19 / Notes on a Semiotic Approach to *Parade, Cortege,* and *Procession*

Louis Marin

Significant elements of festival are usually organized in patterns. Perhaps the most widespread among them is a perambulatory event which takes several different names— pageant, parade, procession, cortege, demonstration, and others. It may practically constitute an entire festivity all by itself, or it may be staged explicitly as one of the focal points of the festival.

In this article Louis Marin discusses festive perambulatory events, indicating the main types and the semiotic and symbolic aspects of each. The argument is built starting from French materials, but its development and conclusions have also a general applicability. Marin reviews the meaning of key lexical terms and events, observing how they are related to domains crucial for any social system: cortege to political power, procession to religion, parade to war. These events are also performances, but the usual distinctions among actors, roles, and spectators are not rigid as in most performances; contact and distance between actors and audience alternate; the varied physical viewpoint of the spectators also has important implications for their reading of the message conveyed by the event.

Corteges, parades, and processions produce time and space of a special symbolic quality. The duration of the event acquires its own artificial length, with parts and "movements" governed by an internal logic. Since the perambulatory event chooses a series of locations and a particular route touching them, it creates "spaces" and organizes them into "places."

Routes themselves are a significant element carrying symbolic meaning. Three major types of them are indicated: (a) the one-way route that signifies irreversibility and focuses on a cathartic final point; (b) the round trip that attaches special meaning to "pendular" reversibility and stresses the turning point, which is an end and a beginning at the same time; (c) the closed circuit, whose movement encloses and excludes, that tends to eliminate the special value of beginning and ending points. Routes can take on—and convey—the political connotations of the perambulation's events. Marin gives examples of left-wing, right-wing, and "erratic" routes in Paris, showing how names of places chosen for inclusion in the route recount their own different stories about political ideologies. Furthermore, gathering and dispersion points are especially important, being "liminal" areas where the passage into and from the special ritual dimension may take place in a disorderly manner and ignite unforeseen, potentially explosive behavior.

The order of parading individuals, groups, and symbols as well as their relative position is another important aspect of perambulatory events: there are key places and key rows, whose reciprocal position suggests social and ideological hierarchies.

Besides analyzing the component parts of the perambulatory events, the article also discusses the phenomenon as a whole. In parades and corteges, processions and demonstrations, states the author, solidarity and community, agonism and antagonism are at play, and in general what he terms the "great semantic apparatuses" of ritual production, which try, if not to resolve, at least to signify and moderate society's most crucial contradictions.

The article makes the point in one particular area of festival study, but the author indicates issues and problems open to further scholarship. The discussion uses a series of examples, each one of which is implicitly proposed for significant study: the Christian Via Crucis of Holy Friday; a 1794 parade celebrating the taking of Toulon, copied faithfully from the procession of Corpus Christi; the demonstration in Paris during May 1968; the parade in the revolutionary fêtes of Marat, designed to build his legend and to constitute an edifying "exemplum"; the royal entries into cities in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and their evolution from an egalitarian encounter into an act of submission to the sovereign. More abstract theoretical questions are raised by the author as he suggests explicitly what to do in order to broaden and further his discussion: furthering the schema "death and rebirth" proposed by E. Leach for all festive sequences; refining the semiotics of festive time and its different types; studying the parade as a case of the passage from metaphor to metonymy indicated by Mauss and Lévi-Strauss. Indeed, this is a series of themes showing the richness of festival scholarship.

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Parade, Cortege, and *Procession**

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This survey is less concerned with defining the "complex ethno-semiotic object"[1] of *parade, cortege,* or *procession,* than with exploring the various symbolic and semiotic aspects of each. Here, the complexity of forms and historical diversity of the object are not only assumed qualities but can also be taken as our point of departure. For

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example, how did our object of study acquire these names? Which derivations, evo-
lutions, shifts, and transfers of meaning affected this group of lexical items? Which
semantic fields are associated with it? What shared or unshared elements can a study
reveal? What is the dictionary's response concerning such terms as *cortege, parade,
procession, demonstration, march, funeral procession, military review*, etc., terms which
we use intuitively in our everyday language. Just as intuitively, we see that the first
four of the above-mentioned terms express different domains which we shall consider
below.

