

FEDERATION, NATION AND NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

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It is a commonplace that Festivals held a central place in the speeches and actions of the protagonists of the Revolution. Events unfolded as if their reflections on the organization of the ideal *Cité* and the structures which were designed to realize it must certainly comprise this celebratory moment or reveal a deplorable gap. The relationship binding the festival to politics and pedagogy was taken for granted by the majority of the revolutionaries. There was certainly much discussion about what these gatherings should be like, what shape they should have, but no one doubted for one moment their fundamental importance for society. From Mirabeau to Robespierre, leaders were all convinced that the New Regime would have no real life without these initiatives. Festivals were not, therefore, folkloristic touches added on after the foundations of the *Cité* had been laid, to give a final touch of perfection: far from being complementary to it, they were part of the very principle of the *Polis*, which they actively helped to build by contributing essential parts of its structure.

When the «Incorruptible» spoke of the festival as an institution¹, this term must be taken literally; firstly, because it is part of the very base of society; secondly, because its function is to create, set up and give life to something which did not exist and which has to be brought into being; and lastly, because the festival, in its enactment, educates and instructs². In other words, it is closely bound up with the act founding and creating a community and a new State. In this paper we shall examine one aspect of this function through the example of the gathering of the 14th July, 1790, and try to understand in what way it contributed to the emergence of the nation and of a truly national consciousness.

Our starting point will therefore be the Federation, not only because chronologically it was the first festival, but also because it acted as an almost permanent referent on which many revolutionaries based later gatherings. This

¹ Robespierre, Maximilien, *Oeuvres*, Paris, P.U.F., 1952, Vol. X, « Sur les rapports des idées religieuses et morales avec les principes républicains et sur les fêtes nationales », p. 458.

² Meaning of the term « institution » which denotes the action of instructing and forming through education. *Dictionnaire Le Robert*, Paris, Société du Nouveau Littre, 1980.

event fascinated both the leading figures of the period and historians such as Michelet³.

What was so new and so important about the Federation to focus their eyes on that emblematic date and which provided such essential material for their thinking? We shall be able to understand the reasons for its fascination by following the preparations for this gathering. For example, L.S. Mercier, curiously, scarcely dedicated a page to the Federation itself. He had eyes only for the works set up on the Champ de Mars, which he described in great detail. We can hardly attribute this inversion of perspective to oversight on the part of the writer, since he was always so scrupulous in his reports of the major events he witnessed. Again, writers as different as the Marquise de la Tour du Pin⁴ and P.F. Tissot⁵ were equally attracted by the subject, and give accurate eye-witness accounts. We must therefore examine this singular event to see what illumination it can give us.

What men these good, fine citizens of Paris are – exclaims Mercier – who have managed to transform eight days of work into days of the most moving, the most unexpected and the most novel holiday that ever was⁶. Enormous stones yield to their endeavour, they seem to be moving mountains, there is no guild which refuses to help in raising the *autel de la patria*⁷.

It was as though all the preparations for the ceremony to come were almost more important than the actual event itself. This preparation of the place which was to receive the Federate delegates was in itself a very important celebratory occasion, as well as a part of the whole final celebration to which it led.

It was undoubtedly the spontaneity of the men and women assembled which impressed observers, but there was something much more fundamental arising from this shared labour. It was the collective confrontation with nature which brought about the blending of people from different political and social backgrounds. Parisians who had previously never met, were brought together in one body which the construction of this monumental square at once formed and revealed to itself. A new way of living together, which did not, and could not, have existed previously, emerged from their labour, not

³ The 1847 introduction to his *Histoire de la Révolution française* begins with some reflections on the Champ de Mars where the author goes to breathe « the great breath of wind which blows on the arid plain ». « This is the only monument the Revolution has left » he wrote and we seem to be reading the founding principles of 1789, *op. cit.*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1979, p. 31.

⁴ The Marquise wrote: « The great circus... on the ground that you can now see, was raised by two hundred thousand people of every class and every age, men and women. Such an extraordinary spectacle will never be seen again (...). In this gathering of all the classes of society there was not the slightest disorder, not the smallest dispute. Each one was moved by the same, single thought of brotherhood... », *Mémoires (1778-1813)*, Mercure de France, Paris, 1979, p. 129.

