenoir during the Revolution to the one set up by du Sommerard, which still exists today as the Musée de Cluny, to illustrate two radically different rhetorical approaches to the exhibiting of fragments in museums.

To complete his collection, "Lenoir evidently had no scruples about mixing the authentic fragment with the contemporary, archaising bust"<sup>74</sup> of a great historical figure for whom he had been unable to obtain a contemporary effigy. Using rhetorical analysis, Stephen Bann shows that a significant shift occurred in the mid-nineteenth century in terms of how collectors viewed fragments of statues and monuments, which can be seen as movement from the predominant trope of metonymy to that of synecdoche.<sup>75</sup> For Bann, the collection created by Lenoir represents a metonymic approach, where fragments are meant to represent the whole. "The connection between each tomb, or fountain, and its original context is a reductive one of part to whole, which in no way necessitates an imaginative link between the series of abbeys, chateaux, and other monuments that were Lenoir's source of material."<sup>76</sup> In this conception of historical narration the modern bust can find its place since it literally *replicates* the past.

By contrast the mid-nineteenth century collection of du Sommerard at the Hôtel Cluny represents a synecdoche, where the object from the past becomes the basis for an integrative construction of historical totalities. In creating "theme rooms" like the "chambre de François Ier", "religious life" and "kitchen life," du Sommerard has "successfully integrated the detached fragment within an overall milieu, [he has] restored the part to the whole."<sup>77</sup> By displaying before our eyes a

<sup>73</sup> See Olivier Imprey and Arthur MacGregor, eds., *The Origins of Museums: the Cabinets of Curiosities in 16th and 17th century Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon/Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>74</sup> Bann, *Clothing of Clío*, 85.

<sup>75</sup> To recall the differences: it is metonymy when a part stands for the whole, for example when we say "the crown" for "the king"; a synecdoche is when the sum of the parts is greater than the whole, for example when we say "she is all heart."

<sup>76</sup> Bann, *Clothing of Clío*, 85.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

complete image without breaks or disjunction, the theme room takes us from the objects to the user in a mythic system of "lived" history.

*Fragments as an undercurrent of the exhibit*

Historical paintings such as the depiction of the storming of the Tuileries or the Valmy battles against the Prussian army did not spare the viewer ripped-up bodies blanketing battlegrounds. Or in a cooler genre, fragmentation as sacrifice set in a small painting representing a hero so devoted to the nation that he has literally given his right arm for it. The arm itself, painted with a high degree of naturalism, is displayed prominently on a table. "In its macabre isolation, it looks back to the holy relics of the saints and, at the same time, forward to the entirely secular still-lives of fragmented limbs created by Gericault early in the nineteenth century."<sup>78</sup> Caricatures, of course, showed the most graphic version of fragmentation; from the depiction of characters eating body parts or sitting on severed heads, the grotesque was taken to the limits of obscenity. Britain's prime satirist, James Gillray, pushed the carnivalesque body to extremes that have yet to be surpassed by the horror films of today.

The caricature entitled "Un Petit Souper à la Parisienne: A Family of Sans-Culotts [sic] refreshing after the fatigues of the day" gives an idea of what I am talking about (fig. 3.7).

A table is featured prominently in the foreground for a scene of cannibalism. Two bare-bottomed revolutionaries -- literally sans culottes -- are making a meal of their human victims. The monster on the left, his bony legs thrust into appropriately plebeian sabots, is about to tuck into a nasty eyeball culled from the human head on the plate before him; he has an ear ready in the other hand. His companion at table, equally bare-bottomed and seated on the naked corpse of a decapitated young woman, a bloodstained axe tucked into his belt, is about to bite into an arm, while three women in the background chew indelicately on the heart and several unidentifiable human fragments. Above their heads, a ceiling larder is stuffed with further supplies of human flesh, while to the left, a group of baby revolutionaries dig into a bucket of entrails as voraciously as if it were a bowl of spaghetti.<sup>79</sup>

The revolutionaries are described as violent human beings by equating the actions of the government to popular cannibalism. The presence of the children

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<sup>78</sup> Nochlin, "Fragments of a Revolution," 169.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 162.



Figure 3.7

"UN PETIT SOUPER À LA PARISIENNE -- OR -- A FAMILY OF SANS CULOTTS REFRESHING AFTER THE FATIGUES OF THE DAY"

Engraving by James Gillray, 1792 (cat. 786). Reproduced from the catalogue of the exhibition, *La Révolution française*, ed. Gaborit, 587.

implies that actions of revolutionaries will multiply through their offspring and the play on words with "sans-culotte" gives it a carnivalesque twist by linking it to other caricatures that used the visual sign of the "naked bottom" to create many different meanings.

The caricatures ordered by the revolutionary government to promote the principles of the revolution were no less tender with the human body. Indeed as Klaus Herding points out, "it was the secret power and strength of the visual arts to provide what reason seemed to refuse, that is, a justification of the emotions in a (supposedly) rational society."<sup>80</sup> The stories of dismemberment depicted in caricatures need to be seen against the middle class insistence on bodily dignity. The myth of Charlotte Corday, Marat's assassin, is an example of the meaning given (or projected) onto the human body. The myth is the following: the Deputy Sergeant Marceau wrote to the President of the Revolutionary Tribunal that the executioner " held up Charlotte Corday's severed head, and struck one of its cheeks. A blush of shame and indignation appeared on the other."<sup>81</sup> The myth "survived all common sense obstacles," Dorinda Outram points out, because of the intensity of the need generated by the terror and execution to externalize concerns such as the survival of a unitary experience of mind and body, and of the possibility of physical dignity, both of which seemed under extreme threat. Above all, it survived because it asserted that in spite of the guillotine's capacity to evacuate all significance both from death and from the body itself, individual reaction to these outrages could survive even execution itself.<sup>82</sup>

All these images of severed bodies exemplify the fears of the middle class for the preservation of the intact, controlled, unitary body-image, one that "differentiated them from the others, and allowed them to validate its claims to revolutionary control against the disordered, wild-passions and energies of the lower class political movements."<sup>83</sup> In other words, bodily dignity, along with political and moral virtue, gave the right to rule. The rhetorical (as well as literal) abuse of the body defined a revolutionary situation.

Returning to the fragments of mutilated statues, what is perhaps the most striking is to see them at all. One wonders why the curators put them on display:

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<sup>80</sup> Klaus Herding, in the catalogue of the exhibition, *La Révolution française*, vol. 1, ed. Gaborit, xxiii. "Ce fut le pouvoir secret et la force des arts plastiques d'offrir ce que la raison semblait refuser, à savoir de donner droit de cité aux émotions (prétendument) rationnelle."

<sup>81</sup> Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 118.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*



to talk about the end of monarchy? In the catalogue, the story of the fragments is placed within a larger story of revolutionary iconoclasm. Indeed, a decree of the Legislative Assembly voted on August 14, 1792 ordered the destruction of all the "statues, bas-reliefs and monuments in bronze erected on public squares."<sup>84</sup> If the monarchy was to disappear, it was necessary that all its symbols disappear as well. "The sacred principles of liberty and equality will not permit the existence of monuments raised to ostentation, prejudice and tyranny to continue to offend the eyes of the French people."<sup>85</sup> But popular movements did not wait for the Assembly to vote. Starting on August 12th, the enormous statue of Louis XIV -- a powerful symbol of tyranny -- was toppled and broken into pieces.<sup>86</sup> The wave of iconoclasm swept through the country and people destroyed religious paintings, statues and church steeples.

But the revolutionaries were culturally sophisticated and proud of their artistic heritage; they were confident that the visual arts were a school for both the illiterate and the literate, while they were positive that the values of the Ancien Régime were false and must be eradicated. Newspapers and pamphlets often approved of iconoclasm in principle but condemned it in practice. Fears were expressed that if the destruction continued, France would become a cultural desert and lose its leadership in the arts. Out of this dilemma, the Assemblée Constituante created an Arts Commission which was to "preserve those works of art remaining from the Ancien Régime which possessed a purely aesthetic or historical value."<sup>87</sup> This led to the creation of public museums (like the Louvre) to preserve objects of the past and educate citizens.

What is important here is what Idzerda calls "the dialectic, the tension between iconoclasm and the need to preserve the heritage of the arts."<sup>88</sup> Indeed, this tension was echoed in the bicentennial exhibit. The room on iconoclasm with its fragments of statues was counterbalanced by the rooms on the "Creative Revolution" which showed the results of artists struggling to create new symbols, new visual codes for a new political order. The balance between destruction and creation takes on even more significance as we interpret the fragments of the royal statues allegorically.

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<sup>84</sup> Cited in Stanley Idzerda, "Iconoclasm during the French Revolution," *American Historical Review* 60 (1954): 16.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> The statue stood on what is today called Place Vendôme.

<sup>87</sup> Idzerda, "Iconoclasm," 19.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.



*Ruins speaking of the cycle of creation and destruction*

When we gaze at the the pieces of statues displayed in the exhibit, a foot from the statue of Louis XIV, three fingers from another statue of Louis XIV, the right hand of Louis XV, or the horse's leg from a statue of Henri IV, perhaps we should not speak of the art object but of the ethnographic fragment. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett remarks that "the ethnographic object is an art of excision, of detachment, an art of the excerpt. [...] Where does the object begin and where does it end?"<sup>89</sup> Like the ethnographic object, the fragment of a broken statue acquires a poetic dimension because of its detachment from the whole. For detachment works on two levels, "detachment refers not only to the physical act of producing fragments, but also to the detached attitude that makes that fragmentation and its appreciation possible."<sup>90</sup> What lies here as ruins of the monarchy are highly significant fragments, they are remnants which attest to a once-tremendously powerful desire for complete change.

For it is common practice in museums to pile up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea or goal, simply ordering them according to countries or chronologies. The leg from the sculpture of the horse, the fingers of Henri IV holding the reins, are supposed to bear witness to the miracle that these fragments of works of art have withstood the fiercest rages of iconoclasm and the neglect of two centuries. In their detachment, however, such fragments appear as the last heritage of revolutionary passion which in the modern age is dismissed as mere vandalism.

But these fragments carry a hidden story. On the first level the group of fragments speak of the iconoclasm of revolutionary action and on the second level they speak about the inevitable rise and fall of monarchies and empires. For Walter Benjamin, it is precisely "visions of frenzy of destruction, in which all earthly things collapse into a heap of ruins which sets the limits upon allegorical contemplation, rather than its ideal quality."<sup>91</sup> When the statues of the monarchy were toppled and broken into pieces they, too, were returned to the ground ("all earthly things collapse into a heap of ruins"). The monarchy displayed as "a heap of ruins" sets the parameters from which I can start the allegorical construction.

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<sup>89</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," *Exhibiting Cultures*, ed. Karp and Lavine, 395.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama* (published in German in 1928), trans. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977), 232.

Because it was conceived from the outset not as a whole, but as a ruin, a fragment, Benjamin sees in the Baroque allegory the movement from things to nature. Allegories might represent death and melancholy but, as he argues, they also speak of redemption. "Ultimately in the death-signs [*the memento mori*] of the Baroque the direction of allegorical reflection is reversed; on the second part of its wide arc it returns, to redeem."<sup>92</sup> The essence of one's melancholic immersion in the meaning of the allegory, "does not faithfully rest in the contemplation of bones, but faithlessly leaps forward to the idea of resurrection."<sup>93</sup>

If we interpret the fragments of royal sculptures allegorically, the image of death inscribed in the broken body part leaps forward, (away from destruction) towards creative redemption. Earlier, I discussed that a narrative undercurrent of fragmentation ran through the exhibit, from the fragments of statues and the sacrificial body in historical paintings to caricatures. An allegorical interpretation of this narrative would start with the "death-signs" of the broken statues and in "the second part of its wide arc," return to redeem creation, in a room filled with caricatures bursting with creative energy and imagination. In fact, because the section "Artistic Creation Under the Revolution" was placed as the final section of the exhibition, the visitor leaves the Grand Palais having found the second part of the arc that "returns to redeem".

When exhibitions seek to be "objective" in their display of material as powerful as these caricatures or fragments of statues, they attempt to hide the allegorical dimension of the narrative. In fact, the curators seem to be unaware of the extent to which *what* they displayed is inextricably bound up with, if not identical to, *how* they displayed it. At least, they did not make it apparent in the exhibition, since the fragments of statues were placed without any textual commentary like the rest of the exhibit. This is why it is necessary to subject "any historical discourse to a rhetorical analysis, so as to disclose the poetical understructure of what is meant to pass for a modest prose representation of reality."<sup>94</sup> In the case of this exhibition, it means uncovering the allegorical hidden dimension of the narrative about fragments and body parts to disclose a story about destruction and creation.

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<sup>92</sup> Benjamin says that "In God's world the allegorist awakens. 'Yea, when the Highest comes to reap the harvest from the graveyard, then I, a death's head, will be an angel's countenance'." (Ibid., 232.)

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>94</sup> Hayden White, "Historicism, History, and figurative imagination," *History and Theory* 14 (1975): 53.

If we listen to visitors, the themes of destruction and creation constantly appear in their stories. As an example, I quote from the interview with a woman born in 1971, who lives in Dijon, is a high school student, with no religious affiliation, and supporter of the socialist party:

[The French revolution] is a very moving period of history, that has generated much polemic, that has seen a huge massacre. On the other hand, it has allowed men and women to express themselves in public and to acquire the human rights of free expression and freedom. [...] What impressed me the most is the execution of Danton and his group in front of Robespierre. I find the guillotine also impressive. It is always impressive that, on the pretext of having different political or religious ideas, one can have one's head chopped off. I find it shocking. [If I were to tell the story of the revolution,] I would say that it is a fundamental part of history and that 1789 is at the basis of all the laws, all the freedoms. [...] I do not feel especially close to the revolutionary personalities. I feel closer to the people, that is sure. I think that people were right. Even with the sacrifices and the massacres, the uprising was necessary and turned out to be useful in time...<sup>95</sup>

In her story, this student repeatedly puts forward an image of destruction followed by one she interprets as positive and creative. The "huge massacres" are explained as enabling the liberty of self-expression, and the "sacrifices and massacres" are justified as both "necessary" and in time, "turned out to be useful." For her, remembering is a balancing act between recalling creative and destructive forces. The latter are redeemed by modern day benefits we share, in particular those which have crystallized around the politics of human rights.

### *Fragments of revolutionary mythology*

I think we can agree with Hayden White that a "narrative becomes a problem only when we wish to give real events the form of a story. (...) It is because real events do not offer themselves as stories that their narrativization is so difficult."<sup>96</sup> If we accept that events come to us in the chaotic form of objects, archival documents and images, then the exhibition narrative should be considered less as a "*form*" than as a "*manner of speaking*"<sup>97</sup> about events, whether real or imaginary. The work of Paul Ricoeur differs on this point. He argues that turning real events into a story is *not* a problem because real events unfold in

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<sup>95</sup> Interview no. 6 in Garcia, Lévy and Mattei, eds., *Révolutions, fin et suite*, 158.

<sup>96</sup> Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in *Critical Inquiry* 7 (Autumn 1980): 8.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

time. For Ricoeur, time links narrative and real life because both go through sequences of events. "Historical narrative, which takes the events created by human actions as its immediate subject, does much more than merely describe those events; it also imitates them, that is, performs the same kind of creative act as those performed by historical agents."<sup>98</sup> For Ricoeur, history has meaning, because human actions produce meaning.

Ricoeur has investigated in great depth the relations possible between the principal kinds of narrative -- mythic, historical and fictional -- and the "real world" to which they undeniably refer. His work is especially valuable to our analysis of the exhibition at the Grand Palais because his intention is to sort out the different notions of story, story telling and narrative informing the principal theories of contemporary narrative discourse. The result is his masterful three volume *Time and Narrative*.<sup>99</sup> As Ricoeur puts it, the book is a "three fold testimony of phenomenology, history, and fiction" regarding the "power" of narrative to "refigure time" in such a way as to reveal the "secret relationship" of eternity to death.<sup>100</sup>

In the school curricula throughout Europe, the history of the French Revolution was, and still is, taught through the actions of Robespierre, Saint-Just, Danton and so on. The historical narrative creates a *mimesis*, Ricoeur would say, with the actions performed by the historical agents. The middle section of the exhibit, "The Revolutionary Event", attempted to do just that: narrate the main events of the revolution through the actions performed by historical figures depicted in the paintings. But unlike the schoolbooks, the exhibition underlined the difficulty of narrativization in two ways: first by interpreting the images only in the catalogue, not in the room and, second, by exploring the dialectic between myth and history -- which I now want to investigate in detail.

### *Storming of the Bastille as mythical origin*

The borderline between real and imaginary was best explored in various myths woven around the storming of the Bastille. Placed as the opening section of

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<sup>98</sup> Cited in White, *Content*, 179.

<sup>99</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>100</sup> Paul Ricoeur, quoted in White, *Content*, 170. Ricoeur's work has influenced new French historians such as Antoine de Baecque who worked with Ricoeur's *La métaphore vive* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1975) to show how the royal body operated as a powerful metaphor in the political imaginary of the readership before and during the revolution. By doing a minute analysis of hundreds of caricatures and articles from the popular press denigrating Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, he successfully shows the interplay of metaphor and history. See Antoine de Baecque, *Le Corps de l'histoire, métaphores et politique (1770-1800)* (Mesnil-sur-l'Estrée: Calman-Lévy, 1993).

"The Revolutionary Event", paintings, drawings and engravings depicting the Bastille were grouped according to themes such as, the Bastille as a monument, the storming of the Bastille, its prisoners, Polloy and its demolition, the image of the Bastille in caricatures after 1789, and the Bastille in commemorations. One can clearly see how a myth of "the people storming the Bastille" was constructed over time out of a relatively minor event of the revolution.

It should be said from the start that the Bastille was chosen by the revolutionaries as the object of their intentions because it *already* was a mythic place. In the political imagination of the time, this medieval prison was symbolic of the King's abusive power: when people were arrested with a *lettre de cachet*,<sup>101</sup> they were imprisoned in the Bastille. "The creation of a myth of the Bastille as the embodiment of despotism reached its pre-revolutionary zenith in a pamphlet [printed in 1783] by the eloquent journalist Linguet. Its frontispiece depicts the king, Louis XVI, freeing unjustly imprisoned victims above the caption: 'May you be free and live!'"<sup>102</sup> (fig. 3.8). On July 14, 1789, a group of men and women led by Théroigne de Méricourt (called "the amazon of Liège"<sup>103</sup>) went to the Bastille prison to deliver its prisoners. When they arrived at the entrance of the prison and the man in charge refused to open the doors, there was a fight and he was decapitated on the spot. The prison was then opened and the seven prisoners found inside were liberated.

After the taking of the Bastille, popular images linked this minor event to earlier mythologies of this prison as a sign of despotic power. The power of the "taking of the Bastille" to speak about larger issues was so effective that it was used in more than 150 different broadsides diffused throughout Europe. "As a symbol of the transition from the old Régime 'despotism' to the new era of 'Liberty', [the Bastille] functions as a semantic turntable."<sup>104</sup> The caricature entitled "Réveil du Tier Etat" (The Awakening of the Third Estate) for example, depicts a clergyman and an aristocrat horrified by the Third Estate awakening from centuries of

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<sup>101</sup> A *lettre de cachet* was a letter signed by the king allowing the arrest of anyone without proof or trial.

<sup>102</sup> Rolf Reichardt, "Prints: Images of the Bastille," *Revolution in Print: the press in France 1775-1800*, ed. Robert Darnton and Daniel Roche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 227.

<sup>103</sup> Théroigne de Méricourt, who started a literary salon only for women, was given a golden sabre for having led the people to the Bastille on July 14. On October 5, she again led the women to Versailles to "bring the king back to Paris." She was dressed as an amazon with her golden sabre at her belt on one side and a gun on the other. It was then that she was nicknamed "the Amazon of Liège."

It is interesting to note that none of the prints representing the storming of the Bastille show a woman leading the crowd. Natalie Zemon Davis explores the possibility that the crowd of October 5 included men dressed as women, afforded the license for transgression by wearing the habits of the 'irrational sex,' in her analysis of cross-dressing and carnival, "Women on Top," *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, ed. Natalie Zemon Davis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975).

<sup>104</sup> Reichardt, "Images of the Bastille," 226.



SOYEZ LIBRES: VIVEZ.

MÉMOIRES  
SUR  
LA BASTILLE,  
ET  
SUR LA DÉTENTION  
DE M. LINGUET,  
ÉCRITS PAR LUI-MÊME.

*Survécut à mortuis.*



A LONDRES,  
De l'imprimerie de T. SPILSBURY, Snowhill.

M. DCC. LXXXIII

Figure 3.8  
"MAY YOU BE FREE AND LIVE"

"Memories of the Bastille," engraving by Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet, 1783. Reproduced in Robert Darton and Daniel Roche, eds., *Revolution in Print* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 227.

oppression (fig. 3.9). The Bastille is depicted behind the man prone on the ground representing the Third Estate. By contiguity, the Bastille comes to signify "popular upheaval". In another image, "Destruction de la Bastille," joyous men and women of all ages watch the first stones fall from the top of the walls as the demolition of the Bastille begins (fig. 3.10). Placed in the foreground, the crowd of onlookers are represented as larger than the prison. The Third Estate is no longer one man, but is now represented by a calm and jubilant crowd.

These images narrate, not the event of the storming of the Bastille *per se*, but other stories and ideas that were important to print. In fact Reichardt says, "we have only recently begun to recognize that the genuine and unique value of revolutionary prints as historical sources lies not in their depictions of individuals or events but in their symbolic, metaphorical and allegorical interpretation of collective ideas and the questions of the day."<sup>105</sup> All the rhetorical forms are at work to develop a myth that will be ideally suited to found a new national identity, more so than the later key events of the revolution, which were politically more controversial.

We might recall that Levi-Strauss locates the impulse to mythologize in the very nature of language itself. "The presumed 'coherency' of history which Western historical thought takes as its object of study, is the coherency of myth. And this is as true of 'proper' or conventional narrative historiography as it is of historiography's more highly schematized counterparts in philosophy of history."<sup>106</sup> Unlike the section on the exhibit about the social context that attempted to keep fiction and history apart, the section on the Bastille unveiled the "impulse to mythologize" in the narration of the revolution. Even though this unveiling was restricted to this section, it created a space for "meditation" and activity. Edgar Morin believes this to be fundamental to commemorations:

What really is fascinating with the French revolution is that myth in historical action and history is present in mythical action, and this occurs right from the beginning [with the storming of the Bastille]. From the moment that we are capable to confront this complex whirlpool without erasing the inexpiable conflict and the tragedy, then we can obey one of the fundamental demands of all commemorations: to meditate.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>106</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, *Le cru et le cuit* (Paris: Plon, 1964), quoted by Hayden White, "Historicism, History and Figurative Imagination," in *History and Theory* 14 (1975): 51.

<sup>107</sup> "Ce qui est véritablement fascinant dans la Révolution française est que le mythe est en action historique et que l'histoire est en action mythique, et cela dès le début, [avec la prise de la Bastille]. Dès lors que nous sommes capable d'affronter le

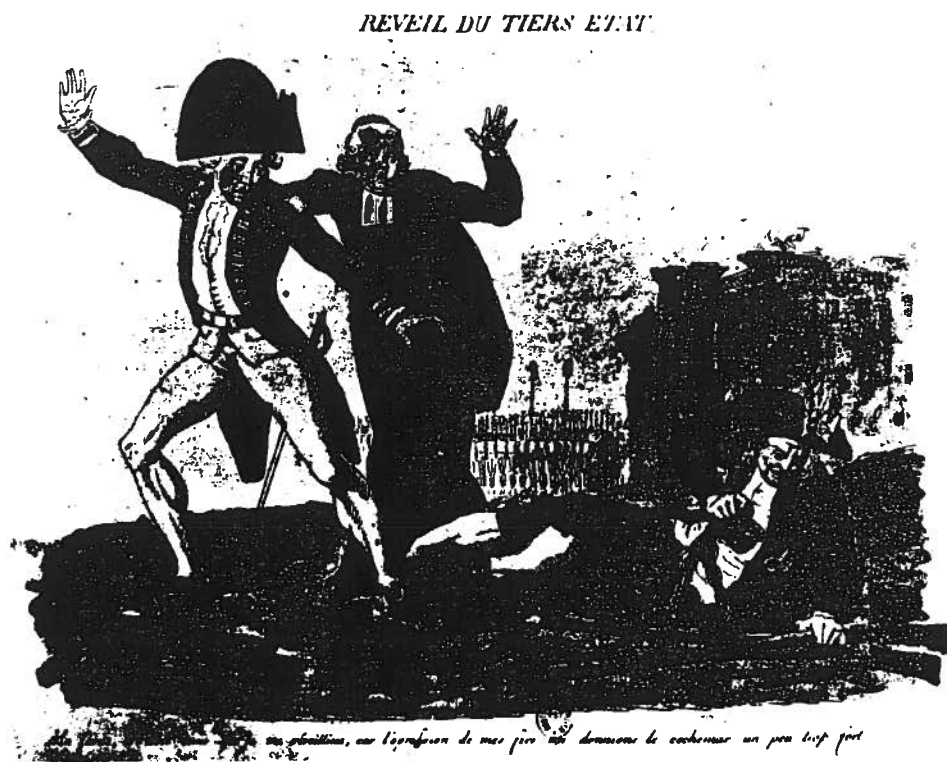


Figure 3.9  
AWAKENING OF THE THIRD ESTATE

"Le Réveil du Tiers Etat," 1789 (cat.518). Reproduced from the catalogue of the exhibition, *La Révolution française*, ed. Gaborit, 407.



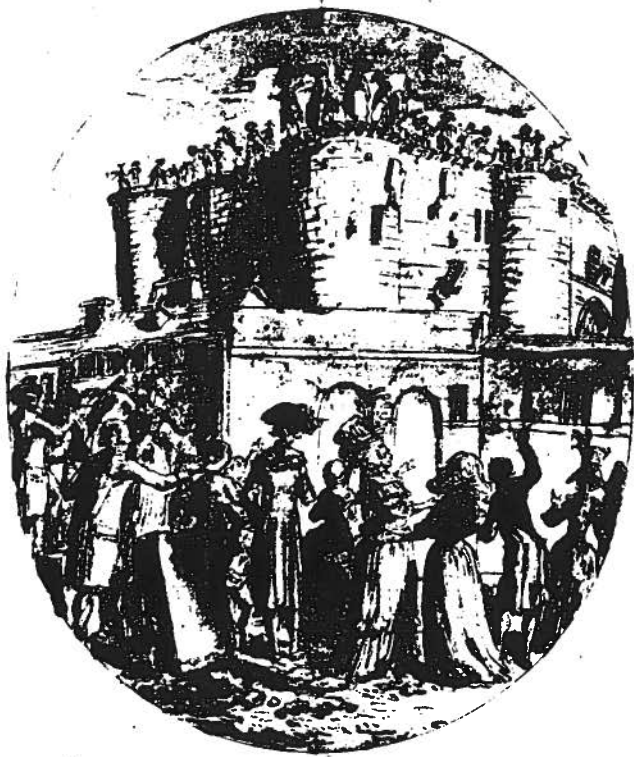


Figure 3.10  
DESTRUCTION OF THE BASTILLE

"Destruction de la Bastille," color etching by Desrais (cat.516). Reproduced from the catalogue of the exhibition, *La Révolution française*, ed. Gaborit, 407.

### *Destruction as an allegory of the fall of Communism*

Revolutionary mythology returned to the present day as the events leading to the fall of the U.S.S.R. occurred in quick succession during the bicentennial year. A visitor to the exhibit in the morning might have seen the events surrounding the fall of the Berlin wall live on television the previous night. In a flash, the end of monarchy portrayed in the fragments of statues at the exhibits took on a powerful meaning as one lived through the fall of the Soviet State with people toppling statues of Stalin.

On Bastille day, the 14th of July, Mikhail Gorbachev sent an open letter to Francois Mitterand as the president of the G7 summit asking to be accepted into "our common house of Europe." More specifically, Gorbachev shared his thoughts on the problems of world economy. "Our perestroika," he wrote, "is inseparable from a *politique* tending towards full participation in the world economy. This tendency is determined by our direct interest in economy. By directing the world economy towards an open structure, the rest of the world will only gain by achieving access to the market of the USSR."<sup>108</sup> In this letter Gorbachev not only spoke of the benefits of East-West economic cooperation, but was suggesting a joint discussion about the problems of the "world economy," especially global debt. Looking back, this letter symbolically represents the beginning of the end of the cold war. Like the walls of the Bastille, the wall of Berlin came down that same year.

The interplay between the mythology of the French Revolution and political decisions in Moscow do not stop at the symbolic date of the 14th of July as a postmark on Gorbachev's letter. Until the mid 1970s, Russian historians agreed that the revolution of 1789, ideologically universal, was a bourgeois revolution, the Declaration of Human Rights was purely formal, and the Robespierrist government of 1793 gave a model of political energy but not a model of society. The Russian revolution of 1917 was seen as having gone beyond the French revolution by realizing the promises of 1793 and by putting in place a Communist State. But from the 1970s onward, this view began to be drastically revised. In an essay on the changing images of the French revolution, Edgar Morin explains that the sense of emancipation associated with the October revolution was dismantled by a series of auto-demystifications in the U.S.S.R.,

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<sup>108</sup> "Notre perestroika, écrit-il, est inséparable de la politique tendant à la participation pleine et entière à l'économie mondiale. Cette orientation-là est déterminée par notre intérêt économique direct. Mais à l'évidence le reste du monde ne pourra que gagner à l'ouverture en direction de l'économie mondiale d'un marché tel que celui de l'URRS." Translated from Russian and published in *Le Monde*, 18 July 1989.

China (with the trial of the Gang of Four) and in Cambodia (with the atrocities of Pol Pot) -- all of which unfolded at about the same time.

All of this has helped to resurrect the idea of democracy (which no longer appears as the ideological mask of the bourgeoisie) and regenerated human rights (no longer seen as a carrier of false and formal freedoms but as the *only* true freedom). What is truly extraordinary, is that this process happens in the heart of communist countries, where people aspire to pluralism and freedom in the midst of enormous totalitarian states. [...]

Gorbachev insisted that democratization is the horizon of communism for the end of the millennium. And shortly later, thousands of students are singing the Marseillaise in Beijing. If in the schools of the USSR the students learned that 1917 was the future of 1789, 1789 has become the future of communism. Little by little, 1789 became the bright star of the future, in the East, in countries of Africa, in Asia and even in Latin America.<sup>109</sup>

Ricoeur has investigated the shared territory between historical events and human actions, and in that respect, the rewriting of history by the communists gives a poignancy to issues of historical narratives. It seems that the "internal dynamic" of the exhibition insisted on the values of a unified Europe and the "ability to project itself outside of the work" was done by history itself.

To retrace my way through the exhibition, I have said at the beginning that the curators displayed the art objects with little or no guidance for the visitor. I proposed to conceive of the exhibit as a landscape of ruins that carry in them stories that need to be uncovered. The first story was one about originals which I anchored in the Marxist interpretation of history. The Marxist narrative interprets the European story depicted in these original works by seeing a link between the oppressed of the different countries. The woman who remembers the event with the flour bags is moved not because these people were French, but because events like these ones (according to her) helped to gather a revolutionary momentum that brought people together to fight for their freedom. Then, I anchored the second story about "social context" present in the exhibition in the theories of the *Annales School*. In my criticism of the scientific and impersonal conception of the social context, I showed that if indeed a European context was shared by the different countries it was based on a sentimental attitude toward the past. The display of agricultural implements created a narrative about a lost agrarian life.

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<sup>109</sup> Morin, "89 régénéré." Edgar Morin is head of research at the Centre Nationale de Recherche Scientifique (CNRS).

The fragments of the royal statues and the narrative undercurrent of body parts in caricatures were interpreted as a story about destruction and creation. The series of events happening before and during the bicentennial in communist countries were brought into the interpretation of the exhibit as an allegory of the fall of Communism. The mythology surrounding the destruction of the Bastille and royal statues were read allegorically as the end of the Communist empire in Europe. Both the re-writing of history by Russian intellectuals and the event that occurred in the political realm in Communist states, during the bicentennial year, brought the historical narrative about the French Revolution into perspective.

In this chapter the issue as to *where* the exhibit took place was treated in a cursory manner. In the next chapter, I will investigate the relationship between place and memory in greater depth and explore the politics of memory of a site that was seen a great deal during the Revolution. The organizers of the bicentennial wanted to recall its most positive aspects but other memories emerged from the shadows of the past.

## THE ARCHITECTURE OF MEMORY

As I walk along the edge of Place de la Concorde, instead of the usual car fumes and traffic, there is a strong smell of pine -- inhaling this, I feel both relaxed and revived. The resinous scent comes from a vast wooden amphitheatre that has been built here to welcome, for one night, over 16,000 spectators to watch the Bastille Day parade (fig. 4.1). A dozen workers dressed in dark blue overalls are busy attaching banisters to the bleacher stairs. The site is well-guarded by police who keep people from approaching the construction of this temporary monument. Passers-by comment on the atmosphere of serenity as they walk and look at the amphitheatre. A silence punctuated only by the sounds of woodworking seems to keep people there who, half-curious, half-hypnotized, are watching the slow but total transformation of a space they know so well.

From an article in *Liberation*, "600 linear meters of wood, 60,000 screws and six weeks of relentless work have been necessary to erect these 'revolutionary bleachers'<sup>1</sup> -- 'revolutionary', because they are a replica of an amphitheatre that was built for the Fête de la Fédération of 1790 (the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789). It was the day when the newly elected representatives of each department came together from all over France to swear to protect the nation. Over the years, the Festival of Federation and the construction of its revolutionary amphitheatre by volunteers has become the "happiest" moment of the French revolution.

The amphitheatre built for the bicentennial on Place de la Concorde is a quotation from history, a reconstruction of the bleachers that were built in 1790 (fig. 4.2). Mona Ozouf would say that this commemorative act is done in the 'logic of the same', in order to replicate a gesture that has been invested with symbolic power.

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<sup>1</sup> Christelle Rebiere, "L'obélisque en prend pour son gradin," *Liberation*, 13 July 1989, p.7.

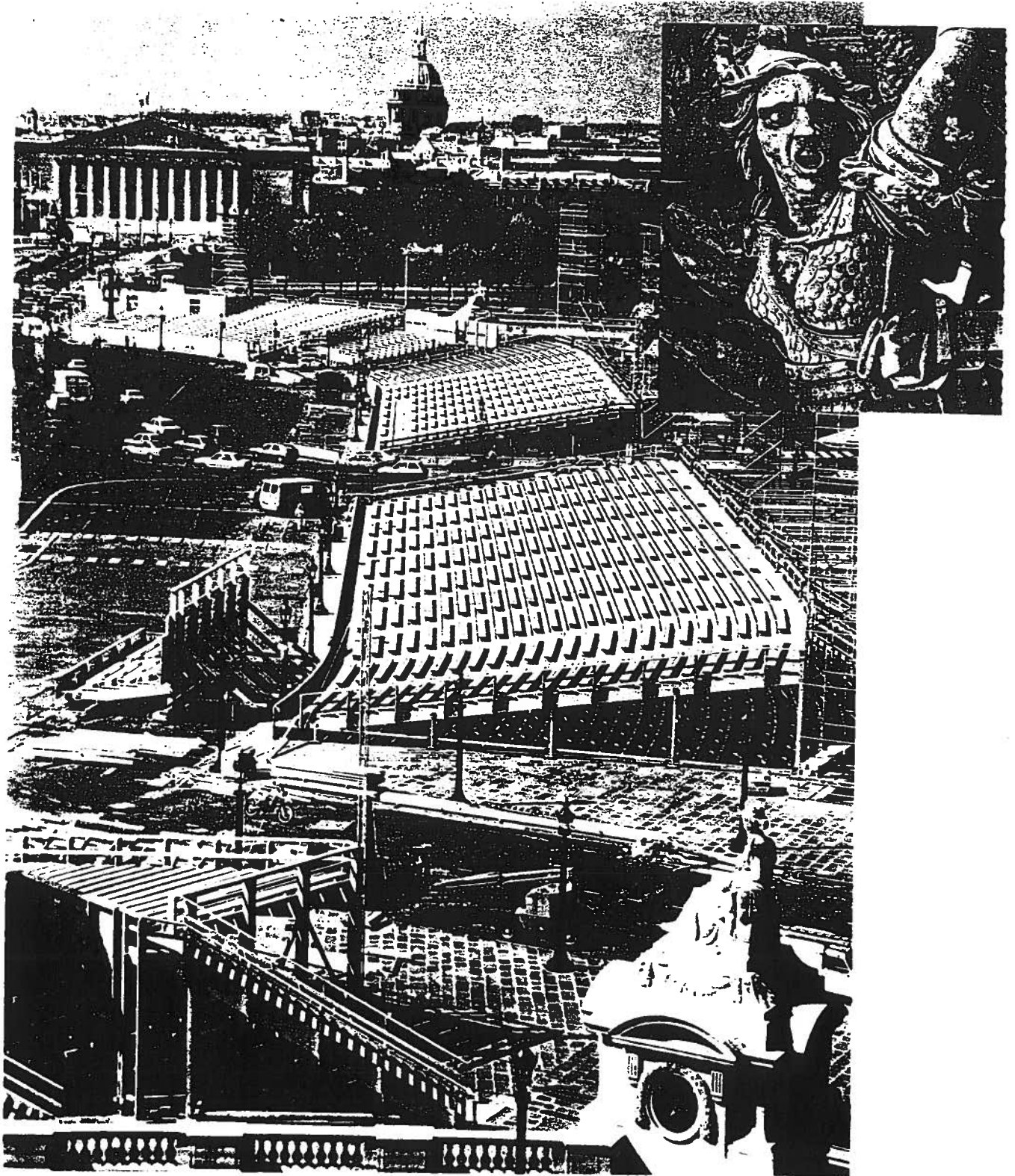


Figure 4.1  
REPLICA WOODEN AMPHITHEATRE BUILT ON THE PLACE DE LA  
CONCORDE, 1989

Temporary installation designed by Patrick Bouchain as a reconstruction of the tribunes built on the Champs de Mars for the Fête de la Fédération, 1790. Photograph reproduced in Hélène Lipstadt, "Revolutionary Fêtes '89," *Art in America* (Oct 1989): 202.

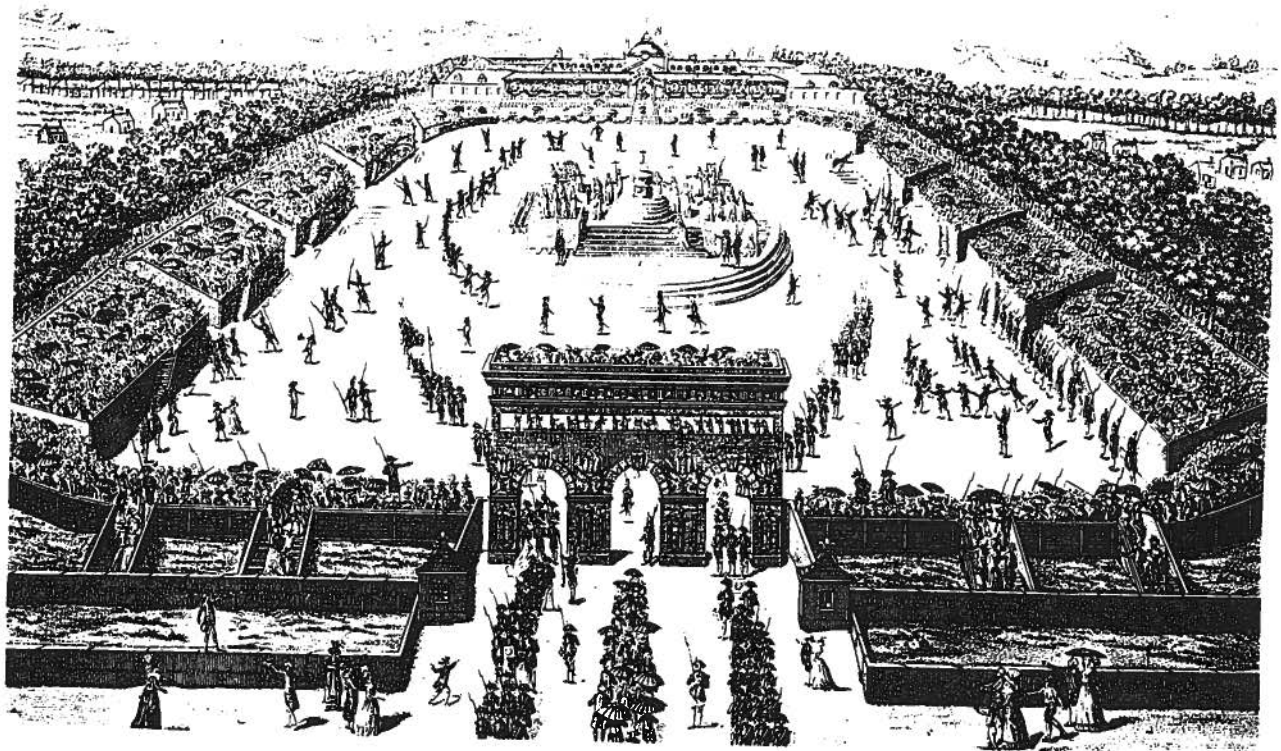


Figure 4.2  
THE FEDERATION FESTIVAL ON THE CHAMPS DE MARS, JULY 14, 1790

Anonymous engraving, date unknown. Reproduced in Jean Garrigues, *Images de la Révolution* (Paris: Éditions Du May, 1989), 18.

The memory of the amphitheatre built for the Federation Festival in 1790 became detached from its original site on the Champ de Mars but retained an important place in the Revolutionary imagination once it was rebuilt on Place de la Concorde two centuries later. One might think that only an architectural historian would be able to associate the 1989 amphitheatre built on the Place de la Concorde with the one of 1790, but during the bicentennial, images about the eighteenth century and the revolution were diffused in many ways. An enormous number of archival images, including many of the Festival of Federation and its monumental amphitheatre, were reprinted and distributed as postcards, books, guidebooks and souvenirs. I would propose that the temporary amphitheatre built on Place de la Concorde, in fact inscribed a double meaning in the urban landscape through the spatialization of history. The first was about providing sitting for a special crowd of people during the parade and the second was about recalling the Festival of the Federation of 1790.

In this chapter, I want to investigate the politics of memory and show that even though the organizers wanted to spatialize certain historical references, the ones that were avoided and silenced were still present in many peoples' minds. The double meaning inscribed in the placement and design of the temporary amphitheatre opened up the door to other memories associated with this particular place. Place de la Concorde provides the material for this argument, but other sites are equally available, like the Place de la Bastille, Place de la Nation or even villages in Brittany that carry the memory of the Chouan anti-revolutionary movements.<sup>2</sup> But Place de la Concorde offers a clear illustration of the allegorical nature of the spatialization of history. It also has the advantage of being the terminus of the Bastille Day Parade. The site was a stage set on which the actors of the parade made their entrance, culminating in the climatic moment of the parade when Jessye Norman, standing in the center of the amphitheatre, sang the National Anthem.

I will investigate the amphitheatre through the notion of 'place of memory' in order to unveil the layers of memory, including some that were not explicitly recognized by the organizers. The analysis of revolutionary images reveals the complex world of memories associated with a place and their sudden reappearance provoked by a commemorative spectacle. The memories I have

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<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of sites of anti-revolutionary resistance that have become associated with the counter-revolution in general see ed. Garcia, Lévy, and Mattei, "Chouan...", *Revolutions, fin et suite*, and Jean Clement Martin, "La Vendée, région mémoire," *Le lieux de mémoire*, vol.1: *La République*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).



chosen to explore here are those that were most accessible as images during the bicentennial; these include an image of the construction of the amphitheatre by volunteers in 1790, a birds eye view of the Festival of the Federation and lastly one images representing the execution of the king on Place de la Concorde. Many other memories could be explored, but these were widespread and common references. The accessibility of these images and the memories associated with them is important to recognize as we move on to their analysis.

## The Amphitheatre and Memory

The amphitheatre on Place de la Concorde fulfills both aspects of the *archival obsession* described by Pierre Nora – it preserves the past (as a perfect replica) while it conserves the present (the Place de la Concorde is fundamentally unchanged by this ephemeral architectural apparition).<sup>3</sup> Memory exists in space, it requires a site, whether in the form of books, tapes, monuments or images. For Nora, contemporary sites of memory are not only our libraries, archives, and museums but also sites of counter-memory, places meaningful to a community as symbolic sites of resistance (for example, the site where, in 1871, Parisian communards were executed by the army of Versailles).<sup>4</sup> Maurice Halbwachs draws a revealing relationship between the symbolic representation of a place and its memory in the following manner:

As to group members who leave places without seeing them again, who are not involved in the process of their transformation and yet wish to deal with them: they soon create a symbolic representation of these places. The image they conjure up draws its content first, no doubt from the places themselves (at least indirectly, if it is based on description). But symbolic reflection detaches these places from their physical environment and connects them with the beliefs of the group. Undoubtedly, the stability of the image depends accounts for the fact that beliefs continue. But this stability is not at the mercy of physical accidents that transform its objects; the image subsists independently because the believers are unaware of such accidents.<sup>5</sup>

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3 Pierre Nora says that "the obsession with the archive that marks our age, [is] attempting at once the complete conservation of the present as well as the total preservation of the past." Pierre Nora, "Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26, *Memory and Counter-Memory* (Spring 1989): 3.

4 See Madelaine Reberieux, "Le mur des Fédérés, Rouge sang craché", *Lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol.1, *La République* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). David Harvey has shown in his study of nineteenth century Paris, how the Wall of the Fédérés and the Sacré-Coeur in fact operate as two poles of collective memory. See David Harvey, "Monument and Myth", *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985)

5 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 205.

Whether from a medical or cultural point of view, memory needs to be located. This notion is not unique to our times, memory has always depended on real or imaginative places. So it was with mnemonic techniques which existed before widespread literacy and the printed word. As Natalie Zemon Davis says, we have learned from Frances Yates how the ancient 'art of memory' involved associating some text or idea to be remembered to the image of place. The orator recalled his speech by imagining it as a succession of 'topoi' (i.e. 'places' and 'topics') in a fictive architecture; seeing, say, an image of Hercules in the niche of such a 'memory theatre' prompted the appropriate texts on the Herculean attributes of strength, cunning, and so on. [These mnemo-techniques] survive as patent remedies in the self-help literature of popular culture. Nevertheless, Proust's *petite madeleine*, Maurice Halbwach's seminal work on the 'social frames' of collective memory, and even cognitive studies and biological research on the 'location' of memory in the brain are all reminders that memory seeks its local habitations.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, places matter in memory. The importance of place in collective memory will become clear as I investigate the rebuilding of the 1790 amphitheatre on a site different from its original location, a shift which created certain tensions about its symbolic meaning.

The symbolism of the site of memory was underlined in *Liberation's* reportage of the amphitheatre which described in detail its dimensions and position relative to other symbolic buildings:

... surrounding the Concorde obelisk, the whole [amphitheatre] forms a 400-meter-long volume that has been adapted to the rectangular form of the plaza. On each side, along the Tuileries gardens and at the end of the Champs Elysées, there are four large sets of bleachers, that are 60 meters long, facing each other, leaving open a view corridor from the Louvre to the Arc de Triomphe. One extremity of the hemicycle reaches the Seine river and the other the Hotel Crillon and the Maritime Ministry. Two other sets of bleachers have been erected in a semi-circle of 40 meters long that equally respects the perspective view that links the Madeleine church to the National Assembly.<sup>7</sup>

This excerpt from the daily press positions the amphitheatre in a constellation of monuments (the Louvre, the Assemblée Nationale, et. al.) that links buildings considered important to the symbolic geography of the city while omitting those considered irrelevant.

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6 Natalie Zemon Davis, "Introduction," *Representations* 26, *Memory and Counter-Memory*, (Spring 1989): 3. See Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

7 Rebiere, "L'obelisque," p.7.

### *The political context of the amphitheatre*

Except for the 150th anniversary which was celebrated (by the Communist Party) on Place de la Bastille as a way to reclaim the site and the working-class neighborhood surrounding it, all major commemorations of the revolution have taken place on the Champ de Mars: the Fête de la Fédération in 1790, the Fête de l'Être Suprême in 1793, and the Exposition Universelle in 1889. Today, it is a green lawn at the foot of the Eiffel Tower where people sometimes picnic on Sundays. During the planning of the 1989 commemoration, a celebration for the Eiffel Tower's centennial was also underway. Unfortunately for the Socialists sponsoring the bicentennial, it was the politically conservative Mayor of Paris who intended to throw the party for the tower's birthday, thus effectively removing the Champ de Mars from consideration as a site for the Socialist bicentennial parade.

According to the organizers, Place de la Concorde was the best site for the temporary amphitheatre: receiving the paraders as they arrived from their long descent of the Champs Élysées, the plaza would also provide a grandiose setting for the performance of the Marseillaise by Jessye Norman -- the climactic moment of the parade. In addition, TV coverage of the paraders coming down the Champs Élysées would have the Arc de Triomphe inescapably in the background -- a visual cue to the audience that this event is taking place in Paris. In fact, the organizers cited the Arc de Triomphe as a necessary geographical reference for a world audience watching the Bastille Day Parade.<sup>8</sup>

Although neither press nor organizers referred to the amphitheatre as a transplant from the Champ de Mars, its new site was part of a discussion which raised difficult memories. Unlike certain places which are packaged as "heritage" with little explanation of what this heritage encompasses or what it might mean to us today, the discussion around the Place de la Concorde could not have been more specific -- it is one of several sites where the guillotine was erected during the revolution and, perhaps because the King was executed here, it has become the site most associated with the memory of the guillotine and the Terror.

The difficult memories associated with this place are reflected in its changes of name. In 1772, the open space was first designed as a plaza by the architect

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<sup>8</sup> According to Christian Dupavillon, head of the Grands Travaux et la Mission du Bicentennaire, "most people know the Arc de Triomphe. That way, spectators will automatically know that the event is happening in Paris." From an interview conducted by the author, July, 1989.

Gabriel and was decorated with a statue of Louis XV riding his horse. During the revolution, the statue was toppled and the plaza appropriately renamed Place de la Revolution in 1792. Louis XVI was executed here in 1793, and Marie Antoinette in 1794. *Liberation* lists others executed on Place de la Revolution, "the guillotine, set up near the Tuileries gates, also executed Charlotte Corday, Danton, Saint Just, and Robespierre; all in all, 1,115 heads have rolled."<sup>9</sup> The association between the plaza and the revolution was such that Napoleon changed its name to Place de la Concorde. "As the symbol of concord and national unity, [the architect] Hittorff in a daring and innovative gesture located a politically 'neutral' 240-ton Egyptian obelisk -- a 'gift' from the viceroy of Egypt to the people of France -- in the centre of the wide-open square."<sup>10</sup> The guillotine was still operating but away from its site of spectacle, moved to the hidden and secure environment of the prison courtyard.

It is revealing that when Jeannenay publicly explained the reasons for building the amphitheatre on Place de la Concorde, he omitted the dark memories associated with this site. He said that "the double emphasis expressed best, the happy beginning of the revolutionary process where the Bastille represents a moment of force, spontaneity and liberation, and the Fête de la Fédération a day when representatives of each department came to 'swear to defend and conserve liberty' -- expressing through their presence their adherence to the new order founded a year before."<sup>11</sup> Paris is 'en fête' and nothing can disturb that.

But the historical references embodied in the amphitheatre of Place de la Concorde and the Bastille Day parade created a complex juxtaposition. First, the amphitheatre is an architectural monument that recalls the participation of the volunteers who built it. Secondly, the built space refers to the Fête de la Fédération and, by extension, the beginning of democratic representation. Thirdly, the plaza is a place of memory of the king's execution and the guillotine -- one of the most enduring symbols of the revolution. Most people who saw images of the circus filled with spectators and paraders drew, consciously or not, from these three references. In this interplay of references, the commemoration had to overcome a difficulty: the dark memories of the Revolution which

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9 "Les Champs, avant la fièvre de vendredi soir...", in *Liberation*, 13 July 1989.

10 Christine Boyer, *City of Collective Memory, Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 35

11 Paraphrased from Jean-Noël Jeannenay in *Programme, des Manifestations du Bicentenaire de la Révolution Française* (Paris: Mission du Bicentenaire/Mundoprint, 1989).

inevitably reappeared as the revolutionary circus were displaced from their traditional site on the Champs de Mars to the Place de la Concorde.

As I begin an analysis of the three images that I have gathered into a constellation, I am struck by the importance of the circular form. The guillotine, placed in the centre of the plaza, is surrounded by people who come to witness the execution and the amphitheatre of 1790 is built out of bleachers placed in an oval so that everyone can see everyone else. In the late eighteenth century, the circle was one of the dominant forms in architectural discourse.<sup>12</sup> Through an analysis of specific archival images, I will explore the centripetal effects of the circle (bleachers facing the centre of the 1790 amphitheatre), and then turn to the centrifugal force radiating out from the centre of the circle where the execution is taking place. But first, I need to unveil the images that depict the construction of the amphitheatre. As I will show, the spontaneous participation of the population to build the commemorative monument for the Federation Festival of 1790 has been constructed as the happiest time of the revolution.

*The first memory: the construction of the amphitheatre in 1790*

The appropriation of spaces, the breaking down of barriers was part of the everyday experience of the early revolutionary years. As Ozouf says, "The beating down of gates, the crossing of castle moats, walking at one's ease in places where one was forbidden to enter: the appropriation of a certain space, which had to be opened and broken into, was the first delight of the Revolution."<sup>13</sup> Appropriation of space came to be visually represented in images depicting popular participation in the construction of the amphitheatre on the Champ de Mars, but people's participation in the appropriation of space is inscribed according to certain ideological constraints that I will now try to uncover.

This anonymous print (fig. 4.3) of 1790, represents people's participation in the appropriation and transformation of a known place, the field in front of the military school in the outskirts of Paris, into a symbolic space, the amphitheatre to celebrate the *Fête de la Fédération*. The amphitheatre is intended to welcome the representatives of all the districts and departments of the country. Reunited

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<sup>12</sup> From its repressive radial form characterised by the panopticon, or the liberal form proposed for the industrial town of Chaux, to the utopian sphere of the cenotaph and the hemicycle of the amphitheatre, it is important to point out that although the circle was seen as a pure form mimicking the perfection of nature, the experience of the architecture was conceived in terms of the senses and not in terms of a non-physical abstraction. For the symbolism of the circle in late-eighteenth century philosophy, see George Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle* (Paris: Plon, 1961), especially chap. 5, "Rousseau." See also Monique Mosser and Daniel Rabreau, "Circus, amphitheatre, colosseum: Revolutionary Paris as a new Rome," *Lotus* 39 (III, 1983): 108-118.

<sup>13</sup> Mona Ozouf, *The Festivals of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 23.



Figure 4.3  
 "TO THE GOOD CITIZEN WORKERS OF THE CHAMPS DE MARS"

Anonymous engraving, 1790. Reproduced in *Fêtes et Révolution* (Paris: D.A.A. de la Ville de Paris et la Ville de Dijon, 1989), 59.

in one place, in the words of Bailly, the mayor of Paris, they will “take the civic oath to be united, to love each other for ever, and to help each other if the situation may arise. I propose that this meeting, this general federation, be pledged on the next 14th of July, a day we all see as freedom. This day will be designated for people to swear and keep their liberty.”<sup>14</sup> The 14th of July, of course, referred to the taking of the Bastille a year earlier.

