

# 1

## FEASTS, ALLEGORIES, AND POLITICS

### *Public Play and Festive Forms*

From the fourteenth century onward, Europe's courts and cities routinely celebrated important religious and political occasions with splendid feasts.<sup>1</sup> This policy was instituted simultaneously in the two wealthiest and most culturally developed areas of the Continent, the Burgundian realm and the northern half of the Italian peninsula, and within a century or so had spread all over Europe.<sup>2</sup> Like the religious and secular occasions themselves, their public festive expressions remained very much the same throughout the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Among the quasi-religious occasions, one thinks first of carnival rites, but numerous feasts were organized on the liturgical calendar as well: to highlight processions, canonizations (such as the canonizations of Ignatius of Loyola and St. Francis Xavier in Rome, 1622; Fagiolo dell'Arco 296) and various special events (such as Christina of Sweden's spectacular conversion to Catholicism following her abdication in 1654). Political occasions for public celebration (which cannot always be clearly distinguished from the religious ones) included dynastic events and various matters of state: visits of foreign dignitaries, the signing of peace and other treaties,<sup>3</sup> state funerals,<sup>4</sup> the handing over of the keys of a city to a conqueror or new ruler, and, especially, the Entries of the ruler in a city. The latter were consciously modelled after antique models combining public entertain-

ment with the serious business of the state (the triumphal processions of Roman generals or emperors), and they required the construction of (mostly) temporary or (more rarely) permanent triumphal arches and similar devices in the streets through which the procession passed.<sup>5</sup> Also revived were antique-style mock battles, including *naumachiae* (naval battles on flooded city squares).<sup>6</sup> At some European courts, elaborate masquerades (*personatorum grex*) were a specialty.<sup>7</sup> And finally, tournaments (with blunt lances, wooden swords and ingenious *imprese* or coded heraldic devices marking the participants) were staged, which aimed at expressing the essential rituals and functional arrangements of feudal-chivalric society and which were, consequently, usually inspired by themes from texts characteristic of the literary revival of chivalry in the Renaissance, such as Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1532).<sup>8</sup> Almost always, the "fighting" on these occasions was prearranged and staged according to elaborate allegorical scenarios, designed to grant the ultimate victory to the primary participant: the prince. Interestingly enough, they occasionally assumed the form of a caricature of the originally serious medieval joust.<sup>9</sup>

The organization of such festive events was stimulated by the ceremonial consciousness that structured the political life of the community—which could be the court, the city, or the budding nation—and by the competition among such communities. The memory of enough feasts has survived in descriptions by visitors and ambassadors, in engravings or paintings, to leave an impression of their splendor and their elaborate ritualistic character. Such festive events could take place in the street, on the marketplace, or in ephemeral architectural structures erected specifically for the purpose within an existing structure or locus. They can be considered "public" because, at least in their origins, they were relevant for, and largely accessible to, the entire polis. An important contributing factor to the public nature of most of these celebrations was the fact that they were movable and travelled, in processions, through the polis.

Characteristically, the festive celebrations of the public type directly involved the ruler (with the court) as a participant, indeed, as an actor.<sup>10</sup> The ruler danced in the ballet, rode through the city as the crowning part of an itinerant procession, or participated in the tournament *à thème*; in funeral ceremonies, the deceased ruler was undeniably still the chief actor. Thus, the sponsor-ruler was a participant in the public celebration, on display, and visible to the entire city. By turns participating in the equestrian ballet (a revival of a Greek practice) or *carrousel*; proceeding on horseback or in a decorated coach through the permanent and ephemeral gateways of the city;<sup>11</sup> enjoying a sleigh-ride in northern Europe, or a regatta or a gondola race on real canals or on artificial lakes in the south—in all these situations the ruler projected onto the crowd a three-dimensional image of himself or herself.<sup>12</sup> At least in theory, the members of the polis had the opportunity to observe their ruler frontally and in profile, from behind and from above as they

watched, perched on rooftops, trees, or poles, as well as from below, as they jostled each other in the streets or in front of the raised dais. More than a presence, the sponsor-ruler was also a ceremonial representation of the Idea of the ruler-in-attendance, and the public celebration was therefore also an occasion to express visually (via clothing, horsemanship, retinue, and the like) the existing class structures within the polis as they were perceived and approved by the ruling class.<sup>13</sup>

During public celebrations of these types, the entire city—its squares, streets, churches, palaces, and fountains—was temporarily metamorphosed into a theatrical, festive space. Besides sheer entertainment, these festivities offered the participants and witnesses an imitative assessment (imitative by allegorical means) of the wealth, the education, and the religious devotion of the sponsor-ruler and the polis as opposed to other poleis. In addition, the celebration, with its multiplication of symbolic accouterments, was also a rhetorical vehicle that could be adapted to communicate a judgment on the state of the community or the nation as well as a judgment on the ruler's function therein. And finally, in all their details as well as in the whole, these festive rituals were also the symbolic expressions of religious, philosophical and deeply rooted mythic concerns. After all, Renaissance and Baroque artists were also, to some extent, philosophers. Whatever the specific occasion, such feasts could be considered the literal and metaphorical expressions of a community or dynastic spirit in action, whether they took place in the streets, in the church or the courtyard of the palazzo. It has been said that "the feast was a privileged moment for polis or court to express itself in its hierarchically articulated entirety and with all the material and symbolic means it had at its disposal" (G. Stefani in Fagiolo dell'Arco 11). Perhaps that was precisely the original purpose of the feast or festive performance: the ritualistic symbolic formulation by a community of its identity as a polis. On the occasion of a shared event, the community rallied together in such a way that it must have been difficult to distinguish between "performers" and "public" (though not between the classes) in an outdoor feast or even in an indoor performance (Fagiolo dell'Arco 287, 431–38). In order to obtain a maximum of "marvels" (*meraviglie*), the concrete details of the initial realization were left to professionals: engineers, artists-craftspeople, laborers, and, in its first stage, men of letters.

