

L. A. ABRAMIAN

## **Chaos and Cosmos in the Structure of Mass Popular Demonstrations**

(The Karabakh Movement in the  
Eyes of an Ethnographer)

The purpose of the present article is to discern certain structural peculiarities of the Karabakh movement, to show how seemingly minor details may link a modern-day demonstration to an archaic ritual drama, the past to the present, and the present to a possible future. Limiting our observations to nine months—from February to November of 1988—we shall attempt to follow the inception, formation, and emergence in the world of the subject of our investigation: the people's power, democracy.

The Erevan phase of the Karabakh movement began on February 19, 1988, when Erevanians gathered in Theater Square to support the Armenians of Karabakh, who had come out in a different square, in Stepanakert, with the demand to be united to the Armenian Motherland. We shall not inquire here how the movement itself began or which historical events preceded it; we are more interested in how the phenomena arising within the popular movement took shape and which laws they obeyed. However, from the outset it is necessary to distinguish the Karabakh movement in Karabakh itself and that in Armenia. These movements are generally identified with each other, whereas in a certain sense they are even direct opposites. Thus, for example, the movement in Karabakh is typologically comparable with a national liberation movement, which has for centuries been directed against Turkic-

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“Khaos i kosmos v strukture massovykh narodnykh vystuplenii (Karabakhscoe dvizhenie glazami etnografa)” (unpublished manuscript). Translated with the permission of the author.

speakers with a different nationality and different religion, and which has been headed by the local authorities, or *meliks*, with the support and involvement of the entire people under their jurisdiction. But in Erevan the struggle has taken on a distinct social nuance. While in Karabakh the *perestroika* and *glasnost'* proclaimed in the country were used in order to unite Karabakh with Armenia, in Erevan, on the contrary, the Karabakh question was often used to confirm the foundations of *perestroika* and *glasnost'* in Armenia. These two movements are also confirmed by the social position of the leaders. In Karabakh, the movement is headed by soviet and party bodies, with the "Krunk" committee composed for the most part of members of the (so to speak) Soviet "feudal" upper class—it is no accident that, after "Krunk" was outlawed, it began to call itself the "Soviet of Directors."<sup>a</sup> It is significant that persecution of these movement leaders is oriented first and foremost toward accusation of "corruption and organized crime," i.e., the accusation typically used against executives. At the same time, in Armenia the active opponents of the movement are in fact soviet and party bodies and "venal directors," while the Karabakh committee heading the movement is composed of intellectuals having no tie whatsoever to the practical world. Therefore, they have been accused of "longing for power."

But let us return to Theater Square. As we have already said, on February 19 several thousand people gathered here, mainly students and members of the intelligentsia. For the first three days, these meetings differed little in their structure from those in Stepanakert, in support of which they were in fact inspired. During these days, the movement had a pronounced political tendency and would hardly deserve the special attention of an ethnographer (except for the fact that the political demands wore an ethnic aspect), were it not that the meetings and processions on February 22 had become general in nature. On the evening of the 22nd, when approximately half a million people gathered before the building of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, demanding the calling of an extraordinary session of the Supreme Soviet, a large number of workers had already joined the procession. From the 25th to the 27th, people from the countryside arrived in the city and joined the demonstrations, giving a universal character to the meetings. We shall not inquire here which specific events resulted in the demonstrations for national-

political demands turning into mass meetings, which in turn led to an unprecedented outburst of national self-consciousness. What is important to us is that, in the final analysis, a special situation was created, during which the mass of people became organized into a single huge body, a brilliant characterization of which has been given by M. Bakhtin in connection with a similar universal phenomenon—the Medieval Carnival.<sup>1</sup> This gigantic body (on February 25 and 26 the fluctuating number of participants in the demonstrations may have reached a million) was not simply a mechanical combination of its constituents. It had a common soul, a common mind, and (finally) a common feeling of ethnic self-consciousness. On these and the following days, according to the testimony of many informants, a remarkable feeling was generated, as though one were present at each instant wherever this massive body of the people swept and thrived.