According to Furetière, *cortege* is "the company kept by a Prince or an eminent
person during a ceremony, including carriages, horses, or other items used to honor
him." Littré takes up the same idea: "a retinue which accompanies another person to
honor him during a ceremony," but he also records a secondary, more generalized
meaning of the word: "a meeting of persons who walk with great pomp," and then
adds, "any large retinue of people."

As for *procession*, Furetière notes the primary meaning as "the prayers uttered
by followers of the clergy on a pilgrimage to a holy place, a church," and then gives
the "proverbial" meaning of a "long retinue of people moving in a line, one after the
other." Littré echoes the latter meaning in his second definition, "a solemn march of
clergy and people which takes place inside or outside a church and during which
hymns, psalms, or litanies are sung," a definition equally valid for pagan ceremonies
analogous to Christian processions.

With regard to the term *parade*, Littré points out the military and warlike aspects
in "the marching of a troop of soldiers in column formation, passing before a leader."
Or, more precisely, "the movement which, after an inspection, consists of all departing
troops marching past the officer who just reviewed them," and more generally, "this
same movement performed by soldiers assembled in a group who must now file out
one by one to begin their march and pass through narrow places."[2]

To the constellation of terms surrounding the three words, we must add *dem-
onstration*, a movement of people assembled to express a political intention. A dem-
onstration can take the form of either a parade or a cortege. We could also consider
march and *review*, two terms that enter the military domain; *review* also overlaps with
parade in that it consists of the inspection of troops arranged to file past spectators.

What then, are the social functions and roles implied by these terms? Using
lexical definitions, we can isolate some essential traits. First, the "processional cortege"
contains the indispensable aspect of collectivity. In other words, every assembly is
not necessarily a cortege, parade, or procession, but there can be no "processional
cortege" without an assembly. This grouping of people constitutes the birth, existence,
and end of the processional cortege. To parade or to form a cortege or procession
implies that the individuals constitute a totality and collectively "take shape," whatever
the modalities of this coming together or the characteristics of the constituted product
might be. This grouping also has a complex and diversified structure, simultaneously
real and symbolic, axial and teleological.[3]

Second, because the notions of following or succeeding, marching or moving,
and line or order recur constantly in the definitions, it seems that the lexical group
is itself a type of body moving through a particular space with a certain orientation
and in a certain order. All parades, processions, or corteges can thus be viewed as a
group of proceedings which, while manipulating space, engender space specific to

each one according to determined rules and norms. In turn, these norms and rules constrain the movements of the parade, procession, or cortege, while enhancing their value. The same can be said of time. A parade, procession, or cortege, arranged in chronological time, structures time according to its own particular temporality and through the structuring, produces a specific time period that both interrupts and establishes chronological time.[4]

Furthermore, *parade, procession,* and *cortege,* not to mention *march* and *review,* imply bipolar structures such as activity and passivity. These bipartite "roles" are assumed by actors and spectators and do not necessarily remain fixed throughout the duration of a parade, cortege, or procession. In sum, a general structure of theatricality appears to interrelate the participants.[5]

Finally, *cortege, parade, procession,* and more generally, the complex object whose profile we have attempted to outline, seem to emanate from the domain of rite or ritual ceremony, whether it be profane or religious, civil or military, festive, diversionary, or directly functional. *Cortege, parade,* and *procession* contain the repetitive structure characteristic of ritual systems, whether the system be syntagmatic or paradigmatic. In other words, the rite in question may correspond to calendar time, such as, for example, the Corpus Christi procession which takes place in the Catholic world on the Sunday following Trinity Sunday, at the end of May or in early June, the military parade on July 14 in France, or the Fourth of July celebration in the United States. In the second, paradigmatic situation, the rite corresponds to a series of occasional circumstances and is performed according to a determined paradigm. Examples of this type include processions in the fields to prevent drought and the ceremony of royal entry into a Western European city as practiced from the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries.[6]

The study of rite can be applied to *parade, cortege, procession,* and *demonstration,* since each constitutes a part of ritual in general, and an aspect of rite, in particular. In terms of the symbolic structure of rite, then, we shall examine the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic elements of the ethno-semiotic object.

