

In our effort to go back into the pit of history, in order to redescove who we are "at bottom", we always stumble over a kind of barrier or wall which divides history into an upper and a lower compartment. The going is relatively smooth until we hit that wall, because what we are doing up to that point is to restep the flow of time in the opposite direction. But when we reach that point and jump the wall, (without being always fully conscious that we indeed did jump it), we find ourselves in an entirely different situation. There is no longer any flow of time to be retraced, because time has, on the other side of the wall, a different and circular structure. Now the wall or barrier I am speaking of has been dated by historians and philosophers within the 8th century BC, the compartment beyond it has been called pre-history, and the one on our side history proper. This more or less general agreement among historians and philosophers is rather surprising, because they have reached it from very discrepant approaches. They all agree that something decisive has happened in the course of that century, although they find it difficult to say what exactly it was that happened. I propose, for the purpose of the present essay, and for that purpose only, to describe that fateful event as follows: During the 8th century BC, in the Jewish and Hellenic world, and very probably in other places too, the cycles of eternally rotating time suddenly snapped open and stretched out to become a flowing river. And I shall call, for the purpose of the present essay, the time that thus suddenly welled up the "historical time", and the one that was thus suddenly broken up "feast time".

No doubt: the statements just announced will require qualifications, not so much as far as the fateful event itself is concerned, but as far as its suddenness is concerned. But before those qualifications are voiced, let us stop for a moment and consider with awe how recent that event is. Mankind has been manufacturing tools for tenths of thousands of years at the least, and in this profound sense has been living much as we do. And it is a mere hundred generations that separates us from that revolution which resulted in historical, which means in our form of existence. For practically the entire period of human presence in the world, which began with hunting and collecting and ended in the construction of empires, feasts were what gave meaning to human existence. And it is only at the last minute, so to speak, that man is looking, sometimes desperately, for a different sort of meaning. One cannot help the feeling, if one takes such a perspective, that we are living on top of a tumbling iceberg, and that the revolution provoked by the Jewish prophets and Greek philosophers, (and no doubt also by the Iranian, Indian and Chinese founders of religions), has only changed the surface. The feeling, in other words, that what we call "history" may disappear one day, and that mankind may again become festive. Symptoms abound to support such a feeling.

Numerous terms are at our disposal to describe pre-historical, or what I here call "festive", existence. Terms that have to do with myth and magic. And the revolutionary event I was speaking about has often been called one of de-mythification and anti-magic. But my approach here will be a different one: I shall try to stress the time aspect. Time, before the event I was speaking of, was the eternal return of everything: of the stars and of the seasons, of the herds of migrating animals, of sowing and reaping, of day and night, of waking and sleeping, of being hungry and eating, of suffering and of rejoicing, of being born and dying. And feasts were a sanctification, (a rendering meaningful), of that eternal return. Thus the world was a merry-go-round composed of various merry-go-rounds, which is to say that time circulated within the world. And since there were numerous circles, everything had its proper time, ("a time for laughing and a time for weeping"), and happened in its own time, ("once upon a time"). It is however important to try and understand that eternal return is not tedious repetition, but rebirth and renewal. (Which is, as Nietzsche showed, a very difficult understanding for us.) The Sun did not return mechanically every morning, it was reborn in its own time. Which was also the time for cocks to crow and for men to awaken. Those various times were interwoven. If the cock did not crow, the Sun might be unable to rise from its death-bed. Not that the cock was the cause and the morning was the effect: there is no causal chain where time goes in circles. But cock and morning were impossible without each other. This is what feasts are about: they are an essential part of the interlocking circles. Not as if the morning feast were caused by the morning, nor as if the morning feast provoked the Sun to rise, but without the feast the Sun could not rise, and without the Sun-rise there could be no feasting. Thus feasts were how men participated in time, which is in the world, and by participating thus gave their lives a meaning. And if they did not feast, (an almost unthinkable thought), the world would fall apart, and life would not be life: because to live is to be feasting.

But after the event I was talking of time became a stream that flows from the past through the present toward the future and drags the world in its all-enveloping waters. It no longer flows within the world, but it is the world that now "happens in time". Nothing can ever return, and if it seems to return, it is an illusion. The sun seems to rise every day anew, but such a return now become mechanical is provisional and approximate: in "reality", (a new word due to the revolution), there will come a moment when the Earth will fall into the Sun, and every morning is different from all previous ones in that it is a step toward the last morning. Thus every event is unique, irrevocable and irrepreavable lost, if men do not take advantage of it. This feeling of urgency, of the ephemorous and of oportunities gained and lost, is the climate of historical existence. There is no "time" for feasts in such a climate.

But if this is so, if there is indeed no time for feasting in our existential climate, we can have no direct experience of what feasts were before the fateful event, and all our information concerning them is indirectly induced from archeological evidence. We cannot truly jump the wall that separates us from pre-historical existence. Now of course this is untrue. We do have direct experience of feasts, and there is time for them in our existence. And this is the reason why it is necessary to qualify the statement that the revolution in time structure which occurred in the 8th century BC was sudden. In fact, that statement will have to be qualified in at least two directions. In the direction of external events, in what may be called the "social dimension". And in the direction of internal processes, in what may be called the "psychological" dimension.

