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TO BE OR NOT TO BE IN A RITUAL: ESSAY ABOUT THE MITIGATED PRESENCE

During research, there are moments when the need is felt for taking a reflexive look back at work accomplished so far. This experience can be quite stimulating. It involves explaining data on which more or less light has been shed and reflecting on the epistemological or interpretative foundations of analyses. My first fieldwork was popular festivals in Belgium. The observations and analyses of these festivals have always had an effect upon my later researches, especially upon my theory of rituals and the details of everyday life. This paper tells the interrogations and discoveries that this moment has allowed me to make: paradox, ambivalence, oscillation, indetermination, play and what I have called: the minor mode of reality. About these secular rituals, I propose a reading through the small details. I invite the readers to read this paper as if it also told about all the everyday life. That is why I say that the "folklore" is a very good anthropological laboratory.

1. FOLKLORE AS ANTHROPOLOGICAL LABORATORY

Festivals are an ambivalent world which leaves room for fluid realities with contrary or contradictory aspects. Over a span of three centuries, French literature presents, among many others, two typical profiles of the festive movement. The authors, François Rabelais and Raymond Roussel, have both a very pronounced sympathy for the theme of the festival. The former accumulates descriptions of festivals, banquets and other enjoyable occasions. Mikhail Bakhtin sees in the carnival way of live one of the key axes to understand Rabelais' works[1]. The latter author makes the carnival the framework of

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[1] M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, New York 1984.

a novel in verse (*La Doublure*) and of two other descriptions in verse[2]. These episodes enable to specify a few of the formal constraints underlying the festive movement.

Rabelais starts with a prologue inviting the reader to come and eat and drink[3]. It was written, according to the author himself, when he was drunk and animated by giant forms. The work of Rabelais stands out as an insinuating moment and a perpetual play with the official and serious principles of the medieval world. But rather than their radical overthrowal, Rabelais expresses a playful combination of the significant established systems (religious, political) with others (popular) and creates an effect of confusion. In these "Propos des Bien Yvres", the alcoholic exuberance of the conversation causes the explosion, through the enumeration of various jokes, of all the syntactical "chains" and, by this dizzy storm of words, creates a strong impression of gaping. Popular idioms, vulgar, religious or Latin expressions play on a double or treble meaning. The relationships between speakers are constantly interrupted. This dialogue, with its brief exchanges, exclamations and interjections, is the literary equivalent of the festive movement.

It is also through an apparent absence of construction that Gaspard and Roberte, the two protagonists of "La doublure" flee from their daily wandering into the Nice carnival. But behind this festive vagueness, there are rhetoric figures. The oxymoron, a stylistic figure combining two antithetical signs, is the essential element. Mention must be made of the playful transposition of the "petty bourgeois" class myths in floats and cardboard heads. The content of an idea is broken in an ambivalent representation. Many identities are split: the false inconsolable widow, the fireman who drinks water, the begging usurer. There are other rhetorical figures: first of all the hyperbole increasing the size of characters and objects and making the ordinary world drift into comedy. The "tooth pick men" as big as the "pumpkin men" are there alongside a float of babies with grotesque hairy nurslings. There is also the repetition implying the multiplicity and the enumeration of the characters, as if the 'thousand pierrots" or the "thousand dominoes" had renounced through this infinite duplication all individuality.

This literary detour invites to consider the festival, from a twin point of view, as a mode of meaning and a process of communication. In both cases, it is the play and the challenge, semiotic or interactional, which appear to characterise the festive movement. I have chosen to illustrate these points with two secular festivals – as different as possible – which are still celebrated today in Belgium. First of all the carnival of Binche is marked by its chief character, the Gille. Binche is a small town of less than ten thousand inhabitants who

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[2] R. Roussel, *La doublure*, Paris 1963; *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres*, Paris 1963.
[3] F. Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, London 2006, p. 11 and followings.

are pride of the "hero of the carnival". The other festival, a political ritual, is Labour Day celebrated in many countries throughout the world on the 1st of May. Its origin goes back to the general strike in the USA, instigated by the trade-unions on 1st May 1986. The festival of labour, which officially began in 1890, was reappropriated by the political forces of the left (in Belgium chiefly by the Socialist Party) and its themes evolved in accordance with the social and economic situations[4].