Being a specialist on early festival and ritual, the author suddenly found himself as though in the thick of an archaic festival, that very same profestival that he once endeavored to reconstruct.<sup>2</sup> A crucial attribute of the profestival is inversion, a devaluation and general abolition of the main (as well as secondary) social contrasts.<sup>b</sup> During the Medieval Carnival of Europe, the upper and lower classes of society, the king and the fool, changed places and meaning, while during the earlier festivals the two structural subdivisions or dual halves of archaic society did so, along with all their associated and opposing attributes—right and left, top and bottom, and so forth. Moreover, such inversions seem to weaken the contrasts and even lead to their disappearance for the duration of the chaotic festival. By the same workings, such important contrasts for contemporary Erevan as townsman/villager, man/woman, big/small (adult/juvenile), Armenian/Russian, etc., were abolished in Theater Square. We shall briefly recount how certain of these vanished, because such processes are far from being an everyday occurrence, especially in such complete form.

The first contrast is one of the most important for Erevan, having been called into existence by rapid urbanization. During the days in February, the influx of villagers into the city was welcomed with great enthusiasm; each new procession from regions near or far breathed new vital energy into the huge body of the people. When, on one of the culminating days in the square, a call was issued to shelter villagers arriving in the city, a large number of

Erevanians (among whom was the author) gathered at an appointed place in the late evening and chanted: "Welcome, guests!" although the number of "unsheltered" guests was extremely small. Apparently, those arriving from the districts found their relatives and former fellow villagers in the infrastructure of the city. This, by the way, was a unique experiment, revealing the social structure of the city without complex and dubious sociological opinion polls. It is noteworthy that most of those waiting for guests from the countryside were typical long-term city-dwellers.

The man/woman contrast was eliminated by the very fact that any young man could address any woman without internal or external prohibition, which prior to the days of February would usually have been taken as a clear breach of customary rules and conduct. For example, a group of young women in a small procession took under their voluntary protection a young man ("Girls, don't be afraid!"—with reference to the closeness of a formation of soldiers), whose social position in the past would never have allowed him to address them, or if he did so, it would have been with definite antisocial intentions. Incidentally, the aborigines of the Australian tribe of Warramunga create "festival" rearrangements in their society simply by breaching the customary form of addressing women.<sup>3</sup> The removal of the man/woman contrast and its replacement by another, less polar (though not identical) relation between the former members of the opposition is well illustrated by the following anecdote. A mother chides her son for not yet being married: "Can't you find yourself a suitable girl?" "And where should I find one," the son replies. "For months now we have all been like brothers and sisters!"

Age distinction, a circumstance that forms another contrast, was also leveled in the February days within the indefinite age of the mass body of people.

In addition, the polarization of bilingualism also vanished completely. This happened quite simply on the very first day of the February meetings, when a Russian-speaking leader stepped forth. As was to be expected in the national-political context of what was taking place, people expressed dissatisfaction with his speaking in Russian. "Before me, one of the secretaries of the Central Committee came before you," he observed. "He spoke in Armenian. And what did he tell you?" This orator did have something to say, though in Russian, and from that time until the end of the Febru-

ary meetings the contrast between the two languages practically disappeared.

Such a major contrast as that between the able-bodied and the handicapped also vanished. It was possible to observe many blind and deaf, with their interpreters, in the square. When a legless man who had come from a distant town in his wheelchair gave a speech, the people, out of respect for the guest, squatted down, “depriving” themselves of their legs, in order not to be taller or different.

In a word, a special chaotic festival structure was created, the cosmos of everyday life was transformed into festival chaos. But the connection between the events that took place in Theater Square and the ancient profestival is not confined to this alone.