⁵ Tissot, P.F., *Histoire complète de la Révolution française*, Paris, Silvestre Librairie-Editeur, 1834, Vol. 2. The author writes: « Le Champ de Mars was the tableau of a great family, and, in this family there was no hatred, no sign of division... », p. 225.

⁶ Mercier, Louis-Sébastien, *Paris pendant la Révolution (1789-1798) ou le nouveau Paris*, Vol. I, Paris, Fusch, 1798, p. 66.

⁷ Mercier, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

only because the citizens were freed from previous class distinctions, but also because on this occasion they were in a sort of state of social weightlessness. The inequalities and differences of status of every day life seemed to be abolished. This singular moment marked a pause in the normal routine of daily life. The tacit or violent conflicts which were their daily lot gave way to a lively feeling of brotherhood which nothing and no one could disturb. There were no more masters or servants, no superiors or inferiors, and people united and acted together «to enjoy this instant when no one was any longer better than an other»⁸.

This interlude made it possible for the proclaimed ideals of community to briefly become real, and allowed participants to forget that reality would always doom them to bitter failure. This gathering offered the group the image of what it should be: made up of equal, fraternal and united citizens. The gap between principles and facts suddenly disappeared in a joyous event enacted by the multitude.

Taken from their normal occupations by these festivities, individuals were no longer isolated monads, concerned only with themselves, but became part of a whole welded together by a single goal. New social ties were forged and interests shared. The Revolution which had broken the aristocracy and its «long chain which rose from the peasant to the King»⁹, in fact, could not be satisfied with this brutal breaking up of the old society. There is a recurrent simile often used to describe the ensuing developments: that of a river suddenly bursting the banks which had till that moment contained it. It seemed that the river which had always flowed peacefully before, guided by the immutable banks of tradition and a power of divine origin which had succeeded itself since time immemorial, had given way to a sudden and threatening violence.

«Let us beware of breaking a dike which has been maintained for centuries, without taking shelter from the flood which may spread further than we foresaw»¹⁰, declared a Deputy in 1789. Later, another metaphor was used, that of the rough sea on which the ship of State could not stay afloat¹¹. The Revolutionaries therefore had to find a means of containing this sudden flood, and of rearranging the links of the chain without which there could be no collectivity in a new pattern.

This new social organization was doubly necessary. On the one hand, it filled the gap left by the destruction of the society existing under the absolute monarchy; on the other hand, it offset the centrifugal effect of the advent of individualism. The existence of this phenomenon, which had been acquired and legally sanctioned, posed the problem of community ties even more acutely, since nothing seemed to exist to hold individuals together.

⁸ Canetti, Elias, *Masse et Puissance*, Paris, Gallimard, 1986, p. 15.

⁹ Tocqueville, Alexis, *La Démocratie en Amérique*, Paris, G.F., 1981, Vol. 2, p. 126.

¹⁰ *Archives Parlementaires*, Recueil des débats législatifs et politiques des Chambres françaises, under the direction of J. Madival and E. Laurent, Paris, CNRS, 1 August 1789, Vol. 8, p. 324, Delambre.

¹¹ Cf. *Arch. Parl.*, 18th December 1792, Vol. 55, p. 144, speech of Leclerc.

As J.L. Nancy has put it, « we cannot make a world simply of atoms. A *diranon* is needed (...), an inclination of one towards the other, of one for the other... »¹². This gathering provided the opportunity by bringing together citizens « separated by democracy » in danger of « being enclosed in the solitude »¹³ of their own hearts.

It is precisely within this unprecedented tension that the festival works, absorbing or attenuating its strength. It draws people out of the self-concern and indifference towards others in which they were generally absorbed, to make them live together. Busy with similar tasks, attracted by the single goal of this celebration, they were made aware of those common interests which, outside their strictly private occupations, assured them of being part of one same, single body. *Homo oeconomicus* was momentarily dormant, while the group member awoke, summoned by the festival, whose scope was to give him life. Public spirit was aroused in this gathering, giving to all those present « the cherished, venerable image of the fatherland »¹⁴. « This sacred fire », indispensable for the cohesion of the whole, was fed by « this moment of enthusiasm » and gaiety where the hearts of the citizens beat for their community.

