

REMEMBERING THE REVOLUTION, FORGETTING THE EMPIRE: NOTES AFTER THE FRENCH BICENTENNIAL¹

PETER REDFIELD

Tragedy or farce, some things do return more than once. The French Revolution has echoed many times, both on the street and across the printed page. It stands out as one of the most historicized events in Western history, with ample interpretations for every paving stone and proclamation. The summer of 1989 marked its bicentennial, and yet another interpretive overlay, the elaborate theater of official celebration and protest. Between opera at the Bastille and a flood of commemorative issues of stamps, T-shirts and journals left and right, the passions of the First Republic became the pageantry of the Fifth. The moment was fleeting; at the distance of several years the French commemoration lies buried beneath dramatic world events, and superseded by another historical anniversary, that of the arrival of Columbus to the New World. Yet in its brief glow the Bicentennial describes a remarkable attempt at spectacle, a modern ritual of national origin in a nation state claiming authority to Enlightenment, and the wellsprings of modernity. By way of introduction, let us open to a page seeking to provide a capsule summary of the French fireworks.

"*Les Jours de Gloire*," announces the headline in *Newsweek*, "France celebrates its bicentennial with the world's first postmodern patriotic festival." The article below lies offset against images of a black woman draped in the *tricolore*, an enormous burst of fireworks over the Arc de Triomphe, and, high in the corner, a grim clump of white men riding stiffly in military review. "We are all children of the Revolution now," it informs us, "— creatures of Liberty and survivors of the Terror, a perpetual bourgeoisie living off our wits" (Adler and Dickey 1989: 20-23). What surprises is both the strength of the claims ("postmodern... perpetual bourgeoisie"), and the manner in which they fall

on the page — the touch of satire, poetry amid corporate journalism. This ironic tone continues through in offering a fuller description of events:

Having turned the sacred commemoration of the Bastille over to an advertising man, Parisians were treated to a spectacle in the style of irrelevance that Americans pioneered... A new slogan taking shape in the streets: Liberty, Frivolity, Irony... A morning military parade with jet fighters streaming tri-color smoke was followed by a mile long parade in the evening dubbed 'The Festival of the Planet's Tribes.' This was a peculiar theme for a celebration of the French revolution, which in fact asserted the universality of mankind over parochial customs and loyalties. On the other hand, what does 'universality' have in the way of spectacle to compare with zebra-striped horses and the Funky Chicken, with a phalanx of Chinese students towing a huge red Chinese drum in memory of Tiananmen Square and a platoon of Russian troops goose-stepping through ersatz snow to the beat of African drums? (Adler and Dickey 1989: 20-21)

It would be easy to glance briefly at this section and the accompanying photographs of the moonwalking Florida A & M marching band, the axe-carrying Foreign Legionnaires, the staring woman with a hoop dress bearing a child with the Palestinian flag, glance briefly and move on. Easy, yes, for this is *Newsweek*, not an academic journal, not even the French press, and yet — here, condensed through the distance of translation, linguistic and cultural, molded as a short and digestible piece, opened in irony and closed with light humor, here we find a discussion of postmodern society, human nature and difference.

In this essay I wish to pursue twin issues highlighted in

the article, that of the possible "postmodern" status of this particular patriotic festival, and that of the modified relations of difference and universality in its reworking of the Revolutionary heritage. In question will be elements of time (change, continuity and measurement) and elements of place (the political geographies of nation and world), together with those narratives which evoke time and place in larger constructions of historically similar and different identities (the traditional, the modern, the postmodern).² As historical anchors I propose two visual events: the Bicentennial, as replayed between personal notes, memories and published reports, and the most related antecedent, the Centennial World's Fair of 1889, especially as depicted in its own commemoration a century later.³ At issue in each case will be the place of images of difference in the representation of revolution, nation and empire, alongside claims of universal meaning in the construction of a public France. The goal will be to better position the moment of the French Bicentennial with respect to anthropological categories of political ritual, while in turn positioning those categories over on the far side of modern identity.

THE BICENTENNIAL

FOR THE REVOLUTIONARIES OF 1789, THERE IS NO DOUBT: THE MESSAGE THEY EXPRESS IS ADDRESSED TO THE ENTIRE PLANET.

— FRANÇOIS MITTERAND⁴

As a first step let us construct a social and historical frame around *Newsweek's* account of the Festival of the Planet's Tribes. At home in Paris, Bicentennial plans were laid, only to be unlaunched and relaid amid political squabbles, for years before the year. In September, 1981, the newly elected Socialist administration announced that France would seek to hold a universal exposition in honor of 1989, both commemorating the Revolutionary bicentennial and looking forward at the possibilities of progress in the coming third millennium.⁵ These grand designs lasted less than two years before falling to political and economic realities, a reluctant Paris and its conservative mayor, Jacques Chirac. Though denied an exposition, François Mitterand's government nevertheless ploughed ahead with other monumental efforts, and despite opposition and political turmoil during the period of *cohabitation*,⁶ the central city would eventually see some major reworking of its landscape. A

controversial pyramid entrance for the Louvre, former palace and totem museum; a gleaming science museum at La Villette, amid traditional northeastern working class neighborhoods; an intricate Arab World Institute near the Seine, its panels combining Arabic patterns and complex technology; an enormous box-like arch over La Défense, the high rise business suburb; and, perhaps the most debated glass and steel insect of all, the large, beetle-like, opera house at the Bastille; all these would be open and waiting on July Fourteenth.⁷ In addition to the architectural props, a fierce climate of commercialism (bearing with it everything from guillotine earrings to tricolor bread), together with active political discussion surrounding elections for the European Parliament, a major economic summit in Paris, and potential revolution in China provided a lively backdrop for the celebrations themselves. While the world may not have appeared in Paris for the occasion in the form of exposition exhibits, it did arrive embodied in its political leaders and their entourages. Between rival Conservative and Socialist guest lists, the army of summit participants, and a timely tour by Mikhail Gorbachev, the city saw a lengthy parade of dignitaries, hurried to and fro amid police escorts. Metal railings to control crowds and small squadrons of traffic police filled the streets, while local and international news merged in media interviews.

The months of June and July in Paris saw the main crescendo of celebration and protest, as mounted by the French state, together with groups positioned within, around and against it. The sheer volume of events was almost overwhelming; here I will describe only the most public displays. Of these six seem particularly relevant to issues at hand, four large night-time outdoor gatherings and two museum exhibits. Moving between personal memories and official reports, I will offer a short sketch of each in chronological order.

The first event was held at the edge of one of Paris' two large parks, on June 10th. A protest concert sponsored by S.O.S. Racisme, the French anti-racist coalition movement, it drew some 300,000 people and lasted all night.⁸ As an eclectic array of bands performed in front of the Chateau de Vincennes, crowds milled about before the sprawling stage, speaker stacks and video screens. Along one side a midway of booths sold refreshments and distributed political literature, including the official program.

"The Concert of Equality," the brochure announces above a colorful image of dancing figures, and includes an

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article about the abolition of slavery as well as a schedule of the evening's entertainment. Just inside the cover is an editorial written by the movement's leader, Harlem Desir, dedicating the concert to the Revolutionary Haitian leader Toussaint L'Ouverture, and relating the memory of him to contemporary events, including the upheaval in China. Beginning with a reference to the revolutionary ideals of liberty and equality for Man, it calls for a widening of them to include all people: "...France is only the country of the Rights of Man when it realizes the Rights of Man for those who are excluded from them."⁹

A week later, the conservative mayor of Paris, Jacques Chirac, sought to upstage the coming state celebrations with a *fête exceptionnelle* of his own, a lavish birthday party for the Eiffel Tower. Before seven hundred invited guests, and a surrounding crowd of five to six hundred thousand, the tower turned chameleon with the aid of ample lighting and fireworks. Packed along the Champs de Mars, site of the original Centennial fair, people chatted, drank, ate and watched. The mood contained a family tone, the smaller children drooping before the final crescendo, a rendering of "Happy Birthday," sung in English by all on stage, including special guest Ronald Reagan. In the flickering light of video screens, thousands of *citoyens* and *citoyennes* sang along, breaking into greater applause than they had for the rendering of *La Marseillaise* that had opened the evening.¹⁰