Questions concerning the syntax of a cortege are derived directly from its temporal and spatial characteristics. *Parade, cortege, procession,* and *demonstration* unfold as they move through a pre-existing space already articulated by certain named or marked places: streets, squares, intersections, bridges, buildings, monuments, districts, neighborhoods, and boundaries within the city; paths, roads, hamlets, farms, fields, fences, and woods in the country. In and from this space, a parade will extract its stage and decor. Because certain stretches of a route will be chosen in favor of others, some places will be kept on the program while others are discarded, some buildings or monuments will be visited while others are ignored. A parade thus manipulates space and the places that already exist. A parade gives space a meaningful structure, and the places chosen for its route articulate the "sentences" of a spatial discourse. On the other hand, those places bypassed or avoided by the parade deploy a counter-discourse of denial or repression. This counter-discourse helps to form the background of the first discourse, thereby giving it another dimension of meaning.

Use of existing space is necessarily accompanied by production of another, more specific space, space which is forbidden, off limits to normal circulation, divided, or whose permanent everyday decor is dissimulated or modified. In the process of spa-

tialization, a parade creates a specific order of places which both determines the route and is implied by the route.

This process is apparent in the Stations of the Cross, a religious procession re-enacting the Passion of Jesus Christ. The route transforms the order of sanctuary places—the side aisles, the nave, the choir, etc.—into another specific area through the re-enactment of Christ's route. This example also shows that the starting and finishing points of *parade, cortege,* or *procession* are markedly distinct from those places connected together along the route, since they constitute the epiphanic place of the parade. Additionally, the finishing point is where a parade disappears as it reaches its "finality"; the group disappears once its performance has been accomplished, or even when the march has ended in failure.

Likewise, the start and finish can be "dangerous" places for the group(s) involved in a procession such as, for example, a political demonstration. At the beginning of a protest march, at either the gathering point or the march's immediate outset, police and the forces of order try to intercept those isolated individuals who are not yet participants in the parading mass. At the end of a march, at its point of dissolution, *provocateurs* join the mass, become uncontrollable elements, and instigate disorder. The assembly and dispersion points thus represent borders between the law of "normal" everyday spaces and places and the law of the parade and its route. They can also be thought of as passages from one law to another; they are themselves outside either law and are therefore dangerous.

The possibilities for such points or passages are in part dictated by the spaces produced. One-way parades, round-trip (one-way plus the return) parades, and closed-circuit or circular parades create very different spaces.

A one-way direction implies an irreversible movement whose temporality may be expressed by, for example, the schematic reproduction of a story or the story's scenario. For a walking collectivity, the end point of a one-way march represents a symbolic victory over those ideas or persons defied by the march.

A round trip emphasizes a reversible, bi-directional spatialization. In the coming and going, the turning point is heavily invested, since it is both the end and the origin of "retrogradation." This duality helps to free a round-trip parade from chronological forms of temporality and from the succession of events, allowing it to become a "presentation of places" through repetition. Similarly, the point of departure is locally identical to the arrival point, but is not identical spatially, or in terms of the space created by the route. By taking place after the departure, a march "legitimizes" the point by reaching it again at the end.[7]

In a closed-circuit or circular route, the movement encloses a space by creating a real or ideal limit and protects the enclosed space with a symbolically closed border. This type of route can also "lock up" the enemy, symbolically forbidding any escape. Such was the parade of the ancient Hebrews around the walls of Jericho. Their march can be understood as an effort to substitute for "real" walls a symbolic encirclement that became conquest and destruction. A closed-circuit route, therefore, turns the encircling action into a local order, transforming motion into respite by obliterating the specific values of the starting and end points.

