

Bloomsday: James Joyce's *Ulysses* Celebrated as Theatrical Event

By Willmar Sauter

“I still met people in Dublin who claimed they knew Leopold Bloom personally.”
Franz Geiselsbrechtinger

Abstract

James Joyce had decided that 16 June 1904 should be the one day in the life of Leopold Bloom, about which he wrote his 800 page novel *Ulysses*. In his book, Joyce actually followed Mr Bloom that entire day, from his getting up and having the nowadays famous kidney breakfast, to the late evening, when he had to break into his own house on 7 Eccle Street to have a drink with Stephen Dedalus, the other main figure of the novel. The centenary of that very day took, accordingly, place in 2004. I have borrowed the identity of Mr Bloom to describe some street scenes from the centennial celebrations of Bloomsday in Dublin. After this introductory presentation, part two of this article will attempt to analyse Bloomsday in terms of a Theatrical Event, embedded in an unusual and striking playing culture. In a third part, Mr Bloom will once more be allowed to make some concluding comments.

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Part One: The Appearance of Bloomsday

*My name is Leopold Bloom and I will give you some short sketches from the centenary of Bloomsday. To be honest, there was no great reason for celebrations. Nothing of the things that Joyce wrote about in his book happened outside his fantasy. So, what is this festival all about? I am, of course, immensely grateful to Joyce for the book, otherwise I certainly would not exist at all. But what really happened on 16 June 1904 was something very different, and paradoxically enough, this is not celebrated at all. That day, the very young James Joyce had his first rendezvous with the likewise very young Nora Barnacle, his lifetime companion and mother of their children. They had a highly passionate relationship to judge from their intensive, outspoken and eroticised letters. Picking that date as the day he portrayed in *Ulysses*, which was not published until 1922, was Joyce's way of commemorating his first lovely experience with Nora.*



*However, the celebration of Bloomsday has nothing to do with James Joyce and Nora Barnacle – so please excuse my little deviation – but is entirely devoted to me, Leopold Bloom, a major figure in *Ulysses*. Wandering about in the streets of Dublin on 16 June 2004, one could meet with a number of copies of myself, all wearing dark suits and bolder hats. According to a Frenchman by the name of Jean Baudrillard these fake Leopold Blooms could be called simulacra – even more so, since there seems to be no original. I mean, I am aware that I am a fictional, virtual figure out of Joyce's imagination. By the way, there were a number of simulacra of James Joyce in the streets that day, too. Not only were there all these pictures of Joyce in papers, tourist brochures and shop windows, but there is also a life-size bronze statue of him at the corner of O'Connell Street and Earl Street North. Furthermore, one could meet him in person, i.e. performed by an imitator outside the Joyce Centre. This guy appears as Joyce every year on 16 June, while he works as a clerk the rest of the year. Well, what did people do on 16 June 2004? Before Mr Sauter will try to*

explain this paradoxical, carnivalesque celebration of myself with his theory of the Theatrical Event, I would like to show some more pictures that Mrs Sauter had taken during the occasion.

One of my imitators is performing on a little platform, just some 10 inches high to make me a bit more visible to the crowd. In front of me, on the ground next to the platform, one can spot three girls in period costumes. Those of you who know the book *Ulysses* will immediately identify this embarrassing episode on the beach, where my eyes were hooked on that lovely Gerty girl. You may also notice that we enjoyed beautiful sunshine during Bloomsday 2004.

In front of the Joyce Centre in North Great George's Street, not very far from my home in Eccle Street, people were waiting to get in to listen to a reading. The location of the Centre is a bit odd, because neither Joyce nor I had ever anything to do with that house, not even with the street. The school house up



the road, where he spent a few years as a boy, is the closest one can come. The people standing on the steps are wearing straw hats and laced blouses, reminiscent of the fashion of the year 1904.



Another picture, although not a very good one, shows a bus that is meant to look like a streetcar

from 1904. On the upper deck there is a young man in a yellow morning gown, performing as young Buck Mulligan, the guy who shaves on top of the Marcella Tower in the very first scene of *Ulysses*. More important, however, are the policemen – real Irish policemen – guarding the black limousine. Had Mr Sauter waited one more moment, he could have got a snapshot of Mary McAleese, the president of the Irish Republic. She visited the Joyce Centre, too, that morning.



