A Driving Force. On the Rhetoric of Images and Power
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Image and Imagery in the Age of the Directory (1795-99)
The Political Symbolism of the Revolution between Old and New Horizons

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Abstract The creation of a new relationship between power, its image, and the people is one of the numerous innovations that have made the history of the Revolution a pivotal moment in the broader European context. After the experience of the Terror, a new era opened, characterised first and foremost by a political body, the Directory, which would soon become the symbolic epicentre of public power, drawing from symbols and strategies both ancient and modern. Through a combination of institutional analysis and the examination of emblematic cases, this text aims to elucidate the methods of creation and the defining characteristics of a specific public image of the newly dominant power.

Keywords French Revolution. Directory. Revolutionary festival. Image and power. Public sphere.

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> Le principe de toute souveraineté réside essentiellement dans la nation. Nul corps, nul individu ne peut exercer d'autorité qui n'en émane expressément.
>
> *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*, art. III

1 Introduction: A New Public Dimension

Article 3 of the celebrated *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* of 26 August 1789,[1] represents one of the cardinal documents for the foundation of a modernity understood not only in a political and theoretical sense but also, and above all, in a social and experiential dimension. Indissolubly linking every public authority to national sovereignty, the provision in question would lead to a general redefinition of the foundation and legitimacy of every political role. From then on, every public official would have to grapple with the popular origin of his power, namely with that generality known as Nation, People, or citizenship (depending on the historical-political context), which was vying for the unprecedented role of a leading political actor.

The revolution in the basis of legitimacy necessitated an intrinsic redefinition of the appearance, symbols, and, in general, the image of power, which had to bear witness to its privileged relationship with the new collective protagonist.

The forging of an unprecedented and original relationship between power, its image, and the people thus represents one of the distinguishing features of the so-called Age of Revolutions. It was precisely this new tripartite connection that enabled the development of numerous innovations across various domains, ranging from the political to the economic, from the social to the religious.

Jürgen Habermas, in his groundbreaking study on the public sphere,[2] already emphasised the foundational role of the year 1789 (along with the cultural transformations that preceded it and, to some extent, laid the groundwork)[3] in shaping a "functioning public sphere

1 See Godechot, Faupin 2018.

2 See Habermas 1991.

3 While the Physiocrats, for the first time, formulated a precise definition of public opinion in which it came to coincide with evidence and reasonableness, Jacques Necker, in a work that has rightfully gained renown, had already, a few years before the great event, highlighted the emergence and the affirmation of a 'supreme tribunal' with the ability to assess and, to some extent, guide every individual holder of a political office: *l'opinion publique*. "C'est ainsi que la plupart des étrangers, par des motifs différents, ont peine à se faire une juste idée de l'autorité qu'exerce en France l'opinion publique : ils comprennent difficilement ce que c'est qu'une puissance invisible, qui sans trésors,

in the politic realm" on the continent, a concept that had already been evolving in the British context for several decades.

As the German philosopher teaches, in order to fully embody the status of public opinion, it had to undergo further development, specifically achieving a deep awareness of its role, power, and potential; in other words, this particular 'public sphere' was called upon to become self-aware. The holders of public power were therefore tasked with a dual mission: from then on, they would not only have to attest to the popular origin of their office, but they would also be called upon to educate the people themselves (or the more or less restricted portion that, depending on the case, would be made to coincide with public opinion) about its new and crucial public function.

A dual and reciprocal relationship is thus established between principals and representatives in which their respective roles become confused and, in some cases, even seem to reverse. An example of the reversal of roles occurs when the latter, who remain mere custodians (not owners) of their office, turn to the holder of the power from which it emanates to remind him of his founding and legitimising function.[4] The most astonishing reversal of perspective can be observed when, as Mona Ozouf has sharply pointed out, one comprehends how the *opinion publique*, to attain its full value and achieve its "plénitude philosophique", must be refined, cultivated, and illuminated by the beneficial influence of one or more enlightened men: "non pas un médiateur, mais un conducteur de l'évidence" (Ozouf 1987, 427), as Condorcet would have theorised. The sender and the receiver of power intersect and hybridise in a complex tangle in which both simultaneously become subjects and objects, superiors and subordinates.