The latter provided an intellectual, even philosophical, foundation for the festive enterprise, and the specific nature of that foundation should come as no surprise. Steadman has written that

many of the external (and sometimes superficial) aspects of the literature and painting of the age—the copiousness of mythological allusions, the imitation of classical figures and motifs and decorative ornament, the frequent glorification of the sages and heroes of antiquity, and indeed the concern for the service of the state and pursuit or bestowal of secular glory—

were in part attributable to the kind of schooling that poets and their patrons were receiving and the character and aims of humanist pedagogy (54).

The dominant philosophical trend that had touched the lives of these men of letters and their patrons was Platonism. With its doctrine of the two worlds, Platonism and its various adaptations, which are known as Neoplatonism, formed a fundamental presence in the formative centuries of western civilization and remained so for more than a thousand years.<sup>14</sup> In fact, Christianity itself was deeply permeated with it. Its interpretive principles structured the creative imagination of men of letters and their patrons, and helped to found the ceremonial festive expression of mythic-political values in symbolic patterns. At the heart of these Neoplatonic adaptations or movements was the shared central notion that an inner reality is half concealed and half revealed by the outer reality. Essentially, Neoplatonism always explored the symbiosis of a fictional semblance on the outside and a veiled truth within (that is, veiled by means of allegory and symbolism), in which the latter refers to archetypes open to subliminal recognition.<sup>15</sup> The Neoplatonic emphasis on images and on the interpretation of visual forms (an emphasis which, as we will see, can also be applied to music) probably originated in Plato's argument that language (*logos*, discursive speech) is an inferior tool for the revelation of truth. From this argument it was inferred that *visually represented* images can lead more swiftly—because more directly—to higher knowledge than language (Gombrich 1972: 147).<sup>16</sup> Hence the crucial function of visual, allegorical emblems in the practical execution of the festive celebrations: "The visual symbolism must be got right, or it will not work," writes Donington (58). The fact that Renaissance intellectuals and many artists were informed by a Humanistic tradition combining Scholasticism and Neoplatonism provided the basis for their ability to engage playfully in complex allegorical cross-referencing.<sup>17</sup> Essentially, the game consisted of encoding and decoding the very diverse but mostly pagan imagery that expressed the symbolical implications comprising, within Neoplatonic thought, the veiled significance of art. For with the Neoplatonic philosophy came also the notion that an image can at the same time represent (surface realism), symbolize (conscious allegory), and express (subconscious meaning) (Gombrich 1972: 123–24).

Perhaps we can best illustrate some of these ideas by means of a contemporaneous, albeit irreverent, application. Jack Wilton, the roguish narrator of Thomas Nashe's novel *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594), explains the allegories contained in the armor of participants in a mock joust:

His armour was ill intermixed with lilies and roses, and the bases thereof bordered with nettles and weeds, signifying stings, crosses and overgrowing encumbrances in his love; his helmet round-proportioned like a gardener's

water-pot, from which seemed to issue forth small threads of water, like cistern strings, that not only did moisten the lilies and roses, but did fructify as well the nettles and weeds, and made them overthrow their liege lords. Whereby he did import thus much, that the tears that issued from his brains, as those artificial distillations issued from the well-counterfeit water-pot on his head, watered and gave life as well to his mistress' disdain (resembled to nettles and weeds) as increase of glory to her care-causing beauty (comprehended under the lilies and roses). The symbol thereto annexed was this: *Ex lachrimis lachrimae* [editor's note: "From tears, more tears"]. A third, being troubled with a curst, a treacherous and wanton wife, used this similitude. On his shield he caused to be limned Pompey's ordinance for parricides, as namely, a man put into a sack with a cock, a serpent and an ape, interpreting that his wife was a cock for her crowing, a serpent for her stinging, and an ape for her unconstant wantonness, with which ill qualities he was so beset that thereby he was thrown into a sea of grief. The word, *Extremum malorum mulier*: "The utmost of evils is a woman."<sup>18</sup>

The iconological novelties that are applied in these far-fetched trappings and *impresae* are explained with the sense for detail that was characteristic of contemporaneous iconographical manuals of Neoplatonic inspiration, such as the mythological encyclopedias and emblem books, which, originally written in Latin, were quickly translated into the European vernaculars.<sup>19</sup> As Nashe's text indicates, they soon surfaced in a context where they could be appropriately and easily applied: the political (and religious) sphere of festive celebrations. The textual and visual memorials of the festive celebrations clearly indicate that the creation of patterns of visual symbolism was a principal concern of the artists who designed and executed them.<sup>20</sup> The first stage in the creation of a festive celebration was thus heuristic and can be compared to the first phase in the construction of a rhetorical discourse: the stage of "invention." A theme for the celebration must be found, or a specific application of a theme devised, as well as the best arguments to advance and communicate the theme. Motifs were gathered from mythological, Egyptian, Christian, historical, literary and scientific sources. Translated and reinterpreted, or "actualized" according to the specific context and for the particular occasion (which involved, in many cases, the superimposition of a required happy ending—a *lieto fine*—on the fable or allegory), the most suitable motifs were subjected to amplification in a literary and visual program that was supposed to be visually attractive and as erudite as the artist-compiler could possibly make it.

This program usually represented a selection of ideas and motifs derived from the philosophical, scientific, and other movements of its period and space (Fagiolo dell'Arco 55). For example, text and decoration could refer to symbolically charged elements from the concrete world of plants and animals as well as from the scientifically or theologically abstract, artistic, or human-

istic strata of knowledge. Thus, fruits and flowers in the program suggest fertility and abundance in the state, especially when linked with dynastic genealogical trees. The four elements have their own sets of connotations, as do examples of metamorphosis drawn from the Great Book that is Nature.<sup>21</sup> And so forth. In the festive celebrations, these elements were combined in redundancy, and presented visually in service to the Ideas that structured the performance and provided its occasion—such as the expression of the identity of the polis, and especially, the ruler's identification with the stable polis. For example, the great contemporaneous interest in exoticism (artistically, with bizarre objects; philosophically, with different societal systems; religiously, with the missions; politically, with embassies) could emerge in festive events because its symbolically charged motifs could become part of, at the same time, utopianism and religious propaganda (see Fagiolo dell'Arco 60).<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the constituent elements of the feast or performance also reflected the new science, for the allegorical apparatus and the illusionistic techniques of decoration, architecture (in particular, artificial perspective with single vantage point), and stage devices (new forms of movable scenery) incorporated the era's sense of the infinite, the dynamic, and the new concept of space.<sup>23</sup> Regardless of its sources, however, a well-defined, coherent, and challenging program was always considered a necessity. For example, on the subject of royal Entries, de Pure writes that,

il faut qu'il y ait un dessein, un point principal, un noeud mysterieux qui d'une façon ou d'autre appartienne si precisement au sujet, et s'étende si naturellement à toutes les parties qui le composent, qu'il ne puisse estre appliqué à autre chose qu'à ce qu'il est destiné. Ce point peut estre ou historique & reel, ou allegorique (205).<sup>24</sup>