Now we have moved back to the Joyce statue off-O'Connell Street. You see his sloppy hat and his glasses to the left in the picture. What happens here is that a group of people in the costumes of 1904 are photographed by

people in casual tourist clothes. If you have a closer look, you can even spot me, posing together with the bronze James Joyce.

After Buck Mulligan's morning toilette, he and his companions go down to the stony beach of Sandycove to have a swim. Now, a lot of people are doing the same on 16 June, celebrating the day in the rather chilly waters of the Dublin Bay.



Turning around, one sees the mighty Marcellus Tower. On the picture, we find Mr Sauter himself standing there, obviously trying to figure out why people are behaving so strangely during that day. It is, indeed, a remarkable day: a celebration of the centenary of an entirely illusionary day, populated with imaginary people that have never existed, and, furthermore, elevated to an occasion, in which even the nation's (real) president is participating. How can it be that reasonable citizens engage in such a mock festival about "nothing", that tourists are flying in from far away countries to visit the places where I roamed about during one day a hundred years ago, i.e. in case I had been a living person and not just the output of an avant-gardist writer of novels?



Part Two: Appearing as a Theatrical Event

A theatrical event can be described as a way of playing and, more exactly, as theatrical playing. Semantically, theatrical playing consists of an element of "playing" and an element of "theatricality", and both of these elements need to be described as separate entities. In many languages, everyday expressions indicate that theatre is "played" – Theater spielen, le jeu du théâtre, ludi romani, etc. – and thus belongs to a playing culture. Playing is distinguishable from everyday activities and follows specified rules, which all participants need to observe. Playing culture is distinct from written culture by its here-and-now character, whereas writing mostly aims at future or retrospective use. Not all playing is theatrical playing, but it seems necessary to relate theatrical playing both to playing in general and to specify what makes it theatrical.

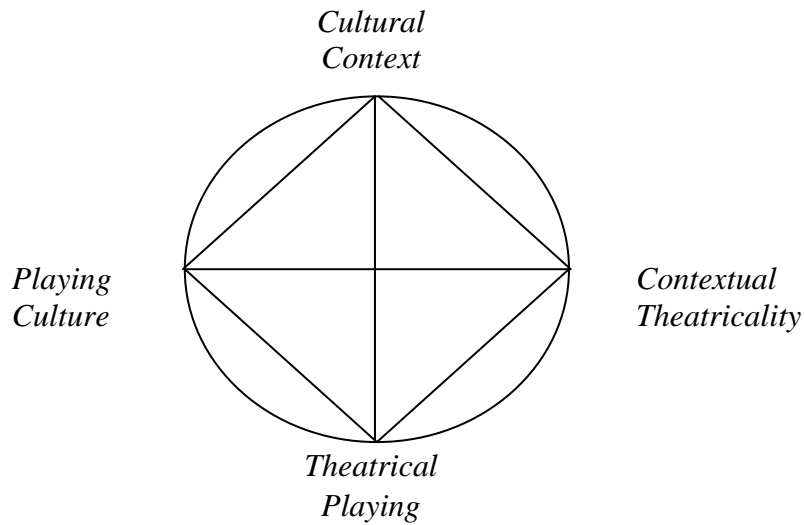
The word theatre has a long history in Western languages. What today is referred to as "theatre" was historically described as spectacle, comoedia, play or entertainment, and when the word theatre was used, it mostly meant a playhouse. But not only has the use of the terminology changed over the centuries, also the conception of what theatre is supposed to be has been negotiated from time to time. Even today the term "theatre" signifies different things in different cultures:

sometimes it is limited to spoken drama, for others it includes all kinds of theatrical genres such as dance, puppetry, music theatre, theatre sports, even circus and masquerades; in certain Asian languages the word theatre is reserved to distinguish the Western type of dramatic art from traditional domestic performances. In other words, the notion of what the term “theatre” designates is highly depending on the historical, geographical and semantic context, in which it appears. In the framework of the Theatrical Event, I will use the expression “contextual theatricality” to mark the open field of activities, which at a given time and place are termed “theatrical”.

A theatrical event has so far been described as a form of theatrical playing, which is related to a playing culture and to the dynamic concept of theatricality. All of these elements are at the same time embedded and functioning in a human society. Theatrical events are necessarily part of the cultural context.