The change in time experience was indeed sudden in the sense that the new time structure does indeed emerge suddenly in 8th century thinking. All of a sudden the Jewish prophets speak of the world as having been created "in time", (in the beginning), and of a Last Day of Judgement, and they attack violently, all of a sudden, the feasts of what they call "pagan worship". All of a sudden the pre-Socratic philosophers speak of the river of time which one cannot enter twice, of the chain of cause and effect, and of "real" unmoved forms as opposed to "apparent" linear motion. But although this change was sudden, it took a very long time to penetrate the social fabric, and that penetration is not complete even at present. During the Middle ages Western society was still fundamentally structured by circular feasts and in this sense remained "pagan", and it was only the invention of printing which rendered linear, alphabetical, which is "historical", thinking common. And even now there are, in the West, important elements which stand out like remnants of pre-historical thinking, not to mention the African, Southeastern and Latin American societies for which historical thinking is only an elitistic phenomenon and for which circular feasting, (like the Rio Carnival), is still the characteristic way of living. And if we look at the Christian holidays themselves, which profess not to be feasts at all, but glorifications of historical events like the birth and resurrection of Christ, it is easy to see that they are at bottom sanctifications of the circle of the seasons. Thus although the change in time structure was indeed sudden, the dominance of the new over the old structure was a slow process which is not yet accomplished. Even now there is still some time for feasting.

As far as our own being-in-the-world is concerned, (which means the way we understand the world, but also the way we experience it, suffer it and try to change it), there can be no doubt that it is utterly different from pre-historical existence. Those who speak about the "unchangeable nature of man" speak either about a biological banality, or they talk non-

ense. The world for us is an entirely different place from what it was for an Egyptian priest, (let alone a paleolithic hunter), and not only because it has much larger and therefore no longer human dimensions, but even more significantly because it has an entirely different, namely linear, historical structure. In this sense the revolution I am talking about was indeed sudden: it brought about a new being-in-the-world, and there are no transitory stages between the new one and the old one. But although this is undoubtedly true, there is another sense in which the Egyptian priest and the paleolithic hunter are still with us, namely within our thinking, feeling and desiring, just below our historical surface. The barrier or wall over which we stumble when trying to re-discover who we are "at bottom", does not stand only in the 8th century BC, but also within us. And we find the archaic, festive climate of existence not only if we jump the wall of the 8th century, but also if we jump the wall within us. In this sense the change of time structure was superficial and it did not touch our more profound levels of being, and in this sense it was therefore not sudden. We may have direct experience of what feasts are, if we dive into our own abyss. And the tumbling iceberg I was talking about thus acquires an existential meaning.

Let us go into this aspect of feasts a little further. What dominates our thinking, at the surface, is science, our feeling is the urgency of every passing moment and the conviction that we are going to die irrevocably, and our desires are dominated, at the surface, by our quest for freedom, for liberation from natural and social conditions. Thus, at the surface, ours is a "historical" existence. The sciences of nature show us the world to be a process, ("natural history"), and provides us with methods to influence that process. The sciences of man and society show us man and society to be processes, (historical phenomena), and provide us with rather doubtful methods to take those processes in our own hands. The feeling of urgency we have and our conviction of definite death, (which are the two faces of the same medal), make tragedies out of our lives, in the sense of life histories, (biographies), which must end in defeat. And our quest for freedom provides us with "progressive" value systems, and propels us toward historical commitments. On the surface, therefore, there is no time nor place for us to be feasting.

But this surface is constantly being denied by what goes on underneath the wall within us. The knowledge science provides us with appears, if thus seen from below, to be superficial knowledge, and the methods of its technology appear, seen thus, to be futile. Our conviction of definite death becomes, if seen from below, unconvincing, and our feeling of urgency becomes, thus seen, a ridiculous overstatement of our importance. And our "progressive" value systems and the historical commitments

assume become, if thus seen from below, symptoms of our alienation from more significant and deeper values. Now of course we cannot accept this constant denial of our whole existence by those voices within us, and we try to repress them. One of the methods of repression is to call them "primitive", voices of Egyptian priests and paleolithic hunters. But still: they keep murmuring, and thus provoke that curious longing within us for a meaning of life long lost, but still there if only we knew how to reach out for it. And indeed we do know how to do it. All we need to do is jump the wall with in us and then dive into the circles of time, let us go and be carried away by the circular rhythm of feasting.

So this is the meaning of feasts for us historical beings. To let go of our feeling, and desiring, and thinking, which tend to alienate us from the world as it appears from underneath the wall, and to participate again in the sanctification of eternal return. Let go of scientific knowledge, and of the tragic sense of life, and of the values of action, and dive again into that world of orgiastic rhythmical throbbing that is waiting for us within us. To feast for us, as seen from the surface, is to allow the temptation from within us to take hold of us and carry us away in its circles. And as seen from below, to feast for us is to crack the armor of history, (of intellect, of individualism, of the drive to succeed), and to live in the full sense of that term. To become again what we are still "at bottom": beings whose life is festive.