It is noteworthy that the *glasnost'* recently proclaimed in our country, by the very word that expresses this concept, comes close to the realm of the profestival. Thus, the root of the Armenian equivalent of the Russian word *glasnost'* (*hrapara-kaynutyun*), is “town square” (*hraparak*), and perhaps it is no accident that the Armenian people indeed came out into the *square*, in order to bring its meaning to life. Let us recall that the square, situated in the center of the town, was always the place where general festivals were held. The fact that the people did not acquiesce in moving their meetings to the outskirts of the city, as municipal authorities proposed, also shows the presence of a natural centripetal force, which has been embodied in the architecture of many cities in the world. This same principle guided Aleksandr Tamanian when he placed an enormous square at the center of his master plan for the city of Erevan. Clearly, it is no accident that the popular “festival” of today took place precisely in the place where the great architect, pursuant to an earlier version of the design, had intended to build a People’s Palace, where spectator-people were witness to solemn deeds of actor-people. Thus, even by Tamanian’s design the contrast of spectator—performer was supposed to dissolve, and this is one of the major attributes of the profestival.

The connection between *glasnost'* (in the Armenian version) and the square is so deep that it is possible to make a conclusion about the one from examining the other. For example, from the condition of Theater Square alone it was possible to judge accurately the state of *glasnost'* in the country. Thus, a kind of spatial code is created as an adjunct to the political—consider the vacilla-

tions in the blockade of the square, the formation of occasional breaches in the wall of the covering force, their positioning (for inexplicable reasons the people were sometimes allowed into the square through one or another subsidiary entrance), the attempt to move the meetings from the center to the periphery, the fluctuations in strength of the blockade (police–army–special detachments, hierarchy of armored vehicle types), and so forth. It is noteworthy that the spatial code may also yield a whole range of structural information of a different type. For example, when instead of the meeting scheduled for March 26 a dead city was declared, this was carried into effect almost entirely in Theater Square alone: those who took part in the first meetings of February 19 and 20 largely remained in their homes, while the curious dwellers of the outskirts and disguised representatives of the party and security bodies appeared around the empty, “dead” square.

It should be pointed out that the root *glas* [voice] of the Russian word *glasnost'* also reveals the deep festival-like political essence expressed by this word. This is not the meek term “freedom of speech,” which, becoming self-sufficient and independent, very often remains solitary and self-absorbed. It is the precursor of such a word, with its “vocal” component, which absolutely requires the presence of a listener, a dialogue, question and answer. It is no accident that participants in meetings and processions created a whole range of word games of ritual question–answer type. . . .<sup>6</sup> It is curious that the organs to whom the questions of the demonstration were addressed themselves became involved in the dialogue and occasionally made replies, again confirming the ancient question–answer archetype under the surface of the popular actions. It should be noted that the question–answer form is also characteristic of the most archaic rituals, especially those dealing with a boundary-line situation (such as the ritual of the New Year), when the cosmos is to be recreated from a world plunged in chaos.

Thus, both the Russian word *glasnost'* [vocalness] and its Armenian equivalent, which is traced back to “town square,” each in their own way reveal the connection between the phenomena to which they refer and the ancient profestival. Added to all of this is yet another festival nuance, by virtue of another policy program that has been announced in the country—democratization, accompanying vocalness, since this in turn presupposes a *process*, a certain movement of popular nature. Often these two ideas—

democratization and vocalness— are juxtaposed with democracy and freedom of speech, not seeing in the first pair all those archaic attributes that we have attempted to delineate and that breathed the spirit of the profestival into the events that unfolded before us.

It is possible to discern yet another important quality of the February meetings, which also guides us in the direction of the profestival. This is the feeling of solidarity, of unity and mutual love that will hardly be forgotten by those who experienced this unexpected emotional condition. Such a mass expression of solidarity is not very commonly seen, and perhaps for this very reason the sadly well-known article "Emotions and Reason," published in *Pravda* on March 21, judged the mutual solicitude, the restraint, and the free distribution of food in the days of February to be a brilliant organization on the part of dark forces.<sup>d</sup> It should be noted, by the way, that the contrast between emotion and reason became, throughout the period under discussion, one of critical distinctions by means of which the most diverse levels, from newspaper reporters to top politicians, and for the most different motives, sought to resolve problems that arose. They resorted to this redemptive formula as a charm, in order to tame emotions with reason. The emotional moment in fact plays a major role in a whole range of phenomena, including the structure of the archaic festival; yet it is absolutely unnecessary to tame the emotions here. On the contrary, it is emotional tension that allows the profestival to operate by its own special rules; but unlike the destructive manifestations of a furious mob, which also exists because of an emotional basis, the popular festival (and its distant descendant, the Theater Square of the days of February) engenders *positive* emotions. (The tragedy of Sumgait had not yet taken place.) For example, in the African tribe Nyakyusa, a ceremony is considered ineffective, and may even cause harm to the society, if the officiants harbor "wrath in their heart."<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, during such popular meetings the emotional does not become the sole ruling principle; it does not eclipse reason, but helps bring about a new consciousness, which is directed inward from without, toward the roots of the community. The profestival develops into a moment when its participants communicate with their sacred history. Thus a sudden awakening formed during the days of February of ethnic self-awareness, with an acute con-