This is not a very original observation. More than three decades ago, Erving Goffman developed his frame theory to describe the relationship between objects or events and the context, which surrounds them (1974). Goffman’s frame analysis as a tool of interpretation is always superior to the object of the encounter. Joseph Roach takes another approach when he describes the historical dependence of the Mardi Gras parades in New Orleans from a historical point of view (1996). The roots of this event are to be found in circum-Atlantic influences, expanding over centuries. Loren Kruger chooses a socially founded view when she describes the cultural activities of the inner city of Johannesburg (2007). The art work with and for the inhabitants is integrated with their social conditions. Another approach to public events is offered by Sue Ellen Case, when she illuminates the performative character of exhibitions, manifestations and appearances in public spaces (1995). Her direction of the analysis goes from the particular to the general. My own concept of the Theatrical Event attempts to include these various approaches by positioning a number of components in a non-hierarchical order.

I have suggested that the Theatrical Event could be understood as consisting of four components: Theatrical Playing – Playing Culture – Cultural Context – Contextual Theatricality. (2004, 2006) It is easy to observe that these terms also linguistically hook into each other. This pattern stands, however, for more than a game with words. On the contrary, it has been constructed to avoid a hierarchical relationship between the components. It is important to understand that these components are tightly interwoven and simultaneously active. Therefore, I have organized them as a circle: there is no beginning or end and it can be read clockwise or in the reversed order. The components are also related to each other according to the diamond-shaped lines of the following figure.



The circle of components is an attempt to represent the Theatrical Event as a holistic model. Although the Cultural Context happens to be at the top of the figure, it is in no way superior to the other components. “Cultural” is here understood as a broad concept, almost in the anthropological sense of all human activities. Thus, the Cultural Context includes not only high art and folk traditions, but also politics and economic enterprises, public discourses on a local as well as on a global level. Within the Cultural Context we also find social hierarchies, gender and class restrictions, religious communities, as well as all the mental and physical foundations, on which a society builds its public life. The way in which cultural activities are organized is called Contextual Theatricality, which is subject to change in the course of history. Who produces what in which circumstances depends on the norms and traditions that are established in the genres of a cultural field such as theatre, music, film, art, etc. Once a production reaches the public, I speak of Theatrical Playing, which is characterized by the interaction between performers and spectators. The audience is as important as the performance in order to create an interpretative interplay that carries meaning in the here-and-now encounter of a theatrical manifestation. Playing Culture, finally, indicates the free exchange of playful expressions that might or might not be observed from outside. The players transgress the limits of everyday life and engage in activities without “purpose” as the classical study *Homo ludens* by Johann Huizinga has stated long ago (1938).

Leopold Bloom has already described the appearance of various scenes in the streets of Dublin. Looking at them through the lenses of the four components I hope to show their appearing as well as their aesthetic, political and historical functions in relation to the overall event. (cf. M. Seel 2000). In the following four sections I will give examples of events that illustrate each one of the four components. Each occasion could be looked upon as a Theatrical Event per se, but my

intention is to show how these events are integrated into the greater event of Bloomsday, which I will argue is best understood as a Theatrical Event.

The President and the *Cultural Context*

It was a remarkable moment to see the President of the Irish Republic, Ms. Mary McAleese, make her way through the crowd on North Great George's Street, heading towards the Joyce Centre to listen to one of the many readings of Joyce's novel. This was of course not a private visit, but she lent the highest possible political authority to the entire Bloomsday celebration. Other public personalities of Ireland honoured other readings, such as the poet and Nobel Prize laureate Seamus Heaney. How political the centenary was perceived in Ireland is maybe best demonstrated by a decision taken in the Irish parliament shortly before 16 June 2004. The members of parliament voted for a change of the copyright law to ensure that an original manuscript of Joyce's novel could be exhibited in the National Library. This, in turn, enraged the grandson of Joyce, Stephen Joyce, to such a degree that he refused to come to Dublin. Instead, he gave his reading in Zürich in Switzerland, where a large part of the novel had been written.