The above considerations of the syntax of parades, corteges, marches, etc., open up the possibility of a typology in which time and space would be linked in diverse ways. Time can be unidirectional and linear, bidirectional and linear, cyclical and

durative, punctual, static, inchoate, or terminal. These different temporal categories, in turn, are integrated with the various spatializing processes. For example, portions of unidirectional linear time may be present with closed-circuit routes, or the inverse. This relationship can be observed in carnival parades where farandoles, merry-go-rounds, or rounds danced on the city squares may be incorporated into the route at any point between start and finish.

Rather than examine a parade in terms of its places, spaces, and times, we can instead look at it in terms of its own internal syntax, isolating such factors as order, ranks of participants, and the composition of the totality. From the Panathenes or funeral marches of antiquity[8] to the demonstrations of the labor unions, political parties, and "groupuscles" of May 1968 in Paris, from the Corpus Christi procession of the High Renaissance to the Red Square parades during the anniversary celebration of the October Revolution, we can see that order is an essential means for getting across the "message," be that message religious, civic, political, philosophical, or social. Often the intended message becomes complex due to the participants' reciprocal relationships and relative positions within the parade.[9]

The composition of a cortege also signifies a message about the intended message. An incident stemming from the French Revolution is a noteworthy example. In 1794, an alpine village celebrated the taking of Toulon.[10] The parade consisted of the municipal authorities, followed by justices of the peace, working classes, eight chosen cantors, and all other cantors and citizens. The "Constitution, however, was carried on a stretcher under a red canopy by the four eldest."[11] Not only was the Constitution being solemnly celebrated as the firmest guarantor of unity among all groups (categorized by age, sex, profession, etc.) and governmental bodies (municipal, judiciary, etc.) forming the indivisible Nation, but this unity was seen as the sacred political body of France. This politico-religious quality was evident to the participants since the organization, instruments, and symbols of the celebration were the same as those used in the procession and display of the Holy Sacrament.

The composition of the cortege thus acts as a syntactical signifier, placing the Constitution in a "here and now" context. It also functions as a semantic signifier, using the metaphor of the Holy Sacrament to emphasize the sacred quality of national unity.

Turning to the semantic values of a parade, we note the importance of toponyms or place names. One illustration of the significance of place comes from contemporary Paris. In recent years, most political demonstrations by the Left, starting from the Place de la Nation and going to the Place de la République, used the streets of Faubourg St. Antoine and Boulevard Beaumarchais via the Place de la Bastille, whereas the few demonstrations of the Right took place between the Tuileries and the Place de l'Etoile using the Champs Elysées. Onto the order of places is superimposed an order of names, and the naming is rarely arbitrary. Sometimes the place transfers its history to the name as in, for example, the street of Faubourg St. Antoine whose name is semantically charged by the revolutionary and controversial activity that has taken place there since the sixteenth century. Sometimes the place is named for its history as in the case of the Place de la Bastille, where the prison fortress of the Bastille was built during the fourteenth century and was later burned by the Parisians on July 14, 1789. Still other places are semantically charged by their names, such as the Place de la Nation or Place de la République.

Consequently, we may say that a parade, by moving through these named places, re-enacts a myth, legend, or story by narrating what is already inscribed in the places, their order, and their names. The parade can also create a new political discourse in addition to providing historical narration. The May 1968 demonstrations in Paris, for instance, showed a certain novelty in the names of places where the demonstrators met and a degree of creativity in that the route seemed to be improvised section by section, thus proclaiming the political and ideological spontaneity of the groups involved.

More generally, *parade, cortege,* and *procession* create through their narrative aspect a system of values from which any parade, cortege, procession, or demonstration derives its legitimacy. The process of legitimization or actualization may, in turn, serve to formalize relationships between participants, such as the political relationship between a sovereign and a city.

