

The Inner Cauldron; the Upward Array

by Alphonso Lingis

Certainly understanding the historical, political, economic, and ideological context of a cultural performance enriches the experience of those who participate in it or only observe it. Victor Turner itemized the intentions of those who organize rituals, initiations, ceremonies, parades, dances; they were performed, he said, "to promote and increase fertility of men, crops and animals, domestic and wild; to cure illness; to avert plague; to obtain success in raiding; to turn boys into men and girls into women; to make chiefs out of commoners; to transform ordinary people into shamans and shamanism; to 'cool' those 'hot' from the warpath, to ensure the proper succession of seasons and the hunting and agricultural responses of human beings to them." [1] Those who organize cultural performances also have economic and political intentions, and, as we see today, people with economic and political intentions may initiate cultural performances and bend them to their purposes. And—the solemn march and tone of the participants provoke caricature and parody; the myths and rituals engender heretics, break-off sects, eccentrics, scoffers, charlatans and profiteers. Certainly understanding the intentions of those who organize cultural performances, manipulate them, parody them likewise enriches our experience of them.

But cultural performances cannot be understood only from their historical, political, economic, and ideological contexts, or from the intentions of the organizers, participants, and bystanders. A cultural performance closes in on itself, its aspects and dimensions adjusting to one another, and evolves with its own logic, that of ceremony and festival.

To be sure, it also enters into relationship with the logic of the political and economic order. Clifford Geertz has done much to show that the relationship between a cultural performance and the politico-economic social structure is more complex than it had been taken to be by sociological functionalism, for which belief and ritual strengthen and perpetuate the social structure of a group, and socio-psychological functionalism, for which religion and ritual satisfy the individual's cognitive and affective demands for a stable, comprehensible, and coercible world. [2] Michael Taussig has meticulously explored the magical nature of that relationship. [3]

I should like here to think about two more dimensions of collective performances—which I can call the inward dimension and the upward dimension. By the inward dimension I mean the actual experience of participants. By the upward dimension I mean the splendor that a people, their institutions, their history acquire in a cultural performance. People are transfigured in glorious adornments and movements; they utter chants expressing sublime sentiments; their history becomes dramatic, exemplary, epic.

It seems to me that the philosophy of mind is poorly equipped to deal with the inner dimension of cultural performances. Phenomenology insisted that philosophy must begin with actual experience, but experience meant the presence of things and events; perception is primary. Here there is experience of the past and the future, and not simply through memory and imagination, not simply a representation of the forms of the present that has passed on or of the anticipated present; there is a

return of the forces of the creative moments of the past.

While collective performances have been much studied as generating political decisions and spiritual trances and visions, there is little about how they generate splendor, and little about that splendor. Aesthetics today has some understanding of the difference between art and commercial or kitsch image-making, and of the difference between genuine and effective theatre and cinema and vapid entertainment, but aesthetic theory still locates the creative force in the individual artists. What is the creative force in collective performances? When and how do cultural performances lose their creative force?

The first time I went to Rio de Janeiro I arrived with a toothache and sought out a dentist. I asked him if he had ever danced in Carnival. "Oh yes," he said. "You have to, at least once in your life," he said to me. "There is nothing else you can do that compares with it."

Carnaval in Rio is not an assembling of the people, but the people themselves assembling out in the streets, dancing with anyone, with everyone. The great escolas de samba are located in the favelas, and the poorest people put aside a real a week for years sometimes, in order to be able to afford a *fantasia* and dance in the Sambodromo. Each escola de samba presents theatrically, with dances and with elaborate floats aspects of Brazil's past, Brazil's future -- the Rio Amazonas and Rio Tocantins; the spectacled bears, the golden lion tamarins, and the toucans; the Indians of the Amazon and the outposts of the Inca; the queens of Africa, the bandeirantes, the quilombolas, the travelers of outer space. Everything -- plants, insects, birds, beasts, heroes, knaves becomes beauty, samba, and popular *alegria*.

Understanding the experience of Carnaval means understanding the experience of dancing in the Sambodromo, the experience of being as beautiful and as sensual as a human being can be, along with two or three hundred in your *ala* as beautiful and sensual as you, is the exhilaration of casting your alegria to the crowds, experiencing it spread and gain momentum.