1.1. PLAYS OF MEANING

Far from an expression or an actualisation of a primordial myth or an event, the rituals of the festival transform it into a signifying system marked by an excess of signs. It is as if the basic theme presented in the form of narrative dramatisation were inserted in a rhetorical structuration putting aside the festive reference. Festivals are not a celebration, but a play with a message.

The "myth" of the Binche Carnival is associated with the origin of the *Gille*. In fact there are two versions. First, the *Gille* is presented as a Castillan lord invited to Binche for the festivals in August 1549 by Mary of Hungary – she sometimes came in Binche – in honor of Charles V. There is also a scholarly speech which presents *Gille*, on the basis of a comparative analysis of the various components of his clothing and his dance, as a high priest celebrating fecundity. But the festive practices of Shrove Tuesday are a "challenge" to the figure of Gille. Their rhetorical configuration creates a movement of secondariness inducing a fictional representation of Gille, even a "nonsense", at several levels: vestimentary presentation of the Gille clothed in heterogeneous attributes (hat with ostrich feathers and clogs, linen cloth and lace, small bells and pleated ribbons) as a hybrid clown but not a serious high priest (figure of oxymoron); circular infinity of the Gille's dance, always the same, during a day and a night (figure of repetition); linear infinity of the number of Gilles in different groups, which deprives him of any referential illusion (figure of enumeration); introduction of discontinuity in the serious dimension of Gille, when they stop many times at local pubs to drink beer or champagne (figure of asyndeton); simultaneous presence of other actors through a juxtaposition of heterogeneous behaviours, not only other Binche carnival groups, but also tourists and students from Belgian universities, who come to drink and to have fun[5].

As for the festival of the 1st May, it is not the oxymoron, but the amplification of political messages, witch structures the rhetorical configuration. Evidence of this is found in the flags (trade union or political), the banners

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[4] A. Piette, *Les jeux de la fête. Rites et comportements festifs en Wallonie*, Paris 1988.
[5] A. Piette, Play, *Reality and Fiction*, „Qualitative Sociology" 15(1992), p. 37-52.

and slogans expressing socialist requests, the speeches made at the end of the procession, etc. This amplifying process, which is not built by precise ritual gestures, is expressed by repetition and enumeration, without denying, as in the carnival, their main reference. However, at the end of the political festival, far from constituting an increase in value of the festive theme, the intentional reactivation of its meaning seems to insert itself in the autonomous field of the sign. Rather than being based on a negation, as in the carnival, it is by putting the signified between brackets that the political festivals function, its referential support finally losing weight, whereas the signifier, endlessly repeating itself, suspends the political message.

On this point, Barbara Babcock's analyses are illuminating[6]. She suggests that "*all* rituals involve a dialogue or alternation between two modes of signification – multi-signifier and multi-signified – both of which differ from our daily, ordinary use of signs. In contrast to the complementarity between signifier and signified characteristic of normal discourse, ritual communication involves *both* an extremely economical and extremely inflated relation of signifiers to signifieds[7]. This view confirms the negative impact of metaphorical experience, mostly forgotten in symbolic studies. Ritual can involve of course "the enactment and transmission of ultimate sacred propositions", but also and especially "the exposure of the ultimately significant to the devastating play of *nonsense*"[8]. It is as if the serious messages or acts could not be pronounced or accomplished outside this "secondary" frame.

1.2. PLAYS OF COMMUNICATION

A comparison with the theatre world, at least in this classical expression, can clarify a few data. In the case of theatrical performance, the dependence of actors on the spectators is strong. How to imagine the success of a play performed without spectators? The theatrical actors deliver their speech in turn in a sustained manner, which is linear, intended for a public whose applause is an indication of reception. The relation between the festive actor and the spectators is much more tenuous. One can even imagine a procession of Gilles and the 1st May without spectators. The festival is characterised by behavioural externality, interstitiality and fluidity.

The behavioural externality is expressed by a multiplicity of situations "outside the frame", different lateralities (small conversation or distraction) which

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[6] B.A. Babcock, *The Novel and Carnival World*, „Modern Languages Notes" 89/6(1974), p. 911-937; B.A. Babcock, Too Many, *Too Few: Ritual Modes of Signification*, „Semiotica", 23(1978), 3/4, p. 147-186.

