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## The Politics of Carnival

# Behind the Masks, The Politics of Carnival

**Aurélie Godet**

Université de Paris, France

1. Baron Joseph X. Pontalba, letter to his wife, October 15, 1796, WPA trans., typescript, Louisiana State University Library, Baton Rouge, 358.

2. Donald Cosentino, "My Heart Don't Stop: Haiti, the Carnival State," in *Carnavall*, ed. Barbara Mauldin (Seattle: University of Washington Press/Santa Fe: Museum of International Folk Art, 2004), 285.

3. Anne Schuchat, "Public Health Response to the Initiation and Spread of Pandemic COVID-19 in the United States, February 24–April 21, 2020," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, US Department of Health and Human Services, May 8, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6918e2.htm>.

4. English churchmen, for instance, connected the devastating Lisbon earthquake of 1755 with the donning of masks and costumes at open-air masked entertainments in London and various "hot Countries (notorious for Lewdness)." For an interesting reflection on the hyperbolic, disruptive power English authorities saw in eighteenth-century masquerades, see Terry Castle,

"The ladies, on one side, found pleasure in knotting my bed sheets together, in throwing water at me ... while I, on the other, smudged their bed clothes with lamp-black, so that they became smeared all over with it; I inserted an apothecary drug, one with a subtle scent, into their pillows; I squirted water at them with a syringe; I dropped bits of wood down their chimneys at night, made holes in the chamber pots, etc."

*Baron Joseph X. Pontalba, describing a party at Louis Barthélémy de Macarty's plantation house during the 1796 yellow fever epidemic in New Orleans*<sup>1</sup>

"In this new age of pandemics and holy wars, it felt good to be there, bottoming out, looking at the world from upside-down."

*Donald Cosentino, about Haitian Carnival in the wake of the AIDS epidemic*<sup>2</sup>

## A Note on Festivity and the Current Pandemic

Almost a year into the coronavirus pandemic, as cities across the globe are either easing out of mandated lockdowns or plunging back into them, it may seem strange (if not inappropriate) to direct people's attention to festivities, as we have done in this journal since 2019. It is hard to ignore, however, that public celebrations—of Lunar New Year in China, of carnival in Venice, Rio, and New Orleans, *et cetera*—as well as private ones—weddings, funerals, birthdays—accelerated the spread of COVID-19 across jurisdictional boundaries in the first months of 2020.<sup>3</sup> Much like natural disasters used to be blamed on masquerades in eighteenth-century Europe,<sup>4</sup> our propensity to engage in public displays of joy has accordingly become a target of many a political speech or media column.<sup>5</sup> Why are some people unable to resist crowds despite the pandemic? some ask, ignoring decades of findings in evolutionary anthropology and psychology.<sup>6</sup>

*Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century Culture and Fiction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986).

5. Since January, in fact, the blame has been successively put on festival-goers, Black Lives Matter protesters, statue-protectors, beach-goers, clubbers, non-mask wearers, and most recently, students, testifying to an overall sense of powerlessness among elected officials and average citizens.

6. Rebecca Renner, "Why Some People Can't Resist Crowds Despite the Pandemic," *National Geographic*, June 24, 2020, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2020/06/why-people-cannot-resist-crowds-socializing-despite-the-coronavirus-pandemic-cvd/>.

7. For a variety of prospective statements, see the livestream virtual event "Festivals, Events & COVID19: Navigating a Global Pandemic," organized by Sophie Mamattah, David McGillivray, and Gayle McPherson in May 2020, <https://www.pscp.tv/w/1IDxLgIraRbJm>. See also the upcoming Salzburg Global Seminar "What Future for Festivals?", scheduled for October 24–28, 2020, <https://www.salzburgglobal.org/multi-year-series/culture/pageld/session-646-1.html> and the regular postings on COVID-19 by members of the Festival Academy, a global community of 737 festival managers from more than 100 countries, <https://www.thefestivalacademy.eu/en/covid-19/>.

8. Richard Campanella, "COVID Geography: Notes from New Orleans," *64 Parishes*, March 19,

Will the pandemic transform the way we celebrate in the future? How long will our fear of collective enjoyment last, and with what implications for social cohesion? How will festivals that heavily rely on tourism respond to the changes in traveling practices likely to occur in a post-COVID-19 world? It is too early to say, although it never hurts to consider the long-term effects of the pandemic on social behavior.<sup>7</sup> One thing is certain: the laws of proxemics are being challenged all over the world. As geographer Richard Campanella recently noted, even cities renowned for their social propinquity, like New Orleans, have internalized the awkward dynamics of social distancing:

Crowded restaurants, packed bars, second-line parades, festivals, the Mardi Gras revelry ...—not to mention the hugging and backslapping of this gesticulating society—all now have us recoiling and uncharacteristically standoffish. It took a few days of browbeating from authorities, but over the course of four days, from March 14 through March 17, street gatherings dispersed, Bourbon Street emptied, bars shuttered, and restaurants scaled down services (behold: *Galatoire's to go*). We've become hyperaware of human geography at its most literal level—body space—and, darkly, we're coming to see that approaching stranger more as a threat than a friend not yet met.<sup>8</sup>

With cancellations (or postponements) mounting, 2020 and 2021 may well become known as the years without festivals.<sup>9</sup> However, as the essays gathered here suggest, the celebratory impulse itself is unlikely to disappear. The history of festivity has, after all, been marked by episodes of repression and suppression followed by episodes of resurgence and renewal. Like the virus that threatens it right now, the festive "gene" can mutate and thus escape extinction.<sup>10</sup> As we write, communities around the world are finding new ways of celebrating together without large physical gatherings, creating fresh forms of festive social interactions.<sup>11</sup> In this issue's inaugural piece, ethnographer Emmanuelle Lallement investigates some of the "home-made" substitutes developed in France during the March 16–May 11 shelter-in-place mandate and reflects upon their possible continuation in the post-COVID-19 world. Her anthropology of lockdown ends on a note of caution: "Someday [festivity] will put an end to the long social emptiness left by months of social distancing.... Festivity, [however], will remain the social marker it used to be." Festivity, in other words, will continue to divide as much as it brings together. As such, it will continue to be politicized. This incursion into the ambiguities of festivity leads us to the main topic of our journal's second issue: the politics of carnival.

### The Politics of Carnival

Most of the essays that make up our thematic section derive from talks given at an international symposium entitled "The Politics of Carnival" hosted by Université de Paris (formerly Paris Diderot University) in February 2015. Organized by historian Maria Laura Reali and myself, the conference gave twenty-two European, North American, Latin American, and Caribbean scholars the opportunity to discuss carnival in true interdisciplinary fashion and to consider the whole historical and geographical span of the phenomenon.<sup>12</sup> The papers given by the speakers explored a wide range of questions, including: What exactly *is* carnival? Who celebrates (or gets to celebrate) it? Is carnival inherently transformative, as its association with protest would suggest, or do the rules that govern it make it fundamentally conservative? More simply, to what extent is carnival the mirror image of everyday order? What kind of "community" does it create? And how does the politics of carnival manifest itself aesthetically?

2020, <https://64parishes.org/covid-geography-notes-from-new-orleans>.

9. For an incomplete but long list of festivals affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_events\\_affected\\_by\\_the\\_COVID-19\\_pandemic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_events_affected_by_the_COVID-19_pandemic).

10. The comparison between festivity and disease is an old one. It was especially popular among eighteenth-century satirists and moralists. See Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*.

11. For changes in the way people have been celebrating major life events and holidays in the US since January 2020, see Addie Joseph, "The Coronavirus Pandemic Is Changing the Way People Celebrate Major Events and Holidays—Here's How They're Adapting," CNBC, April 17, 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/18/coronavirus-pandemic-changes-the-way-people-celebrate-holidays.html>. As for festivals, livestreaming has been used by a variety of cultural institutions and community stakeholders to keep existing audiences engaged and reach new, wider audiences.

12. The program of the conference can still be viewed at <https://calenda.org/315768?lang=en>.

13. For simplicity's sake, the speakers deliberately excluded another, US-specific meaning of the word carnival as a traveling funfair or temporary amusement park that has little to do with Mardi Gras as it is celebrated in New Orleans, Louisiana; Mobile, Alabama; and a dozen other locations.

Unsurprisingly, the stimulating exchanges that occurred did not end in any sweeping, conclusive manner. A consensus nonetheless emerged around three propositions.

### 1. *Carnival vs. the Carnavalesque*

First, carnival—as an annual festival that precedes the fasting period of Lent in Roman Catholic countries and involves processions, music, dancing, and the use of masquerade<sup>13</sup>—should be distinguished from the larger category of the carnivalesque, which has been used to characterize all sorts of collective activities that use symbolic inversion for expressive purposes and in which the negation of the established order provides a temporary opening for alternative, hybrid identifications to flourish.

Both phenomena exist on a historical continuum, naturally. Although the origins of carnival are commonly traced to twelfth-century Rome, the medieval pre-Lenten celebration likely descended from "carnavalesque" (i.e., boisterous) fertility rituals and seasonal events associated with ancient Rome.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the spirit of medieval carnival—characterized by an excess consumption of meat and alcohol, an embrace of "otherness" through mask or costume, dance, and music (rough or otherwise)—has come to pervade festivities such as Christmas and New Year's Eve in Protestant countries like the United Kingdom, South Africa, and the United States. It has even "contaminated" non-festive happenings, including sporting events, political rallies, and protest marches (hence the emergence of the "protestival" category<sup>15</sup>).

Overall, however, they are distinct notions. The carnivalesque may be found outside of the "fifth season"<sup>16</sup> and outside of the Christian sphere of influence. As such, it may characterize any "ritual of rebellion"<sup>17</sup> such as Purim, the Hindu spring festival of Holi, the Muslim Indo-Caribbean commemoration festival Hosay (called "Coolie Carnival" in nineteenth-century Trinidad newspapers), and so on. It may also characterize literary prose, in a process which literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin termed the "carnivalization of literature" and which Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson renamed "the literization of carnival."<sup>18</sup> In a way, it is "a universal category, somehow as integral to the human psyche and to culture as art or laughter or Oedipus," Michaeline Crichlow and Piers Armstrong summarize.<sup>19</sup> Conversely, carnivals may be devoid of carnivalesque spirit. Indeed, Bakhtin and subsequent scholars have documented the gradual domestication of carnival under the effect of various forces (industrialization, the rise of the bourgeois civility, the consolidation of nation-states and of the capitalist system, etc.) and its transformation into a more sedate cultural institution of great economic and political value, worthy as such of official protection (through UNESCO heritage policies, for instance).

### 2. *The Pitfalls of Essentialism*

Beyond the crucial issue of definition, a second area of agreement was the refusal to discuss carnival in essentialist terms. Heeding Maria Isaura Pereira De Queiroz's and Chris Humphrey's warnings against an ahistorical approach to the festival,<sup>20</sup> and following Philip Scher's argument that "whatever soil they germinate from tends to influence their final colors,"<sup>21</sup> the speakers always assigned carnival practices a variety of functions and meanings within the context of a specific time and place. They especially distinguished medieval carnival from early modern

14. Admittedly, the connection between medieval carnival and the Roman urban festival of Saturnalia, which took place in mid-December, is very loose. Little was heard about Saturnalia in Christian times, E. K. Chambers points out in *The Mediaeval Stage*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), 244–45. On the other hand, aspects of the Roman New Year festivities that continued to be popular throughout the former Roman Empire and were described in church records over the next centuries are similar to those found in European carnivals from the late fifteenth to the eighteenth century. See Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 178–204.
15. Graham Peter St. John, "Protestant: Global Days of Action and Carnivalized Politics in the Present," *Social Movement Studies* 7, no. 2 (2008): 167–90.
16. This is how the lengthy carnival season is commonly referred to in Germany.
17. Max Gluckman, *Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1954).
18. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 461.
19. Michaeline A. Crichlow and Piers Armstrong, "Introduction: Carnival Praxis, Carnavalesque Strategies and Atlantic Interstices," *Social Identities* 16, no. 4 (2010): 399–414; 407.

carnival, turn-of-the-twentieth-century carnival from its contemporary incarnations, European from American/Caribbean carnival, *et cetera*.

In medieval Europe, carnival was part of an organic cycle of discipline and release. Since Lent (the forty days that precede Easter) was marked by abstinence and penitence in commemoration of Christ's fasting in the wilderness, the previous days became, in contrast, a time of liberation from ordinary social and moral constraints.

In the early modern historical period (from the fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth century), economic development and national consolidation turned carnival into a site of interclass power struggles. The margin of unruliness occasionally tolerated in carnival broke into purposeful violence because of the links to external political agendas. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie offered the example of Mardi Gras in the southern French town of Romans in 1580 that devolved into public rioting along preexisting sociopolitical divisions, pitting the town's artisans and workers against better-off landlords and rich merchants.<sup>22</sup> More recently, Teofilo Ruiz has documented the recurrent manipulation of carnival for political assertion and for interclass intimidation in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain.<sup>23</sup>

In the late modern period, carnival lost both its ritual and political edges. The deinstitutionalization of carnival and its relegation to the periphery of collective life were extremely rapid. In 1790s France, masks became synonymous with deception and were deemed to be incompatible with the new republican ideal of transparency.<sup>24</sup> Moral "sincerity" displaced the easy, joyful theatricality that had reigned over so much of the former era. In England as well, masquerading came to represent the morally and psychologically unacceptable, an infantile pleasure that must be renounced. The work of moral reformers across Europe was given impetus by new, impersonal forces: industrialization, urbanization, increasing literacy, the decline of magic, the fragmentation of traditional communities (what Richard Sennett has called "the fall of public man"<sup>25</sup>), and the gradual rise of class consciousness. The commercialization of popular culture in the eighteenth century marked a general decline of popular tradition and a move toward new capitalist forms of mass entertainment.

Nineteenth-century German public life and its secularized, institutionalized carnival societies (*Vereine*) exemplified the gradual extinction of the "carnival fires"<sup>26</sup> of European culture.<sup>27</sup> Across the continent, the state encroached upon festive life and turned it into a parade, while other festivities were brought into the home and became part of the family's private life. The privileges that were formerly granted to the marketplace were more and more restricted. "Carnival spirit with its freedom, its utopian character oriented toward the future, was gradually transformed into a mere holiday mood," Mikhail Bakhtin concluded.<sup>28</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century the change was complete: carnival culture had been relegated to the sentimental realm of folkloristic "survivals."

Ironically, during this era of relative metropolitan decline, carnival gained a new lease on life in the postcolonial plantation societies of the Americas, where it combined with indigenous and African traditional masquerades to produce new festive forms. In the eighteenth century, carnival celebrations had been held in some colonial communities of what is now the southern United States, Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. The festivities had taken a variety

20. Maria De Queiroz, *Carnaval brasileiro: O vivo e o mito* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1992); Chris Humphrey, *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).
21. Philip Scher, "From Carnival to Carnival™," *Cabinet* 6 (Spring 2002), <http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/6/carnival.php>.
22. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans*, trans. Mary Feeney (New York: G. Braziller, 1979).
23. Teófilo Ruiz, "From Carnival to Corpus Christi: Festivals of Affirmatio," in *Spanish Society, 1400–1600* (New York: Longman, 2001), 143–62.
24. James Johnson, "Versailles, Meet Les Halles: Masks, Carnival, and the French Revolution," *Representations* 73, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 89–116.
25. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976).
26. Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, 332.
27. Barry Stephenson, *Performing the Reformation: Public Ritual in the City of Luther* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); James M. Brophy, "Carnival and Citizenship: The Politics of Carnival Culture in the Prussian Rhineland, 1823–1848," *Journal of Social History* 30, no. 4 (Summer 1997), 873–904.
28. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky

of forms, including house-to-house visitations, informal street processions, and "promiscuous masking." Local indigenous groups and enslaved Africans had not been allowed to join in but had sometimes carved out their own festive spaces during John Canoe, Christmas, Day of Kings, Corpus Christi, and Pinkster celebrations. The nineteenth century saw a major shift in politics and class structure in the Americas as nations liberated themselves from the European "mother countries." The wealthier citizens of the newly formed states wanted to model their lives after those of Europeans, and as a result, carnival celebrations were policed to fit bourgeois sensibilities, taking the form of fancy balls and organized street pageantry. At the same time, indigenous peoples became free and African slaves were emancipated. Now they could conduct their rituals and celebrations more openly.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Indians and Afro-descendants started regularly participating in carnival, either in their own communities or as part of a larger urban celebration. Expressions of intercultural impersonation—exemplified by the "Black Indian traditions" of Venezuela, Colombia, Recife, New Orleans, and Port of Spain<sup>29</sup> and the carnival celebrations of Mayan groups in Chiapas, Mexico, during which dancers regularly impersonated Blacks, Jews, whites, and even monkeys<sup>30</sup>—were common, pointing to the common traits of miscegenation and syncretism in pre-Lenten celebrations around the Americas. It now became possible to weave a carnivalesque web across the continent, extending from Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, French Guyana, Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, the Caribbean basin (Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, Jamaica, Barbados, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Santa Lucia) to the United States and Canada.<sup>31</sup>

Over the course of the twentieth century, the content of these carnival performances became more overtly political: they regularly raised issues having to do with the legacy of colonial rule (racial adscription, second-class citizenship). The emergence of *escolas de samba* in 1940s Brazil, for instance, signaled the desire of the Brazilian lower classes to participate in carnivalesque performances on their own terms.<sup>32</sup> Across the Caribbean in the 1970s, rituals of interracial solidarity gradually gave way to expressions of ethnic pride—Afro-centric performances, indigenous dances—leading to regular thematic overlaps between political and cultural independence.

As a consequence of these evolutions, the aesthetic range of American carnivals widened. Fulcrum of musical, visual, gestural, and material innovations,<sup>33</sup> American festival arts came to include the "feather explosions" and jazz brass bands of New Orleans, the loud colors and abstract visuals of Trinidad's large-scale *mas'* presentations, and the glittery displays and Afro-Latin rhythms of Rio samba schools. These innovations primarily came from the individual/group's desire to stand out in a crowd. They resulted in a "sensory overload" often greater than that produced by European carnivals of the past.

Today, carnival is the longest official holiday period of the year in many American locales. Rio's is probably the most famous, but carnival is a central national event in other places like Haiti, Cuba, and Martinique. In Trinidad, carnival is the primary medium for popular expression. Its incorporation of East Indian culture distinguishes it both from the Afro-Latin core of most Caribbean and Brazilian carnivals and from the Afro-indigenous amalgamation of Spanish American carnivals (in Peru, Bolivia, Mexico, etc.).

(1968; repr., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 33.

29. Ned Sublette has stressed the pervasiveness of indigenous iconography among Afro-descendants across the Americas: "Black men wearing feathers and horns goes back to Africa, and Africans dressing as Indians at carnivals is as old as slavery in the hemisphere. From Brazil to Trinidad to Haiti to New Orleans, the image of the indigenous person turns up in black iconography." Ned Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans, From Spanish Gold to Congo Square* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2008), 295.

30. Victoria Reifler Bricker, *The Indian Christ, the Indian King: The Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). Indigenous citizens also dressed as Blacks in Oruro, Bolivia, and as whites in various Ecuadorian San Juan celebrations.

31. Actually, the mixed nature of carnival may even be traced back to Africa, for as early as 1620 in Luanda, Angola, Jesuit missionaries sponsored a carnival celebration that featured dance troupes, satiric masqueraders, floats, kings, and the scattered tossing of small coins as alms to the poor. The Luanda carnival was "a complete syncretism of pagan rituals from the Mediterranean pantheon, of Christian rituals from the Iberian church, and of Mbundu and Kongo rituals designed to foster fertility and prosperity," as David Birmingham has noted. David Birmingham, "Carnival at Luanda," *Journal of African History* 29, no. 1 (1988): 96–97.

Interestingly, the New World carnivalesque system has come to influence European and North American carnivals in a process sometimes dubbed "reverse colonization."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, immediately after most islands of the English-speaking Caribbean became independent, a new spirit of Caribbean nationalism emerged and migrations from the Caribbean began to have significant impact on the demographics of cities like London, Toronto, and New York. The Brooklyn Labor Day Carnival, the Notting Hill Gate Carnival in London, and the Toronto Caribana festival were all formally organized in the 1960s. Today, London carnival leaders return to Trinidad every year to learn the latest in design and band organization, while costume designers from the Caribbean visit Notting Hill.

Aside from this cross-fertilization, which is redefining the geographical boundaries of carnival, European carnivals have experienced a renaissance of sorts since the 1980s. New carnivals have been created and older ones have been revived as part of a larger European "festive renewal."<sup>35</sup> While this renewed popularity of carnival around Europe may be seen as an example of the commodification of culture, it also testifies to a general need for conviviality, for an engaged public sphere, and for subjunctive play in the face of modernity-related "ills" (placelessness, the shrinking of social life to the family and workplace, the loss of seasonal rites that have accompanied the shift from agriculture to industry). Clearly, carnival has neither lost its relevance nor outlived its social usefulness in today's world.

### 3. *Beyond the Subversion vs. Safety Valve Dichotomy*

On the specific subject of the politics of carnival, most speakers abstained from adjudicating the classic debate in festive studies on whether carnival, and symbolic rituals of disorder in general, function as safety valves that help reaffirm the status quo by exorcising social tensions, or are defiant, subversive events that explicitly threaten the prevailing order and encourage the formation of popular consciousness. Instead, they provided case studies that pointed to the inherently equivocal nature of carnival.

#### 3.1. *The Bakhtinian Tradition*

The theory of carnival as a transgressive act of political resistance is generally said to have been pioneered by the Soviet structuralist Mikhail Bakhtin. In his influential study of Rabelais's work,<sup>36</sup> Bakhtin presented medieval and Renaissance carnival as a festive critique, through the inversion of binary semiotic oppositions, of "high culture." This analytical orientation contributed to carnival being conceptualized as a ritual of rebellion in which "the proprieties of structure are lampooned and even violated, blasphemy is encouraged and kings of misrule are crowned."<sup>37</sup> To Bakhtin, however, carnival did not simply consist in the deconstruction of dominant culture. It also eliminated barriers among people created by hierarchies, replacing them with a vision of mutual cooperation and equality. During carnival, individuals were subsumed into a kind of lived collective body which was constantly renewed. On a psychological level, it generated intense feelings of immanence and unity—of being part of a historically uninterrupted process of becoming. It was a lived, bodily utopianism, distinct from the utopias deriving from abstract thought, a "bodily participation in the potentiality of another world."<sup>38</sup>

32. According to Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz, carnival only became “national in Brazil at the moment that underprivileged classes of the population gained the right to celebrate in their own way, and to dance freely in the streets.” Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz, “Evolution of the Latin American Carnival,” trans. Pamela Renai della Rena, *Diogenes* 26, no. 104 (December 1978): 62.

33. The idea that carnival stands at the intersection of “four main codes: the musical, the verbal, the gestural, and that of the objects” comes from Monica Rector, “The Code and Message of Carnival: ‘Escolas de Samba,’” in *Carnival! Approaches to Semiotics*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok, vol. 64 (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1984), 151.

34. “The formerly colonized now aesthetically colonize their former masters,” Robert Farris Thompson has summarized in “Recapturing Heaven’s Glamour: Afro-Caribbean Festivalizing Arts,” in *Caribbean Festival Arts: Each and Every Bit of Difference*, ed. John W. Nunley and Judith Bettelheim (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 19.

35. See Jeremy Boissevain, ed., *Revitalizing European Rituals* (London: Routledge, 1992), a collection of case studies on the revitalization of traditional celebrations across Europe.

36. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*.

37. Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 218.

The publication of Mikhail Bakhtin’s doctoral thesis in French (1965) and then in English translation (1968) was unquestionably foundational for the field of “carnival studies,” which emerged in the 1970s as a combination of cultural history, anthropology, and sociology. The expressions used by Bakhtin to discuss carnival (carnival as the “second life of the people,” as the realm of “the grotesque body,” etc.) are still summoned by scholars today. More largely, Bakhtin’s celebration of carnival has served to validate the existence of oral and performative popular culture as distinct from literary culture per se.

Bakhtin’s belief that “what happens during carnival is essentially *different* from what happens during the rest of the year, that the three or four days it lasts are a negation in every respect of the laws and behaviors that hold good for the remaining 360-odd,”<sup>39</sup> has led scholars to investigate further the relationship between “carnival time” and “everyday life.” Can the former influence the latter? Can the act of masking in public go from temporary inversion to actual subversion, to the potential overthrowing of the political order, or at least of its main representatives?

