

## MARKET, FAIR AND FESTIVAL

In its curving watercourse, the Loire encompasses vast areas of central France—Touraine, Blésois, Sologne, Berry—former provinces, all closely related, where one travelled from one town to another by imperceptible degrees, a whole district which since time immemorial, has been, above all, French. The towns there have remained as they were in olden times: peaceful populous villages which are quiet and slow-moving although their organisation is complex, standing on an unpretentious historic substructure whose only outcrops are familiar remains: Here a still-imposing castle; there a church, frequently of outstanding beauty; and sometimes public monuments dating from the first onset of community awareness—they consist of such things as a wash-house, a fountain, a bridge over a river, a shady square, or covered market...

This network of social objects imposed by history on a geography of plains and open hills, of hillsides, is still intact today, and is, essentially, the framework for the activities of today, which rely on it for support, for the control of an area and an economy and to control the service of an entire district. For the activities there are numerous, intense, and organised, and their

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## *Market, Fair and Festival*

object is always the sharing among the population of an existence which is constantly threatened and reaffirmed. When—since it is necessary—this life is exposed to the outside world, it is because the present cuts forcibly across it. The motive which animates it is always the manysided process of exchange, a *commerce* in which what is in circulation is certainly merchandise, but over and above this, all the gestures which incorporate this merchandise in the system, all the signs which mint it and turn exchange into an incessant sharing of *meanings*: collective space and time.

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The town, then, whether it is small, almost a village, or a hamlet, the unifying kernel of a piece of land which defines it as its centre—this town experiences time which is not a deployed neutrality, open, indifferent to the activities which are attached to it. It experiences a kind of time which is cyclically renewed, interrupted, or sometimes suspended, metamorphosing the monotonous unity of life into a meaningful direction which defines a scale of various symbolic poles. At certain times scenes arise where strange performances are given and repeated.

In this way, a network is set up, by which it is possible to locate precisely determined instances which establish the scene at different levels of meaning, according to the nature of the element in play, and the code used.

For example, one can describe an axis which would be that of collective representations on which we could isolate three poles whose relation to each other demonstrates their character which is overlapping and hierarchic at the same time. The instance of a superior level subsumes (takes up and elaborates) the meaning of that which precedes it, but only by extending its form and modifying its content by means of a different symbolism. We will call these three poles the *market*, the *fair*, and the *festival*. We shall dwell chiefly upon the last, to show clearly that the expansion thus described is not a mere development from identical bases. There is another process superimposed upon that of simple expansion, which, so to speak, works at it from within, transforming the elements in play, varying the connotations, and imposing new superdeterminations upon them. So that each level is at the same time a real pole, the only measure of a coherent

set which manifests from one part to another, the productive principles of an organised representation. The axis of expansion becomes the actual movement of the symbolic transformations which double the sociological differentiations and give them a rhythm. In the topology of collective time all these aspects merge into each other and become confused, and have meaning only through their reciprocal transparency.

### *Market*

The market is defined as the recurrent pole whose periodicity is the shortest. Every week it reappears with its stands and stalls, and in this way it only emphasises the other, religious, cycle, which it secularises by trying to take its place; it superimposes itself upon it, and re-echoes its specificity. Salesmen, driven out of the temple, take up the streets and squares and contrast Sunday's sacred contemplation with Monday's commercial display. The primary religious rhythm is thus joined by the primary civil rhythm. These founding institutions together lend themselves to social life in this rather hostile fellowship. Topography often emphasises this, turning the Church square into the market place. And the façade of what could once have been a temple of Reason bears the engraved escutcheon of the commercial bourgeoisie which was in the front ranks of the first Revolution. The time is past when a town official made a tour of the town during high Mass to make sure that no meat was being sold at that time.

The ceremony which refers the individual to himself in the experience of individual communion has a commercial counterpart in the elementary civilised gesture of trade; currency in its course can become a metaphor of the host in which other values claim their place. Thus, the legal weekly cycle is broken down into two related cycles which are divided, usually, by only one day. Here it is a matter of a difference which connects, of a closeness which causes distances: religion and trade express their symbolic complicity in this way. But each of these examples is only a name which, in an institution, sums up a whole associative series in which the individual, subjectivity, inwardness, withdrawal, silence, accessibility to the beyond, are interrelated in religion; on the other hand, in trade, the relations are between collectivity,

## *Market, Fair and Festival*

the common weal, outwardgoing, exchange, speech, politics. On one hand, traffic with God, which strives to establish Man; on the other, traffic among men, which establishes Society.

