

Performative Culture: A Phenomenological Ontology of Culture

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Abstract

Culture is not an object lying out there in space and time like a table or a chair enduring through time by sheer inertia of its substance. Culture is in being because people belonging to it perform it. Hence all culture is 'performative culture' and there is no 'objective culture' as understood by some social scientists. To understand culture appropriately, we need to understand the mode of being of culture first. So, an attempt is made to answer the question: What is the mode of being of culture? Whatever that we have considered which belongs to culture as its part shares aspects of these in its mode of being. This happens for the simple reason that every aspect of the mode of being of culture as a whole finds place within this whole culture as an accentuated aspect of some part of it. For example festive character of culture as a whole finds place in this whole culture as accentuated aspect of festivals which are part of culture. Same applies to play aspect, theatrical aspect, linguistic aspect etc.

Key Words: Culture, Play, Festival, Temporality, Belonging.

Introduction

Culture is not an object lying out there in space and time like a table or a chair enduring through time by sheer inertia of its substance. Culture is in being because people belonging to it perform it.¹ Hence the locution 'performative culture' is used in the title to distinguish from 'objective culture' as understood by some social scientists. To understand culture, to approach culture appropriately to understand it, we need to understand the mode of being of performative culture first. For, the way to approach any thing to

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understand it depends on its mode of being. So in this essay we will try to answer the following question: What is the mode of being of culture, which is a performative culture?

In his magnum opus *Truth and Method*² Hans-Georg Gadamer articulates mode of being of art, history and language. All the three are cultural phenomena. So, in understanding the mode of being of culture in this essay I have followed Gadamer's conceptual repertoire, which he has developed to articulate his understanding of art, history and language. Gadamer's conceptual repertoire is phenomenological. Hence what we are articulating here is the ontology or mode of being of culture in phenomenological tradition. This phenomenological ontology of culture brings to the fore the performative aspect of the being of culture very clearly.

Culture as Play

My starting point is the concept of play, as one aspect of the mode of being of culture is the mode of being of play.³ The mode of being of player does not allow the player to behave toward play as if it is an object and he is the subject. Rather the player is absorbed in the play as he loses himself in the play. Play makes evident that the player is interwoven into an event that he does not control and in which he cannot freely dispose of his subjective horizons of experience and expectations. Play properly is in being when the player plays seriously. Play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of players. Play proper exists when the players do not conceive of themselves as being-for-itself of subjectivity, and where they do not behave "playfully" as subjective individuals. The players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players. Play is to-and-fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end. Since, the movement of playing has no goal that brings it to an end; it renews itself in constant repetition.⁴ The movement backward and forward is central to the definition of play and it makes no difference who or what performs this movement. The movement of play as such has, as it were, no substrate. It is because of this nature of being of play that the same culture continues through changing generations without being tied to people of any generation. It is the game that is played, it is irrelevant whether or not there is a subject who plays it. The play is the occurrence of the movement as such. Hence the mode of being of play is not such that, for the game to be played, there must be a subject who is behaving playfully. Play is not to be

understood as something a person does. The actual subject of play is not the subjectivity of an individual who, among other activities, also plays but is instead the play itself. The primacy of play over the consciousness of the player is fundamental in this phenomenological understanding of play. Play represents an order in which the to-and-fro motion of play follows of itself. It is part of play that the movement is not only without goal or purpose but also without effort. It happens, as it were, by itself. This does not mean that there is no effort by the players; rather it refers phenomenologically only to the absence of strain, felt by players as relaxation. The structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the strain of taking the initiative. Hence the spontaneous tendency to repetition emerges in the player in the constant self-renewal of play. All playing is a being-played. The game masters the players. It is this fact that constitutes the attraction of a game. The fascination the game exerts consists precisely in the fact that whoever “tries” is in fact the one who is tried. The real subject of the game is not the player but instead the game itself. What holds the player in its spell, draws him into play, and keeps him there is the game itself. Every game has its own proper spirit, by which it suffuses the players. Games differ from one another in their spirit. The to-and-fro movement that constitutes the game is patterned in various ways due to difference in the spirit of the game. The particular spirit of a game is partially manifested in the rules and regulations that prescribe the way the field of the game is filled with to and fro movements. The playing field on which the game is played is set by the spirit of the game itself. It is defined far more by the structure that determines the movement of the game from within by its spirit than by the external boundaries of the open space that it comes up against limiting movement from without. Play sets off the sphere of play as a closed world, one without transition and meditation to the outside world, i.e., outside of play. The world of play is a self-contained whole. All play is playing something, where the ordered to-and-fro movement of the game is determined as one kind of comportment (*Verhalten*) among many other possibilities of comportment.⁵ Every game presents the man who plays it with a task. He cannot enjoy the freedom of playing himself out without transforming the aims of his purposive behavior into mere tasks of the game and adopting the tasks of the game as his own aims. And yet the purpose of the game is not really solving the task, but ordering and shaping the movement of the game itself that comes about in solving the task. One can say that performing a task successfully “presents it” (*stellt sie dar*). Here fulfilling the task does not point to any purposive context. Play is really limited to presenting itself. Thus its mode of being is self-presentation. As

self-presentation is a universal ontological characteristic of nature, play is natural. The self-representation of human play depends on the player’s conduct being tied to the goals of the game set for him, but the “meaning” of these goals does not in fact depend on their being achieved. Rather, in spending oneself on the task of the game, one is in fact playing oneself out. The self-presentation of the game involves the player’s achieving his own self-presentation by playing – i.e., presenting – something. What we have noticed in the mode of being of play also holds good with respect to the mode of being of culture. Play is not only a part of culture, but culture in its entirety shares in the mode of being of play.⁶ But it is just one aspect of the mode of being of culture. There are other aspects in the mode of being of culture.