In the 1970s, scholars like Natalie Zemon Davis, Yves-Marie Bercé, Alain Faure, and Robert Scribner suggested links between historical festivals of misrule and popular rebellion in early and late modern Europe.<sup>40</sup> Zemon Davis analyzed a few examples of violent uprising at carnival time led by sixteenth-century youth-abbeyes. “Not surprisingly,” she concluded, “the charivari and Carnival license to deride could also be turned against the political authorities.”<sup>41</sup> Robert Scribner studied how the reflexive, critical, and transformative power of carnival was put to good use during the Reformation in sixteenth-century Germany. Pelting a figure representing the pope with dung, performing carnival plays ridiculing indulgences: these and other carnivalesque events were not merely reflections of anti-Catholic sentiment, he argued. They were the thing itself. Carnival, in other words, was one of the means by which the Reformation turned the world upside down.<sup>42</sup>

Later scholars looked beyond early modern Europe for connections between the “voluptuous panic” of carnival *llinx*<sup>43</sup> and riotous events. They soon found out that in the Americas too, revolt flourished under the mask and that rebellions often used symbolism borrowed from carnival. As a result, the list of carnival-related acts of popular insurgency grew to include a wide range of locales and periods: Bern, 1513; Nuremberg, 1539; Romans, 1580; Wiltshire, 1628–31; Dijon and Aix, 1630; Bordeaux, 1651; the Vivarais, 1783; Paris, 1831, 1848; Monmouthshire, Wales, 1820; Pyrénées, 1829–31; New Orleans, 1874 (the 1873 Comus carnival parade has often been seen as a rehearsal for the 1874 Battle of Liberty Place, which tried to upend Reconstruction); Trinidad, 1881 and 1884 (the so-called *Canboulay* riots that pitted stickfighters against the police), 1970; Cape Town, 1886; Cuba, 1953 (Fidel Castro and his revolutionary guerrillas tried to take advantage of the disorder and drunkenness associated with carnival to attack the Moncada Barracks in Santiago). In the case of Haiti, carnival has so often been associated with revolts that Donald Cosentino, building on Gave Averill’s assertion that “carnival is the most important crossroads of music and power in Haiti,” has described the first Black republic as a “functioning Carnival state.”<sup>44</sup>

The sporadic efforts by civil authorities to suppress carnivals and masquerades were often mentioned by scholars as proof of carnival’s dangerousness. Peter Burke, for instance, showed how in post-Reformation Europe, reformers of all stripes took heavy aim at the practices of

38. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 48.
39. Richard D. E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 156.
40. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1965); Yves-Marie Bercé, *Fête et révolte. Des mentalités populaires du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1994 [1976]); Alain Faure, *Paris Carême-Prenant. Du Carnaval à Paris au XIXe siècle, 1800–1914* (Paris: Hachette, 1978); Bob Scribner, "Reformation, Carnival and the World Upside-Down," *Social History* 3, no. 3 (October 1978), 303–29.
41. Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 117.
42. Scribner, "Reformation, Carnival and the World Upside-Down."
43. Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961).
44. Gage Averill, *A Day for the Hunter, a Day for the Prey: Popular Music and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 154; and Cosentino, "My Heart Don't Stop: Haiti, the Carnival State," 272. See also Elizabeth McAlistier, *Rara! Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
45. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*. See especially the chapter entitled "The Triumph of Lent: The Reform of Popular Culture."
- "simple folk," fearing that ritualized violence and festive license would spill over the festival play frame.<sup>45</sup>
- Outside of the sedition/rebellion trope, Bakhtin also inspired scholars to consider carnival as a locus of resistance to existing hierarchies. Anthropologist Victor Turner's work on liminal psycho-social states during cathartic festivals (including Rio's carnival) was a rare instance of an ethnographically grounded refinement of Bakhtin's insights.<sup>46</sup> According to him, carnival must be seen as a potential engine for transformative social processes, whereas games, music, and theater (except maybe for its avant-garde and experimental forms) should be viewed primarily as forms of entertainment, and ceremony should be seen as normative and conservative. Don Handelman echoed Turner's analysis when he contrasted events of "presentation" or "modelling" (ceremonies) with events of "re-presentation" such as carnival. To him, the internal dynamics of carnival were more unstable, unpredictable, in their interaction with their social environments, and they were therefore more likely to turn into arenas of confrontation.<sup>47</sup>
- Following Turner and Handelman, James Scott showed in 1990 how non-elite, subaltern voices could undermine the legitimacy of the "public transcript" (the site of open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate) by twisting, imitating, and parodying it in a very public, polished display.<sup>48</sup> Plantation slaves in nineteenth-century Trinidad, for instance, used the pantomimes and songs traditionally sung at carnival to put "Old Massa" down at the same time as they put him on. In the twentieth century, the stage names of prominent calypsonians (Mighty Sparrow, Lord Kitchener, Lord Invader, etc.) testified to the carnival proclivity to both horizontalize hierarchies with self-deprecating humor and to elevate the weak, while in the early 1990s, Rara bands in Haiti used coded, metaphoric speech in their lyrics to resist military rule at the same time as they continued to coexist with established power.
- In the 1990s, carnival actually came to be seen as a locus of empowerment for marginalized groups such as women, homosexuals, and minorities. Terry Castle, for instance, showed how carnival masquerades in eighteenth-century England functioned as paradoxical safe zones, locales in which female impulses that were suppressed or veiled in everyday life could be acted on.<sup>49</sup> French anthropologist Michel Agier described how Afro-Brazilians used carnival costumes, music, and songs inspired by Yoruba language in the 1970s to recreate an identity as "Africans in Bahia."<sup>50</sup> His conclusion was that carnival had been in many ways more effective than the Black unified movement (MNU) in the struggle for respectability and, ultimately, racial equality. The same could be said about Guadeloupean carnival, in which activist drum groups like Akiyo have brought political issues to the fore, or about carnival in Oruro, Bolivia, in which indigenous people have found a context to unmask the nation's universalist ideal of "racial democracy" and to retain agency and voice. The history of the popular cultures of the Black diaspora actually presents case after case of repressed subaltern agendas gaining circulation through carnival and attaining legitimacy in the mainstream. More recently, Fabiano Gontijo's *O Rei Momo e o Arco eris* has looked at carnival as an important ritual not only in Brazil's identity formation but also in the identity formation of the country's LGBTQ population.<sup>51</sup> Sometimes carnival participants have subversively embraced the idea of what Peter Stallybrass and Allan White have call "the low-Other"<sup>52</sup> by performing the very vulgarity expected of them (singing

46. Victor Turner, "Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?" in *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*, ed. Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 11–12.
47. Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
48. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).
49. Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, 94. The risks remained high, of course, as the repercussions of sexual activity initiated during masquerades were inevitably more damaging for women than for men.
50. Michel Agier, *Anthropologie du carnaval: la ville, la fête et l'Afrique à Bahia* (Marseille: Parenthèses, 2000).
51. Fabiano Gontijo, *O Rei Momo e o Arco-Íris: Homossexualidade e Carnaval no Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Garamond, 2009).
52. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 5.
53. See McAlister, *Rara! Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora*; Felipe Smith, "Things You'd Imagine Zulu Tribes to Do: The Zulu Parade in New Orleans Carnival," *African Arts* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 22–35; Achille Mbembe, "The Banality of

obscenities, for instance).<sup>53</sup> Investigating such phenomena gives us insight into the self-constructed identities of repressed, subaltern peoples and how these identities are shaped by the power of class and of moral conventions.

All of these works take us away from the topic of rebellion or even subversion. But, to most proponents of the Bakhtinian tradition, carnival is not a revolutionary tactic *per se*. Rather, it enables people to viscerally feel that they belong to a distinct social and political entity and may thus become a vehicle whereby citizens find voice against the state or race- and class-based social divisions. If not outright subversion, then, carnival offers the possibility of creating a space for renegotiating and even resisting hegemony. This is what Fu-Kiau Bunsekei, founder of the Kongo Academy in Kumba in Bas-Zaïre, suggested when he argued in the 1980s that

festivals are a way of bringing about change. People are allowed to say not only what they voice in ordinary life but what is going on within their minds, their inner grief, their inner resentments. They carry peace. They carry violence. The masks and the songs can teach or curse, saying in their forms matters to which authorities must respond or change. Parades alter truth.<sup>54</sup>

### 3.2. The Gluckmanian Tradition

Whereas Bakhtinian theory points to the relative invalidity of the distinction between carnival and non-carnival time and implies that carnivalesque performances can destabilize the sites where they occur, other scholars have challenged that assertion by presenting carnivals as a "safety valve" endorsed by elites as a mechanism to dissipate revolutionary energy and thus maintain the status quo, a sort of Pavlovian mechanism of social conditioning. Max Gluckman, especially, theorized that a controlled, ritualized, periodic public display of social-political tension and conflict such as carnival actually serves the interests of social-political hierarchy and stability.<sup>55</sup> Following Gluckman, other scholars have contended that true carnival parodies can never exist because the idea under attack is never really destroyed. In *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* Catherine Bell thus argued that festivals like carnival merely represent schemes by which solutions to social conflicts are deferred.<sup>56</sup> At the heart of this argument lies the idea that inversion of a stratified order keeps the mold of that order intact. The inversion of gender remains a discourse on gender, for instance. The Renaissance practice of choosing a "Lord of Misrule" rather than a "Lord of Unruliness" to preside over the English Feast of Fools implies that certain types of absurd behavior were allowed, but that total freedom or anarchy was not welcome.

In truth, to characterize carnival as a ritual of rebellion is problematic. The historical record suggests that carnivals have rarely succeeded in effecting more than momentary change and that they have been fueled by conservative impulses as much as by progressive ones.

Originally, carnival was a creation of the church and was meant to foster Lenten ascetic practices among Christian believers. "Foolishness ... is our second nature and must freely spend itself at least once a year. Wine barrels burst if from time to time we do not open them and let in some air," said a fifteenth-century defender of the Feast of Fools.<sup>57</sup> To Roger Caillois, carnivals also brought coherence to primitive societies. Their apparent disorder was actually a source of order in societies lacking in contractual relationships.<sup>58</sup>

Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarity in the Postcolony," *Public Culture* 4, no. 3 (1992): 1–30.

54. Quoted in Robert Farris Thompson, "Recapturing Heaven's Glamour," 23.

55. "Rites of reversal obviously include a protest against the established order [but] they are intended to preserve and strengthen the established order," he notably wrote in *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 109.

56. Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

57. Quoted in Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 102.

58. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 171–72.

59. Quoted in Samuel Sumberg, *The Nuremberg Schembart Carnival* (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 30.

60. Quoted in Bercé, *Fête et révolte*, 63. My translation.

61. Eric Hobsbawm was one of the first scholars to recognize the important relation between festivals and new secular states, claiming that "public celebrations" were one of the three "invented traditions" necessary for their perpetuation. The other two elements were public education and public monuments. See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 271.

The ability of carnival to foster its own negation is perfectly illustrated by the origin story of Nuremberg Carnival, which took place frequently in the sixteenth century. In 1348, when mutinous artisans rebelled against the patrician council of the city, the butchers' craft guild supposedly remained loyal. As a reward, it was granted an annual dance that gradually evolved into the Schembart Carnival. Writing in 1548, a commentator stated that the occasion was a "mirror of a bygone revolt, to remind the common people never to participate in such rebellious madness."<sup>59</sup> A real overturning of social order was thus displaced by a metaphor, cast within a medium of play.

Historical accounts of many urban carnivals of sixteenth-century Europe similarly uphold the idea of carnival as a commemoration of order restored rather than of rebellion. In the French city of Metz, for instance, parades and costumed processions were led by the sons of the wealthiest families, who footed the bill for the large expenses incurred. The crowds expected such euegertist practices, or at least that is what primary sources suggest: "Quantities of newly-minted silver *deniers* were thrown, upon which the people shouted: 'largesse, largesse from the Prince of [Pleasure at] Valenciennes.'" The mayor and the town councilors usually sanctioned the ceremony through their presence.

In late eighteenth-century Europe and beyond, states often used festivals to produce new social imaginaries suitable to their consolidation.<sup>61</sup> Rather than embrace carnival antics as the uncensored expression of the people, however, the French revolutionaries passed a ban on masks just six months after the taking of the Bastille. In the revolutionaries' eyes, masks expressed the servitude of life under a tyranny. Eliminating them was the first step in inaugurating a new regime of openness and sincerity. The next step consisted in replacing carnival with new festivals meant to instruct and uplift a newly liberated human being. As their names—Festival of the Federation, Festival of Reason, Festival of the Supreme Being—suggest, they were meant to effect a "transfer of sacrality" from the Old Regime to the new.<sup>62</sup> Similar experiments also occurred in the aftermath of the Russian and Mexican Revolutions, with newly created festivals serving as secular analogues instilling faith in an infant state. To accomplish this required that the main attribute of festive behavior, its superabundance of symbols and meanings, be shrunk as much as possible to a handful of easily grasped concepts.<sup>63</sup> In analyzing this process, Néstor Garcia Canclini has claimed that popular forms suffered a type of "double reduction": from the rich ethnic diversity of the regional to the unified national and from the flux of social process to that of codified object.<sup>64</sup>

In the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, the global rise of the bourgeoisie led to the domestication and commercialization of festivals across Europe and the Americas, from Paris to Rio,<sup>65</sup> from Tel Aviv to New Orleans. The French Second Empire, for instance, saw the transformation of carnival into exclusive, if not exclusionary, masked balls that offered participants the opportunity to enter extravagant "spectacles of prosperity" that distracted the eye from disagreeable realities.<sup>66</sup> After World War I, local French elites nurtured or resurrected carnival traditions to promote their modernization agendas. Regional folkloric traditions served as substitutes for national narratives defamed by the First World War.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, in US cities like New York, Chicago, Washington, DC, and San Francisco, the members of business associations were concerned about the deep rifts of class and ethnicity that divided urbanites

62. Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 262.

63. William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French, eds., *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1994), xix.

64. Néstor Garcia Canclini, *Cultura transnacional y culturas populares* (Lima: IPAL, Instituto para America Latina, 1988), 479.

65. Eneida de Moraes and Felipe Ferreira have both singled out the 1880s as an important turning point in the history of Rio de Janeiro's "Carnaval." See Eneida de Moraes, *História do carnaval carioca* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 1987); and Felipe Ferreira, *L'invention du carnaval au XIXe siècle: Paris, Nice, Rio* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014).

66. Matthew N. Truesdell, *Spectacular Politics. Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte and the Fete Impériale, 1849–1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 81.

67. Whalen, "The Return of Crazy Mother."

68. Catherine Cocks, "The Chamber of Commerce's Carnival. City Festivals and Urban Tourism in the United States, 1890-1915," in *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*, ed. Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 89–107.

after the Civil War. Along with their commercial potential, it was felt that carnival parades could help foster cooperation and pride among urban residents and become a model for ideal urban citizenship. The "chamber of commerce carnivals" studied by Catherine Cocks thus forged strong links among national history, civic spirit, and the aestheticization and commodification of cultural differences.<sup>68</sup> The rationalization of leisure was particularly marked in New Orleans, where writers such as Lyle Saxon devoted themselves to turning carnival into a tourist-friendly attraction and called for civilized standards of behavior in a festival associated with excess. When members of the Krewe of Momus carnival club were pelted with rocks and other projectiles as their floats negotiated the parade route in 1939, Saxon penned a strong protest to the managing editor of the *Times-Picayune*, noting: "Mardi Gras is our family party and we are expected to be on our good behavior."<sup>69</sup> Often, such staged spectacles opposed actors and audience along the lines of class, race, gender, or indigenous status, and reified power disparities by subjecting performers to the scrutiny of the tourist's gaze.

In the mid-twentieth century, carnival was deployed for state purposes in Trinidad.<sup>70</sup> Playwright Derek Wolcott commented on this carnivalization of state power as early as 1970:

Every state sees its image in those forms which have the mass appeal of sport, seasonal and amateurish. Stamped on that image is the old colonial grimace of the laughing nigger, steelbandsman, carnival masker, calypsonian and limbo dancer. These popular artists are trapped in the State's concept of the folk form, for they preserve the colonial demeanor and threaten nothing. The folk arts have become the symbol of a carefree, accommodating culture, an adjunct to tourism.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, Haitian Carnival served to consolidate state power on a cruder level.<sup>72</sup> Case studies of contemporary pre-Lenten celebrations in small towns in Europe, South America, and the Caribbean suggest, however, that the main agent eroding popular culture in carnival may not be conspiracy by a political elite but commercialization: the deployment of carnival as a leisure commodity to be purchased by consumers rather than an intangible cultural game to be played by participants. In Nice, for instance, the increasing privatization of the festival since the late nineteenth century has had serious consequences for those revelers who can no longer afford to participate in carnival: they need to look elsewhere for alternate sites for festivities and self-expression.<sup>73</sup> There and in other locations, controversies about municipal ordinances and the uses of public space at carnival time are commonplace.

In addition to commercialization, carnival has been wrestling with the twin forces of aestheticization and traditionalization (for at the heart of all traditionalizing processes is the desire to beautify carnival by covering up real issues of power and domination). Classifying carnivalesque forms as "traditions" has neutralized them and removed them from real time—or at least such has been the hope of the elites who have manipulated them. Maria Sofia Lizcarno and Danny Gonzáles Cueto have thus shown how seeking the "intangible cultural heritage of humanity" label granted by UNESCO was a way for Barranquilla city officials to disincentivize debate about the socially constructed and contingent nature of festive practice and to curtail the region's institutional and political crisis.<sup>74</sup>

Carnival may therefore bring together people culturally or aesthetically, but not necessarily politically or economically. While eccentricity is welcome in any carnival, a carnival-centric culture

69. Quoted in Anthony Stanonis, "Always in Costume and Mask": Lyle Saxon and New Orleans Tourism," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 42, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 31–57.

70. Philip W. Scher, *Carnival and the Formation of a Caribbean Transnation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

71. Derek Walcott, "What the Twilight Says: An Overture," in *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), 7.

72. Gage Averill, "Anraje to Angaje: Carnival Politics and Music in Haiti," *Ethnomusicology* 38, no. 2 (1994): 217–47; Michael Largey, *Vodou Nation: Haitian Art, Music, and Cultural Nationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

73. Christian Rinaudo, "Carnaval de Nice et carnivals indépendants. Les mises en scène festives du spectacle de l'authentique." *Sociologie et Sociétés* 37, no. 1 (2005): 55–68.

74. Martha Lizcano Angarita and Danny González Cueto, "El Carnaval de la vía 40, un vistazo en contravía," *Memorias: Revista Digital de Historia y Arqueología desde en Caribe*, no. 13 (July–December 2010), [http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S1794-888620100002-00008](http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1794-888620100002-00008).

75. Piers Armstrong, "Bahian Carnival and Social Carnavalesque in Trans-Atlantic Context," *Social Identities* 16, no. 4 (2010): 447–69.

can promote a very superficial form of pluralism. A good example of this cultural-aesthetic/political-economic dissensus is Bahian carnival. The representation of carnival is mostly Afro-centric, centering on *blocos afro* and *afoxés*, though they constitute only a small proportion of the total number of carnival clubs, because they successfully appeal both to international and Euro-Brazilian tourists from the Brazilian southeast. This Afro-centrism, however, does not really transcend the symbolic to penetrate the material sphere. As Piers Armstrong has shown, Bahia's infrastructure is almost entirely controlled and directed by Euro-Bahians. It thus seems as if the Bahian government is blatantly using carnival to alleviate popular anger in the face of poor material infrastructure and corruption.<sup>75</sup>

Consequently, the usefulness of carnival as an act of political resistance needs to be questioned. If the witty polemics integral to the carnival ambiance provide license for the public ridiculing of figures of authority, they also legitimize political leaders' recurrent claims that a substantial degree of democracy exists in their societies. Likewise, while the carnival economy affords opportunities for disenfranchised individuals, it also diverts their attention away from structural constraints and allows for the persistence of a race- or class-based oligarchy. All traditional carnivals were spawned in sharply hierarchical societies, and they remain more prominent today outside of the more horizontal democracies of western Europe. Is there perhaps an organic relation between carnival, hierarchy, and illusory democracy? Thinking past Bakhtin, Richard Schechner has suggested that carnival "plays out democratic illusions, giving temporary relief from the authority (if not oppression and downright tyranny) imposed in the name of 'democracy.'"<sup>76</sup> Although he has allowed for some exceptions in Trinidad and Haiti, Richard Burton has assigned a similar ineffectiveness to Caribbean carnival:

The dominant order first represses the cultural challenge by force, and then neutralizes it by absorbing it into the structures of power (as happened with Haitian Vodou and Jamaican Afro-Christianity) ... by [transforming] it into exotic spectacle and commodity.... All this defusing does not, of course, render future disruption of public order impossible, but it suggests that such disruption, when it occurs, will be dealt with relatively easily by the structures of power—there is nothing, it seems, that cannot first be repressed and then recuperated and neutralized by the other "system."<sup>77</sup>

If the socially peripheral has successfully been co-opted by mainstream agendas, then we are left with the troubling issue of what social spaces are left for dissent and subversion.

Aside from the aforementioned trends (domestication, commercialization, political co-optation, aestheticization, traditionalization), some scholars have argued for an inherently conservative nature of carnival based on its periodic, repetitive, rule-bound nature. "Everyone is determined to be bad, though being bad, at this point, has its requisite terms.... This is a controlled, literary delirium—saturnalia by rote," Terry Castle thus wrote about eighteenth-century masquerades.<sup>78</sup> "Festivity remains on the margins of history, as if reluctant to embrace its momentum. Its traditional composition protects it from contemporary phenomena and removes it from the tyranny of events," Yves-Marie Bercé concurred in 1978.<sup>79</sup> Following Bourdieu and his key notion of "habitus," Michaeline Crichlow and Piers Armstrong have argued that carnival performances are generative of their

own system of durable, transposable dispositions ..., that is, principles which generate and organize practices

76. Richard Schechner, "Carnival (Theory) After Bakhtin," in *Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience*, ed. Milla Cozart Riggio (London: Routledge Press, 2004), 3.

77. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean*, 264.

78. Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, 262.

79. Bercé, *Fête et révolte*, 55. My translation.

80. Pierre Bourdieu, quoted in Crichlow and Armstrong, "Introduction: Carnival Praxis, Carnavalesque Strategies and Atlantic Interstices," 403.

81. Katarina Real, "Evoe! The Carnival of Recife and Olinda in Pernambuco, Brazil," in *Carnavall*, 203–37.

82. Andrew Robinson, "In Theory. Bakhtin: Carnival against Capital, Carnival against Power," *Ceasefire Magazine*, (2011), <https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-bakhtin-2/>.

83. Katrin Sieg, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.<sup>80</sup>

This might explain the popularity and resilience of carnival practices that perpetuate racism and gender stereotypes, such as blackface or male transvestism. In the Middle Ages, carnival was dominated by male youth societies that played a mostly unchallenged role in the sexual control of rural communities. Charivaris were organized on Mardi Gras Day to punish open transgressions of prescribed gender roles and age relations. Today still, the performance of drag by ostensibly heterosexual men in Olinda's "Desfile dos Virgens," excludes gays and acts more in the mocking spirit of blackface than in solidarity with Brazilian transvestites.<sup>81</sup>

Clearly, not every carnivalesque act is emancipatory, as it can also disinhibit reactionary desires arising from the system. Maybe we should then distinguish between "true" transgressions and those which redirect the carnivalesque toward a system's own reproduction. Consider, for instance, the way carnival satire by white upper-class krewes in New Orleans may actually reproduce dominant structures. Such displays may mimic "true" carnival in their excess and expressiveness, but they ultimately preserve the hegemony of the in-group through transgressions which reinforce their privilege at the expense of an out-group.<sup>82</sup> In assessing the concrete social impact of carnival, one must therefore compare the effects of two types of symbolic disruption: the imitation of the powerless by the powerful, and the reverse. Downward travesty or "ethnic drag"<sup>83</sup> is usually tolerated, unless a certain political consciousness has already taken hold among the oppressed themselves and they are in a position to protest. The latter form of impersonation, however, is more likely to be condemned or suppressed, thus contradicting the Bakhtinian description of carnival as essentially good-humored and democratic.

### 3.3. Toward a Theoretical Middle Ground?

Interpretations of carnival as a safety valve or as a conservative cultural institution are attractive, but they are not unproblematic. The idea that carnival can make social, cultural, and political contradictions seem to disappear, for instance, rests on the assumption that cultural meanings are both created and manipulated by their producers. Is this manipulation always effective, though? Another problem with the functionalist, safety valve theory—even when it is supported by historical evidence—lies in its tautological nature. Because carnival so rarely leads to major social change, it is described as harmless venting. But are there not safer ways of providing relief from strong or repressed feelings of tension? Is organized catharsis not a risky strategy for the elites?

Unable (or unwilling) to resolve the agency versus structure dilemma that underlies the Bakhtinian and the Gluckmanian traditions, most speakers at our conference aligned with a third tradition that emerged in the 1980s and that argues that carnival is a polysemous event, subject to multiple interpretations, and can therefore never be reduced to a single political sign.

Two of the earliest representatives of that position were probably Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, who maintained that there was no *a priori* revolutionary vector to carnival and who provided a deconstructionist interpretation of the phenomenon that underscored ambivalence

84. Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 25.

85. Kinser, *Carnival, American Style*, xv.

86. Denis-Constant Martin, "Politics Behind the Mask: Studying Contemporary Carnivals in Political Perspective, Theoretical and Methodological Suggestions," CERI/Sciences Po: Questions de recherche, November 2001, <https://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/en/content/politics-behind-mask-studying-contemporary-carnivals-political-perspective-theoretical-and-m>.

87. David Gilmore, *Carnival and Culture: Sex, Symbol, and Status in Spain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Agier, *Anthropologie du carnaval*; Alessandro Testa, *Rituality and Social (Dis)Order: The Historical Anthropology of Popular Carnival in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2020).

88. David M. Guss, *The Festive State: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism as Cultural Performance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 6.

and indeterminacy.<sup>84</sup> In 1990 Samuel Kinser described carnival interactions as "a way of dreaming with others, publicly and responsively,"<sup>85</sup> insisting that carnival acts did not demolish social or political barriers but instead created a space for participants to jump over these barriers and then back again, thus creating fluidity between daily life and its theatricalized version. More recently, Denis-Constant Martin underscored the significance of ambivalence rather than inversion in his synthetic discussion of the theoretical and methodological approaches to carnival,<sup>86</sup> while scholars such as David Gilmore, Michel Agier, and Alessandro Testa insisted that carnivals can hold normative and subversive functions at the same time and that it all depends on how they are received and experienced.<sup>87</sup> To them, the theory of carnival is as inconclusive as its object of study is ambiguous.

This accommodationist perspective is not the result of a reluctance to embrace a strong position. Most of the time, it arises from a commitment to in-depth ethnographic fieldwork and to *longue durée* historical analysis. Many scholars who arrive on the field with preconceived ideas about carnival are forced to recognize the ambiguity of the celebration after spending time with its various actors. For instance, until I became a participant observer in the New Orleans Mardi Gras celebrations in 2018 and 2019, I believed that carnival there was being rapidly devoured by a market hungry for new consumers and a local government in need of unifying symbols. But as I began to interview people involved in carnival activities, I realized that the process was not simply a one-way street in which the center inevitably absorbed the periphery. Rather, it was filled with ambiguity and contradiction, with the popular and the elite constantly shifting places. I was faced with as many interpretations of carnival as people I met and interviewed. To some, carnival was fundamentally "apolitical" and represented little more than a few days' entertainment. Others treated it as a cathartic occasion: others still, as a euphoric, emancipatory or anarchic event. Meaning, it became clear, was not something that simply resided in an ideal model (or "text") waiting to be released. It was something that was co-created with each performance, and to understand it meant comprehending the entire context in which carnival was produced, altered, and negotiated.