Bloomsday was, in other words, politically highly explosive. A lot of emotions and prestige were at stake. Some of the issues had become a national affair. This is an observation one frequently makes when observing festivals of any kind. No matter if the event is organized by a national body or if it appears as a flat organisation like in Dublin, in the end the political component always becomes prominent: Who is represented on "Bloomsday", who has the right to claim Bloomsday as theirs, which groups have the power to make themselves heard? Power in terms of the Cultural Context is not restricted to political power, but it certainly has a political aspect. It may be exerted as legislation – like the copyright law mentioned above – or demonstrate its potential by abstaining from legislation: Joyce's *Ulysses* was, contrary to many other countries, never prohibited in Ireland, not because the eroticism of the book would have been less offensive there, but the Irish assumed that nobody would read that strange book anyway. The legal aspect of power is paramount, but not its only function. The symbolic status of power is sometimes just as vital, as demonstrated in Foucault's notion of the public discourse, in which the news and other media are most visible today (1975). Who has the power, the possibility and the influence as well as the "right" kind of arguments to speak through the media, to acquire a voice in the discourse? The media have the power to make an issue an issue, irrespective of their opinion about this issue. And Bloomsday really was an issue in the Irish media, long before 16 June 2004. Also during the week that followed Bloomsday, various evaluations could be read in the major newspapers; there were numerous reports from Bloomsday celebrations outside Ireland, for example from the Hungarian city, where the fictional Mr. Bloom's father allegedly was born! Bloomsday was elevated into a national and international matter and treated with dignity.

A central aspect of power is usually money, the economic power, but in the case of Bloomsday there is no agency or body that assumes an overarching responsibility. In this sense, Bloomsday is not a commercial event. There are different institutions, sponsors, private enterprises and individual persons, all contributing in their own way. Looking at the model of the Theatrical Event, I now focus on the *next component*.

The Producers of Contextual Theatricality

The Joyce Centre, the Joyce Museum in the Marcellino Tower, the world-famous brewery of Guinness, the numerous smaller sponsors, the amateur theatre groups on their platforms, the guy imitating Joyce – they are all producers. They contribute to Bloomsday, but they also compete with each other. Bloomsday offers a field in which the producers can become visible, but they have different ideas and different needs. Since Guinness held the position to offer Bloomsday participants a free breakfast with sausages, sandwiches and beer, other sponsors invited the public to participate in a free, Bloomian kidney breakfast on O'Connell Street already on the Sunday before the great day. More than 10 000 kidneys were eaten that morning! Other sponsors chose other treats. In the context of the Theatrical Event, the habitus that Pierre Bourdieu speaks of tends to be distinguishable through the different genres that are displayed in the field of theatricality (1992).

By genre I mean various cultural norms that have been established in order to differentiate particular ways of expression. In the theatre one could distinguish between comedy and tragedy or between spoken drama, opera, dance and mime. Each of these genres is at the same time organized in separate production facilities. Operas are produced at Royal theatres or other opera houses, comedies are shown in commercial theatres, fringe theatres sport avant-garde performances, etc. And the spectators usually know where to look for which kind of performances. The conditions are similar in other cultural areas, be it the podia on which music is performed – from symphony orchestras to techno discotheques – or the cinemas, in which various kinds of movies are shown. Also outside the traditional art establishment, genres steer the production of events.

The almost ceremonial breakfast eating mentioned above could be seen as one genre of the theatricality displayed on Bloomsday. Since the reader of Joyce's novel meets Leopold Bloom in the morning, the peculiar breakfast that he prepares for himself – while his wife Molly still dwells in her bed – has become a signum for Mr Bloom and for Ulysses altogether. Bloom's kidney has a similar status in world literature as the Madeleine cakes of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. To enact this particular moment of the novel became a specific genre of the Bloomsday celebration. The famous breakfast is performed by the participants of the festival. It lacks, however, the high status of literary readings. There is, after all, a hierarchy between the genres. The readings, organized by the institutionalized Joyce Centre and Joyce Museum, seemed to rank the highest.

That was manifested by the visit of the president, and that is why the reading of Joyce's grandson in Zürich was meant to embarrass the Irish. There were other readings in Dublin, too, mainly in places where the novel situated Leopold Bloom during the day, but they did not have the prestige that the institutions had.

Another genre was constituted by the amateurs who performed selected pieces of the novel as a theatrical show. I will soon look more closely at these performances; what matters here is the fact that they were not well-established theatrical troupes but seemed to be a group of people who simply thought it was fun to embody Joyce's fictional figures. Furthermore, there were all those private people who appeared in period costumes. These could be more or less elaborate, from full-scale dresses of 1904 to just a bow tie à la Joyce. This kind of organisational diversity will be easily recognized in the description of the components that will follow.

All of these participants – from the professional readers to the breakfast eaters – are included in the theatricality of Bloomsday. This loose organisation, allowing for all kinds of Joycean displays, was at the same time the condition for the playful interaction between readers and listeners, actors and spectators, participants and observers. Theatricality at this occasion can be seen as various degrees of participation in the overall Playing Culture of the day. Before we investigate more closely the general play atmosphere, I will point out some features of the Theatrical Playing that was going on in various places.