Temporality of Culture

The second aspect of culture is its radical temporality. In the previous section it was seen that play as well as culture is self presentation of itself. All presentation is potentially a representation for someone, i.e. the spectator. The mode of being of play is not determined merely by the fact that players are completely absorbed in it, but also by the fact that they play their role in relation and regard to the whole of the play, in which not they but the audience is to become absorbed. The spectator has methodological precedence in that when the play is presented for him, the meaning that the play bears within itself is understood and that can therefore be detached from the behavior of the players.

When play comes to its true consummation in being understood by the spectator, the play undergoes *transformation into structure*.⁷ Only through this transformation does play achieve ideality, and emerge as detached from the representing activity of the players and consist in the pure appearance (*Erscheinung*) of what they are playing. Now play is in principle repeatable and hence permanent. In this sense it is a structure (*Gebilde*). In relation to the players, the play has an absolute autonomy. In being presented in play, what is emerges. Audience is supposed to recognize what it “is.”

There is another aspect of transformation which emerges when it is contrasted with change. Transformation is not change, even a far-reaching change. Change always means that something in what is changed also remains the same and is maintained as such. However totally it may change, only something changes in it. To put it in philosophical jargon all change is change of quality, i.e., of an accident of substance, but the substance remains

the same. But transformation means that something is suddenly and as a whole something else that this other transformed thing that it has become is its true being, in comparison with which its earlier being is nothing. Culture is not a substance with changing qualities. There cannot here be any gradual transformation leading from one to the other, since the one is the denial of the other. Thus transformation into structure means that what existed previously exists no longer. But also that what now exists, what represents itself in the play, is the lasting and true. This gives what we called transformation into structure its full meaning. The transformation is a transformation into the true. In being presented in play, what is emerges. It produces and brings to light what is otherwise constantly hidden and withdrawn. Audience is supposed to recognize what it “is.” So, one belongs to culture not only in the mode of player but also in the mode of spectator.

Here arises a possible objection. How can our being-in-the culture be interpreted as the engrossment of the player and spectator in the play of culture? Player is playing on the stage while the spectator cannot enter the stage, his entering on the stage would destroy the play. So our engrossment in *the culture* cannot be of the mode of *player* and *spectator* simultaneously since it is contradictory. How can we get out of this contradiction? Our being in the culture, with our engrossment in it as *players* and *spectators*, is radically temporal in nature. This temporal and historical nature of our being-in-culture helps in avoiding the contradiction mentioned above. We are the spectators of the past of the play. The temporal difference and distance ensures the condition of our being *spectators*, we cannot go back to the past to interfere in it. *We* are players of the play that is going on now. Hence there is no contradiction. This condition of historicity of our being-in-the culture has to be understood properly. The *spectators* of the *play* that has taken place in the past, are themselves would be players of the play that is continuing. Since there is no *telos* of the play outside itself, the players cannot organize their activities with reference to it to participate in the *play*. Hence, would be players become spectators of the *past of the play* to learn how to continue the *play* themselves.

Theatricality of Culture

Hence, in all cultures the traditional religious festive celebration required theatrical representation understood in the widest sense.⁸ “It fulfilled the particular function of gathering the religious community for the festival.”⁹

The theater was “able to serve as a gathering point in which the onlookers were of no less significance than the players.”¹⁰ In the theater “the onlooker becomes indeed a mere onlooker.” An onlooker is an onlooker because he senses the tension that exists “between the prevailing form of real life and the enchanted world presented on stage.”¹¹ According to Gadamer, “Clearly this represents a task of moral transcendence since we all know that the marvelous events presented on stage show us life as it really should be. As is well known, Schiller saw the function of the theater as a moral institution in that it anticipated in the stage play the transition to a genuine ethical form of social life. This moral transcendence returns the onlooker to the innermost recesses of his being. He is no longer a participant in the sense in which those who took part in the religious or secular celebration were participants. He is nothing but an onlooker, and this is reflected by the specific form of the stage in front of him. In the darkness, the solitary onlooker hears from the stage the call of moral transcendence.”¹²

So, thirdly, theater in one form or another is not only part of culture, but also culture in its totality of being, and shares in the theatricality of theater as explained above, which is required by its radical temporality. But this radical temporality of play of culture displays other ontological features of culture also.

Multiple Possibilities of a Culture

“Transformation into structure” that takes place for the spectators of the play points to the ideality, repeatability, and permanence of the play. Play is structure – this means that despite its dependence on being played it is a meaningful whole which can be repeatedly resented as such and the significance of which can be understood. But structure is also play, because it achieves its full being only each time it is played. No doubt we make a differentiation between “what is being represented” in the play from the representing activity of players who are presenting the play, but play as structure, play as understood, play as what is presented does not exist anywhere independently of the representing activity of players. To put it another way even though we make a distinction between a play and its performance, yet play has its being in performance. What we have called a structure is one insofar as it presents itself as a meaningful whole of what is presented in performance.

The variety of the performances or realizations of such a structure are not subjective variety of conceptions of the same play. Rather these multiplicity

of performances are play's own possibilities of being that emerge as the play explicates itself, as it were, in the variety of its aspects. Hence there cannot be any canonization of a particular representation as a correct representation of the play. A "correctness" striven for in this way, to look for a unique correct representation of the play, would not do justice to the true binding nature of the play, which imposes itself on every player immediately, in its own way, and does not allow him to make things easy for himself by simply imitating a so called correct model. In the socio-cultural world there is no such unique correct model of any socio-cultural world to be imitated or preserved. Every age has to understand one's own socio-cultural world in a different way, every linguistic community articulates its culture in different way. If a people erect a canonical presentation of culture to be emulated for all times, they falsify their own culture.

The "freedom" of interpretative choice is not external and marginal phenomena rather the whole performance is both bound and free. It is bound because it is an interpretation of the play, but it is free in that there can be multiplicity of interpretation. In a certain sense performance probably is re-creation, but this is a re-creation not of the creative act of subjectivity but of the play itself, which has to be brought to representation in accord with the meaning the player has found in it as spectator.