What do we know about this image? It is a small engraving, probably a broadside, showing the text of a revolutionary song on either side of the image. The title overhead reads *To the good citizen workers of the Champ de Mars*. It represents the participation of people in the midst of building an immense amphitheatre in the record time of a week in foul weather. Their work is here acknowledged and praised. What remains mysterious and intriguing is the way the pictorial representation recognizes that these legendary ‘days of the wheelbarrows’ were felt and described by many as the true fête. The Marquise de la Tour du Pin writes in her journal, “Such an extraordinary spectacle will never be seen again.” It was a honeymoon, a once-in-a-lifetime experience which, by definition, could never be repeated. The playwright Louis Sebastien Mercier, politically a moderate, describes it as “the most beautiful painting of concord, of work, of movement and elation that has ever been exhibited. [...] These good and brave Parisians citizens who could transform eight days of work into eight days of the most touching feast.”<sup>15</sup>

The small title of the song reads “TUNE around the fireplace.” The song calls on the domestic world, it is not to be sung in a café or around a liberty tree, but at home near the fireplace. The song addresses the private domain and the scene depicted by the image addresses the public domain. These two domains are far from fighting or contradicting each other, on the contrary, as Roger Chartier has argued, the new public opinion that existed before the revolution was formed in the privacy of the home, the home of the educated person who read critically.<sup>16</sup> The interdependence of the private realm of book-reading and the realm of public opinion has been structured into the image. The singing to be done in the home reinforces the image by constructing a positive and spectacular appropriation of a public place. The image in turn states with force the grandeur of the spatial transformation that is made even greater since all this effort is to

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14 Bailly's address to the Assemblée Nationale, 5 June 1790. Cited in Marie-Louise Bivier, *Les fêtes révolutionnaires à Paris* (Paris: Press Universitaires de France, 1979), 37.

15 Louis-Sebastien Mercier, *Le Nouveau Paris*, vol.1, ed. L. Roy. Cited in Bivier, *Fêtes révolutionnaires*, 18.

16 Roger Chartier, *Les Origines Culturelles de la Révolution Française* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 45.

construct a space that will be used only once. The symbolic space has a force that the text could not, in its linearity, express at all.

What about this space? First, it has no context, it could be anywhere and indeed this is the way it was chosen, away from the restrictions of the city, but not too far either. The horizon is underlined by trees which both close the scene back on itself and create a halo asserting the place as a abstract space. Then there are the figures in the space. Unlike the engraving recalling the taking of the Bastille where a crowd of men transforms itself into an organized army, mobilized on a precise objective, the people participating in the building of the Champ de Mars are represented as a mixed crowd of men and women, busy with their tasks, and in small discrete groups.<sup>17</sup>

If we look closer at the composition of the group on the right pulling a wheelbarrow, we see that each figure stands for a different social group. There are several transgressions of social barriers at work in the image. The first transgression crosses over gender lines. Not only are women doing hard physical work, but they are represented as working equally with the men. Mercier who was present during the construction says in his article, "We even saw women, deprived of the ornaments of their sex, forgetting their feebleness and pushing wheel-barrows." The participation of women is also reinforced in the song as it says, "Hurray, adorable sex, you are so amiable, at the Champ de Mars, much better than in [the isle of] Cythere, you are turning over the ground, at the Champ de Mars." Cythere, a site recognized in the eighteenth century as dedicated to love, is set in opposition to the efforts of the revolutionaries on the field of war (Champ de Mars).

In this depiction of concord the contribution of women to build the circus is visually represented as positive but the text is rather cynical in its tone. Indeed, the gap between the two, operate within a larger set of problems attributed to women's position in the public sphere. Increasingly in the second half of the century, Lynn Hunt argues, women became associated with dissimulation. According to Montesquieu and Rousseau, it was women who taught men how to dissimulate, how to hide their true feelings in order to get what they wanted in the public arena. In the influential *Letter to M. d'Alembert*, Rousseau warned men "that no longer wishing to tolerate separation, unable to make themselves

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17 Michel Vovelle, *La mentalité révolutionnaire* (Paris: Press Universitaire de France, 1988), 45.



into men, the women make us into women."<sup>18</sup> As Hunt says, "the sexuality of women, when operating in the public sphere (...), threatened to effeminize men -- that is, literally to transform men's bodies [into women's bodies]."<sup>19</sup> Based on philosophical writings men argued that "virtue could only be restored if women returned to the private sphere."<sup>20</sup> In response to these arguments women began to form patriotic clubs of their own: Olympe de Gouges writes the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Citizen*. others take to the streets and write pamphlets. Quickly, the participation of women in politics became increasingly threatening to revolutionary men. Repression on women's involvement began with the closing of the clubs followed by increasingly fierce actions such as the execution of Madame Roland and the spontaneous mob torturing of Madame de Méricourt.<sup>21</sup>

The second transgression occurs across class barriers. Among the women who are pulling, we can see a bourgeois woman in second position and a sans culotte woman in fifth position. The same with the men. Lastly, we see a priest who is also helping to pull. This could be surprising when we know of the intense wave of de-christianization that swept through the country during the revolutionary years. But the revolutionaries were interested in claiming land owned by the church for the state and were not against religion *per se*, in 1790. Hence the importance of including the church in this image of intense symbolic spatial transformation. The representation of the church on the construction site appears in all the representations I have seen. In his text, Mercier recalls, that a group of monks were looking with pity at people working away. The people around them started to shout "to the wheel-barrow, to the wheel barrow!" to induce them to participate, which they did. The story shows how the collectivity of those who are doing the right thing can bring warmth and devotion in anyone who can come close enough to the field of its radiance. Here we find one of the recurring themes of the revolutionary fête, its potential to be ever-increasing, always including more and more people in its joyous and busy crowd.

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18 Jean Jacques Rousseau, quoted by Lynn Hunt, "The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette", *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 113.

19 Hunt, "The Many Bodies," 113.

20 Ibid.

21 The publication of texts written by groups of women in the form of letters and pamphlets addressed to the king and the members of the government requesting to be added to the *Cahier de Doléance* (an opinion poll done in 1789) is perhaps the best document we have to know what women of all classes thought about the way their country was run, see Paule-Marie Duchet, ed., *Cahier de doléances des femmes en 1789 et autres textes*, (Paris: des femmes, 1981) and the analysis of these texts by Paule-Marie Duhet, *Les Femmes et la Révolution 1789-1794* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978). About the lower class women of Paris, called the tricoteuses (the knitters), who sat in the tribunes of the revolutionary assembly, see Dominique Godineau, *Citoyennes tricoteuses* (Paris: Alinéa, 1988). For portraits of revolutionary women such as Olympe de Gouges, Théroigne de Méricourt and others see Annette Rosa, *Citoyennes* (Paris: Messidor, 1988).

The fifth verse of the song says "Let the stranger admire, all that attracts us, to the Champ de Mars, French freedom, this is our hope at the Champ de Mars." The text then, is quite specific about what is admired by foreigners: freedom from the constraints of the Ancien Regime. The image also represents some spectators watching the construction, there are two couples on top of the embankment who are looking at those who work. They provide an outside gaze. They are confirming the universal implications of this new space constructed by the people, for the people. The gaze of the outsider creates a window of imagination for the viewer, a window that looks onto the participation of people in making their new political order visible in the landscape.

The image establishes a contrast between the smallness of the wheel-barrows and the grandeur of the embankment already completed. The power of the collective political sentiment is so strong that it can transform the untransformable. The figures in the back are shrunk by making the wall behind them seem taller to further emphasize the power of the political sentiment.

But what is the image hiding, what has been erased in order to create this scene of people joining to build together a better future? First, the non-participation and the quasi-boycott of the workers hired from the charity workhouse established as a relief to the large unemployed population. Between 10,000 and 15,000 workers (depending on the source) were first hired at 20 sols a day, and after complaints the pay was raised to 30 sols. After refusing to work an additional two hours, the workers and the architect started a dispute which broke out in a fight. A rumour went around the city that the workers had been paid by counter-revolutionaries to slow down the construction and on the next day, the Champ de Mars was filled with volunteers. On average there were 100,000 volunteers a day who came to help (more than 600,000 persons lived in Paris in the first years of the Revolution), but according to the Spanish ambassador Fernan Nunez, the volunteers were not from the lower classes, but the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, the image, the song and the textual descriptions of Mercier all underline the diversity of the crowd.

We can better see now that the image and its song is intended for the bourgeoisie. It is a bourgeoisie strongly supportive of the Marquis de La Fayette as we read in the last verse of the song: "I made my little song as I was rolling my wheel-barrow at the Champ de Mars, I offer it to La Fayette at the Champ de Mars." As head of the army, La Fayette also represented a trend supportive of a

constitutional monarchy, and he later opposed the radical section of the Club des Cordeliers who were demanding that the king be brought to trial. La Fayette ordered his army to shoot on this very Champ de Mars no less than a year later, on July 17, 1791 -- fifty people died.

In more than one way, the *Fête de la Fédération* was constructed through images and songs as a new fête, representing new ideas. It was a fête set in opposition to the court fêtes of the Ancien Régime. Preparations for the court fêtes were hidden so as to increase their spectacular effects. The appearance of effortless in the production of extraordinarily sumptuous decors allowed the court fête to appear more dazzling, more magical.<sup>22</sup> But in the construction of the Champ de Mars the work of the volunteers has become the spectacle to be admired. The fête is the act of building of an architecture to commemorate (to remember together) the taking of the Bastille. The fête which took place in the completed amphitheatre on the 14th of July appeared to many as exceedingly boring and altogether lacking festive attributes. The collective effort of building on the other hand, was represented and remembered as the true fête.

Unlike the amphitheatre of 1790, the one of 1793 did not call for the participation of the population; in fact, people were advised to stay away from the construction site. In addition, those working on the circus did not acquire an aura for working on a revolutionary monument, they were simply "doing their job". We are told that sixteen men were hired from two companies of the Jura region, that the total cost of the amphitheatre was six million francs (one million dollars) and that the wood was to be recycled as building material after the event was over. Materials and labour circulated within the French economy and the monument was anchored in the geographical imagination of monuments in the Parisian landscape. But the lack of participation takes on greater meaning as we investigate the symbolic power carried by the Festival of the Federation in the narrative on the origin of the republic.

#### *The second memory: the Fête de la Fédération*

There exist a great many paintings and engravings of the Parisian Fête de la Fédération in the amphitheatre built for this event on the Champs de Mars. Some emphasize La Fayette (Colonel of the National Guard and organizer of the Fête de la Fédération) standing on top of the patriotic altar, taking the oath in the

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<sup>22</sup> See Louis Marin, *Le portrait du roi* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1981). Published in English as *Portrait of the King*, trans. Martha M. Houle (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

name of the National Guard, others emphasize the oath echoed by the crowd of participants in the arena (figs. 4.4 and 4.5). The former focus on the sacred moment of the national oath, the latter on the democratic representation of the body politic this oath is legally securing.

In 1989, consciously or unconsciously, the paraders entering the circus were being filmed from the same altitude as one of the engravings of its prototype -- a panorama looking down from the hill Chaillot. It is a water-coloured engraving after Cloquet from 1791 (figs. 4.6 and 4.7). In this panoramic view, the viewer/spectator becomes the visitor and narrator of the fête. Who is the viewer standing on top of the Chaillot hill, looking down on the amphitheatre filled with those who legally represent the citizens? It could not be Louis XVI, because the royal couple is seated in the "king's lodge" at the end of the perspective, practically at the vanishing point. The image has constructed a viewer (probably male) who could be a citizen of any of the newly-founded departments, since the engraving will be printed and distributed throughout the nation as a reminder of the event. This viewer witnesses the legal representation of the body politic, but he also looks down, allowing the architecture of the amphitheatre to be inscribed as a container for commemoration. Commenting on the work of Michel Foucault, John Rajchmann says that,

The art of building is the art of rendering visible, and so discovers one of its central interconnections with power. Architecture helps "visualize" power in other ways than simply manifesting it. It is not simply a matter of what a building shows "symbolically" or "semiotically", but also of what it makes visible about us and within us.<sup>23</sup>

From the top of the Chaillot hill, the viewer looks at a vast panorama stretching below across the Seine and towards the Military School. The cultivated landscape is there on the periphery of the image. This landscape of lines and grids, orderly fields and rationality, both extends into and echoes the tight structure of the revolutionary circus. Together, these two spaces, natural and artificial, create a discourse about democracy, liberalism, and rationality.

There is a play of difference between the perspective and plan views of the amphitheatre that needs to be opened up. The plan "cameo" (in the upper left hand corner) is a representation inside a representation. An angel is playing a

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<sup>23</sup> John Rajchmann, "Foucault's Art of Seeing," *October* 44 (Spring 1988): 104.



Figure 4.4

#### LA FAYETTE TAKING THE OATH

This painting depicts Lafayette at the central altar of the Champs de Mars during the Fête de la Fédération. Anonymous. Oil on canvas. (date unknown).

Reproduced in Jean Tulard, *The French Revolution in Paris seen through the collections of the Carnavalet museum* (Paris: Paris Musées, 1989), 981.

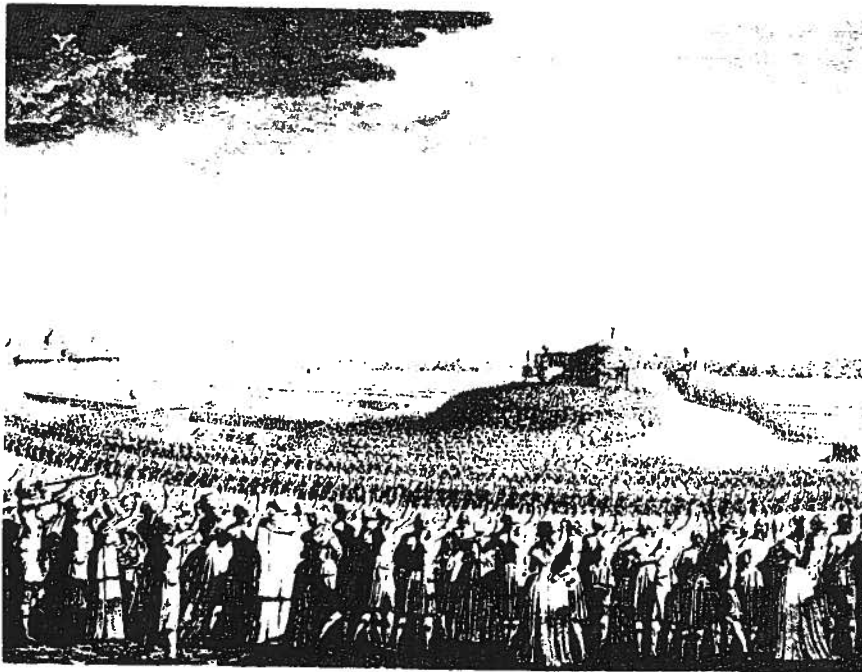


Figure 4.5

#### FEDERATIVE PACT OF THE FRENCH

Anonymous engraving, date unknown. Musée Carnavalet. HIST PC 011 BISC

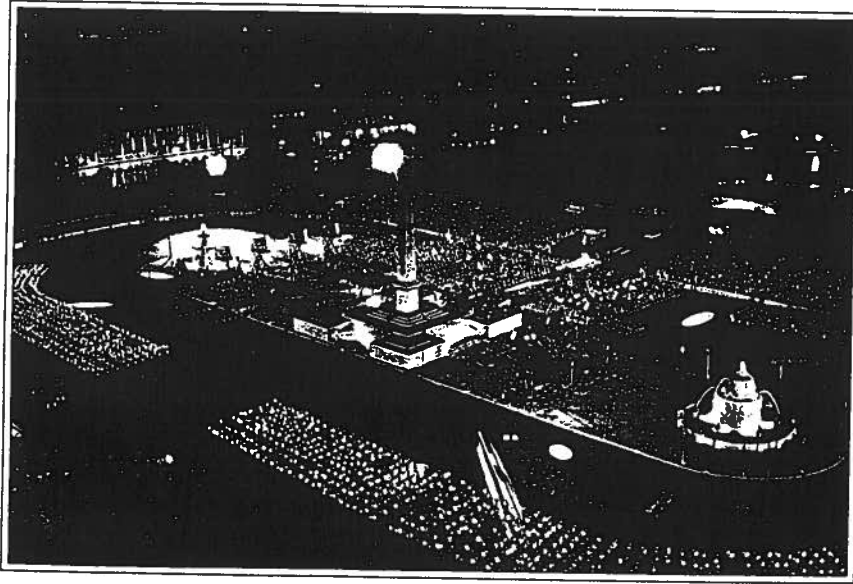


Figure 4.6  
TELEVISION IMAGE OF THE AMPHITHEATRE  
ON THE PLACE DE LA CONCORDE DURING THE PARADE  
Photograph taken by the author from the television coverage (TF1).

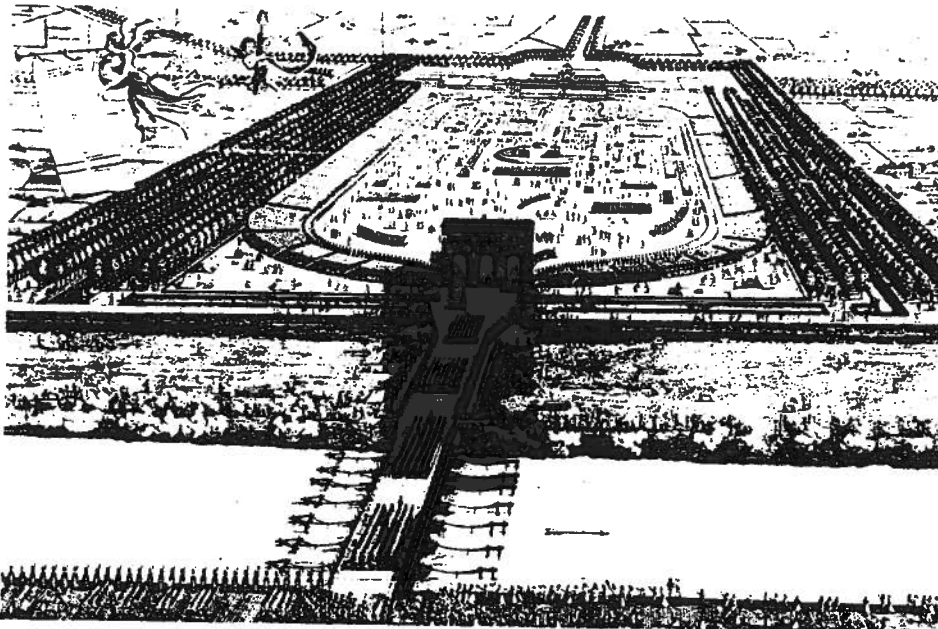


Figure 4.7  
BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE FRENCH FEDERATION, JULY 14, 1790  
"Vue générale de la Fédération française prise a vol d'oiseau au dessus de  
Chaillot," engraving by Hennin. Bibiotheque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes,  
CXXII 10752, 14 juillet 1790. Reproduced in *Fêtes et Révolution* (Paris: D.A.A. de  
la Ville de Paris et la Ville de Dijon, 1989), 46.

trumpet from which a banner hangs -- on this banner is a plan view of the circus. This is "good news", to be disseminated to the people of France by a Christian messenger (after all, it is not Hermes who spreads this word). Also floating in the foreground above the cultivated fields, a cherub carries a fasces surmounted by a Phrygian bonnet, the Roman symbols of republic and liberty. The plan view reinforces the abstract and rational qualities of the circus. It is a plan as an idea (a political idea) and at the same time, it is an ideal plan. Its architecture encloses an open space, a void. The symbolism is clear: for a new government, a clean slate. The bleachers are in the form of a planetary revolution symbolizing what was felt to be a complete political change, a revolution in the sense of a turn around in the course of history. Newton's scientific description of the planets and their movements, the rational conquering of the cosmos, which had always been the realm of religious faith, now appears with force and clarity in the symbolic form of the bleachers.<sup>24</sup> I will come back to the moral discourse that structures the plan a little later.

Turning to the perspective view, I focus on how the paraders have been represented. In the image, we see orderly groups marching and entering the circus. In the open space, rows of figures are arranged around the patriotic altar (in the centre) and some loose groups are milling about. Participants in uniform are marching together in neat rows toward the triumphal arch; others in civilian clothes are spectators walking in loose groups.

Normalization in the fête was made visible through the political representation of certain sections of the population chosen according to norms.<sup>25</sup> These norms distributed people equally by age group, gender, and geographical location. As Foucault remarks, "the marks that once indicated status, privilege and affiliation were increasingly replaced -- or at least supplemented -- by a whole range of degrees of normality indicating membership in a homogeneous social body."<sup>26</sup> The social body in the parade has to become a representation of the body politic, so the classification, hierarchy and distribution of the paraders was made visible through costumes and props. We can read in the diary of Madame La Tour du Pin that the uniforms were one of the striking features of this spectacle, "Nothing in the world can give an idea of this gathering. The troops set in good

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<sup>24</sup> The architect Boullée who designed an amphitheatre explained in his *Essai sur l'art* that the form is inspired from the Roman coliseum. But the simplicity of geometric forms was also believed to copy nature. Both discourses on design, one historical and the other geometrical, are present in Boullée's writings.

<sup>25</sup> Defined by Foucault as a system of finely graduated and measurable intervals which both organizes and is the result of this controlled distribution.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Random House [Vintage Books], 1979), 184.

order in the middle of the arena; this multitude of different uniforms intermixed with the National Guard, shining with newness."<sup>27</sup>

In partitioning the paraders, "each individual has his own place; and each place its individual." In the open theatre of the new circus, each group had its place, "the battalion of Military School cadets were placed at a hundred steps in front of the altar, where they lined up perpendicular to the Champ de Mars, facing the altar."<sup>28</sup> Looking carefully at the third group marching across the bridge, we can see that they hold a square banner. Each group representing one of the newly created departments marched into the amphitheatre by carrying one of these banners embroidered with the name of their department on it.<sup>29</sup>

The visual representations of the Fête de l'Etre Suprême stressed crowd participation -- by then (1793), the 'design' of participation through costume, props and singing had become organized on a large scale. We have the opposite situation in the Fête de la Fédération, where the emphasis is placed on an order rather than participation, an order which, from the written accounts, was felt especially meaningful to those who were there. The 300,000 people who gathered on the top of the surrounding embankments before the procession even started to enter the circus appeared in Prudhomme's report but are not represented in the panorama.<sup>30</sup> The visual representation gives its own narrative of the fête: a serious moment in the history of the Revolution that acquires its power from the possibility to be so organized. There is just enough of a crowd of spectators to legitimate the representatives marching in to take their place on the bleachers, but not so much that this orderly ritual would be made disorderly. We can find in several textual accounts that, in the shadow of order, there was a fear of riots and counter-revolution. The threatening crowd of spectators on top of the embankments needed to be omitted from the visual representation.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Bivier, *Fetes révolutionnaires*, 26 .

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> David was present at the Fête de la Fédération and was very impressed by it. In a sense, David directly confronted the tension between participation and control. "He learned how to handle crowds on a large scale. He consciously instituted festivals 'of the people, by the people, for the people' in the first modern large scale use of political pageantry" in David Lloyd Dowd, *Pageant-Master of the Republic: Jacques Louis David and the French Revolution* (Lincoln, NE: 1948), 77

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Bivier, *Fetes révolutionnaires*, 24.

<sup>31</sup> A quote from the architect Cellerier in charge of this fête reveals a strong concern for controlling the festive space: "The public fêtes motivated by great considerations have a particular aspect to them: the feeling of each becomes the feeling of all through a sort of electrization... The choice of a place is most important. [...] The place is vast, the multiple access points are easy and wide. The enclosure, so necessary to maintain a good order, is already there, which will help the economy that these ideas of greatness should not exclude and will beautify the ceremony with a frame of greeneries. The position is a good one: on one side, the buildings of the Military school; on the other, the river and the grounds of Passy already arranged like an amphitheatre... We would look pointlessly for a place more agreeable and more beautiful than the Champ de Mars." (Bivier, *Fetes révolutionnaires*, 24.)



Inside the circus, minute etch marks describe bleachers full of people and a double row of figures paralleling the form of the bleachers, presumably soldiers. The royal family (Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette and the Dauphin) are not represented in the lodge set up in front of the Military School because the perspective has reduced this spot to an insignificant speck at the vanishing point -- the country is no longer represented by the body of the king, but by the body politic.

Why are the cannons lined up along the Seine in the midst of firing? Prudhomme, in his description of this civic ritual, says "at 3:30 pm the bishop of Autun (Talleyrand) with 60 chaplains of the National Guard, started the mass. As planned, when the mass ended, a bomb gave the signal to all the municipalities of the kingdom." The image collapses into one visual space different moments during the ceremony: before the oath when paraders are still entering the amphitheatre and after the oath, when the cannons are fired simultaneously. According to Rualt, it was like "the sound of an immense artillery replacing an organ."<sup>32</sup> The sound wave spread outwards and, reaching others, was the cue for each of the neighboring departments to fire their cannons, creating an immense 'organ' throughout the country. Thus, the map of the newly established departments is re-enacted by a sound map radiating outwards from Paris.

Under the monarchy the geography of the kingdom was conceived as the addition of successive annexations. This one remains a composite territory that can only be represented by a list. Here the Revolution introduced an essential rupture, by establishing a difference between the totality and its parts. The local space, until then defined only by its particularity, is now defined by the nation that embraces it and goes beyond.<sup>33</sup>

As the component parts of this engraving are identified, it becomes clear that different types of representation are inscribed in the image through a series of codes. The codes make the citizen's representation visible in three ways: *politically, legally and morally*. *Politically*, the citizen is represented as a part of a body politic through the little engraving marks which have been made to indicate the circus is full of people. As Lynn Hunt remarks, the revolution created a change in the degree to which people participated in politics.

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<sup>32</sup> Both quotes from Bivier, *Fetes révolutionnaires*, 27.

<sup>33</sup> Thierry Gasnier "Le local, une et divisible," *Les lieux de mémoire*, Vol.3, 2. Les France, Traditions, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 465.

The changes brought about by the Revolution were not revolutionary. Nobles were able to return to their titles and to much of their land. [...] In the realm of politics, in contrast, almost everything changed. Thousands of men and even many woman gained firsthand experience in the political arena: they talked, they read, and listened in new ways; they voted; they joined new organizations; and they marched for political goals.<sup>34</sup>

In short, these years saw an emergence of a political culture where images (such as this one) were part of this construction.

The male citizen is represented *legally* through the process of election. Spectators sitting in the amphitheatre are witnessing their representative(s) entering the revolutionary circus. Each deputy has been elected to represent the citizens of a department and has come to Paris to take the oath which will secure his legal power to represent others. The image creates a space of representation for the citizen who both wills the law and obeys it. It is in this dual role that the citizen is now being legally represented. The legality of who could vote, however, was far from attaining the ideals of equality portrayed in the image. The systematic exclusion of women from the political sphere began as soon as laws regarding citizens rights were voted by the assembly.<sup>35</sup>

The social contract is ritualized by the community graphically represented on the bleachers of the circus. In contrast with the oath of the Ancien Regime -- when kings received "the supernatural insignia of power from a transcendent God during the ceremony of consecration,"<sup>36</sup> the oath of loyalty taken here, first enunciated by Louis XVI and then repeated by the crowd, "created sovereignty from within the community."<sup>37</sup> The loyalty of this oath took place in what Lynn Hunt calls a "mythic present," the instant a new community is being created, "the sacred moment of the new consensus."<sup>38</sup> What is important here are the words "new consensus" and "new community," for even if some authors have shown that the contractual gesture was modeled after the old egalitarian structure of the Masonic lodges, the visual representation reminded the viewers looking at this engraving that "they were the mythic heroes of their own

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34 Lynn Hunt resumes by saying that "Afterward, kings could not rule without assemblies, and noble domination of public affairs only provoked more revolution. As a result, France in the nineteenth century had the most bourgeois polity in Europe, even though France was never the leading industrial power." Both quotes are from Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), 221.

35 For the issue of democracy and the exclusion of women, refer to Geneviève Fraisse, *Muse et raison: la démocratie exclusive et la différence des sexes*, (Paris: Alinéa, 1989).

36 Jean Starobinski, *1789 -- Les Emblèmes de la Raison* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), 66-67. Published in English as *1789: The Emblems of Reason*, trans. Barbara Bray, (Charlottesville, VA, 1982).

37 Ibid.

38 Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class*, 27.

revolutionary epic.”<sup>39</sup> Hence the engraver of the panorama needed to show people not as a static entity but in movement, running about and marching into the circus. These people are depicted in the midst of creating their own ‘revolutionary epic’.

Returning to the plan inscribed on the banner, I now want to explore how the citizen has been represented as a *moral* individual. The moral dimension of a civic event such as this one preoccupied architects like Ledoux and Boullée. Places that had been used for the official festivities of the old regime were criticized for not allowing people to see, let alone to participate; open spaces were often so narrow that only the king and his suite could fit in. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the crowd of spectators had virtually acquired a ‘right to see’. Boullée asks rhetorically, “why announce the general happiness through an excessively expensive festival if the public cannot share the joy? It is a derision, and such a derision is a citizen's offense.” In his *Essai sur l'art*, Boullée wrote a great deal about the role of new civic monuments in helping to direct the minds of citizens correctly.

It is also by offering to men an attractive power that one can sway them from evil. What could this attraction be? The national pleasures. Yes, the national pleasures. All that is offered to our senses is also given over to our soul. It is a principle from which all national spectacles should be conducted, and if they all were, it would most certainly be a great way to form and maintain the good social morality.<sup>40</sup>

If the mind of a good citizen can be formed by civic festivals, then architecture acquires a central role in transforming subjects of the king into citizens of the nation. For architecture is not simply symbolic, it makes visible this great moral principle of the good individual by literally “making space” for these new citizens in the amphitheatre.

Represented geometrically, the new circus is given as a simultaneous whole. The circus is shown from above, as a plan. The view is a totalizing one but does not place the viewer in a specific place since the point of view is in the sky. It is a construction as an idea or an ideal construction, but it should not be confused with an imaginary place, an uninhabitable place -- here the power of the plan resides in this universality.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>40</sup> Etienne-Louis Boullée, *Architecture, Essai sur l'art*, comp. J.M. Pérouse de Montclos (Paris: Collection Miroir de l'art, Hermann, 1968), 121.

In the plan, a new citizen is formed through the commemorative festival: a citizen who rejects all theatrical illusions associated with the court fêtes and strives for the transparency of hearts in an indivisible community brought together in one place by civic fervor. "When the festival is present in men's hearts, theatres are redundant"<sup>41</sup> says Rousseau. Rousseau's conception of the festival constructed a way of looking at civic gatherings that greatly influenced revolutionary architectural discourse on monuments. Those sitting on the bleachers for example, were conceived as citizens looking at each other (as opposed to watching a spectacle) because they themselves have become the spectacle to be admired. Ideally, there should be nothing in the centre of the amphitheatre.

This community of wills would be sufficiently satisfying to cause the individual to renounce any other object of desire. There would be, literally, no more objects. For this regenerated festival would be nothing other than the awakening of a collective subject, born to itself, becoming aware of itself in all its members, in each of its participants.<sup>42</sup>

Would the ritual performed by Louis XVI on the altar be ephemeral enough to satisfy Rousseau's vision of the regenerated festival? The plan answers this question by emphasizing the circularity of the communal space and de-emphasizing the altar.

To realize such a transparency, Boullée proposes in words what he had drawn up as a project for an amphitheatre on Place de l'Etoile. "The national pleasures are noble and imposing. It is under the gaze of everyone that the soul of the citizen raises and becomes pure."<sup>43</sup> The soul can be purified if, and only if, citizens are looking at one another. "Imagine three hundred thousand people gathered under an amphitheatrical order where no one could escape the gaze of the others."<sup>44</sup> Each person sitting in the circus can see everyone else, and in turn no one can escape the gaze of the others. In a sense, the plan of the circus is the panopticon turned inside out. As Foucault remarks, "Rousseau would have said [that] each overseer should become a comrade. Take Emile: Emile's tutor is an overseer, he must also become a comrade."<sup>45</sup> The plan allows each overseer to become a comrade through the intensity of the crisscrossing of the gazes across

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<sup>41</sup> Jean Starobinski, "The Festival of Iconoclasm," *The Invention of Liberty, 1700-1789*, trans. Bernard C. Swift (Geneva, 1964), 101.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> "Les plaisirs nationaux sont nobles et imposants. C'est sous les yeux de tous que l'âme du citoyen s'élève et s'épure." Boullée, *Architecture*, 121.

<sup>44</sup> "Que l'on se figure trois cent mille personnes réunies sous un ordre amphitheatral ou nul ne pourrait échapper aux regards de la multitude." Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Michel Foucault, "The eye of power," in *Power/knowledge: selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 152.

the open space where "there no longer exist any zones of darkness, zones established by privileges of royal power or the prerogatives of some corporation, zones of disorder."<sup>46</sup>

The amphitheatre proposes a space of transparency -- in such a space Rousseau (along with Diderot) envisioned the fullness of collective joy. In his nostalgic description of the festivals or gatherings of the ancients or the improvisations of popular festivals, Rousseau saw "each person being equal to the rest."

Starobinski continues, "their awareness of this reciprocity would be the very substance of the gathering. They would celebrate a new transparency: hearts would hide no more secrets, communication would be completely free of obstacles."<sup>47</sup> The moral power of the festival would arise from its simplicity, in the words of Boullée, his festival would be "an eloquent pedagogy to save man from degradation."<sup>48</sup> To reach transparency, the iconoclastic space abolished all decorative background, recognizing only its own image and proclaiming that collective presence in itself, by its own simplicity, suffices to create the moral impact of the festival.

In its utopian dimension, the commemorative circus proposes a geometry of mutual surveillance that most strongly counteracts the gaze of absolutism. Most of the images representing the Fête de la Fédération gave little space to the royal family -- the king is one among many other overseers. From the written accounts of those present in the circus, it seems that some felt pity for the king and his obvious lack of power, while others were enchanted to see everyone happily reunited in "one large family."

But here is not the place to uncover the debates surrounding the fête in 1790, rather to understand the ideas associated with the architecture of the amphitheatre since it is the architecture that was copied in 1989 on Place de la Concorde. It seems reasonable to assume that if the Mitterand government decided to spend over six million francs to build grandstands identical to those built in 1790 for one night, it is because they felt it was important to do so. Now, I want to turn to the last memory associated with the amphitheatre and the site: the execution of Louis XVI on Place de la Révolution, now called Place de la Concorde.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Starobinski, "Festival of Iconoclasm," 101.

<sup>48</sup> Boullée, *Architecture*, 121.

### *The third memory: the execution of Louis XVI*

During the revolution, the great theatre organized around the guillotine was performed "to forge a public conscience", in the words of Saint-Just, that could be regenerated after centuries of oppression under the absolutism of monarchy. In his analysis of the revolutionary imagination, Daniel Arasse says "whether we want it or not -- and it is of course the adversaries of the revolution that hold on to it the most -- the guillotine is one of the major images in which the revolution has been represented."<sup>49</sup> The association between the King's death and the revolution has been used by historians to describe the French revolution as violent and cataclysmic in contrast to the slow and relatively peaceful American revolution.

Unlike the heroes of the classical world or medieval romance, whose heroic status is not solely constituted by their deaths, but by their deeds while living, death was practically the only guarantee for the men and women of the French Revolution of heroic status. Death, by 1789, had become part of the cultural "plot," in Margaret Mead's sense, of French culture, and one of extreme importance because it was one of the few elements which could reconcile all the confused and worrying aspects that culture presented.<sup>50</sup>

Not only were a great number of images printed and circulated on the theme of the guillotine during the revolution, but the association between the French revolution and the guillotine was drawn upon throughout the nineteenth century. For example, in 1820, Victor Hugo commented on the enduring symbolism of the death machine, "for our fathers the revolution is the greatest thing the genius of an Assembly could do [...]. For our mothers, the revolution is the guillotine."<sup>51</sup>

As was clear in the exhibit analysed in the previous chapter, the guillotine continues to cast a shadow on the memory of the revolution. Historically though, the guillotine "became the instrument of the death sentence of Justice under the republican government. Ironically it is people from the left who, during the nineteenth century will lobby most strongly to have it disappear. It is Robert Badinter, *garde des Sceaux* under the socialist government, who eradicated the death penalty in 1981."<sup>52</sup> The guillotine was still used, if rarely, up to the time of the abolition of all death penalties in 1981. But many people who are now between 50 and 70 years old could have gone to a public execution by guillotine when they were young and have their own memories of this horrible

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<sup>49</sup> Daniel Arasse, *La guillotine et l'imaginaire de la terreur* (Paris, Flammarion, 1987), 14.

<sup>50</sup> Outram, *The Body*, 150.

<sup>51</sup> Cited in Arasse, *La guillotine et l'imaginaire*, 13.

<sup>52</sup> Jean Garrigues, *Images de la Revolution, L'imagerie républicaine de 1789 à nos jours* (Paris: Editions du May, 1989), 38.

spectacle. The image of the guillotine remains alive in people's minds, it was often mentioned in the press coverage of the bicentennial -- I even overheard two people discussing whether or not the head, after it has been severed from the body, retains its mental capacity for a few moments. Even though the machine has been called the "zero-degree of punishment,"<sup>53</sup> and perhaps for the victim it is, the gruesome spectacle of execution has preoccupied the public since the invention of the machine, so much so that the revolutionary years have handed down to us many stories about seeing lips moving or an eye blink after the head was cut off.

For the purpose of this chapter, I am only looking at images representing the guillotine on what is now the Place de la Concorde. In addition, I have chosen to focus on images representing the execution of the king rather than that of Danton, Robespierre, the Queen or others, simply because the image of Louis XVI's execution has been and still is the most diffused representation of an execution, both during the revolution and today. Counter-revolutionary forces abroad reproduced countless images of the king's death, in order to caricature bloodthirsty revolutionaries as well as to depict the scene as a "real event". And today, the guide book of "revolutionary Paris," printed in all languages of the European Community and available at any newsstand, reproduced an engraving of the king's execution to illustrate a major landmark of the revolutionary era.

In French schools, the story of the king's death has been constructed as an inevitable event. This corresponds with Lynn Hunt's interpretation of the event, "to regain their own political responsibilities as citizens, to take power for themselves, the French had to eliminate all those symbolic connections to monarchy and the king's body. Eventually this took the form of putting the king on trial and executing him in public."<sup>54</sup> In a spirit of regeneration, the republic has been constructed as rising from ashes of the monarchy like the mythical phoenix. This story of origins, this "'birth of the Republic', is inextricably linked with the death of the king and this is the reason why it reappeared in the press with such vigor when the circus was rebuilt on the site of the guillotine.

Even though a number of scholars explain<sup>55</sup> that the divine right of kings was in sharp decline, Arasse argues that there was still an entire set of rituals

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<sup>53</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

<sup>54</sup> Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class*, 55.

<sup>55</sup> For example Roger Chartier, *Les Origines Culturelles de la Révolution Française* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1991).

surrounding the king which constantly reinforced the uniqueness of his person. The political weight of the court was eroding and it seems safe to say that many people saw the death of Louis XVI as the end to monarchical power. Madame de Stael for example, writes about the day of the king's execution and looks back at the Fête de la Fédération for premonitions of what was to come. "The king walked on foot to the altar all the way to the extremity of the champ de Mars [...]. When he climbed the steps of the altar, we thought we saw a saintly victim offering himself voluntarily for the sacrifice [...]. The next time people saw him was on the scaffold."<sup>56</sup> The Fête de la Fédération and the execution of the king are bound together in her words in an unavoidable relationship to one another. In that respect, the exact overlap of the altar at the centre of the amphitheatre during the Fête de la Fédération and the scaffold on the Place de la Revolution realized Madame de Stael's premonition with an intriguing perfection.

Arrasse categorizes the numerous depictions of the king's execution, whether in image or in text, into two modes of description: the 'mystical' and the 'objective'. Monarchists narrated the event in the mystical mode, representing the king as a victim. Republicans used an objective mode, where the last pathetic attempts of the king to take charge of the situation only generate pity from the crowd. His textual analysis of the two modes shows that many descriptions of the king's execution were not based on eyewitness accounts, but on images of the guillotine that were already circulating in France prior to the execution. These images were depicting the execution of common criminals during the trial period of the guillotine. Depictions of this new machine were widely circulated in Europe. So the images representing the death of the king (drawing from these images) were redrawn either to support the revolution or to condemn it; to draw a moral/objective lesson from the event or a spiritual one. "In the royalist version, the mystical king offers himself as a victim to the sacrifice; in the republican version, the objective uncertainty of the events represents the uncertainty of the king himself who, on the scaffold, still thinks that his supporters will save him; his attitude is proof of the aristocratic plot"<sup>57</sup> (figs. 4.8 and 4.9).

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<sup>56</sup> Cited in Arrasse, *La guillotine et l'imaginaire*, 71.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.





Figure 4.8

"THE MARTYRDOM OF LOUIS XVI, KING OF FRANCE"

Engraving by George Cruikshank. Musée de la révolution française, château de Vizille. Reproduced in Daniel Arasse, *La guillotine et l'imaginaire de la terreur* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), 92.

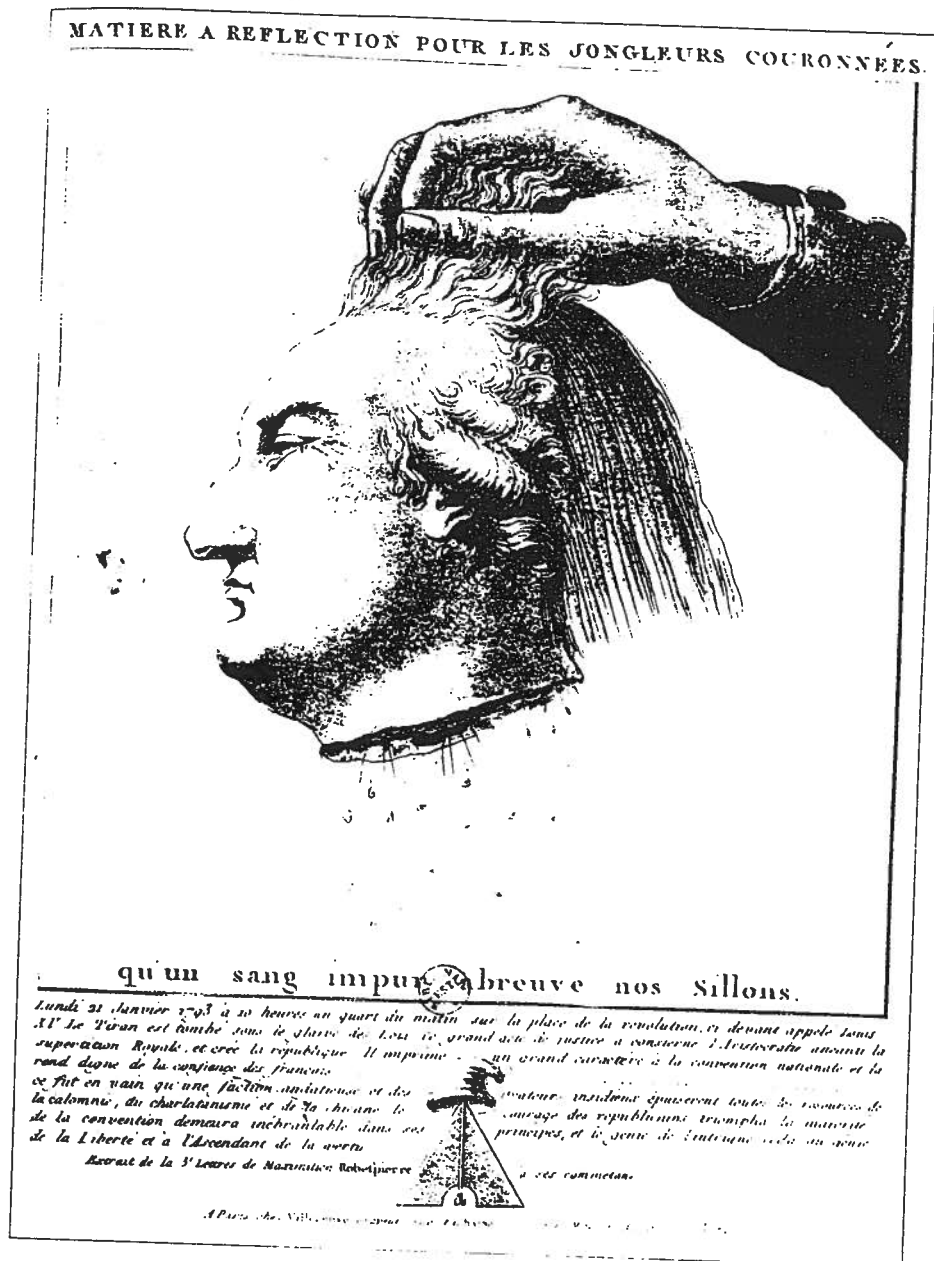


Figure 4.9

"SOMETHING FOR CROWNED JUGGLERS TO THINK ABOUT"

"Matière à réflexion pour les jongleurs couronnés," engraving by Villeneuve. Musée Carnavalet. Reproduced in Arasse, *La guillotine*, 94.

In textual descriptions, the death of the king resisted the banality and equality of the guillotine. In fact, Arasse argues, "this mechanical banality transformed the symbolic value of the death sentence. It multiplied it, producing its own effect, specifically political."<sup>58</sup> Sebastier Mercier writes his account of the execution,

Could it be the same man, who I see being hustled by four executioner's lackeys, forcibly undressed, his voice drowned by the drums and trussed to a plank, still squirming and resisting so that he receives the cut from the guillotine, not on his neck, but mangling the occiput and the jaw?<sup>59</sup>

In contrast, here is the account of Ballanche, a royalist,

Immobile, my gaze arrested, I saw one of the executioners cut the hair of the august victim; but I didn't see the head of my King fall under the ordeal of iron. A band of light, at that moment, stretched over my eyes, blinding me, and changed the instant of sacrifice into a celestial apparition. I didn't hear what the executioner said as he presented the head to the people, nor the sinister shout of triumph which, I was assured, rose on its own out of the heart of this gloomy and religious silence.<sup>60</sup>

These images and texts worked within a long tradition of representing the heroic deed of the king, further emphasizing the uniqueness of his death at the scaffold. Alluding to Louis Marin's work on the eucharistic model in absolutism, Arasse says that "by sacrificing this body made sacred through the theory of the divine right, the revolution effected a sort of inversion of the eucharistic sacrifice and, at the same time, it founded and consecrated the republic."<sup>61</sup> Within this view, the reality of the death of the king was absolutely unattainable since it operates in the realm of the symbolic.

For the purpose of my project, I need to understand more precisely how the image of the king's execution worked. I chose the engraving by Helman which was reproduced in a popular guidebook<sup>62</sup> and, I discovered later, was also reproduced in Furet's first edition of *La Revolution*.<sup>63</sup> The image (fig. 4.10) represents the moment after the king's death: the moment when the Monarchy is no more and the Republic is born. The engraving corresponds to Arasse's 'objective' mode of textual description and to what Louis Marin has called a 'real' depiction. That is, the scene is full of details -- like the correct position of the guillotine on the plaza and the proportion of the army surrounding the scaffold

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 14. For more information on this particular analysis of the eucharistic model and absolutism see Marin, *Portrait du roi*.

<sup>62</sup> Georges Poisson, *Paris, au temps de la Revolution: 1789-1989* (Florence, Italy: Bonechi 1989), 16.

<sup>63</sup> François Furet and Denis Richet, *La Revolution* (Paris: Hachette, 1966), 262.

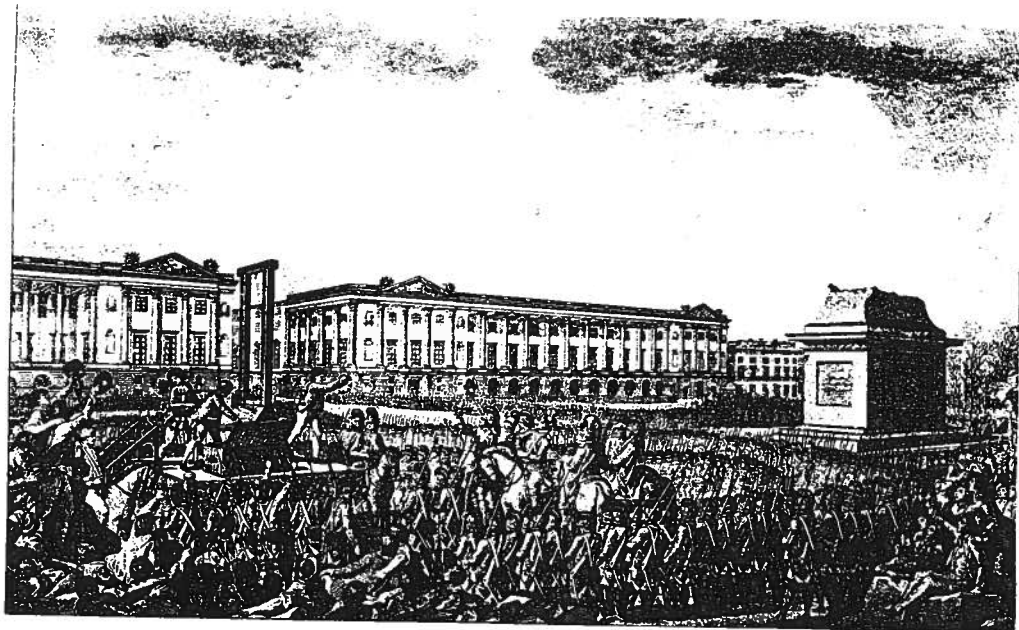


Figure 4.10  
EXECUTION OF LOUIS XVI ON PLACE DE LA RÉVOLUTION,  
21 JANUARY 1793

Engraving by Helman after Monnet. Musée Carnavalet. Reproduced in *Paris au temps de la révolution*, ed. Georges Poisson (Florence: Bonechi, 1989), 16.

in relation to the crowd of spectators -- to construct a 'realistic' view of the event.

This contrasts with images which show the platform entirely surrounded by people witnessing the birth of the Republic at the moment of death of the king. But unlike the 'objective' textual description by Mercier, the 'real' visual depiction concealed certain details like the badly cut head of the king, for the head has to be represented whole.

The perspective Helman uses in this image establishes two axes. One reveals the street (rue Royale) which separates the two major buildings defining the Place de la Revolution: these are now the Hotel Crillon, on the left, and the Maritime Ministry, on the right (the building from which, in 1989, the seven heads of state watched the parade). The other axis places the guillotine in line with the pedestal that once carried the statue of Louis XV and the entrance to the Tuileries. By choosing this 'station point' (the point from which he views), the engraver has been able to superimpose the guillotine over the street between the two buildings and, more importantly, can direct the gaze of the viewer toward the pedestal. As I already mentioned in the previous chapter, after a decree requesting that all traces of royalty be destroyed, the inscriptions on the pedestal were effaced and the statue of Louis XV was toppled; hence the blank side represents not only a pedestal without a statue but a name that has been erased.

This association through alignment both covers and reveals how the execution of the king is inscribed in the Parisian landscape. The plaza is mute about the birth of the republic yet, at the same time, it reveals the end of the monarchy. The line visually connecting Louis XVI on the scaffold and Louis XV's name erased from the pedestal retraces the lineage of the Bourbon dynasty, a lineage that is doubly severed and annihilated forever. But this axis also extends beyond the image into the more remote past of the court, from the Champs Elysées on the left of the image (first established as a piece of urban design under Louis XIV) and towards the entrance to the Tuileries Gardens right (of the Louvre palace, the royal residence until Louis XVI and his family were arrested in Varennes).

As the axis of the rue Royale enters the space of the plaza, it is interrupted by the scaffold which metaphorically becomes the frame of a doorway. By not having to draw in the blade of the guillotine (since it has already fallen down and is hidden behind the wood), the engraver has allowed the guillotine to acquire its secondary meaning as a door, the threshold between monarchy and

republicanism. As Arasse remarks, "the desacralization of the king (in his death) sacralizes the Revolution (in its foundation), and the instrument shaped like a door through which this passage takes place in this exchange receives its true symbolic function."<sup>64</sup> In this image, the symbolic function of the guillotine (as a door) is reinforced by the members of the crowd on the left who are pointing toward it with their hats.

The king has not been executed by a sword, the traditional privilege of the aristocracy. Death by guillotine brings Louis XVI into the realm of the common law. The guillotine as an abstract machine dissolves the explosive shock of the sacred body of the king conjoined with the profane body of the headsman at the moment of death. By transforming the headsman into a citizen/executioner, the introduction of the guillotine during the revolution broke this spectacular convergence of sacred and profane and substituted in its place a spectacle of *reason* and *justice*, in principle, if not in fact.

It is precisely because a large number of people still believed in the divinity of the king's body that the revolutionary government saw an opportunity to operate a symbolic transfer from monarchy to republicanism by having the king executed in public. As Lynn Hunt explains, "because the Bourbons had emphasized the symbolic trappings of rule, revolutionaries were particularly sensitive to their significance."<sup>65</sup> Except for the army, all the spectators present at the execution have been represented as *sans-culottes*. Their presence legitimizes the act as a revolutionary act by graphically representing popular support for what Robespierre called "a political vengeance." In his own words, "the punitive act of Louis has to have the solemn character of a political vengeance."<sup>66</sup> In that respect, the image is careful to not over-emphasize people's joy. As witnesses to this historical moment, the crowd is represented as both serious and impressed. A number of faces have been drawn with their mouths open to represent the moment when, the executioner showing the head of the king to the crowd, people shouted "Vive la Nation!" In short, the image inscribes the moment when the proof of death liberates the citizens' voices who can now call out their new life into the open air. An opened mouth is the visual representation of "Vive la Nation!" but there is more to these faces: there is their gaze.

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<sup>64</sup> Arasse, *La guillotine*, 71.

<sup>65</sup> Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class*, 55.

<sup>66</sup> Robespierre: "Il faut que la punition de Louis ait le caractère solennel d'une vengeance politique." Cited in Arasse, *La guillotine*, 70.

Everyone is looking at the head of the dead king, with the exception of three executioners who are busy around the scaffold. The entire plaza is filled with people encircling the guillotine. But the body of the king is split in two. His head is presented to the crowd, while his body remains strapped horizontally to the wooden plank. The crowd could not actually see the moment of death; the blade falls too quickly to be seen by the human eye creating, according to Arrasse, a terribly anguishing void between life and death. This void was quickly invested with fantastic stories of endless imagination. The uniqueness of the king's body, or more specifically the uniqueness of the king's blood, provoked people in the crowd to come and dip their handkerchief in the royal blood. This unexpected turn of events was later put aside by the 'objective descriptions' as a fable motivated by superstitious royalists. In this pro-revolutionary depiction of the execution of Louis XVI, no one samples the blood.

The memories I have chosen to explore here are those that were most accessible as images during the bicentennial, from the construction of the amphitheatre by volunteers in 1790 and the Festival of the Federation to the execution of the king. The accessibility of these images and the memories associated with them is important to recognize as we move on to the allegorical interpretation of the reconstructed circus on the Place de la Concorde -- allegories point back "as if puzzling to remember an original meaning that has been lost."<sup>67</sup> Here, I will argue, the amphitheatre and the way it was filled during 1989 turned around the way the sense of unity had been constructed in 1790.

### **The Amphitheatre in 1989**

For some commemoratively-minded persons, the Place de la Concorde is a site forever soiled by the blood spilt by the "head-chopper." In January of 1993, a royalist group organised a ceremony to commemorate the day of the king's death. *Time* magazine reported in its "Traveller's Advisory",

'I die innocent!' shouted a dignified King Louis XVI on the scaffold next to the guillotine on January 21, 1793. Minutes later, as a mob bayed below, the King was dead. To mark the bicentennial this Thursday, a royalist group will gather at the execution's exact time, 10:22 a.m., and venue, the Place de la Concorde. The mourners will

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<sup>67</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing, Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 184.

lay wreaths, join in prayers and hear readings from the King's last will and testament.<sup>68</sup>

The small manifestation on the Place de la Concorde was attended by members of the Bourbon family. "During this event, a group of counter-demonstrators cut the head off a sheep and held it aloft on a pike, jeering at the royalist ritual."<sup>69</sup>

But for others, the death of the king was more ambiguously remembered. Although the Bastille Day parade terminated at the site of the king's execution, the festivities did not link the celebration of the birth of the republic with the sacrificial killing of the king. The guillotine in the centre of the plaza has been replaced with a large fountain gushing water day and night as a symbol of life. The memory of death associated with the site brings Edgar Morin to reflect on the meaning of the king's death,

when we witness the court that condemned Louis XVI from today's point of view, we acquit the king, but when we situate ourselves in a place detached from today in the mythological-reality of the Revolution, then assume the death sentence of the king. This point of view calls upon us not to 'vote' the death or the acquittal of the king after the fact, but to maintain in us a doubly contradictory attitude -- one in which we refuse this death sentence and the other in which we confirm it. Far from eliminating all incertitudes or ambiguity within us, this other point of view can only increase them.<sup>70</sup>

In other words, Morin calls for a secular form of meditation on the past that investigates the contradiction of historical events by accepting their mythological dimension.