The Performers in *Theatrical Playing*

I have already mentioned the amateur status of the performers in front of the Joyce Centre. What the observers notice right away is the distance between the performers and the figures they present. Some period details in their costume are enough – the yellow morning gown, the bolder hat – and can be completed with a typical gesture, such as Gerty's limping walk, or a way of talking, for instance in a particular dialect, to illustrate the figures of Joyce's book. The players do not give a complete illusion of the figures they have picked, on the contrary, they only indicate them. Their amateurish playing is indeed very helpful in that matter. All the spectators have their own vision of these fictional characters, so it is neither necessary nor even desirable to present a fully identifiable interpretation of Buck Mulligan, Leopold Bloom, Molly or any others. So what I saw on the streets of Dublin were illustrations of fictional characters, rather than illusionary figures. This requires a certain style from the performers, which are more easily achieved by amateur actors than by conventionally trained performers. Bertolt Brecht has described the advantages of amateur acting in terms of the Alienation Effect and he would certainly have been very pleased with the street actors in Dublin.

In addition, this kind of street acting also required certain qualifications on the side of the spectators. Even as a bystander it was easy to distinguish the audiences according to two parallel parameters. There were those who knew their Joyce and

those who did not. The first category understood immediately what chapter of the novel that was performed, who the characters were and they also seemed to understand the irony towards the figures that characterized the presentations. But there were also the kind of bystanders who only watched without bothering about the novel's personage. The other parameter concerned the familiarity with Ireland, even with Dublin. Quite a few of the scenes were presented in the local Dublin dialects, in which these figures were written or at least thought of. One of them is talking about Paddy Dignam, whose funeral Bloom will attend at 11 o'clock, speaking in a raw Dublin dialect. His monologue seemed to be highly entertaining for Dubliners, whereas the tourists – even native English speakers – only could watch the fun that the real Dubliners in the audience had. Depending on the knowledge and the familiarity of every spectator, the outcome of the Theatrical Playing turned out differently. A Dubliner, who had read Joyce's novel, certainly enjoyed the performances differently from a tourist who never had opened the book.

There is, of course, also some theatricality attached to the readings, although different from the performers. The readers were professionals, either actors, writers or, like in the case of Joyce's grandson, someone with close ties to the family. In every case, they were supposed to possess particular skills for interpreting Joyce's text as text. Performing the text meant, at the same time, that the listeners were sharing the experience of a public encounter with this particular piece of literature, distinctly different from reading the text in one's own armchair. The readings obviously were considered as a solemn form of celebration, the top of the hierarchy among the many expressions of Theatrical Playing.

At the bottom of this status hierarchy we find all those participants, who only had dressed up in period costumes. They marked another form of playing, foremost on the personal level, which nevertheless contributed to the overall impression of a cheerful participation in the events of Bloomsday. The costumes needed not to be perfect either: already a bow tie or a laced shawl indicated that its wearers wanted to share their enthusiasm for the occasion with others. These people usually did not present any text, but limited their playing to the outfit they were displaying.

The different degrees of acknowledged playing were all related to the text of the novel. According to my own grading, the readers of pure literature had the highest esteem, marked also by the visit of the President. The amateur players were less serious in their interpretation of the texts they presented, and the costumed participants only gave visual expression to their understanding of Bloomsday. This unofficial hierarchical order mirrored the status of the producers, described under the heading of Contextual Theatricality. Relating to the "words" was serious, doing without "words" already points to the next component.

The People and their *Playing Culture*

As the reader certainly has realised so far, Bloomsday carried a strong element of Playing Culture. Playing – from the playful behaviour of animals and the playing of children to the highly skilled performances of dancers and actors – has been described in many ways. The “without purpose” of Huizinga has already been mentioned. But the purposelessness of playing does not exclude various functions that playing may have – entertaining, aesthetic, didactic, ritual functions are more or less always present. The distinction between playing and everyday life is another important feature. During Bloomsday I could observe playful activities all over town and these can be characterized as a collective transgression of everyday life. In contrast to Theatrical Playing – albeit closely related to it – those who populate the Playing Culture of Bloomsday are not performing to a distinct audience. They merely give expression to their own cheerful feeling of participation. Victor Turner has suggested the notion of liminality as characteristic of rituals and ceremonies, in which the participants are separated from their ordinary life situation to experience a stadium of change, after which they return to a new position in their daily lives. (1982) Applied to Playing Culture, this concept would mean that the participants during a certain time – Bloomsday – allow themselves to identify with fictional figures and literary places in order to act out their textual experiences in playful exercises. I doubt, however, that Bloomsday constituted a rite de passage, through which participants enter a new stage of their lives. Let me just point out some locations in Dublin, where Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus and their friends were spending their time on 16 June 1904. A few examples might illustrate the relationship between people, places and the hours of that particular day.