And ultimately, the translation (metamorphosis, metaphorization) of external objects drawn from all spheres (that is: figurative or textual emblems) into internal states (into archetypes even), still followed from the central Neoplatonic metaphor: the human being is the small equivalent (microcosm) of what the universe is in large (macrocosm). Similarly, the festive celebration can be interpreted as a microcosm of the world, which was a manner of equating the sponsor-creator of the celebration with the creator of the world (see Strong 1973: 39–41).

Given the specified *raison d'être* of the festive celebrations, the reinterpretation of motifs in their literary-visual-aural program was closely linked with politics (Donington 57). With this I mean that the artistic and artificial expression of allegories and symbols, which amounted to an extensive cultural repertory, was manipulated time and time again for reasons of political and religious propaganda, that is, in order to manipulate the audience's conscience and thought, and to persuade, convince, and especially, to praise.<sup>25</sup> In such obviously political art, visual symbolism was (and remains today) a crucial

factor. The symbolic values of all the artistic components of the performance had to be combined harmoniously, just like the arts/crafts themselves: the union of the arts/crafts symbolized the union of the nation. The desire for stability within the polis or realm, under an increasingly centralized princely rule, was perhaps the principal motif of Renaissance and Baroque public celebrations. Part of the rhetorical function of the latter was to convince the polis and the world at large of this desire. The perceived need to publicly express such ideas in a festive form may well have followed directly from the era's keen awareness of unprecedented political, religious, social and intellectual instability.

The framework of the communal festive event was thus adapted in order to express contemporaneous Ideas. The literary-visual program and the practical details of the occasion served as allegorical reminders of the existence of a higher world of Ideas (including the Idea of the polis, its desire for stability, its place in the temporal and eternal scheme of things). All the concerns and problems that intrigued the era's intellectuals and philosopher-artists were translated into the allegorical motifs that surfaced in every part of the celebration, in which the details were designed to work together to produce a principal meaning. Supplemented with other forms of knowledge known to members of the polis, the allegories merged in the ceremony and its festive expression, and became available for interpretation according to the level of understanding of each individual observer-participant. Allegoresis ruled supreme in these feasts and festive performances; representations drawn from the outer world served, in effect, as expressions of the archetypal consciousness of the polis. The method of allegorical presentation heavily drawn upon on these occasions employed textual or figurative emblems to serve, simultaneously, the purposes of decoration (half revealing the Ideas) and allegoresis (half concealing the Ideas), and also to create a sense of magnificence appropriate to the ruler and the polis. Triumphal arches, fantastic statues and pyramids, and complex floats—why not, as in Florence, 1661, construct a float with a large pond complete with island and beautiful nereids and playful tritons? (Baur-Heinhold 17)—as well as texts of performances, details of processions and pageants, and geometrical figures (appropriately called hieroglyphs) performed in dances or equestrian ballets: all of these inherently transitional, itinerant media were loaded with symbolic evocations of the seasons, the zodiac, the planets, the elements, and the whole or parts of sacred, mythological and secular history. After all, in spite of the beginning shift of opinion that we have detected in Ripa's manual, the learned consensus still held that "truth" could be represented better in images than in words—even, in a sense, according to the Aristotelians themselves, for whom "thought consisted of forms which are received by the mind as images" (see Strong 1973: 28). For example, in the complicated figures of dances, the Pythagorean



belief survived that the cosmic harmonies could be concretely reflected in visual representations of measures and numbers.<sup>26</sup>

The carnivals, feasts, pageants, tournaments *à thème*, and performances arranged along these lines can indeed be called triumphs of deeply entrenched allegorical mechanisms, producing ever more complex results. Of all the forms, equestrian ballets offered perhaps the most grandiose occasions for display. At an especially grandiose *carrousel*, held in Versailles in 1662, Louis XIV was officially inaugurated as the Sun King. He was dressed like a Roman Emperor, and his shield, embossed with a sun dispersing the clouds, bore the devise *Ut vidi, vici*; each of the participating noblemen informed the sponsor-ruler-emperor of his specific attachment by means of allegorical representations and devices, many of which implied or assimilated the need for the sun.<sup>27</sup> As the ceremonial expression of the social organization of the cities, the *poleis* and the courts, such festive events could hardly emerge spontaneously any longer.

Doubtlessly, the creators of the festive celebrations (sponsor, man of letters, composer, engineer, craftsman, and last but certainly not least, architect) counted on their future audience to be somewhat familiar with Neoplatonic theory and allegorical interpretative strategies, both when planning the formalization of the political goals and when making extensive use of symbolism that was based upon antique philosophies and the more recent versions thereof. Much of this symbolism may have been fairly well known as a shared and often seen codex of images and conceits that were classified accordingly in Neoplatonic manuals, which were repertoires of symbolic and allegorical motives (Carandini 283). Yet, the more obscure symbols and references were clearly available only to the more sophisticated among the audience-participants.<sup>28</sup> But although the *hoi polloi* did not have access to the profundities of Neoplatonism, we may presume that even the less educated could have access to at least some of the meanings the designers wanted to impart, even if only through a visual familiarity with frequently recurring motifs. In addition, the intended symbolic argument was often explained in relatively easily available libretti or epilogues.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the allegorical complexity did not necessarily prohibit understanding and enjoyment or appreciation of rich materials, brilliant colors, intricate designs, harmonious sounds, and graceful movements. Also, the technique of subjecting symbols to allegorical interpretation was not restricting and did not contradict the desire for openness and movement that is a prime characteristic of the Baroque sensibility. On the contrary, symbols were not endowed with one single meaning; even for the Neoplatonists, "ideas" were not fixed, but changeable, always open for improvement and reinterpretation (Maiorino 80).