In view of the finitude of our historical existence, it would seem that there is something absurd about the whole idea of a unique, correct interpretation. Here the obvious fact that every interpretation tries to be correct serves only to confirm that the non-differentiation of the performance from the play itself is the actual experience of the play. The distinction between the play and its performance is available only where the interpretation breaks down. In other words, when the performance does not become, as such, thematic, then the play presents itself through it and in it. When a people erect a canonical presentation of culture to be emulated for all times, then they have lost the understanding of 'what it is' that is presented, and it becomes a mechanical performance without anything being presented.

It is interesting to note that culture presents its multifarious views in multiplicity of languages, as play presents its multiple possibilities of interpretation and performance for different spectators in different situations. And yet neither culture nor play loses its identity in being dissolved into their multiple possibilities. Rather all the possibilities belong to the same culture and the same play.

So, the fourth aspect of culture is that it maintains its identity even when it presents itself differently through time. We ask what this identity of the play and the culture is that presents itself so differently in the changing course of ages and circumstances. It does not disintegrate into the changing aspects of itself so that it would lose all identity, but it is there in them all. They all belong to it. They are all *contemporaneous* with it. Thus we need to understand the radical temporality of play and the culture, i.e., we need to understand the culture in terms of time.

The Festive Nature of Culture

This brings us to the fifth aspect of culture. Culture has being in celebration, to use a metaphor, as it does not exist as an object in itself (*Gegenstand*). This emerges from the understanding of radical temporality of culture. The being of the culture is contemporaneous of every time. This kind of temporal structure is exhibited by festivals. It is in the nature of periodic festivals, at least, to be repeated. We call that the return of the festival. But the festival that comes round again is neither another festival nor a mere remembrance of the one that was originally celebrated. The time experience of the festival is rather its *celebration*. From its inception – whether instituted in a single act or introduced gradually – the nature of a festival is to be celebrated regularly. Thus its own original essence is always to be something different (even when celebrated in exactly the same way). An entity that exists only by always being something different is temporal in a more radical sense than everything that belongs to history. It has its being only in becoming and return. A festival exists only in being celebrated. This is not to say that it is of a subjective character and has its being only in the subjectivity of those celebrating it. Rather, the festival is celebrated because it is there. The same is true of play and culture: it must be presented for the spectator, to be understood, and having understood what it is that is being presented, present it himself in his time as a player. This is how the play exists in understanding playing of the play in one's own time.

We need to understand how this happens. The being of the spectator is determined by his "being there present". Being present does not simply mean being there along with something else that is there at the same time. To be present means to participate. If someone was present at something, he knows all about how it really was. It is only in a derived sense that presence at something means also a kind of subjective act, that of paying attention to something. Thus watching something is a genuine mode of participating.

This idea lies behind the original Greek concept of *theoria*. *Theoros* means someone who takes part in a delegation to a festival. Such a person has no other distinction or function than to be there. Thus the *Theoros* is a spectator in the proper sense of the word, since he participates in the solemn act through his presence at it. In the same way, as Greek metaphysics conceives the essence of *theoria* and of *nous* as being purely present to what is truly real, for us too the ability to act theoretically is defined by the fact that in attending to something one is able to forget one's own purposes. But *theoria* is not to be conceived primarily as subjective conduct, as a self-determination of the subject, but in terms of what it is contemplating. *Theoria* is a true participation, not something active but something passive (*pathos*), namely being totally involved in and carried away by what one sees. That is to say the spectator engrossed in play is not to be conceived as the self-conscious subjective observer standing over against the object to observe it methodically.

There is also an essential difference between a spectator who gives himself entirely to the play of culture and someone who is merely a curious onlooker. It is characteristic of curiosity that the onlooker is as if drawn away by what he looks at, that he forgets himself entirely in it, and cannot tear himself away from it. But the important thing about an object of curiosity is that it is basically of no concern to the onlooker; it has no significance for him. There is nothing in it which he would really be able to come back to and which would hold his attention focused permanently. It is the formal quality of novelty – i.e., abstract difference – that makes up the charm of what one looks at out of curiosity. One becomes bored and jaded when the novelty wears off after some time. But, in contrast that which presents itself to the spectator as the play of culture does not simply exhaust itself in momentary transport, but has a claim to permanence and the permanence of a claim. The “claim” is very significant here. “A claim is something lasting. Its justification (or pretended justification) is the primary thing. Because a claim lasts, it can be enforced at any time. A claim exists against someone and must therefore be enforced against him; but the concept of a claim also implies that it is not itself a fixed demand, the fulfillment of which is agreed on by both sides, but is rather the ground for such demand. A claim is the legal basis for an unspecified demand. If it is to be answered in such a way as to be settled, then to be enforced it must first take the form of a demand. It belongs to the permanence of a claim that it is concretized in a demand.¹³ So the play of culture has a permanent claim and a claim of permanence that needs to be concretized as a demand by being understood. Here there is no

distinction of is and ought. The play of culture is moral and ethical like the *sittlichkeit* of Hegel and *ethos* of Aristotle. This explains why player has to be spectator and spectator has to be player. This is the permanent claim always needing to be concretized, placed by culture on us to which we belong.

Thus, contemporaneity is not a mode of givenness of an object to a subjective consciousness, but a task and an achievement that is demanded of one as a claim of the culture to which one belongs. It consists in holding on to culture in such a way that it becomes “contemporaneous,” which is to say, “contemporaneity” does not mean “existing at the same time.” Rather, it names the task that confronts one, the task of understanding as a spectator and playing as a player in culture, so that the moral and ethical culture continues to be in being permanently.