David Guss's long ethnographic experience in Latin America has led him to the same prudent conclusion. He has argued that carnival is essentially a cultural "battlefield" in which no political, economic, or cultural elite can ever hope to achieve a lasting victory:

[T]he more that special corporate and political interests dominate the means of cultural production, the more that popular forms will be relied upon to express what otherwise has no outlet. And yet, the very popularity of these forms and the fact that they mobilize so many potential voters, consumers, and protesters makes them too valuable to be left to the people alone.<sup>88</sup>

In other words, a completely commodified, rationalized, or manipulated carnival would lack flavor. While carnival may be co-opted by the state or by economic elites, as a cultural praxis it draws on the popular and may thus end up incorporating the demands of the disenfranchised masses to stimulate their enthusiastic participation.

Accessing the meaning of carnival performances is even harder for historians than it is for ethnographers. Since carnival can provide overlapping or competing agendas the opportunity to coexist in time and space, one cannot be quite certain, without first-person testimonies,

89. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (London: Granta Books, 2008), 103.
90. Abner Cohen, *Masquerade Politics: Explorations in the Structure of Urban Cultural Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
91. Cohen, *Masquerade Politics*, 134.
92. Rector, "The Code and Message of Carnival."
93. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 15.
94. Boissevain, ed., *Revitalizing European Rituals*, 3.
95. Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 16.

how participants and spectators understood them. Were they viewed as aesthetic spectacles, as an assertion of power by the people, or as cultural liturgy imposed from above? As Barbara Ehrenreich wrote in 2008, "There is probably no universal answer ... to the question of whether carnival functioned as a school for revolution or as a means of social control. We do not know how the people themselves construed their festive mockeries of kings and priests, for example—as good-natured mischief or as a kind of threat."<sup>89</sup>

A study that did succeed in exploring the full historical contingency of carnival performance was the pioneering work of Abner Cohen.<sup>90</sup> Identifying his approach as a "dramaturgical" one, Cohen showed how London's polyethnic Notting Hill Carnival, following its inception in 1965, responded to various socioeconomic changes, taking on new meanings with each performance. Although he described the celebration as essentially dynamic and therefore irreducible to ready-made interpretations, he nevertheless argued that certain motivations and ideas came to dominate different periods and thus divided the history of Notting Hill Carnival into five stages: a heterogeneous, polyethnic phase (1966–70); a Trinidad-style steel band, calypso, and masquerading phase (1971–75); a British-born West Indian phase introducing reggae, Rastafarianism, and other Jamaican influences (1976–79); a period of increased government co-optation and institutionalization (1979–86); and multiple intrusions from a number of sources attempting to regiment the festival even further (1987–91). To "the question of whether popular culture is an 'opium of the masses,' inspired by the ruling classes as part of the dominant culture, whether it is a counter culture, an ideology of resistance and opposition, or whether it is a contested ideological terrain," he answered that it was all of these things at different times.<sup>91</sup>

Other *longue durée* historical studies of specific carnivals have distinguished between Dionysian and Apollonian manifestations of carnival. Monica Rector, for instance, argued that carnival in Brazil began as a popular Dionysian festival and was later appropriated by the upper classes, leading to the creation of "Great Societies" in the 1850s (the equivalent of the Mobile, Alabama, "mystic societies" and New Orleans "old-line krewes"). Yet, it was later reinvented as a more popular manifestation that embraced Afro-Brazilian elements. Both traditions coexist in Brazil today, she concluded.<sup>92</sup> Her analysis of contemporary carnival echoed Roger Caillois's description of agonistic play or games, in which players try to be recognized for their "superiority" while also appreciating the friendliness of the game frame.<sup>93</sup> To Caillois, "Agon" could transform the city streets and town squares into a giant game board on which principals and pawns simultaneously cooperated and competed for the public's eye and ear. The aim of the game was to project one's own values, worldview, concerns, and beliefs. Through competition, people could reach a state of mutual understanding in which they would "bond." Carnival thus created a limited space and time that allowed for the articulation of both difference and unity, exclusion and solidarity, bitterness and exhilaration. Like Caillois, Rector refused to see carnival as a single, static, "authoritative text" and saw it rather as a field of action in which both dominant and oppressed were able to dramatize competing claims or, as Jeremy Boissevain stated, "duel with rituals."<sup>94</sup>

All in all, what the most recent scholarship on carnival shows is that no meaningful comparative discussion of carnival can forgo serious ethnographic investigation or a *longue durée* study of the political-social context in which it has emerged in various locations. As Stallybrass and White insisted in 1986, "The politics of Carnival cannot be resolved outside of a close historical examination of particular conjunctures."<sup>95</sup> Understandably, therefore, most theoretical discussions of carnival dissolve into discussions of concrete instances.

96. Samuel Kinser, *Carnival, American Style, and Rabelais's Carnival: Text, Context, Metatext* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

## Content of This Issue

In accordance with the approach advocated by Stallybrass, White, Cohen, and their “disciples,” the articles collected in this issue refrain from generalizations and offer a window into the politicization of carnival by focusing on specific locales and historical periods. New interpretations of well-known urban carnivals like those of Rome, Nuremberg, Paris, Venice, Trinidad, and London are provided, while other authors call attention to lesser-known festivities (Cherbourg, Cádiz, Agioso, Pointe-à-Pitre, Fort-de-France, Montevideo) and analyze the way these have produced a sense of place and community, or redefined class, gender, and racial boundaries at specific moments in time. The final essays analyze two carnivalesque scenarios in the United States—the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests in New York City and the thirty-four-year-old Burning Man festival in Nevada—and their relation to “regular” carnival. The time range of all these studies extends from the twelfth century to 2020.

In his article on Rome and Nuremberg carnivals from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, **Samuel Kinser** applies his vast knowledge of carnival, honed over an entire career—his *Carnival American Style, Mardi Gras at New Orleans and Mobile* and *Rabelais's Carnival: Text, Context, Metatext* have been very influential to the field of festive studies<sup>96</sup>—to a discussion of the first written and visual descriptions of pre-Lenten celebrations. In a Roman text dating from the early twelfth century, the pope and other Roman citizens are said to have watched a parade through the city, which was followed by the killing of steers and other animals. This festival continued to be observed and grew in popularity over the next few centuries, gradually spreading to other European cities. By the fourteenth century the celebration had become a rowdy tradition featuring boisterous games and bodily self-indulgence, having absorbed activities from other late winter and early spring festivals with pre-Christian roots.

From the beginning carnival was dynamic, absorbing other festival traditions in each of the countries and regions where it was celebrated. The Italian name for the festival, *carnevale* (referring to the Lenten resolution of “removing [oneself] from flesh or meat”) was translated into languages such as Spanish and Portuguese as *carnaval*, into English as carnival or Shrove Tuesday (fasting season), into French as *Mardi Gras* (Fat Tuesday), and into German as *Karneval* or *Fasching* (fasting). Sometimes local names were used to refer to the celebration, such as *entruído* or *entroido* (the opening) in parts of Portugal and northwestern Spain. In each location, carnival took on a new meaning and was embroiled in different controversies.

Despite those regional differences, by the sixteenth century some basic characteristics were prevalent in carnivals throughout Europe. The season for the festival generally began in January with preparations and events that grew in intensity as the time drew closer to Lent. For the elite members of society in the larger cities and royal courts, the celebrations generally consisted of masked balls, comical theatrical performances, and sponsorship of various forms of public competition. For the rest of the population in cities and rural communities, carnival was made up of a set of loosely structured events organized by groups of friends, clubs, fraternities, and guilds, primarily consisting of young men. Figures like those of the bear and the Wildman weaved these performances together into a single festive motif.

Samuel Kinser carefully explores the social and cultural contexts in which these Renaissance

carnival performances occurred and observes that by the time the Nuremberg Schembart parades came to be repressed in the late sixteenth century, carnival had become a system, yet remained sufficiently flexible to accommodate various interpretations of *civitas* and incursions of the “wild” spirit. His comparison between the carnival celebrations that took place in Rome, in Nuremberg, and in the French town of Romans departs from both Bakhtin’s and Gluckman’s theses. Rather than focus on the revolutionary or status-reinforcing qualities of carnival, he concludes that “systems creak on, until they are done in by a mass of changes in which carnivalesque politics often play some small part.” In other words, “community-focused sensibilities are what matters.”

Much like Kinser, **Gilles Bertrand** dismisses views of carnival as either a festival of inversion or as a safety valve and is concerned instead with the issue of how carnival may have contributed to civic cohesion and to the creation and maintenance of a Venetian identity. His essay meticulously traces the history of Venetian carnival from its medieval origins until today and analyzes the meaning of its successive metamorphoses. In the Middle Ages, the main squares of the city were turned over to aristocratic pageantry, sports competitions, and performances by minstrels and actors. Carnival was mostly used as an instrument of civic defense serving the Venetian community. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it became a focal point in the competition between European capitals and testified to the emergence of a “logic of pleasure” year-round. What now appears as the most stable carnivalesque form, the eighteenth-century pre-Lenten festival, with its sacrosanct aesthetic transposition (the use of *ancien regime* masks), was in fact constantly adjusting, both logistically and aesthetically, in reaction to changing power relations. Its excesses were heavily criticized by government and religious reformers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and by the early twentieth century Venice’s carnival had stopped being celebrated altogether. Its revival in the 1980s was a reincarnation of the aristocratic festival as it was known in the baroque era. Today Venetian *carnevale* is open to everyone, and participants come from many countries and a range of social backgrounds to don fantastical costumes and slowly make their way through the narrow streets or ride through the canals in gondolas decorated for the festive occasion. This revived carnival celebration reflects in many ways the eighteenth-century model of an elite urban celebration, with individuals or small groups masquerading for their own enjoyment in an already “touristified” environment. It may thus be described as a rite of commemoration as well as consumption. In his conclusion, Bertrand reflects on the various functions that Venetian carnival has performed throughout the history of the city and insists on the utopian dimension of carnival as perhaps key to understanding the city’s view of itself and its place in European geopolitics.

In the next essay, **Monika Salzbrunn** further reflects on carnival’s contribution to the redefinition of local identities by analyzing contemporary carnival rituals in two French cities: Paris and Cherbourg. Parisian Carnival and its Boeuf Gras (Fattened Ox) parade, whose long and rich history Alain Faure charted in 1978,<sup>97</sup> was revived in the late 1990s after decades of oblivion by a French artist of Russian-Jewish origin, Basile Pachkoff. From the start, Pachkoff’s idea was to establish “translocal” contacts with other European carnival associations as a way to promote his view of Paris as a multicultural, open-minded metropolis and his conception of carnival as a fundamentally fraternal, emancipatory event (carnival expresses “the universal need for joy and brotherhood that lives in all of us,” he wrote on a 2006 flyer). Salzbrunn’s ethnographic work, however, shows that Pachkoff’s opinion is not necessarily shared by all members of the

97. Faure, *Paris Carême-Prenant*.

organization he created in 1998 and that conflicts have erupted between subgroups of Les Fumantes de Pantruche as well as between the group and other local cultural organizations like MACAQ (Movement for the Promotion of Cultural Activities in Urban Neighborhoods) over ownership of the event. Owing perhaps to his greater media visibility, Pachkoff has managed to retain a position of authority, which has allowed his “translocal” agenda to move forward. Between 2006 and 2009, representatives of Parisian Carnival were thus entrusted by the organizers of the Cherbourg Carnival with the task of writing the bill of indictment against “Carnival,” making them active participants in the most important ritual of the carnival season: the closing court hearing before the cremation of “Carnival” on the beach at night. Salzbrunn analyzes one instance of this “collaborative political performance”—the 2006 sentencing of “Villepintator” (a stand-in for then Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin)—as a performance of community transcending regional borders and the provincial/Parisian divide. Her conclusion is that such translocal bonds, by extending the boundaries of the event as well as the boundaries of collective belonging, can turn carnival celebrations into truly participatory events. The final section of her essay calls for a more nuanced treatment of contemporary carnivalesque events and provides useful tips for the would-be ethnographer.

**Regina Zervou’s** fieldwork, which she carried out in the Greek village of Agiasos, fully fulfills Salzbrunn’s call for more nuance in festival studies. Her interviews with key actors of Agiasos’s carnival community, together with her participant observation of the celebrations in 2007–8, testify to the complex relationship between class stratification and cultural prestige since the 1930s as well as to the changing meaning of “tradition.”

During the interwar period the residents of Agiasos manifested their aspirations for social justice and equality by joining the Communist Party, and communist ideals therefore pervaded carnivalesque discourse until the Civil War. In the 1950s and 1960s, a time of great social and political turmoil in Greece, carnival participants used allegory to convey their messages so as to escape governmental censorship. Most of them were “wage-earners” who could not, and would not, dictate what was right or wrong in terms of tradition, as carnival formed an organic part of their lives. The intellectuals of the village, mostly gathered on the board of the local cultural center (Anagostirion), refrained from intervening in the carnival community.

The return to democracy after military rule (1969–74) was marked by the emergence of a new white-collar class, consisting of people with academic degrees. Some of them sought to manage popular culture so as to attract government subsidies and tourists. As a result, the carnival community became informally divided between manual laborers and the “creative class,” acting under the auspices of ostensibly nonpolitical education, cultural, and folkloric associations. The latter appointed themselves the champions of traditional carnival and proceeded to take control of the celebratory events, echoing what happened in the Macedonian town of Sohoh during the same period.<sup>98</sup>

Referencing Anthony Giddens’s concept of “guardians of tradition,” Zervou provides an insightful account of how political subjects (in this case, Agiasos’s “new petty bourgeoisie”) may use popular traditions to exert an ideological “hegemony” over their fellow citizens and dictate the terms under which certain rituals (here, the recitation of satirical poems called *satira*) should be performed. Such hegemonic processes never go unchallenged, of course, but they may prove

98. See Jane Cowan, “Folk Truth: When the Scholar Comes to the Carnival in a ‘Traditional’ Community,” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 6 (1988): 245–60.

99. "The topos of the woman-on-top was one of the most enjoyed" during carnival, according to Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 129.

100. About the "unruly woman" carnival performance, see Pamela Franco, "'Dressing Up and Looking Good': Afro-Creole Female Maskers in Trinidad Carnival," *African Arts* 31, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 62–67, 91, 95–96; Vicki Mayer, "Letting it All Hang Out: Mardi Gras Performances Live and on Video," *The Drama Review* 51, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 76–93; Valeria Sterzi, *Deconstructing Gender in Carnival: A Cross-Cultural Investigation of a Social Ritual* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015); and Kim Vaz-Deville, *Walking Raddy: The Baby Dolls of New Orleans* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2018).

hard to confront for individuals unschooled in carnival's increasingly strict performance "codes." In the long run, it may also deter carnival participants from engaging in experimentation and innovation and thus condemn the festivities to sociocultural irrelevance.

Controversies over how and by whom carnival should be celebrated are also of prime interest to **Katerina Sergidou**. Historically, carnival has largely been a masculine sphere, ruled by fraternities and male youth groups for whom it has often represented a rite of passage. While role reversal has been an aspect of carnival masquerading since medieval times, especially the exchange of men dressing as women,<sup>99</sup> in many communities women's participation in rowdy carnival performances was minimal until the mid-twentieth century, when their growing presence in the labor force led to a larger "gender realignment." Women of higher and consequently more powerful social position were prevented from experiencing the heady, liberating, and potentially disruptive pleasures of the masquerade, while lower-class "unruly women" were criticized as contributing to a climate of insubordination and insolence that justified a violent return to order. Interestingly, once they achieved the status of participants in the 1940s and 1950s, women often played up the feminine side of their social identity by dressing as majorettes or beauty queens, in accordance with the patriarchal order of their communities. Only in the 1970s and 1980s did women fully embrace the improper body and carnivalesque rowdiness as a mode of social resistance or self-affirmation.<sup>100</sup>

Using a combination of historical and ethnographic methods similar to Zervou's, Sergidou discusses recent efforts by female festive organizations to challenge male hegemony over carnival celebrations in Cádiz, Spain, through the elimination of the Ninfas y Diosas custom, a beauty contest that many considered a relic of Spain's patriarchal power structure. She relates their activism to the slow democratization of Spanish society since the end of Francisco Franco's dictatorship (1939–75) and to the emergence of a transnational female public sphere. To her, Cádiz Carnival, and carnival in general, is a space where an embodied, temporary form of counterhegemony can be performed. Sergidou is careful not to homogenize the participation of women in carnival, however. In the same way that the custom of electing festival queens was popular among women in the 1970s, some female carnival bands argue that the Ninfas y Diosas contest allowed women to shine and to play a significant role in the carnival festivities. Accordingly, they contend that the custom should have been reformed rather than discontinued. To Sergidou, this citywide debate over a festive ritual, which resulted in its suppression in 2016, testifies to the capacity of carnival to both anticipate and reflect social change. It "proved that [carnival] can be alive, popular, subversive, and even feminist." It also challenges the arbitrary divide between "carnival time" and "daily life." Indeed, the article shows how artistic manifestations of female carnivalists' desire for equality have been translated into actual public policy.

With **Lionel Arnaud's** essay, we leave the home continent of carnival to explore three of its Caribbean incarnations: Fort-de-France (Martinique), Pointe-à-Pitre (Guadeloupe), and Notting Hill (though taking place in London and outside of the traditional pre-Lenten dates, the latter is generally described as Trinidadian and carnivalesque in character). Rooted in the European colonization of the Americas, these carnivals became a central arena of popular cultural articulations in the age of emancipations, as Arnaud reminds us in the first part of his essay. As a sociologist, however, Arnaud is more interested in the post-1970s period, a time when

101. For an explanation of the way that “Africanness,” signaled by such things as Malcolm X shirts, “operates transnationally and interculturally through the symbolic projection of ‘race’ as kinship,” see Paul Gilroy, “It’s a Family Affair: Black Culture and the Trope of Kinship,” in *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (New York: Serpent’s Tail, 1993), 195.

102. On the emergence of Afro-centric *blocos* like Ile Ayé and Olodum in the 1970s and the way they have challenged the conventional rhetoric of Brazilian carnival, which used to downplay racism, see Agier, *Anthropologie du carnaval*. On the “re-Africanization” of Rara bands in Haiti in the 1970s, see McAlister, *Rara! Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora*.

103. See especially Milla Cozart Riggio, “Resistance and Identity: Trinidad and Tobago Carnival,” in “Trinidad and Tobago Carnival,” ed. Milla C. Riggio, special issue, *TDR: The Drama Review* 42, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 7–23, and Milla Cozart Riggio, ed., *Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience* (London: Routledge Press, 2004).

carnival started serving a more openly militant agenda. His essay looks at how, in a context of growing identity claims and political radicalization, attested by the diffusion and success of Black Power ideas among Afro-descendants around the world, Caribbean carnivals became part of a cultural and political repertoire aimed at denouncing a long history of subordination.<sup>101</sup> More precisely, based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Fort-de-France, London, and Pointe-à-Pitre between 2000 and 2018, Arnaud analyzes how cultural movements like the Guadeloupean Mouvman kiltirél have drawn on carnivalesque aesthetics to both memorialize and display the complex history of Black Caribbean populations. To him, these movements represent a “third way” between the self-regulated, “civilized” celebration of the white bourgeoisie and the unruly charivari of the Black masses, as they combine a supposed African and popular “authenticity” with rigorous, spectacular staging. Arnaud further argues that Caribbean carnival has been subject to constant reinterpretation since the eighteenth century and that, as such, this repertoire is not just a limited set of means for action, but also a convention through which carnival groups constantly reinvent their skills and resources. Finally, the article shows that the repertoires mobilized by Caribbean carnival bands cannot be reduced to an aesthetic gesture that serves political claims, and that they are part of a historical genealogy that testifies to the resilient character of Black communities. Much like the Bahian *blocos afro* have been a central site of Black rejection of the “racial democracy” ethos articulated in Rio and much like Rara bands in Haiti have drawn conscious links between themselves and other African peoples through a style of dress that incorporates Malcolm X shirts, Nelson Mandela buttons, and kente cloth articles,<sup>102</sup> Afro-centric carnival performances in Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Trinidad should be seen as acts of identity affirmation meant to exemplify a society in the making. Far from downplaying the agency of Caribbean revelers, Arnaud nonetheless reminds us that such performances can also be objectified and turned into commodified “heritage” spectacles, and that as such, carnival remains an essentially fluid, equivocal cultural event.

In the next article, **Milla Cozart Riggio** deepens our understanding of Trinidadian Carnival, on which she has published widely,<sup>103</sup> by studying the recent resurrection of two carnival traditions: the Afro-based stickfighting practice called *bois* and the Indo-based whipcracking practice called *jab*. Both of them played a role in the emancipation carnival narrative but came under heavy criticism in the 1950s when the Afro-Trinidadian People’s National Movement (PNM) reclaimed carnival as a decent, respectable festival, cleansed of all aggression.

Carnival was first introduced in Trinidad by Spaniards in the early eighteenth century and was later celebrated by British colonizers and French plantation owners who settled on the islands. The African slaves who worked on the plantations were emancipated in the early nineteenth century and soon embraced the festival as a symbolic rite of liberation. Chinese and East Indian indentured laborers and later American navy men added to the personality of the celebration. Today, carnival in Port of Spain is a huge celebration known as *mas* (an abbreviation for mask or masquerade) in which thousands of revelers come together from all ethnic groups and social classes to join carnival troupes and dance through the streets of town.

In most of the literature about contemporary Trinidadian Carnival, the celebrations tend to be described as profane. This is problematic, as it seems to ignore the deeply religious character of Trinidadian society. To Riggio, playing and praying are essentially related activities on the two-

104. Guss, *The Festive State*, 10.

105. Roger D. Abrahams and John F. Szwed, *After Africa: Extracts from British Travel Accounts and Journals of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries Concerning the Slaves, Their Manners, and Customs in the British West Indies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 32. The “reputation vs. respectability” paradigm was originally introduced by Peter J. Wilson in *Crab Antics: The Social Anthropology of English-speaking Negro Societies of the Caribbean* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973).

106. Abrahams and Szwed, *After Africa*, 32.

island nation. Her interviews with practitioners of the bois and jab traditions testify to a common (though racially distinct) worldview in which ancestors and protective rituals feature prominently. While the “tone” or “ambiance” of these warrior rituals may seem secular, they should more properly be understood as a synthesis of carnival behavior and religious practice. Specifically, warrior traditions consist of an outer, secular layer of carnival “play” surrounding a protected, secret inner layer of religious “work.”

By refocusing our attention on the religious dimension of carnival in Trinidad, Riggio confirms David Guss’s intuition that carnival “can easily oscillate between religious devotion, ethnic solidarity, political resistance, national identity, and even commercial spectacle.”<sup>104</sup> She also makes a welcome contribution to a larger debate on American notions of work and play initiated by Roger Abrahams and John Szwed in *After Africa*.<sup>105</sup> In this volume, the two anthropologists contrasted European American cultures—in which work tends to be associated with productivity outside the home and playing “remains as private as one can maintain”—and African American cultures—in which work is generally associated with cooperation with the family, and play is associated with the crossroads or the street, with men, and with establishing one’s reputation through performance.<sup>106</sup> Abrahams and Szwed added that “in the Afro-American order of behaviors, ‘play’ is ... distinguished from ... ‘respectable behavior.’” Riggio’s ethnographic investigation of carnival warrior traditions suggests that the gap between play and work, the secular and the sacred, masculine, reputation-centered values and feminine, respectability-centered values is much smaller than commonly thought.

In his essay, **Gustavo Remedi** makes another stimulating contribution to the debate on the meaning of carnival politics by comparing three plays pertaining to the *murga* genre and performed at the 2003, 2005, and 2014 Montevideo Carnivals. Produced by three different carnival clubs (Diablos Verdes, Agarrate Catalina, and Don Timoteo), these plays attest to the disagreements that exist within Montevidean society over the neoliberal turn taken by Uruguay after the return to democracy in 1985. In *The Devil’s Cauldron* (2003), the Diablos Verdes *murga* troupe brought to life the crisis of the neoliberal model, taking aim for instance at the World Bank (renamed “International Infernal Bank”) and at the legal immunity granted to white-collar thieves. In *Los Sueños* (2005), the amateur *murga* troupe Agarrate Catalina celebrated the victory of the Center-Left Broad Front coalition and reflected on the “dreams of their parents,” that of truly popular rule, while gently poking fun at Senator José Alberto Mujica, the future president of Uruguay (2010–15). Finally, in *Creer o reventar* (2014), a traditional *murga* troupe associated with Montevideo’s more conservative Unión neighborhood, targeted the leftist coalition—its contradictions, and sometimes inept management—as well as the ideology of “statism” that had seeped into carnival culture. To Remedi, such variations within the *murga* genre point to the equivocal nature of carnival as a medium. Rather than view carnival as inherently confrontational and revolutionary or as conservative and reactionary, he considers carnival theater—and carnivalesque productions in general—as a heterogenous, conflictual, and undetermined “plebeian” public sphere (in opposition to the lettered, legitimate public sphere that Jürgen Habermas had in mind). As such, it is a site of constant negotiation between “the people,” the state, and nongovernmental sources of power (big corporations, the media, churches, etc.). “The political sign and value of carnivalesque theater is neither substantive nor predictable,” Remedi concludes. “The form and ideology of carnival cannot be established other than by studying

107. L. M. Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital: Radical Clowning and the Global Justice Movement," *Social Identities* 16, no. 4 (2010): 537–57; Bleuwenn Lechaux, "Non-Preaching Activism in New York: The Theatrical Militancy of Billionaires for Bush and Reverend Billy," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 23, no. 2 (2010): 175–90; Claire Tancons, "Occupy Wall Street: Carnival Against Capital? Carnavalesque as Protest Sensibility," *e-flux* 30 (December 2011), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/30/68148/occupy-wall-street-carnival-against-capital-carnavalesque-as-protest-sensibility/>; Angélique Haugerud, "Satire and Dissent in the Age of Billionaires," *Social Research* 79, no. 1 (2012): 145–68. As a side note here, David Graeber's death in September 2020 was memorialized via hundreds of "Carnivals4David" on October 11, 2020, making the connection between Occupy Wall Street protests and carnival even more explicit.

particular representations."

A useful way to test this argument about the character of carnival is to see how well it fares on the margins of the phenomenon, that is, in nontraditional sites where carnivalesque motifs are consciously invoked by participants or where their features warrant such invocation by scholars in the process of analysis. The last section of our issue includes essays on two such nonliteral carnival scenarios.

