

Play, Reality, and Fiction: Toward a Theoretical and Methodological Approach to the Festival Framework¹

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Festivals create within their particular settings a mobile and ambivalent world of shifting realities which present contrary and conflicting aspects. This article will describe and dissect the ethnographic complexity of the festive movement in an attempt to uncover the main constraints governing it.

To characterize the time-space of the festival, we shall use the concept of "frame" as defined by Erving Goffman: "I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them: frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify" (Goffman, 1974: 10-11). We must therefore determine the principles of organization and interpretation specific to the festive framework. To accomplish this, we must bear in mind that according to Goffman a frame has a dual status, being both subjective and objective: "Given their understanding of what it is that is going on, individuals fit their actions to this understanding and ordinarily find that the ongoing world supports this fitting. These organizational premises — sustained both in the mind and in activity — are called the frame of the activity" (Goffman, 1974: 247). A frame derives heuristic importance from its susceptibility to incessant keying or transformations. The transformations create the different layers or laminations of the activity concerned, thereby mediating the relationship of a general frame to a particular social situation.

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Although most observers admit that the festive movement really exists, few escape the theoretical temptation to study it by a lateral approach. They are thus prevented from developing a true understanding of the internal dynamics of its rituals and patterns of behavior. In the opening section, we will first discuss two extreme types of these theoretical temptations — that of the celebration festival and that of the transgression festival — and criticize theories that have been built on them. We will then formulate the main axes of our own theoretical treatment of the festival as an interstitial time-space.

Our research is based on ethnographic data concerning the Binche carnival held in Belgium on Shrove Tuesday, which was observed by the author in 1985, 1986, and 1987. In the second section, we shall study it as a typical example of the festive movement.

CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF FESTIVAL THEORIES

Whether we are concerned with the celebration or the transgression festival, Durkheim's works, in particular *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1954), have been the source for interpretations which fail to see the true specificity of the festive framework.

The Celebration Festival

In the French school of sociology, theories of the festival have been associated with analyses of the sociology of religion. Following Durkheim, for whom a feast day provides an opportunity for a community to celebrate and extol itself (Durkheim, 1954), who stressed the repetition of a "unique mythical fact" in a festival, either by a physical presence or by commemoration (Hubert, 1919: LXIII), Isambert adopted the notion of "celebration" defined as a "symbolic valorization" or an "insistence on what must not be left in shadow" (Isambert, 1982: 159-160). Yet how can we encapsulate the whole series of festive behaviors into such an exclusive concept? Even if it is valid only for religious feastsdays, this definition does not take into account the mixtures of festive phenomena such as celebration and enjoyment. Is not the ceremonial dimension itself a playful one? What is the role of amusement sometimes generated by the ceremony itself? Is it to detract attention from the aim of the festival proper? Does the protocol of the ceremony necessarily conflict with spontaneous fun? The aspect of enjoyment may also be subject to rules and regulations and even

codified. What, then, is the relationship between ceremonial and enjoyment?

Is it relevant to apply the theory of symbolic valorization to the festival? Is it excessive to detect in the emphasis on valorization a sliding of attention from the order of the signifier to the signified, insisting on the latter in relation to concrete realities of effectuation? Thus, we see re-emerge in sociology one of the basic qualities of Western metaphysics, namely, a dangerous exteriority of the signifier, except when it is subservient to a plenitude of the signified. Just as the Saussurean correspondence between signifier and signified, a strict correspondence like the front and back of a sheet of paper, is an outcome of this metaphysic, so semiotic research based on the objective form of rituals overlooks the impact of the richly elaborated festive signifier system and its concrete modalities of implementation. When studying "folklore" festivals based on local tradition, instead of defining the dynamic specificity of folkloric culture, this type of research is in danger of arriving at a very limited conception. It emphasizes the festival's loss of magnetism in an urban context, as compared with its original rural setting. It views the urban festival as a mere entertainment instead of the mythical act accomplished by traditional communities. Without denying that ritual is a serious phenomenon, could not the idea that a symbol induces multiple meanings be based on the same epistemological postulate (Turner, 1973)? Without entirely refuting this proposal, it seems obviously incapable of, by itself, accounting for the superabundance of festive signifiers characteristic of carnivals. Thus, a festival will entail both a surplus of signifieds, through a process of connotations and polysemic references, and a surplus of signifiers, involving a specific rhetorical configuration which must be identified (Babcock, 1974, 1978).