The official program for the occasion opens with a statement by Chirac himself. Calling the Eiffel Tower a "symbol of the communication between men," he underscores that the extravaganza is a "present that Paris offers to those who love it," born out of generosity and a "spirit of fraternity." It proceeds to describe the different scenes of the show and explain their significance. Just before the closing birthday number, comes a section entitled "The Tower of All Cultures," describing the singers' voices rising as a hymn to the Eiffel Tower, and to "universal brotherhood." The musical sequence is provided by the blind, black American musician, Stevie Wonder.¹¹

The 8th of July, just a few days prior the inauguration of the new Opera house, saw another protest concert, this one overrunning the Bastille. Led by the French singer Renaud (with backing from the Communist party and independent left groups), the organizers decried debt (of Third to First World nations), apartheid and colonialism.¹² Most directly, their newsprint flyer objected to the vast expense of the state and city Bicentennial celebrations, and the segregation between rich and poor nations at the summit meetings. Beneath a banner depicting a Jacobin version of "hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil" draped above the Opera entrance, a crowd of one hundred thou-

sand listened to music and political exhortations. A small number of concert-goers managed to climb onto the monumental column marking the site of the ancient fortress, but they were quickly dislodged by police. Dressed in a Revolutionary *sans-culotte* outfit, Renaud called the summit meeting "an insult to the collective memory."¹³

And then, finally, it was not merely *the year*, but also *the day*, July 14th, 1989. Following the same path as the now-traditional morning military parade, "*La Marseillaise*," the enormous media ball depicted in *Newsweek*, wound its way towards the Place de la Concorde, former site of the guillotine, before a million spectators, and the assorted cameras of the world. On television the images were remarkably chaotic, figures looming out of darkness; on the street they were even more so, firecrackers, shouts, the shifting crowd and — there — a distant float. As the crowning moment, Jessye Norman, the black American opera singer, dressed as a living French flag, delivered the great Revolutionary anthem itself.

"The triumph of the Revolution," proclaimed the headline of the conservative paper *Le Figaro* the next day. "The Revolution continues," announced that of the Communist *l'Humanité*. "Grand, our 14th of July," added the more neuter *France-Soir*, over a color photo spread matching Jessye Norman with a tank. "Encore!" applauded the leftist *Libération*, next to a black Florida A & M drummer. Each publication offered its summary, a last salvo in the media barrage.¹⁴ The following Monday *Libération* put out a final supplementary section. On page ten we find a photograph of a bare-breasted African woman, staring straight, perhaps seductively, into the camera. The caption beneath focuses on neighboring images from the parade, explaining their symbolic commemoration of Tiananmen square.¹⁵

On a quieter note, French museums offered hundreds of special exhibits during the summer and throughout the year, two of which are particularly worthy of exploration. The Musée d'Orsay recalled "1889," presenting an account of the Centennial world's fair and the building of the Eiffel Tower. On the gallery floor one found a layout of the fair, the spatial arrangements carefully reproduced in miniature. On the walls were drawings of tower plans and the stages of its construction, as well as of theme exhibits from the fair. On a lower level, a continuous slide show presented black and white images of the fair and tower. In retrospect, one of these images in particular stands out: two figures before a grass hut, a bare-breasted black woman and a dark-suited white man sharing a light. We find the photograph again on the front of the journal catalogue of the exhibit, where the caption reads "Strange encounter."¹⁶

Meanwhile, over on the Right bank, the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grand Halle at La Villette presented a joint exhibition entitled *magiciens de la terre*, or "Magicians of the Earth." Beyond the variety of its individual displays, the presentation's most remarkable feature may have lain in its very self-presentation:

First global exhibition of contemporary art, bringing together around a hundred artists in a world-wide selection, from both modern and traditional cultures. An extensive research process was undertaken across every continent, Africa, the Americas, Australia, Asia, Europe... to discuss with artists and to select works for the exhibition. ...the artists's [sic] works are exhibited individually and not in order to represent their culture. The time has come to look again at the categories as well as the geographical and cultural boundaries which have divided and prejudiced opinions on the relations between different cultures in the world. While clearly respecting the differences between the significations and the practices of art in each country, the exhibition intends to show the universality of the creative act by exhibiting artists from the entire world.¹⁷

Researched and collected by a team of specialists, "ethnologists, anthropologists, historians, and critics," the exhibit sought to display as art, material extending beyond "imposed, pre-conceived Western notions..." (Applefield 1989: 1, 5).¹⁸ And so, split between a refurbished exhibit hall and the shrine of Paris modernism, newer and older meanings of that elusive term would combine — *culture* — the plural, the ethnic, transmuting back into the high, the human.

Four spectacles outside, two indoors. What to make of all of this? Do these different spaces, different moments share some things in common? How to describe the Bicentennial in general terms? Certain threads of universalism, of difference do seem suggestively common. *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*, the Revolutionary triad marches on. Yet, after two hundred years we find "liberty" hushed, "equality" dangling the most open political question mark, and variants of "fraternity" loudly proclaimed by official left, right and center. The French revolution is emphatically presented as a world affair, an inheritance extending beyond immediate kin to a united and colorfully global brotherhood. But this ancient metaphor of kin identity also extends back from a vision of unity into questions of difference.¹⁹ Once inside a family circle, do some bothers appear older, others younger? Where do sisters fit around the table? To underscore shades of difference within the Family of Man, let us turn to a time when colonialism and imperialism were stated terms of foreign policy, and fall through the exhibit

on 1889 into 1889, midway between more recent celebrations and the sacred date they would commemorate.

THE CENTENNIAL

THE FRENCH FLAG IS THE ONLY ONE TO HAVE A STAFF A THOUSAND FEET TALL.

— GUSTAVE EIFFEL²⁰

THERE'S ALL *THEY* KNOW ABOUT THE EMPIRE — THE BELLY DANCE.

— JULES FERRY²¹

Itself born in the aftermath of the disastrous Franco-Prussian war and the bitter defiance of the Paris Commune, France's Third Republic faced the centennial of the Revolution with some hesitation and much argument. The practice of regularly celebrating Bastille day had just been initiated in 1880, while the *Marseillaise* had become the national anthem only the year before. Both carried with them far more open overtones of contentious politics than they do today, as indeed did the concept of Republicanism itself (Almavi 1984; Vovelle 1984).²² Ultimately, the government would choose to diffuse much of the revolutionary imagery and lessen the sense of political memorial surrounding the affair. "1789 was a historic date in economics as well as politics, and it is to examine the world's economic situation that all nations are invited," read the prospectus of a government committee studying the coming celebration in 1885. The official commemoration, they suggested, would have the task of "summing up what freedom of work has produced in terms of progress during the past hundred years" (Harriss 1976: 8). The result was the largest world's fair to that date, the first French one to include a substantial colonial exhibit, and the one that produced the most enduring monument of all ephemeral celebrations, the Eiffel Tower.

It was an era rich in empire and exhibition. The latter part of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth saw both the greatest expansion of Western imperialism, and also the rise of world's fairs as a prime means of national and civic celebration and self-promotion in Western Europe and the United States. Under the leadership of Jules Ferry, France had just acquired new possessions in Indochina and Africa to add to its colonial network, ranked second only to that of Britain. This expanding imperial role, it is important to note, was not universally popular in France, nor were strains of assimilation asserted (if sporadically implemented) under its rule (Girardet 1972; Lewis 1962).²³ The world's fairs, on the

other hand, while ideologically contested, held more immediate mass appeal. In a period before the electronic transmission of images or large-scale tourism, the exhibition of exotic goods and foreign structures within a confined space offered a glimpse of the globe to a mass audience, presenting a popular panorama of human geography and history blended through entertainment and science.²⁴