### *The guests in the amphitheatre*

Those sitting in the monumental amphitheatre saw each of the floats descending the Champs Elysées and circling the circus before exiting into the Tuileries gardens. Only they had the experience of 'being there' as Jessye Norman sang the *Marsellaise* at the climactic moment of the evening. The choice of who would sit in the amphitheatre that night is directly related to the question of how the Nation was represented in 1989.

The Mission decided to invite people with the name of Marianne (the name of the allegory of Liberty) and people born on the 14th of July. It seems quite random that these people, for reasons not of their own making, are meant to

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68 "Traveler's advisory", *Time*, 25 January 1993, p. 2.

69 *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 24-31 January, 1993.

70 Edgar Morin, "89 régénéré, Révolution et démocratie," *Le Monde*, 9 June 1989, p.2.



represent, we could say, the typical French citizen. The Mission also, in an act which seems more politically à-propos, invited people who work for non-governmental organizations which advocate human rights world-wide, such as Amnesty International, Médecins sans frontières, etc. The people who work for human rights organizations are 'representative', but they are not elected; in fact, they work outside of governmental structures. As advocates for human rights, their symbolic representation in the circus transcends national boundaries. It is another example of Jeanennay's desire for evangelization, for celebrating those who, like missionaries, set out in the world and act on their beliefs in the universal application of greater ideals. When the bleachers of the amphitheatre are filled with representatives of human rights organizations and those who (because of their name or their birthdate) typify the 'revolutionary' French citizen, they are united in a continuous ring, witnessing each other and reflecting back to the televisual audience the image of a Nation represented by a collective body of people.

The form of the amphitheatre still carries the symbolism of unity and indivisibility, however, according to Thierry Gasnier, when the paraders enter the circus, that meaning becomes inverted. He says, and I agree with him, that the circus and the paraders of 1989 was an attempt to create the multiple out of the one -- while in 1790, the Fête de la Fédération was creating the one out of the multiple. In other words, the bicentennial parade insisted (and I will come back to this in Chapter Seven), on the diversity of cultures and on differences within French culture -- that is breaking up the notion of oneness into multiple differences. If we juxtapose two images -- one of the 1790 Fête full of representatives of the nation and one of the 1989 circus, full of paraders from the provinces -- we can see that the former emphasizes the notion of indivisibility and the latter local differences (figs. 4.11 and 4.12). In this photograph from 1989, the dancers represent the French provinces, not in their similarity but in their differences. Their costumes are constituted of the symbols of the regional flags, brought together into a collage of textures and colors. They wear clogs, symbols of the farmer, to link the notion of regional difference to rural culture. Everything in these paraders points to local and regional specificity. Thirty years ago, a farmer was synonymous with rustic in the sense of being rough. The clogs, yesterday symbols of poverty related to hay and manure, today are emblems of a avant-garde turn to nature -- an ideological turn around that leaves the old

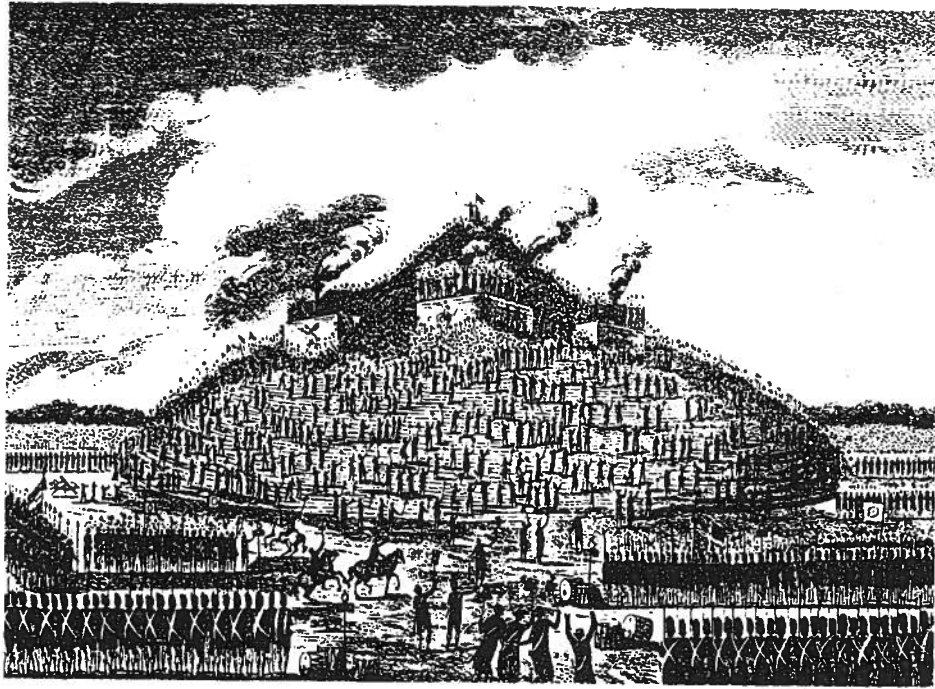


Figure 4.11

THE DEPUTIES GATHER AT THE CENTRAL ALTAR  
DURING THE FÊTE DE LA FÉDÉRATION

Anonymous engraving. Musée Carnavalet. Reproduced in Pierre Nora, ed., *Le lieux de mémoire III: Les France, vol. 2, Traditions*. Paris: Gallimard, 1992., 462.

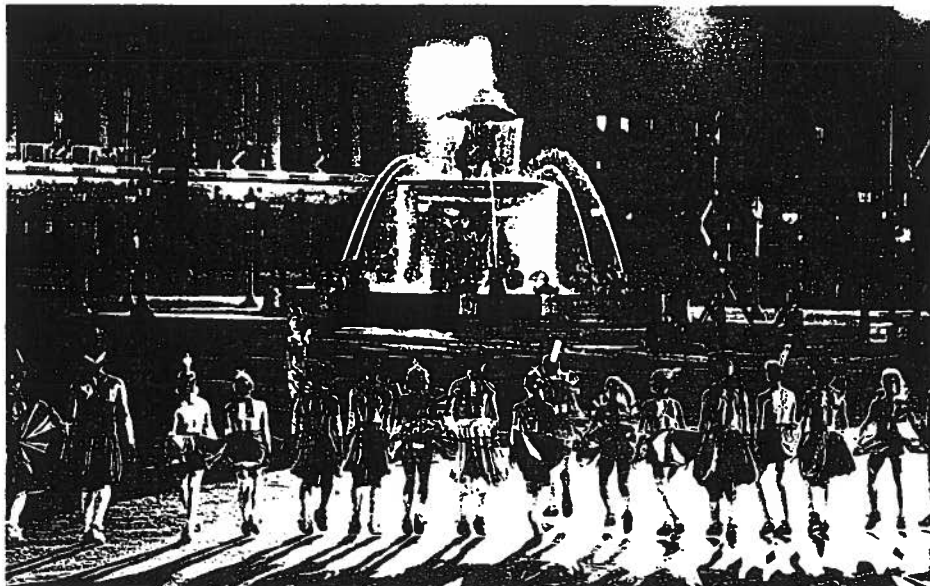


Figure 4.12

THE 'TRIBES OF FRANCE' FORM A CIRCLE  
AT THE CULMINATION OF THE BASTILLE DAY PARADE, 1989

Photograph reproduced in Nora, ed., *lieux de mémoire III: 462*.

farmers in the French countryside astonished.<sup>71</sup>

The countryside becomes a place to be from, and not just a place of agricultural production. The wearing of wooden clogs contributes to construct this new meaning. This celebration of folk culture in the parade, both in the form of folk music and costumes derived from folk traditions, points back to Rousseau's country feast. In both instances the fountain provides the central focus of the festive event around which men and women dance under the open sky. The sense of "collective joy" described by Rousseau, is here carefully designed by drawing from pre-modern cultures -- the implication in both cases being that folk cultures have a direct access to joy.

The reconstruction of the amphitheatre points back to the Festival of Federation and its circus that physically expressed the notion of citizens coming together on an equal basis. The French Nation was made visible, unified by the architecture of the circus, and at the same time, infinitely divisible because of the newly acquired rights for each and every citizen. Today, Thierry Gasnier argues that the notion of being "one" poses a problem.

The fundamental dogma of unity and diversity has tended to shift toward the multiple. The national, as producer of unity, already weakened by France's loss of power in the world and by decolonization, is diluted further in the process of constructing Europe, it has now lost its visibility in the debates about immigration.<sup>72</sup>

The resurgent popularity of traditional provincial identity, the return of local languages -- especially in the south -- was paralleled by a political decision to promote decentralization in 1982. Tourism further increases the necessity for regionalism in its promotion of local foods, landscapes and experiences.<sup>73</sup>

In this constellation of image fragments, the Nation "en fete" is being redefined into an image of plurality that finds its unity only by sharing the same memories associated with the place where they are gathered that night. The memories of 1790 inscribed in the amphitheatre are reinforced by the images depicting its original construction in 1790 and the Federation Festival. The Place de la

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71 Henri Mandras, *La Seconde Révolution française 1965-1984* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 40

72 Thierry Gasnier, "Le local, une et divisible," *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed.) Pierre Nora, vol.3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1992): 463-4.

73 The history of the relationship between a national sense of unity and an insistence on regional culture is neither linear nor simple. One must distinguish between 'cultural regionalism' that, Gasnier argues, has been encouraged since the mid-nineteenth century and the decentralisation of power put in place by the Socialists in 1982. At the time of the bicentennial, aspects of decentralisation were combined with the cultural politics of developing regional music and gastronomy (already begun a century earlier) that was assuming increasing importance with a rise in tourism. Gasnier, "Le local," 463.

Concorde, on the other hand, act as a reminder of the execution of the King where the fountain has come to replace the guillotine. The king operates as a link between the two sets of memories by associating the altar where he took the oath of indivisibility of King, Nation and Law and the termination of that oath with his execution. To recall the premonition of Madame de Staël, "the king walked on foot to the altar all the way to the extremity of the champ de Mars [...]. When he climbed the steps of the altar, we thought we saw a saintly victim offering himself voluntarily for the sacrifice [...]. The next time people saw him was on the scaffold."<sup>74</sup>

All three images create a set of reference associated with this amphitheatre in this particular place on this symbolic date of the 14th of July. These references create the unifying tradition against which the multiplicity of the paraders can be read by the spectators. In other words, the multiplicity of the dancers with clogs only becomes meaningful in terms of the memories inscribed in the amphitheatre located in this particular place. And here lies the double meaning of the site: on one hand it speaks of a unity of commemorative tradition and on the other hand it speaks of a multiplicity of the commemorative practice.

Unlike the designers of the revolutionary festivals who drew from history, looking to Ancient Rome for symbols and models and making them their own, historical references here are images from archival documents that have been reprinted and circulated in the form of postcards and in guidebooks. It is a history preserved in archives, a history constituted by traces. The preservationist attitude toward knowledge weaves an even tighter fabric with commemorative rituals since the commission for the preservation of national monuments is the same commission responsible for the conservation of textual heritage. Hence the allegorical power of the juxtaposition of the memory images of the Fete de la Federation, the King's execution and Place de la Concorde as a site of memory. This commemoration no longer operates as a way to institutionalize nationalism, for the bicentennial of 1989 made archival memory symbolically operative by enacting the commemorative act in real time in a real place. The next chapter takes an in-depth look at the climactic moment of the parade when Jessye Norman enters the amphitheatre to sing the National Anthem. The memories associated with this site are then layered with her performance allegorically representing Liberty and the Nation.

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<sup>74</sup> Cited in Arasse, *La guillotine*, 71.

## A BLACK MARIANNE ON BASTILLE DAY

As I looked into the debates that occurred around the status of nationalism and the idea of liberty in France during the bicentennial, I was struck by the enormous distance between on the one hand, the discourses about the lowly status of the nation by historians such as Pierre Nora, François Furet and Pascal Ory and on the other hand, the coverage by *Liberation* of people's participation during the bicentennial parade which revealed quite a different attitude towards symbols, ideals and revolutionary heroes. The organizers of the bicentennial had "decided" that nationalism was obsolete, that the story of the revolution should not be told through events and heroes but through the life of the common people, and that, in any case, the display of Liberty would only provoke cynical comments. Historians such as Furet had argued for "the end of the traditional idea of the nation."<sup>1</sup> Even though the historians I refer to here have argued for the end of the traditional conception of the Nation, this has not been the case in the political parties of the extreme right; which have not lost that tradition and in effect simply added to it. The party of Le Pen for example, has continued a well established tradition of the Nation based on race and exclusion.<sup>2</sup>

Most of what Europeans know about the 1789 revolution was learned at school (heroes and dates) and in France, this knowledge is confirmed through the practice of republican rituals, established since the 1880s. For most people, republican "dogma" and commemorative rituals such as Bastille Day balls have become intertwined with their historical knowledge of the Revolution. This distance between what the historians had written and popular culture became evident as very few people visited the main exhibition in the Tuileries Gardens dedicated to "explain" the revolution. This exhibit, called *La Memoire Longue*, completely removed the heroes of the revolution such as Robespierre and

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<sup>1</sup> Cited by Yves Lacoste in "Éditorial: De la nation," *Hérodote: La France une nation, des citoyens*, nos. 50-51, (Jul-Dec 1988): 4.

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of this tradition see Herman Lebovics, *True France, The Wars over Cultural Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

Danton and replaced them with a narrative of events (with figures entirely unknown to the public), was intended to give a context to the Declaration of the Rights of Men and the Citizen and show how concerns about the Declaration were still active today. It soon became clear that this revised history was not popular with the crowds because most people could not recognize revolutionary figures they knew.<sup>3</sup>

By contrast, the exhibit at the Forum level of the Pompidou Centre, conceived by Michel Vovelle, drew from a wide range of images and textual quotes, many of which were already known to the audience. People were queuing up to enter and audience responses were overall quite positive.<sup>4</sup> The contrast between these two exhibits illustrates the limits of abstract argumentation in commemorations, a point also made by Pascal Ory after the bicentennial was over. The Mission had invested a great deal of efforts to "illustrate" the relevance of the Rights of Man, not only with the exhibit *La Memoire Longue*, also by having a special television show on the hot date of the 13th of July about the need for human rights in countries ranging from the Kurdistan to China followed by a two hour round table discussion.

But even with all these efforts of concretize, all these speeches insisting that it was in the every day life that the Rights of Man needed to be recognized in order to be better defended, the whole notion continued to suffer from a heavy charge of abstraction. The celebrations found more easily the attention of the public by personalizing the Great Principles of the day through a few heroes. The bicentennial organizers quickly realized that the reality of the Pantheanisation of revolutionary heroes was a solution (...) The mass media and the organizers, one more time, found themselves in agreement.<sup>5</sup>

Here again, we see the decision of the Mission to allegorize the Revolution by painting portraits of the Great Principles onto the narrative bodies of the

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Mission du Bicentenaire, between 25,000 and 30,000 visitors a day were expected and only 500 a day were coming at the time of my interview in early July, 1989. Later in the summer, after lowering the entry price and doing a great deal of advertisement the numbers increased, but not enough to prevent a serious loss by the investors.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, there are other factors involved in the difference of success between the two exhibits, the most obvious one being that the Forum was free and The Pompidou Centre already benefits of a regular public. But the difference in curating approaches still remains. For an analysis of visitors' responses to the exhibit at Pompidou Centre see Jacques Levy, "Changement d'ères," *Révolution fin et Suite*, ed. Patrick Garcia, Jacques Lévy and Marie-Flore Mattei (Paris: Espaces Temps Résonance): 75-95. For an explanation on how the exhibit was conceived see Michel Vovelle and Christian Marc Bosseno, "L'oeil du cyclone," *Le Monde de la Révolution française*, Special edition for the Forum at Centre George Pompidou (28 March-4 September, 1989), p.6. For an analysis of the public frequenting Pompidou, see Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, "Counting the Public or the Public that Counts?" *The Museum Time Machine*, ed. Robert Lumley (London: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> Ory, *Une Nation*, 225.

Revolutionaries, easily passing into the world of the mass media -- as I first mentioned in the introduction.<sup>6</sup>

In this chapter, I would like to show how the ideas of Liberty and the Nation found refuge in the allegory of the Nation and Liberty personified by Jessye Norman and how the need for revolutionary heroes resulted in the "discovery" of the Haitian revolutionary Toussaint Louverture. Both Jessye Norman and Toussaint operate within the most traditional forms of allegory. Jessye Norman performs the *personification* of abstract idea, in this case liberty and the Nation. Toussaint does the reverse. As an historical figure (who is long dead), the personality of Toussaint is treated in a formulaic manner so that he becomes a walking idea, a "narrative body" speaking about equality between races. This is called *figura*. For it is not an abstract idea personified but a person who represents an abstract idea. The emotional response to Jessye Norman's performance of the National anthem during the 14th of July parade will be my starting point to analyse the distance between academic influence on the curating of the bicentennial and people's responses to representations of the Nation, Liberty and revolutionary heroes during the celebration.

### Jessye Norman sings the National Anthem

Traditionally, the symbolic representations of Nation, Republic and Liberty have constituted the pillars of the commemorative model of the French revolution. But the proportional number of representations of each relative to the others has varied a great deal from commemoration to commemoration. In the first ten years of the revolution, Michel Vovelle counts relatively few representations of the Nation (3%) in the revolutionary festivals compared to those of Liberty (60%), Supreme Being (40%) or even Equality (35%).<sup>7</sup>

According to Pierre Nora, the Nation was a uniquely difficult notion to put into representation because France has known two successive versions of the Nation,

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<sup>6</sup> Of all the revolutionary figures, Condorcet has 'crossed over' into the world of the media with the most success. "In 1989, Condorcet only has good qualities: a scientist contested by no one, the author of *Plan d'éducation nationale* (which places him high up in the cultural realm), and the person most oriented toward a consensus, since he advocated equality between men and women, and between people of different races. He appears more as a contemporary man than a man of the eighteenth century -- and in the end, this forward thinking revolutionary was a casualty of the Terror, having committed suicide while imprisoned. This is difficult to surpass. Thus Condorcet was the one who attracted the most sophisticated tools of mass communication: starting in 1988, a colloquium about him was organised by the CNRS and two books were published, the following year a film about his life was directed by Michel Soutter, and a television series (in three sections) was aired at prime time on the national channel (TF1). In addition, there were specially printed medals honoring his Pantheonisation and a series of monuments raised in his honour. From Ory, *Une Nation*, 225.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Vovelle, *Combats pour la Revolution* (Paris: Editions la découverte, 1993), 320. The "Supreme Being" here refers to a theological and patriotic cult promoted by Robespierre and the Montagnards in 1794. An outgrowth of the spirit of the Enlightenment, it took its most ceremonial form during the "Fête de l'Être Supreme" (June 8, 1794) designed and orchestrated by David for Robespierre. The "Supreme Being" was the impersonal deity that created the universe.

both of which are complete: the monarchic nation that continued without interruption from Hugues Capet in 987, expanding to its absolute form under Louis XIV; followed by the revolutionary nation that is distinguished from the other by its radical break and the abstraction of the principles it is based on. The consequence of this, he argues, is that the "Revolution has installed a dynamic of continuity and national unity onto a negation of the unity and national continuity."<sup>8</sup> It is therefore in this contradictory situation that the "origin" of a symbol for the new Nation can be understood. From the day the convention voted in favour of adopting a female figure as an allegory of liberty in order to displace the images of the king as sole representative of the nation, the iconography of Marianne (the name given to the allegory) was far from stable.<sup>9</sup>

More should be said about the early years of revolutionary symbols, but for the moment, I would like to attract the reader's attention to the composite nature of the revolutionary allegory. This argument has been developed by Maurice Agulhon in *Marianne au combat*, where he shows that behind the all-inclusive ideal of Liberty, symbols of the Republic were used as constant reminders that liberty can only exist within a republican government.<sup>10</sup> From the work of Agulhon, Lynn Hunt and others, it becomes clear that French revolutionary allegories have not been as easily read as the official Catholic allegories. Although from 1789 onwards, there has been a constant effort to stabilize revolutionary iconography in national republican rituals, symbols have continually been reappropriated both within and outside France by radical groups. This instability can be seen as a source of empowerment, since the same image can be read in more ways than one, which widens the spectrum of personal investment. The composite and unstable nature of revolutionary rhetoric will become a real issue to be uncovered as I turn to the bicentennial's representation of Marianne in the parade, since it could be and *was* read in many different ways.

But before moving on to 1989, let us ask what was the space given to the traditional allegories in the other two major commemorations of 1889 and 1939? According to Pascal Ory, the centennial of the Revolution in 1889 was a self-

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<sup>8</sup> Pierre Nora, "Nation" in *Dictionnaire Critique de la Revolution Française* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988). "La Revolution, a installé une dynamique de la continuité nationale sur la négation de l'unité et de la continuité nationale."

<sup>9</sup> See Lynn Hunt, "The Many Bodies of Marie-Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution," *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991): 108-130.

<sup>10</sup> Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au combat: L'Imaginaire et la symbolique républicaines de 1789 à 1880* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979).



celebration of the third Republic and the allegory of the Republic was clearly brought to the foreground.<sup>11</sup> In power since September 1870, this government was immediately contested by the Commune and by the 1880's was under constant attack from the "Boulangiste" coalition (a group which gathered enemies of republican democracy from the right and the left). In these circumstances, everything possible was done to celebrate the Republic.

After the electoral triumph of January 1889, the president of the Republic Sadi Carnot, [...] constitutes a government to defend the Republic, it will gather all its forces to erase "boulangism". To do that, Carnot had a prestigious tool: the Universal Exposition, an exceptional showcase to the glory of the republican regime.<sup>12</sup>

In short, the 1889 centennial was born under the sign of the Republic and all sorts of events were planned to celebrate its "origins" -- a banquet dinner for all the mayors of France held in the Salle des Machines was one such event.

In contrast, the 150th birthday of the revolution occurred in 1939 and most of the events planned for it did not take place. As the year progressed, the events that did take place gradually adopted an aura of defending the Nation and the liberty of its citizens.

The left, awakened by the *Front populaire*, did not want to leave the monopoly of the 150th birthday to triumphant nationalism. Yet they could not help but realise that the largest success of the commemoration was the military parade of the 14th of July. Even if 150,000 people marched from the Place de la Bastille to the Place de la Nation [... a traditional route for the left in the east of Paris] their voices were drowned out by the military music of the parade. The Socialists said nothing -- they were paralysed by fear.<sup>13</sup>

The 150th birthday emphasized the Nation; and the centennial, the Republic.

By 1989, year of the bicentennial, academic literature seemed to agree that in France, the image of Marianne had become "banal."<sup>14</sup> In his book on the history of republican symbols, Jean Garrigues shows that different parties continually fought over the meaning of the national symbols until 1946. Since then, revolutionary symbols have been resurrected (in their insurrectional form) only during the events of 1968 and the feminist demonstrations of 1977. After that, Garrigues cynically remarks, revolutionary symbols are "sold to the ad world,

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<sup>11</sup> Pascal Ory, *Une Nation pour mémoire: 1889, 1939, 1989, trois jubilés révolutionnaires* (Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Jean Garrigues, *Images de la Révolution: l'imagerie républicaine de 1789 à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions du May & Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, 1989), 91.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>14</sup> Paraphrased from Garrigues, *Images de la Révolution*.

Marianne gulps down Banania or is mystified by the new Corail trains. Tricolour tooth brushes stand up like revolutionary spades..."<sup>15</sup>

With the exception of the rhetoric of the extreme right, nationalism, and by extension the theology of the Nation, seemed to have lost its appeal for many in the European Community, and France was no exception; for those inclined to be politically left, questions of cultural identity within a common Europe moved to centre stage. The hasty publication of Jacques Derrida's article entitled "L'autre cap"<sup>16</sup> in *Le Monde*, on the question of European cultural identity (after a seminar that took place in Turin) revealed a shift from a concern with national boundaries to a concern with boundaries of cultural identity. As Ory says about the bicentennial,

It is not necessary to be a scholar to guess that behind the present shift away from military heroes to cultural heroes of minorities that have been excluded from the national community, there are interrogations between anxiety and perplexity about French identity, its origins, its components and its capacity to find answers to contemporary questions.<sup>17</sup>

Looking ahead to the planned European Union and Single Market of 1992, the increasing Americanisation of French culture and the rise of an extreme right based on racist exclusion and nationalism, the organisers of the bicentennial were faced with a political landscape where finding a place for the representation of the Nation, the Republic or even Liberty, was not going to be an easy task.

Ory even goes so far as to say that "of the three commemorations, the bicentennial is certainly the one that began under the worst auspices for the organisers."<sup>18</sup> From the beginning of the discussion about how to commemorate the revolution, the press (especially in Paris) reacted cynically, creating a negative atmosphere that was difficult to overcome. *Figaro Magazine* for example, published an article in 1986 entitled "Pour en finir avec la Revolution, tout simplement" (Let's simply bury the revolution). The organisers expressed their relief on several occasions<sup>19</sup> when about halfway through the commemorative year, the press changed tack and began to be supportive (especially *Liberation*)

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<sup>15</sup> Garrigues, *Images de la Révolution*, 150.

<sup>16</sup> The article appeared in *Le Monde* and has since been issued in book form. Jacques Derrida, *L'autre cap* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> Ory, *Une Nation*, 214.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>19</sup> See Jean-Noël Jeanneney, *Le Bicentenaire de la Révolution française: Rapport au Président de la République* (Paris: La documentation française, Collection des rapports officiels, 1990).

and when money brought in by the exceptionally large number of tourists began to be counted up.

In the midst of widespread cynicism toward revolutionary ideals, the organisers decided to emphasise neither the Nation, Republic, nor Liberty but the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen for it, they argued, is the one contribution of the revolution that has had the greatest effect on our everyday life. The Declaration appeared to be all-inclusive, asserting that French citizens are bound together by law, rather than by blood or land. According to Louis Dumont, "the French see themselves as human by essence and as members of a nation by accident."<sup>20</sup> Despite the many spectacular events programmed around that subject and numerous attempts to show the need for keeping up the fight for human rights in concrete situations, Ory argues (and I agree with him), that it remained too abstract. It became clear that "celebrations found the public's attention more easily by the personification of the larger principles of the revolution in a few heroes."<sup>21</sup> This "personification" of the Declaration took form in the Bastille Day parade and in the commemoration of Toussaint Louverture -- a Haitian general who fought to extend the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen to include black people.

The parade, the organisers decided, would give a contemporary form to the dusty Declaration. Recognizing his naive optimism, the designer Jean-Paul Goude expressed what he believed to be the message of the parade: "all humans are equal, despite ethnic or cultural differences and they are made to get along with one another. It might not be very subtle, but it is what one hopes for; and it is the philosophy of Baden-Powell, I firmly believe in it and this is what I wanted to communicate [in my design of the parade]."<sup>22</sup> But within a parade that spoke of Human Rights, the Nation and Liberty still had to be represented. It is in this context of "personification" that the choice of a black American singer to perform the National anthem during the parade should be seen. For all those watching the parade, either live or on television, a black woman was representing Marianne, the allegory of the French Nation and the Republic. The representation of Marianne at a time when the concept of nation seemed to be obsolete for most but dangerously valuable to the extreme right<sup>23</sup> reveals one of

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<sup>20</sup> Cited by Philippe Raynaud, "Heurs et malheurs du citoyen," in *Le débat* 75 (May-June 1993): 125.

<sup>21</sup> Ory, *Une Nation*, 225.

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Paul Goude, "Ce que j'ai voulu faire. Entretien avec Jean-Paul Goude," *Le débat* 57 (Nov-Dec 1989): 35.

<sup>23</sup> The right has always used nationalistic rhetoric but the Front Nationale (the party of Le Pen) has consistently equated socio-economic problems in France with the presence of people of North African origin.

the places where the commemorative model was running into difficulty and had to be reworked. By making Jessye Norman, Marianne, the Declaration of Human Rights was emphasized over the Nation or the Republic, and along the way, the symbol of Marianne was “regenerated” along lines that had never been part of the traditional republican model. In other words, it is by speaking of the Declaration that the state could find an alternative representation of the Nation which would be different enough from those presented by the extreme right and yet be recognisable as part of the commemoration. As Yves Lacoste comments, we should not allow the reactionary extreme right the privilege to speak about the nation in antagonistic terms that used to have a *raison d'être* in the past, but which, today, have to be changed within a European framework. It is important to build new geopolitical representations of the nation.<sup>24</sup>

The feminine allegories of Nation/Liberty/Republic have always been incarnated by a white woman “of the people”, whether the quiet country girl in the genre of “*la Semeuse*” (the sower) cast on the French coin or the subversive working-class woman in Delacroix's painting of “*Liberty leading the people*”. It is, I think, by transgressing the racial barrier of the traditional Marianne as a white woman, that this allegory could be brought into the present in a powerful way.

I will begin by analysing the moment when Jessye Norman sings the *Marseillaise* to uncover the rules that regulate the structure of the event. I will then analyse how these rules work on each other in such a way as to rework the commemorative representation of the Nation and Liberty. During this reworking of the model, certain categories from the past were opened up that could not be seen before (or at least, in that way). One way or another, these categories have to do with race. One issue provoked quite a debate: France's involvement in the slave trade. As categories of the past are brought into the present through the commemorative process, we come close to the sense of awakening so dear to Walter Benjamin. In the last part, I will discuss how the bicentennial exposed the French slave trade through its “remembering” of the heroic figure of Toussaint Louverture.

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<sup>24</sup> Lacoste, “*De la nation*,” 6.

## Deconstructing the moment of the National Anthem

The image of a black Marianne singing the Marseillaise must first of all be *seen* (Fig. 5.1). The sheer size of the singer, so tall and opulent is impressive in itself. Then the colours and the movement of the cloth in the wind are also striking. The bright blue fabric surrounding the dark face floats above a deep red cloth trailing on the ground and these were separated by a brilliant white band wrapping the figure in movement.

In sequential order, the dynamic setting around the singing of the Marseillaise was as follows. First, the periphery of the entire amphitheatre was lined with young choristers singing an overture. Then the streetlights along the Champs Elysées and on the Place de la Concorde were turned off, plunging all spectators into the darkness of the night. Standing in front of the obelisk, Jessye Norman began to sing the the National Anthem from the centre of the amphitheatre -- a centre that had not yet been occupied during the entire parade. Draped in a long tricolour cape floating in the breeze, she slowly walked around the obelisk as she sang (unaccompanied) the entire anthem. Reaching the crescendo, she stepped onto a moving platform, right hand extended in front of her, and was carried towards the Tuileries Gardens. The entire side of the plaza facing the gardens was blocked off by a wall of fountains rising in front of her. And as she approached the wall of water, "like the Red Sea opens in front of Moses,"<sup>25</sup> the wall parted, creating a passage through which the singer left the amphitheatre and disappeared into the darkness of the park.

So many references and symbols in one scene can be disconcerting: what does Moses have to do with the Declaration of Human Rights? But as in any montage, its meaning is driven by the fragmentary. Owens comments on the frustration some people feel in front of a montage,

images simultaneously proffer and differ a promise of meaning; they both solicit and frustrate our desire that the image be directly transparent to its signification. As a result, they appear strangely incomplete -- fragments or runes which must be deciphered.<sup>26</sup>

Each fragment of this montage draws on certain references that would be known to the majority of people watching the parade -- and must now be deciphered.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Written on the sketch Goude drew to conceive of the scene. His sketchbook was published as *Bleu, Blanc Goude* (Paris: Éditions Nathan, 1989).

<sup>26</sup> Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse," *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 206.

<sup>27</sup> Here, I must pause and open a parenthesis to give the idea of "reference" some thought. In *S/Z*, Roland Barthes treats the notion of referent as a direct and unproblematic relationship between the reference brought in by the reader and the text -- in this case, the reader being Barthes and the text being Balzac's *Sarrasine* -- which means that "intertextuality" brings in



Figure 5.1  
JESSYE NORMAN SINGS THE NATIONAL ANTHEM, JULY 14, 1989

Photograph from the television coverage of the Bastille Day parade. Reproduced in Terri L. Cafaro and Diane Neumaier, "La Bicentenaire II," *Art in America* (July 1989), 58.

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"intertextuality" brings in the idea that there can be as many different references as there are readers, but the work done by the referent itself is not put into question. Postmodernism, on the other hand, problematizes the activity of the referent. As Owens says, "postmodernism neither brackets nor suspends the referent," it questions an assumption of cultural homogeneity. (Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 206.)

In this accumulation of references, the body of Jessye Norman becomes one of the "*narrative bodies*" of the French Revolution as it was told during the bicentennial. To start with, Jessye Norman performs standing up, that is, in an active pose rather than seated on a throne as were the live allegories of the revolutionary festivals.<sup>28</sup> Her body is wrapped in loose cloth and she is gesturing to point the way. The combination of a woman standing draped *à l'antique* and pointing the way draws, most explicitly, from the image of Liberty as a leader. Judging from the number of posters designed for the bicentennial abroad that have reworked the Delacroix painting of 1831, *Liberty Leading the People*, into contemporary compositions, that particular image would probably be the first one that would come to mind to a great number of people both in France and in the countries that participated in the commemoration. It is likely that this particular image has been taken up by the media because its allegorical layering is very clear. The contemporary actors are easily recognised and set apart from the allegorical female figure that is dressed *à l'antique*. The contrast is what gives power to the idea of freedom represented allegorically in the female figure leading the revolutionaries beyond the barricade, motioning forward, in an act of historical and political progress.

The tricolour flag which drapes Jessye Norman's body symbolizes the Nation. Today, the three bands of colour on the flag run vertically, but there are a number of images (painted during and shortly after the revolution) that represent the flag with bands of colours running horizontally -- just like the costume of Jessye Norman.<sup>29</sup> Blue symbolised aristocracy, white the clergy and red the third estate. But together, the three colours symbolised the peaceful union of the three orders under one nation. The costume made out of the flag could run with either the red at the top (as it appears on Goude's sketches) or the blue at the top. Evidently, the more conservative choice was to have blue near the head, so that when the TV camera comes in for a close up of the singer's face it would be surrounded only by blue. The snug-fitting red phrygian cap first sketched by Goude was transformed into a loose blue hood when the costume was redesigned by Azzedine Allia, a significant figure in the world of French *haute couture* who is North African by birth and a French resident by choice. By inverting the order of the three colours, putting the red at the bottom and blue on the top, Allia erased all possible reference to the red phrygian cap -- the

<sup>28</sup> For example, the Fête de l'Être Supreme had a cart decorated with flowers and greenery pulled by a pair of oxen carrying a live allegory of Liberty on a throne.

<sup>29</sup> The painting entitled "La Garde Nationale de Paris part pour l'armée" by Léon Cogniet, 1792, is an example of the flag shown with horizontal bands. This painting was reproduced on the inside cover of the bicentennial program booklet.

symbol of insurrection. On the other hand, the large hood and the open robe beneath it clearly calls on the traditional north African men's garment, the Jellaba, a direct reference to the Arab world.

In Delacroix's painting, the flag, symbol of the nation, is clearly separated from the allegorical figure of Liberty who holds the flag in her one hand and a gun in the other. In the parade of 1989, Liberty is now wrapped, if not covered, by the flag. But this fusion of garment and flag problematizes further the reference to the nation by giving it another meaning, that of a shroud. In the eyes of those who (like Allia) know the Muslim religion in which a pilgrim to Mecca wears a simple white sheet (*ihràm*) which recalls this person's shroud, such a use of the flag refers to death and transcendence; a similar association would be made by those who remember that the coffins of soldiers are wrapped in a flag for the funeral ceremony.

This image must also be *heard* (either on TV or live) since *this* Marianne is singing the national anthem. Here, the association between death and the flag goes even further as we think of the relation between the flag and the song of the Marseillaise. The national anthem is a song of military victory<sup>30</sup> in which the verse "contre nous la tyrannie, l'étendard sanglant est levé" (against us the tyranny, the bloody banner is raised) creates a direct association between the flag of the nation and blood that has been shed to defend its freedom.

As we have seen, the painting of Delacroix is a major reference that reworks the narrative body of Jessye Norman. But the inverse is also true -- the image of Jessye Norman also works on the way we now see this painting. The painting is a depiction of the July revolution of 1830, when the people dethroned Charles X and the liberal bourgeoisie placed Louis-Philippe in power. The figure of liberty is represented as a woman from the *menu peuple* holding a gun: she is a warrior. Yet, she is dressed in the fashion of ancient Rome, Rome of the first Republic. By juxtaposing figures dressed in contemporary clothes and the female figure in a roman costume, the painting asserts that it is to be read allegorically, ie. the female figure symbolises the idea of Liberty. The costume designed for Jessye Norman is not "roman", it is "islamic", and in that way, the reference to

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<sup>30</sup> The "Marseillaise" was composed upon the victory over the Prussian army at Valmy on September 1792, a victory that was to be the catalyst for the formation of a national union. Jean Pierre Chevènement (Minister of Defence) explains in an interview, "When the French nation began to fight for its rights, it confronted the monarchies of Europe. And it had to defend itself, arms in hand. But when it declares in Valmy, 'Vive la nation!', one must understand 'Vive les nations!'" (Jean-Pierre Chevènement, "Réponses aux questions d'Hérodote," *Hérodote: La France une nation, des citoyens*, nos. 50-51, (Jul-Dec 1988): 9). Hence the idea that is often expressed in literature that French patriotism is universalist.



antiquity (so traditional in allegorical painting depicting the revolution) is here entirely erased. The double transgression of having Marianne enacted by a woman who is both black and privileged (a transgression both of race and class) helps us to see how the nationalism in Delacroix's painting depends on a conception of the nation as white and legitimizes the revolutionary act by representing the working class in action -- social particularities the bicentennial organisers wished to suppress in their celebration of universality.

The images of the scene can also be *understood*. In that respect, it is worth noting that Jessye Norman does not carry any of the traditional attributes that would qualify the allegory further. She does not wear a phrygian cap which symbolises freedom; her breast is covered (a bare breast would symbolize "fraternity"<sup>31</sup>); she does not carry a level, symbol of equality; or a lance, symbol of the republic. This lack of attributes leaves a wider terrain for interpretation of the allegory and, by extension, a more versatile entry for personal investment on the part of the viewer. But this does not mean that no meaning has been structured into the scene; on the contrary, I would argue that this lack of attributes allowed the other components surrounding Jessye Norman to become her attributes and to enter into a play of meaning with the allegorical figure of Liberty/Nation she is meant to perform. These components include her costume made of the French flag, the obelisk standing in the centre of the plaza, the amphitheatre and the theatrical effects of the parting wall of water in front of the Tuileries.

The obelisk in front of which Jessye Norman is photographed is known to Parisians simply as the centre of the Place de la Concorde. Under the spotlights, it becomes a giant prop around which the singer must walk as she sings the verses of the Marseillaise. The obelisk calls on Egypt simply because of its provenance (erected in Paris by Napoleon on return from his Egyptian campaign). During much of the nineteenth century, the ancient Egyptians were assumed to be white -- since ancient Egypt was constructed as the cradle of Western Civilization. In that respect, the presence of a black women standing in front of the obelisk, is quite critical of this nineteenth century assumption. This meaning is enhanced when it is juxtaposed next to another fragment of this montage: the parting waters in front of Moses on the flight of the Jews from Egypt. Publications of Goude's sketches in the press (before the event) told

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<sup>31</sup> Since two infants can be nursed (simultaneously) by the same mother.

readers that this wall of water was a metaphor for the parting of the Red Sea. The biblical image of people flying from oppression towards freedom is being encoded in the Parisian landscape, at the entrance to the Tuileries.<sup>32</sup>

The reference to the Nation in the tricolour flag and the national anthem is further questioned in the uneasy rapport established when Jessye Norman as Liberty becomes Moses in front of the parting Red Sea. The double inversion of a white Marianne who is performing Moses but a Moses represented by a woman as opposed to a man is in keeping with the genre of the parade described as a "modern carnival".<sup>33</sup> The parade included a great number of inversions, especially between blacks and whites. But even though inversion was there, it was not presented as a joke: on the contrary, the dimming of the lights and the moment of silence before and after Jessye Norman sang the National Anthem set it apart from the rest of the evening. Moses leading the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt was being mapped, through this collage, onto Black Liberty leading the oppressed peoples of the world (in the words of Goude, the "tribes of the world") to freedom.

### **Reading the Black Marianne**

Further to being seen and heard, the image of the black Marianne is also *read* in its play on the word "Moses." Moses is known among black Americans as a name given to Harriet Tubman, who escaped slavery and became a leading abolitionist before the American Civil War. In Afro-American culture, she is a heroine of black resistance. Showing extraordinary courage, she repeatedly returned to the southern states, helping over 300 slaves to make the difficult and dangerous trek on the "underground railroad" to freedom.

The designers of the scene have not hesitated to accumulate historical, biblical and political references in order to give a visual form to the idea of freedom from oppression using the double symbolism of Nation and Liberty, where one is presented as the guardian of the other. Among all these references and transgressions, what provides the stability for this image; what, in other words, gives it its legitimacy? Since Jessye Norman is known not only as an American living in Paris but as an opera singer of world stature, I would argue that it draws its legitimacy from the tradition of black American artists who have made France

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<sup>32</sup> And what a surprising coincidence that this obelisk was carved for Ramses II, pharaoh when Moses led the Jews in their flight from Egypt in the 13th century B.C.!

<sup>33</sup> Régine Robin, "Bakhtin and Postmodernism: An Unexpected Encounter. Notes on Jean-Paul Goude's 'Marseillaise'," *Social Discourse* 3, nos.1-2 (Summer 1990).

their home to escape American racism. For the legitimization would be entirely different if the singer was from Africa. As *Liberation* cunningly remarked "it is better to be black and beautiful than to be a negro and hungry." From Josephine Baker to the writers of the Harlem Renaissance and jazz musicians, the tradition of black expatriate Americans is well anchored in French culture. More recently, the box office success of the stylish film *Diva* by J.C. Beineix created a new space of representation for a black American opera singer (as opposed to jazz or blues singer) in a thriller set in Paris revolving around the classical singer Cynthia Hawkins.

The image of Jessye Norman's head draped in a blue veil with her mouth partly opened was the image that was most widely reprinted after the event (fig. 5.1). In looking at this image, I and many others found her very beautiful; she is victorious and eternal. But when we look at Jessye Norman in that way, Griselda Pollock warns us, we might conflate the beauty of the woman with the beauty of the spectacle and "fail to question what is being done with it and what it is doing for its users?"<sup>34</sup> For she is performing the allegorical representation of Liberty/Nation and at the same time, the biblical role of Moses. It is in between these two roles, between these two representations, that I believe I can find answers to Pollock's questions.

*"What is being done with it?"*

The performance of Jessye Norman took place in the centre of a large replica of the amphitheatre built for the first anniversary of the Revolution in 1790 -- the Fête de la Fédération. The juxtaposition of a black Marianne and the amphitheatre bring together three trends that were, until that moment, kept distinct in the parade: "Black Africa," the reference to 1790, and the echoes of the Declaration of Human Rights throughout the world. By placing a black Marianne draped in a tricolour flag in the centre of the amphitheatre, the designers overlapped these three trends -- cultural, historical and symbolic.

"Black Africa" came through in Goude's decision to use many different kinds of drums and a large number of black participants in the parade,

There is an undercurrent in the parade that I have never revealed officially: the African rhythm. [...] For certain people it is a cliché: even though people from African origin have and still endure horrible things, there is no doubt that in terms of music, "negritude" has impregnated the world surface.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, feminism and histories of art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>35</sup> Goude, "Ce qui j'ai voulu faire...", 36.

In the scene of the Marseillaise the idea that Black Africa is *the* source of all contemporary music took the form of a black Marianne; and this was juxtaposed with the organiser's intention to speak of the Declaration and the 1790

commemoration. Jeanneney explains his intent as follows:

the basic idea (and it had to be basic in order to reach people throughout the world), the idea which protected the event from becoming superficial, came from history. It is the diversity of what has happened to the Revolutionary message which has given it its force and its radiance. The unification of the provinces enlarged during the Fête de la Fédération of the 14th of July 1790, had to be recalled: a unique meeting of such different sensibilities. Better yet, outside of France; the generous craziness of people who (during the Oath of the Tennis Court and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, from the 20th to the 26th of August) pretended to be legislating for all of humanity, became meaningful only because little by little people throughout the world took this message (sometimes against French armies). It had to come through clearly in our celebration.<sup>36</sup>

The organisers did not hesitate to overlap all three trends (Black Africa, 1790, and the echoes of the Declaration) in the moment of the Marseillaise. They decided that the black Marianne ("Black Africa") would be placed in the centre of the replica of the amphitheatre of the Fête de la Fédération ("1790") and would cross the Red Sea ("echoes of the Declaration").

Despite their usual rejection of republican rituals, *Liberation* describes that moment as uniquely magical and Jessye Norman as a "tricolour princess".

Jessye Norman, in absolute silence. Thousands of faces turn toward the tricolour princess. Thousands of open mouths, attentive gazes. Eyes in tears. This time, a breath. The moment is preciously rare. Just for this Marseillaise, on that night, one had to be there. A crystalline moment multiplied to infinity by an ovation.<sup>37</sup>

Through the description of the impact Jessye Norman has on the crowd, the figure is provided with a halo, a sign of holiness that is reserved for a miracle. For a miracle it was. It was the first (and only) time that the commemoration gelled in its most sacred aspect -- a time when most in the crowd shared an emotion<sup>38</sup> generated by the utopian idea of freedom and an end to oppression; a scene that was powerful enough to go beyond the petty fights between the

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<sup>36</sup> Jean-Noël Jeanneney, "Après coup. Réflexions d'un commémorateur," *Le débat* 57 (Nov-Dec 1989), 96.

<sup>37</sup> *Liberation*, 17 July 1989.

<sup>38</sup> Two remarks should be made about this emotional transport. First, only people who would be well disposed to this kind of parade would be present that night -- for example, the mayor of Paris, Jacques Chirac, was not. Secondly, because I was there in the crowd, I myself witnessed a great deal of emotion on people's faces, many with tears in their eyes and many others simply silent.

socialist government and the right-wing coalition, and between the different camps of historians of the revolution. For no one believed it possible any more -- not at this bicentennial and probably not at any to follow either. In Christian terms, such a sharing of emotions around an idea would be called a "communion."<sup>39</sup>

That emotion is, I think, generated by the intersection of two images, one of the Virgin Mary (uncoded here with the traditional blue veil) and the other of a black "princess" -- both of which are, in psychoanalytic terms, non-sexual cult figures. Mary is the pure non-sexual mother who can procreate in sexual innocence and the black princess is the powerful, forever lost, desired phallic mother of infancy. The mere physical presence of Jessye Norman as a large woman and also a mature woman fixates both images in the all-powerful mother figure. The evocation of the maternal can further be traced in *Liberation's* description of the crowd: "tears in the eyes, mouths open, attentive gazes." These speak of desire as in an infant's desire for the mother, not of a sexual desire or lust. But the mother/Virgin is black. There is a cult of the black virgin in the Camargue region in the south of France, where a black virgin is worshipped by the Gypsies, but it is not well known. The black virgin/mother figure here uncodes "otherness" and can be seen as metaphorically representing the universality of the ideals of Liberty. Universality is an idea that is shared by both the Catholic church and the French Revolution: bringing the light of the ideals of the Revolution to the oppressed people of the world would correspond to the Catholic desire for world-wide conversion of pagans, with blackness metaphorically corresponding to "paganism".

But in the everyday life of France, the realities of a post-colonial economy ensure that a large percentage of black people who study or work in France come from former French colonies. The guest group of black Americans that were seen as exotic contributors to Parisian culture have been outnumbered many times over by blacks who have come to France from the Antilles and Africa to stay. "[By] the 1970s, two million blacks resided in France and their presence," William Cohen argues, "sharpened racial feelings in France and revealed antiblack prejudice. [...]"

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<sup>39</sup> A similar evocation was made by Rousseau in his description of the spontaneous feast as it ends with an emotional transport which gelles on an image of patriotic love. Quoting the end of Rousseau's text: "The dancing was halted; now there were only kisses, laughs, toasts, caresses. The result of all this was a general emotion that I cannot describe, the same feeling of universal joy that we feel fairly naturally whenever we are surrounded by what we hold dear. My father hugged me, and as he did he trembled in a way that I can still feel and share. 'Jean-Jacques, 'he said, 'love your country. Do you see these good Genevans? They are all friends, all brothers. Joy and harmony prevail among them.' Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à d'Alembert* (Paris: Flammarion, 1967), 248, translation cited in Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques*, 94.

Most of them because of low salaries, difficulties in finding adequate housing, and the need to send home a large portion of their income, lived in crowded slum conditions. The majority were single males. Their lifestyle in France created a great gap between them and the white host population."<sup>40</sup> In their critique of the bicentennial, the authors of a review in *Art in America* saw the relationship between a black Marianne and post-colonialism perfectly: "The black American singer Jessye Norman, posing as Marianne, symbolized France's supposed rejection of its colonialist past and implied the achievement of the Revolutionary goal for all."<sup>41</sup> I do not think that Jessye Norman was meant to imply the achievement of the Revolutionary goal, but rather its utopian dimension as is the case with all revolutionary allegories. I do not intend to put down this critique as mere confusion or a misreading of what was intended and hold another reading as truth, on the contrary, these alternate readings, where one sees Jessye Norman as a powerful "tricolour princess" and the other as an implication of France's "achievement of the Revolutionary goal for all" raises issues of readings and misreadings in contemporary allegories; these alternate readings partly answer the question of what was done with this image.

In fact Paul De Man argues, in his book *Allegories of Reading*, that there can only be misreadings since the two levels of meaning, literal and metaphorical, greatly influence one another, so much so that he calls them "allegories of unreadability". De Man recognizes allegory as "the structural interference of two distinct levels or usage of language, literal and rhetorical where one denies precisely what the other affirms".<sup>42</sup> In the case of the Marseillaise, the literal level would be the black body of the singer, the flag and the wall of water; the abstract level would be the notion of freedom from slavery, and the nation. De Man explains that, in the case of literature,

in most allegories a literal reading will 'deconstruct' a metaphorical one; [...] Yet because literal language is itself rhetorical, the product of metaphoric substitutions and reversals, such readings are inevitably implicated in what they set out to expose, and the result is allegory.<sup>43</sup>

Here the literal level of the black body of the interpreter "deconstructs" the metaphorical one. Yet the language of theatrical conventions and illusions relies on its own system of interpretation. Such "literal" readings are therefore

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<sup>40</sup> William Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980), 286-7.

<sup>41</sup> Terri Cafaro and Diane Neumaier, "La bicentenaire II," *Art in America* (1989): 59.

<sup>42</sup> Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 221.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

implicated in decoding the metaphorical level from the start. It would be impossible, for example, to first read the scene of the Marseillaise as if it were sung by a white woman in order to understand the metaphor of Marianne as Moses. And this is how, for some people the black body of Jessye Norman draped in a flag becomes either an inspiration ("tricolour princess") or a pretentious nationalistic move (it "implied the achievement of the revolutionary goal for all").

The comment that Jessye Norman represents "France's supposed denial of its colonial past" implies that the critics rejected the allegorical aspect of the image (a black woman as Moses) and read the tricolour flag metaphorically -- as the Nation's veil over the colonial past. Even more important than reading into the image what it denies as opposed to what it is constructing, is their rejection of a utopian message in art. As Mary Kelly says, "critics look at work and they say, 'that's only a negative deconstructive understanding of personal experience' without seeing what the work as a whole represents in terms of a *positive view of social change* and what art could be in the future"<sup>44</sup> [my emphasis]. It is, I think, as a reaction to a solely negative deconstructive critique that *Liberation* took the stand of underlining the positive view of anti-racism -- even its utopian character.<sup>45</sup> Drawing more from *Liberation's* coverage of people's participation, I now turn to the second question of what the image of a black Marianne was doing for its users.

"What is it doing for its users?"

In the words of *Liberation*,

In this fantastic convergence [of people], we witness a reappropriation of symbols that others had taken away. This group of young men and woman arrive around the corner covered with the tricolour and singing as they are laughing "Le Pen, you are done with, we won't let go of the flag any more." This young Arab with a *cocarde* [a tricolour pin traditionally worn as a sign of revolutionary sentiment], these Africans that wave around a little flag offered by Burger King, this group dressed up as sans-culottes who came just for that from Le Havre, these students from Jussieu, this young man who got authorization from his parents after passing his *baccalauréat* exam, this couple in love, this mother worried by the vast crown. [...]

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<sup>44</sup> Mary Kelly interviewed by Monika Gagnon (1986), cited in Pollock, *Vision and Difference*: 155.

<sup>45</sup> This positive outlook only occurred during the press coverage of the parade, for *Liberation* was quite critical of the non-participatory structure of most of the Parisian events put in place for the bicentennial. See for example the press coverage of the Concert Renauld which was not planned as part of the commemoration and allowed (according to *Liberation*) people to "feel good together".

An old Parisian, who confesses a certain tenderness for the greens: "the tricolour flag? It is a symbol of belonging. I feel that I am of the same country as Jean Moulin and Victor Hugo."

A young woman. On her vest is the symbolic hand of SOS Racisme but no republican symbol: "I went to the Renault demonstration and I'm coming to this one too, because France for French people is not France. Those who attack the revolution by reducing it to the guillotine. Their flag is white." Why did she not buy a cocarde? She smiles, "let us not exaggerate."

Nevertheless, according to the reporters in *Liberation*, "people had not worn that much tricolour since the day of the Liberation of WWII and this time with no anger, no one on the other side of the fence."<sup>46</sup>

Regarding the miniaturisation of symbols such as small French flags distributed by a food chain like Burger King, *Liberation* sees them as sources of empowerment and expression of one's identity within the politics of the parade. Dayan and Katz, in their article on the British Royal Wedding, saw these miniature symbols entirely differently. The smallness of the flags is equated with the impossibility for people to participate.

While the performers carried or wore authentic or 'original' symbols, the public was provided with mass-produced, stereotyped copies and, for their part, when the principals wanted to manifest their closeness to the public, they made use of this impoverished repertoire (thus allowing balloons to be facetiously attached to their carriage).<sup>47</sup>

It becomes clear, that the content of the event (if progressive or conservative) works on the meaning of these miniature symbols in the eyes of those who write about them. In one case the small flags held by members of the crowd are seen as expressing their identity through the "reappropriation of symbols" and in the other, the crowd is seen as having only "toy symbols", a poor copy of the real thing.

In addition, the *Liberation* article celebrates the exceptional nature of the event with text and photographs taken in the style of Cartier Bresson, of people in the crowd interacting with a warmth that would normally not be there (for example a young couple and a policeman). Again, recalling Rousseau's description of spontaneous expressions of love. The article argues that the parade and its spectators succeeded in creating what Victor Turner has called a 'liminal' time

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<sup>46</sup> *Liberation*, 17 July 1989, p.17.

<sup>47</sup> Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, "Electronic Ceremonies: Television Performs a Royal Wedding," *On Signs*, ed. Marshall Blonsky (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 18.



and space, where people can behave differently than they normally would, where roles are reversed, and positive images of social change strikes the imagination. This argument also draws from a sentimental journey back to the days of May 1968 when people could mix fun and politics.