The Transgression Festival

Viewed as a celebration, the festival is examined in a frame too specific to capture all of its behavioral features. As a transgression, however, it is no longer defined by a specific frame, but by a series of behaviors that seem to elude any ritual rule. French sociology of the turn of the century doubtless played the key part in working out these theoretical approaches, with Durkheim being once again the central figure.

Carrying on the sociological tradition of Bonald, Saint-Simon, and Comte, extolling the community as opposed to individualism (Nisbet, 1966), Durkheim identified foundations for social organization in the "elementary forms" of aboriginal Australian societies. A generation later, after the First World War and the rise of Nazism and Communism, the College de

Sociologie preferred to study human activities leading to unity (Jamin, 1980), even adding the militant ambition of creating a “moral community” whose regenerative rites would restore “to society a sacred credit” (Caillois, 1959). In this context, the carnival was regarded — beyond all sociological positivism — as a symbolic necessity subsuming in its essence the communal and sacred principles with which to attack the values of a technocratic society geared to production, the individual, and the secular.

For Durkheim, as for Caillois, the festive process thus consists in a destructive movement. It generates a collective excitement that frees society from its everyday ups and downs, engaging the social substance on its sacred substrate. The vocabulary used by Durkheim — and also by Caillois — highlights the destructive process, even to the extent of neglecting all submission to the sacred order. In describing the corrobories or religious ceremonies, the Australian carnivals, Durkheim emphasizes “an extraordinary degree of exaltation,” “unruly passions,” “uncontrolled movements,” “violent gestures, cries, veritable screams,” “a deafening noise,” “a general free-for-all” . . . (Durkheim, 1954). He goes so far as to deny any limits to festive behaviors — “an ordered tumult (a carnival) remains a tumult,” “popular festivals mean that the limit between the licit and the illicit disappears from sight.” Between the non-tumult (humdrum days) and tumult (exceptional days), Durkheim overlooks the specificity of the ordered tumult (carnival) within its own limits and its own interstitial ambivalence, which he reduces to tumult.

Transgression festival theories situate the festival in an almost exclusively “serious” space-time in radical opposition to everyday life, in a realm of antithetic behavior. This conception is based on a teleological explanation of rituals in which the festival is portrayed as reinforcing established society. The antithetic behavior of the festival is said to destroy social convention in order to reinforce it. Thus, the festival is displaced from its proper logic, that of ritual, rules and regulations, play and ambivalence.

Yet, besides or beyond any “anti” aspect, is not the festival perhaps situated in an interval with a reality of its own? This interval could define the interstitial nature of the carnival. The carnival is situated in the interstices of everyday life, between two classes of behavior (reality and fiction, order and disorder) without being equivalent to either. The festive interval thus permits behavior which, though differing from everyday life, does not signify a break from it. Festival behavior in fact presupposes a transfer of elements and relationships with characteristics of everyday experience. The constituents of everyday life are transformed and manipulated in various ways while at the same time being subjected to the

specific framework of the festival context, with its own underlying rules of interpretation and organization.