**John Hammond's** article focuses on the use of carnivalesque imagery and language in the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests in lower Manhattan's Zucotti Park. In so doing, he builds upon studies by Claire Tancons, Angélique, L. M. Bogad, Bleuwen Lechaux, and the recently deceased David Graeber, which highlighted the connections between carnival and activist initiatives such as the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, Reclaim the Streets, and Billionaires for Bush.<sup>107</sup> To him, Occupy Wall Street blurred the lines between "communal carnival" (which he associates with Mikhail Bakhtin's thought) and the more explicitly political "intentional carnival." While he refrains from using Bogad's phrase "tactical carnival" to discuss the deployment of carnivalesque motifs in the Occupy Wall Street protests—laughter at Zucotti Park was "often involuntary, a surrender of one's conscious, rational self to the unexpected," he insists—his description of interventions such as the Superhero March on Wall Street or Corporate Zombie Day call to mind the sorts of "tactical interruptions" advocated by the members of ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) starting in the late 1980s to draw attention to the inadequacy of public funding for AIDS research.

The burlesque protagonists of Hammond's "Carnival against the capital of capital" are superheroes, zombies, and ordinarily clad, sign-carrying bank occupiers who draw attention to global devastations and dislocations caused by the neoliberalization of the city and the world at large. To Hammond, these protesters attempted to create a new, twenty-first-century kind of "carnival" that was neither calendrically nor spatially circumscribed nor permitted by the state but declared and embodied by a movement that identified itself as global, anticorporate, and antiauthoritarian.

The political effectiveness of such carnivalesque politics is regularly called into question in the literature on social movements, and though he argues that Occupy Wall Street protests translated into real political gains, Hammond does not attempt to portray the performances at Zucotti Park as inherently successful. Rather, he emphasizes their role in creating a communal, utopian space in which participants could experiment with alternatives. The article's coda draws interesting connections between Zucotti Park and the affective structure of the medieval marketplace as evoked by Bakhtin. In both cases, carnivalesque dealings break the wall between actor and audience, though they often require "action spaces" and adversaries. They do not so much confront state power as render it irrelevant and ineffectual by neutralizing fear and replacing it with the joyous experience of collective festivity. "Carnival allows us to laugh, and, as Bakhtin teaches us, laughter liberates," Hammond concludes.

Where else can the carnivalesque be found today? Maybe in practices such as graffiti, which bring "down to earth" such contemporary sacred symbols as police cars, banks, or corporate logos. Or maybe in the so-called transformational events that have proliferated in West Coast

North America since the 1990s and which promote personal and social transformation through healing processes and ecstatic rituals. In the last article of this issue, **Graham St. John** looks at Burning Man as one of those dialogic spaces where alternatives can proliferate and whose meaning remains fundamentally open.

Since the inaugural “burn” in 1986, when an eight-foot effigy was torched on Baker Beach, San Francisco, at summer solstice, the festival has morphed into a “frontier carnival” of massive proportions, involving hundreds of volunteers that liaise with media representatives, the local population, and law enforcement. While the festival promotes a clear agenda based on ten principles (including “radical inclusion,” “radical self-expression,” “gifting,” and “decommodification,” “communal effort”), “Burners” (the nickname given to the festival’s participants) have turned Black Rock City, Nevada, into “a heterogenous threshold and contested space.” Combining Foucault’s reflections on “*les espaces autres*” (heterotopia) and Victor Turner’s concept of liminality, St. John provides a fascinating account of the event’s complex history and culture, as well as a stimulating exploration of the dynamic vicissitudes of “transformation” in a context characterized by “the confluence of freedom and governance, struggles over definition, disparate chronicities, contested utopias, zone disputes, [and] culture wars.”

Rounding out this special issue on the politics of carnival, **five book reviews** either provide insight into carnivals not discussed in the issue (Rio de Janeiro, New Orleans, Tel Aviv) or extend the reflections initiated by Gilles Bertrand, Milla Cozart Riggio, and Lionel Arnaud on the Venice and Trinidad Carnivals. Some of them were specifically commissioned for this issue, while others were republished from [H-Net Reviews](#). We hope that you will think their combination of theoretical musings and analysis of specific carnivalesque “re-presentations” (Handelman) a nice complement to the articles’ overall discussion of the politics of carnival.

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## AUTHOR BIO

**Aurélie Godet** is an associate professor of US history at Université de Paris and is currently at work on a political history of festivity in New Orleans from the eighteenth century through today, tentatively titled *Festive City: The Politics of Play in New Orleans from the Colonial Era to the Present*.

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# From Bal Masques to Masked Balls: Festivity in the Era of Social Distancing

**Emmanuelle Lallement**

Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis University, France

*Translated and adapted by Aurélie Godet*

## KEYWORDS

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## ABSTRACT

The lifting of the COVID-19-related lockdown was greeted cautiously in Paris on May 11, 2020. There was some tentative singing, drinks with friends at a nearby café, a few cameras to immortalize the moment. Yet, barely an hour after the beginning of this first phase of France's "deconfinement" plan, a small crowd of people gathered on the Champs Elysées to celebrate the ability to get out without a self-authorized written certification of their purpose. Nothing too exuberant, but still, seeing these residents gather in a public place that has welcomed so many Parisian festive gatherings said a lot about the general mood of the city. Like the *apéro Skype* trend to which French people had reluctantly given in, the event was flaunted as a powerful emblem of the confinement period.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this text argues that social distancing has paradoxically revealed the role that festive sociability plays in our lives. In the era of protective and control measures (*gestes-barrières* in French), festivity has become all the more precious as it has been made almost impossible.

1. *Translator's note:* *Apéro* is short for *aperitif* (pre-dinner drinks). As this French tradition moved online during lockdown, a new ritual was born, that of the "apéro Skype" or "Skypéro" (a portmanteau word with the same meaning).

2. *Translator's note*: The concept of total social fact was introduced in the late 1960s by anthropologist Marcel Mauss (Émile Durkheim's nephew) to refer to an activity that affects the whole of society, including (but not limited to) the economic, legal, political, and religious spheres. See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison, with an introduction by E. E. Evans-Pritchard (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).

3. Emmanuelle Lallement, ed., "Éclats de fête," special issue, *Socio-anthropologie* 38 (2018). In this special issue of the French social anthropology journal, I focused on the recent fragmentation, recomposition, and reconfiguration of festivity, using the following question as a prompt: "Has festivity *in itself* disappeared?"

4. *Translator's note*: Launched in 2001, Nuits blanches, a contemporary all-night art festival, takes place annually in October across the city's streets and monuments. It is a free invitation to Parisians and tourists to engage with works of art by national and international artists.

5. Emmanuelle Lallement, "Événements en ville, événements de ville: Vers de nouvelles ritualités urbaines?," *Communication & Organisation* 32, no. 2 (2007): 2, [https://journals.openedition.org/communicationorganisation/275#xd\\_co\\_f=NzE4N-WRIMzEtYjYyNS00N2YxLWFiZ-mltNDg4NjJlMjA2NzE0~](https://journals.openedition.org/communicationorganisation/275#xd_co_f=NzE4N-WRIMzEtYjYyNS00N2YxLWFiZ-mltNDg4NjJlMjA2NzE0~).

6. For a stimulating discussion of this new proxemic "code," see Yves Winkin, "Viens loin de moi—

## From Bal Masques to Masked Balls: Festivity in the Era of Social Distancing

Emmanuelle Lallement

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Festivity as a social phenomenon stems from the universal need among humans to gather peacefully and joyfully. Anthropologists have variously interpreted it as a manifestation of our desire for excess, for time-out-of-time, and for social inversion. They have also presented it as a "total social fact" through which they may gain a better understanding of the social, religious, and economic dimensions of the communities they study.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary human societies are no strangers to the festive impulse, though they tend to use it as a lever for economic and cultural development rather than as an end in itself.<sup>3</sup> Certain traditional celebrations like town fairs have certainly experienced revivals, but most festivals now tend to fit from the get-go into the scheme of urban, globalized modernity and of the competitive market for territorial identities. The result is a continuum of urban festivities that spans the entire globe. The French *fête de la musique* has been celebrated in New York since 2007 (as Make Music New York), the Parisian Nuits blanches festival has found an echo in Rome as the Notte Bianca, while the man-made beaches that line the banks of the Seine in summer now have their equivalent on the banks of the Garonne and Danube Rivers.<sup>4</sup> In some ways, these new urban rituals may seem like poor substitutes for festivity.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the landscape of revels recently overflowed with events that could be categorized as copies, imitations, or transfers; that had lost their initial meaning to reemerge as commercial events; or that had become institutionalized or politicized. Had true festivity dissolved into residual, "festive-like" rituals, then?

While anthropologists were busy analyzing this multiplication of festive proceedings and debating whether it was yet another sign of the slow, continuous decline of our societies into decadent postmodernity, the COVID-19 pandemic suddenly lent credence to the hitherto inconceivable hypothesis of a future disappearance of festivity. After all, didn't it involve social mixing, physical proximity, rubbing elbows, haptic feedback?

In France, the void left by the state-mandated lockdown was acutely felt by many. Isolation and social distancing measures put a brutal, shocking stop to the festive sociability that punctuated our daily lives. Family gatherings, holiday celebrations, house parties, town fairs, ceremonies, receptions, charity fetes, festivals, etc.: the sudden cancellation of all these left gaping holes in our individual and collective calendars and revealed, through their very absence, how central they used to be to our daily lives. Even now that lockdown has been replaced with less stringent proxemic rules, festivity largely looks like "the ghost of times past."<sup>6</sup>

### Festivity Unmasked via Social Distancing

In one of the great ironies of the pandemic, COVID partly spread via festive gatherings: one soccer game here, one religious service there, one celebratory meal elsewhere. Among the first measures taken by the Chinese government to limit the spread of the virus was the cancellation of New Year celebrations, which usually involve big family reunions and, consequently, domestic and international mobilities. The year of the Yang Metal Rat ended up beginning under the sign of a strict stay-at-home order. Soon, festivities got postponed or called off throughout the world: for an indefinite amount of time, there would be no more weddings or baptisms, no

big sports competitions, no concerts or shows of any kind, no neighborly gatherings or public entertainment. Starting on March 16<sup>th</sup> in France, and either earlier or later in other nations, forms of ordinary sociability ended overnight. Social distancing practices, ranging from the strictest, starkest of lockdowns to the forced *déconfinement* of certain work sectors deemed to be socially indispensable, including the small arrangements people regularly made with the laws, with others, and with their own consciences, would throw into stark relief the inequities of our societies.

Over the months that followed, as accepted spatial and temporal norms were challenged and the most ordinary social practices were redesigned, festivity became the locus of an emerging regime of sociability. New practices appeared and got tested in real time, as exemplified by these Italian neighbors clinking their prosecco glasses across their balconies using poles. Impeded sociability took various, original forms, all worthy of study. It also gave rise to a new set of questions for anthropologists: Could festive phenomena survive outside the traditional setting for festivity? Should the novel practices be considered as mere surrogates or as heralds of a new code of behavior? Studying the forms that festivity took when reduced to a minimum, were we not getting a preview of the future transformations and restructuring of our lives? What did these new festive forms, or rather these new festive sociabilities, reveal about who we were and our collective perceptions of gatherings, euphoria, dysphoria, technological devices, transgression, and order? Irrespective of the answers, the anthropological need for festivity that manifested itself at the heart of social distancing needed to be taken seriously. One needed to grasp what this death-defying festive pulse, or impulse, really meant.

### Homemade Festive Sociabilities

By immediately putting a stop to any kind of gathering in public places, stores, sports arenas, and cultural sites, social distancing measures pushed all forms of festive sociability back into the domestic sphere. Except for clandestine underground parties in certain French cities, festivity largely took place at home in the months that followed lockdown. In compliance with the official statement that "staying at home" was "the easiest way to save lives," people largely stayed put and refrained from making contact with people other than their families, closest friends, and the occasional neighbor. With no access to large meeting grounds, festivities developed indoors, or in the in-between space of the balcony, porch, or patio. Families instituted new rituals, arranging, for instance, to meet for a few minutes of dancing or general blowing-off steam after working all day in separate rooms. At eight o'clock every night, the residents of apartment buildings in big cities stepped out on their balconies to give medical personnel a round of hearty applause. For people who often barely knew one other, these fleeting moments of conviviality were a welcome respite from the supposed anonymity of the urban environment. Sometimes the owners of adequate sound systems decided to switch the mood from simply pleasurable to truly festive by offering to play a few songs to which people might sing along or dance. Street life was temporarily transformed as a result, as it was now experienced from the vantage point of a gallery. The sonic public landscape was no longer dominated by the sound of cars, buses, crowds, and passers-by calling out to each other, and was laced instead with music, conversations between near-strangers, greetings from people one only caught a glimpse of usually. Down with the masks of indifference, everyone seemed to think when the time came to meet again on the balcony.

7. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1956).

8. *Translator's note: Burger Quiz* is a farcical French television game show created by actor Alain Chabat and Kader Aoun, first broadcast on Canal + from 2001 to 2002 before being replayed on Comédie! Channel from 2006. A new version of the show started in 2018 on the French channel TMC.

As toasting the neighbors across the street went from spontaneous gesture to habit, the “presentation of self” analyzed by sociologist Erving Goffman remained an object of careful management.<sup>7</sup> People rarely got rolling drunk on their balconies. Still, this fleeting festive sociability gradually transformed our relationship to space and time as well as our interactions. It brought about a temporary, yet repetitive, synchronization of social life and introduced a new sense of expectation between citizens and their neighbors, akin to that which precedes a date. Maybe these shared moments would lead to acts of mutual assistance or to long-lasting friendships? People promised each other to have a drink together “in real life” and already scheduled dinners for “when this would be over.” The festive mood of these socially distanced gatherings pointed to the possibility of festivities in a not-too-distant, though constantly postponed, future.

Other pioneering forms of festivity grew online, out of professional videoconferencing software. When the first *apéros Skype* were organized in the early days of the French lockdown, inspired by the Italian precedent, they usually felt anomalous. For a start, nobody was a host any more, since everyone stayed home and provided their own food and drinks. Slowly, though, people started trading the names of the applications that would allow them to conform to the new ritual of the (over-)alcoholic evening online conversation. Mastering the use of Skype, Zoom, House Party, FaceTime, and other tools meant to bridge geographical distance became an obligation for people who missed the physical presence of others. The awkward patchwork of faces that adorned our screens formed a visual and sonic landscape with which it became possible to interact. While friends could be variously comfortable with these technologies of “proximity within distance,” it was within families that the digital literacy gap manifested itself most strongly (and comically). Who did not experience, say, a Skype family gathering in honor of a grandmother’s eighty-sixth birthday, only to see a dozen distorted faces against more or less fortunate backgrounds, cutting each other off every second due to their inability to grasp the subtleties of online communication and spending most of this virtual, gift-free birthday party marveling at technology, ranting on about disconnections, or tentatively livening up the conversation with emojis or screenshots?

From these initial, more-or-less-successful ventures, during which alcohol helped many overlook technological constraints, people gradually moved on to more elaborate dealings like themed parties in which participants offered to organize games and costume competitions. Some had a “Miss Lockdown” beauty pageant in which they tried to outdo one another in eccentricity using household items, while others competed in a *Burger Quiz* contest, using a Power Point on a shared screen.<sup>8</sup> Yet others celebrated birthdays wearing wigs. The physical manifestations of exhilaration played a major role in this online festive theater: people kept clinking glasses with their screens, they laughed and sang, they performed skits, and sometimes they dozed off, worrying their friends as a result.

Shared screens actually became the new platform for renewed, sometimes exaggerated, conviviality. People performed for the benefit of others, believing that these interactions of a new kind should be as merry and spontaneous-looking as possible. The virtual festive spectacle that people gifted themselves often fed off the memories of past celebrations and evening parties. They conjured up images from “the world before.” *Apéros Skype* and other forms of “lockdown

9. *Translator's note:* Pioneered by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, the term "extimacy"—a combination of the words "exterior" and "intimacy"—refers to intimacy as a function of public relation.

10. For the performances, see National French Orchestra, "Le Boléro de Ravel par l'Orchestre national de France," streamed live on March 29, 2020, YouTube video, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sj4pE\\_bgRQI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sj4pE_bgRQI); and "Symphonie confinée: La tendresse," streamed live on March 29, 2020, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEjvRktXeis>.

*Translator's note:* André Bourvil, known as just "Bourvil," was a French actor and singer who starred alongside Louis de Funès in some of the most famous French comedy films of the 1960s: *Le Corniaud* (1965) and *La Grande Vadrouille* (1966).

11. Paris Opera, "'Dire merci': Message de soutien du Ballet de l'Opéra national de Paris," streamed live on April 16, 2020, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OliG14G-gmu0>.

12. Sophie Poirot-Delpech, ed., "À travers l'éphémère," special issue, *Socio-anthropologie* 33 (2016), <https://journals.openedition.org/socio-anthropologie/1971#authors>.

entertainment" seemed suspended between yesterday and tomorrow. They hovered between a base of past festivities and a capital of uncertain future occasions.

In addition to modifying our relation to time, the health crisis modified our relation to space. Access to our usual gathering spots—such as our friends' apartments, cafés, night clubs, concert halls, cinemas, the streets themselves—was now prohibited; but we now had access to spaces we used to think of as out of reach. Fragments of private spheres, carefully curated extimacies were exposed to our prying gaze.<sup>9</sup> Epidemic entertainment, broadcast via Facebook live and filmed in a kitchen, a living room, a bedroom, a personal studio, or an office, started to look like private, confidential, improvised concerts in front of a select audience: us. We were thus treated to various "confined symphonies," including a striking performance of Maurice Ravel's "Bolero" by the musicians of the National French Orchestra and a cover of Bourvil's "La Tendresse" by forty-five singers and musicians.<sup>10</sup> Directly from the creator to the spectator, from the producer to the consumer, culture had never been so "(a)live." Its economic dimension was erased, or at least eclipsed, by a sudden willingness to replace commercial promotion with free access and benefaction. Concerts were literally "given," and recipients ranged from the usual fans to the general public, to select communities deemed worthy of gratitude. The dancers of the Paris Opera, for instance, paid tribute to healthcare workers by performing original dance steps along Sergueï Prokofiev's "Dance of Knights." The video, directed by French screenwriter Cédric Klapisch, was released along with the following message: "This film aims to show that whatever happens, we will continue dancing, living, and creating."<sup>11</sup>

To a certain extent, the pandemic confirmed the growing centrality of screens in domestic space. It also transformed public space into many fragments of private space staged for the benefit of neighbors, family, and total strangers. It reaffirmed the significance of three of the basic components of festivity: music, dancing, and singing. It fostered a rebirth of creativity, if not really of the transgressive kind. Indeed, while the main locus of festivity theoretically allows all sorts of excess, homemade festivities remained tame and limited in time. Additionally, it testified to the shrinking of space in our globalized world, as dozens of artists from across the globe joined Lady Gaga for a "One World: Together at Home" online mega-concert. Finally, it corroborated the anthropological axiom that the suspension of ordinary routine plays a major role in festivity and rituals in general. For festivity to occur, there needs to be a specific place, a specific occasion, specific objects, and a return to normalcy once the glasses, the crisps, the instruments, and microphones have been put away and the computers and other screens put into sleep mode. The safety imperative was effectively internalized, though. "In contradiction with the descriptions offered by Jean Duvignaud and other anthropologists of festivity, it appears that the success of contemporary 'festive collectives' ... does not lie in the intermingling of beings but, quite the opposite, in the maintenance of a certain order and the abidance of social distancing. Things will go smoothly only if people stay in their place," sociologist Sophie Poirot-Delpech recently wrote in her introduction to an issue of the French journal *Socio-anthropologie* focused on short-lived collectives.<sup>12</sup> Current substitutes for festivity may thus end up modifying it, but as borderline cases of merrymaking, they also reveal the very logic and structure of festivity.

13. Emmanuel Ethis, "À propos de l'annulation des festivals: Quelles conséquences pour le public?," *Le SocioBlog d'Emmanuel Ethis* (blog), April 15, 2020, <http://ethis-e.blogspot.com/2020/04/a-propos-de-lannulation-des-festivals.html>.
14. Yves Winkin, "Propositions pour une anthropologie de l'enchantement," in *Unité-Diversité: Les identités culturelles dans le jeu de la mondialisation*, ed. Paul Rasse, Nancy Midol, and Fathi Triki (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), 177–86.
15. Victor Turner, "Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 6, no. 4 (December 1979): 468.

## What Will Festivity Look Like in the "World After"?

It is now clear that festivals will not take place any time soon, despite their being "social occasions that punctuate the lives of people working in the cultural industries," as culture sociologist Emmanuel Ethis recently wrote on his blog.<sup>13</sup> While festivals are primarily events, they also belong to regular social time, and the effects of their cancellation will have a profound impact on communities throughout the world, far beyond its effect on the cultural tourism industry. Festivals as events are not just festive parentheses. And festivity in general is never divorced from ordinary social life. It is one of its many possible forms.

Be that as it may, nobody knows what will happen "next": have not our festive rituals already evolved since the beginning of the lockdown? The fluid character of festivity in the era of social distancing will only mirror the fundamental impermanence that characterizes it. There will be numerous examples of creative activities designed to foster festive effervescence. New ideas on how to have fun, how to be psychologically together while six feet apart are already coming from all sides. The challenge of the next few months will be to rebuild relationships, to invent forms of social proximity that will not jeopardize protective measures. Festive forms will surely be a focus of this forced inventiveness, since their performative dimension will likely be central to the reconstruction of social life. From Belarus came the idea of placing cardboard cutouts of the faces of supporters on mannequins to create the illusion of crowded stands during soccer matches. In Germany, a startup came up with the idea of sending virtual applause and cheers (relayed via the stadium's PA system) through an application during games. MeinApplaus.de would effectively allow teams to play behind closed doors while making sure fans can demonstrate their support for their favorite players. In the "realm of the fake," the gamut of real-life interactions has paradoxically been enlarged.

Because it is both a promise and a source of worry for the days to come, festivity right now is mostly experienced as a projection. One imagines future family reunions, catching up with friends and family, while pondering a set of nagging questions: What will be authorized? What will be forbidden? What will be considered a transgression? What will be tolerated? How many people will be allowed in public places at the same time? What will festive practices look like exactly? How far will people need to stand from each other? Will "masked balls" replace crowded dance floors? Ordinary reflexivity on "how to celebrate" now seems to bedevil what used to seem spontaneous. In line with sociologist Yves Winkin's call to "engineer enchantment," festivity will need to be manufactured anew.<sup>14</sup> What will be left of our small quarantine rituals is hard to say. Maybe their repetitive, codified force will give them a degree of autonomy that will endure their future success as traditions—unless these convivial moments of social synchronization are intrinsically *liminal* spaces, "subjunctive space/time" (Victor Turner)?<sup>15</sup> In that case, they would merely amount to a suspension of the old order, an intermission, until something new materializes.

For now, festivity is biding its time. Someday it will put an end to the long social emptiness left by months of social distancing. It will be the unmistakable sign that life is returning to normal, or at least that social life is resuming. But, as explained above, there is no point pitting the drabness of everyday life against the effervescence of festivity. Festivity mirrors our societies and is informed by social norms. Consequently, not everybody will be in the mood to celebrate and festivity will

16. John Waller, *The Dancing Plague: The Strange, True Story of an Extraordinary Illness* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2009).

17. *Translator's note:* Iolanda Cristina Gigliotti, more commonly known as Dalida, was an immensely popular French singer and actress from the late 1950s to the 1980s. She committed suicide in 1987.

18. *Translator's note:* The original reads: "Entrez dans la danse / Voyez comme on danse / Sautez, dansez, embrassez qui vous voulez."

remain the social marker it used to be. Some will find ways of poaching exceptions from the range of new regulations and will undoubtedly take advantage of efforts made by others to free themselves of the rules and hereby satisfy their desire for fun. Others will control their every move and words so as not to appear too elated in times ill-suited to glee. Indeed, is it not indecent to wonder about the future of festivity when COVID-19 patients are hovering between life and death, when medical personnel throughout the world are still fighting to "flatten the curve," when people are economically and psychologically suffering from social distancing measures (think of the homeless quarantined outside, for instance)? Responsibility toward one's fellow-citizens and guilt over having both the means and time for leisure and the pleasures of festivity will probably carry as much weight as the need to create fleeting moments of insouciance and euphoria. Precisely because our current world is characterized by uncertainty and because what we are going through seems perpetually provisional, the ambivalence of festivity has never been so obvious: it defies as much as it structures our lives.

Epidemics and festivity form a strange couple. One may think of the "dancing plague" that occurred in Strasbourg in July 1518 when, in the midst of a famine, somewhere between fifty and four hundred people took to frenetic, unstoppable dancing for days, working themselves up in a trance. The diocese took it to be a ritual of possession, while the secular authorities debated whether to prohibit the dancing or to promote it as a form of therapy. This episode, well-known to medievalists, shook the city for two months and is sometimes seen as a precedent to today's rave parties. The city that suffered from these joyless displays was confined so as not to contaminate others and the lone Terpsichoreans were sent parading away.<sup>16</sup>

In late April, the residents of the 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris witnessed a new sort of "choremania": a dozen residents took to the streets to dance to a song by Dalida.<sup>17</sup> These urban bohemians braved the decree prohibiting gatherings in public places and organized an ephemeral street ball that was quickly broken up by the police. Taking place as it did, the day before the lockdown was lifted, this episode made the headlines and was largely seen as a provocation. From an anthropological perspective, it was more of an urban "micro-event" that punctuated life in the era of the pandemic and that might have been set to the words from a well-known French nursery rhyme: "Join the dance / See how we're dancing / Jump and dance / Kiss whoever you want."<sup>18</sup> Far from having contaminated the rest of the population, such an urge to dance, occurring as it did in a context of health and social crisis, may now be seen as either an omen of a coming furor to party or as the signal of an impending victory of fear.

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## AUTHOR BIO

**Emmanuelle Lallement** is professor of urban ethnography at Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis University's Institute for European Studies. She is also a member of the "Architecture, City, and Urbanism" research unit funded by the French National Research Center, and coordinates the "Re-thinking the Contemporary City" program at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Paris-Nord. Her ethnographic work has focused on Paris, festive events, commercial relations, and global mobilities. Her publications include *La Ville marchande: Enquête à Barbès* (Paris: Téraèdre, 2010) and *Paris, résidence secondaire* (Paris: Belin, 2013). More recently, she edited a special issue of the French journal *Socio-anthropologie* on the contemporary fragmentation of festivity ("Éclats de fête," 2018).