The European tradition of universal expositions also served as a gauge of national struggles to define a distinctively modern ethos of progress. In describing the nation itself the focus was on artifice not nature (Benedict 1983: 5). The largest pavilion in the fair of 1889 was that reserved for the gallery of machines, containing the technology of industrialized nations.²⁵ Yet this technology was also displayed within competing visions of society, varieties of social engineering infusing that of the literal sort. As well as being about machines, the exhibits were about workers, health and progress. The preceding series of exhibitions in France had felt the influence of engineer, sociologist and reformer Frédéric Le Play, the Commissioner-General of the 1867 fair. Despite the intervening change of regime, the 1889 version carried on this tradition (Rabinow 1989: 93, 175-183). Two exhibits dealt with human life and evolution, a history of human habitation and an exposition of labor and the Anthropological sciences, and yet another centered on social institutions. At the same time, as part of these narratives the fair offered a encapsulated look at France's place in the world, including its grip on parts of the globe. France's Empire was laid out in miniature on the Esplanade des Invalides, attached by an umbilical cord of pavilions to the main exhibit at the Champ-de-Mars. The overall organization of space was strikingly clear: at the center the Eiffel Tower, below it the great gallery of machines, and then, physically separate, the collected colonies, fittingly next to the Palace of War. The symbolic relationship of separate parts was further underscored in technological terms; the two sectors being connected by a train.²⁶

Let us explore Centennial via a closer look at its extremes, the colonial exhibition and the Eiffel Tower. Quoting an original bulletin, the Musée d'Orsay exhibit catalogue describes the 1889 exhibition in terms of science fiction made real, and the foreign brought to life:

'Jules Verne dreamed of the voyage around world in 80 days. We will realize it, in 1889, on the Esplanade and on the Champ-de-Mars, in 6 hours!' On the Esplanade des Invalides, what disorientation! Minarets, cupolas, pagodas, galleries and colonades, buildings of raw earth, huts of thatch or bamboo, surround the *grand*

palais of the French colonies in foreign shapes and colors... (Musée d'Orsay 1989: 102)

It goes on to chronicle the encounter between the French and the visiting colonial peoples from both an intended, and possibly an unintended point of view, the march of progress against the loss of magic:

Structures and villages were inhabited by their native peoples, as the Ministry of Colonies had wished, in order to 'put into direct contact with our civilization those populations which it is our duty to win to our ideas.' In fact, this world confrontation was a source of inspiration and reflection for the visitors from the Occident, won over by the melancholy of attending the departure of this 'humanity from beyond a dream with its theaters and its dances, its palaces and its princes, its temples and its gods' (Musée d'Orsay 1989: 117).²⁷

Here we have human future and progress, positioned opposite human heritage and the past. Though one might intend to reshape the other, it ends up seduced by it — at least as long as the other appears vanquished, rare and vanishing. Hints of nostalgia in an age of high imperialism. The fair's colonial exhibition, it is reported, attracted large crowds.²⁸

At the other end of the fair, rising supremely above it, stood Europe's latest, and tallest monument. In his remarkable essay on the Eiffel Tower, Roland Barthes calls the structure "the symbol of Paris, of modernity, of communication, of science or of the nineteenth century, rocket, stem, derrick, phallus, lightning rod or insect, confronting the great itinerary of our dreams, it is the inevitable sign..." (Barthes 1979: 4). Quintessentially useless, yet constructed along the most functional of lines, in its most physical semiotics the tower represents an engineering feat. Not only does it rise to remarkable heights, it also foils resistance, the very open, exposed design allowing gales to whistle harmlessly through. As historian Joseph Harriss points out, "the real strength of the tower is in its voids as much as its iron" (Harriss 1976: 63).

During its construction the tower was often compared to that other, less successful, attempt to build to heaven, the tower of Babel. "Slavery: the tower of Babel/ Liberty, Progress: the tower of Eiffel!" ran the most concise and hopeful couplet (Musée d'Orsay 1989: 204). The comparison offers temptations beyond its rhyme, Babel representing a mythic origin of difference, Eiffel a symbolic closure. At the fair we would then find Babel on the ground, amid the collected tongues and dust of the world, all shadowed by abstract reason, pure and open against the sky. Colonialism, slavery below, liberty, progress above: a

division realized by the iron power of technological truth. And at the summit of everything, floating freely — blue, white and red — the Republic, France.

Over the ensuing century the tower has become an emblem of tourism, part of “the universal language of travel” (Barthes 1979: 4). Where once the world came to it, Eiffel’s tower now goes out to the world, on poster and postcard, and the world returns again to see a form it already knows. In 1989 the tower’s deepest shadow would seem to fall quite evenly around its base, a souvenir in every language. “We are all citizens of the Eiffel Tower,” a former critic would once write.²⁹ *Souvenir*, of course, relates to memory, and the way postcards must look similar to prove their authenticity. At the beginning of his essay Barthes points out that one must take “endless precautions” to avoid seeing the tower in Paris. It is omnipresent. At the end he notes that, once upon the structure, “...one can feel cut off from the world and yet owner of a world” (Barthes 1979: 3, 17). It inspires separation from the real, inclusion of domain. One remembers everything and nothing there, all of progress, no confusion. After a move from church and manor to office highrise, what better site for conservative commemoration of modern ethos?

1889: A fair and a monument, one that would vanish far more quickly and painlessly than the empire, the other endure well after it. In both, the chaos of revolution fades behind expansion and industry, leaving a shadow of gradual progress, not immediate emancipation. Yet a promise of the future is clearly made: though mechanical and social technology, the well-conceived Nation will lead itself, and the Empire, out of archaic dreams and forward in prosperity. Old fears of either stasis or change, memories of terror can be all cast aside; this Republic, we are reminded, is to be a Republic of locomotives, not of guillotines.

THE BICENTENNIAL REVISITED

THE REPUBLIC NO LONGER INTENDS TO MAKE DISTINCTIONS IN THE HUMAN FAMILY.

— PROCLAMATION OF 1848³⁰

In a book containing over three hundred pages, the official commission in charge of the French Bicentennial attempts to present all celebrations and exhibitions relating to that occasion throughout 1989. Extending from Paris throughout France, provinces and possessions, and finally across the world, it covers commemorations of 1789 from Madagascar to Iceland. Both the scope of events and the scope of their inscription are remarkable; here a concert of revolu-

tionary hymns in Nancy, there a school competition in New Caledonia (winners sent to visit the Metropole), there again an exhibit on Danton and Robespierre in Columbia, each, however large or small, recorded with appropriate addresses, times, and a graphic symbol to identify its universal type.³¹ The commemoration of history is itself prepared for history: one could count, map, or chart the celebrations, with even the humblest receiving a line. Though its great sweep might fail, faltering in some tropical heat to miss a poem or mislabel a march, the eye of Paris seeks to take in the globe. A vast catalogue of emptiness, an empire of museums, perhaps, its gaze nonetheless hints at universal heritage, of the Revolution as pan-human experience, of a history for all. Tellingly, the French commission’s very title ties it, as loudly as possible, not just to 1789, the Revolution, but also 1789 the Declaration, of rights for Citizens, and for Man. Whisper and shout echo the same: deep down unity has triumphed over difference.

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 *magiciens de la terre*. The colonial is taken out of anthropology, out of evolution, out of science, and transferred into art. Once in the culture of progress, cultures must be saved from progress. Meanwhile, where the world’s fair avoided the national past, the Musée d’Orsay commemorates the world’s fair, while references to the Revolution fill every kiosk. The past and difference, orphaned by imperialism, are then adopted by museums. Some elements remain — the organization, timing and control of crowds, for example — but the layout displays snares, tangles and diffusion. Space is not so neatly ordered; where the skyline rose to a jarring central tower, it now stretches around a number of vying shapes. 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. Liberty at home has become a representational assumption. As well as official celebration, there is also official protest. At the Chateau de Vincennes we hear talk of slavery past and racism present. A month later the Bastille is retaken, this time to fight debt and apartheid. And on the right, the retired American monarch blesses Eiffel’s creation, and the progressive harmony of technology.

Simultaneously the entire world is anthropologized, sent down the Champs Elysées, under the shadow of the arch of Napoleonic triumphs, and, now looming behind it, that of capitalist enterprise. Self and Other, after all, can fill the same screen. “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité...Unité!” in the words of the editor of *National Geographic* (Garrett 1989). Indeed many of the visuals seem framed by that

magazine's eye — hoop dress, breasts, the Eiffel tower all; indeed, the entire Marseillaise parade could almost be from an issue gone mad, a collage of cultural costumes, a map, coordinates forgotten.