The festival constitutes, then, an interstitial space-time in the social system. Never perfectly self-adjusted, it constantly creates new approximations and shifts using a series of historical elements and heterogeneous subsystems. Through social play, always a source of instability and vulnerability, the festival occupies a ritualized niche, as though, in its objective logic, it can confirm the non-coincidence of society with itself and give a standardized expression to social fluidity. The view of the festival as an interstitial frame will provide the theoretical foundation for our ethnographic description and analysis of the festive movement. Using this perspective, we will observe the complete set of its processes. The behavior involved will be characterized by its median position, ambivalent nature, dialectical relationship to everyday life, and by the need for rules and limitations to prevent it from transgressing beyond the space-time allotted to it.

THE BINCHE CARNIVAL, OR THE COMPLEX PLAY OF TRANSFORMATIONS WITHIN THE FESTIVE FRAME

We must now try to define in more detail, with reference to the Binche carnival, the whole set of forms of festive behavior, identify the rules determining the direction of movement of the carnival, and analyze the exact nature of the ambivalence characterizing it. Ideally, our approach does not emphasize discovering ethnographic facts in the ethnological mode, but rather resolving them in an analytical manner. We will attempt to present our data and analyze them in clear language, without neglecting any part of the observed reality, while yet respecting the limits of an article.

The Primary Framework of the Carnival

“God is a Binche man,” one often hears proclaimed at Binche. This small town of less than ten thousand inhabitants finds difficulty in concealing its great ethnocentric pride. It appears to perpetuate a relative geographical-historical autonomy, while also treasuring its past by a withdrawal into isolation. Far from the important axes of communication, and safely enclosed within its ramparts, its inhabitants never fail to evoke the highlights of its parochial past. Rather than Maria of Hungary and her stay in Binche or the visit of Emperor Charles V, it is with Gille, the hero of a very ancient local carnival, that the destiny of the town is perpetually

associated. Each year on Shrove Tuesday, the whole population of Binche takes delight in being (or admiring) Gille (Piette, 1988).

As we have seen, the festival is merely a transfer to a separate space-time of an everyday activity more or less transformed, or as Goffman would say, "keyed." As far as the Binche carnival is concerned, this means that ethnocentric pride in the town and its relative autonomy are highlighted. Yet, as the same behavior and the same gestures are repeated year after year, complying with the same rules on which the actors do not *appear* to depend, we shall consider the carnival as a primary frame and, first of all, define its organizational principles. The primary framework is that which renders "what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene, into something that is meaningful" (Goffman, 1974: 21). Thus, we seek to identify the strips of activity which, in the eyes of the town-dwellers, transpose everyday experience into the basic canvas of the carnival. These activities are marked by a progression of Gilles towards a unifying structure, which can be perceived at three particular moments during the day. They are the ideal rites of the carnival, i.e., its pure ritual form, freed of its rhetorical configuration and its concrete modalities of effectuation. Thus presented, the ideal rite provides a privileged center of interest for structural or semiotic studies.

Dawn

Those Binchois wishing to play the role of Gilles dress up accordingly (the costume is described below). Then, with family and a drummer, each leaves home in search of a neighboring Gille who will welcome the group with champagne. With their respective families, the two set off to find another Gille and the same ceremonial is then repeated in his house. The various small groups of Gille assembling progressively all meet up at the top of the town in their carnival "society" from eight o'clock onwards. This ritual phase takes place on the outskirts of the town, or in the homes of the Gilles, while it is still dark or in the half light of dawn. This marks the first stage of the unifying structure of the carnival: between each Gille and his family and friends who help him to carry out his ritual task.

Morning

The "societies" all descend, one after the other, toward the central square. On their way, the Gilles offer from time to time a ramon (a shortened broom) to individual friends they recognize in the crowd, who give it back with a kiss. From ten o'clock onwards, the Gilles put on their masks.

Before entering the town hall, where the burgermaster, surrounded by his town counsellors, presents a medal to the oldest Gilles, each society marches around the main square. This final phase marks the creation of the society of Gilles, formed of small groups upon their arrival at the center of the town, where they remain almost permanently outside the houses. The creation of the society is made official by the wearing of masks and the reception at the town hall, where the burgermaster confirms the ritual mission of the Gilles.