[7] B.A. Babcock, *Too Many, too few*, p. 296.

[8] *Ibidem*, p. 298.

take place among the festive actors within their procession. The festival permits also a daring copresence of those who exercise the ritual and are likely to have interiorised it – though still keeping a distance – and the others, sometimes excluded, standing behind barriers, looking without looking at the festive procession whose meaning escapes them. In the same way, political festivals multiply the gestures made without any reference to what could be meant, implying a rapid separation between a serious gesture or speech and the ludic atmosphere which immediately follows (cocktail, dinner).

Secondly, the festive frame implies situations of behavioural fluidity. It promotes just as much both boredom or disengagement, and absorption or engagement. The festival is also marked by a sort of misframing. On the one hand, the fictional keying is almost (not really completely) effaced by a few overvaluing practices: social stakes between the groups of Gilles according to the sociocultural status of participants, presence of municipal authorities and policemen in order to protect the Gilles from violent students, Gilles who are a clown-figure dressed in a prestigious costume and forced to comply with certain ritual rules. On the other hand, the fluidity of such serious behaviours again appears in their ludic retransformation. The policemen do not accomplish really strong intervention. The fine and expensive hat of feathers is bespattered, crumpled and almost ignored in the festive atmosphere. In the political festival, behaviours expressing social and economic stages are coupled with some inconsistencies, like the presence of majorettes and rhythm of the bands.

Thirdly, the festive framework is also expressed by behavioural interstitiality, the specific split between reality of the ritual role and its fiction. Face and masque, person and character, the festive participant is never one or the other. The performance of the Gilles is not only penetrated by a keeping one's distance, excluding total engagement in their role but it is also interrupted in the pubs (but without excess), both participating and not participating in the role. As if a wing extending on to the stage or a scene played in the wings, the festival mixes up the distinctions without either perverting the other. As an interstitial space the festival is capable as much as of implying a symbolic exaltation as of stimulating a distance from its message. The Gille is neither the dancer of the renewal exalted by the local speech nor a fictional character pointing to no reference. Expressing the important stakes of the festival, at the same time as he re-appropriates them playfully, the Gille wavers between the constraint of gestures and keeping his distance. In the same perspective, the festival of the 1st May enables socialist militants to assert their role, while suspending distinct social-political consequences until later. Suggesting various concrete methods for creating these "bracketed" roles, the playful atmospheres of the 1st May are important. At the end of the 19th century, there were singing and dancing through the streets; jokes between participants in their Sunday best were myriad in the procession. Today, in search of new meanings, hands in pockets or reading the

newspaper, the husband is accompanied by his wife with the child's pushchair, passing through irregular rows and gaps between the group, all marked by an attitude of expectancy and hesitation.

It is important to note that Raymond Roussel likes to stress the cracks and imperfections of the masks and cardboard heads: plaster peeling off, a sleeve of a domino rolled up, an ill-fitting wig. Similarly, a large blue top-hat, first confused with the dispensing chemist's flask, cannot hide a black hole, a sort of window which allows the actor to guide himself. "It is here", writes Michel Foucault, "that the whole ambiguous nature of the mask is summarised". It not only enables the actor to watch, in particular, the impression he makes on the others, but it also enables the latter to see that it is only a mask. "That minute gap", he continues, "in which the mask collapses, at the same time reveals it fully for inspection and establishes its true being"[9]. It is certainly in this gap that the festive interval and the behavioural instability which it implies are inserted.