Finally, it seems paradoxical that festive celebrations of the types discussed were designed to be ephemeral, and were yet consciously imbued with an air of permanence (Carandini 280; Strong 1973: 21–22). This seeming



paradox requires further explanation. On the one hand, the festive "event" (such as the performance) is to be distinguished from the "feast" proper, in that the latter was the occasion (in many cases, a recurring one) and the former an (ephemeral) event; yet, the occasion was to be remembered by the event. On the other hand, the symbolism applied to the events was designed to give the impression of a conscious quest for the ephemeral. For example, symbols and imagery pointed at the brevity of life, and occasionally the destruction of the event site was part of the event itself—perhaps testifying to the truth of the assumption that the ritual sensibility acts cumulatively, in the sense that "all further growth requires the immolation of that which was fundamental to an earlier stage."<sup>30</sup> But at the same time, the event was also and simultaneously designed to be permanent. For the actual sensuous experience of the festive event, whether public or private, was partly provoked and partly commented upon by elements that were intended to remain behind as permanent relics of the occasion: historiographical texts, libretto books, engravings, printed illustrations, eyewitnesses' reports in letters and diaries, dedications, properties, architectonic structures, etc. The fairly stable recurrence, in catalogue form, of specific features in written descriptions of festive celebrations, for example, may even lead us to consider such descriptions as a "genre" proper—the verbal equivalent of the detailed engravings or oil paintings that also made the feasts and celebrations permanent.<sup>31</sup> These features characteristically include "inexpressibility topoi" (see Curtius 159–62); the full titles and complete description of the sponsor(s) and participants; a pseudonaive narrator who feigns astonishment and who, for reasons of dramatic immediacy, switches tenses from the historical present to the past and back again; dramatic, epic, and novelistic stylistic and compositional features; and, most likely, authorial inventions and embellishments.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the feasts and celebrations did not only represent the sponsor-ruler and the interests of the polis, but were themselves represented.

### *Baroque Festive Forms and Private Performances*

In the late sixteenth century (the transitional era from the Renaissance to the Baroque), the festive forms by which the city was temporarily transformed into a theatrical space were supplemented with (but not replaced by) new ones, among which the French *ballet de cour* and the English court masque rank first in importance.<sup>33</sup> These forms were organized in more private festive environments, and they reflected the ceremonial rules and circumstances of courts that were in the process of becoming both larger and more absolutist. In other words, festive celebrations like masques and ballets no longer only expressed an "aspiration toward political order" but rather began to pretend that the aspiration had actually been achieved and that the order had been

established in the figure of the increasingly absolute prince (Strong 1973: 171).

The sponsor-ruler continued to participate in these new forms of courtly celebration. Of course, the ceremonial organization still represented dialectically the hierarchical differences between those in attendance: the sponsor-ruler occupied the central position in the entertainment (for example, situated at the apex of the pyramidal pattern of court-ball dances) just as he or she did in real life. Indeed, to emphasize this central position of the ruler vis-à-vis the courtly nobility, and to illustrate the quasi-impossibility of distinguishing between the "play world" and the "serious world," were principal functions of ceremonious festive forms. To this end, the textual-visual-aural program of these new forms remained mainly allegorical and Neoplatonic; dance patterns were still (though more complexly than before) "moving geometrical hieroglyphs" (Menestrier, in Strong 1973: 61). But rather novel was the fact that the participating sponsor-ruler was no longer on display for the *entire* polis.<sup>34</sup> Such ballets and masques were generally celebrated for a select audience in a private context (essentially, the court) and in a fixed, secluded location (a specific room, hall, or "theater"). Thus, on occasion, even the tournament *à thème* moved indoors.

The ballet, which could be ordinary or equestrian (*carrousel*), was a modern successor of the medieval tournament and joust (see further Strong 1973: 57–61). De Pure defined it as "une representation muette, où les gestes & les mouvemens signifient ce qu'on pourroit exprimer par des paroles ce divertissement est destiné presque uniquement pour les yeux" (210).<sup>35</sup> The required skills to excel in the ballet reflected the change that had occurred in court ceremonial and in the functions of the ruler and the court: elegance and grace, rather than muscular force and dexterity, were now the accouterments of the courtier. Such ballets were performed all over Europe, but nowhere with more seriousness of purpose than in France between 1581 and 1672, where a tradition of organized court dances had existed since the end of the fourteenth century but really took off only by the middle of the sixteenth.<sup>36</sup> One of the most famous was the *Balet comique de la Reyne*, given at the Palais du Petit Bourbon on 15 October, 1581 to celebrate the wedding of Mlle de Vaudemont (the sister of King Henri III) and the Duc de Joyeuse. Designed by Balthasar Beaujoyeux (actually Baltazarini), with music by Lambert de Beaulieu and Jacques Salmon on a text by La Chesnaye and painted scenery by Jacques Patin (who also designed the costumes), it is the earliest such ballet of which the music was preserved.<sup>37</sup> Its name was derived from the fact that the queen performed in person, along with numerous ladies of first rank loaded with precious stones, who danced as naiads. In this ballet, as in many other ones, Circe was the protagonist and her magic island (complete with men transformed into wild beasts but transported entirely to a French château) provided the setting; the characters included deities from the Greek pantheon

who spoke or sang like late sixteenth-century courtiers. The main point of the program—which was actually sung as much as it was danced—was to indicate that Circe (the official embodiment of chaos, disorderly imagination, unreason, unproductive creativity, and whatever else brings ruination to a realm by enslaving its [male] forces) will only surrender to the French king, the supremely rational and benign force of the universe, a more powerful signifier of Order than Jupiter himself: “Et si quelqu'un bientôt doit triompher de moy, C'est ce Roy des François, et faut que tu luy cèdes, Ainsi que je luy fais, le ciel que tu possèdes (8).”<sup>38</sup>

Here, as in many similar works performed later at the courts of Christian rulers, the pagan setting obviously served to avoid any charges of blasphemy. According to Donington, the many allegories of this particular spectacle, which lasted well over five hours, and which made use of complex technical devices such as cloud machines and a large, partly hidden orchestra, were designed to

convey the impression (all the more emphatic since it was not in accordance with the facts) that a prosperous and beneficent and perfectly stable monarchy was giving freely of its bounty to a contented court and populace; that all outstanding enemies other than the purely mythological Circe had already been satisfactorily defeated; and that when she, too, yielded, general reconciliation must needs be achieved (57).