I arrived the week of the outbreak of the First Gulf War, in which 92 advanced countries united in no higher cause than to secure for themselves the sources of cheap petroleum. At the Rio Carnaval, I thought this is the important event on the planet. As important, or more important, than military alliances, political campaigns, rises in the interest rates or downturns in the stock market. I thought it was important for me, and I have returned almost every year.

Carnaval closes in upon itself, separating from the economic development and the political organization of the nation, evolving from year to year according to its own logic of surprises, discoveries, and jublations. And the experience of Carnaval closes in on itself. The efforts of journalists and sociologists to formulate what it means for individuals only produce vapid clichés. The splendor of individuals, groups, and floats it creates dazzles the eyes and stuns the mind and is not a symbol or embodiment of anything conceptual or conceptualizable. We are mesmerized by beauty as birds of paradise are mesmerized by their glittering plumes in their courtship dances; we create beauty as in the primordial ocean mollusks create the nacreous colors and intricate designs of their shells. And the alegria that surges is a gratuitous and superabundant outpouring of excess energies that drown out quotidian needs and concerns for the morrow.

While the observation of forms and structures are the means for the historical consciousness constructed by the social sciences, throbbing, energizing, and transforming music, song, and dance are the essential means of that historical sense produced in cultural performances. It is understood

by an obscure bodily consciousness that even phenomenologists have not yet been able to bring to light or describe. Everywhere humans have observed the dances of antelopes, sea lions, emperor penguins, ostriches, pheasants, butterflies, crabs, understood them in their own bodies, and taken them up—dancing crane dances, impala dances, oryx dances. "'O Zarathustra,' the animals said, 'to those who think as we do, all things themselves are dancing: they come and offer their hands and laugh and flee — and come back.'" [4] Nature as the mimetic model and also as the cause — nature in our nature.

A collective performance does not simply assemble and represent the forms of society and its history; it provokes a return of the forces -- the divergent and contradictory forces -- that created them. This return of forces produces that upward dimension of splendor.

Participating in the performance also opens the individual soul to the return of those divergent and contradictory forces, and transfigures the individual. "Anyone who manages to experience the history of humanity as a whole as *his own history*," Nietzsche wrote, "will experience in an enormously generalized way all the grief of an invalid who thinks of health, of an old man who thinks of the dreams of his youth, of a lover deprived of his beloved, of the martyr whose ideal is perishing, of the hero on the evening after a battle that has decided nothing but brought him wounds and the loss of his friend. But if one endured, if one *could* endure this immense sum of grief of all kinds while yet being the hero who, as the second day of battle breaks, welcomes the dawn and his fortune, being a person whose horizon encompasses thousands of years past and future, being the heir of all the nobility of all past spirit—an heir with a sense of obligation, the most aristocratic of old nobles and at the same time the first of a new nobility--the like of which no age has yet seen or dreamed of; if one could burden one's soul with all of this--the oldest, the newest, losses, hopes, conquests, and the victories of humanity; if one could finally contain all this in one soul and crowd it into a single feeling—this would surely have to result in a happiness that humanity has not known so far: the happiness of a god full of power and love, full of tears and laughter, a happiness that, like the sun in the evening, continually bestows its inexhaustible riches, pouring them into the sea, feeling richest, as the sun does, when the poorest fisherman is rowing with golden oars! This godlike feeling would then be called—being human." [5]

Nietzsche thus opposes the historical sense produced by the scientific representation of forms with that produced by the return of forces from the creative moments of history. But he also believed that the historical sense produced by our social sciences could, given a few centuries and more, awaken in us the creative forces that were assembled in the cultural performances of the past, could become our Dionysian festival, our carnival, could "make our old earth more agreeable to live on." [6]