On market day, then, the town symbolises its essence by giving preference to trade. But the place registered for commerce has first been divided in two. On one hand there is a statutory place for strictly selling exchanges. This place is very largely reserved for women, occupied by them: the place where transactions are carried out becomes at the same time the News Exchange and social scene. Meetings are more voluble and more developed than those which are controlled by queues that one must stand in, in the most frequented shops, during the week. The market lends itself to dawdling, encourages talk, and even buying is above all a verbal operation with a rigorously codified rhetoric. But these speeches, which keep the social code going in a regular way, are interrupted in a predictable manner when the inevitable wedding procession from the Church to the Town Hall goes by. Then a general feeling of satisfaction may be felt, as the living present of trade allows itself to be crossed by the walking promise of its own perpetuation.

In contrast to this feminine activity, there is another place which is entirely devoted to speech, to information, to communication—punctuated by abundant libations—the Café. Only men meet here. This, *par excellence*, is the place where opinion is formed, where one learns, where politics take shape because they are talked-about and reached. When all is well, the benches of the Bowl-playing societies are set up, or the footballers, musicians or fishermen; in troubled times, groups are formed there whose intention is action—one may even, if it is wartime, start the first movement of a resistance in the back room.

Every week the little town bends back on itself, then, in order to come face to face with itself, and it breaks down this confrontation into several specialised encounters. There it sums itself up and measures itself. It assesses its citizens and evaluates tendencies. It compares the indices of its economic and political health. It gleans an awareness of itself which is written in numbers in the market price-lists and in words in the evenings spent together by neighbours, or the first attempts of speech in the school playground. It verifies the validity of its policy and evaluates possible corrections of direction. The nature of its

survival is sketched out from week to week and is decided in the municipal elections which are the dates which sum up and define this fraction of time.

But the market is not as exclusive a self-communion as it might appear. It does not trace the solidity of a barrier: on the contrary, it only reasserts it by displacing it. Its procedure consists of admitting what is announced as a novelty into the town with much pomp. It transforms novelty into a spectacular, if ephemeral, display. But it only allows it in doses which are reduced enough for the change to be felt as progress and not as disruption. It breaks down alteration and currency while assuring development. In this way fashions creep in for even ordinary objects, tools, and particularly clothes. The vehicle for this is that figure come from far away, the itinerant vendor, who is both a local dealer and the figure of a stranger. It is he who preserves the connection, the mediation between the inside and the outside, an agent of osmosis, trafficking novelty. It is also he who tells how yesterday's market in the neighbouring town went, compares, makes predictions, tells the news of what is the outside world to the villagers; in this way he arrives at a sort of quackery which is familiar to all cultures, whatever their development or extent.

We have said that the market has its fixed place in the material organisation of a little town, and it also has standing insofar as it is a symbolic system of regulation for all kinds of exchange. But it also does more than organise the mental space in the village, it draws on the very ground the divisions which determine the town's topography by creating urban masses or volumes characterised by their connection with mercantile activity. Village "psychology," like its physiognomy, changes according to which kind of organisation is retained.

The most traditional, and doubtless the most ancient form, is that which assigns a specific, confined place to the market, round which the village arranges itself. All little towns have a market place, the habitual place for institutionalised agitation. In many cases, this affectation has been sanctioned by the construction, on the spot, of an architectural block constituting the covered market, built for that specific purpose. For a long time now, small towns have often devoted a large part of their income to this, and put all their pride in it. Sometimes built up against the church, in the direst cases, most often built on a new site, thus