Another wishful expression, or “confirmation,” of the nation's desired stability under its all-powerful monarch.<sup>39</sup> Other famous examples are the *Balet de la Nuit* (Paris, 1653), in which the fifteen-year-old Louis XIV, dancing together with Lully, anticipated his future role as the Sun King; in 1654, Louis appeared again in the *Balet du Temps* (a production, as always, of Benserade and Lully), in which roles were danced by the Minutes, the Hours, the Day, the Night, the Weeks, the Months, the Years, and the Ages. But such thematic ballets were also danced elsewhere; a case in point is the *Ballett der sieben Planeten* (Dresden, 1678), created for the visit of the parents of Johann Georg II. Magnificent equestrian ballets were given also in Florence (for example, *La guerra d'amore* for the Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1615, and *La guerra di bellezza* for the prince of Urbino in 1616). Perhaps the most splendid equestrian ballet ever was *La Contesa dell'Aria e dell'Acqua*, designed by Sbarra with music by Bertali, which involved floats large enough to be equipped with ponds and complete ships, and which was performed in Vienna, January 1667, as part of the festivities celebrating the marriage of Emperor Leopold I and the Infanta Margareta Theresa (see also the concluding “Ne Plus Ultra” section). The masque was the English equivalent to the French court ballet.<sup>40</sup> Both forms remained rooted in Neoplatonic symbolism and had the same functions. Their designers, in addition to entertaining the court and privileged visitors (*divertimento*), were supposed to testify to the power and wealth

of the sponsor-ruler and serve as historiographers. Their task was to immortalize the idealized, or Ideal, concept of the sponsor-ruler's significance for the Nation and in History *sub specie aeternitatis*, and to convince their contemporaries of this concept and claim's validity.

Special occasions in the life of the polis or the court continued to be celebrated with festive events that were either public and movable, or more private and circumscribed. But a third, additional type of festive form had meanwhile come to fruition in the more private circles of European courts. Unlike in the former two types, the sponsor-ruler did not necessarily participate personally in these new, complicated, and expensive festive forms: opera, the machine play, the heroic-gallant comedy,<sup>41</sup> and the *comédie-ballet*, performances of which were increasingly seen as the ideal climax to specific celebratory occasions—most obviously, dynastic weddings. The practice of presenting, in a relatively private courtly setting, new plays with varying degrees of musical involvement and spectacle, as part of the prolonged series of festivities that marked such occasions, had existed for a long time, first at the richer courts of Italy and Burgundy, and later elsewhere. But these events, though fascinating objects of study in themselves, were not always splendidly produced, or very grandiose, or conceived as guessing games pregnant with Neoplatonic-political significance. Among the more memorable examples of this earlier type were the "Labors of Hercules" on the occasion of the wedding of Charles the Bold and Margareth of York in Bruges in 1468, and the variegated ceremonial festivities that Leonardo da Vinci designed for Gian Galeazzo Sforza's marriage to Isabella of Aragon in Milan, 1490. Such relatively private performances continued to be held throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and gradually a number of them became more splendid and were produced according to the latest technological developments and with the best available artists. Usually, they formed the climax of a complex program of festive celebrations that could last from a few days up to several months. From a vast number of examples, I will merely pick a few. The première of *La Confanaria* (a comedy by Francesco D'Ambra and executed by Vasari) took place for the wedding of Francesco de'Medici with Johanna of Austria in Florence, 1565; the opera *Euridice* (by Jacopo Peri on a libretto by Ottavio Rinucci) was first performed for the wedding of Ferdinand de'Medici with Christina of Lothringen, also in Florence, 1600; at the same court, the 1608 wedding of Cosimo II with Maria-Magdalena of Austria was fêted with the première of the opera *Il Giudizio di Paride*. This fashion was certainly not restricted to the Medici courts. In Castle Hartenfels near Torgau, for example, the wedding of Princess Eleonore with Landgraf Georg III of Hessen-Darmstadt was celebrated in 1627 with the première of *Daphne*, the first truly German opera (composed by Heinrich Schütz on a libretto by Martin Opitz).

No matter how much money and talent were spent on the production of such works, they could always be outdone . . . in the theater of the mind. On

occasion, contemporaneous poets acted like architects, engineers, and producers, introducing the type of the splendid private performance as a motif in their work. Probably the most impressive example is provided by Giambattista Marino in the fifth canto of his once celebrated epic *L'Adone* (Paris, 1623). In a "gilded theater" that has somehow been fitted into the "colossal hall" of Venus's elaborately described palace, Mercury has prepared "a courtly spectacle" to entertain Venus's guest Adonis. In total privacy, sitting on golden chairs, Venus and Adonis watch a lengthy performance of Ovid's tragic tale of Diana and Actaeon by "histrions," not one of whom, characteristically enough, "would deign to act before/ a vulgar and commercial audience."<sup>42</sup> Live beasts run from the stage-forest to the startled but merry couple, there is music, and the many decors are rich and complex. Marino outdoes the actual stage engineers and architects by providing a curious revolving stage for numerous quick and astonishing scene changes (Priest trans. 92–93).<sup>43</sup> His long epic was enormously successful, in part perhaps because the "vulgar and commercial audience" could not yet otherwise satisfy its interest in theatrical extravaganzas of the kind described in the fifth canto.