Evening

The societies of Gilles gather together in a procession which goes from Battignies Square (in a district of Binche) to the main square, where all the societies form a ring. Bengal lights create an intimate atmosphere before the final firework display, when the motto of Binche is lit up: “plus outre” (meaning “go forward”). The third stage marks the apotheosis of the ideal structure of the carnival consecrating a union of all the Gilles surrounded by the citizens of Binche.

The Different Transformations of the Primary Framework

To follow our initial project, we must proceed farther with this “semiotic” presentation of the ritual and clarify how the sequences of activities are submitted to several transformations, with different plays making up the general framework of the carnival.

The Play Between Reality and Fiction

The ideal rite, which enables the actor participating in the carnival to accomplish his unifying mission, is duplicated by a secondary rite. By diverging from the linear sequence of the primary rites, the secondary rite allows the actor to do and to be something different from what everyday life prescribes. Someone taking part in the carnival appears to us as a real person (Mr. X, Y, or Z, who lives in the town of Binche and whose face we recognize, who throws a *ramon* to someone and dances around with members of his family . . .). Yet, the person also appears as a character inserted in a sort of secondary fiction with the following main elements, regarding both costume and gesture:

1. The vestimentary presentation of the Gille as a fictional character assimilated to a hybrid clown. Brightly colored and covered with decorative

baubles, Gille's costume is characterized by contradictory aspects. It is an artificial expression of a hybrid of parts drawn from different spatial and/or temporal contexts. Thus elements determined by a rural context, such as clogs, linen cloth, the broom, a reed basket, and small bells, are mingled with numerous signs of wealth and prestige belonging to the urban context, such as a hat with ostrich feathers, lace, a ruff, pleated ribbons (even on clogs), the mask representing a *bourgeois* of the XIXth century, with waxed moustachios in the style of Napoleon III, and felt decorations representing stars, lions, and national flags.

2. The circular infinity of the ritual characterized by the dance of Gille. The same dance is repeated throughout the day and night to a particular rhythm. This choreographic insistence, with endless repeats, creates an illusion of non-time, and is involved in a circular movement inherent to the domain of gesture. It is without aim or direction, self-centered, and performed for the dancer's pleasure alone.

3. The apparent infinity of Gilles grouped into carnival societies. In 1985, for example, ten exclusively male groups had 687 Gilles, multiplying and thereby magnifying the fictionality of the Gille character.

4. The simultaneous presence of other actors. There is a juxtaposing and mingling of different, even incompatible, types of actors, taking attention away from Gille. Besides so-called "fancy" types among Binche people, the Oriental prince, the Sailor, the Peasant or Pierrot, there are "foreign" actors, including numerous tourists and students from various Belgian universities, taking advantage of the carnival's neutral ground accessible to everyone.

With the presences of these elements, the Binche carnival places Gille in balance between reality and fiction, between the unifying import of his mission and the visual and auditory cacophony of his fictional world, which also entails the decentralizing of the Gille character, through the appearance of a clown, the endless dancing, infinite enumeration, student rollicking, and so forth.

*The Play Between the Times of Action, the Times of Pause,
and the Breaks in the Framework*

The ritual mission, as the essential time of action in the festive framework, will be transformed in a number of ways. Thus it will be:

1. Keyed in the form of a spectacular procession. To attract tourists, the action is commercially appropriated. At the beginning of the afternoon, the societies of Gilles, crowned with expensive ostrich-feather hats, all join in the procession. Leaving from Battignies Square, they arrive at the main

square (and the stage), where they form a ring. The Gilles offer or throw oranges to the public, who are forbidden to throw them back, thus creating a certain animation. The students in particular display their skill in catching the oranges. The spectators crowded on the pavements behind the barriers that delimit the audience, seem to be out of the frame. They appear closer to a state of boredom than complete absorption in the show. Despite high expectations, the tourists do not really understand what is going on and remain outside the show as mere onlookers. Having brought their family "cells" along with them, they have no wish to meet anyone and must put up with being pushed around by the crowds.