Still, is it only an ironic footnote that this great Socialist world parade followed the same route as the military review? Is only the one, cavalry, legionnaires in close array, tanks with muzzles lifted high, jets in tight formations, is only one a real exercise in symbolic power? Between Napoleon's triumphal arch and the former site of the guillotine, along a mighty boulevard, the tribes of the world marched before crowd and camera, turning neither left nor right.

SPECTACLES, MODERNITY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

IN IMAGINING WHAT A HISTORIC BEGINNING MIGHT BE LIKE, THE MODERN IMAGINATION HAS TURNED BACK AGAIN AND AGAIN TO THE EVENTS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION. THIS HISTORIC RUPTURE, MORE THAN ANY OTHER, HAS ASSUMED FOR US THE STATUS OF MODERN MYTH.

— PAUL CONNERTON²²

IT IS SAFEST TO GRASP THE CONCEPT OF THE POSTMODERN AS AN ATTEMPT TO THINK THE PRESENT HISTORICALLY IN AN AGE THAT HAS FORGOTTEN TO THINK HISTORICALLY IN THE FIRST PLACE.

— FREDRIC JAMESON²³

Having set picture and frame, let us now stand back for critique. Where to fit the French Bicentennial? As an ethnographic festival, an example of political ritual? If so, what kind? Would *Newsweek's* "first postmodern patriotic festival" and "spectacle in the style of irrelevance" hold up in any sense as analytic categories? A potential parallel case might be found in an academic discussion of modern political ritual in France, written by one of France's leading anthropologists. In a 1988 article, Marc Abélès examines two rituals performed by the French president François Mitterrand, an inauguration of a train station and a pilgrimage to a significant hill top, one of official origin and one personal. He finds enough similarity between these two events in modern France and mingled categories of religion and politics found in the rituals of traditional society to declare that they do not differ in kind. Rather, modern rituals exhibit the additional characteristics of allowing for personal invention and the transmission of particular messages, while remaining a most effective "historic form of legitimacy" (Abélès 1988: 398). Abélès provides us with another mirror for Bicentennial Man, that of the traditional

simple society, as reconstructed by a modernist science compensating for distinctions born out of other separate modernist social sciences. Alongside the modern/postmodern divide of *Newsweek* describing spectacle we have the modern/traditional divide of a returned native anthropologist describing ritual. Where then to fit the Bicentennial?

Let us first approach the question through the term "spectacle," as applied to a particular form of visual display and social ritual. Spectacle, Festival, Ritual, and Modern each describe a complicated analytic knot; the threads between the first and last may best unravel a patch of the Bicentennial. In the name of analytic clarity, John MacAloon offers an etymology and definition for the term "spectacle," linking it to an emphasis on the visual, on dynamism, and on an audience. In addition, and in opposition to its relative, the "festival," a spectacle can carry connotations of awe as much as joy. Contemporary society's confusion of image and reality, MacAloon suggests, infuses such modern spectacles such as the Olympic games, reflecting an attempting an attempt to control "diffuse cultural themes and anxieties" (MacAloon 1984: 243-250, 273).³⁴

In modern spectacle then, we might see a corollary to traditional visual ritual, a transitory moment of separation and reintegration, a glimpse of an underlying social framework and the sacred edges of the profane. Ritual in traditional societies, spectacle in modern societies, each are portrayed as important events. Their importance is recognized by their audience and explicated by their interpreter. From such a perspective Abélès' analysis of Mitterrand's activities fits well in the mold. Minor ceremonies become incorporated into larger political strategies, in this case that of an individual, modern politician. Through innovative twists and conscious messages, ceremonial moments continue to reinforce the outlines of modern society.

The formula "festival = culture" is, of course, a time-honored one in anthropology. The collected ethnographic catalogue of ritual moments is impressively large, and includes a more than ample array of fairs and parades. Let us then take this formula seriously, return to our examples, simplify 1889 to its fair, 1989 to its parade, and apply the analysis. Clearly these are ceremonial moments, set apart from everyday life. An emphasis on visual display seems central. The Eiffel Tower is a sight, its postcard even more so. Yet the scope and means of each spectacle involves expanded notions of audience; the limits of the village grow unclear, for the community boundaries are neither fixed or singular. The exhibition of 1889 was not a simply a fair, but a *world's* fair, self-consciously French and imperial, bringing together people and objects otherwise far-flung. Here

the means of presentation lay closely allied with the means of transportation. The tribal march of 1989 was not a simple parade, but a choreographed, designed, televised extravaganza. Viewed from the street it appeared as chaos, viewed from the camera, it appeared as a merely puzzling collage. Here the means of presentation lay closely allied with the means of communication. Each event was available to a wide audience, the first largely national in scope, the second international. For such a wide audience many elements drop away on a purely technological level. In the first case the technological limit is physical transportation: an exhibit in a world's fair must be easily loaded, unloaded and labeled. In the second case the limit is electronic transmission: smell, touch and taste are left behind in television's translation of image and surrounding sound. In both, however, the process of transmission and reception of meaning in ritual involves either symbols of increasingly universal value, or increasing shades and variants of symbolic understanding.

Thus while analogy to traditional ritual suggests something important about political order, it fails to ask two additional questions about spectacles increasingly important in modern and possible postmodern variants: Who is the audience? And does the audience (or all of it) care? This last question suggests another point of difference between Centennial and Bicentennial, and highlights a peculiarity of the latter. An Eiffel Tower or an exotic pagoda might inspire "awe" in 1889, but does a Funky Chicken in 1989? Despite filling many magazines, the French Bicentennial filled few hearts. An opinion poll in *Paris Match* found 70% agreeing that too much was being made of the whole affair.³⁵ The majority of people I talked to in France downplayed the Bicentennial. "I can understand how it might interest foreigners," they would begin, "but..." A good number of Parisians, their parking curtailed, pointedly left town. One old woman told me she never goes out on July 14th anyway, as "these days it's only Arabs dancing in the streets." The latest commemoration: a nuisance, an inconvenience, something to be downplayed, derided, only for foreigners or threatening aliens — can one get further from awe?

As an alternative to anthropological models of ritual, Jonathan Crary offers a more immediately historical genealogy of spectacle, after first wondering whether "one can still well ask if the notion of spectacle is the imposition of illusory unity onto a more heterogeneous field." Drawing on Jean Baudrillard, Walter Benjamin and T.J. Clark, he links spectacle to nineteenth century bourgeois life and the growth of consumer society, before citing Guy Debord and offering an alternative coupling to the twentieth century

rise of television and sound cinema. Spectacle, then, could be either a term of modern industry or postmodern media (Crary 1989: 97-107).

Here we have a definition that might account for both 1889 and 1989, or rather a definitional diad, one for each century in question. Twin versions of spectacle, but fraternal, not identical in relation. As a first step this pairing would appear promising: where the Centennial could represent a "traditional" modern spectacle, the Bicentennial would represent a postmodern variant. Turning away from categories of ritual we encounter the other side of modernity, the horizon which seeks to reinvent, not identify or overcome tradition. To be a tribe is no longer to be uncivilized but rather to have culture, and thus identity. In the modern festival America can be represented by a threshing machine, in a postmodern one by Reagan and the Florida A & M marching band. But just what sort of spectacles are these? If a traditional ritual, or time out of time, reflects the possibility of different orders before resolving in *communitas*, what would a world's fair or a festival of the planet's tribes reflect? And how might they relate to the French Revolution?

MEMORY, HISTORY AND COMMEMORATION

THE MEMORY OF A SOCIETY EXTENDS AS FAR AS THE MEMORY OF THE GROUPS COMPOSING IT.

— MAURICE HALBWACHS³⁶

THERE ARE *LIEUX DE MÉMOIRE*, SITES OF MEMORY, BECAUSE THERE ARE NO LONGER *MILIEUX DE MÉMOIRE*, REAL ENVIRONMENTS OF HISTORY.

— PIERRE NORA³⁷

As another step into audiences and issues of the past in the present, let us open the term "commemoration," and examine festivals of remembering and their relations to history and social memory. In his influential study, *The Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs lays the groundwork for discussions of memory extending beyond the scope of an individual subject, placing individual memory into matrix of socially constructed time and space.³⁸ The other axis of his argument involves distinguishing collective forms of memory from that other social record of the past, history. He sees in each an opposite focus; history concerning itself with cataloguing change, collective memory primarily with recalling resemblances (Halbwachs 1980: 84). History, in some senses then, is an illusion: a universal shroud cast over disparate collective traditions; general

history starts when social memory fades and living groups dissolve. While historians eagerly seek to chronicle disruptions with precision, the collective memory resists impressions of change, maintaining illusions of continuity in the face of revolution. "Even when institutions are radically transformed, and especially then, the best means of making them take root is to buttress them with everything transferable from tradition" (Halbwachs 1980: 78, 82).