Carnaval in Brazil begins in 1845. The *Guerra dos Farrapos*, the bloodiest civil war of Brazil's history, had ended with victory of the imperial forces. The returning soldiers celebrated riotously in the capital, shooting their guns in the streets, with much damage to property. Don Pedro I had been forced to abdicate and Don Pedro II crowned emperor, in violation of the constitution; further, the Republican uprising had sympathies among the people. The following year the government feared the anniversary would be the occasion for another such popular antigovernment demonstration, and decreed that the occasion would be marked instead with masked balls, such that those in France that marked the anniversaries of the Restoration of the Bourbon dynasty. But while the ruling elite danced in their elegant ballrooms, the streets again broke out in riotous revelry, with many common people donning makeshift costumes and dancing in the streets. Santeria priestesses from Salvador de Bahia happened to be in the city and whirled in trance with their long white dresses; they were subsequently to be a part of the celebration. But over the years this military and religious aspect of the Carnaval

parades was lost, and Carnaval became all about beauty and alegria. High government officials do not attend, and the now rapidly growing Evangelical churches condemn Carnaval for its sensuality and the licentiousness that is unleashed in the commingling crowds. Carnaval is a locus of conscious ethical conflict--between the ethos of squandering and the ethics of national development--Rio and São Paulo. As they say in São Paulo, there is nothing in Rio except the beach and samba. As they say in Rio, there is nothing in São Paulo but work and money.

In 1964, over in Papua New Guinea, some Australian colonial administrators, remembering the Highland festivals in Scotland they or their immigrant fathers told of, organized the first Mount Hagen Show. The Papuans, they thought, love body adornment and spectacle; it would be a joy to behold and a joy, for them, to celebrate their beauty: a Carnival in the Pacific answering the Carnaval in Brazil on the opposite side of the planet. They summoned the tribes of the Western Highlands, who lived in suspicion and hostility with one another, to come in ceremonial dress and parade together under Mount Hagen. The men came in triumphal war dress and with their weapons. But the Australians organized the show as a celebration of the end of tribal hostility, a festival of the new Pax Australiana.

Before the Second World War, the Australian colonial administration was very thinly staffed, and no effort had been made to extend control or even explore the mountainous tropical island. Then the European war extended to the Pacific, and Australians, Americans, and Japanese fought in New Guinea. The Australians enlisted Papuans in their war, and some 50,000 of them were killed. After the end of the war, as the Australians returned to their colony, they seriously set out to pacify the country. Not to put down armed opposition to them; from their first arrival their guns had quickly showed the Papuans the futility of that. Pacification meant that conflict among the Papuans was not to be settled with weapons, but by recourse to Australian administrators and courts. The million-strong highland Papuans, discovered so late, only in 1930, had been a journalistic sensation, where the Papuans were called Stone Age people and savages. When it was discovered that each high valley had its own language--eventually 867 languages were identified--and the societies so individualistic that defense of one's land was up to the individual and his kinsmen and clansmen, it was easy to imagine them as in a constant state of war. The Australian colonial administration did so depict them and made pacification its overriding priority.

In fact when battles did break out between tribes, they were so constrained by rules and fought with weapons so ineffective--the arrows that are without fletching are really inaccurate--that it would be rare that anyone was actually killed. If someone was killed, the big men immediately demanded and negotiated compensation. If compensation--in the form of pigs, foodstuffs, and shells--was refused, then the fighting would resume until someone of the opposing side was killed and balance restored. Although sickness that resulted in death was attributed to sorcery, most often material compensation was arranged.

For the Australians, these last white imperialists, as for the first, Cortéz and Pizarro, the colony was seen as a source of gold. Later, of silver, copper, oil, and natural gas. The problem was that the prospectors and miners depended on large trains of native bearers to carry their equipment and supplies, and they found that again and again the bearers would not cross boundary lines into the territory of the next tribe. Each tribe controlled its own valley, shutting out the adjacent tribes, though most often men sought their wives from the neighboring tribe -- and this marital exogamy maintained contact and negotiations between the big men of adjacent tribes. To break down the tribal boundaries, the Australians, as they occupied areas where gold panning or dredging could be implanted, decreed that all tribal conflicts be referred to the administrators and the courts they

instituted and sent military patrols to punish conflicts being settled in the traditional ways.