sciousness of the Armenian people's history and a universal interest in this.

Another feature of the archaic festival—its theatricality—is already evident from the title of the square, which came to be called Theater Square precisely during the “festival-like” events. Tamanian thought that he was erecting the Opera building on the very same spot as an ancient temple of “song and love”; in any case, such a legend was preserved in the architect's family.<sup>5</sup> Even if the theatrical past of Theater Square is not of such great antiquity, during the nine months discussed here it became a kind of stage where genuine dramas were acted out. The scenic qualities of the square and the universal license that is characteristic of the theater were very apparent to photographers, for example, since they would not be allowed to photograph a particular political action outside of the square, while the same people within the precincts of the square not only did not object to being photographed, but even endeavored to attract the photographers' attention. All the hunger strikes, the clothing of some of the hunger-strikers, the interior and exterior configuration of the place where the fasts occurred, were organized on a theatrical principle. Being in the form of a tent, the scene of the hunger strikes seemed to make this improvised “stage” even more reminiscent of typical outgrowths of the square—the carnival booths. During one of the May meetings it was planned to hold a mock trial of the authorities on the “stage” of Theater Square, and on July 7 and 8 this same “stage” became the witness of a genuine drama, when the funeral of a young man who had been killed came to a theatrical conclusion here, with an honor guard ritual at his picture on the following day.

The tragedy and sorrow to which Theater Square became an accomplice, whether the above-mentioned funeral or the unseen presence of the Sumgait massacre victims, might seem to remove our square from the gaiety of the festival; but even this is the final and critical attribute that, on the contrary, brings the happenings in Theater Square even closer to the profestival. In fact, within the profestival, laughter and sorrow, mirth and funeral, birth and death are usually combined—whether it be an actual birth and death, or symbolic events during initiation ceremonies.

Thus, many strands lead us from the town square of today to the earliest festival. We have already discussed the spatial code. In this aspect, special meaning attaches to the round form of Theater

Square, our festival space. In such a space, direct mingling of people is better fostered, with movement and rearrangement more free, than in a space of another configuration. The circle creates an appropriate, mobile, shapeless structure within itself. The chaotic nature of folk holidays comes to a certain extent from the roundness of the central square. And the idea of a center, the most compressed space in the world, is directly related to the round square.

The magical force of the circle may appear in the most varied of effects, both natural and artificial, or created by culture—whether it be the spatial organization of the simplest associations of animals or the complex social organism of human society. People move in a circle during archaic rituals, and so does the hand of a modern magician; archaic monoliths [*kromlekhi*] are arranged in a circle, as are many masterpieces of contemporary architecture, such as the Opera and Ballet Building in Theater Square. The latent power of the magical circle is also revealed in connection with the popular movement under discussion. For example, we have postulated an extremely interesting mystical scheme, according to which the unity and cohesion of a nation correlates with a temple with a round floor plan, while the loss of solidarity and dispersal of the nation in the world correlates with the destruction of such buildings. Thus, in the seventh century, the round temple of Zvartnots was built on the eve of the Arab invasions, and in the tenth century, after the destruction of the temple, a large mass of Armenians abandoned their birthplace. By the same token, the building of Gagikashen (similar to Zvartnots) in Ani became a symbol of the cohesion and flourishing of the people, while after the downfall of Ani and the destruction of this round temple the nation was again dispersed throughout the world. When the discoverer of this mysterious connection learned that the stones from the ruin of Zvartnots temple were arranged in a round foundation circle for the purpose of further restoration, he predicted even before the Karabakh movement that the Armenian people would again become united in the near future. This scheme, inspired by the archetype Tower of Babylon (the Armenians too were supposed to “understand each other”), worked surprisingly well in connection with the dramatic events at Zvartnots airport: consider the name of the airport, laid out in round plan, its blockade with picketers, and the “destruction” and battering of the “wall” sur-