Here we have description of a sense of the past as it might operate in societies with collective memory (i.e. traditional) and societies with written chronological history (i.e. modern). While such a division may partly obscure the historical dimensions of the traditional,³⁹ let us make it to distinguish the concept of social memory, and move from Halbwachs to the French historian Pierre Nora in an effort to trace the potential uniqueness of modern pasts more fully. After all, neither the Centennial nor the Bicentennial are simply rituals of culture and evocations of a past event for different presents, but also expressly rituals of timed culture, times out of time set in chronological time. Nora describes the trajectory of the Western experience in terms of the erosion of memory into history, memory being "life...the secret of so-called primitive and archaic societies," where history is reconstruction, the means through which "our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past" (Nora 1989: 8). He suggests that this process has revealed a new form of the past in the present, the *lieux de mémoire*, or "sites of memory." Struck by the historical amnesia of modernity, France's *lieux de mémoire* have become exposed amid the draining of its traditional memory. These *lieux* include "Museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders," which "mark the rituals of a society without ritual; integral particularities in a society that levels particularity; signs of distinction and of group membership in a society that tends to recognize individuals only as identical and equal" (Nora 1989: 12).

Here again, history and memory are seen in opposition, with the *lieux de mémoire* filling a curious, perhaps modern, perhaps increasingly postmodern void between them. In some senses the Bicentennial would seem a prime example of such a concept: a national anniversary, a year simultaneously full and empty of meaning, an occasion born of history but not historical. Something betwixt, between, material, symbolic, functional, yet for all its historicity separated from historical reality: the commemoration of the French Revolution becomes a site of recall for post-memory France. Nora adds a certain measure of subtlety by cautioning that *lieux de mémoire* may not be a single category, but rather plural and contested, specifically featuring an oppo-

sition of the official against the popular. The first variety of *lieux*, he suggests, are imposed from above, "spectacular and triumphant," yet displaying the "coldness and solemnness of official ceremonies," such that one "attends them rather than visits them." The second kind, on the other hand, are "places of refuge, sanctuaries of spontaneous devotion and silent pilgrimage," places where "one finds the living heart of memory" (Nora 1989: 23). The Revolution, then, could be simultaneously remembered from more than one site, and in more than one way.

But, some might continue to ask, was memory ever so full, now so lost, history so empty, and now so complete? Are the two so directly opposed? The *lieux de mémoire* concept offers an attractive knot of connections through which to explore the Bicentennial assemblage, but threads between the collected events become rather slippery. Where lay the "living heart of memory" amid the jostle and noise? On some side street? In a village or an immigrant neighborhood? In an Italian castle among surviving nobility, mourning the day?⁴⁰ Among the Parisians who left the city? Those parts of the assembled crowds who paid little attention? All those, French or otherwise, who did not know what day it was? Is opposition only found in form of silent pilgrimage, or might one also look within official spectacle? Recalling the summer's counter-celebrations, it would appear that not all planned spectacle comes down from the top, or at least not uniformly from the same part of the top. History, perhaps, is also constructed sideways, or at a number of angles up and down. The events of the Bicentennial may have shared a common moment, but they did not all enter or leave it in exactly the same direction.

Extending the metaphor of memory a bit further only adds another cautionary note, if we recall that not all present reworkings of the past are equally distant or cold. Renato Rosaldo's discussion of "imperialist nostalgia" provides another window through which to examine the Bicentennial and its relations to the Centennial, one with a view over postmodernism to colonialism. Rosaldo suggests that the curious blend of memory and romanticism found under the term "nostalgia" largely describes a recent Western development, a modern gaze back at the traditional. Faced with a spate of recent films depicting the colonial past with a wistful touch, he observes that the West now mourns that which it has actively destroyed, and curiously enough, it is often the very agents of this destruction, such as colonial officials and missionaries, who feel the loss most keenly (Rosaldo 1989: 109). Moments after triumph afford the victors the luxury of wistfulness, regret, guilt and glorification. Thus from atop the Eiffel tower huts below appear quaint and picturesque; thus from within the Pompidou

Center worldwide display appears equally artful and magical.⁴¹

COLONIALISM AND DIFFERENCE

JACOBINISM, INDESTRUCTIBLE DEVOURER OF DIFFERENCES.
— L'ÉVÉNEMENT DU JEUDI, *SPECIAL EDITON ON MINORITIES IN FRANCE*⁴²

And now back to that difficult image, the “strange encounter” of 1889. In one frame the imperial welter of race, gender, sexuality and civilization. An odd image for the hundredth anniversary of the French Revolution, but, then again, not so odd really: civilized man and primitive woman share a light, coming together in empire and progress. The Centennial woman focuses on her cigarette, culturally bare — proper without clothes, and yet lacking propriety because of it. The Centennial Man also focuses on *his* cigarette, bowing slightly to accommodate their differences in stature. The meeting might be described as exchange, perhaps of knowledge for inspiration, or less nobly, of vice for vice. Here the Revolution would promise not Terror but Enlightenment; here the primitive would become more *risqué* than threatening.⁴³

Where then to go in 1989? Time has worked some changes; the uniformed European male has vanished, as has the grass hut in the background, though some dark suits and bare breasts remain. Yet right up at the top of the symbolic pyramid, as the Republic incarnate, towers Jessye Norman, official ghost of the official parade. The *tricolore* singing the *Marseillaise*, the clear voice of Liberty rising in the air. France has often been a she, but American, and black? Before the assembled leaders of the world?

In describing the growth of female symbols in nineteenth century American parades, Mary Ryan notes that “their status as the quintessential ‘other’ within a male-defined cultural universe made them perfect vehicles for representing the remote notions of national unity and local harmony.” She compares the early French and American republics, whose assumptions “created a feminine, depoliticized cultural field for the abstract symbols around which the republic could seek ideological unity” (Ryan 1989: 150). A central allegorical figure for both nations was the Goddess of Liberty. “Liberty,” Lynn Hunt reminds us, “was an abstract quality based on reason. She belonged to no group, to no particular place” (Hunt 1984: 62). And yet here, in 1989, is this same abstract liberty, portrayed by a clearly particular individual, from a clearly particular place: Jessye Norman, serving as Marianne, difference now ac-

knowledged at the very mouth of unity. Might, however, some of Ryan’s thesis still carry through? Replace the national with the international, add in another strand of harmony — ethnic, racial. It would seem that the polity is now the world, and France’s nationalism (in some official versions) tied to its internationalism, where it was once tied to its colonialism. The world, its divides threatening to fracture that universal, Man, must somehow be contained, brought into the very representation of national identity, made to sing universality back to difference.

Much has been written about traditional festivals of inversion, ritual glimpses of social worlds turned upside down, and their relation to revolutionary change. In the Bicentennial too, everyday relations are transformed, if through varieties of official commemoration more than popular festival; even the counter-celebrations are forms of organized protest, not popular religion. Certain parameters are shared by both left and right, certain elements accepted as needing to be addressed. While one side may emphasize the Revolution, the other the Eiffel Tower, all acknowledge some heritage, something to be extended or protected. Agreement reigns about the human brotherhood, the debate lying, rather, in terms of the relationship and the terms of equality. In this sense the world is not here inverted, or even levelled, but rather flattened and distanced. All humans have culture. All share History, especially the Revolution, and most especially the nicer parts of it. The future should be different and better, however mourned the past. The glimpse is of a social horizon, universal and very far.