Thus, it is not astonishing that the festival implies an incessant laterality on the part of different actors. It is possible here to transpose Grathoff's conclusion to rituals, which "are a mode of interaction, in which inconsistencies arise within specific limits and in line with specific rules […]. Any player plays at these inconsistencies with perfect ease"[10]. These are signifier-gestures : their only value lies in their execution and, practiced without reference to implied signifieds, they vanish without traces and consequences. There are also distant attitudes, expectative behaviours, expressions of boredom and hesitation. Whereas everyday experience is of a natural world, taken for granted and evident, ritual experience, framed in a rhetorically maximised context, is of a cultural world, thus visually arbitrary. Therefore, the rite is an act of reflexivity on everyday life, likely to engender awareness of it by manifesting its social differentiations. But this is precisely where the necessary impact of the ludic and negative context intervenes. For who could imagine a neat clarification of a domain as vulnerable as the hierarchical relations between people or the arbitrariness of power, outside a ludic context? Play and fictions "take place, according to Susan Stewart, on the interface between the conscious and the unconscious […]. This is the movement of nonsense with its impossible context – a context that is unrealisable, that 'no one can stand' precisely because it is overburdened with consciousness"[11]. As well as wakening his consciousness, the ritual frame involves man's passage into the inarticulate, and does so through the particularly of ritual performance which systematically inverts itself into nonperformance, as if metaphor trans-

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[9] M. Foucault, *Raymond Roussel*, Paris 1963, p. 152-153.

[10] R.M. Grathoff, *The Structure of Social Inconsistencies. A Contribution to a Unified Theory of Play, Game and Social Action*, Hague 1970, p. 147.

[11] S. Stewart, *Nonsense. Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature*, Baltimore 1978, p. 86-87.

ported man into a ritual situation between his conscious and unconscious, in a sort of cognitive hesitation revealed by his signifier-gestures or behavioural exteriority. Thus, it seems to me that the wedding festival, the festive context, is not an act of institution, as Bourdieu said[12]. It is instead the newlyweds' "yes", which is performative and act of institution, but not the ritual context. The ritual, surrounding it, constitutes rather a context of secondarisation that consists in not feeling deeply this irreversible dimension. The ritual context plays, secondarises, lightens but does not institute.

In his analyses of the emotional dynamics of ritual, Scheff advances a supplementary idea: that maximal emotional efficiency is attained in a sort of "balance of attention" between recalling a distressing experience connected with a past event and reliving it under new conditions, in a reassuring spatio-temporal context[13]. Three types of distance are possible: underdistance, over-distance and aesthetic distance, pertaining to a golden mean. In this view, ritual cannot be experienced under a form implying too much or too little distance from the event concerned. Tending exclusively towards one or the other of these poles, boredom or total involvement, thus spells the failure of the emotional experience of ritual. Various means characteristic of ritual contexts can favor this situation of movement: the crowd's presence, the musical atmosphere, the presence of masks, the spatial distance between actors and spectators capable of determining and structuring different degrees of participation or exclusion of one another. The dramatic production and intervention of parodical elements also encourages taking one's distance in relation to the mobilising event. Therefore, we can say that rituals inverting power relations (for example) do not constitute a strict inversion of day-to-day dominator-dominated relationships. These rituals certainly involve reproducing-imitating reality through vestimentary resemblance, adopting distinctive signs, role-playing in order to put oneself in the shoes of the character played. Even though the dramatic dimension of the ritual forbids the actors from really living out this inverted social reality in the here-now, the disproportionate introduction of parodical and comical elements (insults, blows, threats, scorns) turns the relation of strict inversion into a relation "perverting" reality by ritual[14]. This play of involvement and distance-taking, of focused attention and selective inattention characterises the lateral or partial identification process inherent in ritual performance, where man only takes part in things halfway, just enough to make them work. So the ritual's dynamics can be conceived other than in terms of ideological inculcation or socialisation, whether the ritual and its object might be. Schechner

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[12] P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambrigde 1991 (chap. Rites of Institution, p. 117 and followings).

[13] F.J. Scheff, *Catharsis in Healing, Ritual and Drama*, Berkeley 1979.

[14] M. Augé, *Pouvoirs de vie, pouvoirs de mort*, Paris 1977, p. 107-137.

seems to have grasped the characteristic of the ritual frame perfectly in uniting the forms of behavioural associations and attitudes to a regulative binarity through the rite/play pair: "The entire binary 'efficacy/ritual-entertainment/ theatre' is performance: performance includes the impulse to be serious and entertain; to collect meanings and pass the time; to display symbolic behaviour that actualises 'there and then' and to exist only 'here and now'; to be ourselves and play at being others, to be in trance and to be conscious; to get results and to fool around; to focus the action on and for a select group sharing a hermetic language and to broadcast to the largest possible audiences of strangers who buy tickets"[15].