Using a historical example of the cortege, we note that the entry of a King into one of his cities is both a means of maintaining the monarchical aura and of ritually opening a political and institutional dialogue between the sovereign and the city's inhabitants. While several traits of royal entries have disappeared or changed, visits by chiefs-of-state to cities of the countries they govern remain essentially similar. The royal entry is, "first of all, the encounter of two corteges, a royal and a civic, at the city gates. The ordering of persons and groups as well as the royal itinerary for inside the city are fixed by custom, and the decorations and theater of the street are always found at the same points."[12]

In certain situations during the fifteenth century, the King, surrounded by his own in addition to the city's cortege at the city gates, sometimes made an oath to the city. He swore to maintain the rights and liberties of the community, and the community responded with another oath swearing allegiance to the King. But more often, from the sixteenth century on, this mark of obedience and subjugation consisted of presenting the keys to the King *"in signum majoris obedientie et subjectionis."*[13]

In other words, if the city's cortege meeting the King outside the city wall obtained from him a promise to respect the city's rights, the King submitted the city to himself by passing with his entourage through the door whose keys he had received. A pact was thus formed which later became a political contract, abetted by the encounter of the two corteges and their stops in significant places along the way. In terms of the spatialization process and the ordering of places, the royal entry affirms the existence of the space inside the route as part of the larger kingdom and at the same time as a unitary political entity with specific rights. The royal entry not only legitimizes a political relationship, but also seeks to signify and moderate political contradictions. We are reminded here of the semantic apparatuses and their symbolic productions that anthropologists have observed in ritual.[14]

Another semantic dimension of a parade is its repetition. A parade revives a story in a certain way, not so much telling it as reliving it. A parade organized to commemorate a historical hero, like the cortege described by M. Ozouf for the feast of Marat,[15] provides a valuable example for focusing on this semantic dimension. One of the organizers, who is also a theoretician of corteges, writes that he wanted "to present at different points along the route of the cortege, as if in a moving picture, all of the principal circumstances in the life of Marat, retracing it with characteristic titles and emblems in each successive, different grouping." Everything is done, it seems, so that the onlooker

may tell himself the story of Marat's life as it progressively unfolds; the telling is made easier through titles that are displayed to sustain the narrative.

Ozouf writes, though, that "what the cortege distributes in space is not . . . the circumstances in Marat's life revealed in . . . order . . . but the separation of legendary characteristics." What pass before the spectators are not the episodes of Marat's life, but wagons carrying "his public virtues," "his private virtues," the "rewards," and finally the "examples." Furthermore, different ages are incorporated into the examples, so that "everyone can derive, from Marat's life, an example adapted to his own role and abilities." This grouping of different ages in human life with the examples of deeds helps to terminate the cortege with the practical injunction that to participate in the parade, if only by watching, is in a way to become Marat through one's own specific abilities and characteristics.

A commemorative parade not only revives but re-establishes, that is, gives legitimacy to a past by making it a basis and an origin. The performance aspect of a commemorative parade contributes to this construction, transforming the spectators and actors into a living monument to the past. A parade is thus an apparatus in the art of memory.[16]

The performance aspect of *parade, cortege,* and *procession* brings us to the pragmatic dimension. In fact, to the degree that a parade, be it a religious procession, a royal cortege, or a working class demonstration, is more or less a narrative scenario, a legible text, a visible spectacle, a ritual and a ceremony, the syntactic and semantic apparatuses discussed above are also pragmatic ones. The operation of a parade is more than a sequence of movements and gestures. As in all ritual, a parade is organized around significant nodal acts. Concerning the pragmatic dimension, our questions focus on the effectiveness of these acts.

It appears that the major effect of a parade results from the articulation of two domains—the spectators' and the actors'. Unlike theater, where actors perform a story in front of a passive audience, the parade implicates the "audience" of spectators as actors. In many political demonstrations as well as military parades and religious processions, the so-called cortege, while winding its way from marked place to marked place, is viewed at various key points by spectators installed on balconies or at windows, sometimes even on platforms constructed for this purpose.[17] Depending on the personalities involved, or the offices they hold, it can be just as important for the spectators to be seen by the "actors" or by other spectators as it is for the viewers to watch the parade.