rounding the airport by armed forces descending from the sky. Unlike the watchful forces guarding the temple of Zvartnots (*Zvartnots* means "Temple of the Watchful Powers"), these forces were endowed only with punitive and destructive capabilities.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, as we see, the situation that was created exhibits a whole range of attributes resembling the condition of the chaotic proto-festival. In actuality, a peculiar ritual drama was played out before us, plunging the former cosmos into ritual chaos. But, like any drama, it could not last forever. The chaos that was created is pregnant with a new cosmos, and an ethnographer may guess at its anticipated new condition, using as the key the form and progression of the ritual drama.

Such ritual dramas, according to N. Ross Crumrine,<sup>6</sup> are of two types: the first, symbolically removing the structural contrasts, subsequently restores them, reinforcing traditional sociocultural values; but the second type introduces certain changes in how these very values are perceived, and these changes then spread throughout the cultural and social sphere. The ritual drama of the first type actually makes the society able to withstand external and internal changes, ensuring its stability; while the drama of the second type brings about a change in societal structure, whether an evolution or a degradation.

Crumrine assigns to the first type, for example, the "ritual of insurrection" of the Swazi tribe of South Africa, who have also been studied by Hilda Kuper.<sup>7</sup> In the course of this ritual drama, the king of the Swazi is deprived of his kingly regalia and power, and the society falls into a state of chaos. This is considered to be an extremely dangerous time, but fortunately the ceremony ends with the restoration of the traditional hierarchical society. To this same type, Viach. Vs. Ivanov assigns the unofficial folk culture of the Middle Ages, where the periodic carnivals reinforce precarnival society.<sup>8</sup> The transition from chaos to cosmos is the foundation of numerous ritual systems, especially those dealing with boundary-line situations and moving from one condition to another. Such a scheme may be used to form not only the ritual drama of the first type of society, for which such a scheme is most characteristic, but also the ritual drama of the second type of society.

Occasionally transition from chaos to cosmos is so deeply embedded in human subconscious that the two types may smoothly merge into each other, or the ritual and realistic aspects of the

drama may be so interwoven that it is difficult to distinguish them. For example, nearly all popular uprisings contain features of the Swazi ritual previously mentioned, and if they end in failure, the "cosmic order" that follows this chaotic condition confirms and strengthens the former social structure much more firmly and distinctly. On the other hand, if the "chaos" is reinforced, the second scheme is immediately put into effect. It is no accident that the October Revolution unfolded with an intense "holiday" ritualization, and certain activists wanted to build the new proletarian culture only after total ("chaotic") destruction of the old.

By observing how the transition from cosmos to chaos to cosmos occurs, how a given society emerges from a "chaotic" festival state, it is possible to determine the type toward which it is tending, and to guess the course of its evolution. Keeping all of this in mind, let us turn once again to our Theater Square, where festive chaos is enthroned, although it cannot last forever, and its structure may reveal signs that point to a not very distant future.