## *Market, Fair and Festival*

showing the concern taken over a calculation for the future, devoted to physical and economic expansion, the market buildings always retain something of their origin, of the origin of the market itself, as secular social form standing in opposition to the form instituted by religion. Market buildings always look like a church, but a gothic one. Here, however, it is not a matter of building in stone, and the broken arches which support the vaults are only made of wood, but they are often the finest to be found in the district. The clearest opposition is to be seen in the declared openness of the buildings which is affirmed by the absence of any walls. It is only recently, or under the pressure of a menacing situation, that markets have been constructed as fortified enclosures. But very quickly, commerce outgrew this constructed boundary. Trading places grew bigger as they were diversified. Today, the market buildings very often are used only for the minor transactions of vegetables, fruit, cheese, etc., and it is paradoxical that what was once the prerogative of the urbanised lower middle-class tradesmen is now used for the poorest that the surrounding countryside has to offer. As it overflowed, the market came out of the building, towards the square. Trade spread itself around that primary pole, and organised itself little by little into a complex network which had to be organised in order to allow for movement, classification and regulation. Thus a veritable commercial taxonomy could inscribe itself on the village ground, offering little by little its own double in a village of awnings, but which copies it directly in another form by showing schematically its rational analysis. For what makes up a market is the offer of a periodic opportunity for a real analysis of wealth in the classic economic sense, a classification of material resources at the very moment when the social flux of exchange puts them in motion to measure possibilities and needs.

Another place occupied by the market today: the street, usually the Main Street. It is very rare for this other place to be taken up with local transactions. Quite naturally, on the main thoroughfare, where the first local shops which do not sell agricultural produce have been set up, outside trades come and set themselves up regularly. They come there to dispense everything which the village could not produce of itself: exotic goods, products made in a different way from those which are regularly offered by the permanent and too familiar salesmen. On this street

which on market-day becomes a promenade for pedestrians, it is, specifically, the taste for variety which is satisfied, at the same time as the taste for the superfluous. In this sense, the market still offers the chance for the village to make showy, festive purchases, where one can find a sense of luxury and of the gratuitous. Thus one notes that the main road offers a considerable number of stalls where is sold chiefly clothing, cloths, more luxurious cooking aids—in other words, everything whose first object is to be seen rather than to be used. If, in the market-place, one *exchanges* in the truest sense of the word, in the high-street, on the contrary, one *spends*.

Lay and civil ceremony that it is, distributed among household activities, political activities, or showy ones, cross-hatched by specialised sales, and topographic and toponymic specialisation, moulded and informed by the history of the town which runs it, the market is nevertheless only a primary element in the system of collective representations, of which the fair is the second.

### *The Fair*

The fair, being the second pole of common time, is also the one which recurs with the longest periodicity. But this is because its cycle is constructed of very different elements and brings different significations into play. And yet it, too, like the market, defines itself as a particular kind of social circulation. The fair, as well, plays its role, but this is filled out with much wider and, in a sense much more rudimentary—or if you wish, more “primitive”—perspectives, because they are more undeniably symbolic.

In a fair the town is no longer the only thing to be represented. On the contrary, wherever one discerned a sort of introversion, one may now see a decided opening out. The town, as such, effaces itself, and allows itself to be outstripped and invested by what it symbolises; then it is the place where the countryside meets up, tells its story, and realizes itself in exchange. Drawing nearer to its historic essence, in the fair, the town ceases to know itself as a place cast in its own mould: it becomes a head-quarters. A rural contingent establishes itself, and, in some ways deprives the town of itself by peaceful but exclusive occupation. This is

## *Market, Fair and Festival*

equally notable in the times that fairs are held: their rhythm is seasonal, and their times are allotted very much according to the state of the work on the land, and whether they are at a time of materialisation or at a slack time. So, one meets to take a "reading" at each cross-roads of the agricultural year: seed-time, harvest, grape-picking, etc. Then too commerce takes place. But, while one dealt only in short-term household necessities at the market, here one concentrates upon durable domestic equipment—again women take charge of it—and on the buying and selling of capital which varies again according to the seasons: livestock and machines, occasionally men (one "hires" oneself until the next fair). The place where the fair is held is the whole area of the town itself; no street or square escapes it, and the crossroads are enlivened by untoward activities where there is normally nothing but a faceless stream of traffic. Everything is invested in it, and not only the traditional Fair-ground. Informal exchanges take shape there, according to relationships unknown to the market, exchanges extending in many directions. Two opposite directions sum up this diversity, by showing the massive dissemination of urban techniques, of heavy materials, of new products of paramount importance to the country. The peasants come to bring themselves up to date, to put themselves in the know about new developments, to compare possibilities, materials, and prices available at the same time. In one tour of the fair, a general picture can be sketched, a view of the general situation in the profession, after which decisions can be taken and upheld by the conclusions of collective wisdom. Imperceptibly, everything happens as if a rural government were making choices of direction similar to the resolutions of a planning commission. Thus the fair represents a method of economic regulation whose logic and forms go back to a time when centralised statistical services did not exist.