Early in the morning of Bloomsday, the radio broadcasted a warning to drive to Sandycove, the beach below Marcello Tower. Of course, the traffic jam related to the opening chapter of *Ulysses*. After Buck Mulligan had shaved on top of the tower and chatted with the milk woman, he and his companions went down to the stony beach to have an early morning swim. A lot of Dubliners and tourists wanted to experience that very moment of the novel in their own lives, so off they went to Sandycove, bringing their period swim suits or just regular bath attires and jumped into the water. Others might not have had the intention to take a swim, but wanted to be in location at the right time. None of them necessarily intended to perform the situation for someone else; in that sense it is difficult to speak of Theatrical Playing. Nevertheless, there is a strong attitude of playing involved for both the swimmers and the watchers.

Another place of identificatory playfulness was Sweny’s Pharmacy at Lincoln Place. It is the very same pharmacy where Leopold Bloom bought a piece of lemon shaped soap. Mr. Bloom actually forgets to pay for it, which he becomes aware of ten chapters later, when he puts his hand in his pocket while watching the beautiful Gerty MacDowell on the beach. Now, on Bloomsday one or another visitor

passes the pharmacy and takes the opportunity to buy some lemon soap. There were no crowds outside the shop, but the owner had made sure to have these soaps in stock. Amazingly enough, the shop appeared not to have changed its interior a bit since Mr. Bloom stopped by a hundred years ago. The experience of being in this pharmacy on that particular day certainly gave a strong feeling of presence, of fictional identity, a playful interaction with Joyce's novel. A number of other places around Dublin offer similar experiences: the Post Office, where Mr. Bloom picks up a secret letter, a men's toilette beneath the statue of Thomas Moore, who had written the poem *The Meeting of the Waters*, 7 Eccle Street where Leopold Bloom lived, now demolished but with the same type of Victorian houses on the other side of the street, and so on. These places are frequently visited by Joyce enthusiasts all year around, but the exact point in time – the centenary of this particular day – certainly added to the excitement of the encounter.

Time and place are crucial elements of Theatrical Events of all kinds. The experience of the here-and-now feeling, the collectivity of the encounter, and the state of liminality are not exclusively limited to *Playing Culture*, but spread out into all components of the event. These overall aspects of the Theatrical Event as such will be looked upon in the ensuing paragraphs, namely reflecting upon the historical dependence of Bloomsday and the social composition of its participants.

Some General Reflections

The concept of the Theatrical Event is meant to present a holistic model of any event that is perceived in a theatrical way. Its components represent different aspects of the event, which are all simultaneously present during the event proper, but also in preceding and subsequent time sequences. The event is prepared long before and the impressions last long after the encounter between performer and spectator. In addition, there are factors that affect the event from an overall perspective, such as its history and the identities of the main agents of the event as well as its intertextual relationship with other events. These connections, symbolically represented by the diamond-shaped lines between the four components, can be seen as the general pattern of the Theatrical Event, which link together the components into one whole system. Some general factors of Bloomsday are highly significant for the understanding of it as a Theatrical Event.

The most obvious point in question is the history of Bloomsday. History is not to be understood as a "background" but as a very active aspect of the present. Without going into details, it can be mentioned that the first Bloomsday was celebrated in connection with its fiftieth anniversary, i.e. in 1954. Some Joyce enthusiasts decided to commemorate that day by inviting others to a walk through Dublin, visiting the places of the novel and reading from it publicly. It was an exclusively private initiative and I think this character of a private event, in which the public is invited to participate, has prevailed over the years. It has grown, it attracts large crowds, but it is still a predominantly private experience. This might