2. ABOUT THE MITIGATED PRESENCE

I can go further in the interpretation of these festival moments. Popular festivals, political festivals, carnivals are collective rituals. There is no doubt. But which is a ritual context ? To be or not to be in a ritual ? Let us say: not really to be and not really not to be ! How to explain these multiple attitudes and these forms of stratified presence in a ritual ?

2.1. TURNER AND THE LIMINALITY

Victor Turner is no doubt the American ethnologist who has most strongly insisted on the heuristic value of Van Gennep's famous schema, whose simple descriptive level of sequential morphology he has surpassed. Instead of stressing the separation phase (which detaches participants from their former position) or the reintegration phase (by which they are reincorporated into a new place in society), Turner mostly centres his analysis on the liminal phase seen as an ambivalent intermediate period, beyond day-to-day norms and classifications. Thus the "candidates" live out this transitional period in a social limbo, cut off from all social reality, retired to a forest or mountaintop, stripped of their clothing, sometimes painted white or smeared with mud. Designated by a generic term (the "neophytes", the "initiands"), they are associated with ambivalences: androgynes, while at the same time men and women, neither living nor dead but at the same time living and dead, they can be obliged to assume the immobile position of the dead and be treated like embryos or newborns. In his analyses of the Ndembu of Zambia during this liminal period, Turner described the passivity

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[15] R. Schechner, *Essays on Performance Theory*, New York 1977, p. 87.

and malleability of neophytes before their masters, by whom they will be "fashioned" for a new life. In a spirit of the *communitas*' comradeship and equality, they are placed in the presence of disproportionate, grotesque or incongruous representations of natural or cultural data[16].

This presentation of Turner's writings readily attests to a "thirty-year academic career involved in a fierce rebellion against petrification, studying the universal experience of being 'betwixt and between', crossing disciplinary boundaries, and dancing on the interstices"[17] (Babcock and Mac Aloon, 1987: 1). Yet another conclusion might possibly be drawn, making Turner an "essentialist" unable to set himself apart from functionalism and symbolism[18]. It would also indicate that in the social sciences the deconstructionist project is rarely followed through. In Turner's work, one rediscovers a dichotomous vision of society opposing two juxtaposed or alternate models, one corresponding to a structured social system, differentiated and hierarchised and the other to an undifferentiated *communitas*, characterised by spontaneity, immediacy and a communion of equal individuals[19].

On the one hand, this view leads Turner, the thinker of the interstice, towards an excessive and reductionistic vision of the *communitas* as a utopian expression impregnated with the characteristic "flow" of mystical "totalities": the sensation of acting with total involvement, a loss of the self, an expression of transcendence, a state of homogeneity and unity without division or plurality. Does one necessarily need to perceive in this interpretation, as Flanigan does[20] (1990: 57-58), the effect of Turner's religious commitment, which diverts a potentially dialogical theory in a very monolithic direction? On the other hand, Turner reintegrates the dichotomous model – structure/communitas – toward the structure of social life, which achieves the unity of contraries and makes the antistructure function: "men are released from structure into communitas only to return to structure revitalised by their experience of communitas"[21]. Within the "social drama", Turner insists on the stabilising importance of the "redressive" phase (after a rule breaking phase and social cohesion crises) whose ritual is an element capable of restoring the social order and reestablishing the individual's position in the culture or cosmos thanks to his capacity for dramatisation and symbolisation.

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[16] V. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, Ithaca 1967, p. 93-111.

[17] B.A. Babcock B.A. and J.J. Mac Aloon, *Victor V. Turner (1920-1983)*, „Semiotica", 65(1987) 1/2, p. 1.

[18] C.C. Flanigan, *Liminality, Carnival and Social Structure*, in: *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism*, ed. K. Ashley, Indiana University Press Bloomington 1990, p. 52-63.

[19] V. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, Chicago 1969, p. 96.

[20] C.C. Flanigan, *Liminality…*, p. 57-58.

[21] V. Turner, *The Ritual Process…*, p. 129.