On the other hand, the fair also serves another purpose, which is to put peasants of different districts in contact with each other, putting them in a position to establish new links between themselves. Thus a sort of periodic agricultural exchange is set up of which the village, in its entirety, becomes the temporary vessel. The fair is essentially the time for business, the solemn occasion when big transactions take shape and are concluded. What



changes hands is land, herds, harvests; the entire infrastructure of the rural means of production is involved.

To the values put on display in this vast exchange correspond thus that which the market retrieves. At the fair, the region itself identifies itself as such, but it does so to gauge its vitality there too, and to establish the fluidity of its internal transactions, the good repair of its channels of social communication. The political institution has no hand in it, except in the form of an interest in economic intervention dictated by more general considerations and the need to take a world-wide scale into account. So the fair is crowned by an agricultural show, an administrative ritual in which one may inhale the atmosphere of the beginning of the nineteenth century, with its emphasis upon common effort, public welfare, the virtue of industry, the cooperation of different levels of society to the betterment of the lot of all, the concern for the State. In other words, the entire repertoire of the republican and patriotic virtues. At the show, the area strives to surpass itself in what it is best at producing, from cheeses to eloquent speeches. All this forms a system, and preserves a very strong coherence, which may be defined as the regional identity. In this performance where diverse but related situations and actions are organised, related together by a strong hierarchical structure, time, space and wealth mingle to create the identifiable articulations of social life. A modern notion of "progress" or "regression" is superimposed upon it. This draws the whole thing into a constant self-questioning. The fair is an act in this play which covers a whole area, gives it an identity through the varied details of an exclusive production, and allows the arrangement of differences which become riches, from which the first reign of merchandise is born. Thus at the same time a truly basic solidarity is knit together.

And it can be seen from this that the conflict between town and country is not an insuperable barrier, a trench without concrete justification. The town, as metonym for the surrounding countryside, for geographic reasons, can still become its metaphor by way of commerce. In a sense the country merely transposes itself into a town by transporting itself there in the form of the fair. One and the other mingle and lend their identities when they are brought back to the functions they perform; these are summed up in specialised and institutionalised exchange. The process is

## *Market, Fair and Festival*

of variable weight according to the level at which the network of its relations is established, but it is vital and highly symbolic since it is through its channels that any picture of the collective meaning is elaborated and realised.

### *The Festival*

The third pole in the hierarchy of events that we have isolated, the festival, crowns the preceding ones, and outstrips them in the sense that it refutes them in a way while at the same time incorporating their meaning and the basic principles that rule them.

The little town may experience partial festivals, whose significance is limited to a social group, a quarter, even a family, but it only realises one which can totalise the consciousness it has of itself, and symbolise its activities and beliefs. This festival—whose cycle corresponds to the longest natural cycle which summarises all the others containing and annulling them in its own unity: the year—has various pretexts, which are interchangeable according to the region. But its characteristics and its formal definition are almost invariable. Insofar as it is a total collective performance, the festival employs the unchangeable methods which are linked with the very possibility of its existence. The forms of the festival are its essential privilege.