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# Carnival and Politics: Community Matters

**Samuel Kinser**

Northern Illinois University, United States

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to widen the ways in which Carnival's political dimensions have ordinarily been discussed. What happens politically at Carnival should be placed in the social and cultural contexts in which a performance occurs, rather than being discussed only in terms of the performance's publicized representations. This contextual mix should in turn be understood first as composed of competing and cooperating communities, but then also as having far-reaching and lengthily enduring structural roots. The author illustrates these propositions chiefly by means of an overview of Rome's long Carnival history. There is space only to consider in detail two key sets of Roman Carnival sources, a verbal document written in the 1140s and two engravings made in the 1550s. The analysis of their social and cultural contexts leads to two other documentary groups, one stemming from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Nuremberg and the other from the 1570s and 1580 in Romans, France. The long-term, structural thread knitting these disparate Carnival times and places together is the figure of the bear and his humanoid cousin the wildman.

1. This article was first written as an introductory lecture. Preserving this orientation, I have in these notes limited bibliographical references to those providing direct support for my assertions. I have not indicated the current state of scholarship in the many fields on which I touch, nor do I allude to general background materials on these topics. All translations in the article are by the author unless otherwise noted.

2. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968), 474 (originally published in Russian in 1965). See chapter 3, especially pages 197–98, for his emphasis on popular mockery as bringing high people down low; this idea is illuminated from different angles throughout his book.

3. In a chapter called “The World of Carnival” in his influential book *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Peter Burke develops this “safety-valve” view of Carnival, referring to the work of the anthropologists Max Gluckman and Victor Turner for analogous materials before quoting the pastoral letter of the Parisians. But he mistakes the letter’s context. See Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 201–2.

Max Harris, quoting the same passage as Burke, emphasizes that its context shows that the Paris theologians were not affirming this pressure-valve view but were instead condemning it. See Max Harris, *Sacred Folly: A New History of the Feast of Fools* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 222–23. In any case, their pastoral letter, as Harris writes and Burke also notes, does not concern Carnival but instead the Christmas-time Feast of Fools.

## Carnival and Politics: Community Matters

Samuel Kinser

Most discussions of the relation of Carnival to politics take one of three points of view.<sup>1</sup> Some attribute little or no political significance to Carnival: people who take part in this festivity, whether actors or onlookers, are just fooling around and having fun. Even when Carnival revelers invent songs and dances about kings, queens, mayors, or presidents, or about corrupt politicians or brutal police, such mockeries are politically irrelevant because they are evanescent, displaced shortly by other concerns. Whatever political expressions are emitted in the course of having fun involve no train of thought or action.

A second point of view does attribute political significance to Carnival. For those like the Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, a large portion of the festival’s mockeries are modes of popular resistance to the powers that be. Carnival, writes Bakhtin, gives voice to the “chorus of the laughing people.” Its laughter satirizes every sort of elite and official pretension, every kind of rule of those on “high” over people and things that are “low.”<sup>2</sup> This laughter amounts to a politics of resistance exercised in the name of a “low,” commonplace humanity, a reactive response to efforts like that of the Roman Catholic Church to urge Lenten ascetic practices upon Christian believers as preparation for the church’s most important occasion, the celebration of Easter. Those who see Carnival very largely as protest against any and all rule-based counsel and coercion accordingly tend to point to church and also state regulatory measures as the source of the festival’s political aspects.

A third point of view about this issue has been called a pressure-valve idea. To paraphrase a passage in a long pastoral letter circulated among Catholic clergy by the Parisian faculty of theology in 1445, people are like barrels; once a year they need to empty out their vapors or they may explode. Once exuded, however, this idea presumes that political resentments will subside. People’s need for abusive hilarity will end in a return to the status quo.<sup>3</sup> So this position regards the political overtones to mockeries in Carnival as outbursts with only transitory consequences. It is like the first position, except that it grants to Carnival activity something close to the creation of political programs, even explosively powerful ones, which nevertheless have only limited or indeed no lasting influence on the ways that political regimes, whether religious or secular in orientation, govern a society.

The limitations of these ideas of Carnival and politics are easily seen. For most of us at the conference in Paris where I originally presented this article in February 2015, Carnival study requires more than an analysis of performance elements and their outcomes. The processes that generate and organize a Carnival are as important to its character as are its staging and the staging’s effects on audiences and onlookers. Planners and organizers, those who participate informally and opportunistically no less than those rehearsing their roles, casual onlookers as well as ardent community supporters, and last but not least those who look on from afar or later hear about a Carnival happening while remaining resolutely outside the events’ excitement in critical or aesthetic detachment: all these elements and not just the performance itself constitute the meaning of any one or any group of Carnivals. Most of these elements, like many Carnival performances, have political ingredients, such as legalisms and policing concerns, just as do the leadership rivalries that emerge in organizing such events. And they exude indeed, like wine

barrels, a variety of political residues that endure beyond the immediacy of performance to affect the Carnivals of ensuing years and the influences that a given Carnival has on others nearby.

The political aspects of Carnival are thus much broader than those envisioned in the points of view sketched earlier. Politics swirls both inside and around Carnival proceedings; it does not simply arise from whether political programs are present or absent, whether they are successful or not, or whether they are directly or only metaphorically expressed. Carnival poses arguments about society, about how people can, should, and would like to live together. It is a mocking set of arguments, derisively, aggressively, and yet also joyously expressed. Expressive freedom is its essence, right up to and occasionally beyond the boundaries of sanity. Yet society never dissolves on Mardi Gras; carnivalesque craziness explores the dimensions, the elasticity of social controls and not their utter absence.

As a consequence, one must conclude that the qualities of a community always matter—or rather the qualities of *communities* matter—for any agglomeration larger than a hamlet is a community of communities at the same time as it is a community of individuals. But which such communities matter in the case of the political dimensions of Carnival? That is a question that should be answered by trying to scale and weigh the communities and their interaction case by case and epoch by epoch, something admittedly difficult to do for events and places in medieval centuries. Nevertheless, in the following pages I will use such a communally-focused and historicizing approach to such scaling and weighing, primarily by looking at early Carnival history in Rome.

### **Carnival at the Testaccio**

Carnivals were celebrated in Rome over a longer period, one can reasonably conclude on the basis of presently known sources, than in any other place in Christendom. It lasted more than seven hundred years, seemingly without interdiction or interruption by more than a half-dozen years, from at least the early twelfth to the late nineteenth century, and it owed this duration largely to a decision by the top hierarchy in the western European church. For centuries this hierarchy not only permitted pursuit of Carnival's sensuous indulgences in their capital but on at least one documented occasion also honored it with the pope's own presence.

What motivated for such a long time official tolerance of Carnival frivolity during the days just before edible and sexual abstinence was enjoined upon Christians for the six-week Lenten period before Easter? It was a matter of politics. For reasons of local strategy, the popes collaborated with Rome's secular leaders to regulate parades and rituals that were often attacked by segments of clergy and laity as a denigration if not denial of Christian religiosity. The high point of Carnival's lavish public entertainments in Rome was reached in the first half of the sixteenth century when its most popular spectacle looked something like this (fig. 1):

4. The hill's name derives from Latin words expressing the sense of broken clay jars. It is located in the southwest corner of the city, at a spot not far from the Lateran palace of the popes but distant from the eventual center of habitation in late medieval centuries. According to twentieth-century archaeologists, the broken amphorae composing the hill were heaped up there, circa 100–250 CE, where ships coming up the Tiber River discharged their produce for the then one million inhabitants of the city and broke many of these containers.

5. Van Cleve may well have viewed once or more than once the undated scene that he designed (see lower left-hand corner of the print) during the undated length of his residence in Rome and Italy.

It is of course possible that his younger colleague Philippe Galle, who engraved it (see lower right-hand corner), changed van Cleve's lost drawing in some ways. Galle was born in 1537 and began business in 1557 at Antwerp where van Cleve had worked since about 1551. This makes plausible a date for this undated print in the late 1550s, when at least one other print of the 1545 scene, varying in particulars from Galle's work, was apparently produced because it includes the date 1558 on it (see figure 5, discussed later in this study). Given the generally faithful engraving practices of printmakers at Antwerp in van Cleve and Galle's time, there is no reason to suppose that Galle changed van Cleve's design significantly. That is why, in secondary literature about this print, scholars sometimes refer to it simply as van Cleve's work. The dating of the engraving remains an enigma. Different art historians, museums,



Figure 1: Philippe Galle, "Mons Testaceus," circa 1557. Engraving of drawing by Hendrick van Cleve. London, British Museum, No. 1950,0306.2.10.

Where is the Carnival here? What does this sunlit, vineyard- and church-sprinkled scene have to do with "putting away [or leaving behind, lifting off] fleshliness [or fleshly things, meat]"—that is, with *carne-levare*, the etymological root of the word Carnival? "Testaccio Mountain," a small, fifty-meter-high hill in the southwest corner of Rome near the Tiber, is shown here as the site of a brutal food game.<sup>4</sup> The two pikemen in the center, like those striding with sword and shield toward a bounding bull on the right, are on the hunt for a last meaty meal before Lent. Bulls rush down the steep incline on the right to be slain by swordsmen. Two bulls are attached to carts for reasons later to be explained. Men and women enjoying some special status observe the scene from two pavilions while horsemen stationed between the pavilions may be waiting their turn to take part in the action. Pleasure-seekers in the left and right foreground drink wine from barrels and sit to eat beneath tents or mount an elevated structure at left to sit at ease with friends. Also significant in both compositional and symbolic terms is the man riding a dromedary in the very center of the arena; the designer of the print, Hendrick van Cleve, who is said to have visited Rome in the 1540s, has given this apparently inappropriate presence extra prominence by placing a rearing horse and rider before it.<sup>5</sup>

The presence of a camel in the midst of a cattle-slaughtering contest is just barely believable because the popes, like some other medieval monarchs, received exotic animals from time to time as gifts, and some popes seem to have maintained menageries.<sup>6</sup> But its central placement in Philippe Galle's engraving of van Cleve's drawing is not believable. It is there because the print includes several other themes besides that of the pursuit of choice meat—the bullocks—for one last time before Lent. The Carnival day is a vacation day. Here are casual throngs who eat and

and auction houses have dated it from the 1550s to the 1580s.

What is certain is that Galle issued this print at some time as one of a set of thirty-eight engravings, all attributed to van Cleve's designs, titled *Ruinarum varii prospectus Ruriumque aliquot Delineationes*. The significance of this inclusion of the Testaccio print in this larger and possibly later-published series is discussed in the section titled "The Popes' Reformed Carnival" of this article.

6. A number of popes are recorded as having menageries, especially during the Avignon residence of popes (1308–78). Pope John XXII (1316–34) kept not only a camel but also a bear, a lion, stags, and a wildcat. See David Rollason, *The Power of Place: Rulers and Their Palaces, Landscapes, Cities, and Holy Places* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 108.

7. The Carnival-game text together with the other four festivities is printed in Louis Duchesne and Paul Fabre, *Liber censuum de l'église romaine* (Paris: Albert Fontemoing, 1910), 2:171–73. This edition supplies an "i" within a parenthesis to give *carnelevar* in the title of the Carnival-game manuscript a passive infinitive form. For a useful commentary on the five late-winter festivities and a complete translation of them into Italian, see Tomasso di Carpegna Falconieri, "Gioco e liturgia nella Roma medioevale: Dal liber polipticus del canonico Benedetto," *Ludica* 3 (1997): 51–64. This is Benedict's text, which is parsed phrase by phrase in the following paragraphs of my text, as well as recalled in the second section of this study:

"De ludo carnelevar(i). In dominica

drink and saunter about. And on such a pleasurable occasion it is well also to have spectacles that amaze the eye. The camel and rearing horseman are used by the engraver to symbolize the role of spectacle in this Roman festivity. That theme of exhibition and spectacle is also implied by the presence of two pavilions in the foreground, a presence that raises other questions.

Some officials, some organizing groups, must have been in charge of all this. Who collected together and led the bulls up to the tents shown in Galle's engraving on top of the hill? Who collected the carcasses? Who got the food after the slaughter and in what proportions? Does the camel belong to the popes or to one of the so-called barons who had over the preceding two centuries come to dominate Roman secular affairs? Who are the people in the pavilions, and why are there two pavilions, not one? All of these questions of organization and disposition have political as well as logistic, economic, and social-status dimensions. Most of them cannot be answered with precision; most have not even been raised in the extensive scholarship about Rome's Carnival and the Testaccio game. But reasonable conjectures about some of the questions can be made if we shift attention backward to a sprinkling of sources datable before the 1540s, the probable time when van Cleve designed this scene, back to the 1140s, the probable decade during which a canon of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome wrote a document that includes a paragraph titled "About the Carnival Game" (*De ludo Carnelevar*).

Canon Benedict was asked by a cardinal close to the then pope, Innocent II, to compile a list of festive days at which the pope was honored or officiated in person. This list included, in addition to the liturgical ceremonies celebrated throughout the year, descriptions of five late-winter festivities, one of them being the Carnival-game paragraph, which is very brief, the equivalent of only a dozen octavo-sized lines in length.<sup>7</sup> These dozen lines are, so far as we know at present, the earliest authenticated account of any group-ritual activity taking place at Carnival time anywhere in western Europe.<sup>8</sup>

After the midday meal on the "Sunday of putting away fleshly things" (*in dominica dimissionis carniū*), Rome's militia of cavalry and foot soldiers comes forth, wrote Benedict, and they drink with each other (*bibunt inter se*). Then the foot soldiers go to the Testaccio, where they await the other ritual participants, he continued, always using the present tense to indicate that he claimed to describe a repeated procedure, not a single past occurrence. Meanwhile the prefect, an officer appointed by the pope who supervised the city's civic business, went with the cavalymen to fetch the pope at the Lateran, escorting him to the Testaccio. There they "do a game with the pope looking on" (*faciunt ludum in conspectu pontificis*).

Why is the pope present at this gathering on the eve of Lent? According to Benedict, it was "so that no quarrel might arise between them" (*ut nulla lis inter eos oriatur*). Between whom? Benedict did not say whether it might be between the two groups of the militia, foot soldiers and cavalymen, or between factions in the two groups, or between disruptive fellows scattered among them all. What is implied by Benedict's wording, however, is that quarrels will not arise between them because the pope is there. His sovereign presence, given its spiritual authority, would keep peace among them.

The *ludus* (game or play) that the pope and soldiers witness is extraordinary because of its historical echo. It involves a threefold killing of animals, such as was performed in ancient pagan

dimissionis carniū surgunt equites et pedites post prandium, bibunt inter se. Postea pedites depositis scutis eunt Testacium; prefectus cum equitibus vadit Lateranum. Domnus papa descendit de palatio et equitat cum prefecto et equitibus usque Testacium, ut sicut ibi habuit civitas principium, sic ibi in illo die delectatio nostris corporis habeat finem. Faciunt ludum in conspectu pontificis, ut nulla lis inter eos oriatur. Occidunt ursum, occiditur diabolus, id est temptator nostre carnis. Occiduntur juvenci, occiditur supebia nostre delectacionis. Occiditur gallus, occiditur luxuria lumborum nostrorum, ut deinceps caste et sobrie vivamus in agone anime, ut ad Pascha mereamur digne corpus Domini suscipere.”

8. Many Venetian writers about that city’s Carnival cite a fourteenth-century document claiming that Venice’s Carnival began in 1094 as a consequence of a war with the Patriarch of Aquileia. But recent scholarship discounts this story. Although Venice’s Carnival, like Rome’s, lapsed in the nineteenth century, it was reborn, unlike Rome’s, in the twentieth century. It is certainly possible that Venice’s Carnival began in the eleventh century, but trustworthy documentation is lacking. Rome’s Carnival perhaps began even earlier for reasons briefly mentioned in this article, but no firm documentation for it has emerged before that of Canon Benedict.

9. “Ludus” in both medieval and modern times was used sometimes to mean a game and sometimes to mean a play, drama, or representation. Context usually makes it possible to know which aspect is meant. Thinking about this ludus as a moralizing

Rome, although never in connection with the springtime celebration of the Roman Lupercalia, a festivity sometimes seen as an ancestor of Carnival. In the *suovetaurilia* performed in pre-Christian times, a male pig or boar, a ram, and a bull were sacrificed as parts of a purification ritual. In this Christian case taking place many centuries after the abolition of pagan sacrifice, a bear, some bullocks, and a rooster are the animals “killed” (*occidunt*), not sacrificed (*sacrificiunt*). Benedict assigned negative and vicious, not sacredly purifying, meanings to each: With the bear, the “devil, temptor of our flesh,” is killed; with the bullocks the “prideful delight that we take,” presumably in carnivorous eating (*superbia nostre delectacionis*); with the rooster or cock, the “lustfulness of our loins.” The description ends with admonishment and reassurance. If we kill our vicious tendencies analogously to the way deadly blows are dealt in this so-called ludus, we will carry on our lives “purely and soberly in spiritual struggle” (*caste et sobrie vivamus in agone anime*) and will thus merit receiving the body of our Lord during Easter services.

If such a series of executions did take place, is it any wonder that Benedict painted over this strikingly bloody way of putting away fleshliness with a moralizing patina? No ludus as a “game” like that engraved by Galle, apparently in the 1550s, is given any verbal space.<sup>9</sup> But although Benedict wrote about this ludus only as a morality play, some of his words hint at something else, and the context of his words confirms that something.

Note first some curiosities in the grammar. The words for bear and cock are singular, but the word for bullocks (that is, young steers, *juvenci*) is plural. The verb forms that Benedict used are also different for the three slaughters. “They kill a bear”: *Occidunt* is a plural form in the present tense. Is that because this fearsome beast always puts up a fight that demands plural executioners, or is it because, as happened across western Europe in more recent times, the words “they kill a bear” masked already a bear-baiting sport? “A cock is killed.” The verb form shifts from active to passive tense, leaving to the imagination—or to matter-of-fact acquaintance with cockfighting customs among Benedict’s readers—about how the cock died. This same passive rather than active tense is used for the *juvenci*. “The bullocks are killed” (*occiduntur juvenci*)—killed how? By whom? Could it have been that they were already pursued and cut down in rivalrous sport like those seen in the Testaccio game in Galle’s engraving four hundred years later?

Moralizing rhetoric replaces whatever festive tonalities the slaughters had at which a pope was present. It also pulls attention away from political overtones that can be at least suspected, although not confirmed, when one considers the context of Benedict’s words. Pope Innocent II spent most of his papacy (1130–43) in exile from Rome and the Vatican area. The anti-popes, Anacletus II and Victor IV, held the Vatican and St. Peter’s Cathedral there from 1130 to 1138, so that Innocent could not officiate in the Western Christian church’s most holy site, but remained in the south of the city at the Lateran cathedral and palace, when not forced entirely out of the city by raging noble factions and their Norman and German allies. After Innocent died in September 1143 the very cardinal who had requested Benedict’s compilation was elected pope, taking the name Celestine II, only to die within a year. Meanwhile, however, a fraction of the cavalrymen group that, according to Benedict’s grammar, regularly conducted the pope to the Testaccio, mobilized artisans and other Roman citizens to remove from power the prefect, the pope’s chief civil officer. They proceeded to institute a new governing body that they called, not surprisingly,

depiction does not, however, make it any easier to imagine the actual order in which these three executions would have been carried out. Benedict made reference to the most spectacular and presumably the most difficult of them first. A massively muscular bear, rearing up on its plantigrade hind feet to attack or defend itself usually astonishes its witnesses; it is threateningly wonderful even on nothing more than present-day television programs photographing scenes of bear habitat. To follow this killing with a series of bullock executions seems anticlimactic, and to end it all by cutting off the head of a chicken is ridiculous. Did the slaughters actually take place simultaneously or in a different order from the rhetorical order that Benedict described?

10. How and exactly when the papally appointed prefect was removed is not clear. I follow the recent richly contextualized history of the Roman commune revolution by Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur, *L'autre Rome: Une histoire des Romains à l'époque des communes (XII<sup>e</sup>-XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris: Tallandier, 2010).

11. It also surged through French and Flemish towns and cities as is emphasized in the classic account of this European-wide movement by Charles Petit-Dutaillis, *Les communes françaises* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1947). The factionalism of the communes in Italian towns, and above all in Rome, was complicated by the German emperors' sporadic invasions. See Ludovico Gatto, *Storia di Roma nel Medioevo* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1999); and Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur, *Cavalliers et citoyens: Guerre, conflits,*

the Senate, chief organ of the pre-Christian Roman Republic, and moved civic administration from areas under the pope's aegis at or near his Lateran palace to the old center of the Republic, the Campidoglio or Capitoline hill.

The exact date of the insurrection sometime in 1143 or perhaps in early 1144 is still debated.<sup>10</sup> Its import and inspiration, however, are clear: it was part of a commune movement surging through Italian towns and cities during the twelfth century.<sup>11</sup> Although Benedict wrote this account in language asserting the timeless customary character of the Carnival ludus, it is probable that he composed his list of ceremonies and festivities at a very uncustomary moment between 1138 and 1143, the period after Innocent II returned from exile and tried to reorder affairs in the city, but a period also when civic discontent was growing in such proportions that a fundamental disruption occurred in 1143 or 1144.

"The pope leaves his palace and rides with the prefect and the cavalry to the Testaccio," while the foot soldiers arrive there separately. Cavalrymen in twelfth-century Rome were the city's local aristocrats, with wealth enough to purchase a large warhorse and with time enough to train themselves and their horses in regular cavalry maneuvers and military engagements. Nothing could be more normal than for the pope to identify his own prestige with some two hundred aristocratic families furnishing cavalrymen, because it was from these that the popes themselves had for centuries been selected. But before this familiar moment of social difference was enacted on Carnival-Sunday morning, men of modest means in the city, serving as unpaid foot soldiers, had engaged in the socially leveling custom of exchanging drinks with the cavalrymen. Whatever the character of verbal exchanges may have usually been at this point, it is certain that after 1140 these Carnival-Sunday conversations included much anti-papal talk and that the pope was informed about it. When the pope came to the Testaccio "so that no quarrel might arise" he did not come just to be seen as a person above politics, just to be understood as a moral counselor urging Lenten abstinence. He was there to hold down discontent, in customary sociopolitical alliance with aristocratic cohorts of his own kind.

Rome's commune revolution worked because an anti-papal contingent of noblemen developed wide support among both craftsmen and also professionals like lawyers and notaries. By the end of the fourteenth or early fifteenth century, each of thirteen *riioni* or neighborhoods had acquired the right to bring a bull and an uncertain number of "players" (*jocatori*) in the bull-chasing game to the Testaccio in what seems to have become a formal parade. As will be shown in the section titled "Rome's Communal Carnival" of this study, the Testaccio game, far from serving as one of the popes' ceremonial showpieces, developed new aspects by the 1360s that indicate that it had become the commune's chief festivity.

By the mid-twelfth century, the pope's power was no longer primarily derived from alliance with local social factions and their armed forces. As a consequence of the so-called Gregorian Revolution in the eleventh century, the papacy began creating an effective international bureaucracy, which invented techniques of monetary exchange and instrumentalized ideological fervency to support an increasingly legalistic version of its rights and powers. The papacy commanded funds, lawyers, and ideology, but it did not command armies. Its main power to command continued to lie in symbolic representations and in a near monopoly of the means to broadcast those representations. Until the development of printing, communicative power

*et société dans l'Italie communale* (Paris: Presses de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences sociales, 2003). Nonetheless, the Roman commune flourished for over two hundred years before foundering in the late fourteenth century. This is the main theme of Maire Vigueur's lengthy synthesis, *L'autre Rome*.

12. My emphasis on the time-specific political discussion of Benedict's report is not shared by most scholars. Moreover, some believe (like Anna Esposito, "Der römische Karneval im Mittelalter und Renaissance," in *Fastnacht/Karneval im europäischen Vergleich*, ed. Michael Matheus [Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1999], 11–30) that Benedict's statements do not at all reflect Carnival practices going on in his lifetime but instead apply to a period before the papal and clerical reforms led by Pope Gregory VII (1073–85).

depended mostly on learned Latin disquisitions on the one hand and on the rhetorical skills of priests and monks on the other, orating from pulpits week in and week out.

Canon Benedict's dutiful report tells us how clerical ideologists would have liked the days of "putting away fleshliness" to be customarily understood. Its political context allows us to suspect some non-customary overtones to its admonitions. But it tells us nothing about how a ludus involving a three-part killing of animals was actually staged. It offers no insight into the ambiance of the staging—such things as drinking and eating usages or "plays" of other kinds like dicing and betting and parades and races and swordplay—that may well have been going on during these same days in an increasingly prosperous city full of growing droves of pious but also sight-seeking visitors. Who else was at the Testaccio besides the militias? Was there even a camel as well as rooster, bear, and bullocks?

Such are some of the social and operational conundrums as well as the probable politics dimly glimpsed but tellingly avoided in Benedict's report.<sup>12</sup> Is there another way of uncovering what is not said and not even implied by the words' political context but is nonetheless implicated in the narration? Consider for example the symbolic resonances in Benedict's time of the three animals allegedly executed at the Testaccio. Why were bear, cock, and bullocks chosen there to exemplify the significance of Lenten preparation for Christian believers?

### The Wild Outside the Tame

Even if Benedict's report had been less clerically conceived, it would not have thrown light on the reasons for choosing the three particular beasts apparently killed in a ritual way on this Carnival Sunday. To explain their choice requires consideration of a different level of meaning, that of conventionalized symbolic associations between physical and nonphysical reality. Unlike persons living since the seventeenth century in a gathering cultural atmosphere that separates physical from nonphysical, natural from preternatural phenomena, medieval Christians understood these two realms as interspersed, nowhere separated by sharp lines. The miraculous and the ordinary occurred side by side, allowing for no permanently drawn sensory or theoretical differentia.

The avoidance of clearly drawn perceptual and conceptual lines separating natural from supernatural phenomena lent special force to ideological pronouncements emitted by authorities in Christianity's western European capital. But of course a clerical and theological monopoly of symbolic codes and conventions was not possible either in Benedict's time or before and afterward. Daily habits and images flowing from the persistence of pre-Christian languages, gestures, and occupations constantly refurbished what the church denounced as superstitions. However assiduously Christian thinkers and preachers sought to cover and co-opt pagan persistence in accordance with papal and conciliar fiat, their attempts were always frustrated and their admonishments blunted by the inertia of habitual behavior.