For another thing links Jessye Norman, *les magiciens*, and Stevie Wonder, the potentially threatening shades of savagery and sexuality. Are these not beings and images at a remove? Dark skins from America, a drum from China, art from all over the world — what has happened to the Empire of 1889? Where is the map of the colonies? Could not an immigrant from Algeria or Senegal play Marianne? Could not a performer from Madagascar or Vietnam serenade the Eiffel Tower? No, difference is veiled, even as it is unveiled. France is part of the world — generally speaking. This time, no emphasis on the most intimate ties, no unpleasant family history. Rather, along similar lines that external colonialism covered national domination within Europe in the 1880s, now internationalism covers tensions of an uneasy home. The official celebrations acknowledge difference, but suggest, elliptically, that it has also been resolved, at least in Paris; slavery is a musical legacy from America, magic is universally aesthetic, and the Chinese are trying to follow the French. Color on the streets, in museums, reworks the portrait, quickly, easily.

By expanding Western history universally, and presenting Western "tribes," all can experience equality — the flat, distant equality of being the same.

In 1937, the commissioner general of that year's fair could write, in a remarkable mixture of colonial longing and Machiavellian advice:

We need festivals, and above all popular festivals... civilization has hardened us... we no longer know how to divert ourselves, we no longer know how to relax, we no longer know how to laugh... The spontaneity of the people itself is exhausted, worn out. Motion finds refuge on cinema screens, spirit in the metallic throat of loud speakers. These are the machines which live in our place. It is dismal. Our daughters and our sons ask for some American Negro music — a crude vigor often admirable in another place — or some Apache rhythms, to shake a little their boredom... A wise government — and let not the tyrants have a monopoly on wisdom — gives festivals to its people. One 14th of July a year does not suffice us. In the desert of difficult times that we are crossing, expositions are like oases. It was enough, moreover, to wander through the [Colonial] Exposition of 1931 to understand that grand fairs retain all of their glamor for the masses... That year, the French learned a little geography. That year, 'the child enamored with maps and stamps,' who dozes in the heart of every adult, could feast his eyes on thousands of marvels about which he had dreamed once, bent over adventure books and travel stories. Curiosity is a popular virtue. It is an educable virtue, a virtue that we can turn towards real grandeur, towards grace, towards beauty. We are neglecting too much the cultivation of it. For lack of care, it degenerates; it becomes corrupted. Let us not accuse the people, let us accuse their masters. (Bloch and Delort 1980: 11-12)

A hundred years after the heady days of empire and the colonial exhibit on Invalides, fifty years after the colonial exhibit at Vincennes,⁴⁴ no one speaks of white men with burdens. Yet notes of the civilizing mission echo in calls for extending the Revolution around the globe. And a sense of nostalgia has only increased: if the entire world has lost the traditional, perhaps both colonizer and colonized can at last safely play at being tribes.

1889 — The world, lining the Seine in spatial order, mapped out by theme and place, its core exhibits on machines, its periphery clusters of colonies, a fair beneath the shadow of its tower. 1989 — The world, in motion, monuments dispersed, its past bared in museums, its center gaudy celebration, its margins organized concerts. Postmodern? The *Newsweek* account is not unconvincing.

Lieux de mémoire? Rarely, if ever, have some version of memory and history seemed so simultaneously present and absent, so concentrated and so self-preoccupied. Still a century has not transformed everything. To argue an easy equation between these commemorations would distort a confusion of pasts in the past and pasts in the present into something too cleanly opposed; clothes do change, along with faces, words, and maps, however many hints of Man linger on. Here we arrive at a final question of time and organization, that of origin and change. For whether postmodern or modern, Centennial and Bicentennial both appeal to the same source, the same ancestor for their identity.

COMMEMORATION OF REVOLUTION

THE INITIAL DAY OF A CALENDAR SERVES AS A HISTORICAL TIME-LAPSE CAMERA. AND, BASICALLY, IT IS THE SAME DAY THAT KEEPS RECURRING IN THE GUISE OF HOLIDAYS, WHICH ARE DAYS OF REMEMBRANCE. THUS THE CALENDARS DO NOT MEASURE TIME AS CLOCKS DO; THEY ARE MONUMENTS OF A HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF WHICH NOT THE SLIGHTEST TRACE HAS BEEN APPARENT IN EUROPE IN THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS. IN THE JULY REVOLUTION AN INCIDENT OCCURRED WHICH SHOWED THIS CONSCIOUSNESS STILL ALIVE. ON THE FIRST EVENING OF FIGHTING IT TURNED OUT THAT THE CLOCKS OF THE TOWER WERE BEING FIRED ON SIMULTANEOUSLY AND INDEPENDENTLY FROM SEVERAL PLACES IN PARIS. AN EYE-WITNESS, WHO MAY HAVE OWED HIS INSIGHT TO THE RHYME, WROTE AS FOLLOWS: '*QUI LE CROIRAIT! ON DIT QU'IRRITÉS CONTRE L'HEURE/ DE NOUVEAU JOSUÉS AU PIED DE CHAQUE TOUR,/ TIRAIENT SUR LES CADRANS PUR ARRÊTER LE JOUR.*' ['WHO WOULD HAVE BELIEVED IT! WE ARE TOLD THAT THE NEW JOSHUAS AT THE FOOT OF EVERY TOWER, AS THOUGH IRRITATED WITH TIME ITSELF, FIRED AT THE DIALS IN ORDER TO STOP THE DAY.']

— WALTER BENJAMIN⁴⁵

When, and at what point do things start to count? Or the more direct question: what *does* link the dates 1789, 1889 and 1989? Are centuries quintessential examples of empty, arbitrary signs; does a wrap of chronology leave no marks at all? Certainly it would be easy to answer in the affirmative. After all, what remains of the Centennial? The Eiffel tower, and now and then a temporary museum exhibit. And as for the Bicentennial, what will remain of it? The Opera and its hulking brethren (a true *fraternité*?) — surely they will join the tower, perhaps slightly more functional, most certainly

less dominating, fading into a similar series of postcard shots. The T-shirts, papers and videotape can but melt in air, at least until recalled by ghosts of exhibits future. Yet, despite the indifference, a Parisian aversion to non-Parisian crowds and noises, a city overrun by Americans, Germans, Japanese, ex-Colonials and assorted Provincials, France is an undeniably chronological society, where measurement itself has meaning. Even if many were not transported by the displays, few questioned them, or more accurately, questioned the fundamental significance of the date. A distinctive technology of time governs modern commemoration. Rather than a similarity of season or situation, standardized measurement schedules the ritual moment.

Could it be otherwise? Could there be memories of modern revolution, brought on by shifting winds, or a rise in temperature? One might consider the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe, as an appropriate reminder of dramatic social change. Certain actions are taken, crowds gathered, or statues toppled, along lines described before. The sudden shock of possibility, a break in the coverage, wavering images, old language reborn. No invitations went out before the collapse of the Berlin Wall; vacations weren't planned with it in mind. Or, keeping within a stricter ethnographic lineage, consider May, 1968, when Paris saw its most recent reflection of revolutionary threat. Pried from beneath the pavement, cobblestones rose again in barricades, physical reminders of the ways of rebellion past. All eyes turned towards France, the fragility of its social body exposed again before open chaos in the street. Here, perhaps, we might see another form of collective memory, the restless movements of a mob, the traditional gestures of conflict.⁴⁶ Rituals of revolution, as it were, actions of the past reflected through the actors of the present. Barricades, the Marseillaise, Jacobin dress — even chaos can have its formulas, its laws, and even change recall its ancestry, perhaps remembering its way back to structure, perhaps reinforcing earlier patterns.⁴⁷

Holdings such moments against the Bicentennial, we do see at least one similarity: the centrality of crowds, of outdoor gatherings in which certain norms are suspended. People did turn out for the described events in large numbers — laughing, shouting, and throwing fire crackers. Of course, this was a sanctioned gathering, not a riot. The masses focused on entertainment and festivities more than on destruction or physical transgressions. All groups met at specified times, in ordered fashion to witness an event, even if each contained many individuals who seemed remarkably indifferent to official proceedings and pronouncements. The organs of control were omnipresent; battalions of police arrayed behind barricades — mobile metal these, not

cobblestone. Occasionally, there were hints, moments, surges against the lines and anger at crowd control, as the long black cars slipped through straining wedges of frustrated would-be pedestrians. But only a flicker. The Bastille was taken again, but this time released back to the Opera the next day.