explain the flat organisation and the rather invisible engagement of official authorities. It is still open for private sponsors to invent their own events, such as the bicycle parade in period costumes that the sponsors arranged during Bloomsday 2004. Of course, the old-fashioned bicycles carried posters of their sponsors and the parade showed up in various parts of the city. And of course there is a commercial aspect to the entire festival in terms of increased tourist industry, including the marketing of any kind of Joyce items. Still, we are dealing with private enterprise, as it always has been during the last 50 years. These historical aspects are manifested in the loose relationship between the overall Cultural Context and the sphere of the private producers. It is not characterized by a strong flow of money – there are no entrance fees anywhere – nor do the authorities display their power through tangible decisions about organisational matters. There is, however, another aspect that might be just as important, and that is the legitimacy that state and city officials provide through their participation in the events. Hereby the private initiatives are sanctioned – Bourdieu would call it consecrated – and elevated to at least a semi-official status.

Bloomsday has, over the years, become a particular Irish event. Joyce is nowadays celebrated as an Irish writer, but this view has only developed during later years and has a strong historical bias. Joyce had left Ireland in October 1904 and from 1912 to his death in 1941, he never returned to his native country. His work was not acknowledged for a long time, neither in his home country nor in the European literary establishment. He does not belong to the four Irish writers who received the Nobel Prize. Bloomsday has effectively contributed to reinstall Joyce as the Irish avant-garde literary giant he is considered to be today. In that sense, the strong feelings that are displayed in the Playing Culture of Bloomsday have had a powerful impact on the pride that today is connected with Joyce's name. I would say that Bloomsday has achieved a status of national significance, promoting the national identity of the Irish – irrespective of their personal interest in Joyce's writings.

The identities of a Theatrical Event can be specified as the class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity of their participants – creators as well as spectators. It is difficult to know anything exactly about these factors as far as Bloomsday is concerned, because there were no concrete investigations that I know of. The only answers I can provide are the result of my own observations. I think it is a fair guess that the majority of the participants come from the educated middle class. Despite the fact that actually nobody was excluded, the attraction of the event is directed to those who by virtue of their education have some knowledge about the Joycean world. Not even the free breakfasts seemed to entice the less privileged groups of society. The gender ratio, on the other hand, seemed to be fairly well balanced. On the one hand, women in most European countries are the most active cultural consumers today; on the other hand, Joyce's universe is a patriarchal world. Most of *Ulysses* deals with men, with the exception of some strong wom-

en, of which Leopold Bloom's wife Molly is the most prominent (she could also be seen in the streets with her brass bed attached to her hips, mumbling her famous concluding monologue, "yes I will Yes"). To what extent female participants identified with feminine aspects of the novel is impossible to know. They were there and seemed to enjoy the events. Even less can be said about various sexual preferences among the participants. In this case I do not even dare to have a guess – any specific attraction to non-heterosexuals remains unclear. What was clearly visible, however, was the total dominance of white people in all the crowds. Except for a few tourists from Asia, it was an all-white-event. There were of course also differences between these white people in terms of religions, nationalities and cultures, but to know anything more, these aspects would need to be surveyed empirically.

White, middle class, heterosexual Christians – would that be a fair description of the vast majority of the participants of Bloomsday? If this statement would prove to be correct, what would it say about Bloomsday? Well, it mainly indicates what Bloomsday is not. It is not an intercultural or multicultural festival; it is not an occasion that brings out the working class into the streets; it is not an event that attracts a queer crowd. On the other hand, it is possible that the conformity of the participants is one of the conditions that create a strong sense of community and complicity among those attending Bloomsday. Victor Turner has underlined the experience of *communitas* during cultural performances and I think that Bloomsday is an excellent example of how such a feeling of community can arise among participants. This is another instance – and a particularly strong one – of connection between Theatrical Playing and the people engaged in the Playing Culture. Emotions of community, openness and knowing that we all play the same game, bind together the performers and the people in such a way that they are hard to distinguish. Players all, one could say.

Summarising this exposé over the Bloomsday celebrations 2004, I would say that the concept of the Theatrical Event provides a reasonable analysis of the paradoxes of this festivalised occasion. Compared to other possible approaches, it also might clarify how Bloomsday can be adequately described. It is not a ritual that usually is carried by its attempt to achieve spiritual benefits; but there are ritualistic elements to be noticed here and there during the day such as the swimming at Sandycove. Bloomsday is not a ceremony such as a graduation or the opening of the Olympics; ceremonial moments do, however, occur at certain moments such as the visit of the president to the Joyce Centre. It is maybe not even best described as a performance, because there is no centre stage and no basic organisation that would bring together performers and spectators; on the other hand, one can find a number of limited performances within the framework of Bloomsday. For me it is best characterized as a Theatrical Event, wide-open and inclusive, with a clear emphasis on Playing Culture. The playfulness of all partici-

pants leavens Bloomsday as a whole as well as its various ingredients all through. It is contagious, not only for those participating during the day, but obviously also for the producers and sponsors. The playing brings together the reality of the celebration with the fictionality of the object that is celebrated.