But first it is helpful to consider the idea of restructuring, which, along with democratization and vocalness, forms the political-ideological triad that has been proclaimed in the country. In the equivalent Armenian word *verakarucum*, the prefix *vera* does not directly convey a change, but rather corresponds to the prefix "re-" in the word "return" or "restoration." In the Russian word *perestroika*, the prefix *pere-* directly indicates that what is being newly built is not reconstructed, but restructured, and the new should be different from the old. Thus, on the level of the word alone, it may be noticed that the first two members of the triad contain festival-like chaotic qualities (with the semantic nuances of the Russian and Armenian words complementing each other), and the third member, which according to universal law is supposed to emerge from the chaos of this festival, conceals a certain indeterminacy or duality in its meaning. In all likelihood, the word itself once again expresses a mystical connection between word and deed (reality). In fact, we have already mentioned two possible paths of insurrection and revolution—toward a new social structure (in the case of victory) and toward the old order (in case of defeat), while *perestroika*, as often pointed out by the inventor of the "triad," Mikhail Gorbachev, is a new form of revolution. Hence, already on the level of the word we are faced with the question: to which type will our ritual drama and our society belong, and what awaits us—a

traditional return or the possibility of change?

Incidentally, the Karabakh movement is typologically very similar to a classical revolution. Let us stress that we are referring only to typological comparisons, of course, and the features of revolution in the phenomenon under study do not necessarily form a strict chain of logic. It is as though we are looking at a kaleidoscope, composed of fragments of historical revolutions, which shows us various pictures, themselves composed of pages ripped at random from the various chapters of a history textbook. Thus, in March there was a schism between the "right" and "left" wings, whose common forces "came to power" in the days of February: in March, the "leftists" declared the liberal, yet conservative "right wing" to be traitors, and in the following months certain of the "right wing" did in fact betray the movement (compare the experience of the February Revolution in Russia). On March 19, at one of the first gatherings of the Karabakh committee, when the question was being discussed of whether to call a meeting on March 26, it was seriously proposed that people come to the square a day earlier or later than the 26th, in order to take the enemy by surprise. It is noteworthy that this matter was discussed openly, and even broadcast by radio, so that those who did not make it to the meeting were able to listen to the discussion in the street. Such a time fixation may also be seen in the universal demand to hold an "unlawful" meeting of deputies precisely on November 24. (Compare this to the dispute over the time of the October up-rising: the 24th was too soon, the 25th too late; also compare the time correlation between the two events: February/(October) November.) While in the October Revolution the Jews, who were less connected with the land, played a large role, in the Karabakh movement mathematicians and physicists who were not connected with the "land" took a more active part: in the last makeup of the Karabakh committee, five of the eleven members represented these abstract professions. Finally, let us recall the slogan "All power to the Soviets!" which became insistent as early as the days of February and which was resolved only in the session of November 24; let us also remember that the members of the Karabakh committee are chiefly accused of longing for power.<sup>1</sup>

It is now time to return to our "festival" and see how chaos is transformed into cosmos in our case. It should be observed that it is hard to fix a specific day for this transition. Features of a future

cosmic order are glimpsed already within the chaos, but a more vivid indication may be obtained by considering the space code once again. When it was forbidden to hold meetings in Theater Square, the people, as already noted, not wanting to gather in the city outskirts, where it was proposed to move the meetings, and being deprived of the ancient "pagan" center, selected another sacred center—Matenadaran.<sup>8</sup> Of course, it is pure accident that the disposition of Matenadaran itself dictated an elongated shape for the crowd of many thousand people, along the street and the approach leading up to Matenadaran. However, we have already had ample reason to be convinced that even random circumstances, in a remarkable way, form special systems that complement the general scheme. And so here, the round, amorphous, and free gathering in the town square immediately took on a strictly rectangular structure of Gothic type. And the "festive" contact among people, the festive feeling in general, was immediately reduced to a minimum; the theatricalization and festive surroundings nearly disappeared. It may be said that the circle, in becoming a rectangle, quickly lost its festive qualities. It was on these days that the ritual chaos appeared in a new form, and we could already sense the pattern of the new cosmic order.

As already mentioned, changes had taken place in the system of basic contrasts of society during our chaotic holiday, and therefore one could expect new structural changes here as well. Indeed, nearly all the contrasts that had vanished during the chaotic holiday were reestablished, and in an even more pronounced form. Thus, the antipodes of bilingualism not only again drew apart from each other, but an even more "polarized" situation was created, which brought with it the issue of a contrast between Armenian and Russian schools. The contrast between men and women was also reestablished, again in a more acute form. This is shown by the simple fact that an attempt was made in the summer to create a separate female committee of the Karabakh movement. Let us also mention the women's demonstrations, or the general processions and other political actions in whose structure a special place and role were assigned to women. The reestablishment and sharpening of the age contrast could be seen in the activity of a radical wing (chiefly comprised of young people), for example, during the blockade of the Zvartnots airport.