This article shows how people appropriated symbols (the cocarde) and songs (the carmagnole) inherited from the revolution in order to affirm their own political/cultural identity. These identities vary from a sense of belonging, like the man who has a soft spot for the Green party and sees the cocarde as a "symbol of belonging" to the same country as other people he admires, to the young man of North African descent who also wears a cocarde as a sign of (I speculate) being a citizen of a secular state.<sup>48</sup>

Not present in this article by *Liberation* is the negative reaction from those who did not come to the parade or those who did and were outraged by, among other things, the presence of a black American woman as Marianne. A documentary film by Louis Malle which described people's participation during the bicentennial shows a middle-aged woman expressing her disgust of a black Marianne as she says, "they could not even find a French woman!". The presence of Jessye Norman reaffirmed her belief that the present government is not protecting the interest of French people like her -- white and lower-middle class.

When the interviewer of *Le debat* (a historical review under the direction of Pierre Nora) implied "that playing the card of multiculturalism" could not be more in accordance with the current canons, Jeanneney (the person in charge of the commemoration) replied,

I find you quite optimistic. What do you make of the rise of fundamentalists? In a country that had voted just a year before by giving 15% to a clearly xenophobic political party of the extreme right it was not nothing to have the Marseillaise sung by a black American. When I read, on the following days, that Bruno Megret, speaking for the National Front, denounced 'this delirious hymn to cosmopolitanism', I knew that we had hit it right on the spot.<sup>49</sup>

Whether or not choosing a black American to sing the national anthem is seen as a risk or, on the contrary, is seen as playing into the current canons of

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<sup>48</sup> For a full discussion of the feelings and opinion of young people of North African descent towards nationalism, see the excellent article by Camille Lacoste-Dujardin "Renier les parents pour s'intégrer? Le dilemme des enfants de parents immigrés maghrébins en France," in *Hérodote*, nos. 50/51 (Jul-Dec 1988): 138-152.

<sup>49</sup> Jeanneney, "Après coup," 198.

multiculturalism, the presence of a black Marianne certainly created a discussion and it is the debate around Jessye Norman as one of the "narrative bodies" of the French Revolution that I think is important here.

### **In the shadow of French slavery**

Up to now, I have shown that the symbol of the Nation and the image of Liberty are not as empty as was first predicted by historians such as Pierre Nora and François Furet. The complex montage of images created by the allegory of liberty and the Nation personified by Jessye Norman succeeded in drawing an emotional response from the many people present that night. So many people wore flags and cocardes and sang revolutionary songs that *Liberation* commented "so much tricolour had not been seen since the day of the Liberation." I now would like to turn to the issue of revolutionary heroes, which reveals another gap between current academic conceptions about how the history of the revolution should be told and the way the commemoration was experienced. The academic move away from an historiography that relies on heroes and battles, towards a social history was applied to the curation of a number of shows and exhibitions. But when it came to collective celebration, the public responded particularly well to events that reclaimed revolutionary heroes dressed in all their mythic attributes and symbolic accoutrements. This is the reverse of allegorical personification. Called *figura*, this form of allegory turns a real historical figure into a "walking idea" The heroic figure of Toussaint Louverture, for example, became one such a "walking idea" or one could say a "narrative body" of the French Revolution (fig. 5.2). Who could not be struck by this slave who rose from among the numerous workers on the plantations of what was then called the "sugar islands" to become the leader of a revolutionary army? Through him, an entire generation were formed as revolutionaries who could then lead their country to independence and become citizens in their own right.



Figure 5.2  
TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE

Reproduced in *Le Monde*, 12 July 1989, p. 18.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the issue of French slavery was stirred up by the press during the bicentennial. For revolts during the revolutionary period did not only occur in France but also in the French colony of Saint Domingue (present day Haiti). In July 1791, the largest revolt in the history of black slavery contributed (after many attempts to defer the question), to the abolition of the slave trade by unanimous vote at the convention in February 1794.

The issue of slavery was perhaps more directly addressed in other parts of the parade. One of the twelve “valseuses”, woman and child couples who were symbols of universality, danced her way down the Champs Elysées with a black boy dressed as a monarch representing Haiti. The black “Haitian” child-monarch refers to the events of 1792 when, after the first successful revolt against the white colonisers of the island, the heads of the armies decided to dress in royal costumes. “Toussaint Louverture” Aimé Césaire tells us, “imagined a myth, already more political, of a king father of its people, kept in prison by the whites because he had acknowledged the requests of his black subjects and had decided to give them their freedom.”<sup>50</sup> This idea functioned perfectly in the logic of African mythology. The capture of Louis XVI after his flight to Varennes was interpreted as the king really wanting to free the slaves but being kept by the whites in prison so he could not act. The king therefore had to be liberated.<sup>51</sup>

The other image which addressed slavery was found in the float of the African drummers conducted by Doudou N'Diaye Rose. The float was surrounded by black men dressed in the costumes of the colonial soldiers -- like those who served under Toussaint. But comments during the live TV coverage were needed for the audience to link black soldiers to slavery and its abolition by the Revolutionary government in 1794. On the other hand, the montage joining together the image of a black *American* opera singer (as opposed to an African performer) and the image of Moses finding freedom on the other side of the Red Sea pointed more directly, or I should say, more intuitively to the duality of freedom and enslavement. But no part of the bicentennial addressed the issue of slavery more explicitly than the commemoration of Toussaint Louverture.

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<sup>50</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Toussaint Louverture* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1961), 182.

<sup>51</sup> Aimé Césaire remarks that historians have put Toussaint Louverture to trial for elaborating this myth. “But let us be wary: the words are reactionary; the myth certainly is, but the act is revolutionary. In reality, the language used by the negro chiefs was the one they considered to be the cleanest, in this moment of history, to bring together the troops; to give them dignity and to glorify their acts.” (Césaire, *Toussaint Louverture*, 183)

Knowing that Jeanneney intended for the bicentennial to be about "fraternity", it is no coincidence that SOS Racisme (a grassroots anti-racist organisation) co-produced the concert which celebrated the memory of Toussaint on June 10th.<sup>52</sup> For even if SOS Racisme is mostly concerned with racism against people of North African descent, its involvement in the commemoration of the first hero to fight racism in a colonial context would only have legitimized and strengthened their position. Their choice of June 10th as the date of the event allowed the organisers to bring the issue of slavery and its abolition by the French Revolution quite close to the 14th of July parade, which was meant to give a festive form to the Declaration of Human Rights.

The concert for Toussaint and the press coverage around French slavery in the late eighteenth century broke a silence about the French slave trade in a way that has rarely happened in France. In general, French popular culture is not very good at dealing with the country's participation in morally "dirty" dealings abroad.<sup>53</sup> In contrast to the multiple American films about the Vietnam war for example, *Indochine* (1992) based on a book by Marguerite Duras, was the first commercial film to speak about France's involvement in Vietnam. Similarly, the French slave trade has not been a subject of discussion in mass culture such as films, and academic criticism only reaches a small number of people. Among the well-to-do in Bordeaux -- the major city involved in this human trade -- the subject is completely taboo. But "the increasing awareness of the French attitude towards blacks in the 1970s"<sup>54</sup> has helped create a space for this debate to occur.

Before analysing the role played by the image of Toussaint in the commemoration, I need to show briefly how slavery was covered by the press. In *Le Monde's* special issue on slavery and the bicentennial, the question was repeatedly raised: how could such a silence have endured two centuries? The historian Jacques Thibau says that in mass culture as in academic milieux, French slavery continues to be ignored,

We have been interested in the American slave trade and Louisiana from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* all the way to *Roots*, but never in French slavery and its predilection for Saint Domingue. [...] This collective amnesia could have been brought to light through the work of

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<sup>52</sup> Philip Raynaud argues "French antiracism has reconnected with one of the components of the national ideology: the one that tends to dissociate the defence of the rights of men from those of a particular body politic, which has to give them an effective consistency. From Condorcet and the Girondins to Lamartine and, later on, Briand, it would not be difficult to trace a line that would eventually connect to SOS Racisme." (Raynaud, "Heurs et malheurs," 125.)

<sup>53</sup> Resistance to this status quo is mostly found among intellectuals, writers, or filmmakers who make low-budget films with a small distribution.

<sup>54</sup> Cohen, *French Encounter*, 289.

historians, but there is none. [...] When there is a lapse of memory there is embarrassment: the embarrassment of being faced with the frightful connection between the economic/political modernity of Europe and the enslavement of the black people.<sup>55</sup>

During the hundred years that France practiced enslavement -- from the establishment of the Black Code by Colbert in 1685 until the revolt of the slaves in 1791 -- French sugar and coffee companies became increasingly wealthy. So much so, that by the end of the eighteenth century, France had caught up with England, and French sugar and coffees were the most competitive on the world market. By 1789, nearly two thirds of France's foreign investment was in Saint Domingue.

These articles gathered from *Le Monde* show how the late eighteenth century saw two main trends of argument. The first was represented by a group of people who gathered in *La Société des Amis des Noirs*, founded in 1788 by Condorcet.<sup>56</sup> Their arguments for giving equal rights to mulattos and blacks pointed to the inherent limitation of the first article of the Declaration asserting that "all men are born equal." A passage from Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des lois* has often been cited for its clarity on the inherent contradiction of practising slavery at a time of Universalist aspirations, "It is impossible to suppose that these people are human, we would begin to think that we are not Christians ourselves."<sup>57</sup> It is followed by reasoning exemplary of the eighteenth century discussion about culture and nature, "since all men are born equal, one has to say that slavery is against nature."<sup>58</sup>

The second trend, greatly encouraged by the colonial companies, fought to keep the slave trade on the basis that it was economically necessary and that slavery had turned black people into children. The wealth represented by the slave plantations is shown here as the overpowering reason for the members of the constitution to refuse black people the benefit of the legal rights listed in the new Declaration of the Rights of Man. Some said it plainly. In 1791, La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt declared that slavery must be maintained, or else "the result will be the complete ruin of our commerce, a total upheaval of our industry, a stagnation of our work and the misery of our population which only

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<sup>55</sup> *Le Monde de la Revolution Francaise*, (publicité), no. 6, 1989, p. 23.

<sup>56</sup> Abbé Gregoire was later one of the presidents of the Society. Both Gregoire and Condorcet were chosen by the Mission to be Pantheonized.

<sup>57</sup> "Il est impossible que nous puissions supposer que ces gens-là soient des hommes, on commencerait à croire que nous ne sommes pas nous-mêmes chrétiens." (Montesquieu, cited in *Le Monde de la Revolution*)

<sup>58</sup> "Comme tous les hommes naissent égaux, il faut dire que l'esclavage est contre la nature." (Ibid.)

lives from work done on Colonial products."<sup>59</sup> And in order for 600,000 blacks to work for 60,000 whites, the *Code Noir* was kept in place which, among other things, allowed torture and physical abuse that had been forbidden in the new constitution. Under the pressures of the Ministry of the Colonies (supported by the slave traders), the men of the convention insisted that "the Declaration [of the Rights of Men and the Citizen] is not considered to be exportable to the colonies; [therefore] the status of slavery should not be modified."<sup>60</sup>

The newspaper articles do not retrace the polemic between the pro-slavery and abolitionist movements, a story that would recount the abolitionist victory in 1794 when the trade was made illegal, and its defeat when Napoleon reinstituted slavery in the islands ten years later. Instead, *Le Monde* brings forward information about the connection between slavery and the growth of French capital, and at the same time, it proposes a more complex set of arguments regarding the abolitionist movement. Abolitionists, they argue, put in place a "diabolical colonial machine, ready to conquer the world in the name of the ideals of justice and equality."<sup>61</sup> From Diderot to Montesquieu, the anti-slavery fight is proposed here as having prepared the way for the post-slavery economy. "Among the arguments developed by the *Société des Amis de Noirs*, we find a series of projects aimed at abandoning the slave trade in order to establish a global colonial commerce," where the "lights of Europe" will be at the forefront of the modern colonial economy. In a school history book of 1912, the revolution and its ideals are even called upon as a justification of colonial conquests: "Does a European nation have the right to submit the weaker peoples to its empire? [...] The French Revolution has declared the rights of men and not the rights of whites. Colonial conquests are favourable to the progress of civilisation."<sup>62</sup> The conquest of Africa is then explicitly proposed as a solution that is seen as both humanitarian and economically positive to the inevitable suppression of slavery.

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<sup>59</sup> "...il en resultera la ruine de notre commerce, un bouleversement total de notre industrie, une stagnation dans notre travail et la misere de notre population qui ne vit que de la main-d'oeuvre des denrees coloniales." (*Le Monde de la Revolution*, 19)

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>62</sup> This quote sees colonialism as a civilizing and even liberating influence on the "weaker peoples." "Une nation européenne a-t-elle le droit de soumettre à son empire des peuples plus faibles? [...] La Révolution française a proclamé les droits de l'homme et non les droits du Blanc. Les conquêtes coloniales sont favorable au progrès de la civilisation." (Excerpt from a 1912 schoolbook, cited in *Le Monde de la Revolution*, 18)

During the bicentennial the "picturesque"<sup>63</sup> image of the black republican general François Dominique Toussaint (1743-1803), known as 'Toussaint Louverture', caught the imagination of the organisers and those who went to the open air concert dedicated to his memory. As one reads about the story of Toussaint it is difficult not to be impressed. When he was young, he was treated as a special person by his owner on one of the largest plantations of the island. He became a driver and a confidant to his master, and was often asked his opinion on how to deal with "difficult" slaves. He also received a "princely education" from a certain Baptiste, who had just arrived from Africa, because, it turned out, Toussaint was a descendant of Gao Déghennou, a powerful king of the Alladas. In this double difference, a social distinction which sets him apart from the other black people of the island and a racial one that cuts him off from the world of the white man, Toussaint saw his case as unique and called himself "the first among blacks." After the slave revolt in 1791, he fought under the Spanish flag against the French army because Spain had promised freedom to the slaves in exchange for their military assistance. In August 1793 after the French government declared the abolition of slavery on the northern side of the island, Toussaint Louverture became the first black general of the French revolutionary army.<sup>64</sup> His rise to power began and by 1801, he governed the entire island. In 1804, Napoleon sent troops to put him in prison and re-establish slavery. But thirteen years of independent rule enabled the inhabitants of Haiti to successfully fight the French troops until they gained recognition of their independence, making Haiti the second country in the Americas to free itself from Colonial rule.<sup>65</sup>

Toussaint provided a body on which to narrate the history of racism and anti-racism, personifying this debate just as the performance of Jessye Norman personified Liberty and the Nation. Against the efforts of historians to erase heroes from the history of the revolution, the debate about anti-racism and its difficult rapport with the Declaration of the Rights of Man found refuge in the heroic figure of Toussaint Louverture. For it seems very difficult to commemorate events that are two hundred years old (and inevitably feel removed) without representing them allegorically.

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<sup>63</sup> This is the word Aimé Césaire uses to describe how Toussaint Louverture has too often been seen as "exotic" instead of looking at the colonial system he was caught in. See Césaire, *Toussaint*.

<sup>64</sup> The abolition of slavery for the whole island was only voted on 4 February 1794.

<sup>65</sup> This makes Toussaint Louverture a daring icon indeed for the bicentennial – for he is both a symbol of rights and freedoms and an enemy of the French State. This again underlines the universal, rather than the national ideals of 1989.



If the body, according to Antoine de Baecque, was the primary means through which people expressed political ideas during the revolution (especially in caricatures),<sup>66</sup> it seems that today the body remains a powerful device to bring history into the present. The mute body of Toussaint, since it is the body of someone who is long gone, allows two things to happen at the same time "to describe the event and for this description to access the level of the imagination."<sup>67</sup> The figure of Toussaint, I believe, functions allegorically to speak of the politics of equal rights and anti-racism; it speaks of anti-racism today *in terms* of the events of the past. In fact, Owens argues that there is currently a strong re-emergence of the allegorical impulse in popular culture,

Despite its suppression by modern theory -- or perhaps because of it -- allegory has never completely disappeared from our culture. [...] Throughout its history, allegory has demonstrated a capacity for widespread popular appeal, suggesting that its function is social as well as aesthetic.<sup>68</sup>

Owens even goes further to say that the rejection of allegory by the modernist movement "must be one of the factors in their ever-accelerating loss of audience".<sup>69</sup> If one agrees with Owens, the personification of the issue of anti-slavery in Toussaint and the fight for freedom represented by Jessye Norman in the live allegory of Liberty are two examples of this resurgence -- and both were received with significant popular approval.

### *The limits of the Declaration come to light*

The articles in *Le Monde* criticise France's "collective amnesia" about its role in the slave trade and attempt to show the relevance of eighteenth century debate to the post-colonial politics of today. "Today, the debate on the subject [of slavery] remains open for discussion and it has recently been revived by the wave of decolonisation that followed the war."<sup>70</sup> But let us not be too quick to assume that the struggle for freedom in Haiti has been forgotten by everyone. This "amnesia" is limited to history as it is taught in France. In Haiti, it is quite the

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<sup>66</sup> De Baecque says, "We often make the mistake of believing that the revolutionaries were men of abstraction. It would be more accurate to say that they thought of abstraction through metaphor, that they have, for example, thought of the individual, of the human community, and even of the universe, through the form of the human body." ("On se trompe en croyant les révolutionnaires hommes d'abstraction. Il serait plus juste de dire qu'ils ont pensé l'abstraction par la métaphore, qu'ils ont, par exemple, donné à leur compréhension de l'individu, de la communauté humaine, et même de l'univers, la figure du corps humain.") Antoine de Baecque, *Le corps de l'histoire: métaphores et politique (1770-1800)* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1993), 13.

<sup>67</sup> "Les métaphores [du corps] ont permis, dans le même temps de décrire l'évènement et d'en faire accéder la description au niveau de l'imaginaire." (de Baecque, *Le corps*, 15.)

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 229.

<sup>70</sup> "Aujourd'hui encore le débat reste ouvert sur ce vaste sujet, éminemment polémique et d'une actualité renouvelée après la vague de décolonisation de l'après guerre." Marcel Dorigny, "Les chaînes de l'esclavage" (*Le Monde de la Revolution Française*, number 6, 1989), p.17

opposite. Toussaint who has come to symbolise the revolution that led to the formation of the Haitian republic in 1804, is not only a national hero; he is a cult.

The old Saint Domingue dedicates to its freedom-fighter a patriotic devotion that resembles a cult. The pages that Colonel Nemours dedicated to his visit to the humid and cold cell of Fort-de-Joux in the Alps, where Toussaint [sic] Louverture died in 1803, have a religious tone. The minister plenipotentiary of Haiti and his wife had become conscious that they were on a "holy pilgrimage" and prayed in the cell of the martyr....<sup>71</sup>

During the bicentennial, images of Toussaint were disseminated throughout Paris. His portrait strikes the imagination; it puts into representation the late eighteenth century discussion of nature versus culture. In this painting, the "natural" aspect of the black man (his race) has been reworked by revolutionary accoutrements and European clothes (fig 5.2). Inversely, the abstract symbolism of the tricolour sash (culture) is reworked by the black (natural) body. This portrait of Toussaint was painted within the genre of upper class male portraiture which proclaims the possibility for a black man to become "just as civilised" as a white upper class man. The difference is created by social behaviour and not by nature, and behaviour can be moulded to conform to European expectations. It is through images like this one that the white man's imagination about blacks was formed during the Revolution: stories about how freed slaves spontaneously joined the revolutionary army and fought under the tricolour flag;

Haven't you seen, running down from their mountains, from the depths of their forests, from their impenetrable caves, these men, proud by nature, who hid to live freely: that had thrown off their bondage and sawn through their chains. They come to enlarge our armies....<sup>72</sup>

Such text reinforced the notion that freed slaves would automatically become citizens within the larger French nation. Certainly the image of the freed slave provoked multiple debates and festivals to celebrate the "meetings of whites with people of colour." Once slavery was abolished, those who "were slaves in the past [would have] access to full citizenship but only within the framework of

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<sup>71</sup> Charles-André Julien, "Preface" in Césaire, *Toussaint*, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Ne voyez-vous pas déjà accourir de leurs montagnes escarpées, de leurs forêts profondes, de leurs grottes impénétrables, ces hommes fiers de la nature qui se cachaient pour vivre libres, qui s'étaient dérobés à l'esclavage, qui avaient limé leurs fers. Ils viennent grossir nos armées...." (Société des Amis de la Liberté et de l'Egalité de la section du Bonnet rouge à Paris, cited in *Le Monde de la Révolution*, 21).

a larger French nation."<sup>73</sup> In other words, the idea that the islands might want their independence was simply inconceivable.

Once the revolution in France had died down with the events collectively called "Thermidor," the Bonapartist government re-established slavery in the "sugar islands." In 1802, the expedition of general Leclerc sailed to Saint Domingue with orders to arrest and imprison Toussaint. When the ships entered the bay of Samatra, Toussaint wrote to the consul, "I take up arms for the freedom of my colour, that France alone has proclaimed. France does not have the right to enslave us any more; our freedom does not belong to her."<sup>74</sup> Ten months after his arrest, he is dead.

Like an afterthought, the author of *Le Monde's* article on Toussaint Louverture adds, "the ashes of his body have not been found." This detail is not without importance when we know that it was one of the reasons given by the French government for rejecting the pantheonisation of Toussaint for the bicentennial on the grounds that they require the cendres or other bodily remains of the person to be deposited in the building.<sup>75</sup>

In the words of the bicentennial organisers, Toussaint was used as a way to speak of "anti-racism, tolerance and inclusion." In the articles of *Le Monde* on the other hand, the figure of Toussaint shows most clearly the exclusivity of the Declaration of the Rights of Man. As one of the articles read, "Rights of man or rights of the Europeans?" Faced with the enormity of the links between slavery, colonialism and the current poverty of the third world, *Le Monde* restrains its comments to one sentence, "... of all the upheavals created by the proclamation of human rights, the one regarding the status of blacks cries out for attention. A cry that is like a debt we have contracted with what is properly called: the Third World."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> "Je saisis les armes pour la liberté de ma couleur, que la France seule a proclamée. Elle n'a plus le droit de nous rendre esclaves: notre liberté ne lui appartient pas." (Ibid.)

<sup>75</sup> Yet, of the three revolutionary heroes were selected to be interred in the Pantheon during the bicentennial year, Condorcet also had no ashes, yet this did not deter his Pantheonization from proceeding.

<sup>76</sup> "Dès qu'il s'agit des chaînes de l'esclavage, notre histoire a des trous de mémoire, Chantier neuf donc, mais aussi chantier brûlant à voir la tonalité militante qui imprègne les pages des rares penseurs et historiens à s'y être attelés. De là peut-être un certain inachèvement, mais qui témoigne à sa manière que, de tous les bouleversements engendrés par la proclamation des droits de l'homme, celui qui tient au statut des Noirs reste le plus criant. Criant comme une dette que nous aurions contractée envers ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler: le tiers-monde." ("Journal des droits de l'homme, Les chaînes de l'esclavage," *Le Monde de la Revolution*, 18.)

*Did "public opinion" share this view?*

How many people connected the current situation in the Third World and the commemorative images of a black Marianne and Toussaint as symbols of a fight for freedom? One of the questions asked by pollsters in November of 1989 addresses this question directly, so it is worth taking a look at it, in spite of my reservations concerning such an approach to "cultural testing." The poll asked, "In your opinion, in relation to the ideals of the French Revolution, do you think that the each of the following are: important, not important, or that there is no relation?"<sup>77</sup>

	important	not important	no relation	no answer
"To properly welcome immigrants in France"	36%	11%	45%	8%
"To help Third World countries"	59%	8%	29%	4%
"To fight against racism"	52%	9%	32%	7%
"To help countries of the East Block"	66%	7%	21%	6%

The connection with the East Block is obviously high (66%) since the USSR started to open their doors to the rest of Europe in 1989; an act that took the West by surprise and occupied a great deal of space in the press. The second highest percentage (59%) is from people who see an important relation between the Revolutionary ideals and the need to help Third World countries. This shows that third-world-ism is alive and well in public opinion and reveals a certain "fit" with the arguments elaborated by *Le Monde*. But since people saw the least connection between revolutionary ideals and the need "to properly welcome immigrants" it appears that the universalist sentiment of the Revolution has become more a diffuse sense of "guilt" (or "debt" as *Le Monde* called it), towards those who stay in their country than towards those who migrate to France from the third world. In his book on the French attitude towards Africans, William Cohen comments on the modest effects of the anti-racist movement in day-to-day relations,

the efforts of intellectuals and public authorities to combat the growing hostility toward migrant workers have met with varying success. Intellectuals write books and publish manifestoes that, as one worker writing in *Espirit* noted, have little effect on the French

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<sup>77</sup> The Sofres poll was done from November 17-24, 1989 on a national sample of 1,004 adult persons (18 years or older). Note that the numbers are higher than 100% because people could choose more than one answer.

worker living in daily contact and sometimes conflict with his foreign neighbours.<sup>78</sup>

Since the 1970s, immigration in France has shifted from predominantly European men coming to work, to non-European families<sup>79</sup> moving to settle (with the exception of the group of Portuguese immigrants that remains large).<sup>80</sup> Consequently, "the organising axis of immigration," Paul Yonet argues, "has shifted from jobs to legal rights -- [...] rights to family allowances, social and health protection, housing, reunion of family members of course...".<sup>81</sup> The more complex issue of the legal rights of immigrants (as opposed to the older issue of the right to work) directly related to the debate on whether or not blacks should be included in the Declaration of the Rights of Man during the Revolution. When the concert given to honor the memory of Toussaint was covered by *Le Monde*, the relationship between the coalition against racism (SOS Racisme) and the figure of Toussaint was made absolutely clear.<sup>82</sup> In that respect, the commemoration of Toussaint was given a certain power by current debates on the rights of immigrants. The polemic around the rights of immigrants has occupied political parties (the Socialists and the National Front), the authorities and a great many intellectuals. The last book edited by Bourdieu, *La Misère du Monde* (1993), is representative of this type of attempt to deal with tensions around cultural differences; based on ethnographic research of racial tensions, many of the essays also propose solutions.

The bicentennial, and its artificial demand for thinking about the Revolution, has created a space for a more radical than usual rethinking of issues that were put in place two hundred years ago -- such as citizenship. For example, the journal *Hérodote* dedicated an entire issue to questions of racism, the nation and citizenship. One of the contributors, Jacqueline Costa-Lascoux, argues that the way France (and the other countries of Europe) gives citizenship to immigrants corresponds neither to the dissolution of borders within the Common Market, nor to the need for multiple citizenship. In her article on the integration of children of immigrants, Costa-Lascoux says that

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<sup>78</sup> Cohen, *French Encounter*, 290. Note that Cohen's book was published in 1980 and since then, SOS Racisme has succeeded to a certain degree in bridging the gap between academics, authorities and the public at large. The significant number of followers of this movement suggests that many may have wanted to express anti-racist opinions earlier, but had no channels to show this support.

<sup>79</sup> Immigrants from North Africa (excluding their children who become French citizens automatically at age 16) are now three million in a country of about 60 million people.

<sup>80</sup> Paul Yonet, *Voyage au centre du malaise français* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>82</sup> See Danielle Rouard, "Les 'potes' de Pékin", *Le Monde* (13 Juin, 1989), p.24.

too often immigrants are thrown back onto their differences and defined as objects; their requests for dignity have been shoved under the banner of their acquisition of French nationality 'without formality'. [...] The ethnologization of nationality reserved for the children of immigrants, that uses images of the land and blood lineage, ends up emphasising their neocolonial aspects. It is the reverse side of the construction of a new European space based on the free movement of people and freedom in their choice of where to settle, on free exchange and equivalency. Paradoxically, the children of immigrants are fixed to the ground of their low-income housing projects when, at the same time, a pluri-national community is getting organised, capital and businesses move, and 'heritage' has become 'intellectual baggage'.<sup>83</sup>

In general, she says "the way citizenship is conceived today, it is imposed as an identity linked to the land or by birth and disregards the new transnational mobility."<sup>84</sup> Such a mobility seems to be the privilege only of the young European bourgeoisie.

The other face of this "transnational mobility" is of course, the ever-increasing number of people who are displaced from their homes because of war. The movement of goods and people therefore remains within the duality set up by the Revolution in which the desire for human rights to spread throughout the world is counteracted by a "fear of invasion" that results in exclusionary practices. It is this socio-political context which gives power to the double image of Jessye Norman and Toussaint -- one of inclusion and the other of exclusion. In other words, the presence of Jessye Norman, in its utopian form, represented the *inclusion* of all people in the Declaration of the Human Rights and the commemoration of Toussaint spoke of *exclusion* in the way this Declaration was applied.

The historian of immigration, Gérard Noiriel, defends a thesis that is representative of today's democratic ideology which advocates world-wide "conversion" to democratic ideals while it justifies exclusionary practices. His thesis contrasts, in the history of French politics, a "generous tendency of the 'Rights of Man', right to the land, [and] a naturalisation relatively easily given" to "a serious tendency to exclusion," evidenced by the identity card, the attempts of the administration to filter the flow of immigration, etc. (all defended on the

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<sup>83</sup> Jacqueline Costa-Lascoux, "La citoyenneté: un choix?", *Hérodote: La France une nation, des citoyens*, nos. 50-51 (Jul-Dec 1988): 133.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

basis of protecting the democratic rights of citizens).<sup>85</sup> This duality of inclusion and exclusion is repeated as we stand back and look at the issue of citizenship in terms of the current trends of globalization. On the one hand, there is a need to redefine citizenship (in Europe) by taking into account the new borders of the Common Market and increasing transnational mobility, but on the other hand, exclusionary practices are put in place to "protect" Europe from refugees and poor immigrants who are fixed, immobilized in their neighbourhood.

Garrigues comments that revolutionary symbols are being "sold to the ad world";<sup>86</sup> a theme reinforced in the following quote by American scholars, "the Bicentennial and its commodification reduced Revolutionary history to decorative motif. Inflammatory slogans were ironically transformed into commercial jingles."<sup>87</sup> These authors tend to undermine the power of images such as Jessye Norman/Marianne and "prove" the death of revolutionary imagery by pointing to watered-down versions in the world of advertisement. But certain people, like the editor of the rightist *Le Figaro magazine*, know when and how to use such imagery to convince their readers. The cover of a dossier published in October 1985 displayed the head of a Marianne covered by a chador with the heading "Serons nous encore Français dans trente ans?"<sup>88</sup> (Will we still be French in thirty years?) -- giving a powerful image to fuel the xenophobic imagination of its four million readers. Because of images such as this, it is important not to let the extreme right have the last word on the Nation and citizenship. I believe that it is not enough to criticize the way the right speaks about the Nation,<sup>89</sup> but also to construct new representations of the Nation that are socially progressive. This chapter has examined a set of such representations.

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<sup>85</sup> Gérard Noiriel, *La Tyrannie du national* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1991).

<sup>86</sup> Garrigues, *Images de la Révolution*, 131.

<sup>87</sup> Cafaro and Neumaier, "La Bicentenaire II," 56.

<sup>88</sup> This image was the illustration of an article based on the "new demographic science" of Gerard-François Dumont (*Doctor d'Etat* in economy) that "scientifically" showed that birthrate decreasing for white women and drastically increasing for non-European woman (both of which are incorrect). Reactions to this "racist propaganda" came out in the form of articles in *Le Monde* and *Liberation*. But as Ives Lacoste remarks, those who read *Figaro Magazine* unfortunately do not read *Le Monde* and *Liberation*.

<sup>89</sup> Homi Bhaba's work on the Nation is representative.

## A NEW LANDSCAPE FOR THE CAPITAL

During the bicentennial, a significant number of exhibits dealt with architecture, monuments and urban design. The architecture school of the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, for example, put together an unprecedented exhibition of projects by revolutionary architects such as Ledoux, Boullée and Lequeux which, in the spirit of the time in which they worked, were designs for public buildings such as libraries, schools, monuments, and museums. Another show presented eighteenth century plans for modernizing the medieval urban fabric of French cities, a "revolutionary" attempt to find a new order based on rationalization and equal access over space.<sup>1</sup> All of these projects shared a grandiose sense of scale and mass -- even the drawings were oversized, a watercoloured elevation running easily to three meters in length! Without going into the world of what Anthony Vidler describes as the "origins of modern architecture" (a theory that has attracted some criticism) to put things plainly, these eighteenth century projects were designed as propaganda for Enlightenment ideas. Nowhere was this more clearly inscribed than in projects for commemorative monuments during the 1790s. An exhibit in Lyon on revolutionary festival architecture, with floats and temporary buildings, also included a proportionally large number of projects for monuments. Relatively few of these projects were built but some were and may still be visited today like the pyramidal structure built in the memory of an influential Freemason in Parc Monceau in Paris (fig. 6.1). From tombs for dead revolutionary heroes like Marat and Rousseau, to countless allegorical figures of equality, freedom and regeneration standing on oversized pedestals, these commemorative monuments were conceived as instruments of pedagogy to teach the virtues of the Republic to the citizens and to imprint a new symbolic order on an old landscape.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The subject of the modernisation of cities by revolutionary urbanists is a fascinating one I cannot go into here. An excellent source is the French political geographer Dockès. Pierre Dockès, *L'espace économique du XVI au XVIII siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1969).

<sup>2</sup> Monique Mosser and Daniel Rabreau, "Circus, amphitheatre, colosseum: Revolutionary Paris as a New Rome," *Lotus* 39 (III, 1983): 108-117; and Anthony Vidler, *The Writing of the Wall, Architectural theory in the late Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).



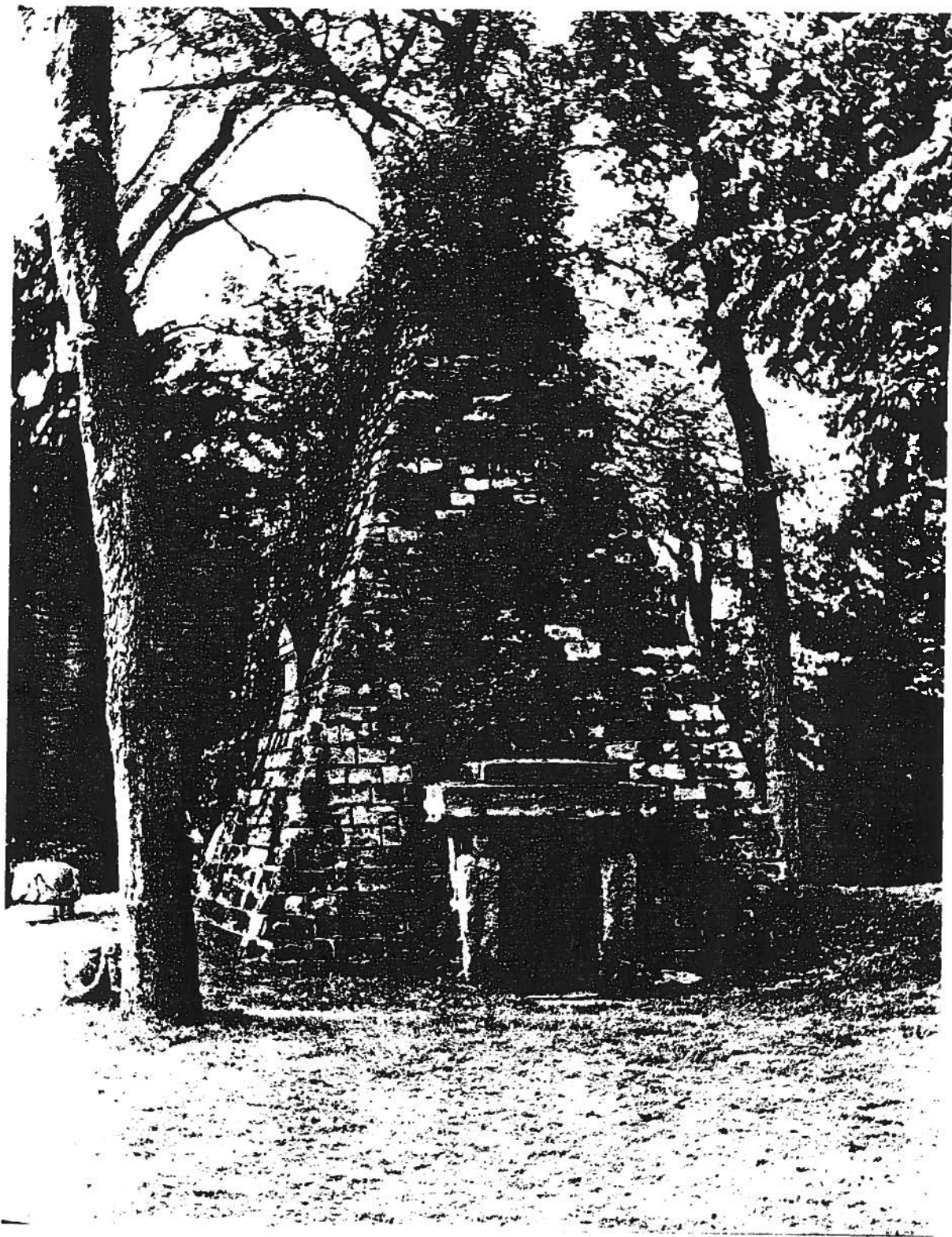


Figure 6.1  
PYRAMID ERECTED FOR THE DUC DE CHARTRES IN THE WOOD OF  
TOMBS, PARC MONCEAU, PARIS

The Duke was Grand Master of the Grand Orient Masonic lodge, established in Paris on Boulevard Saint-Germain in 1774. Reproduced in James Stevens Curl, *The Art and Architecture of Freemasonry* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1991), fig.92.

The exhibition of these projects for monuments commemorating the revolution occurred at a time when debates about the design of new commemorative buildings for the bicentennial were agitating the architectural community and the public in general. The Eiffel Tower, the Grand and Petit Palais were spared demolition after the 1889 centennial exposition and represent today a major reference for modern commemorative buildings. With their ingenious dry assembly using metal and glass, the Grand and Petit Palais have become icons of fin de siècle architecture. The Eiffel Tower represents all of Paris metonymically, as the object rhetorically stands for the whole of the city.

Determined not to be overshadowed by the 1889 exhibition, the Socialist government decided to put on another world exhibition for the bicentennial. The exhibition was to take place in a series of sites around Paris so as to link the different *quartiers* into a festive whole. In addition to the world exhibition another twenty projects (for Paris alone) would be built such as libraries and museums, some of which would be dedicated to the bicentennial and remain as a memory of the event.

When he was elected to office in 1981, François Mitterrand first raised the question of what buildings would be appropriate to leave behind after the bicentennial. Mitterrand considered architecture very seriously and took it upon himself to promote the building of significant architecture during his tenure. "Will we succeed to inscribe in space and to sculpt into building materials our cultural project? With all my energy, I will apply myself to the task."<sup>3</sup> And he did. During the bicentennial year, more buildings were raised out of the ground than at any time since Haussmann's construction projects in the nineteenth century. In an interview with *Urban Press*, the president justified the role played by the state on the grounds that, in contrast to the necessarily hasty pace of private developers, the state is not rushed when making decisions about the placement, form and materials of enduring architectural icons. For Mitterrand, projects need "essentially a breath of fresh air. And time, a lot of time: we cannot build anything that is powerful and new at the rhythm imposed by developers and land speculation."<sup>4</sup> The role of the president as master builder is here legitimized by the opposition of the state to private enterprise.

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<sup>3</sup> Cited in François Chaslin, *Les Paris de François Mitterrand, Histoire des grands projets architecturaux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

The Socialists wished to prove to the world that its particular style of state regulation did not impede economic growth and allowed for enlightened programs of culture and education. New monuments were the most grandiose, visible objects the state could finance to show its commitment to economic growth, culture and education. In the end, François Mitterrand will, by the skin of his teeth, have succeeded in leaving his indelible imprint on Paris. By working on a scale unprecedented in the thirst for building usually manifested by our heads of state, and no doubt using up for years to come all public funds available for such adventures in the process, while milking dry this traditional source of prestige, he has left his successors a city brimming with facilities and has hence prevented their laying claim to the same glory in future. No doubt he will long remain the last of the builder-presidents, the one who used to say "in every city, I feel like an emperor architect; I resolve, I decide, I arbitrate."<sup>5</sup> The intensity of Mitterrand's participation in the design process, in fact, became a sore point in the architectural community that was soon picked up and exploited by the press.

For better or worse, architecture is the most visible lasting trace a government leaves behind. For the Socialist government, the potential for transforming the landscape was emotionally charged. François Chaslin, who is an architectural critic in *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Le Monde*, underlines the symbolic dimension of these projects. "Obsessed by the brevity of socialist experiments (France in 1936, Chile of the 1970s), uncertain of keeping control of the state for long, the left wanted to forcefully place in the landscape of the capital a number of buildings that, in centuries to come, would be its reminder."<sup>6</sup> "Les Grands Travaux" were administered by EPAD, comprising a group of four men formally involved in the ministries of culture and urbanism. The group included Paul Guimard (a writer), Jack Lang (the minister of culture), Robert Lion (the head of cabinet, advisory to the President) and Roger Quillot (representing the ministry of urbanism). They acted as confidants to the president, a brain-storming group and the heads of an active cabinet in which each one brought his respective knowledge.

Even though Mitterrand would have preferred to choose the architects himself, members of the government were successful in getting in place an ambitious

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<sup>5</sup> François Chaslin, "Progress on the Grands Projets," *Architectural Review*, (Dec. 1986): 27.

<sup>6</sup> "Obsédé par la brièveté des expériences socialistes (1939, le Chili), incertain de garder longtemps les rênes de l'Etat, la gauche a voulu poser avec force dans le paysage de la capitale des édifices qui, dans les siècles, feront se resouvenir d'elle." (Chaslin, *Les Paris*, 19)

program of 67 competitions for public buildings, grouped under the title *Concours du President*.<sup>7</sup> These 67 projects throughout France ranged from governmental offices and schools to administrative buildings. The response was overwhelming. The combination of the wide variety of projects and the number of proposals (471 projects for La Defense, 332 for the park of La Villette), propelled France to the centre of contemporary architectural debates. An exhibit at the Pavillon de l'Arsenal inviting certain architects to elaborate utopian plans for Paris in the twenty first century reveals the excitement for interesting architectural solutions and elaborating new ideas for urban design.<sup>8</sup>

The projects that appeared most frequently in the press include: the Orsay Museum, a remodelling of the nineteenth century Gare d'Orsay by ACT Architecture and Gae Aulenti; the Parc la Villette, an urban park reclaiming stockyards and slaughterhouses in the north of the city, designed by Bernard Tschumi and including La Cité des Science et des Techniques by Adrien Fainsilber and La Cité de la Musique; the Bastille Opera by the Canadian Carlos Ott; Le Grand Louvre by the Chinese-American I.M. Pei; the Ministry of Finance in Bercy (as it was moved from its former site in the Louvre) by French architects Ivan Chemetov and Boris Huidobro; L'Arche de la Communication at La Defense, now called La Grande Arche by Danish architect Otto von Spreckelsen; the Institut du Monde Arabe by French architect Jean Nouvel; and the Très Grande Bibliothèque, the competition for which was still in progress in 1989. Other projects were not covered by the press and in that respect, it is clear that the media favored massive buildings over light, high-tech and smaller ones. As usual, already well-known architects took precedence over others.

Most of the projects are cultural and educational institutions or government ministries. The duality of government and information diffusion, whether in the realm of culture or education, suggests to William Curtis the imprint of a cybernetic model in the Parisian landscape. "The centralization of cultural and political power is restated in terms of a mechanistic or, more precisely, a cybernetic model. The metropolis is treated as a hub of information or a database. In such a scenario, the Grands Projets emerge as monumental, collective machines dispensing directives, services, "culture" to all corners of the

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<sup>7</sup> Members of Mitterrand's entourage reminded him that an open competition is the law and the architect's association would be very unhappy if more than one major project were to be done without a competition. The idea of open and anonymous architectural competitions was invented and put in place by the revolution.

<sup>8</sup> The exhibit "Paris, Architecture et Utopie," curated by Kristin Feireiss of Aedes Architektur Galerie, Berlin, and held at the Pavillon de l'Arsenal in Paris. Kristin Feireiss, ed., *Paris, Architecture et Utopie* (Paris: Pavillon de l'Arsenal, 1989).

nation."<sup>9</sup> The project of the Très Grande Bibliothèque, the largest library in France, would be in accord with this model of a centralized hub of information.

If one plots the Grands Travaux on a map of the city (fig. 6.2), the east of Paris, traditionally the working class neighborhoods, is clearly favoured over the western (wealthy) side of the city. The architectural critic Hélène Lipstadt finds the large scale projects grouped at La Villette the most significant in this attempt to bring public buildings into the poorer areas of the city. "The rebalancing of Parisian development to the east is a literal reorientation of the city's cultural focus. The project of La Villette represents the clearest example of the Socialist attempt to redress, through cultural patronage, the centuries-old westward drift of wealth and its amenities."<sup>10</sup> There is, in these projects, not only a desire to bring attention to the eastern portions of the city, but also an attempt to modify the image of Paris through cultural institutions rather than through the direction of its physical planning.<sup>11</sup>

Physical planning has been practiced with a heavy hand over the past twenty years in Paris, in the form of ruthless urban renewal where entire quarters have been replaced by tall commercial buildings, described rightly by Lipstadt as "mediocre applications of International style modernism."<sup>12</sup> Beside new university buildings, post offices and other governmental buildings, only three state buildings in Paris were given a modern form, La Maison de la Radio by Henry Bernard, 1956-63, which is along the Seine in the 16th arrondissement; the Centre Beaubourg by Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano, 1969-70; and Les Halles; the latter two under the Pompidou government.<sup>13</sup> By the time Mitterrand had become president, Paris was in desperate need of a face lift if it was to compete with other European cities for the income generated by tourism. This was, I think, a reason for his choosing to build cultural institutions that would be attractive to tourists.

### *The commemorative monuments*

Out of the twenty projects built in Paris, three were selected to be completed by 1989 and identified as "commemorative monuments". These three buildings --

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<sup>9</sup> William Curtis, "Grands Projets," *Architectural Record* (March 1990): 76.

<sup>10</sup> Hélène Lipstadt, "A Paris of the 21st century," *Art in America*, (Nov. 1984): 108.

<sup>11</sup> I am referring to the major roadworks which have transformed the promenades along the Seine into the 'voie rapide,' an express route built along the river's edge under Giscard d'Estaing's government.

<sup>12</sup> Lipstadt, "Paris of the 21st," 106.

<sup>13</sup> Paraphrased from Lipstadt, "Paris of the 21st."

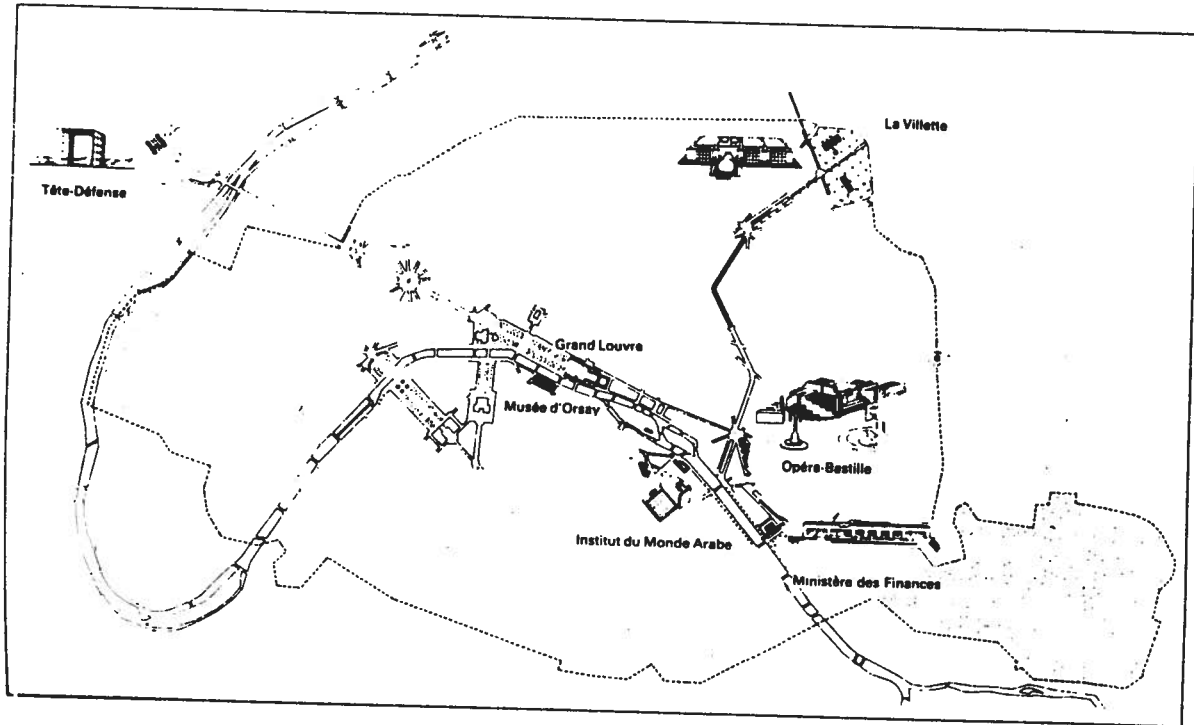


Figure 6.2  
THE THREE COMMEMORATIVE MONUMENTS IN RELATION TO EACH OTHER

Map of the city of Paris showing the alignment of the three projects: left, Grande Arche, ('Tête Défense'); centre, Louvre Pyramid ('Grand Louvre'); right, Bastille Opéra. Reproduced in François Chaslin, *Le Paris de François Mitterrand* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 248.

the Grande Arche, the Louvre and the Bastille Opera -- were inaugurated in great pomp during the bicentennial year. Why these particular projects and not others? The first, obvious "reason" lies in their iconographic potential to be monumental. The Grande Arche at La Défense functions perfectly as a televisual icon -- its form is so simple that it is readable in any medium. Besides the profound significance of the site, the Bastille Opera is monumental in relation to the buildings which surround it; and the Louvre pyramid is a renovation of an existing and well-visited monument. The sheer size of the Grande Arche, the historical dimension of the Louvre renovation and the symbolism of the Opera on the Bastille plaza created a powerful triangle of icons which framed the bicentennial ceremonies. The state used these new buildings as a stage to put on a show with the primary, yet unstated intention, of presenting France as the absolute centre of European culture. By integrating the inauguration ceremonies of these monuments into the bicentennial calendar of events, it allowed these three buildings to enter the political imagination as a reminder of both the bicentennial of the revolution *and* the Socialist government that ordered their construction. Far from being hidden, this double reference to the Socialist government and the French revolution was made explicit by the members of the government and the president himself in a number of interviews and declarations.<sup>14</sup>

The other reason for the choice of these three buildings as commemorative monuments results from their geographical placement: the state intended to rework the constellation of monuments into the axis created by the Champs Elysées. Such an axial alignment would not be significant in another city, but in Paris, this route which extends from the Champs Elysées westward to the outskirts of the city called the "Grand Axis", has a long genealogy beginning under Louis XIV.

Looking at the map of Paris, one sees that all three bicentennial projects are on this Grand Axis which crosses the city from east to west, passing through its centre. In the east is the Opera on the Place de la Bastille, in the centre is the pyramid of the Louvre and, if one extends this line westward up the Champs Elysées, it will end at the Grande Arche. Historically, the idea of an axis that

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<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, among parties of the right, centre or left, members of all political classes find an affiliation with the French Revolution. Where opinions differ (and are split according to conventional political lines) is the manner in which revolutionary ideas are applied to present-day situations. For an in-depth article drawn from interviews, see Marie-Laurence Netter, "La représentation symbolique de la Révolution française dans la class politique," *Hérodote* (Jul.-Dec. 1988): 201-212.

extends the Louvre toward the west was begun by the landscape architect André Le Nôtre. At the request of Louis XIV, he traced a central allée during the renovation of the garden of the Tuileries in 1664. The literal inscription of royal power in the landscape by an axis radiating out of the royal palace toward the sunset was then further emphasized by a road lined with a double row of elms extending the allée of the Tuileries westward to what is now called the Rond Point des Champs Elysées. Under Louis XV, Le Nôtre's design was extended all the way to Neuilly by razing hills which interrupted the perspective.<sup>15</sup> Toward the end of the eighteenth century, an increasing number of wealthy houses were built on either side of the axis. Ultimately, the western portion of the axis was physicalized, in the urban sense of the word, by Haussmann's boulevards. The boulevards of Paris were the hallmark of Haussmanian urban renewal for not only did they allow traffic to flow from one part of the city to another, but below grade they brought all the modern amenities of water, sanitation, and gas which so transformed the city. With the construction of the Arc de Triomphe in the 1830s, the Champs Elysées boulevard became a symbol of the Parisian bourgeoisie and the Grand Axis took on its most theatrical aspect (fig. 6.3).

To extend this axis eastwards from the seat of power to the poorer neighborhoods remained a dream of the revolutionary architects. Many plans were drawn to incorporate the symbolic Place de la Bastille into the existing axial geometry of the city, but the eastern portion was never realized. The most famous of these, called *Le Plan des Artistes*, was drawn under Edme Verniquet from 1783 to 1796. It gathered many different urban projects onto one plan, some of which have been realized and others not (fig. 6.4). The lines represent projected openings of new streets into the urban fabric: the dark ones were realized and the light ones were not. These *percées* were classified into five categories that regulated the height of the facades on either side and the width of the new axis. Note that the Place de la Bastille is entirely reworked under this plan and is also linked in an axis to the "Vieux Louvre" passing by the Hotel de Ville.

The *Plan des Artistes* was made possible by a law passed by the convention in 1793 that ordered the sale of the "biens nationaux" which, for Paris, included the land formally owned by the Church and the crown -- "an eighth of the ground surface of the capital, estimated at 100 million pounds."<sup>16</sup> With this simple

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<sup>15</sup> Refer to Antoine Picon, "L'Echappée royale, de Le Nôtre et Perrault à Perronet," *Les Traversées de Paris* (Paris: Edition le Moniteur, 1989), 131-4.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Pinon, "Le Plan des Artistes entre grands Axes et Opportunités foncières," *Les Traversées de Paris* (catalogue of the exhibition "La Traversée de Paris"), ed. Pierre Pinon (Paris: Editions du Moniteur, 1989), 146. For additional information



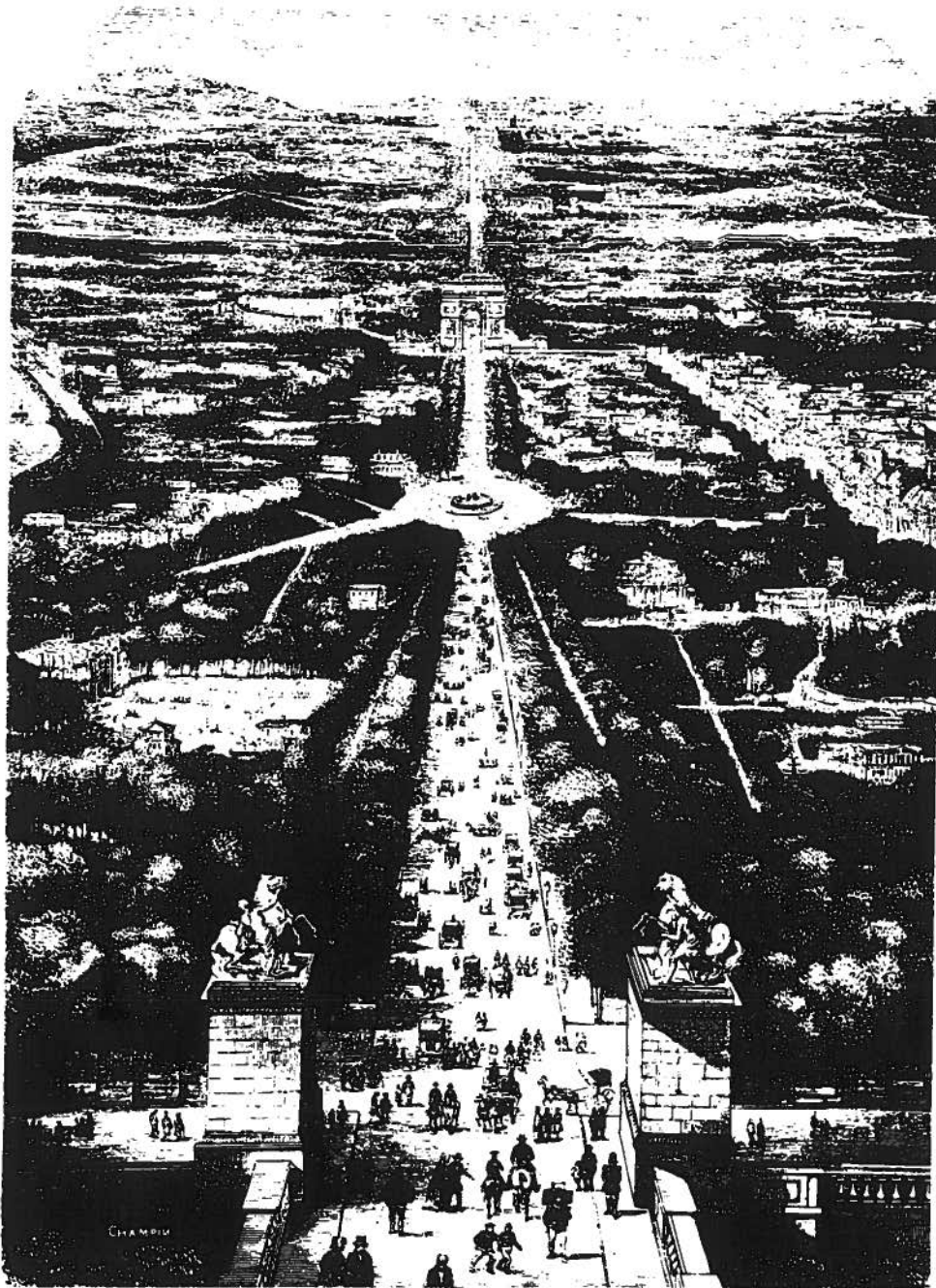


Figure 6.3  
BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE CHAMPS ELYSÉES

Anonymous engraving inspired by Champlin, mid-nineteenth century. Looking toward Saint Germain-en-Laye. Reproduced in *Les Traversées de Paris* (Paris: Éditions du Moniteur, 1989), 167.