It is nevertheless impossible to view a cortege in its entirety from one privileged point of view along the route. "The cortege is an art of time as well as space; it belies simultaneity. It obliges the spectator to choose an observation point and thus limit his vision."[18] Here is an argument implicating the spectator as actor in a parade. He cannot theoretically dominate time in its unfolding in space. It is in succession that he comes to know the episodes. That is why, in a political parade, spectators are often implored with gestures and shouts to descend into the streets and participate. Some can chant the slogan of the marching group, others can applaud. We can also observe that some parades continuously incorporate spectators into their march, spectators who pass gradually from immobile observation to joining in, and finally marching.

The role of spectators as actors is obvious in the royal entry. The symbolic effectiveness of this ceremony is in fact due to the dialogue between two performances, one

given by the monarch to the city, and the other given by the city to its sovereign. In this exchange, a dual process of recognition takes place: recognition on the one hand of the might and glory of the monarch manifested by the glitter of his cortege, and, on the other, of the unity and harmony of the city, shown by the diversity of its group.[19]

In sum, we can use Turner's idea (1969) that ritual feast (in this case a parade or cortege) transforms one or more real and specific social relations into "communitas" both temporal and symbolic.[20] Extending this view, *parade, cortege,* and *procession* could evoke two larger types of communitas: one that symbolically enacts a real, internal antagonism in the society through amicable competition, and one that symbolically rehearses a confrontation with an enemy external to the group. For the first type, we could cite as examples the parade of soccer "fans" before the game and a procession of religious confraternities such as the one in Noto, Sicily, where, on Easter morning, two processions, one carrying a statue of Jesus Christ, the other carrying a statue of the Virgin Mary, race through the city and meet at the cathedral square. Examples of the second type of communitas include military parades on national feast days or the cavalcades that introduced tournaments of the Renaissance.[21] Either of these could provide interesting material for analysis.

NOTES

1. A. J. Greimas, *Sémiotique et sciences sociales* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1976).

2. Definitions taken from *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité ascetique et mystique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1981) and *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chretienne et de liturgie* (Paris: Le Touzey, 1948).

3. Victor Turner, *The Drums of Affliction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

4. Michel de Certeau, "La Cérémonie," *Traverses,* nos. 21–22 (Paris: Minuit); Louis Marin, *Utopiques, jeux d'espaces* (Paris: Minuit, 1973).

5. G. R. Kernodle, *From Art to Theater* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

6. J. Jacquot, "Joyeuse et triomphante entrée," in *Les Fêtes de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1956).

7. Louis Marin, *Le Portrait du Roi* (Paris: Minuit, 1981).

8. N. Loraux, *L'Invention d'Athenes* (The Hague: Mouton, 1981).

9. M. Vovelle, *Les Métamorphoses de la fête en Provence de 1750 à 1820* (Paris: Flammarion, 1976).

10. Toulon, the capital city of the Var, was delivered by the royalists to the British in 1793, but Dugommier, aided by Napoleon Bonaparte, regained it.

11. Vovelle.

12. Jacquot.

13. B. Guénée and F. Lahous, *Les Entrées royales françaises* (Paris: C.N.R.S., 1968).

14. Gregory Bateson, *Naven* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958); Raymond Firth, *The Works of Gods in Tikopia* (London: Athlone, 1967); A. Gell, *Metamorphosis of the Cassovaries* (London: Athlone, 1975).

15. Jean-Paul Marat (1743–93) was a doctor and politician during the aftermath of the French Revolution. Editor of *L'Ami du Peuple,* he was one of the instigators of the September massacres. He was assassinated by Charlotte Corday. See M. Ozouf, *La Fête Révolutionnaire 1789–1799* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

16. F. A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

17. S. Carandini Dell'Arco, *L'Effimero Barocco, Strutture della Festa Nella Roma del '600,* 2 vols. (Rome: Bulzoni, 1978).

18. Ozouf.

19. Jacquot; Kernodle.

20. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).

21. André Chastel, "Le Lieu de la Fête," *Les Fêtes de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1956).