Some features of this major festival, of which we will speak later in more detail, are sometimes already sketched out in the partial and specialised festivals, providing various functions. So one would have to make a place for the traditional religious festivals which concur less and less with the collective use of time which is increasingly set aside as civilian, or secular. The religious festival is inscribed on the periphery of the other communal activities, and only has a place among them insofar as they share common features. So it is not surprising that only the religious festivals which involve a procession can still find a setting which suits them in the town and its layout. The sanctification of men's daily path by a reminder of another path taken on the other side of this world is hardly done anymore now that a new logic provides for the casting away of all uncertainty by turning society into the be-all and end-all of everything human. Only the festival

of some saint eponymous to the town can still summon some extraordinary religious solemnity. But even these festivals have become secularised. However, one can sometimes still see strange ceremonies which involve a complex ritual in which religious theatricality is taken to its limits. Sometimes temporary altars are set up along a traditional route; these are so many scenes set up on the grass as for a primitive theatre. At each of these stops a different saint is honoured, among the incense and flowers. These are rituals which recall customs that only exist in India now, unexpectedly revealing a resurgence of the East in something particularly popular in the West, and which continues so to be, but at the same time it also recalls the row of stalls which are drawn up at the market. Being both a reminder of a remote mysticism and a copy of a materialistic present, the religious festival with its procession and altars is the most paradoxical vision, and in it the contradictory pressures of a history which has broken up past society, find a balance.

Beside this, the content of sporting festivals is very thin since they are only a matter of regulated contests following a combinatory logic which can only offer as a conclusion the very abstract terms of victory or defeat. And yet a whole small town can be passionately involved in the outcome of a football match, and put into it all its honour or dignity. But it is never any more than an ephemeral result which the next season can annul as if it had never existed. Here, it is not a matter of festivals, but of games on a population level, whose gratuity, and negativity in relation to any ritual, and refusal of essential meaning is their whole intention and strength. Nevertheless, these games in one town and another carry with them a movement of exchange between two or more collective groups which are thus thrown back on a sense of their own identity. This sense can be deepened and explored when such meetings develop into contests on several levels grouped for a fair evaluation of multiple efforts; this is the case in the modern "inter-city" contests invented by television for their spectacular resources, but which have now discovered the ways to a deeper collective sense, so that from then on in almost every county there are "inter-village" contests without television or radio, but which nevertheless summon crowds. Events like those which go with the "Tour de France," on the contrary, only manage to create an artificial and superficial

## *Market, Fair and Festival*

agitation which ends by inverting the picture we have of the market held in the High Street: this time it is the salesmen who, for once, file past, while the possible buyers watch them go. It is doubly inverted by the fact that, on this unique occasion, it is here the salesmen who make the offers. The phenomenon of the "advertising parade" is thus more than a basically very ordinary moment in commercial strategy. It takes its meaning from a meeting between forms instituted elsewhere, to which it allies itself by taking the opposite line.

A festival—a real festival—is first of all a game made out of the collectivity identified as such; the festival no longer merely lends itself to a game, it becomes as one with it. A collective game means generalised exchange. But in that very way the exchange is put out, it becomes empty, or rather becomes its own end; exchange for the sake of exchange. An exchange with shares but without a monetary standard. The barter which rooted the town in history through the intermediary of the market, here evaporates. The festival is out of time, but at stake in the same moment, it is a withdrawal, an enclosure, a collectivity which orders the conduct of everyday reality; it abruptly cuts off its connection with the concreteness of commerce. Contracts, salesmanship, the whole language of economics become a game: a play on words, a joke, laughter. It itself becomes, entirely, the symbol of a retrieved homogeneity. In a festival those who are in conflict at the market over exchanges become accomplices in the staging of a total unity. The town turns in on itself and gives itself over to the exclusive law of mingling. It closes off, it fences itself in; and the circle in which it shuts itself off is found again and again in each of its festive activities in favour of the sign of rediscovered meaning, the primacy of the first meaning, the one which is shared between life and death.

Indeed, the circle is the main figure in the festival; it is the one which expresses an awareness and a knowledge, a social need and a mythology. The circle is the emblem of the whole collective performance, the form as much as the content of its knowledge.