Within the concept of the Theatrical Event, the fiction of Mr Bloom unites in a playful way with the fantasies of today's citizens, while its effects upon the nation nevertheless are considerable. In a Theatrical Event, the power of the Cultural Context spreads out to the producers of the Contextual Theatricality, who arrange never ending series of performances, both as Theatrical Playing and as a Playing Culture that is populated by performers, participants, spectators and onlookers. It is my hope that a holistic view of Bloomsday might have illustrated some of these features.

Part Three: Mr Bloom's Corrections of Appearance and Appearing

Mr Sauter's theoretical outlook at 16 June 2004 might have its merits and it is not up to me, the poor advertising canvasser Leopold Bloom out of James Joyce's novel, to judge such an exploration of Bloomsday. But since I am allowed to make some comments here, I would like to take advantage of my fictional status. In a way, as a character of the novel, I know more about my intentions and motives than anybody else – maybe with the exception of Joyce himself. Mr Sauter brought up the question of various identities and he briefly touched upon sexuality and gender. He was wondering whether Bloomsday appeals to homosexuals or some kind of queer people. I think the question has not been treated well from the fictional point of view. The novel is all about heterosexuals and it is so full of sexuality that it deserves a few complementary remarks. I have never felt any desire when looking at a man, but while I am thinking about it, I am, all of a sudden, not so sure of what the young men spending the night in Marcello Tower had in mind. Especially this Englishman, Haines, is an elusive type of man. But my own problems with women are just enough for me and in my view, Joyce could have been less indiscrete with my innermost feelings. I loved my wife Molly, for sure, but since the death of our son Rudy, it is true that "there has never been full carnal knowledge between husband and wife." Early that morning of 16 June 1904, when returning from Dlugacz Butchers, where I bought my pork kidney, I found a letter to Molly from a man, that gave me a strong indication that he was her lover. In a way, one can say that his expected visit to Molly on that day kept me away from home and gave Joyce the opportunity to follow me to all the strange places I visited until late at night.

My own sexual desires increased during the day and were, I agree, satisfied in unusual manners. On my way to Paddy Dignam's funeral, I passed by the central Post Office, where I picked up a poste restante letter from Martha Clifford. Our

correspondence was quite lively, at times, and I would very much have liked to get in physical contact with her. That morning, I was still quite hopeful and responded immediately to her letter, which excited me a bit. As only James Joyce knows, I never succeeded in getting even close to her. Well, there were other encounters during the day, the most famous of which were with three young ladies at Sandycove Strand. One of them, Gerty MacDowell, who I have mentioned earlier, actually seduced me with her blue eyes and her blue navy dress. From a distance, she saw that I saw her and she understood that my hand was moving in my pants and she enjoyed it. Joyce made my state of excitement, which coincided with firework rockets exploding in the evening sky, so explicit that the novel was banned as obscene in all the English speaking countries (except for Ireland, as mentioned before). Late at night I ended up with Stephen Dedalus in Bella Cohen's brothel, but the poor boy had been badly hit by a soldier and I had my hands full to protect him from all the hallucinations that tormented his absinthe-soaked brain. All in all, my erotic encounters that day are nothing to boast about.

The last chapter of the novel is not about me at all, but about my wife Molly. She is allowed to speak for herself and about herself and all she has been doing in her life and during that day. There is a strong emphasis on women in that book, too, I would say. Molly is strengthening, confirming her own ego. "Yes," she says, "and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes."

That is how the novel ends, but the "he" she speaks about is not me. What I wanted you to understand is how much a fictional figure like me can enjoy and suffer during one day – actually just as much as a real man. On Bloomsday people remember me and I wonder whether it makes any difference that I never really existed. In memory, fiction and reality seem to melt together. Maybe that is why historical events are so easily theatricalised all over the world. Theatrical events re-enact – playfully – what has once been or what could have been, on the streets as well as on printed pages. A theatrical event brings it all to life, here and now.

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Photographs by Sylvia Sauter.

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