This is the meaning of feasts for us historical beings. But of course this could not have been the meaning of feasts for those who lived before that fateful revolution. They had nothing to let go of in order to participate in them. They danced before and after the hunt, not because they decided to do so, but their whole life was a feast, and the hunt itself was part of it. They did not organize a feast in order to pray for rain, and another one for thanksgiving after the harvest, because one can not organize one's life from outside, and the rain and the harvest was part of their feasting just as much as was singing and dancing. And even present-day Cariocas do not really organize their Carnival, although they seem to do so, just as little as we organize our social structures. They find themselves within Carnival structure, and the entire year is just a circle of before and after Carnival, where before and after merge and to which the Carnival days give a meaning. To feast for them was and is a spontaneous way of living. For us it is the deliberate effort to be spontaneous. They lived in circular time, and we must deliberately force time into circles, in order to experience feasting. The problem is whether this deliberate effort of ours to be spontaneous is not, in itself, eminently anti-festive. Or to put it in other words: whether to organize feasts, as we must if we want to have them, is not to falsify their very essence.

The problem may be restated as follows: On the surface we are in the world as historical beings, living in a time structure which allows for no feasting. But "at bottom" we still experience time in a circular structure, and therefore long for a festive existence. And on the surface, (on the dominating levels), humanity is in the process of linear progress, a time structure which allows for no feasting. But "at bottom", (on the level of the dominated masses in the Third world and elsewhere), humanity still experiences time in its pre-historical, festive structure. The problem is that we must feast, if we want to integrate the various levels of our mind and of society, and that we must integrate them, if we want to avoid an explosion. But that on the other hand we cannot feast, unless we deliberate to do so, and that might be a self-defeating effort. The best way to approach the problem is to look around and see what sort of feasts are being feasted at present.

We must eliminate, from the start, two types of feasts, because they do not touch the problem. One type is those feasts which still go spontaneously on in "non-historical" societies, like the Rio Carnival, African feasts, and the feasts of South East Asia. Their problem is not that they are deliberate, but that they are being falsified by historical, (namely political, tourist, anthropological and so forth), interference. The other type is those gigantic so-called "feasts" of the proletarian masses, like Firsts of May, Olympic games and Nuernberg rallies. Their problem is that they are no true feasts, but historical mass manifestations. If we eliminate those two types, we are left with a wide variety of feast-like events which have to do with our problem. We may class them under three headings: (a) Feasts that are organized by a historical élite for the dominated masses, in order to plunge them into pre-history, and thus make it easier for the élite to manipulate them. Example for this type of feast are the events which have the mass media for channels. (b) Feasts that are organized by the élite for the élite itself, and for those who want to belong to the élite one way or another. The so-called "festivals" are examples. (c) Feasts which happen because the participants deliberately refuse to go on living historically, and let themselves go into para-religious frenzy. The hippie events may serve as examples. I believe that all present feasts may be classified under one or more of those three headings.

The problem can now be seen more clearly: The three types of feasts show three methods of jumping the wall which separates us from spontaneously festive existence. The first method is to make the others jump, and thus create a situation where the masses live in pre-history, while the dominant class of technocrats goes on pursuing historical values. The second method is to jump oneself, but only provisionally, in order to be able to return enriched by the experience to historical pursuit. The third

method is to jump the wall which separates history from pre-history, because historical existence is felt to have no meaning. I believe that those three methods are the three avenues into the future, and that we may imagine even now how the future will look like, if we look at the feasts that are going on at present. It will be either like those feasts which are apparently spontaneous, but in reality manipulated by invisible decisions back-stage. Or it will be like those feasts which are attempts at providing us with alternatives to historical progress, but in reality serve that progress. Or the future will be like those feasts which try to reconquer what is held to have been the "original" or "simple" joy of living, but are in reality barbarisations. The future cannot be, whatever the method employed, a return to the festive existence as it prevailed before the fateful revolution, because that revolution has changed the structure of time and permits ~~the~~ no return. But the future will be festive, one way or another, because it will have to integrate somehow the pre-historical and the historical forms of existence. It will be a "post-historical" future.

We live at a fascinating time, and there can be no doubt about it. At a time when the impulses of Jewish prophecy and Greek philosophy are beginning to spend themselves, and when the last remnants of earlier forms of existence are disappearing. At the time of crisis of what we call "Occidental civilisation". That civilisation was structurally anti-festive, because it was a historical civilisation which sanctified life not through circular feasts, but through aiming at the "transcendent". Its crisis manifests itself externally and internally, as a crisis of society, and as a crisis of our form of existence. This is why we ask ourselves more searchingly than previous generations who we are "at bottom". And in our attempts to find an answer we re-discover our festive dimension. The "time of feasts", covered for so long by progressive layers of history, thus begins to reappear on the surface. We cannot yet know, nor feel, what this re-emergence will produce, nor do we know or feel what we wish that it should produce, but one thing is certain: one way or another the future will be feast time.