The Mount Hagen Show was organized to demonstrate, to the United Nations Trusteeship Council and the home government, that pacification had been achieved. And to further cement the forced pacification, since the clans and tribes of the highlands would be assembled where they could meet and interact with their respective enemies. It was also organized to bring in tourists, for by now tourism had become a major industry around the world. An airstrip was laid out, several hotels were built, and 850 mostly Australian tourists were flown in.

The Australian organizers had announced prizes for the best costumes, the best drummers, the best marchers, the best dancers. However, as soon as the prizes were awarded, fights broke out between the losers and the winners; the prizes were subsequently suppressed. The show was to occur every other year, but it proved difficult to get the big men of enough clans and tribes to agree for a date, so that it was difficult for tourists to plan to get there. I first went to Papua New Guinea in 1980 but could not learn the date of the show, and in the subsequent 25 years when I had gone to that side of the planet had not been able to learn when it would take place.

Last year there were only some 200 tourists, most of them flown in for just the two days of the Show by tour companies. Thirty years after independence, Papua New Guinea is judged by foreign chanceries and tour companies alike as a primitive and violent place; indeed tribal war was raging across most of the highlands and in the capital, Port Moresby, all the bus companies and even taxis had been immobilized for the past two months by the conflict. Anyway tourists today show little interest in exotic or primitive cultures and the multiplication of cultural shows, whether in Mongolia, Niger, or Uzbekistan, attract few tourists, who have long been bored by song-and-dance shows natives put on for them. It is unlikely that the Mount Hagen Show will draw any more tourists in the foreseeable future. So the show will not degenerate into a show put on for tourists, like the dance performances in Bali, which now the local people do not attend. Some dozens of the tourists will have seen a little of the country: gone to stay a night or two in the \$375 a night Ambua Lodge in the Tari valley, the \$435 Madang Resort Hotel in Madang, cruise the Sepik River on the \$475 a day *Sepik Spirit*, gone snorkeling in the Marova Lagoon. As for the real culture of Papuans today, the tourists leave, in that airport armored van seated behind armed guards, thinking this is indeed a failed state.

Now the government of independent Papua New Guinea, whose army and police are effective only to protect the mines of multinational corporations, supports the Mount Hagen Show to affirm the national identity of the Papuan clans and tribes and to display to the outside world their cultural diversity. A local man I had come to know points out a Member of Parliament. I remark that there do not seem to be many government dignitaries here. My companion tells me that this man is the representative from this district. He introduces me to the Parliamentarian; I congratulate him on the splendor of the Show. He looks down. "It is getting hard to get young people interested in it," he says. I had noted that some participants in the Show were wearing fake kina shells of painted cardboard. The government-sponsored Show was beginning to produce its kitsch double. Later I think the Parliamentarian was thinking of the situation of Port Moresby and the coastal towns. I remembered that in Lae the arriving tourist is rushed by airport police into a van with steel plates bolted over its body and a heavy mesh grill over its windows; three armed soldiers are seated in the van as it speeds through stop lights to the tourist hotel. A government report had found that fully 50% of the inhabitants of Port Moresby live by theft. While greeting the dancers the Parliamentarian was thinking obscurely of the ethical conflict between the government goal of economic development and the situation in the highlands.

Before the Second World War, the Australian colonial authority had refused to grant permits for

missionaries in most of the territory; its military patrols were too few to protect anything but the places where mining companies were prospecting and dredging. After the war, when Australia set out to regain control of its vast colony, the missionaries were seen as effective and permanent agents of pacification. Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, and other fundamentalist missionaries quickly spread across the whole island, building churches and schools and clinics. They are the principal source of cash wages for most villages. The majority of Protestant and fundamentalist churches set out to replace the heathen rituals and morality with unadulterated Christianity. Everywhere the missionaries persuaded their parishioners to demolish the men's house, and husbands and wives to live together as nuclear families. The traditional highland ideal of two children was replaced by the Christian welcome of as many children as God sends. The missionaries staffed clinics and inculcated hygiene; the population quickly doubled. Occupancy of the narrow fertile valleys in the mountainous highlands had always been the principle motive for conflict; now all the valleys are overpopulated. Young men go down to Port Moresby, the coastal towns of Madang and Lae, where the great majority do not find work. The export prices for what agricultural products and coffee that is raised continues to fall. The foreign gold, copper, silver mining companies, the US Interoil refinery, and the Australian Gas Light Company laying a pipeline to bring natural gas from the highlands across the Torres Strait to Australia are state-of-the-art high-tech projects that employ very few local people. With the destruction of the institution of the men's house, these young men have not been acculturated with the loyalties, rituals, and duties and obligations of their tribe, and the village and clan elders have lost their authority over them. Those who return to the highlands do so to plant marijuana, coca, and poppies for the smugglers in the coastal towns. Some of these earn enough money to buy guns. The tribal wars that break out now result in far more deaths and the tribal big men are far less able to negotiate compensations.