2. Interrupted by time-outs taken by the Gilles. During the morning and evening, the Gilles often stop at cafes to drink beer or champagne. During these intervals in the wings, they are no longer playing their role. Yet, they are still careful not to overstep the mark. Inside the cafe, outside on the street, or on the pavement opposite, the Gilles drink up their glasses, smoke cigarettes, and chatter to friends and relations, but maintain the dignity of their role. Furthermore, before and after the procession, while tourists and students wander through the streets, the Gilles, during their pauses at cafes, casually surrounded by friends and relations, form a sort of protection for the "foreign" actors. The Gilles ignore them, behaving as though they are not there. In return, the tourists and students glance at them without staring and do not enter into conversation with them. As soon as midday arrives, the Gilles return home for a copious meal and can completely relax from their mission. Their task is after all strenuous, walking around in clogs, wearing cumbersome costumes, and so forth.

3. Threatened by "breaks in frame." Whereas Gille implies by his costume a prestigious, hieratic, often spellbound attitude, the students may reappropriate Gille's costume in a manner approaching parody. Clothed in simple, loose, even dirty, garments, the students take advantage of the neutral territory of the Binche carnival to launch forth into wild, even riotous dancing, free from all fear of consequences. Scattered all over, their spontaneous movements, not only on the carnival stage but also in the wings, threaten to endanger the Gille's ritual.

Five means are used to reduce sources of unpredictable behavior from the students:

1. Traffic is rerouted away from certain streets near the main square, and many cafes are reserved for students to hold their parties without interruption throughout the day. Along with the park, the thickets, and the ramparts, three cafes on the high street are also reserved for students. In each of these, where more than three thousand glasses are broken or

pinched, all of the furniture (tables, chairs, ceiling lights) is removed to permit riotous dancing.

2. Barriers are set up. During the spectacular procession in the afternoon, the street where the Gilles have their stage is separated from the pavement reserved for outsiders.

3. Special rules, more or less explicit, are followed. Students know that they cannot throw back the oranges without being bombarded in return, just as friends do not disturb the dancing Gilles by giving back the *ramon*.

4. Police intervention. At the head of the procession, police push back the students crowding the high street and central square. In the festival's mixture of play and reality, where physical coercion is banned, but not teasing and banter from the students, the procession could not proceed unhindered without the help of the police.

5. The creation of a buffer-zone. To prevent contact with unpredictable sources of trouble, each Gille's personal territory is extended. It is marked out not only by the noises of bells, clogs, and drums, but above all by the farandoles of relations and friends who dance around or behind the Gilles societies and reinforce their monolithic aspect. When he goes to the start of the procession, Gille is set apart and protected by an accompanying drummer or by his "servants" of the moment, e.g., an orange peddler or hat seller.

The Interplay Between Downkeying and Ludic Retransformation

The downkeying (Goffman, 1974) of the carnival is accomplished by the introduction of elements associated with the reality of everyday life. These elements efface the fictional dimensions of the carnival. However, the overvalorizing elements that, through Gille's symbolic orientation and behavior and the social stakes at play in the carnival, place the carnival in a "beyond" of great seriousness are not only downkeyed, but also reappropriated in a ludic dimension. Thus, two additional strata in the constitution of the carnival's global framework must be examined.