How do these general points affect the particular question of why bear, cock, and bullocks had been chosen for execution when Benedict wrote about the Testaccio "game"? The selection was without doubt endorsed at that time by the papal party, for it is the pope in Benedict's report who rides with the chief men of the city to take an honored place somewhere near that

13. In this section I rely largely on the work of Michel Pastoureau, which concerns the animal symbolism in bestiaries. Michel Pastoureau, *The Bear: History of a Fallen King* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011) (originally published in French in 2007); and Michel Pastoureau, *Bestiaires du Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 2011).

14. Imitations of animals in masking and costuming ways attracted the ire of early Christian apologists from Tertullian to Caesar of Arles and Pope Gelasius I. But after the fifth century, the denunciations became for some centuries little more than rote repetitions of earlier churchly pronouncements. Only after 1000 does evidence of popular enterprise in the imitation of animals arise in the array of environments listed in the text. Michael Camille devoted passing attention to all those heterogeneous spaces (Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992]). Jean Wirth explored only margins of manuscripts but did so, together with the five collaborators to his book, with superb exactitude and insight (Jean Wirth, ed., *Les marges à drolleries des manuscrits gothiques 1250–1350* [Geneva: Droz, 2008]).

15. Paul Aebischer cites these documents from Imola, Ravenna, Mantua, and Padua. Aebischer's essay investigates linguistic, not festive, meanings of the Latin terms used for Carnival in Italian medieval cartularies and cites the Carnival-hen usage only in passing. Paul Aebischer, "Les dénominations du Carnaval d'après les chartes italiennes du Moyen Age,"

small hill. But since Benedict used the present tense throughout his description to indicate the occasion's customary quality, it is possible that selection of these animals was made long before he wrote and was made by other festive organizers than the papal party. We cannot therefore be certain that the animals' qualities emphasized by Benedict were those that led to their original selection or their continued use. There is therefore all the more reason to inquire about their commonly accepted symbolic qualities, which as one might guess stretch far beyond those emphasized by Benedict with a view to Lent.

Animal behavior and the animal world have always fascinated human observers, and talking about them as well as cataloging their peculiarities have been given honored literary and encyclopedic status in the West ever since Aesop and Aristotle. Animal tales and lore became parts of new compendia from the ninth century and led to a spate of twelfth- and thirteenth-century manuscripts called "bestiaries" by modern scholars. The symbolic materials cited in the following paragraphs come largely from recent study of these entertaining, often illustrated miscellanies of animal lore.<sup>13</sup> Bestiary descriptions are of course mere scattered signs of the richer manifolds in people's imaginations. From the eleventh century onward, play by festive maskers with the characteristics of animals can be documented. Animal imitations were irresistible, because they joined in varying proportions something queer, something dreadful, and something amazing to humanly analogous expressiveness. Their contorted limbs protruded from the undersides of cathedral choir seats and jutted from corbels and church-column capitals, wove themselves into tapestries, and decorated the sides and base of biblical texts in books of devotion.<sup>14</sup> Their fearful yet attractive heterogeneity, as these animal shapes wormed their way into the side aisles of orthodoxy, has an affinity with what was happening to Carnival itself as an occasion developing both more attractive and more questionable qualities.

*Carnem-levare*, as a phrase connoting temporary termination of meat consumption, had no doubt been regarded with some recalcitrance by lukewarm Christians from the very beginning of Lenten practice in early Christian centuries. But by the twelfth century, the recalcitrance had turned into conduct that was nothing less than an inversion of asceticism. Lent's restrictions could now be faced, it seems, only by first augmenting the consumption of meat. Records of four towns in central and northern Italy include customary payments dated between 1138 and 1180 as "a hen at Carnalevari," "a hen in Carnevale," and so on. At least in these parts of Italy the date called Carnival signified gearing up for customary feasting as a prelude to Lenten fasting.<sup>15</sup> How likely is it that this was also the case a little further south at Rome? The plural form of bullocks (*juvenci*) in Benedict's account of the 1140s could then be said to indicate that feasting usages at Carnival time had reached Roman quarters well before that date and were being expressed in various ways alongside the anti-feasting ritual described by Benedict.

Consider first, however, before turning to the question of the bullocks, the symbolic associations of the cock, associations indicating the wide-ranging and conflicting fields of semantic meaning that animals had for medieval Christians. The cock, wrote Benedict, symbolizes *luxuria*, the "lust" of "our loins." Indeed, the cock, sovereign of the barnyard, was said to crow after copulating with one of the hens. His strutting promiscuity had been vilified by Christian writers from the fifth century onward. This trait was, however, coupled with a reputation for combative bravery that had made cockfight competitions at Carnival a commonplace in London and no doubt other parts of Europe by Benedict's time.<sup>16</sup> If there were amateurs of such competitions among the

in *Mélanges de philologie romane offerts à M. Karl Michaelsson* (Gothenburg: Bergendahls, 1952), 4–6.

16. William Fitzstephen in his *Vita Sancti Thomae* (circa 1173) described these cockfights during his own boyhood in London, which must have been in the 1130s or 1140s: “Each year upon the day called Carnival ... boys from the schools bring fighting-cocks to their master and the whole forenoon is given up to boyish sport, for they have a holiday in the schools that they may watch their cocks do battle.” I quote here the translation from F. M. Stenton, *Norman London, An Essay with a Translation of William Fitz Stephen’s Description and a Map of London under Henry II* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1934), 30; Stenton’s small book comments on this and other festive features of London’s Carnival and also Lenten seasons recounted by Fitzstephen. The Latin text reads thus: “Praeterea quotannis die quae dicitur Carnilevaria, ut a ludis puerorum Londinae incipiamus (omnes enim pueri fuimus), scholarum singuli pueri suos apportant magistro suo gallos gallinaceos pugnaces, et totum illud antemeridianum datur ludo puerorum vacantium spectare in scholis suorum pugnas gallorum.” The Latin version is from James Craigie Robertson, *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury* (London: Longman, 1877), 9.

17. *Bobacterius* is derived from the Latin adjective *boarius*, “bovine,” which in turn comes from the noun *bos*, “bovine animal.” Maire Vigueur treats the rising power of the *bovattieri* in the commune movement in

militias assembled before the pope, denouncing a rooster as a symbol of lust must have seemed a one-sided and unwelcome complaint.

Beef eating was fine eating; the bullocks symbolized not only sinful alimentary enjoyment but also wealth, the possession of animals occupying the pinnacle of the Roman food chain. (The Latin word for money was *pecunia*, from *pecus*, “cattle herd.”) The richest men in twelfth-century Rome belonged to the *ars bobacteriorum*, the company or guild of cattlemen, colloquially referred to as “*bovattieri*,” and these *bovattieri* often possessed large estates in the Roman hinterland. They were, however, not nobles like the men serving as cavalrymen (*milites*). Like members of the big-business guild (*mercatores*) and men in a variety of professional occupations, the *bovattieri* joined in large part the artisanal guilds in supporting the soon-founded commune.<sup>17</sup> As far as we can tell, given the absence of detailed commune records, most senators, councilors, and judges who eventually served the commune came from this mixture of cattlemen, merchants, and professionals.<sup>18</sup> Thus the presence of a considerable number of bullocks-for-slaughter assembled at the Testaccio carried not only socioeconomic but also some popular-appealing, appetizing overtones for those attending Benedict’s *ludus*, overtones scarcely reducible to the cleric’s moral point of view.

Like those of the cock and young bulls, the bear’s symbolism encompassed differently weighted dimensions for clergy and laity. For the laity in most parts of Europe the man-sized brown bear had for centuries been a menacing reality in the thick forests just outside villages and towns. In the case of twelfth-century Rome, such forests had long since been brought under surveillance and no reports of nearby bear populations are reported by historians of that area. But where then did the players at the Testaccio get such an animal year after year if, as Benedict asserted, its execution was part of an annual ritual?

However the Romans may have acquired them, this large beast’s physical reality came adorned with political status. He was seen as the king of the animals from early medieval times to the twelfth or thirteenth century. But this long period of imaginary rulership was also a period of gathering misfortune. By 1200, estimates Michel Pastoureau in his significantly titled book *The Bear: History of a Fallen King*, the bear’s throne was being taken over by a longtime symbolic rival, the lion.<sup>19</sup>

This usurpation had two main causes. The first was geophysical. The bear’s hulking form was known to be in the woods, not far away. The lion in western Europe, aside from a few prestigious cases in monarchical menageries, existed almost only in mental images given perceptible form in churchly supervised or royally financed sculptures and manuscript illuminations. These images derived largely from passages in the Bible and its commentaries about them by a long line of Christian writers, as well as from some passages in pre-Christian books preserved and cited in medieval times. The bear, on the other hand, was an animal lurking in the woods, the undisputed master of ever-present forests. Its presence in people’s mental vocabulary was thus primarily derived from physical realities that provoked stories and myths attached to local places, some of which were also magnified in literary forms. Pastoureau notes how the killing of a bear in face-to-face combat is reported in varied sagas and chronicles, as a heroic feat that marked a man for royal dominance.<sup>20</sup> The lion’s presence in European mentalities was built not from such local and physical elements but from generalized literary and iconographic representations.

*L'autre Rome*. For his assessment of the group's political sentiments, see *L'autre Rome*, 119.

18. Wholesale looting followed the invasion of Rome by Emperor Charles V's troops in 1527. The archives of city government on the Capitol were burned. Papal records stored in the Vatican, where the commander of the emperor's troops took up residence, were not burned. The consequence has been an almost unavoidably distorted understanding of the city's communal history before 1527. Some notarial records that were in private hands survived and have recently received historiographical attention. The first chapter of Maire Vigueur's *L'autre Rome* summarizes the 1527 disaster and its consequences for the papacy-oriented manner in which the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries in Rome have been traditionally interpreted.

19. Pastoureau traces this gradual takeover during the years 1000–1250. He also writes trenchantly that the bear's majesty terminated at the beginning of the thirteenth century. See Pastoureau, *The Bear*, 135–55, 171. However one estimates the evidence that Pastoureau educes for the terms and dating of this symbolic change, the reader of his book will be fascinated by the marvelously motley array of iconography included in this book to illustrate this theme, iconography covering best the period 1100–1500.

20. *Ibid.*, 38–42.

21. See *ibid.*, 48, for this linguistic point; I have added to his list of etymons the old Anglo-Saxon *bera-*, from whence English "bear" derives. Pastoureau points to the

The difference between those two modes of presence was particularly strong in northern Europe. Places and people in Germanic areas echoed the bear's prowess and high status in the bear etymons of their name: *ber-*, *bera-*, *bar-*, *born-*, *bjorn-*, etc. The acid denouncer of animal images in monastic churches, the Cisterians' cherished twelfth-century leader, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, bore the name of this animal king in the root of his name.<sup>21</sup> "How it would delight me," writes a Tegernsee monk to his abbot in a poem from the first decade of the eleventh century, to "make masks with roguish hands" in the guise of "wolf or bear or ... fox." Such sentiments seem to prove the futility of the injunction to his clerics made by Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims centuries earlier: no cleric, he had commanded in a capitulary of 852, shall allow "games [*joca*] with a bear or with acrobats" to be performed in clerical presence.<sup>22</sup> If clerics were already witnessing such performances in the 850s, it may well be that the centuries-long practice had begun of training bears to perform here and there for the amusement of casual crowds. "Do not concern yourself with jumping bears," wrote Alcuin to a young teacher in Charlemagne's palace school at Aachen (circa 801).<sup>23</sup> In northerly regions of Europe, the bear was such a physical actuality that it apparently led to captures for entertaining purposes as well as engendering all kinds of animal tales, masking games, and allusions to the bear's power and prowess.

Locally anchored awareness of the bear's power over things in the forested realm where he roamed was both a superiority and a liability. While his regally absolute power seemed to have undivided meaning when people imagined the bear's actions in his own wild empire, this same power could not avoid engendering divided feelings when regarded from the standpoint of tamed and ordered human precincts. He might bring in abundance; one might be able to take over and use some of his power (there were some stories of bears who brought fertility to barren women). But he also brought in danger (there were more stories about bears who carried off women and children to kill them or keep them in his lair). He might become prey to groups of hunters or be captured and tormented in bear-baiting sport or be made to perform ridiculous antics for the public. The lion, too remote in imagined habitat to stimulate such stories, retained a symbolic dimension that stayed nobly beyond such ignoble practices and physically beyond concerted action against him.<sup>24</sup>

The second cause of the lion's eventual displacement of the bear from kingship of the animals was jointly theological and physical. The bear, unlike the lion, has an unsettling resemblance to humans. Menaced or surprised in the wild, he rears upright on plantigrade paws and fixes large brown eyes on anything approaching him, just as an unwary human might do. There was also thought to be a particular sexual dimension to this resemblance. On the basis of a mistaken commentary by the ancient encyclopedist Pliny the Elder, bears were even thought by some learned men during medieval centuries to copulate face to face, as humans do. This supposed resemblance fed the tales just mentioned of bears seizing women to live with them in caves and of bear-human families raising half-wild offspring. All this was most disquieting to theologians. What strange force might be hidden behind this human semblance and wild sexuality? Were these tales not proof that nature-oriented religions in parts of northern Europe, long combatted by the church, were secretly sustained by some supernatural force? What force could it be, if not that of the arch-deceiver, the devil, master of all illusions, impelling men to abandon their spiritual nature for the attractions of the material world?

root of St. Bernard's name on  
page 49.

22. I translate in my text only a part of the also incomplete version of Poem 33 by Froumund of Tegernsee given in Max Manitius, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters: Zweiter Teil* (Munich: Beck, 1923), 524, inverting in translation the order of the Latin verses: "Si lupus aut ursus vel vellem fingere vulpem, Si larvas facerem furciferis manibus ... Undique currentes cum trepidis pedibus, Gauderet [sic] mihi qui propior visurus adesset, Ridiculus cunctos concuteret pueros." Hincmar's capitulary, addressed to clerics of his diocese, is published in Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus latinae* (repr.; Turnhout: Brepols, 1969), 125:776: "Nec turpia joca cum urso vel tornatricibus ante se facere permittat." Manitius publishes enough of Froumund's poem to show that the subject is a schoolmaster's enterprise in motivating cloister-school students to learn their lessons. That is, the subject is not a customary festivity with masking practices. But masking practices they are, nevertheless, creating a joyous uproar in the cloister school. Hincmar's text, which also alludes to other proto-Carnavalesque details, has elicited frequent comment. But the commentaries reach no convincing conclusions about the historical meaning and context of his injunctions.

23. Alcuin, "Alcuini Sive Albini Epistolae," in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae Karolini aevi*, ed. Ernst L. Dümmler (Berlin: Weidmann, 1895), 3:392.

24. In this paragraph as well as in the preceding and following ones, I often yield to anthropomorphic

The bear, then, is an embodiment of the devil. Indeed, as St. Augustine was recorded as saying in a sermon dated about 415, both the bear and the lion are figurations of the devil. In another part of the same sermon, labeled however as an "appendix" to it in the collection of St. Augustine's works cited by Pastoureau, this revered "doctor of the church" reiterated: "The bear represents the typical form of the devil; the bear is the devil" (*Ursus typum diaboli praefigurat; ursus est diabolus*).<sup>25</sup>

For St. Augustine the bear and the lion were equally malevolent figures of evil. This theologian after all lived in North Africa where both bears and lions roamed the wilderness. But this was not the case in Europe. Given the lion's physical absence, it is not surprising that the symbolic paths of the lion and the bear began to diverge in medieval Europe. The overly present and threatening bear became ever more clearly a self-evident image of the devil, a sort of king in the demonic underworld. Monarchy over animals in the everyday world was meanwhile reassigned to the other traditional figure of power, the remotely majestic lion. The notion of an innately sinful nature inhabiting the bear developed from century to century in more and more ways, moving from the theological utterances of influential commentators like Rhabanus Maurus (d. 856) to less well-known authorities associating the bear with capital sins, from narratives of dreams in which the bear-as-devil frightens the dreamer to a diverse range of iconographic material.<sup>26</sup>

In the light of Pastoureau's material, it seems clear that the association between the bear and the devil had become commonplace enough in Benedict's time so that he could refer to it as a self-evident epithet. Its ready acceptance depended on the theological affirmation mentioned earlier, that no unwavering line could or should be drawn contrasting natural with supernatural truths. The theological *is* the physical. When the pope in the Carnival ritual described by Benedict presides over execution of a bear, "this temptor of our flesh," he accomplishes a political task essential to his office. He reveals no less than the ecclesiastical reason for the entire *ludus carnelevari* by making the act of execution a metaphor for the supremacy of spiritual power over the might of the devil to encourage fleshly inclinations.... And such devilish might, did it perhaps also stand before the pope in the form of the city's army? Would this army with its temporal might soon try again to batter the walls of the Holy See, the papal stronghold of God's power on earth, as princely forces had so recently done to this very Pope Innocent II, sending him into prolonged exile?

If this was a schema playing in the back of clerics' heads as they watched the three-part slaughter initiated with the execution of a theologically endorsed image of the devil, if this game with all its animalistic intensities was indeed carried on in this fashion for years before and after Benedict's writing, then it must be concluded that any political intentions included in Benedict's moralizing construction were a failure. The successful commune revolt meant that the Testaccio games would be organized by city authorities, not the papacy. They would be in charge of deciding what animals would be executed and whether bears would be among them. In fact, there is no mention of bears ever again at the Testaccio after their appearance in Benedict's document.

By investigating in this second section some of the symbolic properties of the three kinds of animal executed at the Testaccio, the contexts of what was taking place there, outlined in the first section, have widened. A first such widening is obvious: part of the consciousness of everyone

and patriarchal habits by calling either or both lion and bear "he" or "him," not "it." It is an instance perhaps of the dimension of the bear discussed in the text's following paragraph. It may be noted in passing that in *The Bear*, Pastoureau alludes to "bear massacres" in Charlemagne's time without particular examples of them and directs attention only to two secondary sources on more general religious topics. With respect to bear captures for entertainment in these early centuries, Pastoureau offers only a generalizing summary without source reference. See Pastoureau, *The Bear*, 90–91, 255n2.

25. Pastoureau attributes great influence to this formulation (*The Bear*, 281n25). He cites St. Augustine's words about the image of the devil in both bear and lion (*The Bear*, 281n20): "In istis duabus bestiis idem diabolus figuratus est."

26. *Ibid.*, 121–28, 132–34.

27. By sometime in the twelfth century, a bear could be depicted face to face with a bare-headed and bare-legged peasant or artisan in a short tunic: such is the case in a mosaic at Casale Monferrato in northern Italy, in the cathedral of Sant' Evasio. Piercarlo Grimaldi, reproducing the scene in a drawing, suggests that the mosaic must record some use of the bear to do a dance. See Piercarlo Grimaldi, "Bestie, santi, divinità," in *Bestie, santi, divinità: Maschere animali dall' Europa tradizionale*, ed. Piercarlo Grimaldi (Turin: Museo nazionale della montagna, 2003), 11–18.

28. Bruno Brunelli cites texts from Latin and Italian chronicles

at the occasion was the difference in dwelling space of cock and bullocks compared to that of the bear. Cock and bullocks were domesticated parts of people's everyday worlds. But the bear, whether chained and led to the slaughter, as seems to have been the case here, or chained, starved, and beaten into standing on hind legs to perform a clumsy dance, was an alien being in the city.<sup>27</sup> This animal more easily acquired its no less supernatural than locally physical reputation because it was a being that exerted its power beyond civilization in areas precariously traveled and only fragmentarily understood.

The second widening of contexts, probably less conscious in people as they watched what went on at the Testaccio but no less universally shared than the dualism of wild and tame, was the semantic indication that all three kinds of animal evoked not only multiple strands of meaning but also a number of contradictory qualities. But so far as a present-day inquirer can tell, these multiple strands and their frequent contradictions were not discussed and brought polemically to bear on their object. As presented to the reader by Pastoureau, each animal seems to float in a slowly evolving viscous fluid of anomalous and strange inheritances. Christian and non-Christian, anecdotal and theological, highly abstract and intensely sensory, the congeries of meanings seem to have enriched every local encounter in a cacophony of linguistic habits, iconic clichés, and, not least of all, both festive and everyday occasions where, like Froumund the monk in Bavarian Tegernsee, one could mask for a moment as bear or wolf or fox and cavort about, and then go back to a monk's daily routines.

Although every locality and every Carnival occasion in it had its special accents, there was a shared dimension of festive forms alongside earlier simple food usages that had emerged by the twelfth century. This cultural community was as wide as Europe; and one of its edges was exploration of the wild in the tame.

### The Wild in the Tame

The bear as king of animals personified the threats in forested hills and mountains. But as such a sovereign, he ruled territory filled with resources indispensable to townspeople, wood for stoves, fodder for domestic animals, exotic plants for their medicinal qualities, and game for larders. The bear personified abundance as well as danger. And so he led the imagination sympathetically to hybrid beings, not only demonic in character but also humanoid, to something indeed like a savage cousin: the wildman.

The wildman as a figure in Carnival and in other festivities with occasional carnivalesque features had two major medieval forms, as a giant and as a devilish prankster. At Padua in 1208 at Pentecost, for example, a "game was performed with a wildman (*homo selvaticus*)" and a few years later in 1224 a "game (*ludus*)" was played again at Padua in the same suburban meadow "with giants (*cum gigantibus*)."<sup>28</sup> Whether or not the modern editor of these Latin chronicles is correct in assuming that these giants of 1224 were attired like the wildmen of 1208, it is certain that the wildman's attributed might, a trait connecting the figure indirectly to the bear, has often led manuscript illustrators and finally also Carnival organizers at Nuremberg to portray him as a giant.

written at the time in which the events of 1208 and 1224 are mentioned. But no descriptions of the costuming or behavior of wildman or giant are included in the chronicles according to Brunelli. See Bruno Brunelli, *I teatri di Padova dalle origini alla fine del secolo XIX* (Padua: A. Drahi, 1921), 10–11.

29. Some eighty manuscripts with paintings of Nuremberg Carnival paraders are extant, supposedly recording events from 1449 to 1539. While imitating each other's selection of parades, they vary in details. No manuscript can be surely dated from earlier than the 1550s. The best guide to these manuscripts remains Hans Ulrich Roller, *Der Nürnberger Schembartlauf: Studien zum Fest- und Maskenwesen des späten Mittelalters* (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 1965). For recent reassessment of Roller's work and some of the Schembart manuscripts, see Samuel Kinser, "Presentation and Representation: Carnival at Nuremberg, 1450–1550," *Representations* 13 (1986): 1–41; and Samuel Kinser, "Locality, Spectacle, State Politics: Comparative Study of Carnival Traditions in Renaissance Nuremberg and Modern Trinidad," in *Public Performance: Studies in the Carnivalesque and Ritualesque*, ed. Jack Santino (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2017), 16–48.

30. For a reproduction of this giant woman from one of the Schembart manuscripts, see Samuel Kinser, "Why Is Carnival So Wild?" in *Carnival and the Carnivalesque: The Fool, the Reformer, the Wildman, and Others in Early Modern Theatre*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler and Wim N.



Figure 2: Anonymous, Wildman in Schembart Parade in Nuremberg, ms. dated circa 1655 depicting parade figure in 1518. Painting. Facsimile reproduction of this ms. in Karl Drescher, *Das Nürnbergsche Schonbarbuch* (Weimar: Gesellschaft der Bibliophilen, 1908), 207.

The giant shown here (fig. 2) as a wildman in a Carnival parade is a man-handling thief, having uprooted a tree with a peasant clinging to its branches, presumably with the intention of carrying him to his lair for dire purposes.<sup>29</sup> The male giant had an even more vicious mate, apparently paraded in the Nuremberg Carnival of 1518, an outsized wildwoman cradling a kidnapped child on one arm and clutching the doll-sized mother in her other hand.<sup>30</sup>

The behavior sometimes accompanying such frightening depictions had long been denounced by city authorities. The mayor and council of Nuremberg decreed in 1469 that "no one, man or woman ... shall reverse their clothing ... or disguise their visage." And further: "So no one, neither the wildmen nor others, shall run after people to [have them] give money, sizing them up, or using force...." Worst of all, the ordinance emphasized, "in the last Carnival some people in skits and rhymes used light-headed, licentious, immodest, and impolite words and gestures." Anyone behaving in this "undisciplined" and "impolite" manner was to be fined the large sum of three gulden.<sup>31</sup> Similar ordinances multiplied in towns across Germany in the later fifteenth century. Ordinances by such local bodies were signs of the times, which were something like a golden age for civic self-government. Towns burgeoning with commerce found themselves relatively free from interference in their local affairs by princes, by bishops, and even by the emperor, the only superior to which, for example, the "free city of Nuremberg" acknowledged legal allegiance.

As in Rome, Florence, Antwerp, London, or Rouen, artisanal groups in Nuremberg had some legally ordained political power in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries along with merchants

M. Hüsken (Amsterdam: Rodopi,  
1999), 65.

31. Joseph Baader, *Nürnberger  
Polizeiordnungen aus dem  
dreizehnten bis zum fünfzehnten  
Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Literar-  
ischer Verein, 1861), 92–93.

and professional classes. But, as was also the case in other European communes, real political power in Nuremberg remained strongly oligarchic, concentrated in the hands of merchant dynasties who in turn found ways to establish connections with older noble families living in or near the cities. On Carnival day in Nuremberg, the parade in the early fifteenth century began with a dance by the butchers' guild. Within a few years, however, the butchers' guild's festive appearance with its collective dance was displaced by a more individualistic parade of rich young patricians who compacted with the butchers to lead them in to the large central square—and in effect to steal the show with their long pikes and a green bouquet with a small gunpowder charge concealed in it to emit flashes and pops.