The work in progress on the Champ de Mars was thus the *locus* where the Nation began to emerge for the first time. « What was previously only a simple geographic expression or a flowery term for writers wishing to embellish their style »¹⁵, was henceforth changed into an effective reality, because those who composed it had actually experienced it. This singular moment was thus to objectivize two fundamental and complementary aspects of 1789: the passing from a holistic society to one where *homo aequalis*¹⁶ ruled at last, together with the constitution of other collective ties forming in the place of those which prevailed in the Old Regime.

Hierarchical divisions gave way, this time *in vivo*, before a new community which was, as Hegel was to write of the legendary constructions of the Tower of Babel and the Gardens of Babylon, « both the end and the content of the work »¹⁷ being built on this gigantic plain. This preparation for the gathering was therefore an essential celebrative phase, in which the festival to come had a profound effect on the social body, making it exist in a different way from what it had been. This was not a minor phase in the Federation, but on the contrary, a preliminary moment, indispensable to its achievement, already part of the advent of a new sociality.

The monument of the Champ de Mars, destined to reunite the French

¹² Nancy, Jean-Luc, *La Communauté désœuvrée*, Paris, C. Bourgois, 1987, p. 87.

¹³ Tocqueville, A., *op. cit.*, p. 127.

¹⁴ Mirabeau, *Discours sur les fêtes publiques, civiles et militaires*, in Bacsko, B., *Une Education pour la Démocratie, textes et projets de l'époque révolutionnaire*, Paris, Ed. Garnier, 1982, p. 97.

¹⁵ *Arch. Parl.*, 9 November 1972, Vol. 53, Vergniaud.

¹⁶ Cf. Dumont, Louis, *Essais sur l'individualisme. Une perspective anthropologique sur l'idéologie moderne*, Paris, Seuil, 1983, p. 279.

¹⁷ Hegel, *L'Esthétique*, Vol. 3, Paris, Gallimard, 1979, p. 34.

people, underscores this last aspect. The restructuring of an urban space is the means by which the Nation becomes tangible and perceptible to all. The self-absorbed festivities of Absolutism, which were essentially carried out behind the walls and iron gates of Versailles or at best «staged» for the masses on which the system rested, were replaced with public gatherings in which all were actors. This movement towards the constitution of the nation as a collective entity would, of course, have been incomplete if it had only involved the citizens of Paris. There were numerous debates on the new divisions of the realm, where the aim was, among other things, to «blend local, individual feelings into a national, public spirit»¹⁸. «I do not know», Sieyès declared on the subject of the setting up of the Departments, «of a reader and more powerful means to make, effortlessly, a single body of all the parts of France and a single nation of all the peoples»¹⁹. The purpose of this reorganization was clear, and the Federation was the continuation of the same policy but with other means. More precisely, it was the active principle which made it possible to achieve the above-mentioned goals by making this static reform come alive. Michelet, in particular, has written some admirable lines on the Delegates to the Federation who came from all over the country, their ranks swelling as they converged on Paris. How much of his account is fruit of his imagination embellishing the historical facts does not concern us here; what interests us is the significance of this surge towards the Centre. This procession, whose goal is the *fête*, in itself constitutes the integration of different, separate communities. In this collective march the participants no longer considered themselves as members of a village or a commune, but as a part of a much vaster unit, France. To unite them, the historian wrote, «they needed a capital»²⁰, whose task was to break down the different, single elements; to make of the country a homogeneous whole:

We are no longer Bretons or Angevins, said our brothers from Anjou and Brittany. Like them, we shall say, we are no longer Parisians, we are French²¹.