It is not our intention here to delve into the intricate meanderings of the historical and philosophical dimensions of public opinion, its divergent interpretations (Rousseau's critique, for instance, contrasting particular opinions with the uniqueness of the general will,

sans garde et sans armée, donne des loix [*sic*] à la ville, à la Cour, et jusques dans le palais de Rois" (1784, LXI-LXII). On these topics see Baker (1987, 204-46).

4 On the relationship between public opinion and the French Revolution, reference must be made to Mona Ozouf's essay (1987, 419-34). References to the *opinion publique* and its pivotal role in the proceedings of the assembly debates throughout the revolutionary decade are continuous and strongly emphasised. In this context, it is customary to cite an impassioned speech delivered by the representative Nicolas Bergasse on 15 September 1789, in which he proclaimed, before the National Constituent Assembly (and, by extension, before the French people) the supreme authority of his judgment: "Et vous savez que ce n'est que par l'opinion publique que vous pouvez acquérir quelque pouvoir pour faire le bien; vous savez que ce n'est que par elle que la cause si longtemps désespérée du peuple a prévalu; vous savez que devant elle toutes les autorités se taisent, tous les préjugés disparaissent, tous les intérêts particuliers s'effacent" (*Archives Parlementaires* 1875, 8, 118).

la volonté générale)[5] and its various theoretical theorisations during and beyond the revolutionary decade. Rather, what is crucial to emphasise from the outset is the reciprocity underlying the novel relationship formed between custodians and owners of public power, between citizenship and political officeholders.

Indeed, it is from this specific configuration of mutual legitimation that the complex symbolic and iconographic mechanisms underpinning the representation of the diverse organs of power established by the Revolution trace their origins.

2 The Image of Power and the Power of Image in the Revolutionary 'Middle Ages' (1795-99)

In order to address this question, it will therefore be necessary to adopt a bifocal perspective. Firstly, we will have to briefly explore the impressive production of images during the final decade of the 18th century, which marked an explosion in the dissemination of precise representations of public authorities and figures among segments of the population previously untouched by similar propaganda efforts. This phenomenon was a direct outcome of the second element to be examined: the intrinsic connection that the multitude of images, symbols, and visual representations had with political purposes and, therefore, the original aims of the various regimes that succeeded one another during the revolutionary decade. While revolutionary iconography has received considerable scholarly attention, not all revolutionary political periods have received equal scrutiny within the historiography.[6] Only in recent decades have we witnessed a surge in investigations and research into the historically most neglected period of the revolutionary era. This age spans the years between the 'heroic phase' of the Revolution, which culminated in Robespierre's triumph and rapid decline, and the emergence of Napoleon Bonaparte, an unstoppable force heralding a new public order and guiding principles. Despite presenting itself under the guise of continuity, this period marked a new historical rupture through another wave of political upheaval.

5 See Ganochaud 1978.

6 As illustrative examples, we reference the fundamental work by Vovelle (1986). Turning to the Italian scenario, which was swiftly engulfed by the revolutionary wave, we refer to Vovelle 1999. Regarding research into the Directorial period, notable studies on the French side include those by Bernard Gainot (2001; 2010) and Pierre Serna (2005). Serna himself has conducted extensive research into this era from a European perspective, delving into the realm of the 'sister republics'. See Serna 2009. The Italian Revolutionary Triennium occupies a central place within a broader and well-established tradition of scholarship. For a comprehensive albeit somewhat dated overview, see Rao, Cattaneo 2003.

Yet the Directory era (1795-99) holds significant importance in the development of modern political culture and practice. Despite numerous challenges and difficulties, it undeniably constituted the longest-lasting political system of the revolutionary decade. It also marked the period characterised by the highest number of electoral appointments, whose destabilising consequences ultimately led to its downfall. Consequently, it served as a fertile ground for experimenting with theories and principles, extending beyond mere rhetoric, and contributing to the development of a distinctive form of democratic practice.[7]

After the tragic experience of the Terror, and perhaps more significantly because of it, there arose a pressing need to reconstruct society on new, uncorrupted and, above all, stable foundations. It became evident that the *pars destruens*, or the dismantling of the institutions of the Old Regime alone, would not suffice. Rather, the primary objective was to establish a new public order and new principles that remained untainted by the rhetoric of the previous regime. These principles were to be forged, in part, through a reclamation of the heritage from a past that was no longer demonised and entirely rejected. As the Thermidorian era commenced, we witness, to borrow Bronislaw Baczko's words, the rediscovery and reappropriation of the past, along with a re-evaluation of experiential knowledge:

> En 89, l'accent est mis sur le refus radical du passé; élaborer une Constitution, c'est redéfinir le contrat social des Français et celui-ci ne peut être qu'un contrat de fondation. Les Français forment, certes, une nation ancienne; la Révolution l'a pourtant régénérée et, du coup, elle peut agir comme si l'Histoire venait de commencer avec elle. La Nation régénérée, assumant dorénavant pleinement sa souveraineté, tout ouverte sur l'avenir, fonde son identité non pas sur son passé, marqué par la tyrannie et les préjugés, mais sur le projet politique et moral à réaliser. En l'an III, la nouvelle Constitution se propose de cimenter la Nation en s'ouvrant sur l'avenir et en formulant un projet de société, mais l'identité collective est imaginée en fonction du passé que la Nation et, partant, la République doivent assumer. La Révolution a derrière

7 While recognising various merits to this crucial historical period, one cannot overlook the distortions and contradictions that at the same time characterised it. It was precisely in the aftermath of electoral events that actions and measures of the most patently illegal nature were undertaken to suppress the enemies of the directorial regime, coinciding with the extreme factions represented by the monarchists and the so-called *anarchistes*. The *coup d'état* of 18 Fructidor, Year V (4 September 1797), is paradigmatic in this sense, which led not only to the arrest and exile of journalists and writers but also to the removal of two out of five directors, the dismissal of over 100 representatives, and the annulment of elections in numerous departments.

> elle un passé dont elle ne peut se débarrasser; son présent succède au passé immédiat de la Terreur. (Baczko 1989, 339-40)

In this veritable rediscovery of both ancient and recent history, the visual and iconographic sphere carries significant weight and proves itself capable of playing a crucial role in presenting the new political institutions. As paradoxical and even contradictory as it may appear, numerous indicators allow us to discern the revaluation and exploitation of rituals and symbols associated with the *court*, a social and political phenomenon emblematic of the Old Regime. These symbols were carefully purged of any anachronistic references and meticulously 'resemanticized'. In the absence of a monarch who could serve as the pivot and focal point of this hybrid court, in order to understand the visual and political strategies associated with its surprising revitalisation, it becomes decisive to recognise the authority called upon to receive its heritage.

Testifying to the intrinsic connections between iconographic strategies and political authority, it is not coincidental that the most representative body of the Constitution of Year III, namely the Directory, assumed the role of a new and unprecedented 'revolutionary court'. The Directory, aside from defining a specific revolutionary era (an exceptional characteristic in itself) held undisputed authority in the executive function, complemented by a recognised governmental role, and possessed specific prerogatives in the realms of foreign policy and even legislation. The excessive power of the legislature, often blamed for facilitating the ascent of figures of representatives like Robespierre and of organs like the Committee of Public Safety, was remedied through a series of constitutional devices, including the introduction of bicameralism and, most importantly, the substantial reinforcement of executive authority. The reasserted centrality of this executive power, long marginalised after the traumatic experience of Louis XVI's flight and betrayal, thus represents the most distinctive feature of the third French constitutional document.[8] While, at least in theory, the primacy of legislative power as a direct expression of popular choice remained unchanged, starting from 1795, the second branch of the State's power began an ascent that, despite occasional interruptions and ruptures, would pave the way for, or at the very least make possible, the rise of the Napoleonic order.[9]

For these reasons, it becomes particularly interesting to analyse and uncover how this strengthening of executive power, from a political perspective, corresponded to an overexposure in symbolic and visual terms. This phenomenon happened primarily at the expense

8 For an analysis of the drafting and features of the Constitution, see Troper 2006.

9 See Colombo 2000.

of the legislators and led the Directory to assume the role of the true symbolic 'representative' of the nation, both domestically and abroad. With the establishment of the new order that emerged from the rubble of the Terror, there arose an urgent need to recognise specific symbolic and representative figures. In other words, the desire to meticulously shape the public image of the state and its representatives, distinguishing them from both their predecessors and the general citizenry, became increasingly pronounced.