These rich youths initiated the ever more spectacular "Schembartlauf" or "Schempartlauf." The word's suffix, *lauf*, means a "run"; the preceding elements of the noun are less clear. *Schem-* seems to be related to *Scheme*, shadow or phantom; *-bart* or *-part*, a disputed etymon, may be related to Old German *-ard* or *-hart*, a suffix expressing excess or intensity and surviving in English words like drunk-ard and brag-gart. Whatever the signification of the appellation's elements, which suggest running about in a phantom or even devilish manner, the Schembart players were probably always better behaved than the rambunctious wildmen, as befitted their patrician pedigree. At first in the 1440s and '50s, the Schembart paraders apparently carried pouches full of fish, which they threw at people (Lent is coming!). But they soon moved in orderly fashion with their pikes and green bouquets, and in the 1470s they supplemented their own scintillating appearance in the Schembart Run with their most spectacular invention, the "Hell." Such was the name given to a huge sled pulled across the central square with castles or elephants or giants modeled on top. The Hells changed their theme each year and were the high point in parades in which wildmen and wildwomen sometimes also ambled along.

This model of hell is not the hell of Canon Benedict's time, a hell of yawning mysteries with haunting connections to real beastly danger. This Hell is a mockery of people's frightened, fervent, or wandering imaginations: here on the sleds appeared a basilisk, a child-eating ogre, a windmill, a fountain of youth. One can speculate that at some more or less conscious level their purpose was not to throw people into momentary panic like the wildmen denounced in 1469 but instead to confirm that in a well-managed city like Nuremberg everyday conditions had moved away from the precariousness of bygone days toward urban safety and civility. Old myths are presented at an aestheticizing distance, backed up by the Schembart runners with their expensive suits and their leaders (two different ones each year) represented in the manuscripts waving their green bouquet signs of coming spring and wearing cherub-like smiling face masks. The family connections of these leaders are always presented in the manuscripts alongside their parading outfits as small coats of arms.

The shifting politics underlying these new-model parades are easily revealed by relating them to an urban norm, that of civility. Civility, the code and manner of living in a *civitas*, a shared commonwealth, had two contrasting accents in ancient and medieval writers, which have remained characteristic of the term to the present-day. In one direction civility implies community; everyone living together should expect to share in the rights and benefits accruing to that collectivity. In a second direction civility implies greater or less skill in exercising respectful conduct toward all members of a community. Civility in this direction implies hierarchy, a higher

32. The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has used a concept of distinction similar to mine in this passage, indicating the relation of "distinction" to concepts like status and propriety that are regularly employed by sociologists. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984) (originally published in French in 1979).

33. These are the German words from the edict of 1469 quoted in English on an earlier page here: "So sol auch nyemands, weder dy wilden mendlein oder anddere die lewt umb einich gelt inen ze geben anlauffen, schatzen oder notigen" (Baader, *Nürnberg Polizeiordnungen*, 92–93). *Schatzen* means literally to assess or estimate; I paraphrase this action in my phrase "sizing them up."

34. The culminating part of the 1469 ordinance in which these words appear (third and second paragraphs from the end in *ibid.*, 93–94) rehearses the words "impolite" (*unzimlich*) four times and "undisciplined" (*unzüchtig*) twice, and adds an admonition using the same words in affirmative form as the expected way to behave (*alent haben erbercklich züchtigelich und zimlich halten*). The beginning of these remarkable reiterations of hierarchical civility, quoted in part on an earlier page, reads in German as follows: "Nachdem zu verganngnen vasnachten etlich personen spil- und reymensweise vil leichtvertiger, üppiger, unkwescher und unzimliches wort und geperde ... bey tag und nacht wider und für geprauch haben, das dann süntlich ergerlich und schennflich und vor erbern lewten

regard for some rather than others based on their realization of civil codes and manners. One side or tendency of civility emphasizes equality and its corollary, a collective readiness to struggle for its preservation or restoration. The other tendency emphasizes sociable propriety and its corollary, the collective readiness to struggle for preservation or restoration of the orderly distinctions between people that provide support for such propriety.<sup>32</sup> The contrast between civilized and wild or "savage" behavior moves back and forth between the two tendencies. Carnival "wildmen" may function as radical equalizers, as they apparently did at Nuremberg in the 1460s, running after people, sizing them up and forcing them to give money.<sup>33</sup> Or they may be seen, as the oligarchs in the city council saw them at that time, as uncouth disturbers of the peace, "undisciplined," "impolite," a scandal for "honorable people" and especially for "maidens and women."<sup>34</sup>

The consequence for Carnival of this perennial division in the idea of civility is that its doubleness encourages representational play. Who can say whether the Nuremberg wildman marching in the middle of pikemen Schembart runners in 1539 (fig. 3) is an ally of the smart upper-class marchers or their antic critics, showing how easy it is to invade their marketplace and infiltrate a militia's parade? The Hell vehicle being tugged across the square is a "Ship of Fools." But who are the chief fools here?



Figure 3: Anonymous, Schembart Parade in Nuremberg Carnival with Ship of Fools, ms. dated circa 1670 depicting 1539 parade. Painting. Kiel, Germany. Kiel University Library, Ms. KB 395, p. 189.

Is one of these chief fools the Protestant parson Osiander standing amid demonic figures and clowns at the foot of the mast with a backgammon board, and is another one a similarly black-robed figure—a priest or monk?—holding two sticks as if making a compass measurement on a round blue object (fig. 4)?

und zuvoran vor junckfrauen und frauen zu handlen und ze üben unzimlich ist" (ibid., 93).

35. I discuss some of Hans Sachs's works about Carnival in "Why Is Carnival So Wild?", 68–71. I also discuss the 1539 scene and its consequences in "Locality, Spectacle, State Politics," 31–34. It may be that this loss of public permission is what led Schembart participants or their descendants to order hand-painted manuscripts for over a century (circa 1550s–circa 1680s) in which this scene and others were painted in slightly differing versions.

No iconographical analysis of differences in these nearly eighty versions has been made. Such analysis would surely substantiate or disqualify my hypothesis about the sticks and blue object in the masthead masker's hands, accoutrements that might be not measuring instruments but parts of a strangely shaped musical instrument. With an exception that appears at the end of this article, I leave aside further examination of the interacting symbolisms of wildman and bear in Carnival scenes, an interaction continuing to the present in the Carnivals of northern Italy and Pyrenean France and Germany. For some illustration and examination of this ongoing history, see Samuel Kinser, "Once More the Festive Bears: Enduring Themes and Shifting Semes," in *Sentieri della memoria: Studi offerti a Piercarlo Grimaldi*, ed. Davide Porporato and Gianpaolo Fasino (Bra, Italy: Slow Food Editore, 2015), 465–82.

36. See note 18. As will be seen in this section, some statutes



Figure 4: Vignette of masthead on Ship of Fools in the Schembart Parade shown in figure 3.

If the black-robed figure in the masthead represents a Roman Church cleric, is he gesturing to assert the extent of the church's worldwide rule (in other paintings of this Schembart scene, the object held by a black-robed figure is clearly a world orb)? Next to this somber figure in the masthead stands a shaggy devil-bear-goat figure shaking keys like an indulgence-seller, keys that would free souls from purgatory according to Roman Church orthodoxy of the time.

–Or are the fools in this scene only the maskers in foolscap and clownish multicolored costumes, running among devils? No, surely in this scene all are pulled into the Hell's theme. Everyone is some sort of fool for participating in it. Everyone is part of the game going on and therefore everyone induces some reflection about the foolishness of everyone else. The scene mirrors, consciously or unconsciously, a communal reality in which a number of differences—social, religious, and other—are in simultaneous motion within an interacting whole.

Why is it, however, that no non-Carnival players are shown in this scene, no councilmen and no bystanders and onlookers except possibly a few persons peering from shop windows in the background? The absence of these two groups, elite politicians and non-elite folk, turns the viewer's attention away from social class differences toward an amusing show of shared cultural representations. Bringing the wild and wild actions into the tame not by force and threatening moralism like the pope in the 1140s but in carnivalesque jollity, the Schembart parade organizers in 1539 also blunted the fierceness of contemporary religious controversy. Protestant agitation had been polarizing opinions in the city for twenty years.

The invisible mayor and councilmen, guardians of civil order, were not amused at this scoffing evenhandedness that placed religious leaders among running fools and grimacing, gesticulating devils. The Schembart Run was promptly forbidden by mayor and council after this reprehensible representation. But Carnival was not forbidden. Poems, engravings, and playscripts continued to flow, above all those of the shoemaker poet Hans Sachs. We can be fairly certain that less carefully costumed wildmen ran about in the back streets, and properly dressed citizens surely continued to complain to town councilmen about impolite words and gestures.<sup>35</sup>

concerning Carnival survived.

37. Beatrice Premoli has published these brief chronicle references to the Carnival at the Testaccio and also all the relevant 1363 statutes. See Beatrice Premoli, *Ludus carnevarii: Il Carnevale a Roma dal secolo XII al secolo XVI* (Rome: Guido Guidotti, 1981), 4–8. The word *palio* for the award to the winner of a race among horses became a synonym for the race itself in thirteenth-century Italy and was used thereafter for other kinds of races, as we will see. A well-documented account of the *palio* that developed at Siena, a horse race still conducted today, is that of Alan Dundes and Alessandro Falassi, *La Terra in Piazza: Interpreting the Siena Palio* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

38. Premoli prints the statutes of 1363 concerning the Carnival festivities in *Ludus carnevarii*, 6–8. Those in question here are Statutes 79 and 75. The number of the city’s chancellors is not stated in Statute 75 nor are their functions explained there. Statute 75 also declares that the new garments as well as all other Carnival expenses sponsored by the commune government are to be paid by means of a large sum exacted on Roman Jews.

39. SPQR was familiar to Romans because it was inscribed on many ancient monuments extant in fourteenth-century Rome. Its anti-aristocratic and anticlerical side had been reactivated in the proclamations of Cola and his followers in 1347 and the following years.

40. Statute 79 (see note 38, which like this note refers to Premoli’s

## Rome’s Communal Carnival

Carnival’s history in Rome, from the time of Canon Benedict’s early 1140s document to that of Galle’s engraving in the 1550s (fig. 1), will forever remain fragmentary and questionable. First, literacy was small and record keeping was largely in the hands of clerics in a city that had only about twenty thousand people living in it at most times during the centuries preceding and immediately following Benedict’s assertions. Second, nearly all the commune’s state records for the period from the 1140s to the early fifteenth century were burned by marauding soldiers in 1527.<sup>36</sup> That long period was, however, one during which commune authorities successfully frustrated attempts by popes and papal allies to regain the monopoly of political institutions that they had enjoyed between the seventh and early twelfth centuries. This was true especially during the periods of the “Avignon Papacy” (1308–78) when popes resided in southern France and of the “Great Schism” (1378–1417) when two major papal parties divided clerical allegiances across Western Christendom.

The high point of the Roman commune’s relative independence not only from papal but also from a variety of secular authorities, both international (German, French, and Norman most prominently) and local (the great “baron” factions, especially those led by the Colonna and Orsini families), came in the mid-fourteenth century during the insurrection of Cola di Rienzo, who proudly proclaimed the revival of the ancient Roman Republic (1347–54). No one has yet ascertained what circumstances led to the survival of some statutes with information about Carnival during this very period; the statutes are commonly dated to 1363, less than a decade after Cola’s assassination. They include eleven edicts about what was then for the first time called in several surviving chronicles not just the “festival of the bull” (1320) or the “festival of the Palio” (1256, a race for a prize of costly fabric called “palio”) but also the “festival of the Agone and Testaccio.”<sup>37</sup>

Only one activity is specified in the 1363 statutes as taking place at the Agone. Two of four knightly contests called “running at the ring” were to take place there while another two were to occur at the Testaccio. While the Testaccio hill is located in the far southwest corner of medieval Rome, the Agone—later called the Piazza Navona—was near the ancient center of the city, not far from the Pantheon. What connected these two places becomes clear from some of the other statutes. They specify annual purchase of new garments for the commune’s chief officer, a single senator, and new furnishings for his horse as well as for the chancellors of the city government.<sup>38</sup> Obviously these accoutrements were specified in order to enhance the dignity and importance of these officers when they appeared in public during the Carnival. Although the statutes say nothing about a public parade, it can be assumed that the officers did take part in such a piece of publicity, either marching in order from the commune’s seat of government on the Capitoline hill to the Agone or at least appearing there, thus giving the festivities an official face. It was the face of the commune. Officially and unofficially during these prosperous days of commune government, the emblem of the ancient Roman government was also refurbished and proclaimed around town: SPQR, “Senatus Populusque Romanus.” Its words combine succinctly aristocratic and democratic, hieratic and egalitarian sentiments.<sup>39</sup> Like the appearance at the Agone of commune officials in resplendent clothing, the emblem affirms the new central character of the city’s government, thus paralleling the appearance at the Testaccio of the pope

edition of the statutes).

41. Joannes Cavallino, *Polistoria de virtutibus et dotibus romanorum*, ed. Marc Laureys (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 2012), 188.

After speaking of the location of Testaccio hill, Cavallino begins his reference to the ludus there with the comment that every year, while Rome's *civitas* governed "in peace" (is this a reference to quieted social factions, which were in fact about to erupt with Cola's revolution?) this "greatest game" or "grandest festivity" (*ludus maximus*) was celebrated: "ubi hodie singulis annis quibus in pace Roma civitas gubernatur ludus maximus celebratur a populo et iuventute Romana equestri." Cavallino then continued with the words translated in my text: "Et ex alto montis eiusdem [Testatie] emittuntur quadriga seu currus rotarum cum tauris agrestibus et aliis silvestribus animalibus praecipitantibus dictas quadrigas et rotas curruum a ruo dictas."

42. Premoli prints a bronze plaque still extant recording this practice in *Ludus carnevarii*,

4. For further material, see Raimondo Guarino, "Carnevale e festa civica nei ludi di Testaccio," *Roma moderna e contemporanea* 20 (2012): 480–81. For a well-documented discussion of the Roman imperialist strategies implicit in this *jocatori* practice, see Andrea Sommerlechner, "Die Ludi Agonis et Testatie—Das Fest der Kommune Rom in Mittelalter," *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* 41 (1999): 362, 367.

43. See Premoli, *Ludus carnevarii*, 7: Statute 78. Maire Vigueur works out this supposed route of the race from words in an anonymous manuscript written to describe the Testaccio of 1545,

in Canon Benedict's time, whose arrival in escort by the cavalry had affirmed that the city was under the aegis of the Roman Church.

The statutes specify three other elements only fragmentarily recorded previously. First, six "four-wheeled" conveyances were to be constructed and covered with red cloth. Inside each of them were to be placed the "usual" animals, two pigs and two bullocks.<sup>40</sup> Pigs at the Testaccio, a presence so evidently suitable to Carnival indulgences with their succulent flesh, had already been mentioned by implication, I would suggest, in a book called *Polistoria*, written about twenty years earlier (circa 1345–47) by the Roman canon Joannes Cavallino. This cleric lauded what he called Rome's "grandest festivity" (*ludus maximus*) celebrated every year in Rome at the Testaccio: "From the top of the same [Testaccio] hill quadrigas or wheeled carts containing wild bulls and other woodland animals are released, spilling them out of the said quadrigas and tumbling wheeled carts."<sup>41</sup> I interpret "woodland animals" in this citation as referring to either half-domesticated pigs, raised in adjacent woodlands, or perhaps to entirely wild boars. But perhaps some other game were also caught and inserted in these wagons. The adjective modifying bulls is *agrestis*: it can apply simply to rurally grazing animals but occasionally in some classical authors the word seems to carry a nuance of wild, aggressive behavior.

Galle's engraving (fig. 1) shows how the sixteenth-century Testaccio ludus had apparently changed from those described in Cavallino and the statutes of 1363, for it shows only uncovered two-wheeled carts drawn by bulls—some of them very large with developed horns—who are thus pulling the carts instead of being inside them. There are also no signs of other animals in or around the carts, which also do not seem to have wheels broken or dislodged by a precipitous descent.

A second element about the Testaccio game that is more fully explained in the 1363 statutes than in fragmentary earlier materials concerns the *jocatori* (players), each is to be paid four florins for their participation in the Testaccio festival. How many players there are is not specified, nor whether they represent the different parts of the city, called *riioni* (Roman dialect form of Italian word for "regions"; the word refers to politically designated neighborhoods or wards). These players may also have come from small towns conquered by Roman armies over the course of two centuries since Canon Benedict's time. One of the ways that the commune government used to weld these territories to Roman interests and identity had long been to require conquered territories to send such athletically capable men to participate in the Testaccio game.<sup>42</sup>

A third new element featured in the statutes defines in greater detail the horse races mentioned only tersely in earlier documents. Three palios—that is, lengths of fine cloth—were to be obtained each year made of gold and silk. They were to be awarded to the winners in the "usual" races. The three races were reserved for different horse owners: one was reserved for horses belonging to "Romans," a second for those of "foreigners," and a third for those of *jumentarii* (stablemen). These qualifiers are explained by the medievalist Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur thus: the first race is among horse owners who are Roman citizens, the second among residents of Rome's conquered hinterlands, and the third among the *jumentarii*, men who handled heavy-bodied horses normally used to draw carts and other heavy objects. These horses would do especially well, Maire Vigueur explains, in racing up the steep incline of the adjacent Aventine hill at the end of a race beginning in the meadow at the foot of the Testaccio.<sup>43</sup>

the occasion probably depicted in figure 1. Of course there is a danger in reading backward almost two hundred years from 1545 to statutes dated in the 1360s.

A study of the terrain, however, makes Maire Vigueur's speculation plausible. There is flatness at the foot of the Testaccio hill, the distance leading to the Aventine hill is about five hundred yards, and one of the statutes of 1363 about the Carnival game prohibits plowing or planting crops on or around the Testaccio, that is, in space that may well have been reserved for Carnival races. See *ibid.*, Statute 85, on the prohibition of plowing and sowing.

44. *Ibid.*, Statute 80.

45. The words quoted in the translation in this paragraph are from a chronicle by Adam of Usk whose other features, along with these words, are cited in the Latin text in note 48. Adam saw Rome's Carnival in 1405. I am supposing that when he saw *caporioni* lining up at the Agone, each of them with his own contingent of competitors, he saw a custom that had been around for some time, and perhaps even from the 1360s when the writers of the 1363 statutes emphasized that the Agone and Testaccio games should be solemnly celebrated (*ibid.*, 7, Statute 79, line 1: "ipsi ludi ... debeant solepniter celebrare"). Perhaps then well before 1405 there had been instituted a "solemn"—but certainly festive—march from the Capitoline to the Agone with officials and competitors. By 1425 such a march seems to have even included the bullocks, as we will see.

46. See Benedict's Latin text in note 7 for his words about the Testaccio hill as the beginning of

Still another of the statutes specified wages for the "lion's guard" on the Capitoline and insisted that the guard take care in feeding the lion! Here is the new occupant of the bear's throne located on the hilltop seat of commune government. This lion was no doubt supposed to represent the government's collective force and belligerence and its noble superiority. It was not there simply as part of some rich senator's prestigious menagerie. Mention of the lion's guard in a list that specified the salaries for banner-bearers, stablemen, bell ringers, and Capitoline guards, all of them participating somehow in the Agone-Testaccio festival, suggests that the lion may have been taken along on parade to these two festival sites, or perhaps some special event involving exhibition of the lion took place during the Carnival days on the Capitol itself.<sup>44</sup>

During the high point of communal control of the city in the fourteenth century, the Testaccio together with side activities at the Piazza Agone made it collectively "the grandest festivity" of the city, as Cavallino wrote in 1345. Its civility broadened in both the egalitarian and hierarchic sense, if that term can be made to include the militarism that not only helped maintain sporadic self-defense but also helped create and preserve Roman domination of governments and resources in nearby towns. There was nothing distinctive about this imperialistic behavior; such was the endeavor among nearly all contemporary Italian city-states.

Among the new egalitarian elements in the Carnival was, it seems, the fact that the Romans assembled at the Agone together with the captains of each region who were colloquially called *caporioni*. The *caporioni* must have marched, each of them from their own rione, to this arena for the ring-running sport, each with their own contingent of competitors, including the *jocatori*, who would eventually be participating in the bull and pig hunts at the Testaccio.<sup>45</sup> Elite elements in the statutes are more obvious. Running at the ring requires skills of horsemanship achieved only by men of leisure. Swift horses were owned almost only by the rich, so winning two of the three horse races was also automatically bestowed on the upper class (one of these two was reserved for subdued but nonetheless no doubt rich upper-class residents of nearby communities dubbed "foreigners"). Only the third race was reserved for horses commanded by or perhaps even owned by the working-class *jumentarii*. The richly woven cloth rewarded to winners also pointed upward in terms of status distinctions, as did of course the new clothes for officers of this communal government.

At least as important as changing and supplementing one or another of the ambivalent features of Rome's way of "leaving aside fleshliness" was the geographical realignment of the festivity. The Carnival in Benedict's time moved first from some unspecified place of assembly, where cavalrymen and infantrymen exchanged drinks, toward the Lateran palace of the popes in the southeast corner of the city and they then went, cavalrymen and pope, to the Testaccio in the southwest corner. The communal Carnival participants, on the other hand, moved not from east to west but generally from north to south. Processions moved first slightly northwestward from the Capitoline hill to the ancient Stadium Domitiani (present-day Piazza Navona) for the Agone festivity. The Agone was near the most densely populated area of Rome in the fourteenth century. Parades then moved southward past the foot of the Capitoline and finally on south to the Testaccio.

In social terms the route in Benedict's time moved from an eccentric area of ancient Rome, an area chiefly populated by papal dependents, to an even more eccentric and more sparsely

Rome's civic existence ("ibi habuit civitas principium").

47. Guarino makes this point about geographical reorientation ("Carnevale e festa civica nei ludi di Testaccio," 480) and refers to Alain Boureau's similar reasoning in *La papesse Jeanne* (Paris: Aubier, 1988), 96–97. The particular symbolist mode of interpreting the reorientation in the text is mine.

populated area to the west. The symbolism of this route was far more important than its social actuality. It moved from the original site of Christian governance in the city (the Lateran palace was ordered built by Constantine in 314 or 315 to house the bishop of Rome) downward in prestige and backward in time to a site that Benedict called the origin of Rome, rehearsing what appears to have been contemporary mythic history.<sup>46</sup> That is, it moved from what appeared to clerically minded contemporaries of Benedict as the center of Christian authority throughout the Western world to a small hill of broken pots, the shrunken remains of pagan empire.

The route chosen by the more secular-minded leaders of the commune, on the other hand, moved past reemerging monuments of ancient grandeur. It went up north and back down south, thus passing not once but twice, on the way to and from the Agone, the site of the new capital of the commune government of Rome, the Capitoline hill that symbolized ancient Rome's dominion of the entire Mediterranean-centered known world. The commune's festive route fostered dreams of outward-reaching visible power. The Lateran's festive route, in contrast, had served like every ceremonialized pathway of the popes to refurbish inwardly held belief in the meaning of Rome's transfer from pagan to Christian hands, in the victory always and everywhere of godly over human power.<sup>47</sup>

The commune's reorientation of the route to the Testaccio, no less than the augmented festive activities occurring in and around that place, must have slowly brought about some change in the ideologies surrounding and supporting the Testaccio "game." It was no longer chiefly about slaying animals in Lenten preparation or about killing them for one last big feast. It was now primarily about entertaining spectacle.

In the eyes of a foreign cleric who had come to Rome seeking preferment in 1404 and saw the Carnival in 1405, this changing atmosphere of the festival had dubious consequences. The Welshman Adam of Usk included the following eyewitness report in his chronicle. The report shows that the regulations of 1363 were still being followed in almost every regard. But here we have for the first time some account of how Carnival participants behaved at the Testaccio as well as on the days just before and after the events.

Around Quinquagesima Sunday [Canon Benedict's "putting away fleshliness Sunday"] the Romans assemble with the caporioni, at the Agone games, drawn up in armed bodies... Three large silver rings are fastened to a rope high off the ground, and they charge their horses at them trying to run their lances through the rings and thus win them. The senator, two conservators, and seven regents of the city are present at this civic game, attended by much pomp, with the block and ax used for beheading the seditious borne before them. During this same festival [ludus] Romans indulge, like the sons of Belial and Belfagor, in excessive drinking and unrestrained licentiousness.... Then on the Sunday itself, at the Jews' expense, four carts, covered with scarlet cloth and containing eight live boars, are yoked to eight wild bulls and taken to the top of "the mountain of all earth"—so-called because it is made of earth brought from every part of the world, as a sign of universal lordship—and when the carts come down the hill they break up, and the animals are set free, whereupon it all becomes spoil for the Romans to fight over, and then everyone rushes upon the said beasts in unrestrained attack with his own weapon.

Not everyone who fought in the field succeeded in getting a piece of the meat. That had certain consequences for another aspect of fleshliness, a sexual one: "Anybody who fails to bring home a piece of the spoil for his wife is regarded as wretched and senseless, and is not allowed to lie

48. Adam of Usk, *Chronicle of Adam of Usk 1377–1421*, ed. and trans. C. Given-Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 195, 197. Given-Wilson's edition of this chronicle gives the Latin and his English translation on facing pages. Thus the translation in this study, with elisions and emendations by me, can be found on his pages 195 and 197. Given-Wilson's Latin text on pages 194 and 196 follows here and contains no elisions or emendations.

"Romani, circa Dominicam in Quinquagesima, cum capitibus regionum, ad agonem, tanquam fallerata fallanx, conueniunt, et iuxta id beati Pauli dictum, "Omnes quidem currunt," etc., pro brauiio fortiter certant. Tres magnos anulos argenteos, ad unam altam cordam ligatos ponunt, et in equis, ut lanceas in eos mittant, currunt, inde huiusmodi anulos habituri. In isto ludo urbis cenator, duo conseruatores, et septem regentes eiusdem in magno apparatu, stipiti et secure pro cediciosorum decapitatione precedentibus, intersunt. Eodem ludo taberne crapula, sed miserie epula, cum indomita luxuria, ut Belial et Belfagor filii, quam bestialiter discurrunt Romani. Deinde in ipsa Dominica, ludeorum expensis, ad quatuor currus, octo apros uiuos continens et scarleto rubio contactos, ad summitatem montis omnis terre, ideo quia ex omni terra mundi in signum uniuersalis dominii illuc allata compositus, octo ponuntur tauri indomiti, et, per descensum montis dissolutis curribus et bestiis liberis, omnia cedunt Romanorum in predam; et tunc quilibet ac si dissoluto impetu dictas bestias inadit suo instrumento. Itaque, si quis aliquid de huiusmodi preda uxori non attulerit, quasi miser et

with her until the feast of St. Pancras [May 12]. And often in this kind of commotion they inflict blows and wounds on the courtiers, because of what they do to their wives and daughters."