The Overvalorizing Elements

The Symbolic Features of Gilles. The Gilles of Binche participate in a symbolic order with great affective power to mobilize the population of the town. The mobilizing capacity of the key symbolic orientations can be understood in terms of three pairs of items. Each pair is loaded with a positive and negative pole, as follows: past+/future-, interior+/exterior-,

constraint+ / freedom-. The polar valences create a sort of mystification and are manipulated by the organizing committee — Goffman would speak of “fabrication” (Goffman, 1974: 83) — to keep the population in a state of strong affective mobilization in favor of the Gilles. Along the first axis, the Binche carnival is considered a “traditional carnival” and Gille is similar to many dancers participating in ancient European carnivals. “The carnival must remain traditional,” say the Gilles. Certain practices associated with Gille’s costume testify to a desire to fix a number of elements in conformity with the oldest possible historical model. On the second axis, the carnival is valorized for its purely local authenticity, as opposed to commercial “folklore-style” renditions of Gille outside the town. The local valorization of the character implies an “osmosis” between the inhabitants of Binche and their Gille. Along the third axis, Gille is presented as a serious person, whose solemnity resembles that of a “high priest” who can fertilize the earth. Where is the Binchois who does not repeat that Gille’s dance makes the land fertile, that the ramon chases away evil spirits, and that the gift of an orange represents a hopeful offering made to secure even more in return? These are animist interpretations safeguarding the rituals of the carnival by giving them a meaning. It is therefore logical that Gille should submit to different rules during the exercise of his ritual.

The Behavior of the Gilles. The overvalorizing elements are also found in the behavioral logic of the Gilles under specific rules set up by a local association. Thus, Gille must respect the rhythm of the dance steps and his costume, he must avoid drinking too much or letting his hair show below his cap at the back of the neck, his mask must not cover his forehead, he must not munch chips in the street or dance with a woman in a cafe. Gille should also keep his hands out of his pockets, refrain from leaving his group without being accompanied by a drummer, and not go outside the town. In a case of serious infringements of these rules, a Gille can be excluded from the carnival. “Commissaires” are appointed by each society to make sure that all is in order. In fact, the global pride of the Binchois in their Gilles means there is no difficulty in conforming to the agreed standards and rituals rules. Gille’s deferent presentation is marked by some particular signs. With the monolithic society of dancing Gilles, physical contacts (apart from lightly brushing up against someone) and conversations are rare. During periods of relaxation, when the group is interrupted and the Gilles disperse among their friends and relations, they always behave correctly. When we tried to photograph a Gille holding a glass of beer (champagne would have looked better) and another one smoking a cigarette, the one rapidly put down his glass and the other stubbed out his cigarette. Gille can embrace a friend he recognizes in the crowd, but he must throw him or her a ramon and leave his group to give a friendly kiss. The distances

separating one Gille from another in their rounds are also significant. It is not actually the *ramon* or the (empty) basket of oranges which unites the Gilles. Gille's ideal dance is stiff and he must not hop about too much. His choreographic dignity is further enhanced by certain features of his costume (lace, pleated ribbons, heraldic ornaments, a hat with ostrich feathers, a double hump, the amplified sound of small bells).

The Social Stakes. Gille was no doubt a character issuing from the popular theatre of the Commedia Dell'arte, which gives him his appearance of a foolish coward. But thanks to the industrial prosperity of Binche in the nineteenth century, Gille has undergone a transformation, progressively acquiring his present aspect. Today, he retains a special manner and, in the eyes of the local population, a prestigious dimension. These qualities situate him in direct descent not only from early European dancers, but also from the industrial middle class of Binche. When the carnival became organized at the end of the nineteenth century and began to meet with growing success, how did the other festive characters of the Binche carnival react to the focus on the Gille character? In fact, though wishing to preserve a certain specificity in their clothing, they longed to imitate Gille's garments and gestures. Even today, the costumes of the Sailor, the Oriental Prince, and Pierrot or the Peasant are a mimetic reappropriation of Gille's costume. For example, the Oriental Princes, who are in fact ordinary working-class men from the suburbs, are looked down upon by Gilles, who consider them uneducated and not people to meet socially. This attitude persists despite their desire to be assimilated to Gille: "The Oriental Princes are indeed Gilles. There is no difference between them, they make the same gestures," you often hear people say on the outskirts of the town. Likewise, even the Peasants, whose role, now played by children from the local school, probably harks back to the nineteenth century participation of peasants, wear not only signifiers of a rural context, such as smocks, a game pouch, a bandeau, and a ruff, but also a hat with drooping feathers (though not with as many feathers as Gille's hat). Patent leather shoes may signify their assimilation to the urbanized character of the Gilles. Even among the Gilles themselves, a real hierarchy exists among the different societies, with their various connotations of prestige according to seniority, the socio-professional categories of their presidents, their budgets, and their more or less firm respect for the ideal model of Gille. For this reason, rivalry, jealousy, and tension arise among the societies, sometimes leading to a new group being formed. Such elements of conflict appear to be a complete break from the frame created by the fictional keying of the carnival's primary framework. They can be observed in particular during the preparation for the carnival, for example, when two societies cross in the street and each starts to play its drums as loud as it can so that the other