It is there, present everywhere, materialised in a thousand ways, a ubiquitous symbol in order to reaffirm in the enactment of the game the principles of a still lively kind of popular and peasant wisdom. Spurred on in its course which constantly doubles back

on itself to take the same path, it spells out the law of eternal repetition, the affirmation that everything is profoundly identical to itself in its metamorphoses—identity itself, the end which is an endless second beginning. Its motionless movement makes it the paradoxical index of the primitive thought of history and society, which it is not hard to find in the substructure of our civilisation as in more universal symbolism, from which come such formulae as “the wheel turns,” “fate settles the debts and deals the next hand,” “the first will be the last, the last will be the first,” etc. The middle ages managed the production of this by turning the world into a stage on which an unfinished and constantly restarted performance was played according to a single script. Shakespeare’s theatre testifies to this, being called the Globe theatre, which was not a name given lightly.

It is primitive thinking, but it leads its teaching towards metaphysics in the quite simple merry-go-round. The muted and unconscious dreaming of the collectivity endows its fascination. The child, guided by its parents who stay down below, learns detachment and turmoil, and life as separation without estrangement, difference, circularity themselves. And the movement becomes complicated in the vertical by a regular oscillation of ups and downs. The unexpected hand of metaphysics intervenes by hanging up high a prize which must be seized but which a hidden will operates, and snatches away.

Thus it is a primary figure, but also mechanical and fatalistic. Yet it has its subtleties when one moves from the merry go round (a movement which is brought from the outside, beyond responsibility, apart from the gesture of salvation) to the bumper cars. The fashion for this in modern funfairs is surely not due to a more attractive or prestigious technology: the country is ignorant of such abstractions. More deeply, the anchored determinism of the roundabout is here substituted by a scene in which what is in play is nothing more or less than the fantasy of individual liberty. No doubt the orbit is clinched in the same way finally, but some deviation is allowed, a semblance of steering symbolises the extension and the limits of a newly-discovered freedom of choice, and seems to promise a more flattering autonomy. Furthermore, this eminently philosophical game contributes another component from which its relevance to the individual also draws its definition: aggression. Revealed individ-

## *Market, Fair and Festival*

ualism goes with battle against others. One meets another to defeat or subjugate him. Tugs o' war have no place here: they demanded the common effort of an entire village. The monotonous solidarity of destiny, collective responsibility, fades before the illusion of a rupture of the same. One stops going in circles. One posits oneself through opposition. The existentialist game of the possible roads to freedom is superimposed upon the theological merry-go-round of medieval inspiration.

Developed in full, written large this time in space, one finds the same pair of opposites in two other games which are equally complementary. The switchback, or roller-coaster, follows a movement of delayed return—whose path is nothing less than the obstinacy of that very return—and takes on the idea of the merry-go-round, by the fixity of its anchored destiny. On the other hand, the airplane ride reproduces a pantomime of liberty since a steering system with an illusory sense of satisfaction masks, once again, the circular fatality, and only exists to offer an instant of illusion to this systematically disappointed desire.

The circle, set up vertically this time, and immobile, becomes a target, and its inward shrinking is modeled on what one must aim at to win, the middle of the target. Thus the circle as a representation, brought back to its centre, offers itself as the very means of escape. The centre is the exit, and "ex-centricity" is of no value. The centre, the abstraction of the very principle of the circle, is also its liberty, the way out which breaks the power of circularity, its stop signal. The mastery of consciousness is also won by concentration, as language shows us. The practice of Zen in archery would tend to confirm this in other cultural areas. The practised archer does not fail to see this, he is the man whose superiority is immediately recognised, which he interprets as a victory of his mastered inner self. He often gains the advantage of becoming—even if only for the evening of the festival—the village hero. The centre which he conquers makes him honoured by the restoration of form, and in this way, to his profit, he is made popular and becomes a centre of attraction.

The aleatory centre is also found when it is placed explicitly at the service of the symbol, in its most ancient gaming function, and its most transparent one: then it becomes the Wheel of Fortune, and here, it is not men who are subjected to it, as in the roundabout, but numbers, reminiscent of a still living and

popular Pythagoreanism. The lottery draws destiny from chance. "Everyone is a winner!" cries the man in the booth, untruthfully or ironically.