Could cloaks of festival and spectacle create and blanket crowds, prevent historical drama by providing official theater? In a popular history of Parisian fairs, Jean-Jacques Bloch and Marianne Delort suggest as much:

Who knows... if that atmosphere of liberty and festivity which reigned in Paris in 1968, that rarest of times when strangers challenged each other joyously in the street, did not mark (all claims aside) the place unoccupied by the laughter of a universal exposition which had not taken place. (Bloch and Delort 1980: 12)

Official commemoration may thus simultaneously celebrate and smother change, back along the lines of Turner's (1969) ritual process.

But is there not another level at which change can be subverted? Is not the constant flow of measured time a subtler illusion than a world's fair? Its units are equally empty, but sometimes some are named. Certain events in Paris become "the French Revolution," they become singular, an it — *the* Revolution, a model, a guide, an ancestor, for all other radical moments in France.⁴⁸ And, as such, it can serve as author, an origin for the Republic, or a range of ideologies. Once this revolution, once *the* Revolution, becomes tied to "July 14th, 1789," it becomes, in Nora's sense, an identified site of history: official and filled with significance, entered in schoolbooks, inscribed on monuments, noted on calendars. But also, and perhaps as significantly, forever named as the past.⁴⁹

The obvious is not uninteresting. Historian Donald Wilcox suggests that the very perception of time as absolute and linear defines our experience in ways subtle but deep: We are so accustomed to apply absolute time to the quotidian details of life that we do not readily appreciate the extent to which it changes the focus of identity, depersonalizing historical realities and removing them from immediate contact with life... As a means of measuring the intervals between concrete events in terms of these primary qualities, the absolute dating system is implicitly subversive of traditional notions of personal identity. (Wilcox 1987: 255)

As Benjamin suggests with regard to calendars and clocks, in order to endure a revolutionary consciousness would have to re-inscribe time itself, rewriting a pattern of days, holidays and memories.⁵⁰ The Jacobins, of course, tried, but the Bicentennial remembers 1789, not - III. An

older rationalization of time lives on, reinforced by celebration.⁵¹ In this sense the program of the Eiffel Tower celebration, the Hollywood history of the right, speaks most tellingly. "*Rendez-vous* in a hundred years!" it proclaims on its final page, before closing with an advertisement for a large, dark Citroën.⁵²

ANTHROPOLOGY AND COMMEMORATIVE SPECTACLE

...MODERN THOUGHT IS ONE THAT MOVES NO LONGER TOWARDS THE NEVER-COMPLETED FORMATION OF DIFFERENCE, BUT TOWARDS THE EVER ACCOMPLISHED UNVEILING OF THE SAME. ...WHAT IS REVEALED AT THE FOUNDATION OF THE HISTORY OF THINGS AND OF THE HISTORICITY PROPER TO MAN IS THE DISTANCE CREATING A VACUUM IN THE SAME, IT IS THE HIATUS THAT DISPERSES AND REGROUPS IT AT THE TWO ENDS OF ITSELF. IT IS THIS PROFOUND SPATIALITY THAT MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR MODERN THOUGHT STILL CONCEIVE OF TIME — TO KNOW IT AS SUCCESSION, TO PROMISE IT TO ITSELF AS FULFILLMENT, ORIGIN, OR RETURN.

— MICHEL FOUCAULT⁵³

In efforts to describe universal human behavior by cataloguing cultural difference, practitioners of anthropology have done a great deal to fill out the category of traditional. However, when ethnography actually confronts the modern at home, it all too frequently fails to recognize it as other than that which it has imagined home from far afield. Paris is neither a village, nor wholly French. The translation of scales and measures requires more than transportation or expansion. For while the commemorative spectacles of 1889 and 1989 are modern analogies to anthropological categories of political ritual, and the modern indeed shares with the traditional, it shares by intentional comparison and distancing, not uniformity. When anthropology gazes at the present, eye to camera, it must also watch frame and focus, present and past. In a modern and international world, images near and images far have different backgrounds and resolutions; when the camera itself builds spectacle, smell and touch diminish, while image, transmission and reconstruction blur in bites of sight. Moving or still, film brings everything closer, from farther away.⁵⁴

Perhaps it is the same with certain memories. Imagine, for a moment, that as well as "imperialist" nostalgia there is also "revolutionary" nostalgia, the mask of dated histories recalling and forgetting memories of change. When can one mourn what one destroys, except as it vanishes, and when can one celebrate what one might fear, but as it crosses

the stage, carefully timed? The French Bicentennial, then, would mark an intersection of nostalgias: colonialism finding a museum, culture returning to art, and the *tricolore* to a coffee cup.

Of course, nostalgia may not always have the last word. Yes, postmodern festivals are different from modern festivals and traditional ones. But in recognizing a category that seeks to describe the complexity of contemporary existence, it is important to remember that this variety of complexity does not simply eradicate prior complexities. Postmodern does not erase modern, any more than modern erases traditional. In a Europe now disturbed by its own tribes, some reborn from beneath the mantle of modern socialism and carrying guns, the Bicentennial parade in the City of Light cannot suggest that either revolution or empire are quite beyond memory, or forgetting.

NOTES

1 A previous version of these observations was presented at the Berkeley Symposium on Visual Representation in March 1990. In addition to the conference organizers, reviewers of *VAR*, U.C. Berkeley and the Camargo Foundation, the author must thank Susanna Barrows, Arthur Chandler, Pamela Cheek, John Leedom, Jono Mermin, Richard Price, Paul Rabinow, Marc Redfield, Randy Starn, Lucien Taylor, Silvia Tomášková and Brackette Williams for different assistance, comments and encouragement along the meandering way.

2 However debatable their definitions, I will employ these terms, conserving the ethnographic convention which accepts categories used by native speakers, in this case the language of assorted contemporary international journals, newspapers and pamphlets. Relevant informants on the "traditional, modern, postmodern" triad here include Clifford (1988), Fabian (1983), Hebdige (1986), and Jameson (1991). In the gray overlap between social and artistic varieties of "modern" and "postmodern" modernity, I informally invoke public architecture as the best scale model for the commemorative festival. This invocation is one between lived experience, visual image, and textual representation of visual image, such as that sometimes found in descriptions of landscapes and structures. Here the architecture in question is a French one, or rather an international national French one, as viewed by an American reading French and American views; moreover it is also an architecture of time, a ritual monument to chronological history, and the heritage of universal counting, as viewed by one of the inheritors.

3 Other historical comparisons could be found in the tradition of festivals during the Revolution itself, especially the Fête de la Fédération on the first anniversary of Bastille Day, and the Festival of the Supreme Being in 1794, both held (like the later world's fairs) on the Champ-de-Mars. Other fairs, especially the Colonial Exposition of 1931 and the "Cinquantenaire" festival of 1937, would offer further comparative possibilities. Considerations of scope and space dictate these events beyond the central margins. For more on revolutionary festivals and culture see Hunt (1984), Ozouf (1988) and Schama (1989). For more on world's fairs see Benedict (1983), Bloch and Delort (1980), Hodeir (1987), Rabinow (1989) and *Le livre des expositions universelles 1851-1989* (1983).

4 From "Un entretien exceptionnel avec le Président de la République française, François Mitterand." *Le Courrier de l'UNESCO*. 6 June. (1989): 6.

5 The first two themes of the fair were to be *Les Chemins de la Liberté* (liberty seen emerging out of a historical ground provided by the Enlightenment, recovering from the challenge of fascism, and just welcoming young nations fresh from the margins of history) and *La Solidarité Humaine* (a unity which diverse human societies must recognize as both fact and absolute necessity in the face of world problems). To round out the futuristic focus there would be two other sections as well: *La Biologie* (concentrating on genetics, human blood and the brain) and *Construction d'un quartier de l'an 2000* (depicting problems and progress in urban life less through technology than in terms of general living conditions). The ultimate stated goal of the project was to underline the problems confronting the modern world, and to help inspire a genuine mobilization of the youth of France, Europe and the Third World. See *Projets pour l'exposition universelle de 1989 à Paris: livre blanc*, (1985), p.11, 30-35.

6 Between 1986 and 1988 socialist Mitterand occupied the presidency, while conservative Chirac was prime minister.

7 For a concise summary of the various architectural projects, see Robert Hughes, "Paris à la Mitterand," *Time*, September 18, 1989: 88-92.