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information on the subject see L. Bergeron, "Biens nationaux," ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf, *Le dictionnaire critique de la Révolution* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988); and Marcel Marion, *La vente des biens nationaux pendant la Révolution* (Mégariotis Reprints, 1908).

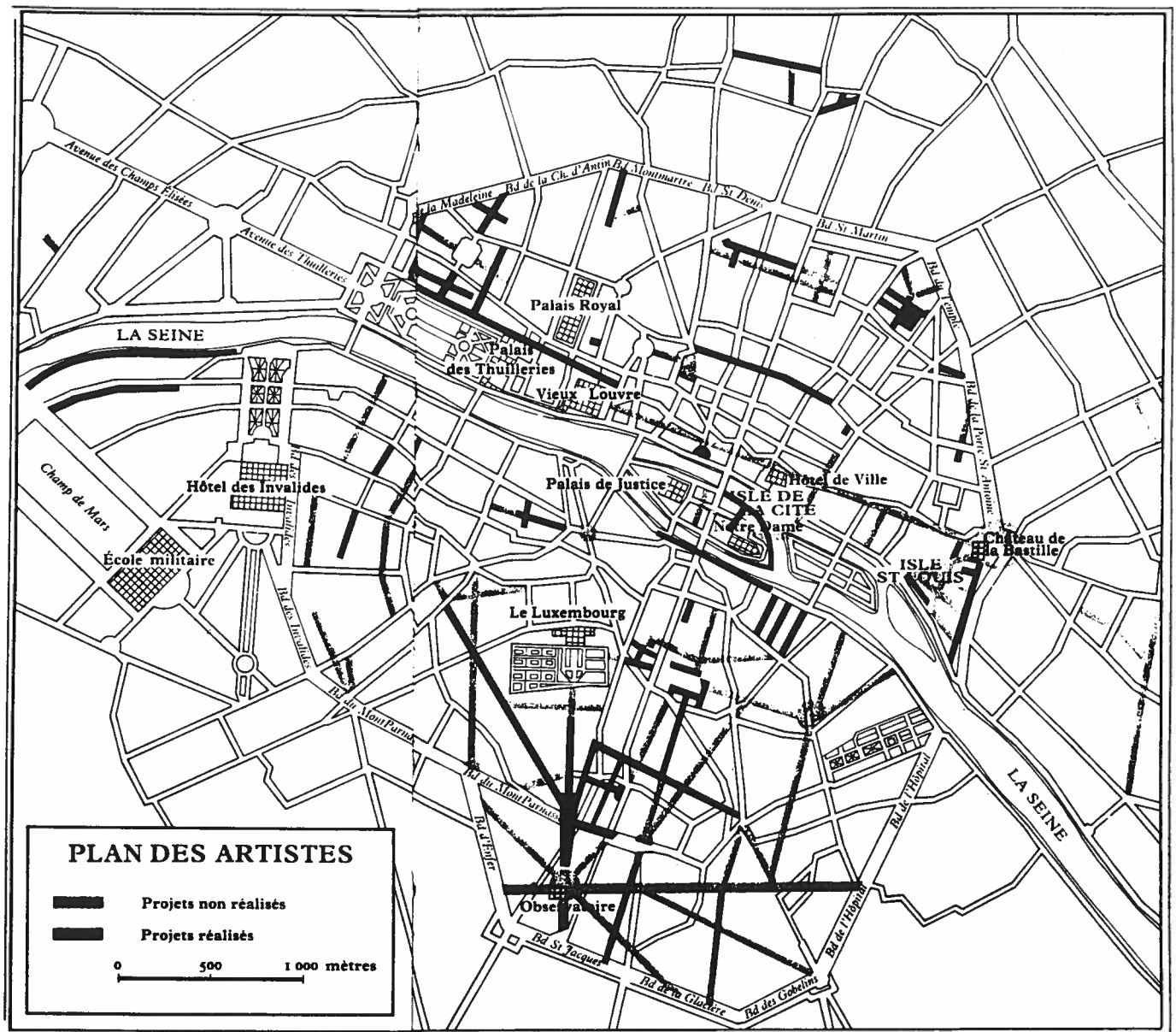


Figure 6.4  
PLAN DES ARTISTES

Reproduced from *Les Architectes de la Liberté*, Annie Jacques and Jean-Pierre Moulleseaux (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 141.

move from private to public ownership, the State became a developer. "In principle for the good of the Nation, the state became rich and also allowed for the participation of small owners in a political economy."<sup>17</sup> For when the State considered that a lot was too large for development it would find it advantageous to subdivide and sell it as small lots.<sup>18</sup> Some of these projects (drawn in darker lines) were realized under the Empire and later by Rambuteau under Louis-Philippe and Haussmann under the Second Empire. The only axis linking the Bastille to the rest of the city is reaching south to the street bordering the Seine river, but not the one connecting to the Grand Axis.

Around 1920s, Le Corbusier drew his vision of modern Paris, the "Plan Voisin," which revived the east-west axis with a twist. His "grande traversée" was set parallel to the Champs Elysées, by an axis running along the avenue de l'Opera, explicitly set against the existing "triumphal royal route." For Le Corbusier, the royal axis ended in a cul-de-sac on Place de la Concorde, whereas his *traversée*, by continuing to the outskirts of the city, would bring "fresh air" to the urban fabric. "Coming from an open space and going to an open space, it ventilates Paris in one fell swoop" he said.<sup>19</sup> On a perspective drawing illustrating his 'plan voisin' (fig. 6.5), the *traversée* is an absolutely straight route paralleling the horizon on the upper part of the drawing. But Le Corbusier's new axis disregarded the revolutionary utopian plans by avoiding the Bastille plaza and going through the symbolically more conservative Place Voltaire. By setting his axis parallel to the old one, Le Corbusier effected a critique of the historical city but at the same time, erasing its revolutionary history of utopian planning. In fact, Jacques Lucan says that the proposal is legitimized by the old axis and the principles that put it in place; "the new east-west 'traversée' is only a partial critique" and simply "remains an idea."<sup>20</sup> Even if the critique is partial, the Plan Voisin still resurrected the idea to complete the eastern portion of the axis through the capital which contributed to keep the idea alive until the 1980s.

The state's decisions to emphasize the east of Paris and to extend the Grand Axis eastward by linking the Grande Arche, the Louvre and the Opera Bastille clearly calls on the revolutionary *plan des artistes*. The linkage established by the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Law of 4 April 1793, articles 1 and 2. Quoted by Pinon, "Plan des Artistes," 145.

<sup>19</sup> Le Corbusier, "Précision sur l'état présent de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme," Paris, 1930, 194. Note that this axis crosses another north-south axis. In an attempt to return to Paris its status as a place of exchange, Le Corbusier established the point where the two axes cross as the site of Les Halles (the central market).

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Lucan, "Le Corbusier: d'est en ouest: ventiller Paris," *Les Traversées*, 176.

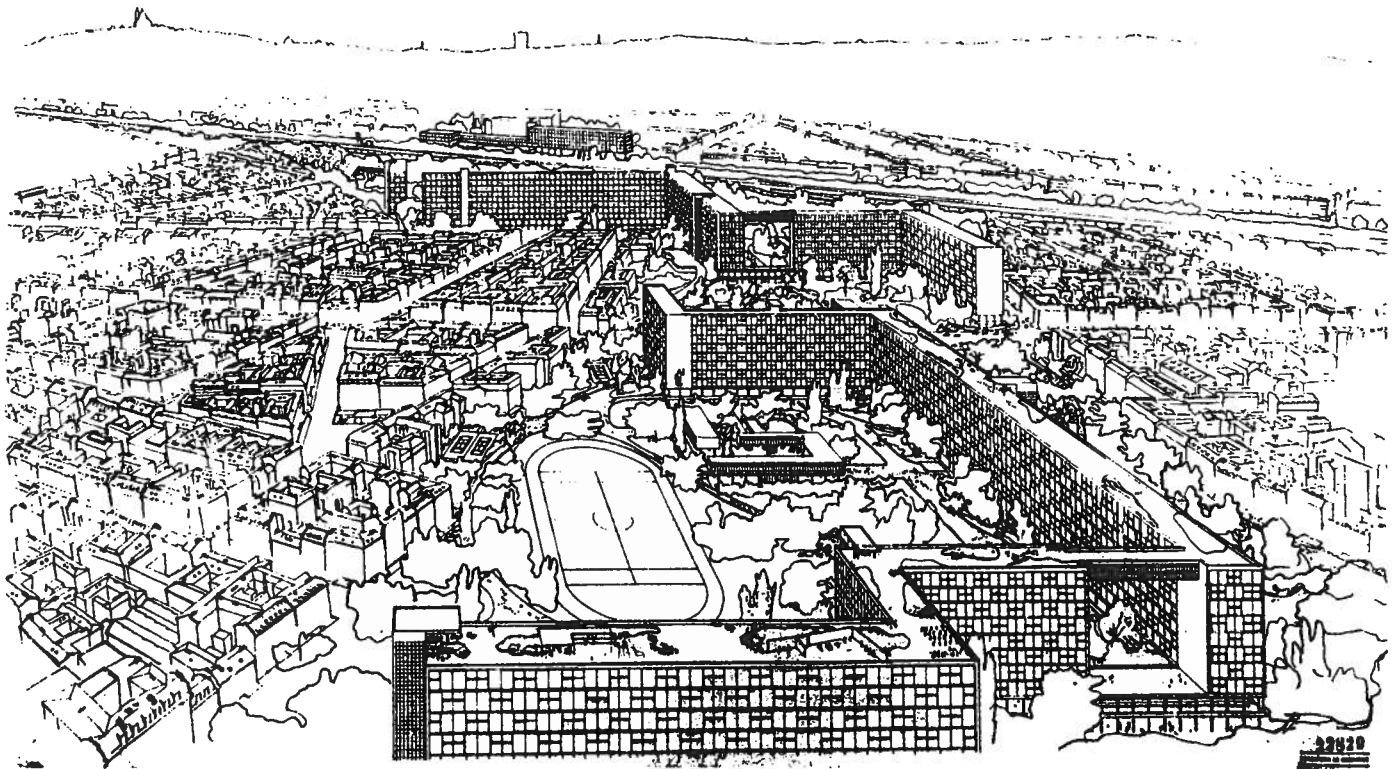


Figure 6.5  
 'LA GRANDE TRAVERSÉE' IN LE CORBUSIER'S 'PLAN VOISIN'

Portion of Le Corbusier's 'Plan Voisin,' showing "La grande traversée" crossing Paris from east to west at the top of the perspective. Drawing by Pierre-Eduoard Charles Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), ca. 1937. Fondation Le Corbusier. Reproduced in *Traversées de Paris*, 167.

building of the Bastille Opera at one end and the Grande Arche at the other appeared to many architectural critics as a welcome ending to a long, confusing and frustrating debate about the form and the image of this Grand Axis.<sup>21</sup> The realization of this utopian dream of the revolution is one among many instances cited by the press, when they wished to draw a parallel between revolutionary architecture and the Grands Travaux.

The physical connection between the Louvre and the Bastille Opera remains unrealized, yet because both buildings were inaugurated for the bicentennial, they are connected in a way that is culturally meaningful in the twentieth century: through their media coverage. The physical networks so valued by Haussmann do not resonate in contemporary thought. The emphasis on the gaze so prevalent in nineteenth century urban design has been replaced by the gaze of the television camera. The power of new monuments resides, I think, in their mediatic quality rather than in their physical connection to the surrounding urban fabric.<sup>22</sup>

It is by juxtaposing the permanent quality of the commemorative monuments to the ephemerality of the celebrations, that the symbolic landscape of Paris could be reworked with such intensity. Not only were these monuments included in the television coverage of the Bastille Day parade but, during the days preceding the parade, the G7 heads of state participated in their inauguration (fig. 6.6). The presence of the most powerful heads of state at the inauguration ceremonies gave legitimacy to the buildings in a way that would not have happened without the juxtaposition of the summit with the bicentennial. Being an international event, all the TV stations of the countries represented at the summit were covering the ceremonies and these new buildings were acting as a stage set. Inversely, turning the annual meeting of the G7 into a sort of "architectural tour" of the new commemorative monuments of Paris, partially transformed the political event into a cultural one. In any case, the combination of the press coverage about the buildings in magazines such as *Art in America*, *House and Garden* and *Global Architecture*, along with the television coverage of both the G7 ceremonies and the parade resulted in a powerful advertisement for the new Paris. In the report to the President, Xavier Beguin-Billecocq says "that the bicentennial of the French Revolution has had an international success that can be

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<sup>21</sup> For the entire history of successively frustrated attempts to terminate the Grand axis, see François Chaslin's article, "Les Désaxées: trente ans de projets pour la tête défense," *Architecture d'aujourd'hui* 258, (Sept. 1988): 52-81.

<sup>22</sup> For a similar argument, see Françoise Choay, *Allegorie du patrimoine* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1992).

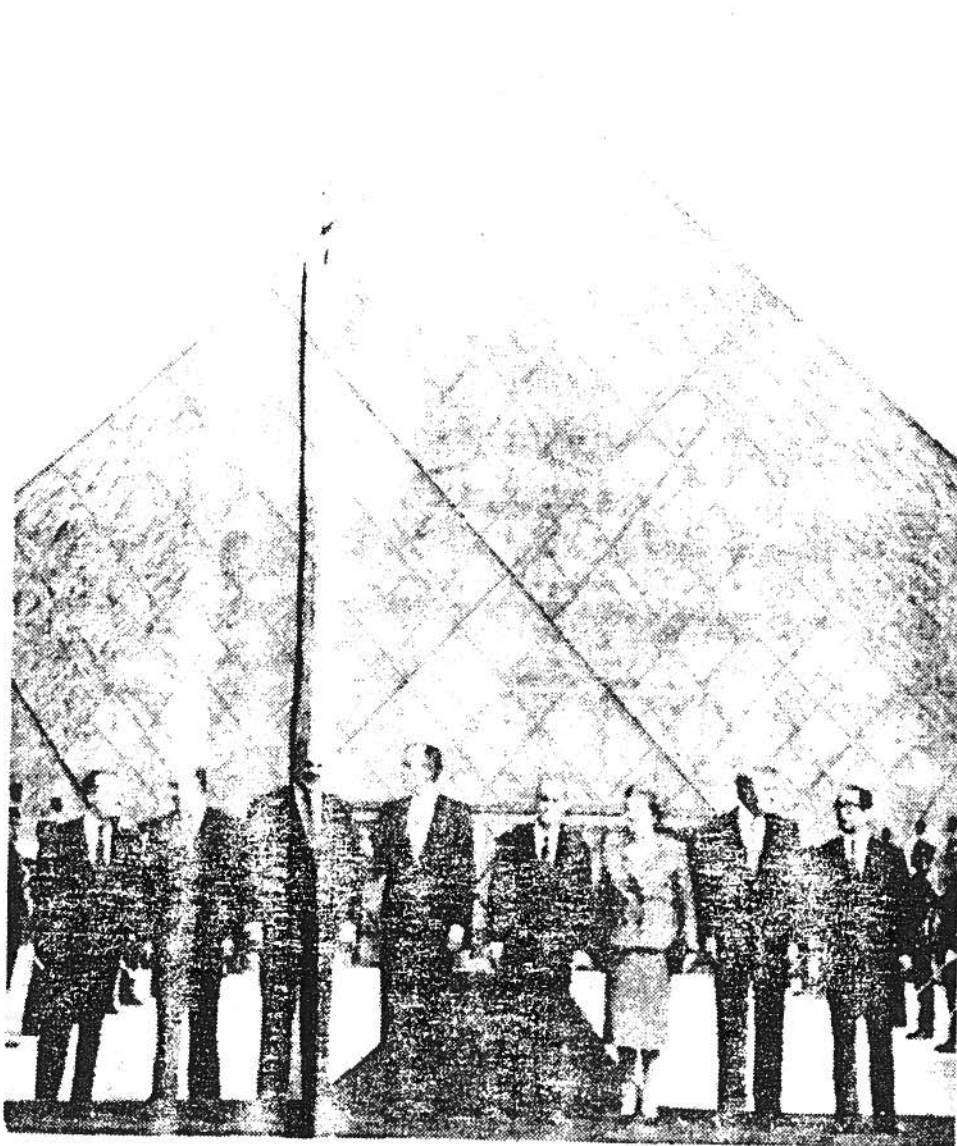


Figure 6.6  
THE GROUP OF SEVEN IN FRONT OF THE LOUVRE PYRAMID

On the occasion of the G7 Summit and the inauguration of the Louvre extension. Photograph from *Herald Tribune*, July 1989.

attested to by the amount of the foreign press coverage on the bicentennial since 1988. The largest beneficiary of this success is the increase in prestige of the country in the world and in tourism."<sup>23</sup> The 'payoff' is that tourists are now queuing up to visit the Louvre much more than in the past, they go to the top of the Grande Arche even though it is off the beaten-track of tourist sites and tickets are sold out for the Bastille Opera the day they go on sale. This means that people who saw these new buildings in the media (whether in the press or television) were then intrigued enough to visit Paris and see the buildings for themselves.

In the next three sections, I focus on one monument at a time by treating them as a montage of comments and references elaborated by the press – rather than as buildings that can be criticized on exclusively architectural terms. Some of the references elaborated by the press are imaginary, others contradictory, but they all contributed to invest meaning into these new iconic objects in the landscape. References range from Egyptian to revolutionary architecture, comments jump from the royal attitude of Mitterrand to discussions about a Socialist style and the new symbolism of the Grand Axis.

This chapter is intended to act as a stage on which actors of the commemoration can enter the "play," including the 14th of July parade and the summit. In the next chapter, an analysis of the parade shows how the monuments came together with the floats in such a way as to allow for an allegorical interpretation to emerge. This allegorical interpretation uncovers certain social issues of racism and exclusion that will be discussed at length, but first, the commemorative monuments.

## **The Louvre and its Pyramid**

No monument demonstrates an historical citation of revolutionary architecture better than the pyramid designed by I.M. Pei for the courtyard of the Louvre (fig. 6.7). This work provoked many comments and discussions in the corridors of the Commission for Historical Monuments, the offices of the Louvre museum and the government. The Louvre had been a royal residence since its extension

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<sup>23</sup> Xavier Beguin-Billecocq, *Le Bicentenaire de la Révolution Française, rapport au président de la République*, ed. Jean-Noël Jeanneney (Paris: La documentation française, 1990), 379. To purchase advertising equivalent to the press coverage of the bicentennial would have cost, in millions: in the UK: FF 125 (Cdn\$ 6); Italy: FF110 (Cdn\$ 5.5); West Germany: FF 183 (Cdn\$ 9); the USA: FF 300 (Cdn\$ 15); Argentina: FF 22 (Cdn\$ 11).



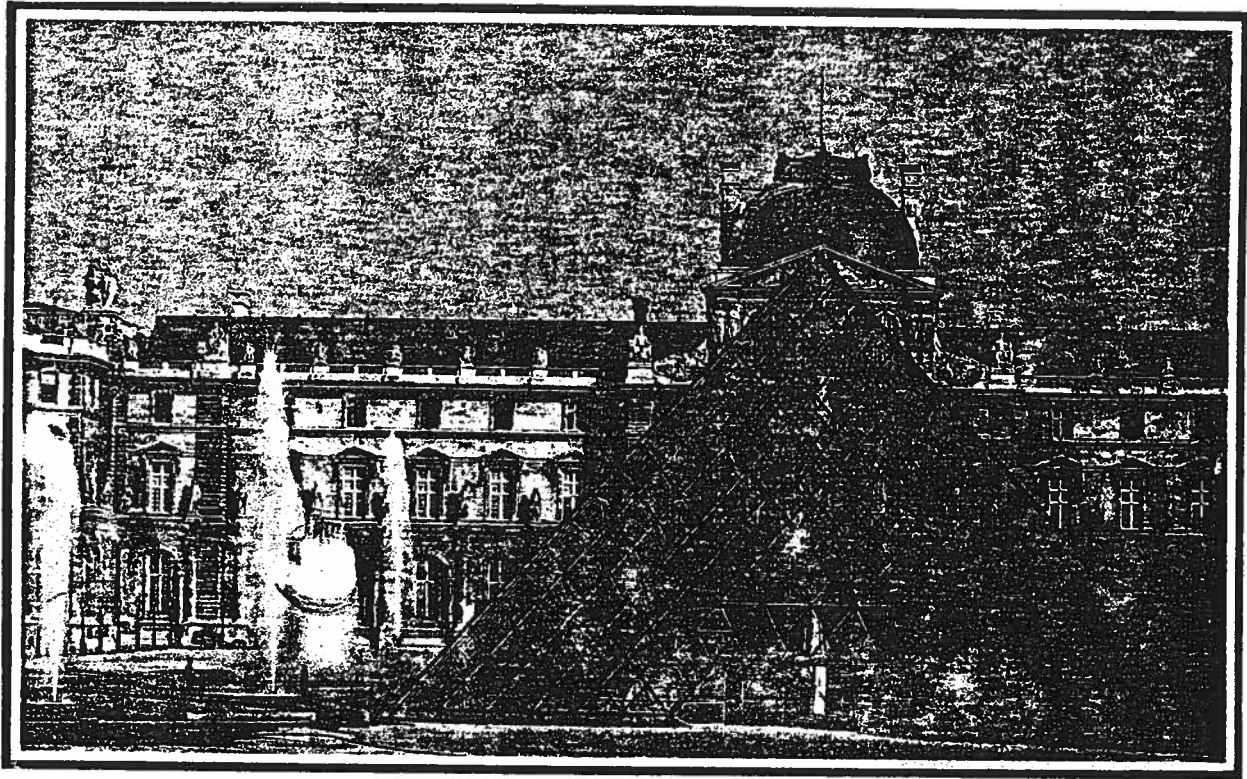


Figure 6.7  
THE LOUVRE PYRAMID, PARIS, 1989

Postcard showing the new pyramid by I.M. Pei in the courtyard with the Louvre in the background.



in 1570 by Catherine de Medicis and a public museum since the revolution. The Louvre brought together the world of the Ancien Regime and the revolution into one building and it is this dual symbolism that made its renovation especially meaningful and controversial.

Indeed once the French revolutionaries took power and founded a republican state, the question of how to talk about the past was placed high on their agenda. Debates on whether objects belonging to the royalty should be symbolically destroyed or, on the contrary, kept as a reminder of the past for future generations led to the destruction of many churches and sculptures, but it also led to the creation of public museums. The Revolutionary government, looking for a way to dramatize the creation of the new republican state, nationalized the king's art collection and declared the Louvre a public museum in 1793. Once the palace of the kings, the Louvre was recognized as a museum for the people, to be open to everyone free of charge.

The works of art in the new museums were seen as powerful reminders of the fall of the Old Régime and the creation of a new order. Still today, one can read engraved in the stone above the entrance to the Apollo Gallery (built by Louis XIV) an epigram dedicating the opening of the museum to the "anniversary of the fall of the tyranny." As one enters the gallery, a large case holds three crowns from the royal and imperial past, ceremonially displayed as public property. As a result, "the work of art, now displayed as public property, becomes the means through which the relationship between the individual as citizen and the state as benefactor is enacted."<sup>24</sup> These spaces were crucial to articulate concretely the new values that at once discredited the Ancien Régime and celebrated the republic. The collection, its confiscation from tyrants, and the trophies of war -- all gathered in one space -- stood as visual proof of a historic shift in power.

French revolutionaries believed that a greater access to culture would counteract human destiny. On the individual level, culture could save people from the anguish of death and, on the collective level, from barbarism. Educating the masses meant

building cultural centers, theaters and museums in order to give people tools to better understand others, to control one's destiny, but also the destiny of humanity: to work towards the development of culture was a way to move forward on the road of reason and

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<sup>24</sup> Carol Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship," in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures*, (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 9.

democracy. Knowledge of art and contact with paintings would make people more civic-minded and more democratic, more open to the world and more able to understand it. [...] This model was based on the concept of a cultivated aesthete, a democrat and a scientist, all three in one -- a concept that has existed since the Enlightenment. The development of a critical sense would, so it was argued, preserve the self from collective passions.<sup>25</sup>

The Louvre was not the first royal collection to be turned into a public museum, but its transformation was the most politically significant and influential on the design and conception of art museums in Europe and in North America. Carol Duncan sees the Louvre as the origin of the *national museum*.

Every major state, monarchical or republican, understood the usefulness of having a public art museum. Such public institutions made (and still make) the state look good: progressive, concerned about the spiritual life of its citizens, a preserver of past achievements and a provider for the common good. And since public museums are, by definition, accessible to everyone, they can function as especially clear demonstrations of the state's commitment to the principle of equality. The public museum also makes visible the public it claims serve. It produces the public as a visible entity by literally providing it a defining frame and giving it something to do. Meanwhile, the political passivity of citizenship is idealized as active art appreciation and spiritual enrichment. Thus the art museum gives citizenship and civic virtue a content without having to redistribute real power.<sup>26</sup>

The public museum was established as a means of sharing what had been private and exposing what had been concealed. But this new attitude toward the public and its right to have access to art also created a split between the experts and the consumers (the lay persons). The curatorial gaze, along with emerging technologies of collecting and cataloguing, enabled a vast gathering, filtering, and organizing of artwork that previously belonged to the king, the aristocracy and the church.

*Napoleonic transformation of the revolutionary museum into a state institution*  
However, in the early nineteenth century the Louvre still resembled the older, private collections, with long tables in the centre and paintings hung in vertical rows that reached up to the ceiling. The appearance of the main gallery was rather dark. A very long space with a continuous barrel vault, and with small windows

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<sup>25</sup> Olivier Donnat, *les français*, 66-7.

<sup>26</sup> Duncan, "Art Museums", 9.

along both walls. "Paintings were placed between the window, and along the center were tables on which were arranged bronzes, busts, objets d'art, clocks and 'other curiosities' -- 'precious spoils taken from tyrants, or from other enemies of our country'. The paintings were hung chronologically. At first then, this museum was not a picture gallery as it would be understood today, but contained many items that had been in older collection, and they were laid out as they might had been in a 16th century collections, with tables in the centre of the room containing mixed three-dimensional material, with paintings in multiple tiers on the walls between the windows."<sup>27</sup> In 1803, the Louvre, renamed Musée Napoléon, reformed its collections and methods of display. The work of the specialists was an immense task of "requisition, selection, distribution, installation, removals, reinstallation, classification, restoration, inventories, exhibitions, catalogues, for thousands upon thousands of works."<sup>28</sup> A major archive was being created.

The organization of light and space played a crucial role in the re-articulation of the old palace as a new public democratic space, and the revelation to the gaze of that which had been hidden. The space was partitioned and illuminated. Plans for top lighting which had been designed during the old régime but had not been carried out were revived, and the immense perspective was divided into bays separated by great transverse arches supported on double columns. New classification were made. The work of living artists were separated out and displayed separately. Previously collections had contained both older pieces and the work of living artist/craftsmen. The tables and their contents were removed from the centre of the gallery, leaving the paintings on the walls. With the new top lighting, the windows were blocked up. At first the paintings were displayed mixed together, with the attractiveness of the painting being the only criteria of inclusion, on the grounds that 'The museum is a flower bed where we must assemble the most brilliant colors'.<sup>29</sup>

Following earlier German examples of museums, paintings were re-hung in national schools of artists and within the schools, works of important masters were grouped together. This practice characterized art museums everywhere. In laying out paintings by geographical and historical divisions of schools of artists, the museum becomes a 'picture book' of art history. The viewer is able to see a panorama of history at a glance. "Seeing is knowing. The viewer has become a gazing subject, to whom the laying out of seriated ranks of things demonstrated a

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<sup>27</sup> Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, "The Museum in the Disciplinary Society," *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, ed. Susan Pearce (London: Leicester University Press, 1989), 69.

<sup>28</sup> Bazin, quoted in Hooper-Greenhill, "The Museum," 69.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

fundamental order."<sup>30</sup> The vestibule called the Rotunda of Mars (still intact today) states the art-historical program of the museum. Four medallions in the ceiling celebrate the most important moments in the history of art.

Each contains a female personification of a national school along with a famous example of its sculpture. Egypt holds a cult statue, Greece the Apollo Belvedere, Italy Michelangelo's Moses and France Puget's Milo of Crotona. The message reads clearly: France is the fourth and final term in a narrative sequence that comprises the greatest monuments of art history. Simultaneously, the history of art has become no less than the history of the highest achievements of Western civilization itself: the origins of Egypt and Greece, its reawakening in the Renaissance, and its flowering in early 19th century France. As promised by the vestibule's decorations, the sculpture collection was organized as a tour through the great schools.<sup>31</sup>

Following the example of the Louvre, museums were established in regions across France and curators and lecturers were appointed to transform the collecting of art into the gathering and dissemination of knowledge. "Once museums had been set up in a regular geographical network in France, [Napoleon] established them in other parts of Europe. Thousands of works that had been confiscated during the revolution from the whole of France were gathered in warehouses, identified, catalogued, documented, repaired, and assessed for their educational potential. A new cultural strategy (that is still at work today, albeit in a different form) was laid over the military geography of Europe. The museological map of Europe was superimposed onto the military map: thus Brussels, a military port, and hitherto not a centre for collections, was designated a museological centre and received 31 important paintings. Antwerp, however, seen as little more than a marginal city, a small military outpost on the outskirts of the [French] Empire, lost many of its historic treasures. Once the institutions were established with their full complement of objects, exchanges were proposed between museums, both nationally and internationally."<sup>32</sup>

The Louvre in Paris, capital of 130 departments of the Napoleonic Empire would represent a faithful reflection of all European art. Each European city would do so on a smaller regional scale. Thus a vast intersecting museological gaze was established that related collections in the regions of France and the conquered domains to the central collections in Paris, the centre of the Empire.

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<sup>30</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, "The Museum," 70.

<sup>31</sup> Duncan, "Art Museums", 95-6.

<sup>32</sup> Germain Bazin, *The Museum Age* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), 180.

Interconnections were established in and out of the centre and across the regions.<sup>33</sup>

This created a new network of spaces of knowledge that conceived of the visitors as people to be educated democratically. For the first time, a fundamental split was believed to separate the 'masses of citizens' from the experts. In the museum the experts are hidden in basements and offices while the citizen is walking around the public spaces. The production of the museum then becomes the compilation of catalogues, inventories, installations, and restoration of artworks. The sequence of public spaces on the other hand are surveyed by guards and controlled at the entrance. Knowledge is offered to the public on the condition that the visitor consumes passively and shows respect for the works of art.

Two centuries later, after the recent renovation work of I.M. Pei, the Louvre museum is still remarkably coherent both as a series of ceremonial spaces and as a picture book of a Western history of art. The 'origin' of art is still represented by the great epoch of Egyptian and Greek civilizations, followed by Italian Renaissance art and "flowering" in the galleries devoted to the "national schools" of French Flemish paintings. No matter what route one takes, this sequence is reinforced by the monumentality and centrality of the halls, the stairs and the galleries.

#### *The Louvre renovation*

Before the renovation, an official report had shown how the Louvre, supposedly one of the largest museums in the world, was in desperate need of renovation both in terms of its physical appearance and its organization. Chaslin summarizes this 250 page report with great humor,

Each morning the office has to improvise a plan for opening the rooms according to the absenteeism of the day. The number of museum guards is so insufficient that the galleries are opened only on Mondays and Wednesdays, three quarters of Thursdays and half of Saturdays and Sundays -- because that is when the staff takes its vacation days, like everyone! Certain rooms are opened only one morning a week and the elevator never works on week-ends for fear it might break down. Strikes have become a ritual. Dust accumulates on the paintings, the frames, the sculptures and the windows are never clean because they constitute the insurmountable frontier between two universes that ignore each other: the national domain, which cleans the outside every three

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<sup>33</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, "The Museum," 70.

months and the museum proper which cleans the inside according to another calendar.<sup>34</sup>

But the real problem, Chaslin concludes, is the lack of floor space to exhibit the collection properly, to restore the artwork and to find adequate room for offices to administer the museum. Critics agreed that "due to the lack of service areas, the Louvre has often been compared to a theatre without a back stage."<sup>35</sup> The necessary space could not be found within the palace itself so the offices of the financial ministry had to move into a new building and extend the museum space below the surface of the ground.<sup>36</sup>

The Louvre addition was one of the *grands travaux* which was not commissioned through the competition process. At the personal request of president Mitterrand, I.M. Pei was approached directly by the French government to design this project. For Mitterrand and his entourage, I.M. Pei was the perfect architect to give back to the Louvre "the grandeur it deserves." Pei had designed the East Wing of the National Gallery in Washington D.C. and a number of other museum additions that required thought about how to juxtapose modern architecture to old. This project provoked a polemic between the school of the "moderns" against the "ancients" and between the progressive left and the conservative right. At times, this amazing battle occupied ten pages of a magazine and frequently made the front pages of the daily press in the period from January 1984 to the spring of 1985.<sup>37</sup> The most virulent reaction occurred at a meeting in the Historical Monuments office around an early model of the project. The next day *Le Monde* called the pyramid a "house of the dead," others "a mound," "a monstrous volume," "a wart on a beautiful body," "an oriental skylight," "an imported metallic architecture." *Le Figaro* received hundreds of letters; right-wing sentiments flowed without restraint: "this American from Chinese origin," "this pyramidal stupidity." The controversy finally came to a halt when a full-scale model of the pyramid was built in the court, miraculously calming public opinion. The placement of new monuments in the Parisian landscape was not only controversial but, and this is what intrigues me, was the catalyst to an intense debate about the symbolism of the urban landscape.

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<sup>34</sup> Chaslin, *Les Paris*, 115.

<sup>35</sup> Lipstadt, "Paris of the 21st," 112.

<sup>36</sup> This part of the project became the Ministry of Finance at Bercy, again in the eastern part of the city. The modern building by Ivan Chemetov and Boris Huidobro consists of a long slab sailing over the roadways of the Gare de Lyon on one side to meet piles rising from the Seine on the other.

<sup>37</sup> I take this information from François Chaslin, "La Marque du Sphinx", *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 256, (April 1988): 14.

Certainly, the conservative group most opposed to the project was reacting to the "odious" possibility that the leftist government might leave an indelible mark in the symbolic centre of power. The unbearable thought, for rightist thinkers, was that the left could "sign, inscribe, trace, remember"-- in a word, be visible.

Already, a bombastic Arch had been designed which cut off the patriotic axis of the Champs Elysées with no respect; worse, the "popular" opera was projected to spread itself all over the Bastille plaza, allowing the left to claim for itself the origin of the Revolution. But Jacques Chirac, the conservative mayor of Paris was in favour of the Louvre pyramid, and this added complexity to the expected clash between the right-wing city hall and the left-wing national government and prevented the usual tensions between state and city governments. For the architectural community, in the words of Roland Castro, the whole polemic was "absolutely emblematic of all that in France represents a fight for order against change, of new against old, of conservatives against progressives."<sup>38</sup> Never were the French so preoccupied by architecture and, in Chaslin's opinion, this is mostly due to the fact that the pyramid would remain a visible trace of a Socialist regime.

When, in 1985, a mock-up of the pyramid was erected in the court, enough people saw that the fuss was out of proportion with the pyramid. They agreed that "it would be quasi-transparent at night and reflect the light during the day", in other words, its impact would be minimal. In the end, the socialist government and the pyramid supporters got their way and the Louvre renovation, complete with the pyramid was completed for the bicentennial celebrations. The opening of the economic summit was celebrated at the pyramid, which shows the important place held by this monument in the grand chess game of the bicentennial celebrations.

When the renovation was completed, an interview with Pei revealed, to everyone's surprise, that the symbolism of the pyramid which had inspired such polemics for fifteen months was, in the eyes of the architect, insignificant. In a strict modernist tradition, Pei talked about the pyramid as a formal solution to a set of objective constraints. This is an excerpt from an interview granted by Pei to the magazine *Connaissance des Arts* for the opening of the Pyramid:

Connaissance des Arts:

"Did you dream of surface structures different than the pyramid?"

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<sup>38</sup> Cited in Chaslin, *Les Paris*, 124.

I.M.Pei:

"Of course [I imagined other structures], but I eliminated them very quickly. A simple glass plate, like Ramierez Vasquez or Jean Nouvel suggested, wouldn't have given enough light nor space below ground; would have become disgusting in less than five days; and would look like an aquarium. The pyramid presented the evident solution to satisfy all the requirements, because its volume is structurally stable and requires a minimum of support, by comparison with a plate. A cube isn't as stable as a pyramid, but a cone is. We eliminated the cone as unacceptable in our context."<sup>39</sup>

Pei goes on to discuss height limitations and span requirements, the functional needs for space below the court, and orientation problems in an underground structure with no natural light. When it came to the question of how the meaning of the historical site had been altered a rumor was circulating that if Pei wanted to put a pyramid in the Cour Napoleon, it was because "he does not consider it really interesting." The rumor was confirmed when, in an interview with *Le Monde*, Pei declared that the façades enclosing the court are an example of when "the glorious period of French classicism had ended" and that the façades "are already a pastiche."<sup>40</sup> In Paris, where fashion and styles are the life and blood of cultural movements, a remark such as this was not taken very well by those who were promoting the style of the Second Empire. As a sort of reverse snobbery they described that style as intriguing and full of imagination -- long after it had been considered mediocre.<sup>41</sup> As a modernist, it is evident that Pei would find the style of the Second Empire superficial and merely ornamented but for Parisians, Pei was simply considered out of touch.

The issue of the Grand Axis also entered into the debate around the pyramid -- even if the Champs Elysées is too distant to be seen from the Louvre. Its alignment along the Grand Axis arose during a discussion about the exact placement and angle of the pyramid in the court. "If we come from the Concorde we will see the pyramid slightly to the left of the small Carousel."<sup>42</sup> The Carousel is a small arch standing at the edge of the Tuileries gardens and is on axis with the Arc de Triomphe. Now that the main entrance to the Louvre Museum is through the Cour Napoleon and not through the avenue bordering

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<sup>39</sup> Ieoh Ming Pei, *Connaissance des Arts* 444 (Feb. 1989).

<sup>40</sup> Ieoh Ming Pei, *Le Monde*, 13 January 1989, p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> Evidence of the contemporary taste for heavy nineteenth century Beaux Art architecture is provided by the renovation of the Orsay train station into the current museum of the nineteenth century.

<sup>42</sup> Meeting notes quoted in Chaslin, *Les Paris*, 136.



the Seine, the arch of the Carousel acts as an entrance piece to the court and the pyramid. With the pyramid off axis, "it was necessary to stop the gaze from wandering to the back corner of the court."<sup>43</sup> In order to avoid that unfortunate occurrence, "a statue will be placed on the right in the central alignment of the small triumphal arch, just like the statue of Athena marks an axis at the Parthenon."<sup>44</sup> The statue was not going to be a modern art object but would recall the original function of the site as a royal residence. Despised by the king, on its commission, Bernini's statue of Louis XIV astride his horse was finally going to find its place and function to catch the gaze on the alignment of the grand axis. The re-introduction of the grand axis in the discussions regarding the design of the court confirms, I think, the importance of the symbolic alignment between the Grande Arche, the Louvre and the Opera Bastille as a meaningful imprint of the state on the city.

Once the project was completed, the press agreed that Pei had succeeded in creating an underground entrance that orients visitors and directs them to the different wings of the museum. To paraphrase the responses, critics felt that the 70 meter-high pyramid brought necessary light into the entrance hall and the three adjacent small pyramids illuminated the new underworld adequately. The unattractive tourist buses were finally removed from the avenues and parked in an underground parking area. An arcade containing a restaurant, bookstores and other museum shops is now filled with visitors. The introduction of shops in the museum had been much criticized as "an invasion of a historic precinct, an impure mix of a commercial arcade into a national shrine."<sup>45</sup> The Cour Napoleon and the large water fountains surrounding the pyramids allow tourists to linger and rest; the taste makers have now declared (as if there had never been any controversy) that Pei's project was an "urban design solution reaching perfection".

The project of renovating the Louvre became a metaphor for the princely attitude of Mitterrand during the construction of the Grands Travaux. The measurements of the pyramid were publicly announced as duplicating the proportions of Giza (35 metres at the base and 21.64 metres at the summit). A pyramid sitting in "Cour Napoléon" pointed to the relationship between Napoleon and his expedition into Egypt. The relationship between Egypt and the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Lipstadt, "Paris of the 21st," 112.

Louvre pyramid was further reinforced by the alignment between the obelisk brought back from Egypt by Napoleon that now stands on the Grand Axis in the centre of Place de la Concorde. The art work brought back from the Napoleonic expeditions, whether it be from Holland, Italy or Egypt, stands as a constant reminder of colonial and imperial power in the Parisian landscape. Even if it might not have been intentional, Pei's design was a clear reminder of these abuses of power. In fact, the association between Pei's project and the Egyptian pyramid caught the attention of the press and inspired nicknames for the president such as "Miterramsès I" and "Tonton-Khamon." Along the same lines, Lipstadt remarks that "the refashioning of the Louvre, the oldest and most significant nonecclesiastic monument in Paris, is clearly important enough to Mitterrand for him to risk the Pyramid's Pharaonic associations."<sup>46</sup> Unlike the Bastille Opera, Mitterrand was personally involved throughout the design process of the renovation of the Louvre, even in details such as the darkness of the granite used to build the fountains' edges. The involvement of the president reinforced the image that the Louvre project was not only a mark of the Socialist government in the heart of Paris but was a personal mark of Mitterrand himself.

The Louvre is at one end of the Grand Axis. The other end of the axis is the Arc de Triomphe at the top of the avenue des Champs Élysées. In the transformation of the symbolic landscape of the capital, it was decided to further extend the axis westward, beyond the Arc de Triomphe all the way to the edge of Paris. This would recall the history of the different architects who had worked on the Grand Axis, like Le Corbusier, and would symbolically extend the geography of Paris. Next, I investigate the commemorative monument designed to both close and open the western end of the axis: the 'Grande Arche' by Otto von Spreckelsen.

### **The Grande Arche**

The Grande Arche was chosen through a large international competition. According to Robert Lion, the president of the competition the objective was to "mark the second centenary of the French Revolution with an architectural gesture, like the Eiffel Tower marked the first centenary."<sup>47</sup> The competition brief insisted on the triumphal symbolism of the site on the Grand Axis, which

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> The jury was made of four foreign architects: Richard Rogers, Kisho Kurokawa, Richard Meier, and Oriol Bohigas, and three French architects: Antoine Grumbach, Gérard Thurnauer and Bernard Zehruss.

begins at the Louvre, at one end of the Champs Élysées, and continues through Paris for eight kilometres to the Porte Maillot, where the city of Neuilly begins. It is also an area with a past. Called La Défense, this satellite business district in Neuilly was laid out in 1958 according to the orthodox principles of modernist planning: a city of towers on a pedestrian esplanade.<sup>48</sup> It is this esplanade that allows for the Grand Axis to traverse the site. For over thirty years, the dilemma has been whether to close or simply to mark the axis as it enters the business district of La Défense.

This site has troubled French urbanists under successive governments, and the press presented the problem of a monument at the end of the Grand Axis as a 'big problem'. "More than any other urban design, the story of La Defense would reveal the State's hesitation when it is confronted with taking architectural decisions, with marking a site, an era by something 'big' and its incapacity to find a design strong enough to withstand the ups and down of the economy and the changes in public opinion."<sup>49</sup> Somehow we can say that La Défense gathers in one area all the political and urban ideologies of the post-war period, a blueprint of its most contradictory governmental decisions. Two photographs taken from the same place, one in 1954 (fig. 6.8) and the other in 1970 (fig. 6.9) show how office towers have transformed what was left of Le Nôtre's royal allée so that it had become indistinguishable from a straight avenue from anywhere in the world. Aware of the situation, Mitterrand decided to act quickly. "La Tête [de la] Défense became the perfect candidate for a socialist program, [...] to represent the new administration in this showcase quarter for international business."<sup>50</sup>

Out of 424 competition entries, the jury chose four projects and submitted them to the president. A release from the Élysées palace in *Le Monde* announced the winning scheme to be "remarkable for its purity, for the strength with which it poses a new milestone on the historical axis of Paris and by its openness (fig. 6.10)."<sup>51</sup> The winner was a Danish architect absolutely unknown to the members of the jury. The organisers of the competition expressed their reservations in terms of the effects of this scheme on the visual axis. Their report said that the project is "rich in suggestive sketches" but "carries both promises and uncertainties."<sup>52</sup> The president was also concerned with the visual axis and

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<sup>48</sup> A plan inspired by the work of Le Corbusier.

<sup>49</sup> François Chaslin, "Les Desaxées, Trente ans de projets pour la tête-Défense," *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (Sept.1988): 52.

<sup>50</sup> Lipstadt, "Paris of the 21st," 108

<sup>51</sup> Cited in Chaslin, *Les Paris*, 169

<sup>52</sup> Cited in Chaslin, *Les Paris*, 170



Figure 6.8

'LA DÉFENSE' IN 1954

Photograph of the future business district in Neuilly, taken in 1954, looking toward the Arc de Triomphe. Reproduced in *Traversées de Paris*, 194.

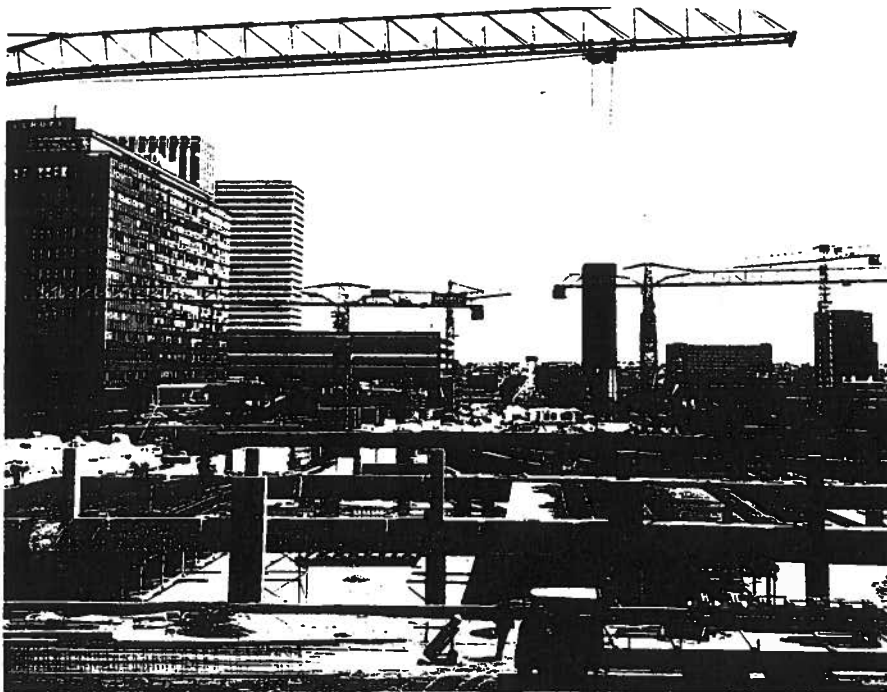


Figure 6.9

'LA DÉFENSE' IN 1970

La Défense realized as a business district. Photograph taken in 1970, toward the same direction as the image above. Reproduced from *Traversées de Paris*, 195.

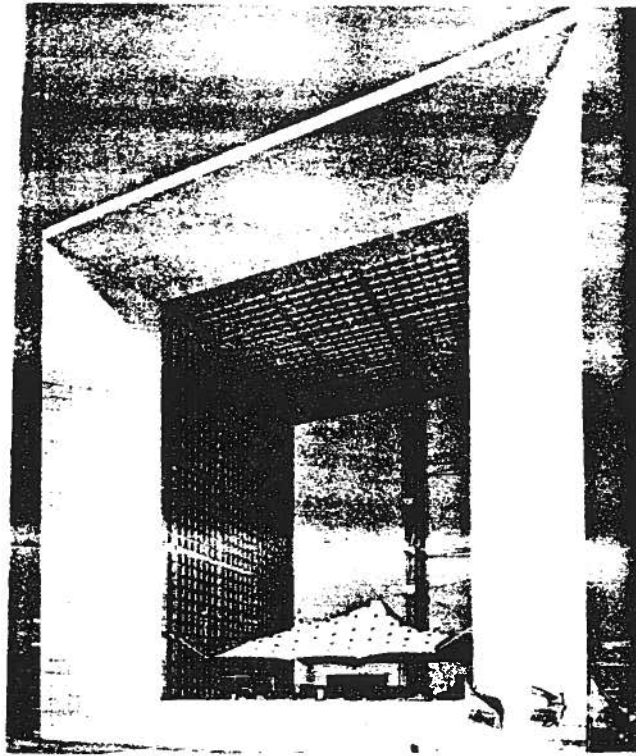


Figure 6.10  
THE GRAND ARCH AT LA DÉFENSE, PARIS

Designed by Johan-Otto von Spreckelsen. Photograph from *Architectural Record* (Mar 1990): 79.

reserved his full agreement until seeing analytical drawings. Thus, the alignment and the visual corridor framed by the Arc de Triomphe were perceived as integral to the design of this new monument. Later, as the project was taking form on the drawing boards, the issue of the axis acquired yet another twist that provoked much discussion.

Otto von Spreckelsen was the director of the department of architecture at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen and a respected architect in Denmark. As a fifty-four year old professor, he taught more than he built -- his total *oeuvre* was his own home and four churches. He described his intentions for the project in his competition entry in the following manner,

An open cube  
A window on the world  
Like a momentary pause on the avenue  
Looking to the future.

It's a modern triumphal arch,  
To the glory of the triumph of humanity.  
It's a symbol of hope that in the future  
People will be able to meet each other freely.

Here, under the 'Triumphal Arch of Man', people  
will come from the entire world to know other people,  
to learn what people have learned in the past,  
To understand their languages, their customs,  
religions, arts and cultures.  
But above all to meet other people!<sup>53</sup>

His interpretation was successful, being picked up immediately by both the government and public officials. By comparing the Grande Arche to the Eiffel Tower, the director of the Bicentenary Commission emphasized the commemorative dimension of the monument and its potential for becoming an icon:

It is the shape of a cube. From far away, it evokes a triumphal arch, but a resolutely modern one. By virtue of its building technology, it anticipates the 21st century and will doubtless become a symbol for its epoch as did, after a hundred years, the Eiffel Tower. By virtue of its inauguration, it is a monument -- but an inhabited monument with offices, exposition halls and exchanges.<sup>54</sup>

The non-architectural press also re-stated the architect's intentions in their coverage, "The genius of Spreckelsen (and the jury that chose the project) was to

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<sup>53</sup> Otto von Spreckelsen, quoted in Christian Dupavillon and Francis Lacloche, *Le Triomphe des Arcs* (Paris: Editions Découvertes Gallimard, 1989), 86.

<sup>54</sup> Dupavillon and Lacloche, *Le Triomphe*, 87.

reconcile the aspirations and the secret reticences of the capital city, to respect the perspective and to give a new face to the other side of the city. To give the image of a limit and to suggest continuity. To close Paris and to open it."<sup>55</sup>

The press could not label the design of the *cube* as either modern or post-modern, rationalist or formalist, human scale or oversized. No criteria were working and at the end, the media called the architect a "calm orphan." An orphan because, the press decided, the architect did not have stylistic parents and calm because of the good impression he gave to Mitterrand upon their first meeting. The character of the architect appears to have been part of the press coverage of these new buildings. The meeting was reported to be "very satisfying". "Mitterrand immediately appreciated the architect for his refined manners, physical elegance and sober accoutrements, in addition he was wearing some sort of ecological clogs which confirmed his earthly dimension -- dear to the Chief of State."<sup>56</sup> Details such as the attitude and the look of both Pei and Spreckelsen played an important role in the public imagination invested in the new monument.

Spreckelsen did not feed the polemics animating opposing camps of the architectural community and was therefore easily accepted. A debate, organized at the *École Polytechnic* to discuss his work, was packed with people, including many who were not designers, revealing the interest of Parisians in this new building. During the meeting, people expressed their concern that the personal taste of the president had become the guiding criteria for choosing new designs. Roland Castro, the chair of the meeting, answered with political ingenuity: "We now know what he thinks, what he is looking for: evidence and simplicity, formal and political, the consensus. Spreckelsen's project brings in fresh air, it is without tyranny: it is a good political manoeuvre that pleases everyone. [...] But the real test of this government" he added, "will come with the socialist urban design involving low cost housing. [...] It is in this ordinary architecture that the seven year term will leave its mark."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Le Monde*, 13 July 1989.

<sup>56</sup> Chaslin, *Les Paris*, 171.

<sup>57</sup> Roland Castro, cited in Chaslin, *Les Paris*, 174. After this public meeting, Castro was asked by the prime minister to research and gather together projects for the socialist planning and design of low-cost housing in the "difficult" suburbs of Paris. The result of this research was published under the title *Banlieues 89* and has now become an important reference for architects on both sides of the Atlantic.

Design work on the project began. The competition brief initially required that the building contain an international centre for communication. But in September 1984, the French economy was grinding to a halt and the council of ministers requested that the initial program be abandoned and the interior space be divided up between government ministries and private enterprises. They also proposed a strategy of mixed financing, in which the state would pay 34%, the Caisse des Depots 26%, and banks and insurance companies the remaining 40%. As a result of these financial contortions, decisions on how the spaces would be programmed were constantly changing and the design had to be entirely redone eleven times. In August of that year, the architect quit, frustrated with the project, and the following March he died. Nevertheless, work on the building continued, and its completion was planned for the Bicentennial year.

Only the span at the top of the cube still holds a residue of the initial program, with the 'Arch of Brotherhood' Foundation. But no one is really interested to know if in this splendid building the offices contain ministries or private corporations. The Arch of Otto von Spreckelsen will remain in history as "an absolute success", a little impenetrable, open onto the future but with a slight turn. It is a white marble temple, a commemorative monument. The tourists and kids will climb to the belvedere. And it turned out to be true, tourists line up on an esplanade where glass walls try hopelessly to protect them from drafty winds flowing through the open cube. During the bicentennial, the belvedere was the location for the meeting of the summit of seven heads of state. The symbolism of this massive building played its role fully for this meeting. On the one side, the building is directed outwards as "a window of hope" and on the other, Paris is seen from such a distance that it simply becomes abstract.