In the middle ages, instead of numbers there were kings or governors, icons of social classes. History was then nothing but the knowing figure of that circular wisdom where everyone had to change places, exchange fates, until everything started over again or was obliterated. The lottery (everyone to his lot) could also, later, determine elections or conscriptions. Here again the metaphysical paw shows a claw: the transcendental decisions of providence take the form of a designatory tag. It is the simultaneous incarnation of a judgment and perhaps of a salvation. A reminder of the reminder written by the finger of God: *Mene, Thekel, Phares...*

Fortune withdraws her finger, content to use only that of the winner himself when fate increases the odds by distinguishing the possibilities: the numbers leave their circular cavalcade and write themselves upon bits of paper. Here a new responsibility must be taken on. It is no longer the menacing arbitrary choice of blind Fortune which takes charge of everything, now it becomes necessary to choose with discrimination. Fate prepares for the motions of a manoeuvre—just like the roundabout mentioned earlier. But here again the game is decided in advance and the solution is already arranged since time immemorial. The detour is nothing but illusion and the salvation saves nothing unless as a joke. Fatality plays the game of liberty with itself.

Thus the Wisdom of the circle is staged, given a story, all ready for the vignette. But it is not a pure representation. The game of the circle is not content to demonstrate its metaphoric possibilities. The funfair imposes both pleasure and seriousness upon it. It is still, in fact, a practice in which it is highly socialised, giving rise to a whole popular theme which also informs many stories and songs. The circle is what dancers describe in the whirl of that solemn institution which is the ball. It is not by chance that the village ball, the country ball, sticks to those dances which pair off in twos. This is not because of backwardness, unconscious anachronism, reactionary old-fashionedness, any more than for the sexual fore-taste of an insinuating parade. It is, much more deeply, to obey the social need to mingle and meet. Families communicate in this

## *Market, Fair and Festival*

way, and allow themselves the chance to start new ones. They renew themselves and perpetuate themselves because it is there, in this solemnity disguised as pleasure, that marriages take shape or are decided. The ball opens out the circle slightly, which allows for decentralisation, the unit of a couple, and the resumption of two lives in a revolution similar to those of the astronomers' twin stars. This is the quasi-sacred function of the ball, whose meaning is made even more precise: a miniature cosmos which is in play there. Think of the traditional popularity of the globe covered with mirrors which turns in the centre, projecting a starry sky onto the ordinary ceiling. The ball is also a narrative cosmology on which a single law for man and the universe is imposed. The same applies to the roundabout, whose roof is also usually starred, and whose external frieze is often painted with sea-like undulations in which one can distinguish the figure of the ancient Oceanus girdling the world. In the ball life inaugurates itself, and gives itself in this way to celebration and to fate. The dancers themselves identify with the findings of the lottery, when all they care about is to "draw a lucky number."

Popular literature with its themes and its philosophy is not a little influenced by all that, for this group which hardly reads at all, but when it does, wishes to recognise itself in the romantic variations on the forms we have described. An entire literary form draws on this circle, and is enriched when it comes in line with travelling shows, and travellers who bring to it strangeness, travel, exoticism, the pull of the outside, the centrifugal aspiration which widens imaginations which are no longer satisfied with the narrow circle of their lives and understandings.

Again it is the circle which whirls in the hands of jugglers, when it makes itself the archetype of all spectacles and shows itself in the circus ring. Here the play splits in two and the imaginary scene engenders its concrete counterpart by the setting. And one can also see that joyful procession, the circular pursuit of trained animals, daring dives into the middle of circles of paper or flames. Here one waits for the preparations of a transgression with feverish excitement.

This game fascinates by what one can sense in it, a certain



seriousness, the presence of repressed elements, underneath the ostensibly gratuitous spectacle.

Finally it is the bursting storm of flaming catherine-wheels, which repeat the same wisdom in luminous writing on a background of dark night. And when the end of the game comes, the dispersal, the achievement of the totalising image, the assembled town recognises the meaning: the crowd dissolves again into separate beings as the last spark falls.

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The town which made its own acquaintance at the market, promotes itself as a centre at the fair, and at a festival conceives the circle in its polysemic generality: law, principle, and end. A unique and multiplied rhythm which is the measure of life. At a festival the town does more than amuse itself, its act is deeper: it represents itself with everything on which it is based as a human community. From this, it administers teaching by offering its lessons to the desire to learn, at the same time as securing its own perpetuation.