This was what the gathering was to achieve. Traditional alliances were to be overturned and reorganized on other bases. Local and regional ties were to give way to the advantage of a preferential attachment to the State, around which the community should be re-structured. There, on the Champ de Mars, plural became singular and the multitude «One People»²². The Federation was the first stage in this project which aimed at re-ordering the country and

¹⁸ *Arch. Parl.* 4 November, 1789, Vol. 9, p. 671, Duquesnoy.

¹⁹ Quoted by Ozouf-Marignier, M.C., in *Annales E.S.C.N.*, n. 6, Nov.-Dec. 1986, «De l'universalisme constituant aux intérêts locaux: le débat sur la formation des départements en France 1789-1791», p. 1194.

²⁰ Michelet, *op. cit.*, ..., p. 423.

²¹ Bailly's address to France, quoted by Montlosier in *Mémoires*, Paris, Librairie Firmin-Didot et Compagnie, 1881, Vol. 1, p. 94.

²² Expression used by Sieyès about the aims of the festival in *Journal d'Instruction sociale*, no. 5 and 6, Minutes of the Comité d'Instruction publique (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1889, Vol. 1, p. 571).

all the different people living in it. Finally, «flocks of men have become a nation»²³ Mirabeau was to say. The latter could exist as a collective unit in its own right because those who composed it had directly experienced it in their labour and in this march together.

Yet, if this function alone were taken into consideration, we should be neglecting an essential factor. In order to discover the other goals of this enterprise, we should examine its purely political aspect. Its objective, in fact was also to consecrate the spectators of power which shows itself as sovereign before them. It was here that the citizens were to become aware of the authority which had become declaredly theirs; not only because they were present, but also because the festival endowed this gathering, which was already in itself significant, with slogans and mottos to convince them of the reality of their new prerogatives.

Thus, on the façade of the *Autel de la Patrie* erected in the centre of the amphitheatre, people could read: «you are the nation, you are also the law – it is your will; the King is the guardian of the law»²⁴. The foundations of the State were thus translated into simple formulae, which all could understand, concentrating the legitimacy of the Institutions almost in the form of slogans. The over-riding Nation now visibly substituted itself for the monarch, and this abstract concept was to become concrete in its statement as a consciousness shared by those who were present. The breakdown of the political order in 1789 here became a spectacle which officially and publicly sanctioned the caesura. The ceremony and its detailed organization were also part of the monumental «writ» revealing to the spectators the bases on which the Regime was hencefort to operate.

The President of the National Assembly sat on the right of Louis XVI, with no intermediary, on an identical chair placed on the same level alongside his. On either side were the Deputies who enclosed them as if to contain them in their number²⁵. As was noted, nothing was left to chance. This staging was a wordless but very eloquent language, where the foundations of the *Cité*, the grouping of the constituent parts and their respective places in the hierarchy were statements/signs easily interpreted by the whole of the onlookers. A communication which was totally visual was established, free of any intermediary, between those entrusted with power and those who had invested them with it. In thus exposing themselves to the eyes of all present, the former were no longer remote, disembodied personages, but actually became *their* representatives. Beyond their positions and their official functions, they possessed faces and bodies with which all individuals might identify.

The estrangement and distance inherent in the exercise of power seemed almost abolished in this moment, replaced by a widely-felt involvement and intimacy. These were all elements to guarantee that all the citizens, whether

²³ Mirabeau, *op. cit.* ..., p. 103.

²⁴ *Moniteur Universel*, no. 197, 16th July 1790, p. 129.

²⁵ All these details are taken from the *Archives Parlementaires*, 9th July, 1790, Vol. 17, p. 12.

active or passive, should consider themselves as the real holders of that authority which was speaking and acting in their name. Their very presence was proof of the interest they showed for the *Polis*, independently of their actual situation. They only had to be present to be involved.

Despotism had had to «put fear in (their) hearts»²⁶ to keep its subjects at a distance, whereas the New Regime would see that their interest in the business of the *Cité* was stably engaged. On this occasion, therefore, individuals became the collective public, at the same time that the opinion corresponding to it was formed. What was only «a dull mumble»²⁷ in Neckar's words - an «abstract form of authority» invoked by the protagonists attempting to circumvent royal absolute power before 1789 - now actually emerged. «The festivals», actually guided «public opinion»²⁸ and ensured its spread, which was indispensable to the process of legitimization of the institutions, by offering those who controlled them the real opportunity to refer to and trust in them.