will make mistakes. It is as though this were the only way in which each of the "prestigious" groups can prove its superiority. During the carnival of 1984, a late night encounter between two societies, no doubt both somewhat drunk, led to a skirmish with blows and insults.

There are other signs which help us to distinguish between the more or less prestigious societies as well. Some societies can be seen on Shrove Tuesday enjoying a delicious breakfast of oysters, usually with each member wearing his plumed hat. The diners belong to the organizing committees and are more in search of new business contacts than anxious to escape from humdrum life. Other men, more simply dressed, very likely find it difficult not to drink too much.

The Ludic Transformation

Although the festive framework is specific in embracing downkeyed elements that tend to efface its ludic fictionality, it also encourages a ludic re-appropriation of these elements. For instance, the ideological amplification of Gille, symbol of a collective identity acknowledged by the entire population of Binche, is integrated in a popular discourse of the simplest kind. The carnival does not require an actor to have a deep understanding of his character. "Gille is an ancient character" and that is all that needs to be known. That is the message that the carnival must put over. This is a fine way of achieving the ludic retransformation of a "fabrication" (Goffman, 1974) here a self-mystification.

The process of overvalorizing a festive element and re-appropriating it on another, more or less distant level occurs at the "juridical" level. Thus, groups of Gilles present themselves as "societies," as though they constituted a microcosm of the social relations in the town. Has exclusion, the main sanction for the Binche groups, already been applied? The force of the festive groups resides no doubt above all in their voluntary participation, which entails abiding by the rules. The disciplinary framework functions like a set of simple directives to "socialize" the young and the new residents. It imparts the spirit of loyalty to tradition in removal from all outside influences and confirms the dignity of Gille. But this valorizing does not prevent the Gilles from having a lot of fun, dancing, throwing oranges, and relaxing in the cafes. Yet, within a certain latitude, the Gilles always follow the rules. Likewise, the fact that Gille focuses on the choreographic movement, can at certain moments shift attention from the traditional character. Some Gilles show a disengaged attitude while dancing, with such out-of-frame activities as smiles and conversation, even though in the evening they will put their whole hearts into lively dancing.

Yet, they always remember to behave with a decency worthy of the character they are acting.

We have already pointed out the social stakes. Gille, who combines the historical dignity of the dancer of renewal, the social wealth of the nineteenth century bourgeois, and the imaginative fascination of his costume, poses as a symbolic value and reference model. He is at the source of a unanimist discourse organized during the festival around a symbolic surplus which seems to remove him from everyday life. At the same time, he suggests a hierarchy among the "societies." The most extreme hierarchical differences are possible at the carnival. The one between the Gilles and the Oriental Princes is clearly affirmed. The tournament of loud drumming which took place between two societies in 1984 is proof of the intensity of hierarchical feeling. But the festive framework, while creating extreme attitudes, can also produce an intermingling of social classes and even an effacing of differences. The Gilles of lower social rank can be compensated by the morning's grand reception at the town hall or the possibility of sporting a brilliant costume. This is the case with the Oriental Princes and numerous Gilles whose finery confuses the social identities. Yet, more remarkable still is the absence of consequences when a fight occurs between Gilles. It is immediately minimized and obscured from memory once the carnival is over.