Two more elements characterise Turner's theory of ritual. First, there is the symbolic valorisation of rituals whose elements are connected to a set of meanings referring ultimately to the "social". Turner strongly insists on the semantic structure of symbols characterised by their multivocality or polysemia. A symbol refers to a set of referents and multiple meanings permitting a representation of different aspects of the cultural system. According to Turner, the emotional and collective qualities of the symbolic object underlie its functional impact on the social system and facilitate the passage from the obligatory to the desirable: "A single symbol, in fact, represents many things at the same time: it is multiversal, not universal. Its referents are not all of the same logical order but are drawn from many domains of social experience and ethical evaluation" (Turner 1969: 52-53)[22]. Secondly, Turner insists much on the performative value of ritual implying a transformational process between two states. Unlike Van Gennep, only interested in the description of the transitional phase, Turner focuses on the transformational dynamics of rites. In fact, the ambivalence of ritual figures produced by the juxtaposition of contradictory and opposed contexts causes the rite to reestablish itself in a new coherent form. Among others, the classic example of the "boy-man" in initiatory rites illustrates this mechanism for he in fact plays two contradictory roles and for the transformational process from one to the other implies an integration of the two on a higher level and, at the same time, a change of context. Through this interpretation, the "internal consistency" of rituals is valorised: a functional whole in the service of the social structure, an undifferentiated whole opposed to everyday life, a symbolic whole referring to a set of meanings, and a transformation whole accomplishing an action. How to suggest another reading of the ritual?

2.2. BATESON AND THE PLAY OF ANIMALS

When Gregory Bateson observed otters playing at fighting, he concluded that they were involved in a type of interaction whose units of action were analogous, without being identical, to those involved in a context of real aggressiveness. So play is a class of behaviours defined by a negation (it is not a true fight) nor is it equivalent to the behaviour denied by this negation (it is not a non-fight either). Considering that each class of behaviour is separated from others by a limbo-zone, Bateson inserted ludic interaction into this one. One can go to the extreme limit of a behaviour without entering the following class and without risking the inherent consequences. Festivals undoubtedly take place within precise spatiotemporal limits, and permit various behaviours which would hardly be

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[22] V. Turner, *The Ritual Process…*, p. 52-53. For another critique of Turner's symbolic approach, *cf.* D. Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism*, Cambridge 1975.

given free rein outside these limits, and which may also be inconsequential after the festival. The constitution of the festive interval therefore implies a twofold process: not only the transfer of elements and relations characteristic of everyday life, transformed and manipulated into another context in various ways, but at the same time the specific framing of this new context, involving rules of interpretation and organisation just as specific.

Bateson takes an interesting stand on this particular point. His theoretical reflection testifies to preferential treatment allotted to the contextual categories of behaviours. Here, it is not so much a question of understanding them in themselves (as is most frequently done) but of grasping a contextual relation in accordance with a specific framing. As the result of observations of animals playing at fighting, Bateson realised the importance of framing behaviours issuing from one context and reintroduced into another with new categories of organisation. So by playing at aggressiveness, I have already mentioned, the otters show their capacity to emit and to accept the signal "this is play" as a metamessage or metacommunication, i.e. communication on communication, a metamessage framing the set of behaviours engaged in[23]. "What is characteristic of 'play', writes Bateson, is that this is a name for contents in which the constituent acts have a different sort of relevance and organisation from that which they would have had in non-play"[24] . Therefore, it is important to understand neither play nor ritual[25] as a behaviour or a sequence of activities but as a category of contextual organisation capable of specifically reframing behaviours which have meaning beyond the ludic or ritual frame. Bateson carries on: "The essence of play lies in a partial denial of the meanings that the actions would have had in other situations"[26]. It is the negative characterisation of play that counts, as with metaphorical contexts. "The central point, which I am really trying to get across, is that 'play' is not a class of that sort, but is somewhere out here in the limbo. A 'play-chair' is not only a chair; it is not even one of things which are properly classified as 'not-chairs'. Play is a class of behaviours defined by means of a negative but without commonly identifying what that negative negates"[27]. Thus play implies more than a simple reframing of a message or an action in a new context, for it itself supposes the manipulation of contextual categories. In the act of playing at fighting, that is "not really" fighting, what is more important than the content itself is the particular impact of the negation, hence the relation between the categories. The paradoxical dimension of such a metacommunication implies that "not only does the playful nip not denote what be denoted by the bite for which

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[23] G. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Paladin Frogmore St Albans 1973, p. 150-166.