So we can say, not only periodically returning festival is part of culture, but also culture in its totality of being has a share in the festive nature of the festival. To understand the festive character we have to first answer the question: what is the festive character of a festival? Gadamer has provided the decisive answer to this question. He writes, “Naturally, this quality need not always be associated with joy or happiness, since in mourning we also share this festive character together. But a festive occasion is always something uplifting which raises the participants out of their everyday existence and elevates them into a kind of universal communion. Consequently, the festive occasion possesses its own sort of temporality. It is an essentially recurrent phenomenon, and even a unique festival celebration bears the possibility of repetition within itself. The commemoration of a special occasion is itself enacted in a festive fashion. Enactment is the festival's mode of being, and in the enactment, time becomes the *nunc stans* of an elevated presence in which past and present become one in the act of remembrance....the mystery of festive celebration lies in this suspension of time. In contrast to such festive occasions, we are in our everyday lives constantly bound by particular functions and time-limits. In the festival, the particularity of our purposes gives way to communion in a heightened self-fulfilling moment which does not acquire its significance from any task still to be accomplished and does not gain from any further purpose to be achieved. The decisive thing is not just the fact that we are lifted out of everyday life, nor the fact that we do not expect the festival to serve any ulterior purpose. The decisive and characteristic thing is that it presents us with a positive content of its own.”¹⁴ Modern civilization which is dominated by an extreme form of life which is dependent on the achievements based on “the deliberate

and calculating pursuit of power and material advantage” and the “tendency toward acquiring and manipulating things” fail to notice this positive content of the festive celebration. According to Gadamer, “the original and still vital essence of festive celebration is creation and elevation into a transformed state of being.”¹⁵ In this kind of genuine creation “something drawn from within ourselves takes shape before our own eyes in a form that we recognize and experience as a more profound presentation of our own reality. This overwhelming truth is summoned up from hidden depths to address us. In pagan antiquity, this occurred through the manifestation of god, and in Christian ritual, the sacrifice of the Mass has a comparable significance.”¹⁶ But this creation is also a rhythmic recurrence. In Gadamer’s words, “it is an intrinsic characteristic of every festival that it enjoys a specific, rhythmical recurrence that elevates it above the flow of time, in a kind of cosmic rhythm, it assures that not all time pass by indifferently in the same homogeneous way. On the contrary, in the course of festive time, the heightened moment returns.”¹⁷ Culture does not exist and endure in a linear empty time; rather culture has its being through constantly returning fulfilled time.

Culture as Representation

The sixth aspect of culture is that it is representation. It is mentioned before that culture as play presents something, i.e. what it is, which needs to be understood. The special sense of presentation proper to culture needs to be understood clearly. We need to compare it with and distinguish it from the sacred representation performed by the *symbol* and secular pure indication performed by *sign*. Not all forms of “representation” have the character of culture. Symbols, badges and signs are also forms of representation, yet none of them wholly exhibit the representation involved in culture.

The essence representation involved in culture is different from two extremes of representation, i.e., *pure indication*, which is the essence of the sign, and *pure substitution*, which is the essence of the symbol. There is something of both in culture. Hence culture as a whole not only shares in the nature of both sign and symbol but also contains them as its part and hence turning culture into a semiotic web, like a literary text.

Representing done by culture includes indicating what is represented in it and yet culture does not represent as a *sign*. To fulfill this function of representation culture draws attention to itself, by being striking, clearly foreground itself and presenting itself as an indicator. But a sign, being distinct

from culture, does not attract attention to itself in such a way that one lingers over it by getting absorbed in it. A sign is something that points away from itself. A sign is there only to make present something that is absent in such a way that only the absent thing comes to mind. A sign does not invite the viewer to pause over its own intrinsic interest as is the case with culture. A sign is something schematic and abstract as they point not to themselves but to what is not present – e.g., to the curve ahead or to one’s page.

Of all signs, the memento most seems to have a reality of its own. It refers to the past and so is effectively a sign, but it is also precious in itself since, as a bit of the past that has not disappeared, it keeps the past present for us. But this characteristic is not grounded in the being of the object itself, i.e., in the being of memento itself. An object from the past has a value as a memento only for someone who still recalls the past. Mementos lose their value when the past, of which they remind one, no longer has any meaning. Furthermore, someone who not only uses mementos to remind him but makes a cult of them and lives in the past as if it were the present has a disturbed relation to reality. A culture is not a memento in this way however old it may be. An old manuscript of it may be a memento, only as a physical object coming from past, but not as a literary work of art.

A memento also does not cause us to linger over it but over the past that it represents for us. But a culture points to what it represents only through its own content. By concentrating on it, we too come into contact with what is represented. The culture points by causing us to linger over it in reading like a literary work of art, for its ontological valence consists in not being absolutely different from what it represents but sharing in its being. What is represented comes into its own in culture, as it does in the literary work. It experiences an increase in being. But that means it is there in culture as it is there in the literary work itself.

The difference between a culture and a sign has an ontological basis. The culture does not disappear in pointing to something else but, in its own being, shares in what it represents. This ontological sharing pertains not only to culture but also to what is called a *symbol*. Neither symbol nor culture indicates anything that is not at the same time present in them themselves. Hence the problem arises of differentiating between the mode of being of culture and the mode of being of symbols.