Money is also a means of overvalorizing the festive practices. At Binche, money spent at the carnival is contained within an almost closed circuit, limited to the town. Individual spending, especially by the Gilles,² brings profits to the local fancy-dressmakers and to local cafes. The spending by "foreigners" enables the tradesmen to support the Gilles societies. The astonishing conjunction of spending by individuals within the festive framework constitutes the financial challenge of the carnival. The purposes of this spending are diverse; some buy for ostentation (Gille wants to make a fine impression); others spend to attract money (according to the logic of the spectacle); and many spend on entertainment (especially on drink). But the financial challenge, too, can only be understood in relation to its reversibility as well as the explosion of the festive practices on the day of the carnival. The spending proceeds as though the sudden change from a serious life style will not be followed by any dire consequences. Gille's costume, particularly the plumed hat of which he is so proud, may be crumpled and splashed in the festive mob. Yet, the crowd of spectators, unaware of its significance, may hardly notice. So festive money hangs in the balance,

²On an average, 25,000 Belgian francs are spent for the whole carnival, with around 10,000 Belgian francs going for Gilles' costumes alone. One dollar is worth about 35 Belgian francs.

being a valorizing challenge and also revealing the vanity of the festive system.

CONCLUSION

“This is a festival, then!” The carnival involves a shifting away from the everyday hub of life. It detaches one of its expressions from the everyday and reframes the meaning in another context. Thus, the carnival appears as a regulated challenge to established limits, a special play authorizes an intermingling of ordinarily incompatible themes and types of behavior.

Festive behavior oscillates between two realms and is situated “between the two” in a gaping interval on which its specificity is based. Neither real nor fictional, ludic nor serious, structured nor disordered, being one and its opposite without ever being either, festive behavior implies, in this to-and-from movement between two limits, a referential ambiguity and tension. The festive domain is thus in a constant dialectic association with the everyday.

In the festive practice, Gille is neither a dancer of renewal extolling the everyday, entrusted with a mission of verification, nor a purely fictional character going back to some obscure reference system. Expressing the serious import of the multiple stakes in the carnival (symbolic, social, hierarchic) while also invoking them in a ludic order, Gille balances between gestural constraint and the practice of distance. As a notable figure of town life situated in the interstices of the social structure, the reveller expresses the ambivalence and confusion of the usual categories. At the same time, he calls for “reflection” on their limits. As though continually putting on a brake to safeguard the contradictory character of the carnival, he forestalls any break from the festive framework by one or another of its anti-thetic attitudes. The vestimentary transfiguration of the reveller integrates him in a realm beyond seriousness, while at the same time reuniting in him the diverse contrary or conflicting behavior which he imposes on the festive context. It is this complicated balance that ensures the festival’s conformity to the rules. In such a realm beyond seriousness, there is no longer a question of associating the carnival to a negativity implying a regenerated positivity or a radically formal negativity. Rather, it highlights the development in the carnival play of a poetic negativity, already interwoven with a positivity. It thus maintains a dialogue between the two.

Based on the methodological tools presented by Goffman in his *Frame Analysis*, this article has attempted to decipher the ethnographic complexity and subtlety of the play of frames within the festive framework.

Perhaps the main reason for the success of this type of festivity lies in the behavioral play. In any case, the formal grammar reconstituted here from a festive experience is worth comparing with studies of other more or less similar festivals. It should also be compared with other kinds of phenomena for which a Goffmanian analysis is likely to prove heuristically valuable in describing and explaining experience. In particular, the concepts used here should give impetus to an interesting analysis of photographic material concerning ethnographic situations.

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