The most interesting phase in the development of these increasingly splendid private courtly performances—clearly, I use the adjective "splendid" to indicate the scale of expense involved, the profusion of talent employed, and the total desired effect of the performance—was the period that immediately followed the publication of *L'Adone*, stretching from the 1630s through the early 1670s.<sup>44</sup> (Interestingly enough, this was also the most violent and brutal part of the seventeenth century.) And of the splendid performances within this period, the most magnificent ones—produced with no eye to cost and eclipsing anything that had been shown before—were première performances of total works of art that had been designed to inaugurate a new, permanent auditorium, a symbolic locus or focal point for the power of the sponsor-ruler in times to come.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the 1631 carnival season in Rome was highlighted with the première performance of *Sant'Alessio*, an opera created by Rospigliosi and Landi especially for the occasion, in the brandnew Barberini palace. A different version of *Sant'Alessio* was given on similar occasions, in 1632 and 1634. In Madrid, the 1635 inauguration of the Hall of Realms in Philip IV's Buen Retiro palace was the occasion for the first performance at the Retiro of Calderón de la Barca's *El mayor encanto, amor*. In the Palazzo Pitti, Florence, 1637, the wedding of Emperor Ferdinand II with Vittoria de Urbino was feasted with the première of *Le Nozze degli Dei*, an opera with music by Ferdinand Saracini and decorations by Alfonso Parigi. In Davenant's private residence in London, Rutland House, the first operatic performance of any kind in England was held in 1656, prior to the return of King Charles and perhaps in order to test Puritan policies toward theatrical entertainment. Performed on that occasion was the first part of Davenant's *The Siege of*

*Rhodes*.<sup>46</sup> In the Grande Galérie of the Louvre, Paris, 1660, the wedding of Louis XIV and the Infanta Maria Theresa was celebrated with Cavalli's opera *Xerxes*. In Munich, 1661, on the occasion of the birth of Princess Maria Anna, the festive opera *L'Erinto*, by Kerll, Bissari, and Santurini, was first performed. Also in Munich, 1662, in the opera house on the Salvatorplatz, the birth of Max Emmanuel, heir to the Bavarian Electorate, was the occasion for the performance of the opera *Fedra incoronata*; the performance was followed by a tournament with pageant, which continued the Phaedra theme (*Antiope giustificata*), and by *Medea vindicata*. In the Salle des Machines in the Tuileries, Paris, 1662, the opera *Ercole amante*, composed by Cavalli on a libretto by Buti and with machines by Vigarani, was performed to celebrate the Peace of the Pyrenees (1659), as well as (belatedly) the wedding of Louis XIV and Maria Theresa. Again in Paris, 1664, the Park of Versailles was inaugurated with the first series of the "Plaisirs de l'Île enchantée," which lasted three days and included ballets, festive dinners, fireworks, tournaments, and performances—including, on the second night, the première of the *comédie-ballet* *La Princesse d'Elide* by Molière and Lully. And in Vienna, 1668, the new theater "Auf der Cortina" was the setting for what would go down in history as the most splendid show of the century: the two-day, extremely costly performance of *Il pomo d'oro*. In Paris, the Académie Royale de Musique was inaugurated in 1671 with the opera *Pomone*, composed by Robert Cambert on a libretto by Pierre Perrin. And the list goes on and on.

Functionally and practically, the splendid private festive performance still had much in common with the public festive celebration as well as with the masque and ballet. Certainly since the *Balet comique de la Reyne*, the primary subject and main purpose of all these forms had become the praise of the ruler by means of his or her representation in a heroic or gallant-heroic role as the (real or desired) provider of stability for the realm.<sup>47</sup> Their designers strove to achieve this goal in two ways: first, via intellectual means that were originally informed by Neoplatonic theory (thus, their success or failure depended on the application of the habits of allegorical interpretation that had been part of the western cultural imagination at least since the Middle Ages), and secondly, via the use of time-honored mimetic-rhetorical techniques for representing these Ideas and emotions and affecting the audience's ethos. Just like the public celebratory forms, the splendid private performance was, indeed, a *rhetorical discourse* between the sponsor-ruler, the artists, and the audience. Indeed, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, theoreticians and practising artists in all media reapplied the principles of traditional rhetoric to poetry (which includes drama), to music (the connection between music and rhetoric was suggested first in Quintilian's *Institutiones*), and even to the visual arts. They did so in order to imitate more naturally the passions and deeds of Man (*mimesis*)—which Humanism considered the common goal of all the arts.<sup>48</sup> I use the term "rhetoric" as it was understood in the



seventeenth century, that is, as an *organon*: a practical tool to reach the hearts of men, "a science of persuasion" (Fagiolo dell'Arco 58).<sup>49</sup> Of the three types of rhetoric that Aristotle described in the "Art" of *Rhetoric*, the epideictic type seemed the most relevant: it is mainly intended to praise (or blame), does not aim at transmitting new facts or developing new areas of thought, and does not even intend primarily to persuade or dissuade.<sup>50</sup> The conception and execution of private as well as public festive performances thus concurred with Aristotle's opinion that the master discipline controlling all the arts and sciences, is, ultimately, politics.

But the splendid and usually private festive performances differed from the public festive celebrations, and from the masques and the ballets, first of all, in the sheer size of the enterprise, and also in the fact that the rhetorical purpose was far more evident and expressed with much greater concentration in these total works of art. Leonardo's rhetorical approach to art (see n. 48) may guide us through this point. If painting, poetry, and music are all seen as directly related, in that they all address the intellect, then it can be said that the function and end of all art, whether pictorial, plastic, or literary, is to move the affections. From this, it follows that the artist's ultimate emphasis must be not so much on the content (*Idea*) as on the form (*mimesis*)—which confirms our previous suggestion that for the Baroque artist, originality of subject (*invention*) was less important than the masterful re-presentation of the subject (*disposition*, *elocution*) in a new context (*materia superat opus*; Argan, in Castelli ed., 11). From a strictly rhetorical viewpoint, "total works of art" such as the splendid festive performance, which uses all artistic media and matter available, can thus more effectively persuade, dissuade, or praise than any single medium by itself. For unlike the latter, the splendid festive performance addresses all the senses at once and therefore penetrates the intellect more efficiently.<sup>51</sup> The festive performances created after these models ranged from Florentine-style *intermedi* to *comédies-ballet*, "machine plays," and full-fledged opera—forms that all thrived on ostentation. The point is that in its attempt to incorporate every artistic element available, the splendid festive performance was for all practical purposes the culmination of the venerable philosophical-theoretical attempt at blending the arts, which the Humanists had reemphasized in their discussion of the ancient topos of *ut pictura, poesis*. Such private celebrations amounted even less to a celebration of the community spirit than had been the case in the transitional forms of the private ballets or masques. Obviously, the enclosed space affected the policy of admissions as well as the perception of the presence of the ruler. Instead, the focus of the festive event was exclusively the person and function of the sponsor(s)-ruler(s). No longer a collective occasion, and circumscribed within the limits of a specific locus, the private celebration really became a "performance" in the modern sense—but a performance from which the general community was almost totally excluded and which ceased to hold direct