8 For an official account, see Daniëlle Rouard, "Les «potes» de Pékin," *Le Monde* June 13, 1989: 24.

9 Pamphlet "Le Concert de l'Égalité" Paris: S.O.S. Racisme, 1989.

10 For a synopsis see Anne Giudicelli, "On ne badine pas avec la Tour," *Libération* June 17-18, 1989: 29.

11 See pamphlet "Paris 89: Programme Officiel" (Paris: 1989) A not uninteresting pun lies imbedded in the translation of *Tour* to Tower — for English speakers this

could suggest a cultural tour, the world's fair still haunting the iron structure. However, if the reader will permit a dry observation, this particular program was remarkably expensive.

12 "Dette, apartheid, colonies, ça suffat comme çi!" ran the slogan. See pamphlet "Bienvenue à la manifestation et au concert du 8 Juillet, Ça suffat comme çi!" (Paris: 1989)

13 See article "Ça suffat comme çi," *L'Humanité* July 14, 1989: 11.

14 See *Le Figaro* July 15-16, 1989: 1, *L'Humanité* July 15, 1989: 1, *France-Soir* July 15, 1989: 24, and *Libération* July 15-16: 1.

15 See *Libération* July 17, 1989: 10.

16 ee "1889. La Tour Eiffel et l'Exposition universelle," *Le petit Journal des grandes Expositions*: 196, 1989. The image is also reproduced in the more lavish exhibit catalogue, 1889, *La Tour Eiffel et l'exposition universelle*, p. 117.

17 From the short bilingual brochure *magiciens de la terre*, Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou/La Grande Halle - La Villette, 1989, translation in text.

18 For more on the exhibition see the full version catalogue *magiciens de la terre* (1989) and comments in Bhabha and Burgin (1992), as well as Applefield (1989).

19 The term "difference" can sprawl analytically vague, yet for all its theoretical currency it retains an everyday tone in its abstraction. For this reason I choose to employ it, generalities displayed but undissected.

20 Quoted in Harriss (1976), p.140.

21 Reportedly said while passing a sideshow of the colonial exposition. See Wright (1987), p. 300.

22 The 1880s marked the first decade of the Republic in which its existence might be said to be taken as given, immediate, post-Commune monarchist threats having receded. Even so, the elections of 1885 saw a resurgence of anti-republican right, and in 1889 itself the maverick candidacy of General Boulanger hinted the possibility of a new authoritarian regime (Wright 1987: 230-252). The essays in Nora (1984), provide fuller histories for a number elements of republican ritual.

23 Indeed, it can be argued that the empire was not the clear product of any conscious, consistent expansionist government policy (Wright 1987 240-241, 299-300).

24 Not surprisingly, parallels can be made with the growth of anthropology as a discipline, and the introduction of similar colonial themes within the academy. George Stocking opens his history of Victorian anthropology with an image of the Crystal Palace of 1851, the first great world's fair (Stocking 1987: 1).

25 For an inventory of some of the exhibited items see *Reports of the United States Commissioners to the Universal*

Exposition of 1889 at Paris (1890).

26 For the fair's layout see illustrations in Bloch and Delort (1980), 83 and Musée d'Orsay, (1989), 254-269. For a richer account of changing and conflicting context of social and spatial visions expressed in French world's fairs see Rabinow (1989).

27 The quotations are taken from Archives Nationales F12 3760 and Melchior de Vogüé, *Remarques sur l'Exposition du Centenaire*: 165.

28 The exhibition's allure is perhaps allegorically described by an anecdote told by its *commissaire spécial* himself, a mocking tale about a "working girl" and an "Annamite" [Indochinese] man who fall in love, only to be foiled by French laws on bigamy. A view from the top: worker, woman, colonial — conjoined by desire, separated by the state. Bloch and Delort (1980), p. 95. For a remarkable collection of quotations surrounding the 1889 colonial exhibit, see *Le livre des expositions universelles 1851-1989*. (1983), p. 90-91 (sources p. 347).

29 See Mary Blume, "Eiffel Tower, at 100, Has Defeated Its Critics," *International Herald Tribune* June 5: 16.

30 Quoted in Charles-Robert Ageron, "L'Exposition coloniale de 1931," in Nora (1984).

31 See *Programme des manifestations du Bicentenaire de la Révolution Française*, (Paris: Mission de la Bicentenaire de la Révolution Française et des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen, 1989), esp. p. 130, 236, 283.

32 Connerton (1989), p. 6.

33 From Jameson (1991), p. ix.

34 Much of MacAloon's model flows out of the work of Victor Turner, especially *The Ritual Process* (1969). Both emphasize social control as the political ends of "experiences of unprecedented potency," or "awe," though Turner applies his model universally, while MacAloon examines "modern" society as a special case.

35 See *Time*, July 24, 1989 (134): 15.

36 From Halbwachs (1980), p. 82.

37 From Nora (1989), p. 7.

38 Connerton (1989) provides a more general review of social memory, dividing it into commemorative ceremonies (ritual) and bodily practices (habit). This essay, while privileging the former of his categories, ultimately involves both in its special case of chronological celebration. Middleton and Edwards (1990) offer a collection of essays on memory and forgetting, from a perspective of politics, communication, and social psychology.

39 A resurgence of interest in the historical sensibilities of purportedly non-historical peoples has marked anthropology in recent years, cautioning against overly facile distinctions. See for example Price (1990).

40 A rather remarkable Paris T.V. news story on Channel 2, Sun. July 16th, reported a counter-celebration of the nobility, organized by a relation of Mussolini and protesting, among other things, the "materialistic" tendencies of modern society.

41 One could consider a long list, from aristocrats to witchcraft, of things that might seem cozier from a distance. The point in questioning nostalgia is not to remove either rejoicing or regret as possible reactions to social change, but rather to uncover a wider, and deeper range of memories and histories. See also Davis and Starn (1989) and Lowenthal (1985).

42 From Labro (1989), p. 68.

43 However, the image could also be read the other way, as repression of veiled fears. Neil Hertz (1985) follows several examples, text and image, of a "recurrent turn of mind: the representation of what would seem to be a political threat as if it were a sexual threat." The prime source is Revolutionary Paris, 1848 and Commune editions, the prime threat, a castrating woman. Our strange encounter would then hint at another exchange of fire, that of seduction and domination, covering fears of castration, or — as bad or worse — decivilization, the loss of clothes, culture, Empire and History.

44 In 1931 an entire exposition devoted to colonialism was held at the Bois de Vincennes in Paris (See Chandler 1989). In addition, the "Cinquantenaire" festival of 1937 also featured a large colonial exhibit.

45 From Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in Benjamin (1969), pp. 261-262 [trans. in text.]

46 For more description and analysis see the journal *Pouvoirs* 39 (1986), a special issue on May 68 as well as Vigier (1988), pp. 52-57.

47 Recall Marx's lines witnessing the erosion of the Second Republic into the Second Empire: "And just when they [the living] seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them their names, battle cries and costumes..." (Marx 1975: 15). The comparisons with Halbwach's formulation of change and tradition are not uninteresting; for both opposed terms representing different ends of time join at transformatory moments. In the face of the future, memory of the past becomes indispensable.

48 Simon Schama suggests that the "French Revolution" *per se* (as opposed to the series of its events) only came into being in 1830, when, as a memory, it helped to reconstruct the political landscape (Schama 1989: 7).

49 No chronological date, after all, can be identical to any

other. Thus when one is frozen in significance, that particular significance is then denied to the present; time is both distinctly marked *and* separated.

50 This rewriting could come in the form of replacement rather than opposition. See Connerton (1989: 41-48) regarding relations between National Socialist festivals, Christian and Pagan calendars.

51 Regarding the Revolutionary calendar see Hunt (1984 70-71), and Bronislaw Baczko, "Le Calendrier Républicain," in (Nora 1984: 38-79). Regarding shifts in historical pedagogy away from chronology, and the issue of French school children not knowing the dates of the Revolution, see Lowenthal (1985: 222-223). After 1989, one would imagine, a greater number might pass the test.

52 Pamphlet "Paris 89: Programme Officiel" (Paris: 1989)

53 Foucault (1973: 340).

54 Film also affects perception of time. See Pinney (1990) for further discussion of the moving, the still and representation in anthropology.

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