At the Mount Hagen Show the marching groups bearing the now obsolete and purely ceremonial weapons, the presence of representatives of the government, and the large contingent of police and army all affirm that henceforth violence is the monopoly of the state. However, malaria-researcher Dr Ivo Müller explained to me, the Westminster-style parliamentary government set in place by the Australians does not succeed in establishing political parties with national, or even provincial programs for development or even for public health. The 109 parliamentarians are in fact tribal big men, working to divert some of the national budget to enrich themselves and their tribesmen. Corruption is rampant in the ill-equipped and ill-paid army and police, who readily sell their guns to fellow-tribesmen in times of conflict and allege that their outposts had been raided. During the last elections, there were known cases of politicians arming their supporters; six of the nine Highlands electorates were invalidated by the High Court due to violence and intimidation. Once again clans and tribes take responsibility for avenging or compensating for aggressions done to them.

With the dwindling number of tourists in attendance, the entrance fee for tourists has been this year increased from \$30 to \$100. Coca-Cola advertised itself as a sponsor this year, meaning, I suppose, that it contributed some money. The participating tribes are given \$5 per performer to help in transportation costs. But some groups have come from the coastal towns of Madang and Lae, and even some from the outlying Bismark Archipelago. So they do not come for the money, but for the experience. I greet a doctor I had met in Medang; he had long practiced here and retired to New Zealand upon Independence. He tells me he had attended the first Mount Hagen Shows in the 60s. I ask him how this one compares with the first ones. Oh, it's much bigger now, he says.

Despite what the Parliamentarian said, there are indeed young men marching in the Show; the majority of the men are young. You watch them, holding on to archaic, but fearful weapons, chanting war chants the length of the day and you think that this show, far from demonstrating the pacification

of the highlands, celebrates a warrior culture, which continues in new dimensions in independent Papua-New Guinea. You note that some of the old men, and also some of the young, bear scars from wounds on their legs, arms, chest, and back. You get a sense of what I called the inward dimension of the performance, the experience of the participants, a cauldron of contradictory forces, the return of hopes and despairs, rages and triumphs, terrors and audacities from across thousands of years past. They are men who wage their wars not only against cunning and hostile humans, but also against supernatural powers and the weapons of sorcery. And you see what I called the upward dimension, the way the condensation of all these forces is creative of splendor. For here the tribal wars of today--the ragged young men defending with guns their drug smuggling, the bands of raskals holding up trucks on the roads, occasionally able to rob a foreign company manager or a tourist--produce splendor, the dazzling spectacle of gorgeously and fantastically arrayed phallaxes of men holding together ten-foot long lances, bows and arrows, and battle axes that are truly works of art. Not the splendor of their actual aggressions, but splendor that closes in upon itself. But were the multiple and contradictory forces that drive them to no longer recur, would not the Mount Hagen Show have become but a kitsch entertainment?

Splendor expands and evolves with its own logic. Traditionally, before marriage highlands young men have few interests in gardening, pig raising, payments or exchange. They do not have obligations to share in the work of building houses or work in the fields until they are married and set up their own household; they spend their time in group festivities and displays. [7] They long to be like birds, fleet, brilliant, untamed, and devote themselves to splendor. All-night singing and courting parties were frequent; young women dressed in their finery and invited young men who came unrecognizable in the extravagance of their facial painting and body decorations, singing long-rehearsed songs in the falsetto voices of birds. (There was no promiscuity, no sexual intercourse.) The Huli young men, wearing their red wigs decorated with flowers, their faces painted red and yellow, wearing the iridescent blue breast shield of the Superb bird of paradise over their bodies painted red, spent a year parading from village to village.