There is an obvious distinction between a symbol and a sign, for the symbol is more like culture itself. The representational function of a symbol

is not to point to something that is not present. Instead, a symbol manifests the presence of something that really is present. This is seen in the original meaning of “symbol.” A symbol is used for achieving recognition between separated friends or the scattered members of a religious community and to show that they belong together. It not only points to the fact that people belong together, but demonstrates and visibly presents that fact. The “*tessera hospitalis*” is a relic of past life, and its existence attests to what it indicates and it makes the past itself present again and causes it to be recognized as valid. The word “symbol” is derived from Greek word “symbolon”. In Greek tradition “symbolon” was a technical term for a token of remembrance. “The host presented his guest with the so-called *tessera hospitalis* by breaking some object in two. He kept one half for himself and gave the other half to his guest. If in thirty or fifty years time, a descendant of the guest should ever enter his house, the two pieces could be fitted together again to form a whole in an act of recognition. In its original technical sense, the symbol represented something like a sort of pass used in the ancient world: something in and through which we recognize some-one as already known to us.”¹⁸ A symbol makes present the whole without itself being that whole, by pointing out to those pieces which when associated with it will lead to that anticipated whole. Religious symbols function as distinguishing marks and the meaning of these symbols by being understood unites everyone. What is symbolized is in need of representation, inasmuch as it is itself nonsensible, infinite, and unrepresentable, but also capable of it. It is only because what is symbolized is present itself that it can be present in the symbol. In the words of Gadamer, “In the case of the symbol... and for our experience of the symbolic in general, the particular represents itself as a fragment of being that promises to complete and make whole whatever corresponds to it. Or, indeed, the symbol is that other fragment that has always been sought in order to complete and make whole our own fragmentary life.”¹⁹

A symbol not only points to something but also represents it by taking its place. But to take the place of something means to make something present that is not present. Thus in representing, the symbol takes the place of something: that is, it makes something immediately present. Only because of the presence of what it represents is the symbol itself treated with the reverence due to the symbolized. Such symbols as a crucifix, a flag, a uniform have so fully taken the place of what is revered that the latter is present in them.

The concept of representation used above to describe culture essentially shows the proximity between cultural representation and symbolic

representation. In both cases, what they represent is itself present. Yet a culture as such is not a symbol. Through their mere existence and manifesting of themselves, symbols function as substitutes; but of themselves they say nothing about what they symbolize. One must be familiar with them in the same way as one must be familiar with a sign, if one is to understand what they refer to. Hence they do not mean an increase of being for what is represented. It is true that making itself present in symbols belongs to the being of what is represented. But its own being is not further determined by the fact that the symbols exist and are shown. It does not exist any *more* fully when they exist. They merely take its place. Hence symbols’ own significance (if they have any) is of no importance. They are representatives and receive their ontological function of representing from what they are supposed to represent. In contrast culture represents through itself, i.e., through the increment of meaning and being that it brings. But this means that in it what is represented is there more fully, more genuinely, just as it truly is.

Hence a culture is situated halfway between a sign and a symbol. Its representing is neither a pure pointing-to-something nor a pure taking-the-place-of-something. It is this intermediate position that raises it to a unique ontological status. Artificial signs and symbols alike do not – unlike culture – acquire their signifying function from their own content, but must be taken as signs or as symbols. We call the origin of their signifying function their “institution”. In determining the ontological valence of culture, it is decisive that in regard to culture there is no such thing as “institution” in the same sense.

By “institution” we mean the origin of something’s being taken as a sign or functioning symbolically. In this fundamental sense, even so-called “natural” signs – e.g., all the indications and presages of an event in nature – are instituted. They function as signs only when they are taken as signs. But they are taken as signs only because the linkage between the sign and the signified has previously been established. This is also true of all artificial signs. Here the sign is established by convention, and the originating act by which it is established is called its “institution.” So too the symbol has to be instituted, for only this gives it its representational character. For what gives it its significance is not its own ontological content but an act of institution, an installation, a consecration that gives significance to what is, in itself, without significance: for example, the sign of sovereignty, the flag, the crucifix.

So far we looked at the representation from the side of that which does the representation and found that culture that does the representation is

neither fully sign nor fully symbol but shares in the representing function of both. Now let us look at representation from the point of view of what is represented to find out how is that, which is represented in culture, represented in culture. Is it represented as a copy or represented as mirror image? We start from the view that the mode of being of culture is *presentation* (*Darstellung*) and ask ourselves how the meaning of presentation in culture can be understood.

The essence of a copy is to have no other task but to resemble the original. The measure of its success is that one recognizes the original in the copy. This means that its nature is to lose its own independent existence and serve entirely to mediate what is copied. Thus the ideal copy would be a mirror image, for its being really does disappear; it exists only for someone looking into the mirror, and is nothing beyond its mere appearance. But image is neither a copy nor a representation, for it has no separate existence. The mirror reflects the image – i.e., a mirror makes what it reflects visible to someone only for as long as he looks in it and sees his own image or whatever else is reflected in it. It is not accidental, however, that in this instance we still speak of an image (*Bild*), and not of a copy (*Abbild*) or illustration (*Abbildung*). For in the mirror image the entity itself appears in the image so that we have the thing itself in the mirror image. But a copy must always be regarded in relation to the thing it means. A copy tries to be nothing but the reproduction of something and has its only function in identifying it (e.g., as a passport photo or a picture in a sales catalogue). A copy effaces itself in the sense that it functions as a means and, like all means, loses its function when it achieves its end. It exists by itself in order to efface itself in this way. The copy's self-effacement is an intentional element in the being of the copy itself. If there is a change in intention – e.g., if the copy is compared with the original and judgment is passed on the resemblance, i.e., if the copy is distinguished from the original – then its own appearance returns to the fore, like any other means or tool that is being not used but examined. But it has its real function not in the reflective activity of comparison and distinction, but in pointing, through the similarity, to what is copied. Thus it fulfills itself in its self-effacement.

A representation, by contrast, is not destined to be self-effacing, for it is not a means to an end. Here the presentation itself is what is meant insofar as the important thing is how the thing represented is presented in it. This means first of all that one is not simply directed away from the presentation to what is represented. Rather, the presentation remains essentially connected

with what is represented – indeed, belongs to it. This is the reason why the mirror throws back an image and not a copy: what is in the mirror is the image of what is represented and is inseparable from its presence. The mirror can give a distorted image, of course, but that is merely an imperfection: it does not perform its function properly. Thus the mirror confirms the basic point that the intention is the original unity and non-differentiation of presentation and what is represented. It is the image of what is represented – it is “its” image, and not that of the mirror, that is seen in the mirror.