Meanwhile, the Grande Arche was entering the geographic imagination of Parisians. A telling example of this is cited in the magazine *Architectes Architecture*, "This grand monolithic cube, 112 meters high, [...] could let Notre Dame with its steeple fit inside its interior void, as wide as the Champs Elysées."<sup>58</sup> This statement is not as simple as it might first appear. The steeple of Notre Dame that fits in the arch is the steeple designed and never built by Viollet le Duc. It is an imaginary but enduring steeple in this game of monuments. The void of the Grande Arche is as wide as the Champs Elysées. Elsewhere, we

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<sup>58</sup> *Architectes Architecture* 44 (May 1989): 66.



discover that it is the same size as the Cour Carrée of the Louvre. Now that it fits in other monuments and others fit in it, the Grande Arche has joined an elite club. It has become completely accepted as a part of the geography of Parisian monuments. In addition, the cube is slightly rotated by 6°30' from the axis line of the Grand Axis. The architect encouraged this additional reference to the axis line by explaining that this displacement refers to an identical pivot at the court of the Louvre.<sup>59</sup>

## Opéra de la Bastille

I will next look at the Bastille Opera, sited on the *place de la Bastille*, one of the mythic sites of the Revolution. In the first year of their term (1982), the Socialist government ordered a report from the finance inspector Bloch-Lainé which was quite clear on the need for a new opera house in Paris.

An inherently costly art form, lyrical art finds in the Garnier palace all the necessary conditions to fuse a minimum of democracy with a maximum of expenditure. With a low number of spectators and the great pomp of the performances, the cost of putting on shows is larger than the gain even with tickets sold at high prices [...]. The commission is convinced that the solution is to build in Paris, if possible in the heart of the city, a large modern opera of three thousand seats.<sup>60</sup>

A new large opera was therefore, "in the works." Later on, in an interview with *Le Monde* announcing the architectural competition for the new opera, the cultural minister Jack Lang called it "a popular opera". But what is a popular opera? The question was debated at length within musical circles showing how the definition of a popular art form can be quite unsettling.

In order to bring the opera together with the new music school, La Villette was an obvious site. But members of the culture ministry realized that the inauguration of a *popular* opera would be a perfect symbol for the 1989 bicentennial. Finally, the idea to celebrate magnificently the French Revolution on the very site where it had begun won over, and the place de la Bastille became the new home of the popular opera. A night at the opera for the 14th of July

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<sup>59</sup> In fact, this particular degree of rotation was not planned by the architect but was a necessary solution to find room for the foundations of the cube in the underground levels which are packed with metro lines, the RER, and more. The architect was delighted by this rotation and elaborated a symbolic *rapprochement* with the courtyard of the Louvre.

<sup>60</sup> Charles Garnier's Paris Opéra was built under Haussmann. Francois Bloch-Lainé quoted in Chaslin, *Les Paris*, 188.

"would be one of these deep emotional moments of the nation that marks our history, like the Fête de l'Etre Supreme in the year II, the return of Napoleon's ashes or the funeral of Victor Hugo."<sup>61</sup> All the emotional components were there. The Place de la Bastille was doubly symbolic to the members of the socialist government because, on the night of their victorious election, an enormous crowd spontaneously gathered at Place de la Bastille, despite a rain storm, to celebrate the new government.

By bringing the opera to the people, rather than the people to the opera, Mitterrand hoped to raise the profile of the working-class neighborhoods in the east of Paris. This was not an act of urban removal, but to show that the Socialist government puts its money where its mouth is -- in the heart of the working-class neighborhoods of Paris. This project had, as its stated goal, the "democratization of opera", recalling the revolutionaries' desire to democratize access to culture, whether by creating public libraries or public art museums. The "popular opera" was to welcome nearly a million spectators a year in its two theatres, a great deal more than Garnier's Opera which sells only 330,000 tickets a year, 80,000 of these for seats with partial views. This was planned to be achieved two ways: by streamlining technical aspects and increasing shows to six times a week. The house capacity would be tripled and, when coupled with a policy of lower ticket prices, opera should become more accessible to the lower income populations of Paris.

In 1982, out of 756 projects participating in the competition, six projects were short listed to be presented to the president. Mitterrand chose, without great excitement, the design of Carlos Ott, a Canadian of Uruguayan origin. The building was designed between 1983 and 1987. In 1989, following the dream of the cultural ministry, it was opened in great pomp as a part of the bicentennial celebration, with an opera inside and a public ball outside on the Place de la Bastille.

The destruction of the Bastille in 1789 had left a void in the urban fabric of Paris and finding an architectural solution for this highly controversial site was not easy. The shape of the site was awkward and the program extremely difficult.<sup>62</sup> The French press attempted to cover up the general disappointment which

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<sup>61</sup> Chaslin, *Les Paris*, 187.

<sup>62</sup> The highly detailed architectural program for the building resulted in the Bastille Opera giving 475 shows a year (Garnier has 174), twenty of which would be different programs in the large theatre; in addition it would be possible to rehearse five shows simultaneously thanks to an elaborate system of set manipulation.

resulted when the sketches by Carlos Ott were published. *Le Figaro* spoke of "its aspect of peaceful force," *Le Matin* recognized that it would be a monument "less impressive than Beaubourg." The restrained attitude of Carlos Ott made him quite popular among journalists but the specialized press was critical of his design. In the words of *l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*,

Epithets have flourished to mock the contortions of the Bastille colossus as it awkwardly hesitates between the monumentality of its circumstances and its relations of scale with the faubourg Saint Antoine. Whale, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, and other mastodons installed in the bathtub shape vie with maritime metaphors: tugboat, phantom vessel, or drunken boat.<sup>63</sup>

The American press was no friendlier in this quote from *Progressive Architecture*,

It certainly does not gather up and dominate the empty directionless space before it. The principal façade is weak and awkward: the [...] building mass is linked by a skinny, trabeated arch spanning a ceremonial stairway to a 17th century house left stranded at the corner. As an icon, the Opéra de la Bastille fails dismally.<sup>64</sup>

Nowadays, it seems that when the press decides that a building cannot function as an icon then it will probably never become one, since the media controls its representation. The head of the Opera Association, Robert Lion, recognized the negative press about the building and attempted to rescue it by commenting on the interior, "there are probably some problems with the exterior of the building, but then one must also cast the blame on the place [de la Bastille], the space. On the whole, I am extremely pleased with all the interior of the building."<sup>65</sup>

On the inside, the presidential directives for a "popular and modern" opera were generally considered well-met. The acoustic engineers interpreted this and tried to make a 2,700 seat house with homogeneous sound, so there would be no discrepancy in sound relative to the cost of the seat. "Without being revolutionary, the acoustics at the Bastille manage to do away with some of the privileges perpetuated at the Salle Garnier."<sup>66</sup>

Another "success" is the interior stairway that was designed in contrast to those in Garnier's opera. Spectators parading up and down the stairs of the opera

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<sup>63</sup> *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, 1989.

<sup>64</sup> Barbara Shortt, "The New Elephant of the Bastille," *Progressive Architecture* 70 (Dec.1989).

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Pierre Bergé, *Connaissance des Arts* 444 (Feb. 1989).

<sup>66</sup> Bruno Suner, "Ott à l'opéra Bastille," *l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 268 (April 1989).

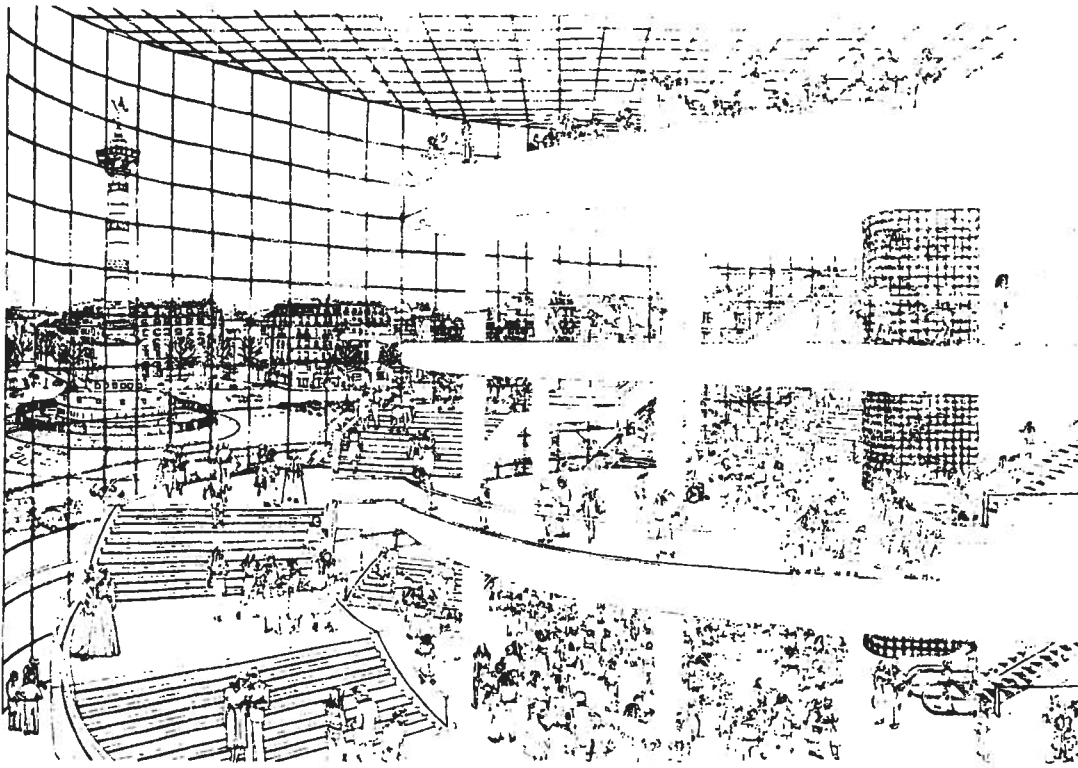


Figure 6.11  
 PERSPECTIVE OF THE INTERIOR OF THE BASTILLE OPERA  
 Drawing by the architect, Carlos Ott. Reproduced from *Art in America* (Nov 1984): 111.

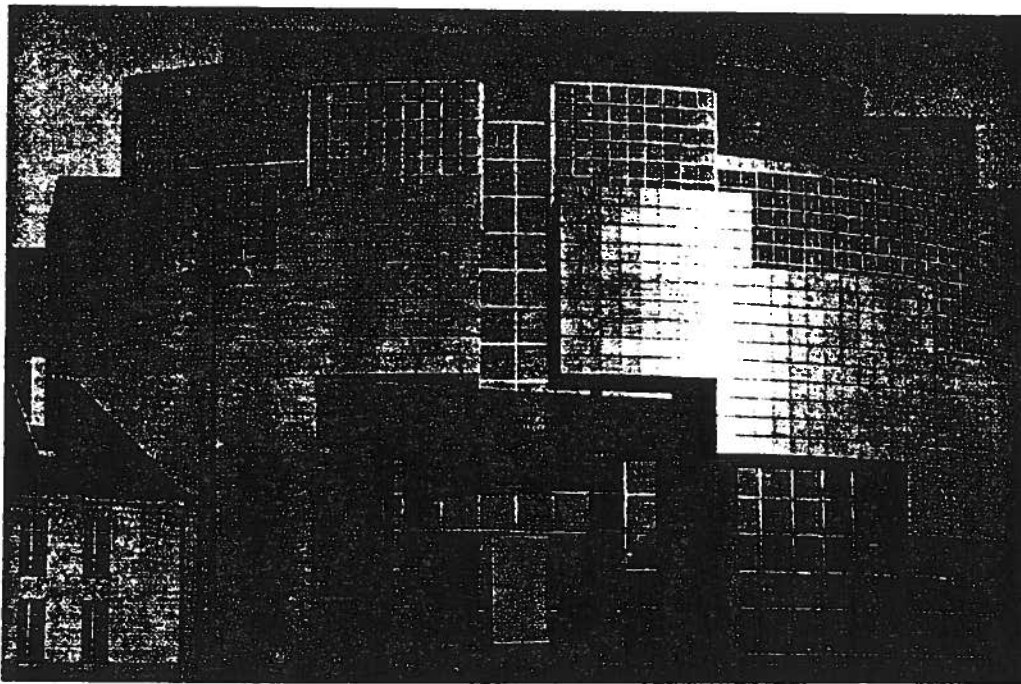


Figure 6.12  
 THE OPERA ON THE PLACE DE LA BASTILLE, PARIS  
 The façade of the Bastille Opera overwhelms the small seventeenth century house to the left of the image. Photograph from *Progressive Architecture* (Dec 1989).

dressed in luxurious accoutrement have come to symbolize the opulence and wealth of the nineteenth century bourgeoisie. The stairs of the Bastille Opera proposed an alternative design solution for this "popular theatre." Ott did not want to display his spectators like the visitors on the facade of Beaubourg, he wanted to hide them by splitting them up into groups that would find refuge in a multitude of places on different levels of the curved foyer (fig. 6.11). From these platforms placed in space, spectators could contemplate the spectacle of the city and be seen from outside - but not like fishes in an aquarium. The stairs do not float in a total transparency but "a receptive transparency that is modulated, contrasted and framed."<sup>67</sup> In the end, critics agree that, in reaction to the theatricality and waste of the Opera Garnier and in opposition to the 1970s architecture of Beaubourg that has become for Baudrillard the ultimate "cultural machine", the Bastille opera shows the result of an exercise between monumentality and the insertion of a public building in the urban fabric. Its monumentality is due to its size, and the corner of the site, occupied by a small seventeenth century house, would appear like a doll's house regardless of how the façades of the opera were treated (fig. 6.12).

### A Socialist Style?

When the socialist government first came to power and the discussions about the Grands Travaux were first set into motion, there was a certain agreement that a socialist architecture would probably be more urban than not, regionalist rather than international, and would emphasize collective housing and public buildings. But when it came to the question of style no one wanted to risk a definition. In an interview with *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, Jack Lang, the cultural minister, said that "we do not have a preconceived model... Today's French society is pluralist; and the tastes and aspirations are different, often contradictory."<sup>68</sup> But after a number of the Grands Travaux raised out of the ground, many journalists attempted to define a model for what *they* saw as a socialist style.

The American press attempted to define a socialist style for Paris as the architecture of the 80s. Hélène Lipstadt compares the Pyramid of the Louvre to Beaubourg built in the 70s:

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<sup>67</sup> <sup>67</sup> Chaslin, *Les Paris*, 207.

<sup>68</sup> Cited in Chaslin, *Les Paris*, 33.

Elements of Beaubourg reappear without its technological garb, even in the project that appears to critique it. Though ennobled by the pyramid, Pei's complex, a self declared rival to Beaubourg, is a similarly abstract, single-entry circulation system. In short, it is as if the building as circulatory space or support for passage has become the very emblem of socialist policy of accessible culture.<sup>69</sup>

The entrances to these various public buildings (in fact they are extremely different from one another), become for Lipstadt a metaphor for accessibility to culture. The association between revolutionary architecture and a socialist style seem to be the overriding reference. In *Architectural Record*, William Curtis argues that there is a similar fascination for technology in eighteenth century architecture and in the technological feat of Spreckelsen's project.

It will be interesting to see whether or not the Arch succeeds in capturing the imagination of the general public, for in France there is a genuine pride in technical feats as the Concorde Airplane, The Ariane rocket, the TGV superfast train, and the domesticated Minitel computer. The Arch is about such things and might almost be [...] constructed by the Aérospatiale. There is something of that heady vision of science which one finds in E.L.Boullée's sublime monument to Newton which, with a gyroscope suspended inside an awesome sphere is an emblem of universal laws.<sup>70</sup>

The technological difficulty to span 100 metres on the top of such a high building certainly was a feat. The press closely followed the construction process and commented on every problem the engineers encountered along the way.

The press also commented on the pure and simple forms shared by a number of the buildings. The Arche of la Défense is a perfect cube, cast like a die on the Grand Axis. The *Louvre* addition is a pyramid. The Bastille Opera is an agglomeration of half cylinders and interlocking rectangles. Looking further, there is the sphere of the geode at the Museum of la Villette and the four towers of the proposed La Très Grande Bibliothèque which mark an empty rectangular volume. "Claude-Nicolas Ledur", a pseudonym for a bureaucrat at the Ministry of Planning, who works in the Grande Arche, offered an interpretation of the geometries shared by these new monuments,

Our situation furiously suggests a *rapprochement* with the movements of the revolutionary architects who, two centuries ago, attempted to renew the basis of architecture. [...] In the years 1770-

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<sup>69</sup> Lipstadt, "Paris of the 21st," 112.

<sup>70</sup> William Curtis, "Grands Projets," *Architectural Record* (March 1990): 81.

1780, a number of young architects attempted a rebirth of their art by rigorously analyzing an Antiquity more Greek than Corinthian, and by looking for inspiration in the structures of nature (cristallography made major progress at the time) which exerted a fascination on these people taken by the pure forms and original truths. It may be that a similar process can be picked up in these contemporary projects.<sup>71</sup>

These kind of historical references to the revolutionary architects should not be discounted as pop history, because they open on to spaces of geographical imagination, discussed by those who work in, or around, these new buildings.

### **The Power of the Prince**

The last issue I would like to uncover in this chapter is the media's repeated attribution of royal power to the attitude of Mitterrand in his involvement with the Grands Travaux. This allows us to see that the debates surrounding the new commemorative monuments are actually tightly intertwined with certain fears about the the way government officials act. This links the commemorative monuments to the criticisms and fears among certain people that there is a return of monarchical power.

Early on, the press latched onto the president's special interest in architecture as a way to "explain" his push to have a number of important buildings set underway. Chaslin comments on Mitterrand's love for construction materials and buildings. "He loves materials, as a man who comes from a rural culture, he is wary of fashions and styles. He ignores the trends, the debates between different schools of professionals." In Mitterrand's own words: "I always have a tendency to dread excess, a surfeit, embellishments and frills." The president said that the two projects that expressed his vision best are the Grande Arche and the Louvre pyramid, both of which are truly without frills, confirming the president's rapprochement with the revolutionary architects and the geometric pure forms, commented on by Ledur.

By default, the presidential taste gains importance as the winners of the successive competitions are selected out of the hundreds of projects. The

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<sup>71</sup> Claude- Nicholas Ledur (pseudonym of a representative of the minister of planning), "République recherche style desespérément", *Libération*, (5 January, 1990), p.6

winners seem to share an aesthetic of pure volumes adorned by sober surfaces and daring construction techniques. Of course, architects criticized the lack of freedom of the juries which could only select the short list and had to leave the final choice to Mitterrand. These rumors were soon taken up by the press and interpreted as a "fait de prince" (prince's act), the power of the president to leave his mark on the capital was made clear in the title "La Marque du Sphinx". At times, the Egyptian metaphor positively described Mitterrand as a man who has "impenetrable thoughts, just like a sphinx." Instead of commenting on the hierarchy of the decision process that placed Mitterrand at the top, the press interpreted these decisions as "royal acts".

Even though many governing rituals and customs have changed with the advent of republican government, it seems that in a number of cases, certain attitudes of the president recall those attributed to royal absolutism. Absolutism, as it is conceived of today in the political imagination, greatly emphasizes a luxurious lifestyle and endless festivities. In fact, the association between court behavior and the government began, according to Jacques Revel, before the polemic surrounding the Grands Projects. Revel argues that an increasing number of postures and attitudes of government officials recall those of the court of the classical age and have introduced a fear of the return of monarchical power. "Since the beginning of the fifth republic" he says, "the suspicion of a monarchical drift along with a renaissance of court customs is taking a major place in the national political imagination."<sup>72</sup> A 1960s caricature of De Gaulle as a builder-monarch reveals how criticisms of the president have often drawn on the extravagant building projects of the monarchy. The implication is that present-day projects will ruin France as did those commanded by Louis XIV in the seventeenth century (fig. 6.13). I think three issues contribute to this association between monarch and president: not knowing what the president "really" thinks, the ability to hire and fire those that take decisions, and the representative power of architectural objects -- especially monuments.

#### *What does the president really think?*

Despite the proliferation of television and radio, it is rare that the French electorate hear their president speak directly to them. The presidential speech is restrained and is delivered in measured portions. This restraint makes it more essential, powerful and precious. Usually, the press hears about presidential

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<sup>72</sup> Jacques Revel, "La cour," *Les Lieux de Mémoire III: Les France*, vol.2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 180.



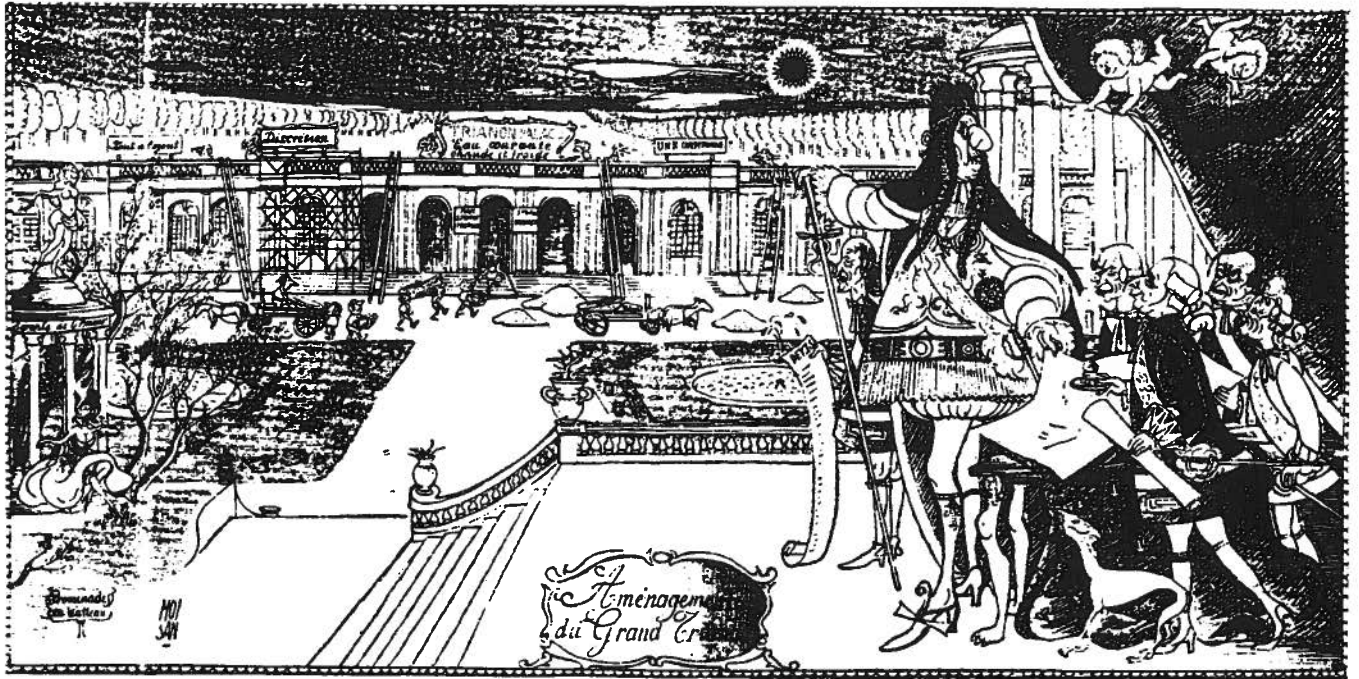


Figure 6.13  
PRESIDENT DE GAULLE AS A BUILDER-MONARCH

Caricature by Moisan published in *Le Canard Enchaîné*, 3 April 3 1963.  
Reproduced in Nora, ed., *Lieux de mémoire III: Les France*, vol.2, 133.

thoughts and decisions through successive intermediaries. What the president actually said can never be checked, since journalists only hear through other people, never from him directly. Consequently, presidential opinion takes on greater power by hiding its origin and making truth unreachable. Interpreters of "what has been said" can then alter meanings indefinitely. On the other hand, members of the government can always refute interpretations of the press, since they are closer to the origin of the presidential speech act. In this game of cracked mirrors and opacity, the president always has the last word.

Drawing from Rousseau's search for transparency, the French revolutionaries sought to remove all screens hiding governmental affairs and transform the workings of the state into a transparent machine. Knowing that, it would be fair to assume that the advent of modern media would turn French republicanism into the most accessible and transparent form of government. But this is not the case. In a sense, if there was, and still is, so much discussion about access to information (the modern version of transparency) and the desire for a "direct democracy," it is because it does not exist. Revel sees the presidential speech act as a "strange machiavellian language, that has been delayed in a political culture which, for 200 years, only wants to think in terms of transparency but values nothing more than opaque behaviors; which is obsessed by legitimate power but indulges in imagining it as an absolute exercise, detached from any reference other than itself."<sup>73</sup> It is probably because of the obvious potential of television for a real transparency in government that this expectation for opacity and self referential exercise in absolutism takes the form it does: an antiquated opacity.

There is no doubt that the reserved attitude of Mitterrand feeds this desire for an antiquated opacity -- whether his attitude is genuine or entirely constructed does not matter here. Mitterrand's personality is introverted and he is slow in taking decisions. When he was to choose the winning scheme or the kind of stone that should be used for this or that facade, the president would constantly defer taking a decision, and he became famous for saying: "I have not decided yet". Not only would Mitterrand ask for more drawings and models to make up his mind, but appointments would constantly be cancelled. When the work could finally be presented to him, he would often be in a foul mood and be quite vocal about his feelings of deception about the work. Among architects, the "ice cold" meetings

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<sup>73</sup> Revel, "La cour," 186.

with the president became a rite of passage that were both feared and envied (fig. 6.14).

The lack of access to what the president thinks about a project and the inability to get an opinion on choices to be taken increased his power and created an aura of mystery around the presidential desire, taste and intentions. Mitterrand's official portrait in which he wears a coat (not a jacket) and a wool scarf is telling in this desire to appear literally impenetrable (fig. 6.15). In that sense, there is a parallel between Mitterrand's success in creating a situation where those around him want to please him and Louis XIV's ability to develop rituals of flattery into a political strategy.<sup>74</sup>

In addition, absolutism entails an ability to manipulate representations of power and here too, there is a parallel with Mitterrand's government. Chaslin has noticed that the opinion polls testing Mitterrand's popularity have risen and fallen in tandem with those testing people's support of his Grands Travaux. The president's ability to control representations of power through architecture reflects on him as a head of state. This relationship occurred around the time of the polemic over the Louvre renovation. In January 1985, Chaslin notes, the polling company Ifres showed a majority of public opinion set against the project of the pyramid (53% against 21%) and, at the same time Mitterrand's popularity was at its lowest (57% against 39%). When Mitterrand was re-elected (sharing his government with the right), the situation was reversed where 57% of French people were supportive of Mitterrand (against 38%) and 56% of the people interviewed saw the pyramid as a valuable contribution to the Parisian landscape (against 23%).

The association between the popularity of the president and his action in the realm of architecture supports Revel's thesis on how people measure pure power. In France, "one measures the virtue [of the president] by his capacity to handle pure power: people expect him to succeed in certain things that are usually done by specialists; from a man who is democratically elected on a platform, people measure his talent in the strategies he is capable to invent, by the secretive ways he surrounds himself, and by the atmosphere of the surprise he can generate."<sup>75</sup> According to Revel, the actions of the President are less

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<sup>74</sup> For an analysis of flattery in French absolutism, see Louis Marin, "Le discours du flatteur ou l'éloge du roi," in *Le portrait du roi* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1981).

<sup>75</sup> Revel, "La cour," 186.



Figure 6.14  
 PRESIDENT MITTERRAND LOOKING THROUGH A MODEL FOR THE TRÈS  
 GRANDE BIBLIOTHEQUE  
 Photograph from *Architectural Review* (Dec 1986): 27.



Figure 6.15  
 OFFICIAL PORTRAIT OF FRANÇOIS MITTERRAND, 1988  
 Reproduced in Nora, ed., *Lieux de mémoire III: Les France*, vol.2, 185.

important to most citizens than his ability to manipulate the representation of his power. Certainly, the controversy around the Louvre Pyramid is a case in point since the project itself changed little from the first model to the last; only public opinion on how successfully the president handled power changed. Mitterrand's ability to weather the ups and downs from fall 1981 to spring 1989 allowed the public to invest him with a strength that the press described as royal impenetrability. At the end of the day, secrecy, strategy and opacity became a sign of pure power.

*The power to choose those who will decide*

The second aspect that links the president to courtly behavior is his power to nominate people who are in positions of taking decisions. First, the president chooses his collaborators and those who will be his confidants and he can dispose of them as he wishes. Who fills these positions remains a secret until it is made public. Often, these people seem to have little in common which always frustrates the press that has to comment on these choices as soon as names are made public. Revel calls the entourage of the president the "members of the court" because, just like a king, the president can make people appear and disappear as he wishes.

Further emphasizing this court like attitude is the real increase in the president's executive power. "The emphasis on executive power is particular to France" Revel says and its "cultural and political aspect are indissolubly linked." The ability to order a great number of buildings built like the Grands Travaux turns the executive power into visible marks in the city that are a constant reminder of that power. Again, the physical reality of the new monuments and their imposing size and materials appears as an antiquated gesture that would belong in a traditional kingdom rather than in a secular republican country like France.

In choosing who would take decisions regarding the Grands Travaux, the president constituted a small group of four men, who for several years, decided virtually everything regarding the projects: from the appropriate programs (an opera or a theatre, a music school or a museum...), the sites for construction (east versus west), and the juries of the international architectural competitions. These four men were the confidants of the president, cloaking all decisions in a veil of secrecy. Before Mitterand, this form of action within the governmental structure was considered natural but it had now become the object of violent public attacks. Expressions like "le fait du prince" (the prince's act) and "les

chantiers du president" (the construction sites of the president) became "part of the regular press coverage, a subject of irony in the satirical newspapers, a source of eternal polemics about the right way to spend money from the public purse..."<sup>76</sup> In other words, even if, according to Revel, many people in France measure the talent of their President by his strategies and the secret he envelops the affairs of the state, the same public thrives on criticisms and polemics.

*The power of representation present in architectural monuments*

As Louis Marin argues, the representation of absolute power under Louis XIV existed solely in the realm of the visible. The French court (like most absolutist regimes that could afford it) relied on expressing power through luxurious objects and elaborate sieges, but it is the marks of luxury and opulence that now constitute the political imagination of that period. Mitterrand's emphasis on building visible objects in the landscape that are impressive in their size or location inevitably drew a parallel with the absolutist past. The question remains as to what makes the association between the court and the presidency so alive in people's political imagination.

I would propose that commemorative monuments were the perfect vehicle for this association to occur. First, architecture retains a sense of play. One form can be as good as another, some buildings are so simple they look like children's building blocks. The new buildings therefore acquire a certain quality of lightness interpreted as the representation of power. Similarly, the luxury of the buildings and the park of Versailles have become representative of court entertainment. Further associating the royal festivities to the commemorative monuments are the celebrations planned to occur around the inauguration ceremonies. Secondly, by being closely associated with the bicentennial, the new monuments manifest a power that was until then cloaked in secrecy and opacity. In their visible presence the Grande Arche, the Louvre Pyramid and the Bastille Opera House propose a stage on which the state can deploy its power by distributing roles for each one to play. Here again, the theatrical dimension of the monuments recalls the absolutist splendor of the court's physical environment.

I would like to end this chapter on a curious association between the bicentennial monuments and something that falls neither within the court nor

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<sup>76</sup> Chaslin, *Les Paris*, 17.

the usual references to revolutionary architecture. This association returns me to a consideration of Freemason mortuary architecture (fig. 6.1). I must first explain that upon his nomination, Mitterrand requested an unusual ritual for a newly elected president. Absolutely alone, he descended into the lower levels of the Pantheon holding a rose in his hand (symbol of the Socialist party) and went from crypt to crypt. He remained there quite a long time to meditate on "the history of France and those who shaped it." In this gesture, Mitterrand succeeded to embrace tradition, the nation and great men all in one. The press throughout the world commented on this man's first public act performed alone the day after he was elected. Some interpreted it as an "obscure Masonic ritual."<sup>77</sup> After that day, the image of a man alone in a building housing the dead became irremediably associated with Mitterrand.

The form of Pei's Pyramid for the Louvre resurrected this image (compare figs. 6.1 and 6.7) and the press described the building as "a transparent tomb for a few million voters." Because of an insertion of a modern form in the oldest part of the city, the pyramid has perhaps become the most symbolic project built by the socialist government. For me, Pei's project symbolizes the ability to create light out of darkness. Mitterrand was successful in bringing an obscure Masonic ritual into the bright sparkle of a modernist building. The image of the cenotaph, the eternal mausoleum of the socialist left, the symbol for reason and intellect during the Enlightenment, this petrified philosophy suggested by the pyramid since the end of the eighteenth century, will see its imprint in a modernist ray of light. Whether or not the dark image attributed to Mitterrand after his "obscure Masonic ritual" in the Pantheon had been altered by 1989 to become one of modernity and light, there is no doubt that the pyramid will remain associated with Mitterrand's reign in the years to come.

The three buildings share a simplicity of forms and are aligned on the Grand Axis crossing the city from east to west which links them together into a new symbolic geography. By extending the traditional axis both toward La Defense and toward the east of Paris it turned what was an unfinished gesture into a completed urban design solution. It might be ironic that the attention given to the Bastille occurred when the neighborhood is increasingly becoming gentrified which means that the opera only opens the door wider for the wealthy to come to the east side of the city. Lastly, by incorporating these particular buildings into

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<sup>77</sup> Chaslin, *Les Paris*, 173.

the calendar of events of the bicentennial the new symbolic geography of Paris was given a public image that rose above the polemics and was legitimized by the visit of the G7 leaders.

Now that I have sketched out the transformation of the symbolic landscape of the capital by the socialist government before the bicentennial, I would like to turn to the way in which these buildings were incorporated in the calendar of events during the peak period of the festivities on the 12th, 13th and 14th of July 1989.



## COSMOPOLITAN TRIBES

On the evening of the 14th of July, Paris was plunged into darkness. As the streetlights of the entire city were extinguished, the monuments along the Grand Axis lit up with colorful spotlights. Seen from above, the city looked like one of those metro maps that light up the best itinerary on request; from east to west, the Grand Axis traversed the city, starting at the symbolic site of the Bastille and continuing to the Louvre, the arch of the Petit Carousel, Place de la Concorde, the Champs Elysées, l'Arc de Triomphe and ending with the Grande Arche at La Defense. Lit up in this way, the festive landscape took on its fullest meaning: president Mitterand had fast forwarded the symbolism of the Grand Axis to *our fin de siècle* and beyond.<sup>1</sup> The severe façades of the Grands Travaux, intended to "carry France into the 21st century," became part of the stage set for the Bastille Day parade on the evening of the 14th. The parade was widely seen as a carnivalesque, outrageous and bizarre event, in which the juxtaposition of images from many historical periods and different cultures created moments of surprise, contradiction and incongruity. Commenting on the open structure of the design of the parade, Peter Redfield says, "indeed the entire Marseillaise parade could almost be from an issue gone mad, a collage of cultural costumes, a map, co-ordinates forgotten."<sup>2</sup> I am not sure that the co-ordinates were forgotten, rather that these were not the traditional or expected co-ordinates for a republican commemoration. The co-ordinates can be found in the multiple representations of universal fraternity, which I will interpret allegorically.

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<sup>1</sup> Most people saw the controlling hand of Mitterand during the festivities of the bicentennial. Nineteen percent agreed with the statement "the Bicentennial was extensively taken over by François Mitterand" and 73% agreed with the statement "It is normal that Mitterand was so present during the Bicentennial, he is the President of the Republic." Eight percent did not answer. These numbers are derived from polls done on 28 November 1989. (CSA, *Conseils-Sondages-Analyses* (Paris: 1989), 221.)

<sup>2</sup> Peter Redfield, "Remembering the Revolution, Forgetting the Empire, Notes after the French Bicentennial," *Visualizing Theory, Selected Essays from VAR, 1990-1994*, ed. Lucien Taylor (London: Routledge, 1994), 331.

### *The Bastille Day Parade as a carnival*

Sketches for the design of the parade began to appear in the press months before the event. This prepared audiences for an unusual interpretation of the revolution. It also enabled people who were finally there when the event happened to place country names on the unusual floats and costumes. During the live transmission of the parade on television, there were times when commentators were at a loss and misinterpreted certain floats or costumes. Still, their efforts to make sense of what they saw gives us an idea of what most people *thought* they saw on their screens on the night of the 14th of July. This is the reason why I am paraphrasing their commentary, as opposed to doing my own in order to briefly describe the parade. What follows is a montage of images and comments taken from the French television coverage which should give a sense of the sequence of the floats and the groups of paraders, for their order tells a story -- even if it is an elusive one.

The parade opens with a massive Chinese drum that is kept silent as a sign of respect for those who died during the Tienanmen Square massacre. Two hundred Chinese students wearing white bands across their foreheads (a sign of mourning) walk beside their bicycles, ringing their bells continually.

Then, 292 "National Drums" advance in 21 rows, representing the Nation and its mayors. This is a reference to the newly elected mayors of 1790 who came from all over France to participate in the Fête de la Fédération and to swear unity together. These professional drummers wear a tricolor sash and each of their drums is lit up by a small individual light. Next come the flag dancers from the Palio (in Siena) but in place of flags from the different contradas, they are throwing French flags high up in the air.

Behind them is "the Nation," represented by 1,250 non-professional drummers lined up in eighteen columns. They are all dressed in black to symbolize people who have come, *en masse*, to demand something. The idea is that two hundred years later, the people come forward to meet themselves (fig. 7.1).

Then, 1,100 musicians advance, playing traditional folk musics on old instruments. They are grouped by province and each group flies the flag of their *department*. Each music is distinctive, yet all the sounds mix, in an overall score arranged by Willi Baradou, a composer from Benin (fig. 7.2).



Figure 7.1  
THE NATION

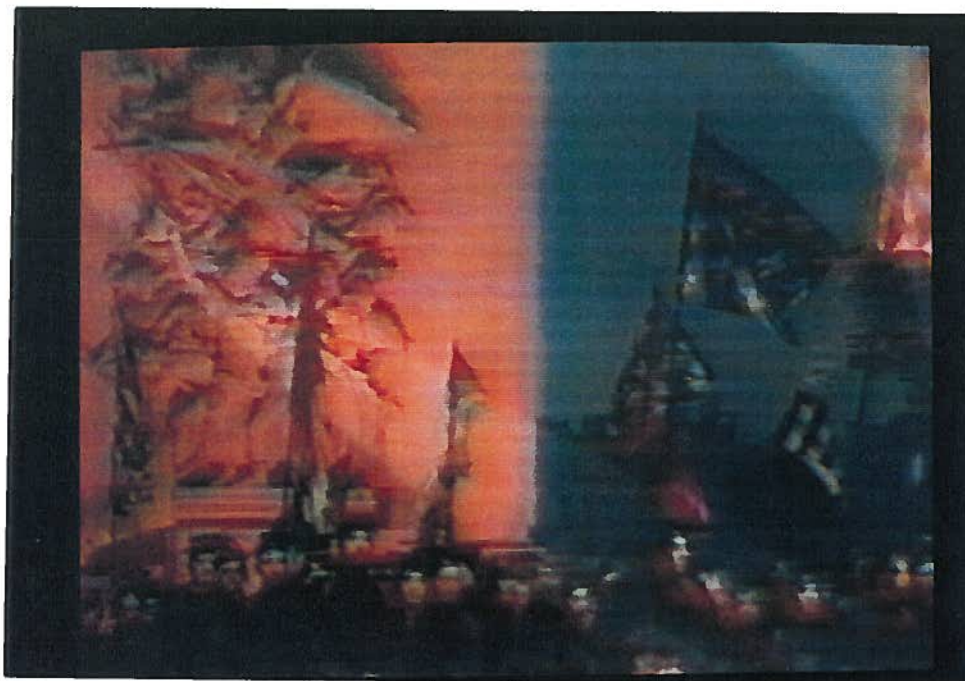


Figure 7.2  
FOLKLORIC MUSICIANS UNDER THEIR DEPARTMENTAL FLAGS  
Figures 7.1 to 7.10 are of the television coverage (TF1) of the Bastille Day parade,  
July 14, 1989. Photographs by the author.

Following them are fifteen "valseuses," symbols of universality composed of a woman and a child (a mother and child?). The children represent the countries of the world: Canada, Germany, Palestine, Spain, Holland, Italy, Japan and so on (fig. 7.3).

Then there are dancers who wear wooden clogs. Their movements, based on those of speed ice-skaters, were choreographed by Découfflé. Symbols of creativity and joy, they wear emblems from the different regions of France (fig. 7.4).

The first large float refers to Toussaint Louverture. The Senegalese musician Doudou N'Diaye Rose conducts a large group of drummers. At the top are six women draped in blue, white and red with turbans. In the back of the float, Senegalese dancers in tutus from Swan Lake dance their traditional dance. The float is framed by black men dressed in military costumes from the colonies carrying flags from Africa. On the edges are women from Guinea dressed traditionally (bare-breasted and wrapped around the waist with a colored fabric) who beat on oil drums in a simple rhythm (fig. 7.5).

The following float represents England. It opens with 150 royal guards dressed in their Scottish "tattoo," followed by a group dressed as punk kids who are dancing a choreography by Lea Anderson. Large fire-trucks spray them with rain and they are protected by black umbrellas carried by doormen from Claridge's Hotel (fig. 7.6). Following them are the Indians living in London who, wearing traditional Indian dress, are dancing the classical Bharat Natayam to the tune of Indian pop music. The formality of the royal guards is contrasted by the craziness and expression of freedom in the two dance groups. The section on England is closed by a red double-decker bus full of "passengers."

The float called a "pyramid of drums" is composed of musicians from Guinée who are dressed in vivid colors. It is meant to represent all the countries of Africa. The edges of the Place de la Concorde are now filled with chorists and all 1,200 drummers (fig. 7.7). They start to sing the "Prelude à la Marseillaise" written by Wally Baradou, a musician from Benin. After a moment of silence, Jessye Norman appears at the base of the obelisk and begins to sing the Marseillaise. At the finale, she exits toward the Tuileries by passing through a wall of water.



Figure 7.3  
Valseuse with Child



Figure 7.4  
Dancers with Wooden Clogs





Figure 7.5  
SENEGALESE FLOAT SEEN FROM THE BACK



Figure 7.6  
BRITISH FLOAT WITH PUNK DANCERS AND FOOTMEN FROM  
CLARDIGE'S HOTEL

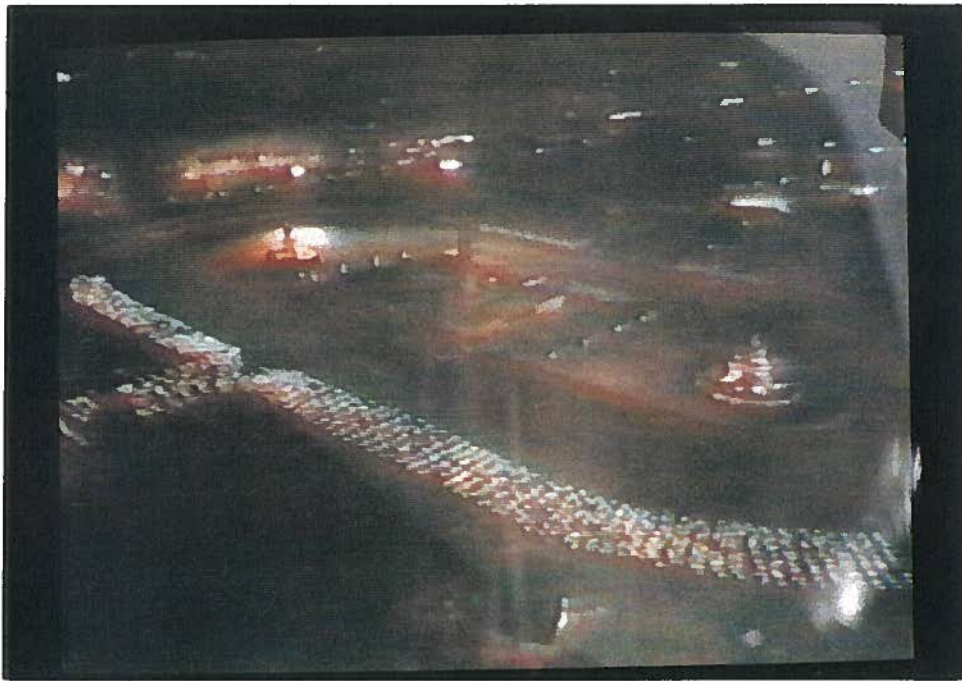


Figure 7.7  
PARADERS ENTER THE CIRCUS

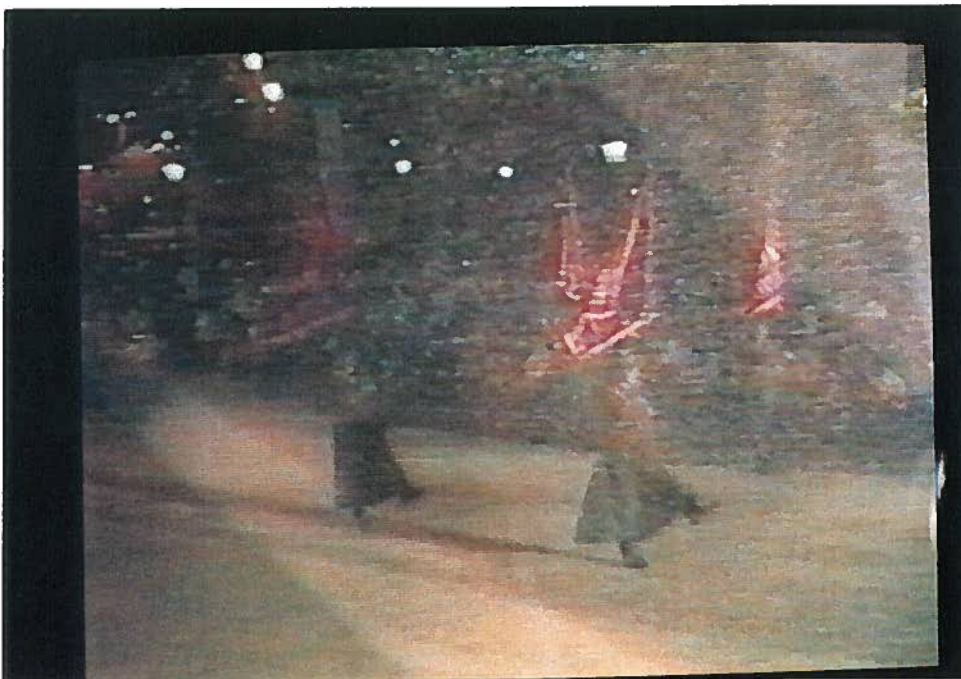


Figure 7.8  
RUSSIAN FLOAT

As the parade resumes, the Russian float under "snow" is opened by Red Guards of the 1917 revolution, followed by a white bear ice-skating with a woman dressed in Russian-looking costume on an oval ice rink (fig. 7.8). Following this tableau, there is a group of women dressed in folk costume who represent all the different regions of the USSR; they are followed by a constructivist float and dancers dressed in constructivist costumes choreographed by Maurice Hoffman.

In the next section, there is a 27 meter long black locomotive 'driven' by 'Jean Gabin,' the actor who has best personified France in Jean Renoir's film "*La Bête Humaine*" (fig. 7.9). The Florida A&M marching band playing "The Funky Chicken" by James Brown while marching backwards, opens the American section. A float made of bleachers carries a crowd of people waving little American flags and smiling constantly, the top of the stairs is occupied by cheerleaders. To the music of James Brown and Michael Jackson, in front of tall pink walls, break dancers closed the parade (fig. 7.10).

The parade was televised and diffused live through satellite transmission to reach an estimated 700 million viewers in 63 countries, which raised the event to the category of what television producers call a "world class event" like the Olympics, a papal visit, or a royal wedding in the United Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> The time and space of the festive geography of the city were entirely reworked in the editing of images for the television coverage of all the events on the 14th. From the lunch party at the Matignon palace to the the military parade on the Champs Elysées, or the G7 posing in front of the Grande Arche, all the events of the day occurring at different places were brought together to create a "whole event." These different events worked on one another; the politics surrounding the Summit for example, significantly altered certain aspects of the parade -- I will return to this later.

Jean Paul Goude, the designer of the parade, is a man from the advertising world. "A successful designer of department store windows that captured the spirit of the 1960s and schooled future fashion starts like Thierry Mugler, Goude gained his fame in 1969, when his career as the art director of *Esquire* began. He 'engineered' Grace Jones -- not only her persona, but also the music she sang, a

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<sup>3</sup> The two kilometer long spectacle about universal fraternity was baptized *La Marseillaise*. It was a memorable evening for me and apparently I was not alone, for if one looks at the polls done in November of that year, 78% of those polled felt that Goude's parade was a success. Out of the sample of 1,004 people interviewed, 62% remembered Goude's parade, and out of these 62%, 78% said that the parade was a success, 13% said that it was not a success and 9% did not answer. Four percent of these people were there physically, 69% followed it live on television and 75% saw parts of it the next day on the news. (CSA, 148-173.)



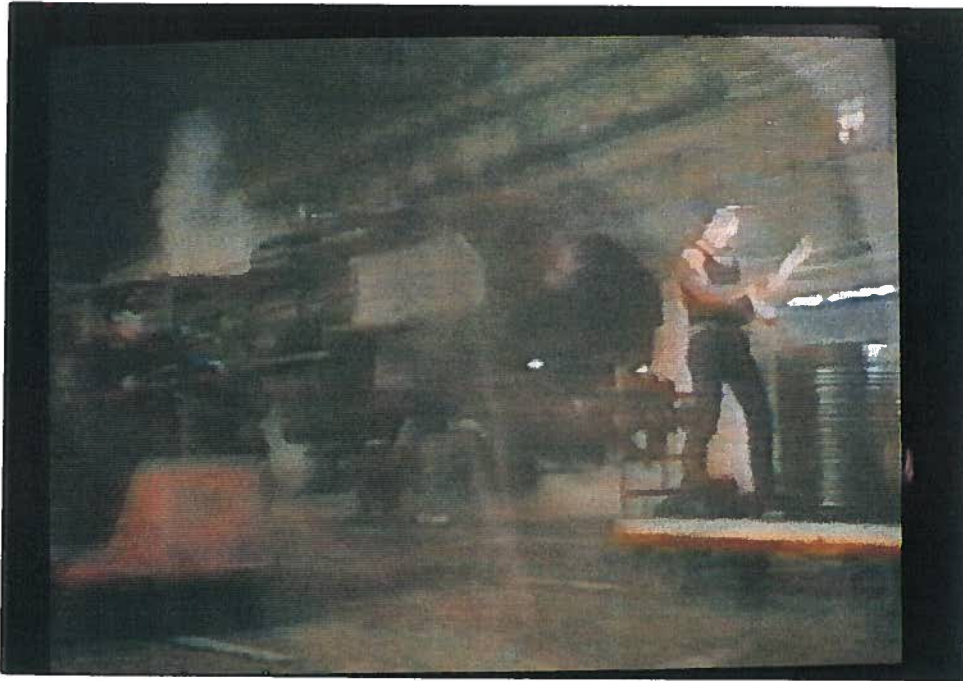


Figure 7.9  
STEEL DRUMMERS ON THE LOCOMOTIVE FLOAT



Figure 7.10  
BREAK DANCER AT THE REAR OF THE AMERICAN FLOAT

hybrid of New York funk and traditional French cabaret."<sup>4</sup> His most recent and best known work had been for Dim, Kodak and Perrier, for French TV commercials similarly combine references to French music, dance and film of the 1930s, with the culture of contemporary New York. When Jack Lang (the cultural minister) recommended the hiring of this "ad man" for the most visible and official event of the entire bicentennial program rather than someone with a background in theater, it created a wave of negative reactions among the intellectual elite. To use Bourdieu's categories, one could say that the established French intellectual elite has been less influenced by the postmodern discussions than by Barthes, Lacan and other poststructuralist writers who, while analyzing modernism in a new way, have and still insist on keeping mass culture (such as advertisement) and high culture carefully separated. As Huyssen argues, "Lacan deconstructs Freud, Barthes analyses Sarrasine by Balzac, Derrida deconstructs Heidegger and the classics."<sup>5</sup> In the best of Adorno's tradition, the commercial world of advertisement was seen as spoiling an event that should have been handled by someone from the arts. The choice, in fact, was equally criticized by intellectuals, the Catholic church and the Communist party; in different rhetorical forms, all three saw it as a proof of the denigrated state of our culture.

### *Topsy-turvy métissage*

The desire to keep a clear distinction between mass and elite cultures was ridiculed by the carnivalesque genre of the parade. Described as a "constant symbolic inversion" that was "truly a carnivalesque event,"<sup>6</sup> the parade freely used elements of the carnivalesque genre in its inversions, irreverence, comical images, and the many references to popular culture. This bricolage of references, this montage of image fragments worked with carnivalesque techniques in such a way as to invert, divert and make fun of the dualities attributed to high modernism. Carnivalesque imagery inverted the modernist hierarchies of elite over popular, avant garde over folkloric, and urban over primitive by elevating the half of the couplet that was traditionally depicted as inferior. These inversions and surprising juxtapositions of modern and primitive or cross dressing create a sense of wonder, of surprise. This is an aspect of allegory which

<sup>4</sup> Hélène Lipstadt, "Revolutionary Fêtes '89," *Art in America* (Oct. 1989): 203.

<sup>5</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 208.

Much of Barthes' work looks at mass culture, especially his investigation of modern mythologies as well as in his work on fashion but, all in all, I think that Huyssen is right in the sense that culturally, the majority of French intellectuals seem interested in keeping a clear divide between mass and high culture. A case in point: *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* (the main source for film analysis and criticism started by la nouvelle vague) has steered clear of analytical articles on television.

<sup>6</sup> Régine Robin, "Bakhtin and Postmodernism: An Unexpected Encounter. Notes on Jean-Paul Goude's 'Marseillaise'," *Social discourse* 3, nos. 1-2, (Summer 1990): 230.

has been described as "illogical juxtapositions." In the 1930s, painters such as Paul Delvaux and Max Ernst explored this aspect of allegory by treating the different fragments as enigmatic emblems. The surrealists used this technique of illogical juxtaposition as they explored ways to depict the landscapes of the Freudian unconscious.<sup>7</sup> Here we recognize the context in which Benjamin imagined his "materialist pedagogy" that brings images together in unexpected ways. Benjamin, who knew the work of the surrealists well (his work on the arcades was inspired by André Breton's text on the passage de l'Opéra), maintained an ambiguous relation to their project. For him, when the objects of the arcades are "juxtaposed to the dazzling commodity display of the present, they express the essence of modern history as a riddle."<sup>8</sup> For the surrealists, this riddle is to uncover or allude to the repressed impulses that generate dream images. In the parade, the riddle is about the value of métissage.

The dancers representing "joy and creativity" for example, were dressed in costumes assembled from flags and insignia from the different departments and thus wore wooden clogs in place of dance shoes. Their choreographer, Decoufflé, (a member of the contemporary dance scene in France), looked at speed skaters for movements which would counteract the heaviness of the wooden clogs. Goude explained in *Le Débat* how he intended to reverse the traditional hierarchy of avant-garde and popular culture by elevating the image of the clogs, seen as a cliché of the countryside, into the realm of the imaginary.

... for me, the clog is not synonymous with mud, the comic peasant. It is a beautiful object that produces a great sound as it hits the cobblestones, and this is what I wanted to put forward. The same thing with the traditional head dress from Brittany or the folk costumes. It is their sublimation that I wanted to obtain.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, the marching guards of the Kremlin who led the floats representing the USSR inverted traditional gender roles. Dressed in the jack boots and long coats of 1917, young women performed the march. Irreverence in the treatment of high culture was seen in the Indian dancers of the British section who danced a traditional choreography to music sung by an Indian pop star from London. Comical images often drew from popular imagery -- like the white bear ice-skating with a Russian dancer.