[24] G. Bateson, *Mind of Culture*, Bantam Books New York 1988, p. 134.

[25] G. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind…*, p. 155.

[26] G. Bateson, *Mind of Culture…*, p. 134.

[27] G. Bateson, *The message 'This is Play'*, in: B. Schaffner (ed.), *Group Process: Transaction of the Second Conference*, Josiah Macy Jr Fondation New York 1956, p. 194.

it stands, but, in addition […] the bite itself is fictional"[28]. If playing at fighting is not really fighting, it is nevertheless not a non-fight which could be a handshake or a kiss. The ludic nip resembles a bite but indicates at the same time that it is not really a bite.

2.3. DETAILS OF EXISTENCE

What should be retained? "It was the 'not really' aspect of play, play as 'not really X behaviour', which interested Bateson more than the nature of the 'X' in this statement"[29]. This detour through Bateson's reflections on play culminates by giving a descriptive and analytic place to the "not really" of social behaviours, constitutive of the minor logic of reality. How can this mode of co-presence of contrary elements be expressed "algebraically"? Behaviour which is "not really" is of course different from behaviour which is "not yet" (according to the transformative logic of the rites of passage). The paradoxical point of view lets me insist on the behavioural margin which means that X is not really X and that Y is not really Y either. In a certain way, it is the latitude which means that a playful nip is not really a bite *and* a non-bite in an additional mode: because the bite in question does not exist, says Bateson, nor is it a non-bite and a non non-bite in the mode of neutralisation. Indeed there is something here. Rather, it is a bite which is not really a bite (it is only a playful nip) and it is also a non-bite which is not really a non-bite (it is, just the same, more than any other behaviour, something resembling a bite). If X = bite and Z = non-bite, the ludic nip corresponds to [X-A] + [Z+B] given that A is the behavioural difference between the bite and the nip and that B is the behavioural difference between a non-bite and what makes the nip resemble a non-bite. Because it is the ludic context (P) which implies that X is not really X and that Z is not really Z, but that there is A and B, slightly different from each other, the formula could be : P (X) + P(Z) = P(X+Z).

Surely it is A (what makes that X is not really X) or B (what makes that Z is not really Z) that has to be photographically remarked and visualised in Gilles' behaviours. Supposing we transpose this idea to the social reality in general! Yves Barel is very interesting here: "If the individual is already a socialized being […], it is impossible to reduce him to what the society makes of him. No enumeration of the social roles filled by an individual, however complete and meticulous as it might be, will ever embrace the reality of this individual. Let there be no misunderstanding: this is quite different from simply saying that the individual, apart from a social being, is also a biological, psychological and

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[28] G. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind…*, p. 155.
[29] S. Stewart, *Nonsense. Aspects of Intertextuality…*, p. 29.

moral being or a consciousness immersed in an unconsciousness. All this is true, but it is also as a social being that his reality cannot be socially expressed to the full extent"[30]. Indeed it is the "not really" which expresses itself in the "not…to the full extent". "In other words, continues Barel, the gap between the concrete individual and his roles is theorizable, which signifies that one should not regard it as a negligible entity in endeavoring to understand the everyday life and historic destiny of a society"[31]. Thus, the two levels, the visible and the invisible, sources of a laterality by which social life unfolds, deserve the same attention. Precisely between the visible and the invisible, in the ever present and recreated limbos of reality, the minor mode of reality arises. I was convinced by these essential principles: the double negativity regulating festive roles, the double play of significations shattering traditional symbolic logic, the valorisation of "inconsistent" attitudes in terms of secondarity and reflexivity. The participants in rituals live this modality of mitigated presence, wavering between engagement and disengagement. They know that one must not be overexpressed compared to the other, as if the seriousness was mitigated by the play and the play was itself mitigated by the seriousness. This is made in various proportions according to the rituals and the persons themselves.