The events of 1 Prairial, Year III (20 May 1795) mark a crucial turning point in this regard. The irruption of the Parisian mob and, above all, the assassination of deputy Jean-Bertrand Féraud (whose head was gruesomely displayed on a pike to Convention President Boissy d'Anglas as part of a recurring macabre ritual), compelled the representatives to make a historic decision. It was Deputy Louis Legendre who, amidst the turmoil, resurrected an idea that had been proposed on occasion but never fully implemented.

> Je demande que dorénavant nous délibérions en costume et armés. Si nous l'avions fait aujourd'hui, nous aurions été délivrés deux heures plus tôt, parce que les bons citoyens auraient, au premier coup d'œil, distingué le représentant d'avec le révolté.[10] (*Gazette Nationale, ou le Moniteur Universel*, 25 May 1795)

The need to distinguish the representatives from potential rebels and, more broadly, from the populace, conferred significant political symbolism onto a visual element, the *costume*. Henceforth, those in positions of authority were to be instantly recognisable: the style of their clothing, the components of their garments, the colours and symbols they contained were meant to signify not only the distinction between public officeholders and the general populace but also to facilitate the identification of each specific public role.

The Commission of Eleven, tasked with drafting the new constitution, adopted this principle, envisioning a precise ritualisation of

10 The journalist Claude-Joseph Trouvé, writing in the *Moniteur* of 4 June 1795, adopted a similar stance: "Ne négligez point, a dit l'auteur du Contrat Social et d'Emile, une certaine décoration publique; qu'elle soit noble et imposante. On ne saurait croire à quel point le cœur du Peuple suit ses yeux, et combien la majesté du cérémonial lui en impose. Cela donne à l'autorité un air d'ordre et de règle qui inspire la confiance, et qui écarte les idées de caprice et de fantaisie attachées à celle du pouvoir arbitraire. Nous oserons ajouter, en faisant l'application de cette maxime, que si les Assemblées nationales eussent continué à porter un costume uniforme, elles se seraient épargné ce long avilissement dans lequel les factieux les ont jetées [...]. Qu'ils nous soit donc permis d'espérer que l'heureux effet d'une pareille séance ne sera point perdu pour l'avenir, et que la Convention se convaincra, par ce succès, de la nécessité de conserver une décoration qui assure à ses délibérations un caractère solennel et une marche plus prompte et plus facile".

the image of power. Every political authority would be bound by a series of stringent regulations pertaining not only to their appearance but also to their public conduct, and in some cases, even their private lives. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that in the final document, the image of the Republic's two most important branches of power received dedicated attention in the form of two distinct constitutional articles, 165 and 369.[11] The first, relating to Directors, stipulated that they:

> ne peuvent paraître, dans l'exercice de leurs fonctions, soit au-dehors, soit dans l'intérieur de leurs maisons, que revêtus du costume qui leur est propre. (*Constitution du 5 Fructidor an III*, art. 165)

The second article of the pair, directed at representatives and any other public official, required that:

> dans l'exercice de leurs fonctions, le costume ou le signe de l'autorité dont ils sont revêtus : la loi en détermine la forme. (*Constitution du 5 Fructidor an III*, art. 369)

The most immediate and theoretically coherent solution for the creation of a visual and symbolic authority would have been to select the legislative body, which was considered the quintessential representative of the people. Despite the increased importance of executive power, the legislative body remained the custodian of national power and sovereignty. However, there was a significant problem both for domestic public events and international representation: its sheer number, since, according to the new constitutional text, it would reach as many as 750 members. Consequently, as indicated in the mentioned articles, the role of the symbolic representative of the French Republic would have been assumed by the rival power.