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<sup>7</sup> See Angus Fletcher, *Allegory, the Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, especially the chapter "Psychoanalytic Analogues: Obsession and Compulsion" (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964), 279-303.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the arcades project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 293.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Paul Goude, "Ce que j'ai voulu faire," *Le Débat* 57 (Nov. 1989): 38.

Rabelais drew from carnival imagery to write fiction for the elite, not for those who participated in the carnival. Similarly, Goude's work drew from carnival imagery just enough to distance the event from the usual seriousness of republican commemoration and move it towards a realm of laughter, color and lightness, but not so much as to turn the parade into a real carnival and endanger its commemorative content.<sup>10</sup> This carnivalesque genre assembled images from a wide array of sources, many of which were unknown to one audience group or another. As Natalie Zemon Davis shown in her own work on early modern France,<sup>11</sup> it is the property of carnival to be polyvalent, using images which are open to multiple interpretations. This openness to multiple interpretations allowed the parade to pass through the many cultural frontiers both within France and abroad. The carnivalesque imagery could turn an obscure reference into a surprising association of images. Not everyone would know, for example, that the float representing France, a locomotive "driven" by "Jean Gabin", refers to the film *La Bête Humaine* by Jean Renoir depicting workers taking over a factory ruined by bad management, but most people, one way or another, would relate to a large train flanked on both sides by SNCF workers dressed in official costumes, chauffeuring small electrical luggage dollies which carried bare chested young men beating on oil drums to simulate the sound of a locomotive.

Carnivalesque imagery in the parade was successful in reversing established notions of culture inherited from the moderns. But I think it did more than that. The parade in its comical and stylish approach to commemorating the revolution also gave an image to the revolution. And this image presented universal fraternity not as a set of homogeneous, distinct and coherent cultures, but as a mixture of polyvalent, internally fragmented cultures. As Régine Robin remarks, "what was seen around the world by seven hundred million viewers, wasn't a patriotic homage but a *Universalist* show; it was an hymn to cultural hybridity, to diversity, to cultural and musical crossings."<sup>12</sup> In France, the idea of "hybridity" and "cultural and musical crossings" have crystallized in the word *métissage*. The Arab-French disco music "Rai" is a good example of *métissage* where the two cultures mix but do not blend beyond recognition. The parade

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<sup>10</sup> I want to show that Goude used the carnivalesque genre to problematize modernist assumptions. Reference to the literature on Bakhtin would not help me make this point, because Bakhtin mapped the modernity of Stalinist USSR onto Rabelais's interpretation of a pre-modern carnival.

<sup>11</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern Europe*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975).

<sup>12</sup> Robin, "Bakhtin," 231.

should therefore be seen as a celebration of cultural and racial mixtures, and be situated in the current discussion on métissage.

As Huyssen points out, "It is precisely in the 1970s and 1980s, that the recent self-assertion of minority cultures and their emergence in the public consciousness undermined the modernist belief that high and low cultures have to be categorically kept apart; such rigorous segregation simply does not make much sense within a given minority culture which has always existed outside in the shadow of the dominant high culture."<sup>13</sup> In France, the notion of métissage was developed by minority cultures as a way to assert their right to be included in human rights, to combat racism and to advocate equality.<sup>14</sup>

According to political philosophers like Etienne Balibar and sociologists currently working on questions of métissage and exclusion,<sup>15</sup> it is clear that young people who have organized in anti-racist movements are denouncing integration as a myth and advocating métissage as a way to confront racist attitudes. The most successful movement, led by Harlem Désir, is called *SOS Racisme* and had existed for about a decade prior to the bicentennial. Solidarity across racial barriers is embodied in their motto "touche pas a mon pote" (don't touch my chum) as well as their logo, an open hand symbolically stopping racist acts, both express (albeit in a different form) contemporary versions of fraternity.<sup>16</sup> In his writings, Désir invokes the complete elimination of racial difference through métissage. In the program brochure distributed at the *SOS Racisme* concert on June 10, 1989, Désir dedicates the concert to Toussaint Louverture and relates contemporary events, including the upheaval in China, to his memory. Beginning with a reference to revolutionary ideals, Désir calls for a widening of these ideals to include all people: "France is only a country of the Rights of Man when it realizes the Rights of Man for those who are excluded."<sup>17</sup> There are many shortcomings as well as elements of strength in the anti-racist discourse, to which I will return in the last part of the chapter.

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<sup>13</sup> Huyssen, *Great Divide*, 194.

<sup>14</sup> For an interpretation of the beginning of the anti-racist movements, see Balibar's article in *Le Monde* covering the arrival of the "rouleurs de convergence 84" in December 1984. The "rouleurs" were a group of 800 young immigrants (of the second generation) who rode their motorcycles through the country as a way to advocate equality regardless of cultural background and race. Reprinted under the title of "La société métissée" in Etienne Balibar, *Les frontières de la démocratie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> I am referring to Balibar, *Les frontières* and Gilles Ferreol, ed., *Integration et exclusion dans la société française contemporaine* (Lille: Les presses universitaires de Lille, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> For how I am using the word 'fraternity' in this chapter, and on its contemporary sense in France, see note 19.

<sup>17</sup> Harlem Désir, *Le concert de l'égalité* (Program pamphlet for the concert, Paris: SOS Racisme, 1989).

*Métissage brings fraternity into the political imagination*

I would like to propose that the parade, by representing the revolution as carnival, allowed the notion of "fraternity" to come forward into the present and become visible through images of métissage. What interests me here is not so much the *reasons* why the government wanted or needed to represent France in the light of métissage, rather what I find intriguing is the different ways the parade can be seen as an allegory of *fraternity*.<sup>18</sup> To interpret the parade allegorically, I propose first to look at the way fraternity was put into representation in the parade, in other words to understand what the rules structuring the representation of "universal fraternity" were; and then to explore how these rules worked with the current socio-political context.<sup>19</sup>

The rules governing the representation of fraternity operate along three major axes: (1) fraternity within the nation, (2) fraternity across nations and (3) fraternity across races. Fraternity within the nation was presented in the first three sections of the parade where "the people of France," "the 38 tribes of the North" (for the 38 departments), and the "mayors of France" were meant to represent the French Nation. These two sections referred a great deal to the Fête de la Fédération of 1790. For the sake of clarity, I will first uncover the notion of fraternity in the festivals of the 1790s and see how the parade represented the Fête de la Fédération in 1989. Fraternity across nations was presented as cosmopolitanism and solidarity with French ex-colonies. Cosmopolitanism was inscribed in the twelve couples called "les valseuses" and solidarity with ex-colonial nations was made most visible in the Senegalese and African floats. Fraternity across races was made particularly visible in the British floats.

After unveiling the rules that govern the representation of universal fraternity in the parade, I will then explore how these rules worked with the surrounding context. There is no doubt in my mind that the political advocacy for métissage

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<sup>18</sup> There are a number of explanations for why this occurred: the changing relationships between France and the Third World, the relatively recent changes in the demography of the population, and the racial tensions that have become increasingly violent. A general message of brotherhood in this context was perhaps the one choice that a majority of people in France would support.

<sup>19</sup> Throughout this chapter, I use the word "fraternity" as a direct translation from French. The word was and still is marked by a gender preference of brotherhood over sisterhood even if the etymological history of the word claims to be gender neutral in the eighteenth century. (Martin du Gard says "It is you that I loved with a fraternal friendship, a pure love. It is you I love like a sister.") Today, such gender-biased language has been criticized in France by feminist scholars such as Luce Irigaray, but it has been met with a much greater resistance than in the northern countries of Europe. As a result, even if for example the Bastille Day parade included men *and* women representing the French provinces, since all dressed alike, all appear as one – the 'one' being a 'brotherhood' as opposed to a truly gender blind representation. The word 'fraternity' therefore, must be viewed within a cultural context that is much less aware of the implication of sexual politics than in countries such as Sweden, Denmark and North America. Because I intend to explore notions of 'métissage' (that is, linkages across racial 'borders') I have intentionally not explored the gender bias inscribed in the notion of fraternity in this particular chapter.

and the discussions around its cultural and philosophical worth greatly contributes to reading the Bastille Day parade as an allegory of fraternity. But métissage is a highly contested terrain and this is why allegorical interpretations of the parade can vary accordingly. For this reason, I will end by placing the parade within the contemporary discussions about métissage.

If I am to unveil the allegorical process through which a carnivalesque parade on fraternity becomes relevant to certain audiences today, a quick sketch of the representations of fraternity in successive commemorations seems necessary.

After its short-lived celebration in the Revolutionary years, the 14th of July was not re-instituted as a national holiday until 1880. It was organized as a day-long event, beginning with a military parade in the morning, followed by popular games and entertainment in the afternoon, a fraternal dinner in the evening, and a popular ball at night. In the eyes of moderate republicans, the 14th of July festivities were a sort of fraternal ideal where, in the manner of Rousseau's festival, "the Parisian bourgeoisie, people from the cities, from the countryside and the army would socialize in a brotherly fashion."<sup>20</sup> From the start, the 14th of July was not seen as an abstract commemoration of an important historical date. The government viewed parades, balls and fraternal dinners as ways to pass on republican values, and more importantly, to foster brotherly relations between people. "This particular day is not only 'the remembrance of time past,'" Christian Almavi argues, "it is a time that is lived and shared in a brotherly fashion, in a well defined, clearly signposted space."<sup>21</sup> Fraternity was at the core of the commemorative model reinstituted by the republicans of 1880. Since 1815, the Catholic Church had regained control of public space by occupying the void left by revolutionary festivals so the 14th of July was, for the government, a way to re-assert its control over public rituals.<sup>22</sup>

By the turn of the century, an increasingly organized syndicalist movement saw the 14th of July as "an opiate of the people with which the government tries to make people forget their horrible fate." The first of May was advanced as an alternate "comradely" celebration. A caricature drawn by Aristide Delannoy in

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<sup>20</sup> Christian Almavi, "Le 14 juillet," *Les Lieux de la Mémoire I: La République* ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 425.

<sup>21</sup> "Cette journée particulière n'est pas seulement 'le temps retrouvé'; elle est le temps présent vécu et partagé fraternellement dans un espace bien déterminé et bien balisé." (Almavi, "14 juillet," 439.)

<sup>22</sup> Consider the political geography of the festive: in Paris the inhabitants of the popular neighborhoods of the north and the east put a great deal of energy into the street decorations to celebrate the Republic while the bourgeoisie would leave town and close their shutters to show how much they hated the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille.

the leftist journal *L'assiette au beurre* in 1907, shows to what extent "fraternity" was perceived as bourgeois hypocrisy. The republican trilogy of liberty, equality, and fraternity is replaced by three figures representing the church, capitalism, and army, all three contemplating the proletariat with contempt (fig. 7.11). Liberty has become the church, equality capitalism, and fraternity a soldier. The soldier's head is a skull which turns the image into an allegory of the bloody repression of strikers by the armed police under Clemenceau's ministry.<sup>23</sup>

It was not until 1935 that the 14th of July, as an expression of fraternity, was taken up by the left, in the form of the Front Populaire. The reappropriation of this symbolic date was seen as "a pacific reconquest by the people" who had elected the Front to power in 1936. Almavi argues that even though their time in government was brief, the Front managed to turn around the symbolic meaning of the 14th of July. There was a general sentiment that the revolutionary symbols -- the tricolor flag, the Marseillaise and the storming of the Bastille -- had been reclaimed from the right who had "pulled them out and deflected them from their original meanings."<sup>24</sup> Jean Renoir's film "La Marseillaise" (commissioned by the Communist Party at that time), powerfully expressed this sense of reappropriation of revolutionary symbols of the 14th by the left.

Today, François Furet suggests that "the revolution is not a player in the chess game of the political party anymore."<sup>25</sup> As a consequence, he continues, the 14th of July is "depoliticized and turned into folklore."<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the symbolism attached to the 14th of July does not seem to stir up a great deal of emotion in those who govern today.<sup>27</sup> In that sense, Furet is right in saying that "the revolution is not a player in the game of the political party anymore," but what he does not say, however, is that the symbolism of the 14th of July is very much a player *outside* of these parties.<sup>28</sup> The parade, I believe, has to be seen squarely in these terms. Not only was the "official" theme of the spectacle "fraternity between the peoples of the planet" a response to supporters of SOS Racisme; but it reflected current discourses among intellectuals who are analyzing the revival of revolutionary ideals of brotherhood represented by these movements and the

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<sup>23</sup> See Jacques Julliard, *Clemenceau briseur de grèves* (Paris: Gallimard-Julliard, 1965).

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Almavi, "14 juillet," 457.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> A series of interviews with members of the different Ministries were conducted during the bicentennial, all of which show that the Revolution does not stir in them strong political or ideological discussions. See Jean Davallon, ed., *Politique de la mémoire* (Lyon: Press Universitaires de Lyon, 1993), esp. p. 47.

<sup>28</sup> A case in point: all the positive and negative comments on Goude's 14th of July parade simply would not have taken so much room in the newspapers if it had taken place on any other day of the year.





*Des mots... des maux.*

La trilogie réelle : Église, Capitalisme, Armée, sous la trilogie républicaine : Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, contemplée avec désabusement par le prolétariat.

Figure 7.11

# 'FRATERNITY' AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

Caricature by Delannoy for the journal *l'assiette au beurre*, 1907. Reproduced in Nora, ed., *Lieux de mémoire I: La République*, 447.

concept of métissage. These would include discussions about racism and anti-racism by Bourdieu in *La misère du monde*, democracy, métissage and racism by Balibar in *Les frontières de la démocratie* and a critical inquiry of the foreigner by Kristeva in *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*<sup>29</sup>. All these discussions brought the parade's apparently superficial message of cultural métissage to the center of contemporary concerns, and this is the reason why I can interpret the parade as a powerful allegory of fraternity.

### Fraternity within the Nation

Fraternity within the nation was most clearly visible in the first three sections of the parade. The 292 "National Drums" lined up in 21 rows representing all the mayors of France. Dressed in black, they wore a tricolor sash across their chest as a symbol of being elected. They were followed by 1,250 drummers representing "The Nation" who were also dressed in black but wore miners' hats on their heads and a small rigid French flag attached to their back. Each element of the costume was lit: a miner's light on the face, another on their instrument and a third on the little flag. Lastly, the 1,100 musicians of traditional folk music, "the thirty tribes of France" dressed just like the drummers, were grouped by department, each one marching under a large flag depicting their region. The TV commentator explained to the viewers that the "National Drums" recalled the time when all the mayors of France walked to Paris to take the oath at the Fête de la Fédération in 1790. In addition, the folkloric musicians recalled the marching paraders at the Fête de la Fédération who represented each department.

The parade explicitly referred to the Fête de la Fédération because it has been constructed as the happiest moment of the revolution, when people came together to take the oath of unity. It has been constructed as a time of perfect fraternity between the king, the church, the army and the people. In referring to this moment, the parade drew from a discourse of fraternity that is known to most people in France. Clearly, the Fête de la Fédération and its presence in the bicentennial parade of 1989 differ in a number of ways. So, in order to see the difference, I first have to sketch the representation of fraternity in the Fête of 1790.

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<sup>29</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *La misère du monde* (Paris: Seuil, 1993); Etienne Balibar, *Les frontières de la démocratie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1992); and Julia Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1988).

Because it is a sketch I might give the impression that the representation of fraternity in the festivals of 1790 was homogeneous. Clearly, the work of Mona Ozouf and Lynn Hunt on the culture of the revolution have shown us that fraternity should be conceived as a site of struggle rather than a consensus both in terms of class and gender. But in the writings of Jean Louis David, who was the designer for many of the official celebrations, and of those who lobbied for official celebrations at the Convention, certain common references seem to surface. Indeed the philosophy of fraternity that traverses the work of Enlightenment philosophers like Kant and Rousseau was a major reference in the way fraternity was discussed during the revolutionary years.

### *Fraternity during the Revolution*

As the revolutionary government was attempting to set in place a constitutional monarchy, commemorative festivals became a way to make public the oath of brotherhood and unity. Jean Louis David, the designer of most of the official parades, "learned to handle crowds on a large scale. He consciously instituted festivals 'of the people, by the people, for the people' in the first modern large scale use of political pageantry."<sup>30</sup> He also knew that *participation* and *transparency* were the two major ingredients needed to fulfill the mandate of the revolutionary government: the creation of like-minded dedicated citizens from one end of the country to the other.

Participation was encouraged by organizing over 60,000 events throughout the country, from planting a liberty tree in a village square to celebrating the funerals of revolutionary heroes like Marat and Voltaire. The government distributed booklets for songs and speeches to all these events so that "the ritual oaths of loyalty [...] sworn en masse during [these] many revolutionary festivals commemorated and re-created the moment of social contract; the ritual words made the mythic moment come alive, again and again."<sup>31</sup> Song booklets were printed for the most part in Paris and sent out to local schools in all the departments. Pupils would learn them so that they could join in mass singing at their civic festival. "The best speeches were reprinted in little manuals so that they could be re-used in local ceremonies every *décadi* or republican Sunday"<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> David Lloyd Dowd, *Pageant-master of the Republic: Jacques Louis David and the French Revolution* (Lincoln, NE, 1948), 77.

<sup>31</sup> Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 27.

<sup>32</sup> James Leith, *Media and Revolution: moulding a new citizenry in France during the terror* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1968), 70.

Through mass singing, these vast crowds could be drawn into active participation which was considered vital in democratic festivals. As the *Journal de Paris* declared in November 1793: "No republic without national festivals, no national festivals without music."<sup>33</sup>

The desire of the revolutionary leaders to establish a uniform and homogeneous popular participation in parades throughout the country was at once founded on a reality of the relatively rapid access to a great number of places, but at the same time they might not have fully grasped the scale of operations which their desire implied. The *Journal des théâtres* pictured all "Frenchmen singing the same song every republican Sunday under the shade of a single liberty tree."<sup>34</sup> On the individual scale though, an illustrated songbook like *Le nouveau chansonnier patriotique* cost one livre fifteen sous, a price beyond easy reach of even a first class carpenter (who would earn six livres a day). The quantity of printed material subsidized and diffused by the government for the festivals was often underestimated, for example the 550 copies of song books -- one for each district -- would hardly have sufficed for a large scale festival chorus.<sup>35</sup> Only further research would enable us to determine how far these deficiencies were off-set by local efforts.

Whether or not these local events were successful in having people participate as the government intended, these song books did not circulate in a void. As Roger Chartier convincingly shows,<sup>36</sup> there was throughout pre-revolutionary France a high number of educated people that were excluded by the aristocracy from qualified jobs. These people were critical readers. For example, they read Rousseau's philosophy about education (*Emile*) and citizenship (*The Social Contract*) and were eager to put these ideas into reality. Rousseau's concept of "transparency" was taken up by intellectuals and integrated in a discourse about parades and celebrations. For it is through the transparency of the parader, they argued, that people could be elevated and become "noble and generous citizens." The "transparency" of the citizen in the fraternal participation of festivals was at the core of the commemorative model established by the revolutionary government in the 1790s.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 54

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 81

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 82

<sup>36</sup> Roger Chartier, *Les origines culturelles de la révolution française* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1990).

Rousseau's *Letter to d'Alembert*, in part a moralizing critique of the obscurantist qualities of theater, is also a description of an ideal form of transparency in a country feast. This text (among others) became a major reference for the revolutionaries.<sup>37</sup> As Starobinski remarks, "it is no exaggeration to say that this idealized feast is one of the key images in Rousseau's work."<sup>38</sup>

I remember being struck in my childhood by a rather simple spectacle, an impression of which has stayed with me despite the passage of time and the variety of things seen since. The regiment of Saint-Gervais had completed its maneuvers and, as customary, broke into companies for supper. Most of the troops gathered after supper in the Place Saint-Gervais and started dancing, officers and soldiers alike, around the fountain, onto the basin of which drummers, fifers and torchbearers had climbed. People dancing happily after a long meal would not seem to offer much interest for the eye to behold. Yet the unity of five or six hundred men in uniform, holding one another by the hand and forming a long band that snaked about in rhythm and without confusion, with a thousand twists and turns; a thousand figured harmonies, and the selection of tunes that animated those harmonies; the noise of the drums, the light of the torches, and a certain military formality in the midst of pleasure -- all of this combined to create a very vivid sensation, so that one could not remain unmoved. It was late and the women were asleep. All got up. Soon the windows were full of spectators, who redoubled the zeal of the actors. Unable to remain at their windows for long, the women came down into the street. Mistresses came to watch their husbands. Servants brought wine. Even the children, awakened by the noise, ran about half-dressed among their mothers and fathers. The dancing was halted; now there were only kisses, laughs, toasts, caresses. The result of all this was a general emotion that I cannot describe, the same feeling of universal joy that we feel fairly naturally whenever we are surrounded by what we hold dear. My father hugged me, and as he did he trembled in a way that I can still feel and share. 'Jean-Jacques, 'he said, 'love your country. Do you see these good Genevans? They are all friends, all brothers. Joy and harmony prevail among them.'<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Of course there have been very different interpretations of Rousseau's philosophy throughout the years of the revolution, but two points need to be made. The first is that the figure of Rousseau took the proportion of a cult, and a temple was built in his honor in the center of the Palais Royal (the hotbed of revolutionary discussion and debates). The other issue has been analyzed in depth by Ernst Cassirer, who argues that the revolution "created" Rousseau and not the other way round. That is, the revolutionaries picked his ideas (as opposed to someone else's) and attempted to put them into practice. See Ernst Cassirer, *The Question of Jean Jacques Rousseau* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>38</sup> Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 93.

<sup>39</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à d'Alembert* (Paris: Flammarion, 1967), 248, translation cited in Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques*, 93-94.

All the crucial elements of the model are set in place in this text: the open-air communal site of the public square, the meal, the wine, the music (as in a harvest festival), the patriotic character of the uniforms, the link established between the father and the land, the liminal<sup>40</sup> quality of the relationships when there is equality between the different ranks, between masters and servants, a time when love can be shared without fear or embarrassment -- in other words, a fraternal love. The participants are not dancing in couples but they form a chain. This detail is, again, significant for it works as a metaphor for the "chain" or "knots of fraternity", an image that became quite popular during the revolution.

For Rousseau, Jean Starobinsky argues, the festival represents

in its 'existential' realm of emotion, what the *Social Contract* formulates in the theoretical realm of the law. Similarly, after the social contract has been signed the citizen enjoys a dual status: he is at once 'member of the sovereign' and 'member of the state'. In other words, he both wills the law and obeys it.<sup>41</sup>

In the country feast, the citizen is represented as a participant who wills this participation and also obeys the rules of the event, dances in a chain, and expresses fraternal love with everyone regardless of gender or class. But the end of the text is firmly anchored in the relationship between Rousseau (as a young man) and his father. What the father says to him is significant: "Jean-Jacques," he said, "love your country. Do you see these good Genevans? They are all friends, all brothers." The triangle between father, son, and country is established here *in terms* of brotherly love and here, the triangle only links men, and excludes women.<sup>42</sup>

The Fête de la Fédération was the event where the Rousseauist ideal of fraternity materialized. The oath of La Fayette on the pedestal in the center of the Champ de Mars included the promise to remain unified to all French citizens "by the indissoluble ties of fraternity."<sup>43</sup> Camille des Moulins wrote that "the festival of

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<sup>40</sup> Victor Turner applied the word "liminal" to the anthropological description of different types of rites of passage in traditional cultures (a concept derived from Van Gennep's work on regional folk cultures in France after the WWI). Turner expanded Van Gennep's concept to include any time when participants are, what he calls "between and betwixt," For the complete definition, refer to Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture, Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), especially pp. 249-250.

<sup>41</sup> Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques*, 97.

<sup>42</sup> This issue has already been touched upon in chapter three when I refer to the work of Lynn Hunt on the progressive reconstruction of the "proper" woman's place during the second half of the eighteenth century by elaborating a discourse on the relationship between women and dissimulation.

<sup>43</sup> "... par des liens indissolubles de la fraternité." Camille Des Moulins, cited in *Dictionnaire Critique de la Revolution Française*, ed. Mona Ozouf (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 733.

the 14th of July encourages us to see, if not monsieur Capet as our equal, at least all men and peoples as brothers."<sup>44</sup> When the notion of fraternity is applied with revolutionary fervor, it is expressed as infinitely expandable beyond the horizon of the nation.

During the revolution, the practice of *fraternity* did not come naturally and needed to be encouraged in different ways. The *souper fraternel* (fraternal dinner)<sup>45</sup> was one such way; it consisted in dressing tables in the street or in a small plaza and inviting people to come and share food and conversation for the evening. But as Mona Ozouf remarks, one often finds references to the "faux frères" (fake brothers) who "pollute the fraternal dinners."<sup>46</sup> The brother seemed to have quickly created its opposite -- the enemy. "In a free country there are only brothers or enemies"<sup>47</sup> says a section of the Marchés. The notion of difference plays fully here as fraternity becomes the way to divide brothers from enemies. This is how revolutionary armies were seen as a logical and necessary outcome of the idea of *fraternity* and not as a contradiction, since these armies would keep out the "faux frères", the enemies. Parades of volunteer revolutionary soldiers (men and women) were perhaps the most representative form of fraternity during the revolutionary years since the parade was both a celebration and a display of unity against the enemy.

It is through this association between fraternity and the army of brothers that the soldiers dancing in a chain in Rousseau's country feast can become orderly rows of paraders without losing their symbolic meaning of fraternity. During the Fête de la Fédération, it was the beauty of the military costumes that seemed to have impressed crowds the most. We can read in the diary of Madame La Tour du Pin that "nothing in the world can give an idea of this gathering. The troops set in good order in the middle of the arena; this multitude of different uniforms intermixed with the National Guards, shining with newness...."<sup>48</sup> The old troops of the king were at last replaced by those who volunteered to fight for democracy. The membership in this new social body was emphasized through fraternal displays of taking oaths of unity, "peace kisses," embraces, enthusiastic discourses

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<sup>44</sup> "La fête du 14 juillet tend à nous faire regarder, sinon monsieur Capet comme notre égal, du moins tous les hommes et tous les peuples comme frères."

<sup>45</sup> Reinstated in 1880, these fraternal dinners are still practiced today in all the communes of France. They are an occasion for the left to give speeches that retrace the history of republicanism. The history of participation in the fraternal dinners from 1880 to today is analyzed in Christian Amalvi, "Le 14 juillet du Dies irae à Jour de fête," *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris, Gallimard, 1984).

<sup>46</sup> Mona Ozouf, ed., *Dictionnaire Critique de la Révolution Française* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 734.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Translated from Marie-Louise Bivier, *Les fêtes révolutionnaires à Paris* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979).

in which they congratulate themselves on having flattened "l'hydre du moderantisme."

*1989 recalls the Rousseauist sentiment of 1790*

The notion of fraternity elaborated by Rousseau and put into practice during the Fête de la Fédération can be found in the section of the 1989 parade representing the French Nation. Indeed, a return to the original harvest feast, the knots of fraternity and the patriotic relation between land and the military, can be found in the group of traditional musicians called "the 30 tribes of France." The musicians were meant to represent the different departments by playing music from each region of France; yet they were all alike (in black) and with a French flag floating above the head of each parader. Taking one theme at a time, I would like to unravel how the parade represented 1790 and its Rousseauist ideals: patriotism and transparency.

First, the Rousseauist ideal of brotherhood is based on the patriotic relationship between the military men and the land. In Rousseau's feast, the military men dance together in "fraternal love" and Rousseau's father says "Jean Jacques, love your country. Do you see these good Genevans? They are all friends, all brothers." In 1790, this relation between fraternal love and the land was transcribed, so to speak, in the parade sections of military men representing each department. Each group marched under a banner with the number of their department embroidered in the center, bringing the relation between land and brotherly love into the abstract world of the new political geography.<sup>49</sup> In 1989, these banners were replaced by traditional flags, each with its own iconography and symbols of the region. The 1989 parade referred to the militaristic intent for homogeneity by having all the paraders dressed identically, yet it transformed the abstract numbering of each department into figurative images embroidered on the flags of each department. The relation between land and military brothers is therefore presented as a relation mediated by a sense of place. This emphasis on the region and its cultural differences was reinforced by having both women and men participate in the parade and in the choice of music.

In the 1989 parade, transparency in fraternal relations takes the form of traditional music. A different musical score was written for each department to be played on traditional instruments such as the fife, the fiddle, bagpipes and the

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<sup>49</sup> An original of this banner is hung in the stairwell of the Musée Carnavalet in Paris.



accordion. After that, Willi Baradou, a composer from Benin, took all the different scores and rewrote them so that they could be played next to one another in the parade. In this impressionistic approach to music writing, each group could have its own regional music and play next to one another, without cacophony.

In Rousseau's feast and in the Fête de la Fédération the relationship between brotherhood and land is expressed in terms of unity. "Officers and soldiers alike" started dancing around the fountain, and in 1790, the troops are "set in good order and the multitude of different uniforms were intermixed with the National Guards."<sup>50</sup> In both cases, barriers are broken down in order to show unity, and transparency in people's relationships is its result. In the bicentennial parade, unity is represented in the uniform design of the costumes and the unified "symphony" of musics; yet differences are underlined in the flags of the departments and in the music of the regions. Transparency between people of different class or different ranks present in the 1790 model is reworked into a transparency between regional cultures -- where one regional culture fades seamlessly into the next.

These regional differences were based on traditions that existed *before* the revolution, juxtaposing references to the Fête de la Fédération to pre-modern folk traditions. These pre-modern cultures have survived the nineteenth century insistence on erasing regional differences. In the context of what is currently called a "renaissance" of regional cultures, the volunteers who came from all over France to play folkloric music were given the most public of approvals. Up to then, regional traditional music was considered to be part of a conservative turn to traditional ways of the past.<sup>51</sup> In a sense, this aspect of the parade is similar to Rousseau's country feast since both have based their criticism on a celebration of folk culture in opposition to urban culture. Rousseau criticizes the fakeness and opacity of the theater and advocates the transparency of spontaneous relationships at the feast. His country feast "simulates the return to an original state of innocence. But this is a fiction, a symbolic game, not a true return to the origins."<sup>52</sup> To represent France by traditional folk musics is to effect a symbolic return to an original state of innocence before industrialization.

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<sup>50</sup> Bivier, *Fêtes révolutionnaires*.

<sup>51</sup> See Henri Mandras, *La Seconde Révolution française 1965-1984* (Paris, Gallimard, 1988).

<sup>52</sup> Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques*, 92.

In referring to 1790, the parade reworked revolutionary ideals of homogeneity present in fraternity with notions of plurality. Fraternity is no longer about the liminal celebration envisioned by Rousseau, it is about the "fraternal" cohabitation of regional cultures which can come together in one while maintaining their individual identities. The image of the traditional musician dressed as a miner marching under a departmental flag puts in place all the necessary fragments of the bicentennial allegory of fraternity within the Nation: regionalism, pre-modern culture, a grouping of people called a "tribe of the north" (with the anthropological overtones this word implies), and modernity (in the working-class imagery). The costuming of the parader in the clothes of a miner should be handled separately, and this is why I will take a short detour in order to uncover how the image of the modern miner reworked further the image of the traditional musician.

#### *The dark side of brotherhood*

When seen up close, the 1,250 drummers of the parade wearing their miners' hard hats, playing drums and with little flags above their heads, looked like toy soldiers. In a sense, the military soldier of the revolutionary armies of 1790 had become a toy soldier in the parade of 1989. But when the drummers were seen from a distance, the impression of an homogeneous dark mass prevailed.

From street level, the drummers advanced as if they were in a military review, where all the paraders look in the same direction and we, the spectators, can see the bodies line up along vanishing lines repeating to infinity. The shots taken from a zeppelin for the TV coverage and published in a number of newspapers on the following day gave an overview of the rows of drummers in the parade. According to the TV commentary, the idea was that "200 years later the people comes forward to meet itself." Nowhere was this idea more clearly expressed than in the image depicting all the drummers in a circle looking at each other across the plaza (fig. 7.7).

The image can be interpreted in two ways. The positive interpretation advanced by the TV commentator is about strength in numbers. The drummers represent the Nation come back, two hundred years later, to finally face itself in a true spirit of fraternity. In this image, the utopian symbolism of the elliptical amphitheater is carried even further by the rows of bodies lining its edges. The individual light carried by each person turns the rows of musicians into a brilliant necklace against the darkness of the night. In such an interpretation,

fraternity is expressed in the ring of people looking at one another across the empty space which doubles up the spectators sitting on the bleachers, also looking at one another across the space. In this mirror effect, the drummers of 1790 have indeed come to meet those sitting on the bleachers, and have, in their return, closed the circle.

Or have they? Another possible reading calls on the working-class imagery introduced by the miner's hat and lamp. If the drummers are seen not as military men but as working men, then the brother has become a comrade. From a modernist point of view, a mass of people where each one has an individual light can only be interpreted negatively because the Fascists were the first to use electrical lights in their parades. Walter Benjamin, who commented on the use of lights both in billboards and in the fascist parades, says that by comparing parades with mass-produced electric bulbs, the citizen is shown to be a replaceable entity. The parade, he says, established a "comparison of human beings with a control panel on which are thousands of electric light bulbs; first these die out, then others light themselves anew."<sup>53</sup> The homogeneity of the drummers (no difference between men, women and youngsters is visible) certainly recalled on this anguish of the "replaceable man" present in modernism.

After investigating the notion of fraternity within the nation, I now want to turn to the notion of fraternity across nations. In the parade, this notion of fraternity took the form of cosmopolitanism and solidarity across nations with people of Third World countries and specifically with ex-colonies. Cosmopolitanism was treated abstractly, with a "cool" aesthetic, in the form of "les valseuses." I will uncover the references to Kantian political theory in the abstract, silent spinning of these fashion models and their child escorts. Then, I will analyze the Senegalese float as a representation of solidarity with French ex-colonies. This multi-tiered assemblage of soldiers, dancers and drummers, pulsing to the "world beat" inscribed a complex relationship between colonialism and post-colonialism.

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<sup>53</sup> Walter Benjamin cited in Susan Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing : Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 309.

## Cosmopolitanism

The concept of cosmopolitanism (fraternity across nations) was most clearly inscribed in the twelve couples waltzing their way down the Champs Élysées. As a group, they were meant to represent "all the countries of the world." Called "les valseuses", these couples were composed of a boy and a woman embracing in the manner of a dancing couple. The boys were wearing colorful costumes representing the different countries of the world. The women were entirely dressed in black. For those who knew, the woman and child recalled the revolutionary allegory of fraternity: a woman dressed *à l'antique* with two boys, one white and one black, (that is unrelated by blood) who symbolically represent "brotherly love".

During the revolution, fraternity was rarely represented alone, most images associate fraternity with liberty, equality and sometimes even the republic. Even though revolutionary symbols were not fixed, certain associations recurred over the years in such a way as to become readily recognizable. In the case of fraternity, the feminine figure was usually associated with two children - always boys establishing firmly the patriarchal order of succession of revolutionary values. The engraving of Duchemin entitled "Fraternité" depicts a female allegorical figure with "a black child and a white child kissing each other. The two "brothers" share a symbolic kiss of fraternity. According to the *Grammar of Styles*, it is "a reinterpretation of Charity of the classical era."<sup>54</sup> All the parameters of fraternity were put in place in images such as these: brotherly love between races, symbolically represented by children (not by adults), and by boys (not a girl and a boy or two girls) (fig. 7.12).

The TV commentator interpreted the valseuse as a symbol of universality but the presence of the boy suggests fraternity. There was only one boy not two, but since all the women looked alike and the boys were of different races, it seems reasonable to say that fraternity was a major component of the valseuses. The montage of images presented in "les valseuses" inscribed several notions of universal fraternity in ways that need to be analyzed carefully.

First, consider the name "les valseuses." A valseuse is a woman who knows how to waltz. Such a man would be called a "valseur" but, since the feminine

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<sup>54</sup> Hélène Guicharnaud and Philippe Sorel, *L'art sous la révolution*, (Paris, Flammarion, 1989), 15.



*Fraternité*

Figure 7.12

"FRATERNITÉ"

Engraving by Duchemin. Reproduced in *L'art sous la révolution, la grammaire des styles* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), 15.

form of the noun was chosen to describe the section of the parade, the focus is on the women rather than the boys. Indeed, the woman clearly leads the dance, not only is she physically larger, but the boy perched on her dress sits like a child on the floor -- with his legs extended out. The word "valse" also has a colloquial meaning when used in the phrase "la valse des ministres," to criticize the government's internal movements from one ministry to another (presumably with little real change). Here, since the different countries are waltzing, the double entendre gives a comical edge to the idea of capital waltzing from one country the another.

Goude's design sketches for the valseuses show consecutively: Turkish whirling dervishes, an eighteenth century dress puffed up with a panier, and a large black hat which oscillates between the traditional Alsatian head dress and a sort of halo floating behind the woman's head (fig. 7.13). The child only appears with the woman in the final sketch. In this drawing, the relationship between the child and the women is shown as a loving one with little hearts floating up from their lips lightly touching. During the parade, the sexual aspect of the relationship was not underlined except by the obvious heterosexual coupling of a women and a boy, rather than a women and a girl. All of the women are black fashion models while the children vary according to the dominant race of their country, the Haitian boy is black, the Europeans are caucasian and so on. The boys were dressed in the traditional costumes of the country they represented: the Italian was in a character from commedia del arte, the German wore leather shorts and a Bavarian hat and the Dutch boy had wooden clogs. Countries were visually coded by the kind of cultural clichés one would find in travel brochures -- they were quickly identifiable.

The costume of the women, on the other hand, was both more ambiguous and more stylish. They were entirely black, black women dressed in black. Their round head dress recalled central African hats constituted of a series of rings, or for western audiences, opaque halos. Their skirt enveloped a cage under which an electric cart took the couple in large circles across the avenue. For most audiences, the spherical dress would recall the large dresses of the eighteenth century simply because of the overflow of imagery from that period all through that year. As in the allegory of fraternity, brotherly love was expressed as a warmth between people of different races. The revolutionary allegory depicted a white and a black boy kissing on the cheek and the valseuses also depicted love across racial barriers by mixing couples. In addition, the feminine figure, central



Figure 7.13  
JEAN-PAUL GOUDE'S SKETCHES FOR 'LES VALSEUSES'

Reproduced in *Bleu, Blanc Goude* (Paris: Editions Nathan, 1989).

to the revolutionary allegory is not white anymore but black. The allegory of fraternity (like the allegory of Nation, with Jessye Norman as Marianne) has been literally reworked at the seams: the universal mother of fraternity is a black women.<sup>55</sup>

Once set in motion, the valseuses swirled around like planets; they rotated about themselves and spun across the avenue in circles. The little boys atop the dresses were perched like countries on the surface of the globe. Precariously installed, nations appeared in all their ephemerality in contrast with the timelessness of the women representing the planet Earth.

### *Kant and cosmopolitanism*

The association between fraternity and the spherical nature of the Earth was theorized by Immanuel Kant in his writings about cosmopolitanism. Kant developed a theory of cosmopolitanism in *Eternal Peace* (1795). After the *jus civitatis* (civil rights of a people), the laws of cosmopolitanism were meant to regulate the relationship between people of different nations (*jus cosmopoliticum*). In the spirit of the Enlightenment, brotherhood between different nations as well as the integration of foreigners were argued on the basis of the spherical form of the Earth. "Hospitality only means the right for each foreigner not to be treated as an enemy upon arrival in a country."<sup>56</sup> This generosity would naturally come from the fact that "the Earth is round: naturally then, inevitably."<sup>57</sup> Elaborating further, Kant writes that "we speak of the right of all humans to ask foreigners to enter their society, a right based on the common ownership of the earth's surface, its spherical form forces them to support one another, since they would not be able to disperse themselves to infinity, and originally, one does not have more rights over a country than the other."<sup>58</sup> This visionary rhetoric for a universal cosmopolitanism is therefore inscribed both in the principles of a political morality and a Newtonian understanding of the world.

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<sup>55</sup> This recalls contemporary discussions of the "Eve theory" which posits a single mother, in Africa, for all humanity, based on reading variations in human genes.

<sup>56</sup> "Hospitalité signifie donc uniquement le droit qu'a chaque étranger de ne pas être traité en ennemi dans le pays où il arrive." (Cited by Kristeva, *Étrangers*, 253.)

<sup>57</sup> "La terre est ronde: naturellement donc, inévitablement." (Ibid.)

<sup>58</sup> "On ne parle que du droit qu'ont tous les hommes de demander aux étrangers d'entrer dans leur société, droit fondé sur celui de la possession commune de la surface de la terre, dont la forme sphérique les oblige à se supporter les uns à côté des autres, parce qu'ils ne sauraient s'y disperser à l'infini et qu'originellement l'un n'a pas plus droit que l'autre à une contrée." (Immanuel Kant, "Idée d'une histoire universelle au point de vue cosmopolite," (1784), *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3 (Paris, Gallimard, 1986), 350.)



The full development of cosmopolitanism requires the elimination of the notion of foreigner and a respect for differences. So in order to avoid wars started by states for the advancement of their own interests, Kant proposes a world federation that would bring all states into a union. Here, Kant recognizes the element of difference that would lie in the center of the universal Republic. First the coexistence of the states would guarantee the continuation of democracy better than a "reunion under a superior power" that would degenerate into a universal monarchy. In addition, Nature, that is being respected by practical reason, would guarantee differences through a diversity of languages and religions. In this brief outline, one can see the major components of Kantian cosmopolitanism: on the one hand, cultural differences are respected through a political morality, and on the other a federative union is protected by universal rights.

But Julia Kristeva is quick to point out that "far from this ideal, Europeans consider the newly discovered countries as being without 'owners', and will double up on injustice regarding these foreigners."<sup>59</sup> In order to bring together his theory of cosmopolitan brotherhood with the reality of the new world, Kant calls on the practical reason inherent in Nature itself. "Only practical reason can possibly prescribe laws that would not restrain free human beings; but it means that Nature is doing it itself, whether we want it or not."<sup>60</sup> In this view, the potential "brothers" of the new world are "free people" regulated by the laws of Nature. Difference, therefore is at the core of the universalist cosmopolitan model theorized by Kant.

The Newtonian model present in Kantian cosmopolitanism appears not only in the spherical form of the valseuses, but in their circular motions -- a metaphor for the movement of planets. By juxtaposing the spherical planets with the revolutionary allegory of fraternity, the valseuses bring together universalist cosmopolitanism and brotherhood across nations. In the best of the Kantian tradition, the foreigners from around the world are invited to join into the federative dance of a universal republic simply and naturally because the earth is round.

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<sup>59</sup> Kristeva, *Etrangers*, 254.

<sup>60</sup> "Il n'y a que la raison pratique qui puisse prescrire à des êtres libres des lois sans les contraindre; mais cela veut dire que la Nature le fait elle-même, que nous le voulions ou non." (Ibid., 359.)

The Kantian model which includes cultural differences (religion and languages) and union (universal republic) can clearly be seen in the waltzing couples. Dressed alike, the women represent the federative union and the children represent difference. But in this time and place, to represent difference with a child takes on a meaning of its own. Indeed, I would argue these images of cosmopolitanism should be seen in the context of a current conception of brotherhood based on the "Family of Man" ideology.

### *The Family of Man*

The first reference to the "Family of Man" ideology (even though the concept already existed in the 1920s) can be found in the title of the photographic exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1955. The pan-human conception of brotherhood was laid out in Carl Sandburg's prologue. "The first cry of a new born baby in Chicago or Zamboango, in Amsterdam or Rangoon, has the same pitch and key, each saying, 'I am! I have come through! I belong! I am a member of the Family.'"<sup>61</sup> As one reads on, the Family of Man is again justified in terms of the roundness of the Earth. "People! flung wide and far, born into toil, struggle, blood and dreams, among lovers, eaters, drinkers, workers, loafers, fighters, players, gamblers, [...] one big family hugging close to the ball of the Earth for its life and being."<sup>62</sup> In the words "one big family hugging close to the ball of the Earth" pan-humanity is defined not only in terms of the planet but, more importantly for our present discussion, in terms of children, not adults.

In her work on western attitudes toward primitive art, Sally Price argues that the Family of Man ideology is based on the unstated premise that events of warmth come about through an enormously commendable broadmindedness and largesse on the part of the host-culture. Virtually by definition, the Euro/American heritage is uniquely equipped, the logic goes, to allow for such enlightened appreciation of cultural diversity. Westerners thus become the ones responsible for issuing invitations to partake of the Brotherhood of Man.<sup>63</sup>

What Price cynically calls "the appreciation of cultural diversity" is not represented by adults but by children which turns the warmth between races into a Universalist motherly love -- that is, a love of a woman towards any child.

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 26.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 26.

The Family of Man took on a commercial form in the Coca-Cola advertisement "we are the world; we are the children...". In its promise to combat world starvation, the Coca-Cola commercial equates Universalist rhetoric with a discourse on childhood, where all members of the chorus become children and the mother's milk is replaced by soda pop. In this context, the valseuse regresses into the state of childhood as an end in itself.

Nowhere was the "family" aspect of the ideology of the Family of Man captured better than in the charity advertisement which blanketed Parisian billboards during the spring of 1986. The image showed a little blond girl planting a benevolent kiss on the head of a little black boy, while his mother, dressed in African robes, stares blankly into space (fig. 7.14). Sally Price sees in this mingling of races a definite suggestion of philanthropy. From a European or American perspective, "this act of tolerance, kindness, this 'equality' accorded to non-westerners (and their art), the implication goes, is not a natural reflection of human equivalence, but rather the result of Western benevolence."<sup>64</sup> Most recently, the clothing company "The United Colors of Benetton" cast brotherhood directly in the mold of cosmopolitanism through the many-colored people featured in their ads. The diversity of races visually enhanced the pun between the many colors of the Italian clothes and the colored faces of the models. Even though most of their products are for adults, the models are children and teenagers, again presenting cosmopolitanism as a regression into childhood.

It is inevitable that such images, which play off an ideology of the Family of Man, would rework the Kantian notion of cosmopolitanism proposed by the valseuses into an idyllic regression to childhood. Much of the attraction of the valseuses and other floats that displayed cosmopolitanism lay in the satisfaction engendered by philanthropic goodwill. In fact, the question of how to represent France's relationship to other countries became most acute in the floats depicting Third World countries in general and former French colonies in particular.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 25.



Figure 7.14  
POSTER PUBLISHED BY "COMITÉ FRANÇAIS CONTRE LA FAIM," 1989.

Reproduced in Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 24.

## Solidarity with the former French colonies

The powerful drum beat of the musicians from Africa and their colorful costumes became a major target for the photographers running up and down the Champs Elysées during the parade. Many cultural critics saw the direct reference of the African floats to colonialism (and the centennial exhibition of 1889) either as a sentimental journey into imperialism, or as France's attempt to erase its colonial past. Peter Redfield for example, compares 1989 to 1889, where the centennial "represent[ed] the traditional modern spectacle [and] the Bicentennial would represent a postmodern variant." Elaborating further, he comes to the inevitable question, "What has changed since 1889? On the one hand, we see an exhibit on anthropology and labor, an exhibit on the history of human habitation, and on the other Les Magiciens de la Terre."<sup>65</sup> "Les Magiciens de la Terre" was an exhibit of 'primitive art objects' from Third World countries displayed in the different museums of Paris. In 1989, Redfield argues, the spatial organization is not as clearly defined,

No longer do we find graphic colonial segregation laid out along the Seine, only de facto political segregation of First and Third World leaders at the Summit. [...] Where the world's fair avoided the past, the Musée d'Orsay commemorates the world's fair, while references to the Revolution fill every kiosk. The past and difference, orphaned imperialism, are then adopted by museums. [...] Space is not so neatly ordered; where the skyline rose to a jarring central tower, it now stretches around a number of curving shapes.<sup>66</sup>

It does not come as a great surprise that the past, even the colonial past, is "adopted by museums" since that is their function. What intrigues me is not so much how the centennial was a modernist event and the bicentennial a postmodern one (since this seems self-evident), but rather how representations of colonialism were used in the current discourse on brotherhood. In other words, how did the parade, in its desire to speak about fraternity across nations of the third world, integrate and turn inside out the colonial model elaborated during 1889?

### *The Senegalese Float*

One of the floats representing Africa was dedicated to Senegal because, the commentator told us, "the majority of the slaves were taken from that area of

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<sup>65</sup> Redfield, "Remembering," 331.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

Africa during the slave trade" and, as we already know, revolutionary France attempted to abolish the slave trade. The float was framed all the way around by rows of men dressed in army costumes recalling those worn by the French colonial troops at the time of independence and carrying the Senegalese flag. Above them rose a float in the form of a large stairway where a group of drummers were playing traditional Senegalese music. On the last step Doudou N'Diaye Rose, wearing an evening smoking jacket, was conducting the group of drummers below. At the very top, six women stood in a row playing hand-held drums. They wore turbans as headdresses in blue, white and red cloth that fell all the way down to the platform of the float -- giving them exaggerated stature (fig. 7.15). From the front, the design of the float juxtaposed two cultures: the traditional Senegalese musicians and the tricolor costumes which wrapped the bodies of these six women; but it also worked with two scales, a human scale and an extra-human scale, a technique introduced in experimental theater by director Robert Wilson,<sup>67</sup> which gives a dream-world quality of "Alice in Wonderland" quality to the whole float.

In the back of the float was a stage on which a group of Senegalese women danced a traditional choreography from their village. But they were not dressed in African costumes, they wore white tutus from the ballet "Swan Lake" (fig. 7.16). The red curtains drawn back on each side as well as the backdrop picturing a landscape in perspective situated the scene in a western theatrical tradition. Yet the Senegalese dancers were not performing steps from classical ballet; they were in bare feet and their movements were unmistakably African. In this montage, a post-colonial image is formed: the western world of Swan Lake is taken over by Senegalese dancers and Senegal is also redefined by the white fluffy tutus of a European ballet. As Homi Bhabha says "in the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative."<sup>68</sup> In this float, we can see how the process of splitting the ambivalence of modern society Bhabha talks about is written as both the 'performative' Senegalese nation and the French 'continuist' nation.

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<sup>67</sup> For an interesting analysis of Robert Wilson's work, refer to Craig Owens, "Einstein on the beach: the primacy of metaphor," *Beyond Recognition*, ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tilman and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>68</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "Dissimination: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation," *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 297.



Figure 7.15

THE FRONT OF THE SENEGALESE FLOAT

Photograph by the author from the television coverage (TF1) of the bicentennial parade, July 14, 1989.



Figure 7.16

"SWAN LAKE" AT THE BACK OF THE SENEGALESE FLOAT

Photograph by the author from the television coverage (TF1) of the bicentennial parade, July 14, 1989.

Two issues emerge from the description of this float. First, how was 1889 represented and second, how is this representation brought into the present to speak about current issues of brotherhood across nations of the Third World? In order to investigate these two issues, it would be useful to briefly look at the representation of what is today called the Third World in the 1889 exhibition.

*The "universal" exhibition of 1889*

"Jules Verne dreamt of going around the world in 80 days. In 1889, at the Esplanade of the Champ-de-Mars, we'll do it in 6 hours!" announces the "Official Bulletin of the Universal Exposition in December 1888." Indeed, bits and pieces of the world were gathered in the center of Paris and visitors could enjoy a complete "dépaysement" as they strolled from one pavilion to the next. But the layout of the exhibition grounds did not replicate the geographic relations between countries on the planet -- Senegal, for example, was not next to its neighboring countries but grouped with other French colonies in central Africa in the *Palais central des colonies*.<sup>69</sup> The exhibition mapped the western view of the world's order which rendered history, progress, culture and empire in an "objective" form. By setting up the world as a picture, Timothy Mitchell argues, the organizers "ordered it up before an audience as an object on display, to be viewed, experienced and investigated."<sup>70</sup> Indeed, great care was taken to reproduce buildings from around the world by reconstructing from exact measurements, using the same materials and techniques of construction. Craftsmen were brought in to guarantee the authenticity of the building techniques and when their work was over they were often asked to stay on to complete the display.

The decision to inhabit the reconstructed villages with indigenous people was strongly supported by the Ministry of the Colonies, in order to "bring these populations into direct contact with our civilization [since] it is our duty to bring them into our ideas."<sup>71</sup> But for many visitors, the simplicity of these villages was perceived as a welcome relief from the precious and overworked qualities of the Asian palaces. "From this group of huts, built without false ornaments, emanates a sense of sincerity and an exactitude in the reproduction of life which is uniquely pleasant in contrast with the rest of the fair. The "canaque village" gives a frank illusion of people from far away, a revelation about a corner of the

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<sup>69</sup> See plan of the pavilions in Caroline Mathieu, *1889 la tour Eiffel et l'exposition universelle* (Paris: Paris Musées, 1989), 267.

<sup>70</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 6.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Mathieu, 1889, 251.



planet lost in the great Pacific."<sup>72</sup> The village gives the visitor a poetic image of the Primitive as "purified bearers of the human unconscious, as survivors of our lost innocence"<sup>73</sup> and yet there also is a sense of distance combined with curiosity which epitomized the visitor's response to the exhibitions.

The confrontation between primitive and western, Caroline Mathieu argues, did not inspire in the visitor what the Ministry of the Colonies had hoped. In fact, "the simplicity of these villages was a source of inspiration and reflection for western visitors who were taken by a melancholy for the loss of 'a dream of humanity far away' with its theaters and dances, its palaces and princes, its temples and gods."<sup>74</sup> Turning nostalgia into a desire to travel, many visitors to the world exhibitions became interested in seeing the original (so to speak). After organizing excursions to visit the Crystal Palace at the Great Exhibition in London, Thomas Cook, the "master-mind" of mass travel in the nineteenth century, began to offer excursions to visit not exhibits of the Orient but the real thing.<sup>75</sup>

Along with other factors, the exhibition acted as a catalyst for the spread of tourism beyond the beaten track of the European Grand Tour.<sup>76</sup> But as Mitchell argues, the power of representation put in place by the exhibition was such that although visitors to the Orient "thought of themselves as moving from pictures to the real thing, they went on trying -- like Flaubert -- to grasp the real thing as a picture."<sup>77</sup> Searching for any elevation to give them height, visitors could not see a foreign city until they could mimic the panoramas they had seen at the exhibition. The right place would be where the city would spread below giving them enough distance to see it as a whole.

The representation of 1889 in the bicentennial parade acknowledges that we have already seen "the real thing", either in our own travels or on television, and therefore places the colonial exhibition in an anti-touristic framework. The situation, is turned inside out; the bicentennial was not about giving a tour of the world in six hours but about what happens to culture in a global economy. The culture of Senegal is not shown for its exoticism, in order to reaffirm the

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<sup>72</sup> Pol Neveu, quoted in Mathieu, 1889, 250.

<sup>73</sup> Price, *Primitive Art*, 33.

<sup>74</sup> Melchior de Vogüé, cited in Caroline Mathieu, "Invitation au voyage" in Mathieu 1889, 117.

<sup>75</sup> See C. R. Fay, *Palace Industry 1851: A study of the Great Exhibition and its fruits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951).

<sup>76</sup> See James Buzard, *The Beaten Track* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), esp. chap. 2.

<sup>77</sup> Mitchell, *Colonising*, 22.

west in its geography of progress, but for the way it survives in the face of progress and global capitalism.

In 1889, a frame separated the world of the viewer from the world of the display. The Canaque village was distanced by physically keeping visitors on a platform, carefully ordering objects and people, and annotating the content to guide the interpretation of the observer. The Senegalese float does not deny the idea of the world as a picture (after all, the television cameras emphasize it even further), but it brings odd elements into the picture. The realism in the construction details and the care taken in reproducing Senegalese culture -- shades of 1889 -- is purposely shattered by the introduction of western objects within the picture frame. The Senegalese women are dressed in African turbans and robes but their fabrics create the *tricolor*: the "purity" of an African dressed in traditional clothes referring to 1889 is disrupted by the introduction of the revolutionary French flag. Similarly, the Senegalese dancers are dressed in western white tutus, the conductor wears a smoking jacket, and the soldiers "who fought for the independence of Senegal" are dressed partly western, partly African.