Culture depends on the identity and non-differentiation of presentation and what is presented, still this means that a consciousness of the presentation that increasingly differentiates and departs further and further from identity can never detach itself entirely from it. Rather, non-differentiation remains essential to all experience of culture.

The conception of culture, however, is not fully covered by the model of the mirror image. It only shows the ontological inseparability of the presentation from “what is represented.” But this is important enough since it makes clear that the primary intention in the case of culture is not to differentiate between what is represented and the presentation. That special intention of differentiation that we call “aesthetic” differentiation is only a secondary structure based on this. It distinguishes the representation as such from what is represented. It does not do so by treating the representation the way one usually treats copies. It does not desire the presentation to cancel itself, so that what is presented can exist by itself. On the contrary, it is by affirming its own being that the presentation enables what is presented to exist.

At this point the mirror image can guide us no further as a model. The mirror image is a mere appearance – i.e., it has no real being and is understood in its fleeting existence as something that depends on being reflected. But the presentation has its own being. This being as presentation, as precisely that in which it is not the same as what is presented, gives it the positive distinction of being culture as opposed to a mere reflected image.

That the representation has its own reality means the reverse for what is represented, namely that it comes to presentation in the representation. It presents itself there. It does not follow that it is dependent on this particular presentation in order to appear. It can also present itself as what it is in another way. But if it presents itself in this way, this is no longer any incidental event but belongs to its own being. Every such presentation is an ontological

event and occupies the same ontological level as what is represented. By being presented it experiences, as it were, an *increase in being*. The presentation itself is an ontological emanation of that what is represented.

Essential to an emanation is that what emanates is an overflow. What it flows from does not thereby become less. We need to get beyond substance ontology or ontology of objects. We need to think afresh the basis of the positive ontological status of culture. There should be no hesitation in accepting that the original one culture is not diminished by the outflow of the many representation from it, this means that its being increases. The *presentatio* is an event of being – in it being appears, meaningfully.

“Belonging” to Culture

The seventh aspect of the mode of being of culture is that, we belong to culture. *Belonging* refers to the transcendental relationship between being and truth. For *belonging* knowledge is conceived as an element of being itself and not primarily as an activity of the subject according to Gadamer.²⁰ That knowledge is incorporated in being is the presupposition of belonging to the being.²¹ Here thought does not start from the concept of a subject that exists in its own right and makes everything else an object. In this thinking there is no question of a self-conscious spirit without culture which would have to find its way to culture: both belong originally to each other. The relationship of belonging together is primary. Hence, to belong to being of culture thinking must always regard itself as an element of being of culture itself. In thinking what thought experiences is the movement of the thing, i.e. culture itself. We need to recover and learn this kind of thinking which is the self giving of the being of culture to thought, if we want to recover concept of belonging, if we want to go beyond the idea of the object and the objectivity of modern scientific knowledge toward the idea that subject and object belong together, i.e. we belong to the culture. Our involvement in the play of culture as spectator and player ensures that the understanding belongs to the being of culture understood.

For this we need to understand the figure of spectator of play of culture and the distance from culture that it implies even when he belongs to culture. In the context of culture, experience of spectator is of the nature of occurrence, i.e. in the experience of the culture something occurs. Seen from the point of view of the spectator belonging to culture, “occurrence” means that he is not a active knower seeking an object, “discovering” by

methodological means what was really meant and what the situation actually was, though slightly hindered and affected by his own prejudices. Here there is an element of passivity of thought that needs to be acknowledged. The actual occurrence is made possible only because the word of the culture that has come down to us as tradition and to which we are to listen really encounters us and does so as if it addressed us and is concerned with us and this occurrence define correctly the meaning of belonging as it pertains to our experience of the culture. From cultural tradition what addresses us and how it addresses us cannot be controlled actively. The temporal distance from the past ensures that we are not in control of that which addresses us from the past.

On the other side, that of the thing, i.e., culture, this occurrence means the coming into play, the playing out, of the content of cultural tradition in its constantly widening possibilities of signification and resonance, extended by the different people receiving it. Inasmuch as the cultural tradition is newly expressed in language, something comes into being that had not existed before and that exists from now on. As we noted when the play transforms into structure by being understood by the spectator, this ideality of play that is understood is not something subjective but the very possibility that is of the play itself, that is there henceforth, which was not there before this understanding. Here understanding of the spectator is not a methodic subjective activity of the spectator, but the activity of the play itself that the spectators suffer in which what is represented in the play emerges into being henceforth.

Methodic activity of the scientific observer is based on the model of seeing the alienated object standing over against him. But the idea of belonging (*Zugehörigkeit*) to the culture is related to the idea of *hearing* (*hören*) also. “It is not just that he who hears is also addressed but also that he who is addressed must hear whether he wants to or not.”²² It is a moral and ethical demand. When one looks at something, he can also look away from it by looking in another direction, but one cannot “hear away” in this way. Because of this difference between seeing and hearing, the latter has primacy as the basis of belonging. “There is nothing that is not available to hearing through the medium of language.”²³ All the other senses have no immediate share in the universality of the verbal experience of the culture. They only offer the knowledge of their own specific fields, but hearing is an avenue to the whole because it is able to listen to the logos. We need to recover the ancient insight into the priority of hearing over sight to recover the idea of

belonging. Since, the language, which we hear, is universal in the sense that everything can be expressed in it, in contrast to all other experience of the world language opens up a completely new dimension, the profound dimension from which cultural tradition comes down to those now living. Belonging is brought about by tradition's addressing us. Everyone who is situated in a tradition – including even the man who considers himself free from all history like the social scientist – must listen to what reaches him from it. The truth of tradition is like the present that lies immediately open to the senses.