Firstly, it is essential to observe that, while the Constitution includes the article regarding the costume of the legislative body in its final Title, which pertains to General Provisions, the requirement for the Directory to wear specific attire is outlined in the Title dedicated to it. This seemingly minor detail implies that, even in the Commission's initial plans, the visual aspect was intrinsic and crucial particularly for the Directory.[12]

Comparing the two provisions, it is also worth noting that, while the former solely regulated the public activities of those delivering addresses, in the case of the directors, their private lives were subject to regulation as well, specifically pertaining to the image they

11 See Godechot, Faupin 2018.

12 See *Projet de Constitution pour la République française* 1795.

were expected to maintain within their own homes. This disparity suggests that, even more so than the legislators, it was the directors who assumed the role of symbols and representatives of the Republic. This mismatch is further supported by additional constitutional provisions aimed at adorning the Directory with *éclat* and grandeur designed to amplify the authority of the new revolutionary state. Articles 166-8 established, for instance, an exclusive guard force of no fewer than 500 men and mandated that each director should always be accompanied by two of them. Article 172 even outlined the construction, at the Republic's expense, of a dedicated residence for the directors, ultimately selecting the magnificent *Palais du Luxembourg*, formerly the residence of the Count of Provence, the brother of the king, who would later become known as Louis XVIII.[13] Lastly, Article 173 stipulated a remuneration exceeding fifteen times that of the representatives.

Figure 1 Anonyme, *Costume des Membres du Directoire Exécutif de la République Française*, s.d. Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris

The imbalance in the portrayal of political representatives (namely, the members of the two legislative branches) and those destined to serve as the symbolic representatives of the Republic was also evident in other articles of the new constitutional text. These measures

13 To enhance the splendour of the building, which had served as a prison during the Terror, the directors did not hesitate to employ the old furniture of the royal palace. This serves as another sign of the increasingly apparent connections between the previous royal court and the new revolutionary one. See Mathiez 1933; Vauthier 1914.

simultaneously reinforced the paradoxical characterisation of a revolutionary court that appears to aptly describe the Directory. For instance, by granting the authority to appoint the highest-ranking officials in the state, ranging from generals to tax collectors, from colonial civil servants to commissioners dispatched to local administrations and tribunals, the directors were able to establish a network of connections, affiliations, and even patronage, which did not escape criticism and led some to decry the resurgence of shady courtly practices.[14]

3 From Theory to Practice: The Festivals of the Directory

Above all, it was the public celebrations that would serve as the barometer of the media's excessive coverage of the Directory, which increasingly projected an almost regal aura. The subject of celebrations, as one might surmise, occupies a central position within the theme examined, because it is capable of uniting and sustaining the various factors and individual dynamics discussed thus far. In fact, festivities had been a pivotal element of the revolutionary discourse since the initial parliamentary debates.[15] However, it was only after the general refounding following the fall of the *Incorruptible* that an organised and precise system of republican celebrations was first conceived and, most importantly, implemented. Through the law of 3 Brumaire, Year IV (25 October 1795), dedicated to public instruction, French representatives established a comprehensive system of no less than seven national festivals to be observed annually in each canton of the Republic:

> Celle de la Fondation de la République, le 1er vendémiaire; celle de la Jeunesse, le 10 germinal; celle des Epoux, le 10 floréal; celle de la Reconnaissance, le 10 prairial; celle de l'Agriculture, le 10

14 Even before the official approval of the constitutional text, Representative Jean-Philippe Garran expressed his outrage during the session on 27 July 1795: "Pour moi, bien loin de craindre que le pouvoir exécutif n'ait pas assez d'indépendance sous ce rapport dans votre constitution, et qu'il ne soit trop facilement accusé, je crains bien qu'investi, comme il sera, de tant de moyens de se faire *des créatures*, il n'échappe souvent à des condamnations justes, et même à l'accusation" (*Gazette Nationale, ou le Moniteur Universel*, 2 agosto 1795; italics added).

15 The capacity of images to symbolically cement and institute a new social order was carefully considered from the earliest days of the French Revolution. As stated by Mazeau (2018, 14-15): "Redoublant les grandes collections de portraits politiques qui se constituent dès 1789, les fêtes et leurs images permettent d'habituer le regard aux visages des nouveaux fondés de pouvoir et, parfois de les reconnaître. Elles exercent donc un rôle fondateur dans l'établissement du nouveau régime représentatif, fondé sur une nouvelle culture visuelle de la reconnaissance physique du charisme politique, tout en explorant les porosités entre célébrité et popularité".

> messidor; celle de la Liberté, les 9 et 10 thermidor; celle des Vieillards, le 10 fructidor.[16] (*Collection générale des décrets* 1795, 100)

We can observe the reemergence of the reversal of roles between those who held and those who wielded sovereign power, a topic to which we had previously directed our attention. It was through these festivals that the new revolutionary order sought to present itself to the French people. By evoking astonishment and appreciation for their grandeur, these festivals aimed to symbolise the implicit endorsement and approval of the elusive yet pivotal public opinion.