The introduction of these western elements into a picture referring to 1889 reworked Senegalese culture in certain ways that differ from one area of the float to another. It seems clear for example, that having the French tricolor draped as turbans reworks Senegalese culture in a different way than do the Swan Lake tutus. The tricolor turbans call on ideas of the French Nation and the tutus on western elite culture. Inversely, by being presented as powerful priestesses, the Senegalese women in their turbans rework French republican iconography in a different way than the dancers rework classical ballet.

#### *The women in tricolor turbans*

In his famous analysis of the cover of *Paris Match* magazine which showed a black man in uniform saluting the French flag, Roland Barthes argues that "what [the image] got rid of is certainly not French imperialism (on the contrary what must be actualized is its presence); it is the contingent, historical, in one word: fabricated, quality of colonialism."<sup>78</sup> He also points to the zeal portrayed by "this Negro serving his so-called oppressor" in the political context of the 1950s. Retracing Barthes' analysis, we have, at the first level: a black soldier saluting the French flag; at the second level, a positive image of French imperialism.

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<sup>78</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), 256.

Similarly, in the Senegalese float, we have at the first level, the black women wearing tricolor turbans; at the second level, a positive image of French post-colonialism. But the differences in their medium, where one is a photograph and the other a performance, alters this similarity. The composition of the *Paris Match* photograph is crucial to fix the two levels of mythology Barthes later analyzed. The float, by contrast was a live performance, to which the performers bring their own interpretation -- no matter how tightly Goude may have choreographed the movements. I would therefore argue that the *way* the costumes were worn on the float mattered more than *what* they wore. The difference lies in the interpretation brought in by the performers, and this becomes quite meaningful when it comes to the dancers dressed in tutus of Swan Lake.

The scene in the back of the float was framed like a scene from a ballet. Red curtains draped the sides and a backdrop depicted a landscape of gently rolling hills. Everything, including the white tutus, inscribed western elite culture. But the Senegalese women, dancing, turned this image upside down; their frequent acknowledgement of the "soldiers" marching below, the particular rhythm of the dance and their relationship to each other on stage turned western theatrical conventions into a narrative about them, about their life in Senegal, and about what it meant *to them* to be on the Champs Elysées. On that stage, the white swan became a Senegalese bird communicating through dancing its excitement to be in Paris on this warm summer night through dancing.

The interpretive power of the performance dissolves the Swan Lake setting and re-established the dancers right in the center of Paris in 1989. Brecht would call this "the social gestus" of the performance, which reveals "the external, material expression of social conflicts to which it bears witness."<sup>79</sup> The whiteness of the costumes supports the "social gestus" of the performers by giving the argument a specific reference point: the relationship between black and white that was at the core of nineteenth century scientific racism. These black women are dressed in the white tutus of the Swan Lake ballet, a symbol of whiteness and purity.

Indeed the idea that white symbolically represented goodness and purity and black represented evil was firmly established in French culture in the nineteenth

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<sup>79</sup> Bertolt Brecht, cited in "Les maladies du costume de theatre," *Essais Critiques*, Roland Barthes (Paris: Le Seuil, 1964), 53.

century and is far from having disappeared. The extent to which the black skin was seen as sign of negative forces may be gauged in the comment by the utopian Charles Fourier, "when blacks would live in harmony, they would be bleached rather than tanned by the sun."<sup>80</sup> And later on, in asserting human equality, Victor Hugo wrote to one of his Haitian correspondents that "in front of God, all souls are white."<sup>81</sup> The float confronted this "oppositional" nature of black and white. Unlike the black soldier on the magazine cover the "social gestus" of the performers on the float dissolved the western references to Swan Lake and brought them into the foreground.

The montage juxtaposing western symbolism and Senegalese performers was not an attempt to describe realistically either Senegal at the exhibition of 1889 nor Senegalese culture today, but to portray a positive image of fraternity between France and one of its former colonies in Africa, Senegal. The *Paris Match* cover of the black man saluting the flag, according to Barthes, "got rid of the historical, the memory that once was" by purifying it to where the image was given a natural and eternal justification, a clarity which does not belong to an explanation but to a statement of fact, in other words, where image was turned into myth. By contrast, fragments of history come together in the montage of the Senegalese float. I can identify at least two sets of historical references inscribed in this image of postcolonial fraternity: to French colonialism in Africa and another to the war that led to Senegal's independence. The influence of French colonialism was made visible in the tricolor turbans, the smoking jacket and the tutus; the independent status of the Senegal was clearly inscribed not only in Senegalese flags but also in the army costumes worn by the troops during the war of independence.

Interpretations of this positive image of postcolonialism varied in accordance with the political leanings of the interpreter. The left-wing daily *Liberation* saw it as a celebration of the meeting of different cultures while Philippe Meyer, a journalist at *Le Point* and the radio station *France Inter* (center to right wing), interpreted the presence of blacks in the parade as a colonialism in drag.

*Liberation* commented on the sensuality of the montage of different cultures in the parade. "At the bottom of another Marseillaise, the one on the Arc de Triomphe, the large valseuse and the Guinean dancer enter the stage of the

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<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980), 222.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 223.

Champs [Elysées]. The world music is triumphant, with its share of sensuality, that belongs to métissage."<sup>82</sup> Sensuality for *Liberation*, originates from the convergence of these three different figures on the Champs Elysées: La Marseillaise, as sculpted by Rude on the Arc, the valseuses and the Guinean dancer.<sup>83</sup> Métissage is here narrated on the three female bodies, one in stone, one that represents cosmopolitanism, and the one who, in her nudity brings warmth and sensuality to the asphalt of the city.<sup>84</sup>

The comments of Philip Meyer are representative of the opposite interpretation. "The parade of Jean-Paul Goude reminded me of my childhood: reading Tintin in the Congo, where the negroes speak "banania", and the large wall maps at school, where Occidental Africa was in pink and Equatorial Africa in light green. In fact, from the famous boxes of breakfast chocolate to the bicentennial parade, it is now established that the essence of the negro, his earthly vocation, is to be an image, social, entertaining and of little consequence. On the following day, the newspapers celebrated the métissage: it is the new name for the sauce with which we accommodate our former colonials."<sup>85</sup>

### *The unbrotherly Summit*

In fact, the images of solidarity with ex-colonies were drastically repoliticized by the G7 Summit meetings occurring on the days before and after the parade. The question of the Third World debt (among other things) was on the agenda. At the suggestion of Jacques Attali, the seven poorest countries were invited to the Summit to participate in these discussions.<sup>86</sup> But Prime Minister Thatcher and President Bush refused to admit them to the debating table. The idea of a counter-Summit was not a new one, for since 1984 there have been a number of them but because of the bicentennial "the opportunity was too good, this year,

<sup>82</sup> "Au pied d'une autre Marseillaise, celle de l'arc de Triomphe, la grande valseuse et la danseuse guinéenne entre sur la scène des Champs. La sono mondiale qui accompagne triomphe à son tour, avec toute sa part de sensualité, propre au métissage." *Liberation*, 17 July 1989, p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> This interpretation of métissage which derives from the transgression of nude female bodies in the public sphere of the avenue would benefit from an additional exploration. But it would also take me on a detour that does not belong here. However, I can recommend on the subject Nancy Glazener, "Dialogic subversions," *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. Ken Hirschkop and David Shepard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).

<sup>84</sup> These female dancers were a dangerous icon in the post-colonial context – one wonders whether the attempted subversion and deconstruction of the colonial tropes were not too subtle, and might have been missed by certain audiences that would instead see these colonial tropes confirmed. This is what came out in what Philippe Meyer said in the quote that follows.

<sup>85</sup> "Le cortège de Jean Paul Goude m'a rappelé mon enfance: la lecture de Tintin au Congo, où les nègres parlent banania, et les grandes cartes murales à l'école, où l'Afrique occidentale française figurait en rose et l'Afrique équatoriale en vert pomme. Au fond, depuis les boîtes de célèbre petit déjeuner chocolaté jusqu'au défilé du Bicentenaire, il est désormais prouvé que l'essence du nègre, sa vocation terrestre, est d'être une image, sociale, divertissante et de peu de conséquence. Les journaux du lendemain célébrèrent le métissage: c'est le nouveau nom de la sauce à laquelle nous accommodons nos anciens colonisés." (Philippe Meyer, "Leur 14 juillet," *Le Débat* (Nov.-Dec. 1989): 60.) Meyer is the editor of *Point* and at the radio station France Inter.

<sup>86</sup> These were Burkina-Faso, Mozambique, Zaire, Haiti, Bangladesh and the Philippines.

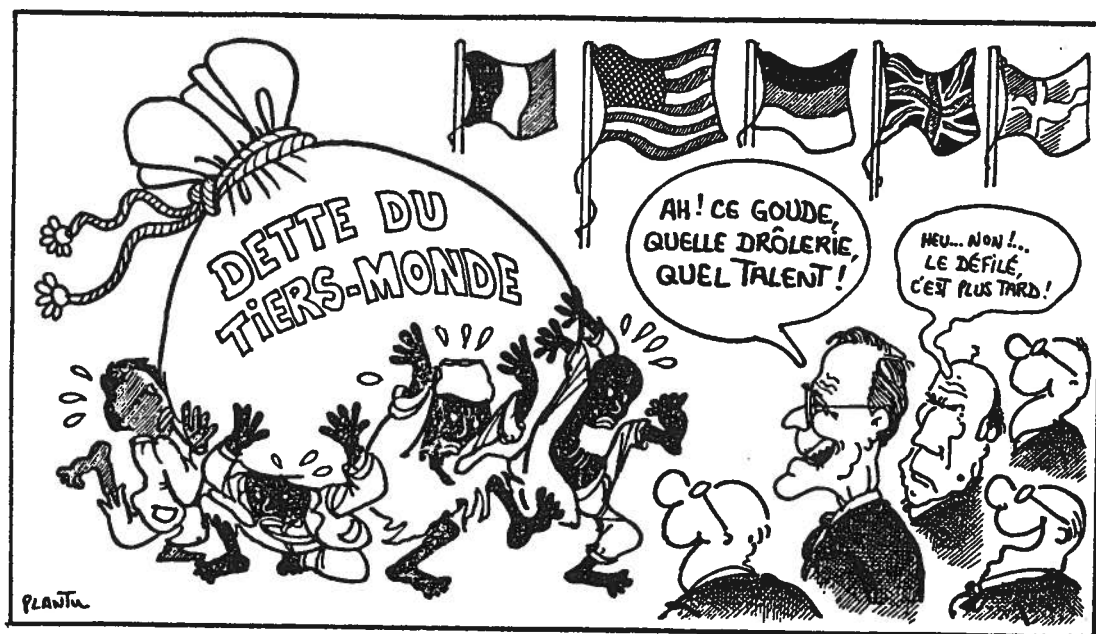
not to try to mediatize to the maximum this forum of the poor"<sup>87</sup> wrote *Le Monde*. Indeed the counter event was mediatized, "the final declaration" written by these seven poorest countries was publicly delivered to Attali and discussed in the press. This gave to the parade a political context where the demands of the new "Third Estate" to participate were violently marginalized by the conservative and exclusionary policies of the Group of Seven.

The tension generated by the economic inequality of the Third World and the representation of cosmopolitanism and brotherhood in the parade did not escape the public. A caricature published in *Le Monde* turned this tension into a criticism of President Bush's decision to forbid the poor countries to participate in the Summit (fig. 7.17). The caricature shows a group of people evidently from the Third World carrying an enormous bag marked "world debt," crushed by its weight. Bush looks at this spectacle and laughs as he says "Goude is so ingenious, what talent!" And Mitterand is telling him "Sorry ... but the parade is coming later." Like the caricature of *L'assiette au beurre* which replaced the republican trilogy of liberty, equality, fraternity with the church, capital, and the army, all three looking at the proletariat in contempt, the proletariat has now become the Third World and the oppressor has become the banks and the US government.

Let me summarize before proceeding into the next part of the analysis. The representation of fraternity in the parade has followed certain rules. Up to now, I have identified those that represent fraternity within the nation and those across nations. Fraternity within the nation was presented within Rousseau's notion of festival based on the relationship between brothers, land, and army. Even though the notion of plurality reworked this triangle, the Rousseauist ideal of the country feast re-emerged as a celebration of pre-modern cultures. Kantian ideas of a federative republic which could include all nations was presented within the new cosmopolitanism structured by the Family of Man ideology. Finally, fraternity with former colonies presented a positive image of postcolonialism by including a discourse of colonialism and independence into its reference to the universal exhibition of 1889. But this was immediately

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<sup>87</sup> Jacques De Barrin, "Les damnés de la terre," *Le Monde*, 15 July 1989, p. 4.



## ***Les Sept et la dette***

Figure 7.17  
"THE GROUP OF SEVEN AND THE DEBT"

"Les Sept et la dette." Caricature by Plantu, front page of *Le Monde*, 15 July 1989.

problematized by the exclusion of Third World presidents from the discussions of the Summit. I now want to turn to the third set of rules guiding the depiction of fraternity in the parade. These concern the representation of fraternity across races.

### **Fraternity across races**

The notion of fraternity across racial barriers was visible throughout the parade but nowhere was it clearer than in the British section. The section opened with 150 royal guards dressed in their Scottish tattoo, the British version of fraternity within the nation. Following them were four red fire-trucks with their ladders extended high up into the air. A group of men standing at the top of the ladders dressed in their bright yellow rain gear were happily spraying the British punk dancers below. Beyond them was a group of women in classical Indian dress performing a "temple dance" to the pop music of the Indian community of London. Here we can see the juxtaposition of two "minority" cultures: Indian and punk. One is marginal because of its race and the other because of their rebellious aesthetic. The modernist divide between high and low cultures is dissolved by classical Indian dancing performed to pop music and the punk dancer protected from 'rain' by the wide umbrella of a doorman from Claridge's Hotel -- clearly an experience usually reserved for Britain's elite (fig. 7.6).

Fraternity in the UK is presented here as a mixture not only of different races and different minority cultures, but is also treated in a carnivalesque fashion, as comical inversion between popular and elite, high art and mass culture. Closing the section, a double decker bus filled with people further underlined the idea of Britain as society where fraternal love exists between people of different races. The actors in the bus were from a vast array of cultural and racial backgrounds; they were waving their hands to the crowd watching the parade on the avenue displaying their happiness in a Rousseauist "brotherly love."<sup>88</sup>

The culture of a nation, in this case the British Nation, was presented as a positive image of fraternity across racial barriers. But it is no accident that the most vivid image of this idea was in the British float. At the beginning of the

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<sup>88</sup> Note that unlike the advertisement of Benneton, these were not children, they were all adults, which means that these representation of metissage have not "regressed" the argument into childhood as was the case in the Family of Man ideology present in cosmopolitanism.



revolution (around the time of the Fête de la Fédération) England was held by the revolutionaries to be the model of what France should become: a constitutional monarchy. With this reference in mind, the UK is here again displayed as the positive model of what France should become: a brotherly mixing of cultures and races. The message is clear; the current "constitutional monarchy" has to integrate the new third estate: people of the ex-colonies.

In the British section of the parade, the display of fraternity across races reworks the revolutionary allegory by attention to both the age group and the gender. In the crowded "bus" the fraternal groups include young men and women of all races. The black and white boys of the allegory have grown up and acquired sisters in the process. The notion of fraternity is now recognized as *métissage*, and this is why it seems necessary to end this chapter with a critical discussion about the contested terrain of *métissage*.

#### *Métissage and the anti-racist movement*

The word *métissage* will mean something different in the socio-cultural literature, in the slogans of the anti-racist groups and in the press coverage that celebrated the *métissage* of the bicentennial parade. But the general idea is one of mixing of cultures and races in a "fraternal" fashion.

Initially, the word "métisse" was meant to describe people born from parents of different racial groups. The nineteenth century obsession with purity and race led to the development of a lengthy ordering system to classify various degrees of *métissage*, each one with a particular name. In both Spanish and French colonies, the various degrees of *métissage* were then correlated to rights and access to property. Organized linearly, the whitest man would be granted the greatest number of benefits and the darkest woman would have the least legal protection and benefits.

Over the past two decades the increasing number of violent incidents and crimes committed against people of North African and African backgrounds have led to the rise of anti-racist movements in France.<sup>89</sup> They appropriated the word *métisse* and turned it into *métissage* in order to denounce the very racism

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<sup>89</sup> In polls done in 1991, only three years after the parade, one can see that even though 50% people interviewed expressed a certain sympathy towards people of North African origin (50% positive, 40% negative), when asked if they thought there were too many Arabs in France, 70% answered yes. This reveals the common connection between nationalism and exclusion. See Gilles Ferreol, ed., *Integration et exclusion dans la société française contemporaine* (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1994), 54.

implicit in the word. For Harlem Désir, the leader of the anti-racist coalition, métissage is the basis of his anti-racist ideology. It is necessary, he says, "that humanity be comprised of only racially undifferentiated individuals for the anti-racist program to be accomplished. As long as there will be differences between groups, there will be material for preconceptions."<sup>90</sup> This type of argument formulates a demand for mixing races and presents métissage as a method toward equality.

The contradiction of this anti-racist argument, Policar argues, "is obvious. To want a multiracial society and, at the same time, to promote non-differentiation presents a major paradox."<sup>91</sup> This can be explained by the fact that difference is perceived as a source of non-equality. Policar continues, "the emphasis placed on requesting equality implies a final abolition of differences. This oscillation between an emphasis on mixing and an emphasis on difference reconstitutes the fundamental opposition structuring the ideological debates in France since the revolution of 1789; where the opposition is formed by a logic of assimilation and one of differentiation."<sup>92</sup> Policar therefore places the current discourse on anti-racism within debates that have existed since the revolution, and implies a philosophical deadlock, which leads him to search for another philosophical basis for anti-racism.

### *Métissage as a reaction to cultural relativism*

Arguing for métissage as a method for greater equality and fraternity can also be seen as a reaction against cultural relativism. The study of cultural differences and cultural identities by ethnographers has given an academic basis to cultural relativism. Ethnographies show that people are in large part nothing else than the product of their culture. Even though advocates of cultural relativism position their work as contributing to fight racism, it also creates a situation in which people think "You are completely different than me, but I forgive you."<sup>93</sup> Similarly, in the North American context, cultural critiques are pointing to the moralizing effects of transferring the concept of *difference* onto multiculturalism.

<sup>90</sup> "Il faut que le genre humain ne comprenne que des individus racialement indifférenciables pour que le programme antiraciste puisse s'accomplir. Tant qu'il y a de la différence entre groupes, il y a matière à préjuger." (Cited in P.A. Tanguieff, *La force du préjugé. Essai sur le racisme et ses doubles* (Paris: La Découverte, 1988), 191.

<sup>91</sup> "Vouloir une société multiraciale et promouvoir, simultanément, l'indifférenciation représente un paradoxe majeur." Alain Policar, "Racisme et anti-racisme: un réexamen", Ferreol, *Intégration et exclusion*, 23-58, 38.

<sup>92</sup> "Or le primat accordé à l'exigence d'égalité implique l'abolition finale des différences. Cette oscillation entre le primat du mélange et le primat de la différence reconduit l'antinomie fondamentale qui structure les débats idéologiques en France depuis la révolution de 1789, antinomie formée par la logique de l'assimilation et celle de la différenciation." (Ibid.)

<sup>93</sup> G. Roheim, *Psychanalyse et anthropologie*, 1967, 416, cited in Ibid.

[The] concept of 'difference' as a category imposed on and used to describe the cultural identities of people of color [...] subsumes ethnic identity into a universal category of difference without attention to our specific historical internal differences. Furthermore, this notion of difference is predicated on a singularity which takes as its center the Western speaking subject and which posits that all people of color are different to this subject yet transparent among themselves.<sup>94</sup>

Cultural relativism therefore places emphasis on cultural differences, as opposed to similarities (or common grounds), which closes the door to dialogue by assuming that since two groups are culturally different they cannot understand each other. Politically, this position reinforces the position of western centrality by placing the western subject as "regulator" of different groups and actively denying possible cross-cultural alliances.

Returning to the parade, it would seem an error to interpret the hybrid mixture of cultures within the framework of "difference" present in multiculturalism, in other words, cultural relativism would not be the right standpoint to analyze this event. First, because the particular histories of each country (even if they were simplified and often stereotyped) were part and parcel of the montage of images. The history of colonialism and the war of independence were inscribed in the Senegalese float, the history of the Russian revolution and the fight for regional recognition were integrated in the Russian one and so on. Second, the different "cultures" were not presented as a homogeneous and "transparent among themselves" but as always fragmented, dual, or mixed -- as with the clog dancers.

#### *Métissage as a reaction to nationalism*

For the editors of *Passerelles* (a review on intercultural studies), the idea of métissage is no less important than Copernicus' theories which showed that "God is no longer in the center of the world."<sup>95</sup> For them, métissage is an idea that "reshapes our vision of the world: when the métissage of populations will occur at the level of the planet, the States, the nation, the peoples, will no longer be at the center of citizenship and identities."<sup>96</sup> Of course, the mixing of cultures

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<sup>94</sup> Rosa Linda Fregoso and Angie Chabram, "Chicana/o Cultural representations: Reframing Alternative Critical Discourses," *Cultural Studies* 4, no. 3 (1990): 207.

<sup>95</sup> Paul Balta, "Le métissage culturel," *Passerelles* 5 (Fall 1992): 14.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

and races is not a new occurrence, but the emphasis on nation states during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (still continuing in present-day territorial disputes in Eastern Europe and the former USSR), they argue, has purposely buried its importance. Long avoided by historians and anthropologists obsessed with the study of "pure" cultures, Serge Gruzinski argues that today, "the phenomenon of métissage can no longer be avoided."<sup>97</sup> Within this axis, métissage is advocated as a way out of nationalism as well as fanaticism -- be it in a recurring fascist ideology based on purity of the race or fundamentalist discourses based on the purity of religious codes.

In these socio-cultural discussions about métissage, one finds recurring references to Julia Kristeva's *Stranger to ourselves*, published in 1988. In it, she argues that the notion of "foreigner" has been part and parcel of western philosophy. Through textual analysis she unravels the different arguments and positions elaborated about the foreigner at various points in time. In her conclusion, she advocates the idea of tolerance which can be developed by turning the gaze within to recognize strangeness in ourselves. Based on this idea of recognition that strangeness is not in the "other" but within oneself, *Passerelles* advocates a universal cultural métissage. "When France and other states, will recognize that they are countries of immigration, of regional cultures, and that for many generations, families are vectors of numerous references resulting from cultural métissage, they will discover that experience for this transition toward new citizenships already exists."<sup>98</sup>

### *Multiple identities*

A number of artists see in métissage a way to articulate a more textured and complex condition of marginality. For example Guillermo Gomez-Pena (a Mexican-born performance artist) resists the categorization of a single identity when he says: "I believe in multiple identities. Depending on the context I am Chicano, Mexican, Latin American, or American in the wider sense of the term. The Mexican other and the Chicano other are constantly fighting to appropriate me or reject me. But I think my work might be useful to both sides because I am an interpreter. An intercultural interpreter."<sup>99</sup> For this artist, métissage is not a

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> "Lorsque la France, et d'autres Etats, reconnaitront qu'ils sont des pays d'immigration, de cultures régionales, et que depuis plusieurs générations, des familles sont les vecteurs de plusieurs references issues d'un métissage culturel, ils découvrirons que les experiences pour cette transition vers de nouvelles citoyennetés existent déjà." (Ibid., 15)

<sup>99</sup> Guillermo Gómez-Peña, cited in Rafael Pérez-Torres, "Nomads and Migrants, Negotiating a Multicultural Postmodernism," *Cultural Critique* 26 (1993-4): 165.

way to present a cohesive cultural identity but is a way to build bridges between cultural groups.

Métissage, for those working in the realm of culture (whether as artist or socio-cultural commentator), is advocated as a positive reading of multiple identities. In fact such a positive view reverses the modern fear of mixing, contamination, and perversion -- exemplified by André Malraux's policies to create a homogeneous state culture in France in the late 1950s and 60s. But I do not think that we can reduce métissage to a simple reversal of the modernist insistence on keeping cultural spheres separated. It would simplify both the modernist project and the contemporary one embodied in métissage.

Discussions about métissage as a cultural "expression" of our times has led critics like Frederic Jameson to see its darker side. For Jameson, multiple identities is an imprint of the ills of late capitalism. In an argument that strangely recalls Durkheim's argument that the "sickness" of a society is to be measured by the suicide rates, Jameson proposes a link between schizophrenia and the postmodern condition, where the hegemony of late capitalism triumphs in entirely liberating the sign from its referent. Jameson therefore explains multiple identities as a consequence of the postmodern condition.

#### *Toward a pluralist universalism*

Trying to find a philosophical basis for anti-racism, Alain Policar first analyzes Habermas' contribution to the question of communicative action, and then sketches a philosophy of pluralist universalism based on a metaphysics of dialogue. He then opens the door to a theoretical position based on Perelman's discursive rhetoric. In his *Traité de l'argumentation* Perelman brings us into a world where rhetoric is for *reasonable* argumentation as opposed to *rational* demonstration. Perelman concludes that

only the existence of argumentation that is neither constraining nor arbitrary, gives meaning to human freedom, that is a condition of reasonable choice [...]. Thanks to the possibility of an argumentation that provides reasons, but reasons that are not constraining, it is possible to escape the dilemma: adherence to an objective truth that is universally valuable, or recourse to suggestion and violence in order to bring others to accept one's opinions and decisions.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> "Seule l'existence d'une argumentation, qui ne soit ni contraignante ni arbitraire, accorde un sens à la liberté humaine, condition d'un choix raisonnable... C'est grâce à la possibilité d'une argumentation, qui fournit des raisons, mais des raisons non contraignantes, qu'il est possible d'échapper au dilemme: adhésion à une vérité objectivement et universellement

In the manner of a judge, the philosopher is interested to first hear the different sides before elaborating his or her own argument. The philosopher's position will come out of a choice between different possibilities. In arguing one's choice this type of rhetoric aims "in opposition to fanaticism and skepticism, which leaves the door wide open to violence and the elimination of the participation of the other -- at rationalizing a decision."<sup>101</sup> This thesis therefore proposes a universality of the reasonable linked to the existence of a universal audience. This has the advantage, Policar remarks, of avoiding the problems encountered in abstract universalism which rejects the multiple in favor of the absolute. And it also has the advantage of rejecting the cultural relativist position by emphasizing what Meyer calls the "fundamental and universal characteristic of questioning"<sup>102</sup> present in all human activity.

Métissage as a contemporary form of fraternity is to be seen in this network of discussions about anti-racism, multiple identities, cultural relativism, and a political philosophy of pluralist universalism. Within these discussions, or I should say, because of these discussions the message of universal fraternity deployed on the Champs Elysées on the 14th of July acquired a much larger intellectual and political radiance than it would have otherwise. By supporting this kind of parade, Mitterand and the Socialist party succeeded in placing themselves within these discussions -- evidently an easier task than integrating the presidents of the seven poorest countries into the meetings of the Summit. Having said that, it seems that when a government displays the portrait of its nation on the TV screens throughout the world, these images should be taken seriously. In that respect, the images of métissage, however they were interpreted by the different audiences, now exist, for better or worse, in circulation and are part of the discussions of anti-racism and fraternity.

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valable, ou recours à la suggestion et à la violence pour faire admettre ses opinions et décisions." (C. Perelman, in collaboration with L. Olbrechts-Tyteca), *Traité de l'argumentation, La Nouvelle Rhétorique*, vol.2 (Paris: P.U.F, 1958), 682.)

<sup>101</sup> Policar, *Racisme*.

<sup>102</sup> M. Meyer, *De la problematologie. Philosophie, sciences et langage* (Brussels: P. Mardaga), 1986.

## CONCLUSION, THE "PAYSAGE MORALISE"

In 1790, an anonymous pamphlet was sent to Bailly, the mayor of Paris, written as an utopian dream. With the preparation for the Festival of Federation underway, the author pleads the case for an integrated approach to the design of festivals and monuments, an integration that would ensure the good development of the new democratic citizen. In effect, the text can be read as a seed of what the Mitterand government put in place during 1989: a "paysage moralisé" -- a moral tale about heritage and democracy. A paraphrase of this letter can introduce the conclusions I want to draw in this final chapter.

At the fête, the tables are covered with leaves and free meals are distributed. There, where in the past rose the Bastille prison, is now a plaza. We can see the mass of a pyramid, crowned by one of those discovered temples that Boullée likes so much. In the evening, the dreamer can watch a Rousseauist festival. From the windows of the Bourbon palace, where a friendly passer-by took him, he discovers an immense parade, continuing uninterruptedly from l'Hotel de Ville to Place Louis XV. A chain of national guards drawn out along the waterfront is doubled back on the Seine by a chain of barges which carry the representatives of the Nation, their own doubles reflected in the water.<sup>1</sup>

Mona Ozouf remarks that we can see in this pamphlet all the elements of the utopian city set in place by, and through the festival -- the straight line, readability, symmetry, transparency -- with their resulting grace: the reciprocity of human hearts. But most importantly, "there is no festival without a monument"<sup>2</sup> that necessary coexistence is stressed here in this pamphlet but also in numerous other texts of that period.

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<sup>1</sup> Paraphrased from the anonymous pamphlet, *Songe patriotique, ou le monument et la fête* (Paris: Didot le Jeune, 1790).

<sup>2</sup> Mona Ozouf, *The Revolutionary Festivals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 133.

The dream of this patriotic author came to life during the bicentennial as monuments and festivals supported one another to portray a moral tale about heritage and democracy. As we saw in Chapter Six, the symbolic landscape was reworked by the careful placement of the new commemorative monuments. By reinforcing the existing Grand Axis, the new monuments addressed the Napoleonic past of the city but also extended the axis towards the east to include the Bastille, a symbolically charged site of memory. By locating the Bastille Day parade on the Grand Axis, the message about the value of *métissage* was set into a dialectical relationship with the monuments standing in the background. As the pamphlet of 1790 described a utopian festive landscape, the television coverage of the 1989 parade created its own utopian city, where monuments and festivals coexist and express a dream about the future.

The way in which the opening sequence of the official televised coverage of the parade set the stage underlines the significance of new monuments aligning with the old along the Grand Axis -- now spanning the city from sunrise to sunset. Indeed, it was not a mere accident that this opening sequence catapults the viewer from the east out towards the Grande Arche in the evening, as if the camera was flying towards the setting sun in the west -- looking out from the 'window onto the future'.

The show begins with a dark and murky shot, then the camera moves out into a light and open space, and the first object that comes into focus is the Louvre Pyramid, brilliant and crystalline. As the camera pans around it, the viewer gets the feeling that they are beginning to rise, floating up and over the pyramid as one begins to glide in a very long continuous movement, dipping down again towards the paving of the empty Louvre court and then, picking up speed, out of the courtyard and up, over the arch of the *Petit Carousel*, over the pools in the Tuileries garden, brushing against the stone tip of the obelisk in the centre of the empty amphitheatre at *Place de la Concorde*, and swiftly, sometimes at the level of the cobblestones and sometimes grazing the tops of the trees, all the way up the *Champs Élysées* before passing under the *Arc de Triomphe* to finish on a shot framed by the Grande Arche at *la Défense*.

In this opening sequence, the monuments of the Grand Axis -- both the new (the Pyramid and the Grande Arche), the old (the Arch of the *Petit Carousel*, the *Place de la Revolution* and the *Arc de Triomphe*) and the temporary (the amphitheatre) -- are presented like a theatrical set awaiting the actors of the



festival. The long continuous shot across the heart of Paris is like an architectural bird's eye view set in motion at high speed, which gives the viewer the impression of flying in a dream – no doubt a patriotic dream about democratic festivals and monuments. Thus described, we see a vacant but highly designed landscape, a Paris without people, where the monuments are waiting for the actors to enter on stage. Here, monument and event begin a televisual symbiosis: the monument is needed to locate the event, and the event is needed to bring the monument to life. Meaghan Morris, writing on the bicentennial of Australia's foundation as a colony, remarks that,

The descriptiveness of live television is not that of a theatrical 'still life'; or *nature morte*. [...] On the contrary: live [television] pursues the living for its transient and fugitive potential, its veer towards instability. For the living are not ghostly after-effects of media, as Baudrillard's fables would have it. The living animate the media event by ignoring its critical limits.<sup>3</sup>

The television coverage might have been the most astute depiction of the "paysage moralisé". In fact, it reworked the revolutionary patriotic dream into a symbolic fusion, in which the paraders and monuments created a series of tableaux vivants. When the parade was filmed toward the Place de l'Etoile, the vertical Arc de Triomphe stood as a reminder of the Empire, and when the cameras filmed the parade in the opposite direction with the Place de la Concorde, the horizontal amphitheatre was a reminder of festival of 1790. The telescopic lens of the television camera thrust images of the paraders (virtually) against the monuments -- although in actuality, they were far apart. In this telephotomontage, each float appeared in front of the Arc de Triomphe, the Grande Arche and the amphitheatre on Place de la Concorde with its obelisk in the centre.

The coverage of the traditional musicians referred again and again to the Arc de Triomphe until, in one lingering shot, the monument was shown close-up, with Rude's sculpture of "Liberty leading the People" captured in focus, behind a large grouping of traditional musicians, among a panoply of flags from each of the departments of France (fig. 7.3). This shot collapses regional, national and global identities in its fusion of the traditional flags of the regions, the sculpture depicting military and republican sentiments, and the circumstances of

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<sup>3</sup> Meaghan Morris, "Panorama: the live, the dead and the living," *Island in the Stream, Myths of Place in Australian Culture*, ed. Paul Foss (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1988), 185.

televisual coverage, diffused globally to audiences world-wide. The paraders are acting the part of multiculturalism and métissage in front of a triumphal arch erected to commemorate the Napoleonic wars but also associated with the First World War through the tomb of the unknown soldier at its base.

In this juxtaposition, the memory of war has been upstaged by the liveliness of the festive parade in front. The regional flags rework the patriotic symbolism of the war. And the juxtaposition is reworked further when we discover a white cube floating, far beyond, in the middle of the arch. Like a jewel glowing in the night, the Grande Arche is there as a reminder of a well-ordered future, promising democratic access to new forms of communication with high technology. The instantaneous transmission of the coverage throughout the world on high-tech satellites confirms this promise.

The community of believers invoked by Jeannenay in his introduction to the program is here enacted in its fullest sense. The old monument carries the memory of Victor Hugo (his grandiose funeral took place under its vault), who occupies the background like a ghost, "channelling" his message from the past through Jeannenay. This venerable work of architecture was offered as a source of meditation on the heritage of the Revolution. The top floor of the new monument has been dedicated to rotating exhibitions on the theme of "human rights today," and for this reason the building has been dubbed the "Arch of Brotherhood." This act calls on the state's responsibility in taking an active role in human rights both nationally and internationally. It makes visible what an administration is meant to do to insure the wholesome food, good housing, health care, and medical institutions which the population needs to remain healthy -- in short, to foster the life of individuals. This move showed how the care for individual life was inscribed in this monument as a duty of the state.

To be sure, the superimposition of the parade on one arch associated with war and another associated with brotherhood, is an *ænigma*. The "paysage moralisé" inscribes two meanings to 'fraternity': one positioned relative to its Napoleonic and colonial past (the Arc de Triomphe) and another in relation to the future framed by a vision of technology and government protection of human rights. In this particular juxtaposition, the meaning of the parade constantly alternates between a discourse on brotherhood in the army (represented in Rude's sculpture on the Arc de Triomphe), and a discourse on métissage in the parade -- the postmodern version of 'fraternity'.

The discussion of the "paysage moralisé" reactivates questions about the intersection of spectacle and memory studied in the thesis in terms of how they are put into representation and located in a site. In that regard, melancholy was constantly hovering over many of the discussions about the devalued form memory took during the bicentennial events. To start with, the Mission was faced with a particularly hostile environment for celebrating the content (that is, the Revolution and the Enlightenment) of the commemoration. As Pascal Ory says, this particular commemoration of the French Revolution could not have started under worse auspices. The general lack of enthusiasm of the press, which endured until the Bastille Day Parade, is quite telling in that respect. Secondly, the bicentennial organizers faced the difficulty of creating a meaningful public event in an urban context that has, since the nineteenth century, been viewed as a functional system rather than as a site for ritual. With the interventions of modernist planning, Western cities have been stripped of much of their memory of place, leaving behind a trail of spaces well described as 'placeless' by Relph. As a result, as Christine Boyer argues, it has become extremely difficult to create meaningful interventions in urban public spaces, be they in the form of architecture or festivals.

My point of departure has been that the government, faced with this denigration of the public realm and cool reception to the Revolution, was trying to make revolutionary heritage mean something to people today by using allegorical techniques of spatializing and visualizing history and consequently (yet paradoxically, since it ran against their intentions) effecting a smooth passage for this heritage into the world of commodity and spectacle. To analyze this dilemma, I investigated the mechanisms of representation and the ways the organizers attempted to make Paris *mean* the revolution. But in order not to reduce the commemoration to 'spectacular' effects, I interpreted the allegories of the commemoration with a redemptive intent -- a redemption of collective memories in public spaces as opposed to strictly individual ones. In that regard, spectacles are in a privileged position since they operate at the crossroads between history, memory and place. Spectacles take place in public spaces and for this reason, they carry the potential for making collective memories visible in a critical manner.

The question as to what needs to be redeemed was explored in each chapter by looking at different facets of the commemoration, but the central theme has been

about the urgent need to value the memory of place -- which would translate in practice, by a dialectical design approach to places of memory. In each chapter, I analyzed an allegorical aspect of the commemoration, then, in an allegorical fashion, I reversed it, in order to redeem it.

To begin with, in chapter two, I showed that, in the eyes of most people who questioned the upcoming anniversary of the Revolution, the notion of 'republic' was belittled and passé. In response to this all-too-evident lack of concern with the central premise of the bicentennial, the commemorators felt it necessary to tell the story of the birth of the nation as a moral tale of sacrifice and community, a story which had demonstrated that it could be spread as the 'good news'. In the program, the specific mechanisms of distancing, reflection and ritual re-enactment are evident strategies used to secure these symbolic meanings of the event and their contemporary political implications.

The major commemorative exhibit was seen by many as an accumulation of objects from the past -- possibly the debris of history so treasured by Walter Benjamin, but to many others, such as Linda Nochlin, just seen as a senseless accumulation, unilluminated by a curatorial vision. But an allegorical approach to the interpretation of this exhibit showed that, by refusing to give guidance, the exhibit allowed for multiple story lines and interpretations to emerge. By treating the exhibit as fragments rescued from the past to be constellated into images, I could extract from it what I believe to have been at least three stories about how history is told. That a historical meta-narrative can no longer be sustained is a truism of contemporary 'post-modern' criticism; this exhibit, so comprehensive in every other way, of course had to recognize this and thus opened up the possibility that multiple 'legitimate' interpretations of history are possible.

Recognizing that the modernist city, rationalized and systematized from Haussmann to Le Corbusier, has denied the possibility that the city is a complex of 'milieux de memoire', the organizers attempted to re-invest history in the urban landscape spatially by building a temporary amphitheatre modeled on a historical amphitheatre -- one which, perhaps not coincidentally, has long been associated with happy memories rather than pivotal historical events. An allegorical investigation of this monument revealed that the original meaning of the monument has been entirely reversed: from an attempt, in 1790, to create one republic out of multiple departments and estates to a present-day attempt to

create a 'multiple', multi-cultural, and pluralistic society out of what has been represented as a unity -- the mass-citizenry. In other words, the wooden amphitheatre attempted to rework the memory of the Fête de la Fédération into a discourse on the importance of multiplicity within a democratic government.

Shifting from a temporary monument to the permanent ones built for the bicentennial, the spatialization of history, as a long-term transformation of the urban landscape was explored through an analysis of three major monuments built for the commemoration: the Grande Arche, the renovation of the Louvre around the central motif of the Pyramid, and the Bastille Opera. Their placement in the Parisian landscape reshaped the historical narrative associated with the history of the grand axis by extending it, for the first time, towards the east of the city -- traditionally the working class area. The media's coverage of these new monuments consistently stressed that the socialist government was trying to consolidate their power and leave a lasting mark on the national landscape by creating a link between revolutionary heritage and socialist politics.

The best known and most traditional form of allegory is the personification of abstract ideas such as liberty or equality. In the bicentennial parade, Jessye Norman personified liberty and the nation by singing the National Anthem at the foot of the Egyptian obelisk and left the amphitheatre by metaphorically "parting the waters" of the Red Sea. This powerful allegory collaged fragments of images from vastly different traditions to create a kaleidoscope of meanings which critiqued and re-worked republican and nationalistic dogma. My use of allegory to critically unpack that moment looked at how it attempted to shift the notion of "liberty for blacks" into a representation of Nation that is fully inclusive of people of color. This double meaning took on its fullest expression through the narrative body of Toussaint-Louverture, a real person who was taken up by the commemoration to represent the idea of equality among people of different races. The figure of Toussaint, celebrated on the same day as the commemoration of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, exposed at the same time it attempted to expunge the shadow of the Declaration: the exclusion of blacks and the persistence of racism today.

Notions of racism and nationalism came together in the carnivalesque Bastille Day parade. I investigated how, by using collage and surprising juxtapositions, the parade tapped into a reservoir of images from the past which speak of fraternity in order to address localized struggles for cultural identity today and

the interconnectedness of culture throughout the world, especially meaningful in the context of contemporary discussions about "métissage." In treating the parade allegorically, I could show how the same image was interpreted in opposite manners by different audiences. This allowed me to come back to the instability of meaning inherent in public spectacles.

By treating the commemoration allegorically, it allowed the interpretation to investigate the double meanings inscribed in the program, the exhibit, the monumental landscape and the parade. But the allegorical critique is a violent one, it does not intend to carefully excavate the layers of meaning through a gentle and constructive hermeneutic circle. For the allegorist, to reconstruct meaning, the objects of contemplation have to be in fragments, the flesh must be pulled away from the bones. In that respect, the beauty of Jessye Norman as she sings the Marseillaise must be seen as superficial and one has to strip the image into pieces that can then be recombined into a constellation about liberty and race. Similarly, to treat the commemorative landscape as disconnected fragments is to give form to the melancholy expressed by the critics of postmodernism. But the allegorist reassembles the fragments into new meaningful constellations, and this constructive move leads to the redemptive form of this type of criticism. According to Benjamin, the constellations always resist a broader ontological vision, a "structural totality" as Adorno called it. The constructions remain open, driven by the impossibility of recovering what has been lost, always pointing to the instability of meaning, not its existence. Conceived as images, the allegorical constructions drew from images from the past and juxtaposed them to contemporary ones that were circulating in the form of postcards or in the media. Human geography has been and will always remain fascinated by visuality. The allegorical form of criticism gives a language, a form, to discuss the ephemeral and fragmentary aspects of what Sorkin has called "variations on a theme park."

My goal was to investigate questions surrounding spectacle through an analysis of the allegories of this particular commemoration. But now that the work is over, the "allegorist leaves empty handed" Benjamin says; for at the end, all the constellations of fragments, all finished puzzles are to be destroyed and left behind as ruins. In this destructive final move one can see that the allegorist always tends towards the recovery of meaning but only to leave open the fullness of its instability.

### *Postscript*

At the end of his book on Walter Benjamin, Max Pensky presents the Benjaminian image of the collector as an antidote, so to speak, to the melancholic drive of the allegorist.<sup>4</sup> There is something particular to the collector, something that cannot escape the actuality, the presence of the fragments of the past -- it is not just a memory or a mere documentation staked away in the library -- the collector brings together concrete objects into a constellation in which "an element of that-which-has-been (das Gewesene) enters into the present."<sup>5</sup>

At first sight, the collector appears to be involved in something opposite from the allegorist. Because the allegorist "has abandoned the investigative effort to illuminate how the things relate to, fit in with one another." The allegorist tears pieces away from their historical context (like the image of the beheading of the king in the third chapter or Toussaint-Louverture in the sixth chapter), and recovers meaning by bringing them into a constellation. The collector, on the other hand, brings together objects that share a natural affinity. For me, all the objects are united by their direct connection to the bicentennial.

But Benjamin sees an allegorist hidden in every collector, and a collector in every allegorist. For the collection of a collector is never complete it is always missing a valuable piece which means that the collection remains for ever piecework. What the collector has that is non-existent in the allegorist is the love of the object, the collector cherishes each element of the collection, sometimes in a rather obsessive manner. On the other side, the allegorist can never have enough fragments to choose from to create constellations. The one fragment that would be necessary to complete the puzzle, to recover the lost meaning will always be missing, hence the frustrated desire for meaning that can never be reached. "What allegory has that is so lacking in the spirit of the collector is the desperate search for meaning under whose weight the false image of the world buckles, and from which issues of messianic will, a call to make good again has been broken. The things themselves constitute that null point where the 'counterpoles' of the collector and the allegorist meet: to embrace that

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<sup>4</sup> For Benjamin, the idea of the 'collector' represents more than his own personal fascination with collecting incunabula and children's toys. Pensky argues that, in Benjamin's essay "Unpacking my Library," the collector -- who loves objects, cherishes them and wants to keep them -- can be seen as the Janus-face of the allegorist, obsessed with death, melancholy and redemption.

<sup>5</sup> Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 243.

meeting place, to master it, and to direct the energy of the crossing onto the heart of the present is the goal of Benjamin's criticism."<sup>6</sup>

If I were to look at the commemorative landscape no longer to find clues for allegorical reading but in a more introspective manner, I would turn to my library and look at a collection of photographs I took as I walked the heritage tours designated as "revolutionary Paris". Acting like a tourist in my own city to see things 'fresh' I followed the itineraries of a guide book put out by the city of Paris. One of the itineraries begun a few hundred meters from the house where I grew up, in the left bank, right in the centre of Paris. The tour meandered in the streets of my neighborhood making stops at places like the printing shop of Marat, the house of Camille des Moulin, the Procope where revolutionaries would dine after a session at the assembly and so on.

As I took photographs of these different sites of memory it became clear that bits and pieces of my own experience were always within the frame. As I reached Place Danton, for example, the guide book directs the visitor's attention to a large bronze statue of the revolutionary figure of Danton leading two men. The statue was erected where his house once stood. Today the statue is blocked in between the entrance to the *métro* and a couple of bus stops. Still, it is a popular place to make appointments and the pedestal of Danton's statue is often crowded with people sitting on it, waiting. The statue is in front of a cinema complex with four theatres and I remember coming here for *matinées* on Wednesday afternoons, the free day for high school students. I decide to capture Danton's statue and the movie theatre in one frame. The theatre refers to those Wednesday afternoons and the statue to May 1968. One morning, after a long night of rioting around the boulevard St.-Germain, I walked on the deserted boulevard among the leftovers from the barricades: overturned cars, tree grates and cobblestones. Vivid colours in the midst of this gray landscape brought my attention to Danton's statue decorated with a red sheet placed on his shoulders like a roman toga and flowers carefully placed on his body.

My photograph includes references to personal memories (lonely Wednesday afternoons and the student revolt of '68), as well as the newspaper stand where I buy *Liberation* each day, the metro entrance I use more than once a day – in short, elements of the landscape from everyday life and memories from the past.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



In this photograph, two images of Paris rub against each other. The statue stands as a canonical representation of a democracy based on decentralization (in opposition to the Jacobean's centralization) and the urban environment around it envelops it like a cloak, putting to sleep all the revolutionary references. For only at certain times are these revolutionary references called upon and awakened. Most actively by the students in 1968, and most passively by the eyes of the tourists, reading the guide book's interpretation of what this statue represents. Technically, my snapshot of Danton's statue with the cinema is an "incorrect" tourist photograph. The blurry stripes created by moving cars invades the bottom of the frame, the people standing near the statue attract one's attention to the oversized pedestal and the statue itself is badly lit. Worst of all, people are denying the existence of this statue by looking away from it.

The black and white photograph of Danton's statue in the guidebook, on the other hand, has been tightly framed around the figure so as to erase all information behind it and restore its authority. The picture makes no reference to anything else in the environment, and gives the viewer little freedom to explore. The conclusion is inescapable: it is impossible to exclude my personal past and experiences from my 'tourist' work. Indeed, in this collection of photographs, I can finally see Benjamin's idea of the stereoscopic interpretation of history; where one's own experience forms one image, the historical event the other and together they give the subject an understanding of the past. I will be filling these photographs among the allegorical interpretations of the Parisian landscape during the bicentennial. For if the personal photographs carry with them an atmosphere of sentimentalism, the allegories, on the other hand, are offered like the candles for the dead.

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BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF REVOLUTIONARY DATES

# 1789

- 5 May Opening of the general estates by Louis XVI at Versailles.
- 6 May Conflict between the three estates. The third estate refuses to be marginalized, physically and politically.
- 17 June The third estate constitutes itself as a National Assembly (joined by nine deputies of the clergy, including Abbé Gregoire).
- 19 June Reunion of the clergy with the third estate voted: 149 against 137.
- 20 June The king orders the closure of the meeting of the third estate. The deputies re-assemble at the Tennis Courts (Jeu de paume) and swear to give a constitution to the country.
- 27 June By decree of the king, the clergy and nobility reunite with the third estate. The general estates become the National Assembly.
- 9 July The National Assembly proclaims itself as the National Constitutional Assembly, and a 30-member constitutional committee begins to work on the drafting of a constitution.
- 11 July Necker (progressive financial advisor) is fired by the King.
- 12 July After the announcement of the firing of Necker, people take to the streets in Paris and the army is called in to fire on the crowd.
- 13 July A Parisian militia is formed and the Hôtel de Ville is fortified
- 14 July Storming of the Bastille.
- 15 July Bailly is elected mayor of Paris and La Fayette as commander of the National Guard of the capital.
- 17 July The king visits Paris and is received at the Hôtel de Ville by Bailly and La Fayette who make him wear a tricolor cocarde. Emigration begins: the comte d'Artois, prince de Condé, duc de Bourbon, duc d'Enghien,... all leave France.
- 21 July Riot at Strasbourg (This is one of many riots which continue to occur throughout France over the ensuing five years. They are bread riots, pro- and anti-revolutionary riots,...)
- 4 August The king shuffles his cabinet to favor the faction of Lafayette. During the night, the National Assembly votes the abolition of feudal privileges.
- 10 August Decree of the National Assembly requiring soldiers to swear to "the Nation, King and Law".

20 August	Foundation of the 'Society of French Colonists' to defend colonial interests in the Antilles against abolitionists.
26 August	The National Assembly declares the Rights of Man and the Citizen.
1 October	Officers of the bodyguard at Versailles offer a banquet to the newly arrived regiment from Flanders. In the presense of the Queen, they fling away the tricolour cocarde and replace it with her emblem, the black cocarde.
5 October	Agitation in Paris after news of the banquet. Thousands of Parisian women march on Versailles, joined at night by the Parisian National Guard and La Fayette.
12 October	Secret appeal of Louis XVI to the king of Spain. Appeal by the comte d'Artois to Emperor Joseph II to militarily intervene in France.
21 October	The National Assembly declares 'martial law' to repress popular uprisings.
22 December	The National Assembly decrees the organisation of administrative departments.

## 1790

13 Feb	The National Assembly forbids the taking of religious vows and supresses monastic orders.
29 March	Pope Pius VI condemns the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.
1 April	Publication of the 'red book', which lists the royal pensions accorded by the king.
5 May	The National Assembly decrees the election of judges.
8 May	The National Assembly decrees the rationalization of weights and measures.
3 June	Uprising of mulattos in Martinique.
6 June	Festival of Federation in Lille (followed by ones in Strasbourg, Besançon, Rouen. Also counter-revolutionary rioting in Avignon and Nîmes.)
19 June	The National Assembly abolishes hereditary nobility, titles, orders and any form of hereditary distinction between the French.
3 July	Condorcet publishes his article "On the admission of women to the right of the city," advocating their right to the vote.
14 July	Festival of Federation in Paris celebrating the storming of the Bastille and the National Constitutional Assembly.
8 August	The governor of Saint-Domingue (Haiti) orders the 'Colonial Assembly' to disband.

- 14 August The 'Peace of Varella' between Catherine II and Gustave III. Russia and Sweden look to intervene against the revolution.
- 12 October The National Assembly dissolves the 'Colonial Assembly' but reaffirms the legality of slavery.
- 29 October Mulatto uprising in the north of Saint-Domingue.
- 25 October Slave uprising in Saint-Domingue.

## 1791

- 19 February 'Mesdames', the daughters and aunts of the king, depart in exile.
- 28 February The National Assembly discusses the emigration of 'mesdames,' retained in Arnay-le-Duc by the authorities. 400 armed aristocrats assemble at the Tuileries, they are arrested by La Fayette.
- 3 April The city of Paris requests the National Assembly to transform the church of Saint-Geneviève into a pantheon and to inter Mirabeau there.
- 3 May Pius VI is burned in effigy at the Palais Royal. The papal nuncio departs Paris. New constitution in Poland, inspired by revolutionary ideas.
- 5 June Decree of the National Assembly removing from the king the right of grace.
- 10 June Election of Robespierre as public accuser for the criminal tribunal in Paris.
- 13 June Decree of the National Assembly requiring military officers to make a declaration of faith to the principles of the constitution.
- 14 June The National Assembly votes to abolish guilds and forbid strikes and workers 'coalitions.'
- 20 June The royal family escapes from Paris incognito.
- 21 June Arrest of the royal family in Varennes. They are brought back to Paris.
- 14 July Festival of Federation celebrated again in Paris.
- 15 July The National Assembly declares the king inviolable, but contains to suspend him of his powers until he is presented to the Assembly and ratifies the constitution.
- 18 July Decree of the National Assembly forbidding agitation, sedition and rioting. Danton leaves for England, Marat goes into hiding.
- 28 July Decree of the National Assembly organising the National Guard.
- 22 August Beginning of slave uprising in Saint-Domingue.
- 14 September The king takes an oath to the constitution in front of the National Assembly.

- 18 September Festival on the Champs de Mars to celebrate the constitution.
- 9 November Decree of the National Assembly requiring emigrés to return to France before January 1792 or lose their property and be condemned to death in absentia.

## 1792

- 9 February Decree of the National Assembly confiscating the properties of expatriate French for the good of the nation.
- 20 March The Legislative Assembly authorises the funds necessary to fabricate the new machines for capital punishment, the guillotines.
- 24 March The National Assembly establishes the political equality of 'free men of colour' in the Antilles.
- 20 April France declares war on the king of Hungary and Bohemia, leaving the German states of the Holy Roman Empire out of the conflict.
- 20 June Commemoration of the king's attempted escape, pretext for an invasion of the Tuileries by a crowd. The King is forced to wear a red cap and to drink to the glory of the nation.
- 30 July
- 10 August Storming of the Tuileries. The royal family takes refuge in the Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Assembly provisionally suspends the king and elects an executive council. The royal family is interned at the Temple.
- 15 August The Commune of Paris, led by Robespierre, demands the creation of a "people's tribunal. The Legislative Assembly refuses.
- 30 August Prussians lay siege to Verdun.
- 2 - 9 September The "september massacres," in which the crowd takes people out of prisons and kills them
- 16 September Pillage of the queen's royal chambers.
- 19 September Creation of the Louvre as a public museum.
- 20 September Victory at Valmy. The Prussian retreat is the first victory of the National army.
- 21 September The first public sitting of the National Convention declares that "the monarchy is abolished in France."
- 22 September Decree of the National convention that all public acts be dated "the Year I of the French Republic."
- 3 December Speech of Robespierre to the Convention where he demands the death of the king.

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| 1793 | 20 Jan | The convention votes to execute the king: 380 against 310.  |
|      | 21 Jan | Execution of Louis XVI (Creation of the Republic).  |
|      | 2 June | Arrest of the Girondins followed by their execution.  |
|      | 7 July | The fall of Robespierre. 83 other Robespierrists are executed.                                      |
| 1795 | 26 Oct | Nomination of Bonaparte as chief of the army.   |
|      | 31 Oct | The "Directoire" is elected and will remain until November 1799 when Bonaparte leads a coup d'etat. |