And yet the mode of being of cultural tradition is not sensible immediacy unlike what is the case with mode of being of objects of science. Immediacy of sensible givenness does not provide the basis of being of culture. It is language and vividness of articulate discourse that is the basis of being of culture. In Gadamer's words, "Vividness is here an authentic presence of that which is narrated: "we literally see it before us." And yet we also know that here it is the imaginations of the reader and listener that bring such presence about – a singular form of presence, which is surely not that of an unequivocal and fixed pictorial representation."²⁴ In interpreting its texts, the hearer who understands it relates its truth to his own linguistic orientation to the world. This linguistic communication between present and tradition is the event that takes place in all understanding. Here it is interesting to note that language is not only a part of culture but also the entire culture shares in linguisticity in its being to be able to reach every contemporary generation. That is to say culture reaches us as a text to be understood.

This structure of the hermeneutical experience of culture totally contradicts the idea of scientific methodology. It itself depends on the character of language as event of conversation. Language as event means among other things that the use and development of language is a process of conversation, which has no single knowing and choosing consciousness standing over against it to guide it unlike what happens in artificial technical language of science. The other more important point is the one namely that what constitutes the hermeneutical event proper is the coming into language of what has been said in the tradition. This is an event that is at once appropriation and interpretation. This event is not our action upon the culture, but the act of the culture itself.

The modern scientific method that dealt with the objective thing in itself is alien to it and it is only an "external reflection." The true method was an action of the thing itself. This assertion does not mean that hermeneutical

cognition is not also an activity, or an effort. But this activity and this effort consist in not interfering arbitrarily with the immanent necessity of the unfolding of thought unlike what happens when one latches onto this or that ready-made notion as it strikes one. Certainly, the thing does not go its own course without our thinking being involved, but thinking means unfolding what consistently follows from the subject matter itself. It is part of this process to suppress ideas "that tend to insinuate themselves" and to insist on the logic of the thought. In all thought, only pursuing what consistently follows from the subject matter can bring out what lies in it. It is the thing itself that asserts its force, if we rely entirely on the power of thought and disregard obvious appearances and opinions. The hermeneutical experience of the world is an activity of the thing itself, an action that, unlike the methodology of modern science, is a passion, an understanding, an event that happens to one.

The hermeneutical experience of the world requires rigor of uninterrupted listening. A thing does not present itself to the hermeneutical experience without an effort special to it, namely that of "being negative toward itself." A person who is trying to understand a text of cultural tradition has to keep something at a distance – namely everything that suggests itself, on the basis of his own prejudices,²⁵ his own habitus,²⁶ as the meaning expected – as soon as it is rejected by the sense of the text itself. The experience of reversal (which happens unceasingly in talking) has its presence here. Explicating the whole of meaning towards which understanding is directed forces us to make interpretive conjectures and to take them back again. The self-cancellation of the interpretation makes it possible for the thing itself – the meaning of the text – to assert itself. The movement of the interpretation is dialectical not primarily because the one-sidedness of every statement can be balanced by another side, this is, as we shall see, a secondary phenomenon in interpretation – but because the word that interpretatively fits the meaning of the cultural text expresses the whole of this meaning, i.e., allows an infinity of meaning to be presented within it in a finite way.

The objectifying procedure of natural science and the concept of being-in-itself, which is intended in all knowledge, is only an abstraction when viewed from the medium of language. Abstracted from the fundamental relation to culture that is given in the linguistic nature of our experience of it, science attempts to become certain about entities by methodically organizing its knowledge of the culture. Consequently it condemns as heresy all knowledge that does not allow of this kind of certainty and that therefore cannot serve the growing domination of being of culture. But we need precisely this kind

of heretical knowledge to belong to culture. What exactly is the nature of knowledge, understanding and thinking that belongs to the being of culture understood which enables us to belong to and to participate in cultural world uncovering social solidarities? What is the element of happenstance in this kind of thinking, which amounts to the activity of the thing itself that the understanding mind suffers? What is the discipline that needs to be exercised in the effort needed for the happening of understanding? These are questions that will be taken up in another essay. Here it suffices to say that when spectator understands the meaning of the play going on he recognizes “what it is” that is played. By recognition is not meant knowing something again that we know already, i.e., what is familiar is recognized again. According to Gadamer, “The joy of recognition is rather the joy of knowing *more* than is already familiar. In recognition what we know emerges, as if illuminated, from all the contingent and variable circumstances that condition it; it is grasped in its essence. It is known as something.”²⁷

Conclusion

From our investigation of the mode of being of culture one structure has come out clearly: whatever we have considered which belongs to culture as its part whether it is play, festival, theater, language, or any other item, shares its aspect in its mode of being. This happens for the simple reason, which is also our concluding thesis, that every aspect of the mode of being of culture as a whole finds place within this whole culture as an accentuated aspect of some part of it. For example festive character of culture as a whole finds place in this whole culture as accentuated aspect of festivals which are part of culture. Same applies to play aspect, theatrical aspect, linguistic aspect etc.

End Notes

¹ Many studies in anthropology have taken performance by actors and experience by onlookers as their organizing concepts, yet none of these studies have tried to open up the multiplicity of dimensions inherent in cultural performance. Some have seen performance only in public, highly conventionalized, authentic, spectacular, theatrical, or ritualized events, while others have extended performance to the analysis of cultural behaviour at any level, including mundane everyday events. For Dell Hymes, performance is “the interpretable, the reportable, the repeatable”, and the “doable” in social action applying primarily to “authentic or authoritative” performance for an audience (*In Vain I Tried to Tell You*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981, pp.82-84). Victor Turner defined performance as social or cultural drama, in which he included such mundane communicative phenomena as