As we see, the system tends to return to a prefestival condition,

and with an even more pronounced structure; in other words, our ritual drama seems to drift toward the first type, and our society tends to remain traditional and unchanged. But in the new “cosmic order,” a new contrast has appeared that was not present in the former structure. This is the contrast between the new and the old order, true and false democracy, or, in a broader sense and using current definitions, between the proponents of *perestroika* (in the meaning that we have seen in the Russian word) and its enemies. It is at this point that the system has a possibility of approaching the second type, and society has a possibility of being rescued from a return to the hopeless past. It is noteworthy that this contrast had taken shape quite clearly during the meetings at Matenadaran, when an orderly structure appeared in the space code. Such a change may or may not occur, depending on which type prevails, but it is significant that the possibility of change is allotted to that very element which, as we have seen, also contains a certain ambiguity on the level of the word itself.

The oscillation of the system between the two types is connected with yet another mysterious phenomenon—coincidences and regularities in significant dates. The meeting of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, which was supposed to decide the fate of Nagornyi Karabakh, was scheduled for the 5th of July, i.e., the very day when, sixty-seven years ago, Karabakh was handed over to Azerbaidzhan during a similar meeting of the Kavbiuro. This “coincidence” creates a definite cyclical rhythm, the possibility of a vicious circle. In any case, it also helps to move the system toward the first type. And although the meeting was transferred to the 18th of July, it nevertheless carried the imprint of the 5th of July.<sup>h</sup> The foregoing is not just a scholar’s analysis; the author found that many informants expressed a similar opinion, which was also expressed in various speeches at the meetings. The danger of a return was further heightened by the fact that Stalin’s personality and spirit reigned in the 1921 meeting, and during the present meeting many viewed with alarm indications of a return to Stalinist times. However, the mere fact of changing the date of the meeting creates, if only in formal terms, a new hope of duality, or a possible competition between the two types.

A similar ambiguity is expressed in the so-called kingly code (conceptualizing the idea that all festivals deal first and foremost with the contrast between the hierarchical top and bottom). This is

a special subject and we will not be able to discuss this interesting aspect of the archaic festival here.<sup>9</sup>

One may get the impression that the structural forecasts presented here were made after the fact, when the course of events was already known: that the system, for example, would ultimately tend toward the first type. But as early as October the author made these same predictions at the Moscow Institute of Ethnography, when the competition between the two types was still sharply evident.

Another numerical "coincidence" is our chosen period of nine months, at the expiration of which the movement gave birth to its child: on the 24th of November, the people held a meeting of their deputies, and this took place in the very same Theater Square, in the Opera Building. True, the child [i.e., claiming Karabakh part of Armenia] was declared illegitimate, the meeting itself unlawful, yet the event as a whole, the genesis, the period of pregnancy, and the delivery into the world already belong to history. During the course of these nine months, the popular movement went through all the phases of a festival and created the utmost of its possibilities—a people's power, a genuine democracy, even though it was destined to live only a short time—the meeting had not even finished when a curfew was imposed in the city.

I would prefer not to conclude the article in a pessimistic vein, although the square to this day is surrounded by soldiers and armored vehicles, and yet another mystical coincidence has been added: let us remember that both Zvartnots and Gagikashen were destroyed by earthquakes, after which the solidarity and unity of the people were shaken. We hope that the terrible earthquake of December 7 does not end by destroying the building of the round temple of the people's spirit that was erected during those nine months.