These ceremonies constituted one of the sources for the expansion of this public expression and the moment when the people gathered together could draw on the elements necessary for its existence. There, «this queen of the world who makes revolutions and the strength of States»²⁹ was ostensibly manifest and embodied in the attentive crowd.

Representing them, the Federation focused the principles fundamental to the emerging society. Here, for various specific contexts which were still free from the murderous divisions of the future, doubtless lies the cause of the fascination that the Federation has never ceased to arouse. Firstly, this initiative established itself in a mythical way as a model that the revolutionaries were later to attempt to imitate despite the many divisions they had to face. In fact, the further away they moved from this initial period of the Revolution, the harder they tried to reproduce its real or supposed essence. When the National Assembly published Mirabeau's speech on festivals in September 1791, the Federation was an essential reference point. The bill put forward was aimed at making it an annual institution in order to «renew the oath of fraternity which binds all citizens together and all the Departments of the Kingdom to the central authority and to the constitution»³⁰. But they were very far indeed from the unanimity which had seemed to prevail only one year before. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy, the King's flight, the massacres on the Champ de Mars and the Pilnitz Declaration were all cracks which already deeply threatened the union which all invoked in their vows.

Later, in 1893, Seconds presented a report in which, on the subject of the festivals, we may read: it is they who can «bring about the unity of opinion,

²⁶ Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, Paris, G.F., 1979, Vol. 1, Book IV, Chap. III, p. 159.

²⁷ Baker, Keith, M., «Naissance de l'opinion publique», *Annales E.S.C.*, no. 1, Jan.-Feb. 1987, p. 44.

²⁸ *Arch. Parl.*, 10th April, 1792, Vol. 41, p. 409, Laureau.

²⁹ *Arch. Parl.*, 17th April, 1793, Vol. 62, p. 519, Seconds.

³⁰ *Arch. Parl.*, 10th September, 1791, Vol. 30, p. 532.

the unity of will, the unity of feelings, in short, perfect unity»³¹. The festive gathering was to express its indissoluble fusion with the Republic. David too spoke of «fraternal embraces», where «the French have one voice only»³² and further quotations and references could be repeated almost endlessly.

We are, of course, well aware of the functions, differing according to their contexts, of these unitary speeches. The early ones were concerned with stabilizing the Constitutional Monarchy, the later ones the *Republica*. Their origins are obviously different, but a common goal is clear: to bring about the deep unity of a people whose differences were to merge in a single whole, whether it was called Nation or Fatherland. The different Frances, heirs of the Old Regime, were everywhere to submit, in the crucible of the festival, to the alchemy of the One, the means to reveal this new community to itself and to perpetuate it in its being.

If the popular gathering was the chosen framework for the affirmation of the community, it was, however, not sufficient in itself. It aroused, but it also depended on, the existence and maintenance of a national consciousness which was not automatic, but had to be created. In other words, it had also to be the place where the citizens could find the necessary elements for the construction of that consciousness. The «nationalization of the masses»³³, which we have seen was a central goal, also came about through the spread of mutual identification signs, which were fundamental to this process and ensured its achievement. We shall, therefore, now consider the festival as a medium, which made it possible to establish a communication without which there could be no real community. «The Revolution, the Constitution: this is what our public festivals must recount, honour, consecrate» wrote Mirabeau in a speech to the Deputies. «There you will speak to the people of the events which have brought about the new institutions»³⁴.

These gatherings were thus the opportunity to create a past and a collective memory. A history was elaborated there which was to assure people that they belonged to the same whole, not simply, as is often sustained, through symbolic repetition of what had happened, but on the contrary by a profound reworking of the facts to which an identical significance had to be attributed. These ceremonies took particular dates and events and transformed them radically to make them unfold other than they had been experienced. The first performances made the event «happen», almost in the sense that this expression has nowadays, that is to say that they gave the particular episode a dimension it had not previously had, by removing it from its specific, even accidental, context, assigning it a national significance. This shift was neither the reproduction nor the duplication, but the re-elaboration, of the event, and it

³¹ *Arch. Parl.*, «De l'art social ou des vrais principes de la société politique», 7th January 1793, Vol. 56, p. 583.