relevance for the members-at-large of a polis (unless they were involved in it as craftspeople or derived their income from it). It is highly characteristic, for example, that unlike the public forms described in the preceding section, the private splendid performances under examination here were usually staged at night, when the commoners and the laboring folk were supposed to be asleep. The nocturnal setting emphasized the exclusion of those who led a working life, and at the same time celebrated the unrestricted freedom of the ruling class to substitute its own schedule for the natural, temporal organization of the cosmos.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, the enclosed site of the splendid performance (theater, opera house, pleasure garden) symbolically confirmed the power of the sponsor-ruler by its architectural arrangements and the organization of the stage, by applying the linear, "peep show" perspective with a single, or "absolutist" vantage point, and by exploiting the symbolic effects of the great machines.<sup>53</sup> The new forms (machine play and opera) were developed in symbiosis with these developments in theater and stage architecture. Like a true *rey planeta* or Sun King, the sponsor-ruler promoted the court as a microcosm of the universe in which he occupied the center and the courtiers served as satellites. Still redolent of Neoplatonic symbolic strategies, the private festive performance emphasized and confirmed the status quo in the relationships at court. These magnificent performances of new machine plays or operas were, at the same time, an invention of the absolutist Baroque age, the best synthesis of the period's intellectual, political and artistic concerns, and, perhaps, the culmination of the organized spirit of play in the West.

We might justifiably interpret these entertainments both as an ironic comment on the dreadful events of the time and as a deliberate flouting of the reality surrounding the court or its theatrical locus. Symbolic and arrogant celebrations of the power of the sponsor-ruler (who paid) and the artist-craftsman (who created), the performances expressed a deep contempt for the forces that succeed in imposing intellectual and physical restraints on ordinary humankind. Contrary to all practical or rational sense, they required "loss" expenditures of money, creative energy, and labor so huge as to seem to later observers rather out of proportion to their own ultimate significance and to their context. By means of their machines, the designers and the participants pretended to defy the laws of gravity and the separation of the cosmic realms. Such courtly festive celebrations became, in a way, somewhat pathetic substitutes for court life itself—equivalent in function to the heavily ornamented spaces in which the court functioned in its regular organization. The proverbial courtly-Baroque opulence in ornamentation may well have been an overcompensation for a crushing sense of worthlessness and a neurotic fear of annihilation and of the void. Unable to tolerate the emptiness and the distance between a project and its execution (Alewyn 1957: 107), the courtly Baroque

demanded instant gratification (Alewyn justifiably calls the Baroque "eine ungeduldige Kultur. Es kann nicht warten").<sup>54</sup>

A further significant characteristic of the private splendid festive performances was the opportunity they gave the sponsor-ruler to withdraw personally from the action on the stage. Instead of participating in play-in-performance, the sponsor-ruler observed "performed play."<sup>55</sup> Instead of appearing as an agile person on display, he or she became a static function while (often but not always) remaining on (deliberate) display. The ruler's relative rise in status—from Renaissance prince of a city-state with or without outlying territories, to Baroque absolute monarch—made it often (though not always) impossible for him or her, as sponsor, to play personally. Instead, he or she only presided over the performance, placing the spirit of play under his or her aegis. Staged *for* rather than *with* the sponsor-ruler, the private splendid performance was, in content and execution, the ruler's metaphysical, symbolic expression. For example, the gradual changes in theater architecture and stage design reflected, or were even occasioned by, the fact that the sponsor-absolute ruler did not necessarily wish to be on permanent display. The advent of perspective with a single vantage point coincides with the withdrawal of the sponsor-ruler as an active participant: the whole stage is arranged in perspective from his or her vantage point in perfect symmetry—the world is ordered, the ruler is the fixed point of reference, the embodiment of stability heads the state. Again, the *Balet comique de la Reyne* anticipates this development: the king himself did not participate (though the queen did), and an engraving, done around the time the work was performed, shows him sitting in the theatrical space as it was codified half a century later by the influential Sabbattini:

Let [the prince's seat] be placed as close as possible to the focus point, and on a level with the vanishing point, let it be surrounded by a balustrade of stout wood so that no harm may result from the press of the people, who on such occasions are used to take little consideration. About it may be placed seats for his courtiers or for the soldiers of his bodyguard, as they may please.<sup>56</sup>

In spite of its fixed setting, the splendid festive performance was limited neither spatially to the narrow confines of the theater, opera house, or pleasure garden, nor temporally to the actual duration of the performance. Instead, it outlasted its sensuously perceived execution: perhaps for reasons of propaganda, it allowed a ratiocinative discussion of itself and of its creator(s), sponsor(s), and participants. This discussion was part of the structure of the celebration and was built into its very fabric. For this reason, the splendid festive performance cannot be studied in isolation from its context, nor only through its literary program. As a ritual, it consisted of a set of phases which had to be gone through completely. In fact, the words "perform" and

"performance" are derived from Old French *parfournir*: "to carry through completely" (Turner 12ff), "to accomplish entirely, complete, achieve" (OED). A performance did not begin when the first line of the prologue was spoken or sung, nor did it end with the last line of the epilogue. Rather, the performance proper included the occasion, the organization, the construction of the specific site, various festive activities (including the central event, the ephemeral performance of machine play or opera), as well as the (typically Baroque) paradoxical effort of making the ephemeral permanent, by means of material records, enduring physical structures, and the lasting reputation of the event and its sponsors, audiences, and artists.