Erevan, January 1989

*The article was written during a difficult time for Armenia and the author. Today, in the middle of summer, 1989, much has changed. The First Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR has been held, where the two ritual principles again came into competition—to this and other aspects of the contemporary ritual drama the author has*

*devoted a special article ("Archaic Ritual and Theater: From the Ceremonial Grove to Theater Square"). Processes of democratization have again begun in the republic, after temporary stagnation and repressions. The troops no longer blockade Theater Square; there is no need, since the very subject of our study, the symbolic center of the world, where our festival was played out, is now under excavation for not entirely clear purposes of construction and repair.*

### Editor's notes

a. The "KrunK" committee is named for the Armenian word for crane, a bird of great symbolic meaning for Armenians, appearing in art, literature, and music. The crane is associated with the homeland, but, in one Armenian hymn, delivers messages to dispersed Armenians abroad. The bird has become a symbol of cultural and political revival, for it returns to its homeland, just as Armenians hope Nagorny Karabakh will.

b. This is precisely the theme of a Western anthology: Barbara A. Babcock, ed., *The Reversible World, Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978). See editor's note q of the previous article for other relevant sources.

c. Because the short passage that follows was also in the previous article, I have edited it out of the main text here. The passage reads "For example, the leader would ask: 'Whose is Karabakh?' and the crowd would answer in unison 'Ours,' and so forth. This is repeated three times (there being several possible sequels). Any other kind of ritual, such as the silent group listening to a recording of a certain song in ritual posture—fist raised overhead—might end in such a question-answer ceremony. Again, it is no accident that the most popular choral song, 'Who are they?' also has a question-answer structure, in which the people became involved, replying in their many thousands with a warm 'Ey!' to each question of the refrain. The demonstrations, whose purpose (as the word implies) is to demonstrate a particular demand, also assumed a question-answer form. However, the Erevan demonstrators often demanded an immediate response to the demonstrated demands (questions), thus giving the demonstrations a nuance of a dialogue."

d. Armenians have been very concerned about the reactions of the central press, which they felt often distorted their goals and misconstrued peaceful intentions. The spontaneity of the demonstrations and the responsive, *ad hoc* nature of the Nagorny Karabakh Committee have been testified to by many observers and participants, but this was not how it was reported in Moscow.

e. See note m of the previous article, on the Zvarnots incident.

f. Some of the correlations drawn here may seem forced. The point that intellectuals were the vanguard of both "revolutions" is clear, however.

g. Matenadaran, an imposing stone building, is sacred in the sense that it is the national archive, holding religious and secular manuscripts that are highly valued

for their wealth of history.

h. See the previous article for clarification of the meaning of July 5, 1921 for Armenians. See also "A Chronicle of Events 1920–1988 in Nagorno-Karabakh," *Glasnost'*, January 1989, issue 16–18, pp. 11–17.

## Notes

1. M. Bakhtin, "Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekov'ia i Rennessansa" (Moscow, 1965).

2. L. A. Abramian, "Pervobytnyi prazdnik i mifologija" (Erevan, 1983).

3. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

4. M. Wilson, *Rituals of Kinship among the Nyakyusa* (London, 1957), p. 8.

5. Cf. also the corroboration of Tamanian's belief by the testimony of Martiros Sar'ian (in G. Khachatrian's novel *Artavazd* [Erevan, 1975], p. 271, note 76, in Armenian). The Church of Gethsemane (Gefsimanskaia) of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries stood on the grounds of the present square (see K. Kafadarian, *Erevan. Srednevekovye pamiatniki i lapidarnye nadpisi* [Erevan, 1975], pp. 45–46, in Armenian). There are no precise reports of a more ancient past for this ground.

6. N. Ross Crumrine, "Ritual Drama and Culture Change," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1970, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 361–72.

7. H. Kuper, *An African Aristocracy: Rank among the Swazi* (London, 1947); *idem.*, *The Swazi: A South African Kingdom* (New York, 1964).

8. Viach. Vs. Ivanov, "Iz zametok o stroenii i funktsiakh karnaval'nogo obraza," in *Problemy poetiki i istorii literatury* (Saransk, 1973), p. 52.

9. For this, see L. A. Abramian, "Arkhaicheskii ritual i teatr: Ot tseremonial'noi ploshchadki do Teatral'noi ploshchadi" [translated here.—Ed.].