³² *Arch. Parl.*, Plan pour la fête du 20 Prairial, an II, Vol. 90, p. 142.

³³ We borrowed this expression from Mosse, G.L., *The Nazionalization of the Masses*, Howard Fertig, New York, 1975, p. 252.

³⁴ Mirabeau, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

did not occur in any arbitrary way. Not every event can be captured in this way. An event must already concentrate in itself significant moments which may be symbolically exploited by society as a whole. This was certainly the case of the fall of the Bastille, which tolled the knell of the royal counter-attack and opened up a chasm under the regime, leaving the authorities – or what was left of them – as if hanging in mid-air with no defence against the irruption of the crowd. The movement soon affected the whole country, and the «fourth estate», to use the apt expression of A. Mathiez, brought about the *Grande Peur*. Almost everywhere the confrontation was open, brutal and irresistible. By August, feudality had expired. A year later, the Federation would celebrate the publicly sanctioned reconciliation of the Nation with itself. The lacerating, destructive division gave way to order and a re-found unity.

Between these two dates, the fall of the sinister prison and the insurrection in the provinces were purged of their subversive character. What had previously divided, now became the symbol of fraternity. The single, fragmentary accounts of groups and protagonists, limited by circumstances, were replaced by the History of a whole people who, by the festival, were made the direct subject of the event that was being celebrated. It was no longer the Parisians alone who had taken and destroyed the shameful fortress, overthrown the throne in August 1792... but France as a collective being.

At the same time, this change in scale was also, as we have seen, the occasion of a profound change in the value attributed to the events which had taken place. This shift was essential for the emergence of a truly common past. It is not enough, in fact, for groups to share in the same history for them to consider themselves members of the same society. They have to be able to give their experience the same significance. Unless this happens, instead of binding the whole, it becomes the permanent source of divisions which will be endlessly re-activated. The Federation became precisely the way to give the events a common interpretation, accepted by all, an acceptance they had not previously had and which now had to be generalized. The performance contributed to make, of what had been traumatisms and chaos, «simple, clear, communicable things» and indeed made «a controlled consensus of the meaning possible»³⁵.

The festival functions as an undertaking of symbolic codification which seeks to minimize «the equivocal and the blurred», to make peace reign where there has been conflict. This will explain, in part, why the language of these celebrations and the messages they delivered were always simple and understandable for all. The emblems they used, the mottos they enacted and the monuments around which they gathered all contained a univocal eloquence which was designed to exclude any different interpretations of the facts.

This was the structure of the community saga, and this statement-made-into-spectacle was transformed into a «myth» because it took on values which «amplified it, filled (it) and ennobled (it) by giving it the dimensions of an

³⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre, «*La codification*» in *Choses dites*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1987, p. 99.

account of the origins and an explanation of its destiny»³⁶. What was a scandal, in the many sense of this term, presented itself, at the same time, as conceptually available to the citizenry as a whole.

These gatherings functioned, therefore, as a sort of vast museum, which, by putting them on show, integrated the parts necessary for the construction of the collective memory. They accumulated the emblematic dates marking the coming about of the new society. 14th July 1789, 10th August 1792, 21st January 1793... moments which testified to its existence and vitality, in turn confirmed by their repeated celebration. These festivities had thus very clear objectives: to instil into the social body – and keep before it – those elements which would ensure a national consciousness. The festival untangled the threads of group history, which it enacted to perfection, by giving it, *a posteriori*, a coherence and a rationality which it had not immediately had for those who had been its protagonists or spectators. The fragments of this past, which had until then been scattered, were put together by these celebrations, like a giant puzzle, to make up a picture which suddenly made sense.