An interesting point for consideration is the fact that the splendid performance was only a part (though usually the climax) of a series of fluently connected events, all of which were in a sense incorporated into a total rhetorical scheme. For example, a coronation or wedding mass was followed by a banquet, which could itself lead into a ballet, after which could follow a presentation of awards or distinctions, which itself might occasion a theatrical performance of some sort, which could be concluded by a fireworks display. All these events were intricately connected in time and space by the presence of the participants, as well as by the deployment of related symbolical-allegorical schemata. The point is that the several aspects or stages of the celebration were often not clearly distinguishable from each other. The entire event was, indeed, a "performance:" the completion of an elaborate set of rituals.<sup>57</sup>

The etymology of the word "performance" leads to a related consideration. If a performance, strictly speaking, demands "to be carried out completely," it follows that there is a finale, or rather, that the performance in the large sense, as the total series of events, *is* the finale, the conclusion, the final stage. A double emphasis can be distinguished, then: first on the process, which corresponds with the Baroque obsession with movement, and second, on the implied "sense of an ending." Carrying the latter notion somewhat further, one can argue that the splendid festive performance, in its large as well as in its limited meaning, was always the posited culmination, even the required ending, of a total series of other events. Not infrequently, this culmination constituted a challenge of sorts, setting in motion another social drama, another series of events (see the Interlude for a discussion of potlatch; Bataille 1970, vol. 1: 309). For example, in 1659, the war between Spain and France was concluded with the signing of a peace treaty (the Peace of the Pyrenees), which was in turn confirmed by the marriage of representatives of the two dynasties involved, in turn celebrated with a "performance" (in the large sense), which culminated in the splendid performance (in the limited sense) of the opera *Ercole amante*. First the war, then the peace treaty, then the dynastic marriage, and finally the splendid private performance of the opera formed a quadrangular series of events that we, as observers looking back in

time, can hardly afford to dissociate. These events were inextricably connected parts of a complex social drama, or interwoven sets of social dramas, which—as is typical of social dramas—had their origin in an initial breach and which were resolved in a conclusive reconciliation (Turner 92ff). The operatic performance was thus the culmination, the *lieto fine* of the total social drama, in which the original breach was not only redressed but in which the participating dynasties were symbolically raised to a level superior to the level they occupied before the social drama began, or, in the case of the example given, to the level of the demigods (Hercules). This elevation was, of course, the true climax of the entire series of connected events. The organization of the whole corresponds nearly exactly with the order of four elements represented in a complete ancient drama: the *agon* between the old and the new fertility principle; the sacrificial death; the *anagnorisis*, or recognition of the king to be followed by the latter's initiation and reincarnation; and then the feast or marriage in honor of the young god, to be followed by a procession with songs of joy.<sup>58</sup> Another example of a performance with such a "sense of an ending" was the première of *Tartuffe* at Versailles in 1664. After the court had already engaged for several days and nights in the elaborate costuming and fanciful mythmaking that constituted the first series of "Plaisirs de l'Île enchantée," the appearance of Tartuffe toward the end of these festivities, was extremely shocking. Dressed in a simple, black robe—probably the first "real" dress that the participants had been exposed to since "Les Plaisirs" had begun—this villain was suddenly introduced as the signifier of the "real" world, and therefore as a dangerous intruder. My point is that an understanding of *Tartuffe* and the contemporaneous controversy which it generated would be enhanced by considering the play in its total setting as a composite of rhetorical strategies, as a well-placed feature in the structural organization of "Les Plaisirs," and as a pawn in the service of a specific artistic-ideological purpose.

To the ritualistic minded Baroque sensibility, a complex series of events, be they historical or fictional, simply would not have been complete without a festive performance giving the events of the drama a higher meaning. It has been argued that no experience, whether personal or social, can be called complete until it has been "performed," until meaning has been squeezed out of it ("ex-pressed") and transferred to terms intelligible to others: via words, song, dance, architecture, or any other medium of communication (see Dilthey, quoted in Turner 13ff). This means that the splendid festive performances were not seen by their Baroque sponsors and makers as mere decorative appendages or whimsical entertainments that necessitated real expenditures (the cost of the theater, the artists' fees, among others) but, more importantly, also as *sacrifices* (by means of economic "loss" creating sacred things), as symbolic expenditures (Bataille 1970, vol. 1: 306–7). As the ritual culmination of series of social events or dramas, the festive

performance was an absolutely necessary catharsis of the lived drama and the formulation of the meaning that the series of events was, in retrospect, perceived to hold.

Yet another reason for studying the entire "event" of a festive performance, rather than simply the text of the performed opera or play, is supplied by the iconological tradition of the Renaissance. Artists worked according to what Gombrich has called "the principle of intersection" (Gombrich 1972: 8). When artists selected subjects—usually from antique sources, although in the Renaissance they added a miscellany of contemporaneous objects and motifs, such as symbolically pregnant clocks or spectacles—they intended these subjects to have specific, contextually significant meanings. We must bear in mind that for the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century artists who worked with images and for the audiences who were asked to interpret them, the image and even the specific subject were closely determined by the occasion for which they were used and the place where they appeared.<sup>59</sup> Thus, a story or fable or image or symbol did not have one set and fixed meaning but was intended to be interpreted, allegorically and pragmatically, according to its specific context. In other words, when Circe appeared in a performance given for Philip IV of Spain, we cannot expect automatically that she would be perceived as having the same functions as in a late sixteenth-century French *ballet de cour*.<sup>60</sup> Symbols are open-ended, diachronic semantic fields, very much linked to continually changing social life itself (see Turner 21–23). Similarly, when characters or events were lifted from the texts of pagan antiquity (especially, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) and inserted into the symbolic world of the festive performances, they acquired new and constantly changing connotations. This principle, though it is basic, has been largely ignored in the scant criticism that exists of plays or operas created as Baroque festive performances.

For all these reasons, any study of the splendid festive performance, like the study of iconology itself, must start with the institution and the event rather than with an isolated analysis of the specific image, symbol, or text. Likewise, because the Baroque festive performance cannot be studied in isolation from its context, the student must not overvalue individual factors (the creative process) at the expense of social factors (the communication process). Indeed, the latter is probably the more important of the two, since it provides the true *raison d'être* of the festive celebration. Renaissance Humanists maintained the notion of antiquity that representational art is always communication, a form of "discourse," since each work of art establishes a relationship between what does the representing and what is being represented (LeCoat 30). The celebration of festive events was likewise a serious discourse, a communication of truths (real or fictional) between a sponsor-ruler, numerous artists and craftspeople, and a specific audience. It has been said that for Renaissance Humanists truth was readymade, whereas