How can one help but react with mild indifference and in one way or another take one's distance upon reading a poster written: "Pay no attention to his poster" or in any other situation where it is impossible to behave in any way without acting in exactly the opposite way ? A reality, which paradoxically imposes being and not being, also risks involving this same indetermination. Is not it said to all human beings: "Live!"? What goes for behavioural indetermination is also valid for cognitive indetermination, for example, the incertitude of beliefs, always fragmented and hesitant. People, who do not directly acknowledge their lateral involvement and who not necessarily explain their fragmented experience of beliefs, lock the interviewer, sociologist or social anthropologist, into his customary perspective: on the one hand, orientated by a scientific habitus, he acts and thinks as if people were totally involved in their activities; on the other hand, he focuses more on a verbally explained world vision than on their unpronounced beliefs and ideas. It follows that the informer's accounts usually risk missing their minor mode of reality. Now, we can explain many attitudes of rituals: hesitation, indetermination, ambivalence, engagement and disengagement. That is to say attitudes of everyday life. The minor mode of reality is a new "theme" in social sciences, to adopt Holton's expression[32]. Associated with the researcher's intellectual or affective involvement and/or the representations founding a discipline, "themata", while not figuring among the central concepts of theories,

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[30] Y. Barel, *Le paradoxe et le système*, Grenoble 1989, p. 190-191.

[31] Y. Barel, *Le paradoxe et le système…*, p. 192-193.

[32] G. Holton, *The Scientific Imagination: Case Studies*, Cambridge 1978, p. 3-24.

are nonetheless sources of intelligibility. This analysis could be considered as a secular reading of festivals and rituals.

Summary

This paper invites not to reflect on festivals as a celebration or a transgression but to observe them as «a play with» meaning and communication. The author considers the folklore as a genuine laboratory of observation of everyday life. He illustrates his analysis with the examples of the Binche Carnival (Belgium) and of Labour Day (1st of May) and gives an interpretation with G. Bateson's concept of «play», as the English anthropologist had used to describe the play of animals at fighting. This leads the author to strongly insist on the small details of behaviours always imprinted with a "not" characteristic of ritual contexts.

Sein oder nicht sein in Ritual
Über die gemilderte Gegenwart

Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel lädt zu einer Reflexion über das Phänomen des Festivals ein. Dies wird nicht betrachtet als eine Gelegenheit zum Feiern bzw. eine Form der Transgression, sondern als ein „Spiel" von Bedeutungen und Kommunikation. Die Folklore ist für den Autor ein wahres Laboratorium, in dem man das alltägliche Leben beobachten kann. Um Seine Analysen zu illustrieren, zieht der Autor Beispiele des Karnevals in Binche (Belgien) sowie das Feiern des Arbeitsfestes (1. Mai) heran, indem er die gemäß dem Konzept des „Spiels" des amerikanischen Anthropologen Gregory Bateson interpretiert. Bateson verwendete dieses Konzept zur Beschreibung des Spiels der Tiere während des Kampfes. Dies führt den Autor dazu, einige Details des Verhaltens zu unterstreichen, welche immer einen Hauch der Negation aufweisen, charakteristisch für die rituellen Kontexte.

Być albo nie być w rytuale. O złagodzonej obecności

Streszczenie

Prezentowany artykuł jest zachętą do podjęcia refleksji nad festiwalami, widzianymi nie jako okazje do celebrowania czegoś lub formy transgresji, lecz raczej jako „gry" znaczeń i komunikacja. Folklor jest dla autora prawdziwym laboratorium, w którym obserwować można codzienne życie. Dla zilustrowania swoich analiz przytacza przykłady karnawału w Binche (Belgia) i Święto Pracy (1-Maja), interpretując je zgodnie z koncepcją „gry" amerykańskiego antropologa Gregory'ego Batesona,

który stosował ją do opisu gry zwierząt podczas walki. Prowadzi to autora do silnego podkreślenia drobnych detali zachowań, które zawsze mają znamię pewnej negacji, charakterystycznej dla kontekstów rytualnych.

K e y w o r d s : festival, carnival, ritual, detail, play, negation, presence, engagement, Bateson

S c h l ü s s e l w o r t e : Festival, Karnaval, Ritual, Detail, Spiel, Negation, Gegenwart, Verlobung, Bateson.

S ł o w a   k l u c z o w e : festiwal, karnawał, rytuał, szczegół, zabawa, negacja, obecność, zaręczyny, Bateson.