Thanks to them, the many hopes and the contradictory goals, the deaths, the violence and all the different kinds of divisions were integrated into a unique tableau where the people could see what had made it exist, and see itself as a people. This reconstructed history would from then onwards be transparent, great, heroic and readable for all. It would no longer be opaque or equivocal. The thickness and rich complexity of historical reality was replaced by a clear outline where every fact was easily explainable. The chain of these facts thus acquired the appearance of a genealogy from which all trace of mystery had disappeared. That is another reason why the performance was mythical and why it was able to serve as a school of edification for the whole people. The Festival, in celebrating «these events which will be forever remembered by the French nation»³⁷, thus became the indispensable complement of public education, because the dates and characters which it enacted had also been metamorphosized into models held up as examples to the admiring gaze of the citizens.

In a society which was still largely illiterate, these performances throughout the country made it possible to reach sections of the people which no other institution had previously been able to touch. «We imagine that the post and printing are sufficient to spread ideas; as if the people living in the country, in its present state of customs and education could conveniently and naturally make use of these two instruments». They needed «a more accessible and more immediate form of education, and, to speak boldly, a more dynamic and lively one»³⁸. The festivals would meet this need and they were also media in this sense, since they were integrated into the vast pedagogical machinery which the revolutionaries aspired to set in motion.

³⁶ Nahcy, J.L., *op. cit.*, p. 122.

³⁷ *Arch. Parl.*, 10th February 1792, Vol. 38, p. 392, M. de May.

³⁸ Daunous, «Essai sur l'instruction publique», *op. cit.*, p. 512.

Talleyrand said that these ceremonies enabled «morality to reach man»³⁹, and recalled him constantly to his duties: in the festivals, the individual would learn how to love his country, its constitution and its laws. As Mona Azouf has pointed out⁴⁰, these festivities acted as vast purification rites, transferring the break which had taken place in the social order to the social, ethnical level necessary to enable the new order to function well. Several needs were met to bring to life the principles of the regime being constructed, on the one hand, and to strengthen the national consciousness of the citizens, on the other. The latter, in fact, could not be limited to the existence of a common past, but in addition required individuals to be called upon regularly, as members of the community, to take part in present events in order to thus identify with their future.

Our initial intuition regarding the consubstantial nature of the ties linking the festival to the very act of foundation and institution of a new form of organization of political and social life, now seems to be borne out. These ties, as we have seen, never ceased to work together in their mutual aim of bringing to life a collectivity which previously did not exist, but which had to be created. Herein doubtless lies the fascination the revolutionaries felt for Moses. This «law-maker of the Jews»⁴¹, as Mirabeau defined him, had succeeded in uniting them as a people, despite their dispersion, by giving them specific laws, customs and rites. His name figure in many speeches, and Boissy d'Anglas⁴² was also inspired by his example when he hailed the nation to which the festivals had given a particular, original «physiognomy».

In this effort to break the continuum of history and bring about a new society, the festive moment was considered as one of the essential instruments which both made its creation possible and conferred upon it the capacity to face the ages. It gave something very fundamental to the creation: permanence and stability. In these celebrations, the new institutions took root so strongly that from that moment onwards it seemed that nothing could shake them. This is why Moses seemed so attractive as a model; he had succeeded in defeating everything that might have contributed to breaking up his people. Neither their scattering all over the world nor the persecutions from all sides have succeeded in destroying them. The people has survived in its essence as a people defying both the passing of time and the murderous attacks of history. The greatness of his work is attested by many signs whose marks are still visible and tangible after the relentless passing of centuries. This was, though of course in a very different context, one of the goals of the Federation and of the ceremonies which followed it.

³⁹ Talleyrand, «Rapport sur l'instruction publique», in Baczko, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

⁴⁰ Ozouf, Mona, *La Fête révolutionnaire 1789-1799*, Paris, Gallimard, 1981, p. 340.

⁴¹ Mirabeau, *op. cit.*, ... p. 97.

⁴² Boissy d'Anglas, *Essai sur les Fêtes nationales suivi de quelques idées sur les arts et sur la nécessité de les encourager*, Paris, Year II, p. 192.