“speech behavior” and “the presentation of self in everyday life”, as well as the more grandiose “state drama or social drama” (*The Anthropology of Performance*. New York: PAJ Publications, 1986, pp. 77, 81). For Richard Schechner, the key questions in the analysis of performances are “who performers are, how they achieve their temporary or permanent transformations, and what role the audience plays” (*Between Theater and Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985). In Schechner’s view, “there is a unifiable realm of performance that includes ritual, theater, dance, music, sport, play, social drama, and various popular entertainments” (1988:257). Stanley Tambiah has theorized that ritual acts are performative (1) “in the Austinian sense” by analogy to speech acts, (2) as staged performances using multiple media, or (3) as “indexical values ... attached to and inferred by actors” (*Culture, Thought, and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985, p.128). Edward Bruner’s “anthropology of experience” includes expressions, which he defined as “representations, performances, objectifications, or texts” (“Experience and Its Expressions,” in *The Anthropology of Experience*, Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner, eds. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986, p.5). He asserted that “the anthropology of performance is part of the anthropology of experience” (“Experience and Its Expressions,” p. 6). The close relationship between performance and experience has also been noted by Dwight Conquergood, who stated that “performance-centered research takes as both its subject matter and method the experiencing body situated in time, place, and history” (“Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics”, *Communication Monographs* 58(2), 1991:187). Gary B. Palmer and William R. Jankowiak have tried to combine performance of actors with experience of onlookers through the imagery of theater. In their view, “It is through performances, whether individual or collective, that humans project images of themselves and the world to their audiences...When we observe performances and physical constructions, we experience them as mental imagery...Every performance has some significance for its audience. In the experiencing of performances, we find commentaries, intended or not, on ourselves and our communities. As we accept or reject these commentaries and act accordingly, we function as intersubjective cultural beings.” (“Performance and Imagination: Toward an Anthropology of the Spectacular and the Mundane,” *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (May, 1996), pp.226- 227). Thus, it appears that the multidimensionality of performance and experience involved in culture need careful examination. The current state of divergent views of performance theorists need to be combined in a common frame of reference. There is a need to resolve some of the grosser discrepancies so that the anthropologies of performance and experience can differentiate and coordinate in a more coherent theoretical framework. Those interested in a detailed bibliography on the subject should consult, William O. Beeman, “The Anthropology of Theater and Spectacle,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 22 (1993), pp. 369-393.

² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Second, Revised Edition, Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (Continuum, London, New York) 2004.

³ Here we follow the phenomenological description of play given by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, Second, Revised Edition, Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (Continuum, London, New York) 2004, pp.102-110 and *Relevance of Beautiful and Other Essays*, Translated by Nicholas Walker, Cambridge University Press, 1980, pp. 22-31.

⁴ But Pierre Bourdieu will object to this snobbery of a philosopher claiming to play a purposeless game. Criticizing Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, which is a cultural object, he writes pejoratively, "Asking to be treated as it [the *Critique of Judgment*] treats its object, i.e., as a work of art, making Kant's object its own objective, i.e., cultivated pleasure, cultivating cultivated pleasure, artificially exalting this artificial pleasure by a rouseur's ultimate refinement which implies a lucid view on this pleasure, it offers above all an exemplary specimen of the pleasure of art, the pleasure of the love of art, of which, like all pleasure, it is not easy to speak. It is a pure pleasure, in the sense that it is irreducible to the pursuit of the profits of distinction and is felt as the simple pleasure of play, of playing the cultural game well, of playing on one's skill at playing, of cultivating a pleasure which 'cultivates' and of thus producing, like a kind of endless fire, its ever renewed sustenance of subtle allusions, deferent or irreverent references, expected or unusual associations... 'Empirical' interest enters into the composition of the most disinterested pleasures of pure taste, because the principle of the pleasure derived from these refined games for refined players lies, in the last analysis, in the denied experience of a social relationship of membership and exclusion. The sense of distinction, an acquired disposition which functions with the obscure necessity of instinct, is affirmed..." *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Translated by Richard Nice, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1984, pp.498f.

⁵ Roger Caillois has distinguished at least four basic compartments in the games: agon: competition; alea: chance; mimicy: simulation;ilinx: vertigo in his *Man, Play, and Games*, Translated from the French and with an Introduction by Meyer Barash, New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1961.

⁶ That nature of culture in its entirety shares in the nature of play and play is not just part of culture has been noticed by Johann Huizinga in his *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, (London, Paladin), 1970; Jacques Ehrmann, "Homo Ludens Revisited" *Yale French Studies* No. 41, *Game, Play, Literature*, (1968), pp. 31-57; and Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp.102-110, *Relevance of Beautiful and Other Essays*, pp. 22-31.

⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.110.

⁸ Cf. William O. Beeman, "The Anthropology of Theater and Spectacle," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 22 (1993), pp. 369-393.

⁹ Gadamer, *Relevance of Beautiful*, P.61.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. Pp. 61-62.

¹² Ibid. P.62.

¹³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.123.

¹⁴ *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, tr. Nicholas Walker, Ed. Robert Bernasconi, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, Pp.58-59.

¹⁵ Ibid. P.59.

¹⁶ Ibid. P.60.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *The Relevance Of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, Translated by Nicholas Walker, Cambridge University Press, 1980, p.31.

¹⁹ *The Relevance Of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, p.32.

²⁰ Gadamer develops his conception of *belonging* in his *Truth and Method*, pp. 453-457. We follow him here.

²¹ As ancient thinker as Parmenides considered this to be the most important signpost on the way to the truth of being. As latest as Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher, tries to recover the idea of belongingness by developing his conception of *habitus*. He writes, "To speak of habitus is to include in the object the knowledge which the agents, who are part of the object, have of the object, and the contribution this knowledge makes to the reality of the object. But it is not only a matter of putting back into the real world that one is endeavouring to know, a knowledge of the real world that contributes to its reality... It means conferring on this knowledge a genuinely constitutive power..." *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Translated by Richard Nice, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1984, p.467.

²² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.458.

²³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.458.

²⁴ Gadamer, *Relevance of Beautiful...*, pp.162f.

²⁵ For understanding the role of prejudice cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 268-306.

²⁶ For history of 'habitus' cf. Roy Nash, "Bourdieu, 'Habitus', and Educational Research: Is It All Worth the Candle?" *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Jun., 1999), pp. 175-187.

²⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.11.