Within this context, it fell upon the Directory once again to assume the predominant and visually striking role during public celebrations. Even prior to the individual ceremonies, this choice had been established within the constituent assembly, where the at least symbolic subservience of the legislature to the executive authority was unmistakable. In fact, Articles 72 and 167 of the constitutional text stated:[17]

> Le Corps législatif n'assiste à aucune cérémonie publique, et n'y envoie point de députations.
> […]
> Le Directoire est accompagné de sa garde dans les cérémonies et marches publiques où il a toujours le premier rang. (*Constitution du 5 Fructidor an III*, artt. 72, 167)

The stark contrast between the 'transparency' exhibited by the legislators and the flamboyance displayed by the directors could not have been more conspicuous. In addition to the symbolic components, a precise and rigid ceremonial framework, reminiscent of the much-maligned Old Regime, was also revived. This revolutionary etiquette allocated specific positions to each public office during processions and public parades.

When we shift our focus from the numerous theoretical provisions to the actual unfolding of these grandiose republican celebrations,

16 Three additional festivities were subsequently introduced: the anniversary of the king's death (stipulated by the law of 23 Nivôse, Year IV); the commemoration of the fall of the Bastille and the end of the monarchy (both specified by the law of 10 Thermidor, Year IV). On 13 Pluviôse, Year VI, the annual celebration of the sovereignty of the people was decreed (to be observed on 30 Ventôse) and on 2 Fructidor, Year VI the annual celebration of 18 Fructidor was established. Finally, it's worth noting occasional festivities stemming from exceptional events, such as the public funeral held for General Hoche on 10 Vendémiaire, Year VI (1 October 1797). It is important to acknowledge that Robespierre, drawing from a prior report by Mathieu, had already outlined a calendar featuring four annual public celebrations during his renowned speech on 18 Floréal, Year II (7 May 1794). However, the events of 9 Thermidor and the fall of his own creator did not allow the project to be fully realised.

17 See Godechot, Faupin 2018.

it becomes evident that the visual and symbolic prominence of the five directors consistently remained a central concern for the organisers. Among these celebrations, this concern was most pronounced in the one that served as a reminder to French citizens of the victory achieved by the three directors (Barras, Reubell, and La Révellière-Lépeaux) over monarchical intrigues. This is the celebration that, in the words of Mona Ozouf, represented 'the quintessential manifestation of executive power': the festival of 18 Fructidor.[18]

As expected, the directives issued by the central government emphasised the symbolic and visual significance of the Directory during the celebration. On this exceptional occasion, the members of the Directory were authorised to don the distinguished *grand costume*. This attire consisted of an elegant blue gown and a nacarat cloak, both embellished with intricate gold embroidery, along with a fine silk sash, vest, and plumed hat. This attire, in and of itself, conveyed to the spectators, and by extension to the populace, the impression of the Republic's power and grandeur.

If France and the French Nation were to assume a visage for this particular occasion, it could only be that of the President of the Supreme Executive Body. In the Program for the First Anniversary of 18 Fructidor, drafted on the 8th day of the month (25 August 1798) by the Minister of the Interior and former Director François de Neufchâteau, the absolute centrality of the symbolic leader of post-Thermidorian France is readily evident:

> Le 18 Fructidor, à six heures du matin, une salve d'artillerie annoncera la Fête. Cette salve sera répétée, le même jour, à midi. Les cérémonies de la Fête seront exécutées l'après-midi dans le *Champ-de-Mars*. […] À quatre heures de l'après-midi, *le Directoire exécutif* et les Ministres, les Ambassadeurs et Agents des puissances étrangères, les Autorités et Administrations qui auront été convoquées, sortiront de la maison du Champ-de-Mars pour aller prendre place sur l'amphithéâtre élevé autour de l'Autel de la Patrie. […] À l'arrivée du Directoire et du Cortège sur l'amphithéâtre, le Conservatoire de musique exécutera une symphonie. *Le Président du Directoire* prononcera un discours, après lequel le Conservatoire exécutera le chant *du 18 Fructidor*. Ensuite *le Directoire*, précédé des Ministres et le l'État-major, descendra vers l'Obélisque, ôtera des mains de l'Hypocrisie le Livre de la Constitution, le portera en triomphe, et le posera, ouvert, sur un cippe placé au centre de l'Autel de la Patrie.[19]