You are seated on one side of a baseball field, behind a chain-link fence. There are dozens of armed soldiers among you. On the three sides of the field there are banks of earth, on which thousands of local people are seated. The drums pound, and you see a phalanx of men entering from the far corner, marching with high steps and chanting warrior songs and cries. They are marching ten abreast, linked together with adjacent men each holding on to the ten-foot-long lance, spear, bow and arrows, or battle-axe between them. They are wearing long multicolored woven aprons in front; behind, bunches of long cordyline leaves, green, yellow, and cherry red, like the tails of great birds. On their bare chests they have hung the nacreous pearl kina shells, eight inches across, cut in the shape of three-quarter-moons. Their torsos and limbs gleam with oil; their eyes oil; their eyes are flashing in their faces that they have painted in primary colors, red, yellow, blue, black; boar tusks have been inserted in their nostrils, flying-fox teeth hooked around the rims of their ears; some wear shell disks from their nostrils, covering their lips. They wear woven caps tight on their heads, in which they have affixed rows of flowers and small shells and bands of gleaming green beetles. On top, over a band of filmy cassowary and bright-colored parrot feathers, they have spread crowns of shimmering golden plumes of the Senderowasi, the Reggiani bird of paradise, the multibanded two-foot-long plumes that decorate the heads of the King of Saxony bird of paradise, the three-foot-long black or white plumes of the Stephanie's Sicklebill or Ribbon-tailed Asrapias birds of paradise. Then the women enter the field. These are not the young women exhibiting their beauty and sensuality that parade in festivals, carnivals, and fairs in Europe, North America, the Caribbean, and Latin America. They are the matriarchs of families and clans, their bare breasts covered with dozens of elaborate shell necklaces of all sizes, colors, and shapes, necklaces of the foot-long bailer shells, twenty, thirty

pounds of them—their bridal wealth. They advance in swaying dance steps, their crinkled yellow grass skirts swirling to the tinkling sounds of the bells they have fastened about their ankles. They too wear headdresses of cuscus fur, eagle feathers, and bird of paradise plumes often much higher and far-outspread than those of the men. The tourist cannot help thinking of the immense slaughter of birds of paradise, but in fact the headdresses are heirlooms carefully wrapped up and stored from year to year, even from generation to generation, as are the tons of seashell necklaces that are the bridal wealth of the matriarchs. The women pound the narrow kundu drums they carry and chant songs extolling the proud history of their clans, their migrations and victories in battle. Another phalanx of warriors enters the field, marching with high steps. Then another. More flanks of women dancers.

The Huli wear huge wigs grown from their own hair, overhanging domes decorated with red and yellow flowers; the men march with high steps and then face one another very close-up and dance in leaping ever-faster steps. The Asaro have painted their bodies with white clay and wear large globes with grotesque faces over their heads. There is a group of young men wearing only grass skirts and bearing no weapons from Admiralty Islands who dance in the center of a circle of drummers. There are youths painted black with the white lines of skeletons. There are some groups performing charades: someone dressed in whiteness's clothes cracking a whip over men laying railroad ties. There are small groups doing comedy acts.

The men march; the women dance all day in the thin air of the mountain sky; at the end of the day they withdraw to makeshift huts to take off their adornments, eat, and sleep. Behind, over the gloomy mists of Mount Hagen, a rainbow suspends its luminous colors. The following day you arrive at sunrise to watch them don their adornments again; when they are finished they bunch into groups chanting and dancing with leaping steps while waiting their turn to enter the field.

Your eyes swim in the swirling grass skirts and the glints of sunlight flashing off the shimmering multicolored plumes, your heart and muscles pound with the stamping feet and drumbeats. Their chants echo across the landscape, throbbing on the flanks of Mount Hagen, that second highest volcano in the country, pounding too in your chest, you feel your blood hot and surging with the exultation of two thousand men and women, of 125 tribes, zigzagging back and forth like slow-motion streaks of lightning across the crowded field under the magnesium-white sun.

References

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