18 Cf. Ozouf 1976, 219.

19 De Neufchâteau 1798, 1-5, italics added.

Figure 2 Philippe Joseph Maillart, *Grand costume du Directoire exécutif: «Le Directoire exécutif est le dépositaire du pouvoir de la nation. Il est la première des autorités constituées, celle qui surveille toutes les autres».* Collection de Vinck. Un siècle d'histoire de France par l'estampe, 1770-1870, vol. 49

4 Conclusions: The 'Unfathomable' People

On both theoretical and legal fronts, as well as in practical and experimental terms, it was the responsibility of the Directory to represent the newly established French Republic, both domestically and internationally. As illustrated by the examples provided, holding the iconographic monopoly of power became indispensable for fulfilling this role. It was only by visually presenting and flaunting its magnificence that the revolutionary state could instil in its citizens and allies the respect due to a powerful, stable, and firmly rooted political entity. In this sense, it can even be argued that the role the Directory had to assume in the tumultuous years leading up to Napoleon's rise (which would usher in a new and unprecedented era of interplay between image and power) was part of a mechanism largely beyond its control, with the Directory serving as a pivotal, albeit temporary, component.

Ascribing the intricate system of visual power representation (of which we have been able to offer only a few albeit significant examples here) solely to the efforts of the directors would be to burden their responsibilities excessively and ultimately overestimate the

capabilities of individuals who were periodically elected and at times replaced within a matter of months. The reconfiguration not only of the image but, first and foremost, of the imaginary of power, is indeed a complex undertaking. It involves various personalities, both as individuals and as part of collectives, who contributed to it, often in a somewhat unconscious manner. This process included French representatives who sought a distinctive attire to set them apart from the common crowd, constituent deputies who responded to this call by introducing specific regulations into what would become the longest-lasting institutional order of the French Revolution, and commentators, publicists, and journalists who, during the same months when the groundwork was being laid for the new public order, acted as advocates for this iconic representational endeavour.

Within this framework, we must not overlook another pivotal actor, seemingly reduced to the role of a recipient of this effort to visually affirm power but, upon closer examination, an active participant and influencer in turn. While the symbolic trappings that public authorities adopted in the wake of Robespierre's downfall (particularly the Directory) gained significance through their presentation to the French people, the latter did not simply passively receive this imagery.

As we mentioned at the outset, the revolutionary era also inaugurated a new phase in the legitimisation of power, which could no longer be divorced from the demonstration of its popular origins, the ultimate source of all authority. While not all power could be directly wielded by the people, all authority had to, to varying extents, originate from and be traced back to a unique source. Consequently, even the acquired visual splendour of political officeholders had to be nothing more than a reflection of the mandating subject. Thus, in the midst of the constituent work, Boissy d'Anglas could symbolically declare:

> C'est dans la dignité des magistrats qui brille la majesté d'un peuple. […] La gravité, la dignité, la parure décente du magistrat, disposent les esprits au respect et à l'obéissance. (*Gazette Nationale, ou le Moniteur Universel*, 1 July 1795).

It was not sufficient, therefore, merely to hold power and exhibit its authority; it was imperative to continuously demonstrate the connection that one's position maintained with the most significant tribunal of the century: *l'opinion publique*. Thus, during the few but significant years under examination, we observe the deployment of various means and instruments, both old and new, to publicly reaffirm the relationship between power, the people, and authority.

The main subject, the formal source of all public power, inevitably occupied the focal point of systematic efforts in education and 'moralisation'. While these endeavours aimed at the noble objective of aligning French customs with the standards of the new public

institutions, they were not exempt from pursuing intentions linked to specific propaganda goals. Public celebrations, in this context, assumed paramount significance as the ultimate expression of an 'aesthetic ritualisation of power' destined to endure for decades and centuries to come. Their primary role was to illustrate how a precise political order intended to present and offer itself to the community through imagery, which, even before it was respected, needed to be visually recognised as the new dominant authority.

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