Adam of Usk's report also indicates that changes had occurred in the horse races at the Testaccio, changes that eliminated the awards for foreigners and stablemen. The races were now only for the local rich and preeminent.

Following this three cloths are fastened to the points of lances, the first made of gold for the best horses, the second of silver for the second best, and the third of silk for the fastest mares; and whichever rider gets to each of them first carries it away as his prize. And then eventually, [having ceased] the said onslaught on the beasts, they go away in meanspirited procession to their wives, some with little bits of animal, and others with intestines or dung, on the ends of their swords.<sup>48</sup>

### The Popes' Reformed Carnival

During the long conciliar and schismatic period of ecclesiastical difficulties for the Roman Church that followed upon the popes' return from Avignon, the Roman high clergy never wavered in its project to destroy the commune's pretension to govern the city, including its management of festivities. But for decades it seems to have been forced to use compromising language even when asserting its supreme authority over the city. Thus when Pope Martin V took the opportunity in 1425 of appointing a new "standard-bearer of the Roman people," he was careful to declare in his bull, *Circumspecta sedis*, that although it was he who appointed this man as standard-bearer, the new occupant of the office governed "in the name both of the Roman Church and of the Roman People." This officer, he agreed, would govern all the "spectacles" presented in the city, including the Agone and Testaccio. In an age without printed pamphlets or broadsheets, the standard-bearer was the chief means of broadcasting, along with architecture, robes and uniforms, and loud shouts, the source and character of public authority. The standard-bearer was also of course in charge of proclaiming the identity of the army in wartime. Here this media manager, as one might call him today, was acknowledged as exerting his authority "in the name" of both church and commune.

In the following lines, this same papal proclamation of 1425 sanctioned a remarkable new custom to be held on the Saturday after the Agone celebration on Friday and before the Testaccio spectacles on Sunday: Saturday would be devoted to "exhibition of the bulls and other solemnities."<sup>49</sup> There is no reason to suppose that this was anything other than acknowledgment of an already-established custom, just as was suggested with respect to the caporioni's appearance in the Agone festival, first mentioned in 1405. How and when did this new custom come about with its making of Roman Carnival an officially three-day affair? I would suggest that this Saturday exhibition of the bulls to be slaughtered reflects an increased anchoring of Carnival's festivities in the city's varied neighborhoods. Did this increased anchoring occur as a ricochet from new difficulties facing the city after 1350, difficulties in no way acknowledged in the statutes of 1363 but perhaps affecting the very decision to proceed to such a compilation? The city was recovering from the internecine rivalries stirred up by Cola's insurrection in 1347 and from the sickening demographic destructiveness of the Black Death in 1349 and the following years. And in 1378 the pope returned from Avignon along with an array of bureaucrats and office seekers. In such trying circumstances, each local region of the vast but underpopulated

uecours ad sancti Panchardi festum cum ea non coibit. Et sepius in huiusmodi discursu cedes et uulnera, et presertim curtesanis, propter uxores et filias sibi exosis, inferunt. Postea tres pannos, primum aureum pro melioribus, secundum argenteum pro secundis equis, et tertium sericum pro equabus uelocius currentibus, in lancee ponuntur summitate; et si quis huiusmodi eauster prius eos tetigerit, eos pro se in brauium reportat. Et demum a dicto bestiarum incursu, aliqui cum modicis frustis, aliqui cum intestinis et stercoribus, in gladio mucronibus, pomparum cum uilitate transiunt ad uxores.”

49. Premoli prints the bull *Circumspecta sedis* in *Ludus carneleuarii*, 29–30. The elements of this bull translated in my text are introduced by Martin V’s appointment of a Roman nobleman, Pietro de Astalli Domicelli, as the new “generalem Vexilliferum Romani Populi,” giving him the right to exercise the powers of his office including the governance of Carnival’s spectacles in the name of church and state: “tam Romanae Ecclesiae quam Populi Romani nomine, nec non in Spectaculis, sive ludis Agonis, et die Sabati, quo Taurorum spectaculum, et alia solemnia celebrantur, et etiam Testaciae Spectaculo.”

50. No documents support this speculation about the invention of the Saturday exhibition in the middle to late fourteenth century—none except a now generally recognized falsely dated manuscript chronicle (supposedly written in 1372; see Filippo Clementi, *Il Carnevale romano nelle cronache contemporanee* [Città di Castello: R.O.R.E.-Niruf, 1939], 1:50) (volume 1 is a reprint

city probably dropped back toward reliance on its local leaders, and every caporione must have been quick, like any modern ward boss, to realize the value of fostering some festive distraction. So each rione, combining self-reliance with some rivalry and imitation of neighboring regions, probably developed its own way of selecting a prime bull and then showing it around their part of town. Saturday’s exhibition may have been born in this way or perhaps not at all in this manner. However the exhibition came about, one can be sure that the caporione, the captain in each district, along with that district’s best athletic jocatori, played important roles in it.<sup>50</sup>

Such exhibitions could not preserve the commune government’s control of Carnival. The popes’ power over Rome’s internal affairs increased swiftly and definitively when the conciliarist party’s program for reforms that would diminish papal monarchy foundered at the Council of Basel in fractional bickering. By the mid-fifteenth century, popes were more monarchically sovereign in Rome than ever before. In 1469 Pope Paul II could thus issue new regulations of Carnival in which secular authorities had no say.<sup>51</sup>

The collapse of secular jurisdiction had two causes. On the one hand, it was a consequence of the way the commune had moved to make the festival an official showplace rather than a time of desultory pastimes prefacing Lenten fasting. Officializing the tradition, giving it more and more well-ordered parts, ensured its confiscation by perspicacious clerics as part of their return to ultimate power in city politics.

On the other hand, the cause of collapse was the slow rise to power of a new hybrid class of elites in the city, a class of rich men with both extended manorial property in Rome’s hinterland and ample business and marital connections with the older but sharply reduced class, the “barons,” emanating from the once numerous equestrian army of *milites*. This new aristocracy, saluted in both notarial archives and papal documents as *nobiles viri*, “noble men,” included not only the still dominant businessmen in the merchant and cattlemen guilds as well as the barons but also the officers of the commune, including the caporioni and the honored players in the Agone and Testaccio games, the jocatori. The commune’s fusion of local patriotism with modest yet deep-rooted proprietorship and locally centered clerical connections was replaced by European-wide visions of the socioeconomic advantages of connections to the cardinalate and the papacy.<sup>52</sup>

The ascendancy of this new aristocracy together with the sovereignty of popes in city government are reflected in sparse references to the Testaccio game in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century sources about Carnival. These sources, written for the most part by Italian city-state ambassadors in Rome or by papal secretaries, mention horse races more often than the bullock hunts at the Testaccio. Moreover, when the Testaccio is mentioned it is usually because in the year being discussed “no scandal” or “no quarrel” took place.<sup>53</sup> Clearly a movement had begun to diminish the kind of disorder that Adam of Usk reported in 1405, a movement no doubt prompted and promoted by the new aristocrats, the *nobiles viri*, who were beginning to exercise their socioeconomic power to also influence the cultural character of the city.

There is no space here to trace in detail how intermittent papal cooperation with and resistance to these new noblemen, and especially their festive policies and behavior, injected a new spirit into the old festivity from the early fifteenth century onward, a spirit reflecting the new disposition

of the first edition published in 1899) preserved in the archives of a noble Roman family, the Boccapaduli, which was first published in 1762. Premoli reprints chapter 9 of this manuscript as published in 1762, a chapter taken from this supposititious chronicle written by a supposititious Roman notary, Nardo Scocciapile; the chapter describes how someone nicknamed “il Magnifico Mathaleno” organized and participated in the “Festa di testacie” (see Premoli, *Ludus carnelevarii*, 9–13). But neither the notary’s name nor someone called the Magnificent Mathaleno have ever been found elsewhere and the description shows elements of sixteenth-century rather than fourteenth-century Carnival circumstances (see Guarino, “Carnevale e festa civica nei ludi di Testaccio,” 478). In grandiloquent terms, the chapter describes the parade of bulls through each rione on some days before Carnival proper begins. This parading is supervised by each region’s caporione. Then follows an exhibition of bulls on the Capitol on Fat Saturday (*sabato grosso*), after which the bulls are led to the Agone. On Sunday the grandest parade occurs, including triumphal carts (*carrì trionfalli*) drawn by *ufali* (meant to be *bufali*, the Italian domesticated species of buffalos) and by horses, and followed by *jocatori*. The full names of the *jocatori* are listed, in each case as the son of so and so. This listing, rione by rione, takes up most of the chapter, so that the account becomes primarily a recital of patrician names. Its indication of Saturday’s proceedings enlarges upon what is specified in Martin V’s bull of 1425, but since the whole document is apparently a fake,

of political power in the city after 1450. We must lurch forward to the clarity provided by verbal and visual materials about the Carnival of 1545, the best documented among several festive extravaganzas financed by the Farnese family’s pope, Paul III (1534–49).

Recall some observations made at the beginning of this study about the Testaccio print by Galle (fig. 1). I suggested that his engraving divides onlookers’ attention among three chief themes: the sportive butchery of animals, leisurely crowds who stroll about and eat and drink, and objects to please and amaze the eye like the unlikely camel shown in the sportive field. Another aspect of the third theme of pleasing spectacles, that of elite order and entertainment, is scarcely emphasized in Galle, but information in verbal accounts about the Carnival of 1545 brings this theme forward emphatically. These accounts place emphasis on the splendid parade of senator, conservators, the selected *jocatori* from the thirteen rioni of the city together with their *caporioni*, and finally the *confaloniere* (banner-bearer) of “the Illustrious Roman People,” whose banner was inscribed with the “usual” SPQR. This emphasis in verbal accounts on a banner-bearer with a commune-glorifying flag is absent from Galle’s engraving. The absence suggests that verbal accounts of the occasion were directed to different patrons from those who would probably be attracted to Galle’s print, a matter that cannot be pursued here. Two other engravings of this Carnival game do indeed show the SPQR flag, one of which will be studied below. But another piece of verbal evidence about the cultivation of spectacle in the 1545 Testaccio should first be cited.

At a time just before or just after the killing of bulls and pigs there rode into the arena in 1545 six horsemen clothed “like ancient [Roman] soldiers.” The anonymous author described with delight their apparel as well as the ornaments of their “most beautiful horses,” so that “to all the people the things that those six horsemen did on those horses seemed a miracle, and especially what they did before the beautiful ladies.”<sup>54</sup> It seems certain that here the author described the maneuvers that are quite distinctively shown in a painting now housed in the Museo del Palazzo Venezia.<sup>55</sup> There the horsemen are placed before two pavilions between which flies a banner showing Pope Paul III’s Farnese coat of arms. Both pavilions show seated women, and a woman in the foreground in a long trailing gown seems about to mount stairs to the left pavilion. From verbal sources we learn that Margaret of Austria, illegitimate daughter of Emperor Charles V (1519–56) who was married to Ottavio Farnese, one of the pope’s grandsons, was especially honored at the Testaccio of 1545. This woman in the trailing gown may therefore be Margaret, joining women friends in the pavilion. The placement of the six horsemen before the two pavilions was surely chosen in order for viewers (and first of all the patron or patrons of this huge painting measuring two by three meters) to identify these six men as including Margaret’s husband Ottavio and his older brother, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, as well as their cousin, Cardinal Santa Fiore.<sup>56</sup>

Between 1363 and 1545 the elements of civility, seen from the hierarchical point of view, have taken an ever more spectacular turn. High-born women, unmentioned before although perhaps present in past Carnivals, are now placed so as to be seen as well as to see. Humanistically inspired ancient Roman costuming glitters on men riding by the pavilions, men whose clerical standing and Farnese parentage may have astonished and worried at least a few reflective observers. There was good reason for worry. The year 1545 is a date one generation after Martin

one cannot use it to affirm that an exhibition of bulls took place not simply in the streets but on the Capitol before the parade to the Agone occurred, whether in 1372 as the fake document claims or in 1425.

51. Premoli prints the most pertinent of these statutes, some of which are discussed in the section titled "Fractions" below.

Premoli, *Ludus carnevarii*, 40–41.

52. Sommerlechner, Maire Vigueur, and especially Guarino emphasize the emergence of this hybrid class. This emergence of a Roman hybrid class has obvious connections to what is sometimes called by historians studying later fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian history a process of re-feudalization. Sommerlechner, "Die Ludi Agonis et Testatie -Das Fest der Kommune Rom in Mittelalter," 362–67; Maire Vigueur, *L'autre Rome*, 350–64; and Guarino, "Carnevale e festa civica nei ludi di Testaccio," 483–84.

53. For these primary sources, increasing in number and length after the year 1500, see Premoli, *Ludus carnevarii*, 41–95, 109–22.

54. Premoli prints one of five known verbal accounts of the Agone and Testaccio of 1545 in *ibid.*, 131–32. The five accounts are briefly mentioned in Fabrizio Cruciani, *Teatro nel Rinascimento, Roma 1450–1550* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1983), 541–42. Cruciani prints one of these accounts on pages 551–60, which is different from that in Premoli, particularly in its description of the Testaccio. Premoli prints the account cited here in my text in *Ludus carnevarii*, 132.

Luther began denouncing papal worldliness with unexpectedly explosive resonance; anticlerical sentiments had been around for a long time but now indeed, as some segments of public opinion were not hesitating to say, a new crystallization of those sentiments was taking form.

The verbal accounts of 1545 also show that elements of popularizing, non-elite civility had broadened and grown more spectacular. Just as the carts or wagons began to roll down the hill, verbal sources report, "thirty-six Mattacini clothed in red rode out with pikes in hand to be the first to assault the bulls."<sup>57</sup> Mattacini were zanily acting performers presumably invoked here because of their bright red costumes and entertaining maneuvers in provoking the bulls, much like similar picadors do in modern bullfights. There were many people to applaud, some sixty thousand of them if the anonymous verbal report just quoted can be trusted. Did they applaud the Mattacini or rather the Roman-costumed relatives of the pope? Was the standard-bearer of the Roman city government an object of applause or was all such fervor reserved for the most eminent female member of contemporary Roman society, daughter of the pope's most powerful ally in a darkening international political world? Or did these sixty thousand people scream and cry for everyone and everything without distinction and spend most of the time eating to excess, as one report implies?<sup>58</sup>

The Roman-soldier-costumed cardinals on horseback in 1545, relatives of the pope, were not a novelty. Pope Alexander VI's son Cesare Borgia took part in the Sunday Testaccio celebration of 1502, allegedly killing a bull on foot with his bare fist; moreover, this exhibition took place not at the hill in southwest Rome but in the square in front of St. Peter's Cathedral. It was the third consecutive year that the bull slaughter took place there. In 1504 under Pope Julius II, however, this signature Carnival game returned to the Testaccio hill.<sup>59</sup>

In 1539 on the Thursday preceding Ash Wednesday, six years before the great celebration of 1545, Paul III authorized an especially grand parade from the Capitol to the Piazza Navona. It was the usual day and the usual route for the Agone phase of Carnival, the one where officials were especially displayed. But this parade consisted of triumphal wagons such as those used to praise ancient Roman generals returning from conquest; the themes on the wagons advertised nothing but the grandeur and close ties of the pope to his mighty imperial ally Charles V (the marriage of Charles's daughter Margaret of Austria to Ottavio Farnese had taken place just the year before). All this was portrayed in entirely pre-Christian representations of men and animals, and all the placards on the wagons were written in the learned Latin phrases employed in humanistic emblem writing.<sup>60</sup> Only two cardinals dared publicly protest the worldly pagan character of this parade, growing like a puffy parasite upon festive days whose name etymologically signified "leaving fleshliness behind." One of these cardinals was Gasparo Contarini, a reform-minded prelate receptive to both the doctrinal and practical reasons for disgust with the loose and corrupt practices of the church. The other was Gian-Pietro Carafa, an arch-conservative in ecclesiastical affairs who since 1536 had worked with Contarini on a papal commission to formulate reforms but who would soon move toward repressive rather than reforming policies.

While the religious turmoil convulsing European politics since the 1520s thus touched Roman Carnival at its edges in 1539, just as it did at Nuremberg in that same year, it did not in the short term influence the main course of Carnival at Rome. Consider the following engraving (fig. 5), which seems to represent the Carnival at the Testaccio six years after the controversial parading

55. Cecilia Pericoli Ridolfini studied two paintings of the 1545 Testaccio, both of them at that time in the Museo di Roma. One of the two paintings was on loan and in the 1980s was returned to the Museo del Palazzo Venezia; this is the one described in my text here. Cecilia Pericoli Ridolfini, "I giochi a Testaccio in due dipinti del Museo di Roma," *Bollettino dei Musei comunali di Roma* 23 (1975): 46–63. All reproductions of it that I have found are of very poor quality, and I have not been able to obtain a decent copy for reproduction in this article. The least muddy reproduction in print is in Martine Boiteux, "Chasse aux taureaux et jeux romains de la Renaissance," in *Les jeux à la Renaissance*, ed. Philippe Ariès and Jean-Claude Margolin (Paris: J. Vrin, 1982), plate 2.

56. All six of the horsemen in the Roman-soldier contingent are listed in the two versions of the Testaccio published by Cruciani in *Teatro nel Rinascimento* and Premoli in *Ludus carnelevarii*.

57. Premoli, *Ludus carnelevarii*, 132.

58. The report of "G. N." (Cruciani, *Teatro nel Rinascimento*, 559) states that "Carnival day" terminated in "bagordi e tomlti a furia." The other report, published in Premoli, is the one that records the number of sixty thousand spectators (see the last lines of Premoli, *Ludus carnelevarii*, 132).

59. Boiteux, "Chasse aux taureaux et jeux romains de la Renaissance," 38.

60. Both Premoli and Cruciani have published contemporary accounts of this Agone parade, which seems with its triumphal wagons a remake of the parade

in 1539 just described. This engraving of the Testaccio is attributed to one Johannes Teufel and bears the date 1558 in its lower left-hand corner. It would thus appear to have been engraved at almost the same date as I have calculated to be that of Galle's undated image (fig. 1).



Figure 5. Johannes Teufel [or Theufel], "La Festa di Testaccio fatta in Roma," 1558. Engraving. Hamburg, Germany. Hamburger Kunsthalle, Druckgraphik, Inv. Nr. 3389.

The representations in figures 1 and 5 differ in significant details, but their overall similarity makes it probable that both were influenced by verbal accounts published in 1545 or 1546 and by paintings, one of which, by the miniaturist Giulio Clovio, has been securely dated as having been finished shortly after the Testaccio celebration in 1545.<sup>61</sup> In spite of their general similarity figures 1 and 5 represent very differently the atmosphere pervading the occasion and its framework in the countryside just outside the Aurelian Wall with its bastions, pyramidal monument, and gate labeled Porta Ostiense on the left side of Teufel's print. Instead of Galle's expansive landscape with sunny sky and vineyard-dotted hillsides, Teufel presents a narrower background of rough hills and ravines beneath a cloudy sky with a cartouche in the sky that names his subject.

Running boys and a clearly indicated masker on a hillock in the left foreground, a large-wheeled carriage and two elegantly gowned ladies in the middle foreground, and the advancing men and cavalry on the right lead the eye toward apprehension of an agitated mid-ground where the Testaccio game is taking place. Quite in contrast to the settled atmosphere that seems to be part of Galle's way of representing the Testaccio, Teufel's print's cluttered and crowded juxtapositions encourage a sense that what is going on has many parts that do not move in the same direction. There is a giant two-wheeled cart at the foot of the hill on the right with a large ill-shaped supine object lying within it and men poking at the object on the outside of the cart. This may well represent a pig cart, an element entirely absent in Galle's print. In the miniature painting by Clovio mentioned above a pig cart in this same position at the bottom of the hill is surrounded by a group of twenty or thirty persons, intensely packed, slashing in seeming frenzy at an object that is not itself visible.

that “il Magnifico Mathaleno” presented to Romans in 1372. See Premoli, *Ludus carnevariij*, 120–22; and Cruciani, *Teatro nel Rinascimento*, 548–51. But as suggested in note 50, it seems more likely that the unknown forger of this pseudo-document knew about the 1539 parade and/or other early sixteenth-century Roman restagings of ancient Roman triumphal parades.

61. According to Cruciani, a painting of the Testaccio by Clovio was finished in 1546. It is partially reproduced on the cover of Cruciani’s paperbound book and muddily reproduced in entirety on page 561. Cruciani gives a rapid review of the visual works related to the Testaccio of 1545, but his and other work done on them leave in suspension many questions of attribution, dating, and patronage, not to mention interpretation of their meanings, purposes, and eventual influence, both painterly and cultural. See Cruciani, *Teatro nel Rinascimento*, 543–44. Pending more deeply delving inquiry, it is useful to note now that the three well-established engravings related to this Testaccio scene (by Galle, Teufel, and a Frenchman who allegedly worked in Rome from 1559 to 1578, Etienne Du Pérac) were all made more than a decade after the event by non-Italians, while three renditions in paint were probably made closer in date to the actual event and were probably executed in Rome (see on the paintings not only Pericoli Ridolfini, “I giochi a Testaccio in due dipinti del Museo di Roma,” but also Guarino, “Carnevale e festa civica nei ludi di Testaccio,” 475). I have not discussed Du Pérac’s engraving in this article for a number of reasons, among others

In Galle’s print two bulls run, one bull has fallen, and a fourth bull comes down the hill, attached to a cart. Here two bulls run near the middle of the field and a third charges down the hill unattached to either a two-wheeled cart or four-wheeled wagon. Horsemen, bulls, pig cart, other carts (two more are at the top of the hill), and men on foot all seem to be moving or standing still for different reasons. The atmosphere exuded by these elements indeed resembles something between the tumult to which Adam of Usk referred in 1405 and a flux of lankly disintegrated actions.

New reasons are indicated in Teufel’s print for the attractiveness of the festival at the Testaccio. At the left end of the field are three musicians in a row playing, as far as one can see, a flute, large drum, and shawm. Outside the field on the hillock in the left corner is a lute player. He wears the semblance of a Roman soldier’s costume like those found in verbal texts describing the 1539 parade and 1545 Testaccio. But he has a foolscap on his head and a long-nosed mask on his face. The person sitting next to him wears a long cowled garment. The upper end of the cowl almost seems to be shaped to form a face looking at the lute player while a true face, turned to the right, seems engaged in conversation with a woman further to the right. Is this cowled person also wearing some kind of mask? Whatever one decides about these features, it is certain that music making and masquerade have in this print been added to the Testaccio amalgam.<sup>62</sup>

The camel shown inside the field in Galle’s print is placed outside the palisade on the left in Teufel’s print with someone not riding but presumably tending to him. No one except a barking dog seems to be paying attention to the antler-bearing deer shown below the camel. The motif of exhibiting exotic animals on leisure-time days and locations is thus not only repeated but also given more figuration than in Galle’s print. Eating and drinking also continue to be represented, as in the group under an improvised canopy, again on the left.

Finally, and seemingly most pertinent to the theme of politics in Carnival, both city government and papal banners are shown in this print, the SPQR flag to the left of the right pavilion and the Farnese coat of arms to the left of the left pavilion. The pavilions are shown in constricted, less elegant form than in Galle’s print. Men in broad-brimmed hats as well as women are vaguely outlined inside these elevated constructions. And there is at least a suggestion of the contingent of the six elegant equestrians, the dukes, princes, and cardinals, who play brilliant roles in the verbal reports but no role at all in the print by Galle. Two cavalymen rear their horses before the left Farnese pavilion, while a third one with plumed hat rides from the right toward the other two. This small reference to elite elements indicates that the composer of the Teufel print seems little interested in status distinctions. He wants us to see it all, and this “all” ends up in a somewhat inchoate set of differences, partly because of a strange insistence on littering the arena as well as the hillocks nearby with small, repetitious tufts of vegetation that distract the eye from the human actions.

The references to sociopolitical distinctions represented by the two banners, the two pavilions, and the cavorting horsemen amount to little compared to the general display of disparate pleasure-seeking in this artwork that is formally centered—but not emphasized—on the careless destruction of animals. The scene seems almost designed to advertise the indifference of both the elites and the general public shown in this depiction to the gathering protests about the Testaccio and the Roman Carnival. Not only had the two cardinals Contarini and Carafa

because it is generally dated by art historians to the 1560s, a time later than the dates attributed to figures 1 and 5 here.

62. The three persons seated on a hillock in the left foreground of Teufel's print are not unique. This cluster of figures is probably a variant based on the paintings of the scene, one of which Teufel may have seen. The Palazzo Breschi painting in Rome puts four figures, not three, in this group; a lute player is standing at the left, a little distant from three seated figures. The Palazzo Venezia painting includes five persons in the left foreground; two women and two men are seated closely together, all looking to the right while a bearded lute player sits behind them. The miniature painting of the 1545 Testaccio by Clovio, preserved in the J. P. Morgan Library in New York City and poorly reproduced in Cruciani, *Teatro nel Rinascimento*, 561, does not seem to include any of this group making music and talking.

63. See note 5 above for further reference to this work. In the Harvard University Library copy, the first page of the set, a page dedicated to an Antwerp patrician (the library's call number for this item is M24480.1) states that all the designs in the set are by van Cleve and all the engravings by Galle.

64. The Latin title of this set is sometimes misprinted in secondary sources. In the unpublished master's thesis by Elise Boutsen it is cited thus in the table of contents: *Regionum rurium fundorumque varii atque amoeni Prospectus*. See Elise Boutsen,

protested the 1539 triumphal parade for its pagan overtones, but they had also, as members of a papally appointed commission, submitted to Paul III in 1538 a sharply worded set of proposals for church reform. The reform list, like the cardinals' reaction to the 1539 Agone, was in effect warning the pope and his entourage that the freedom to do anything during Carnival and other festivities that pleasurable feelings or hierarchical status might inspire had to be terminated. An ecclesiastical convocation occurring in the same year as that of the Carnival discussed here showed that Paul III must have at least half-heard the warning. An international assembly of all Western Christendom's bishops met in January at Trent in northern Italy to consider church reform, only to adjourn almost immediately while settling on a reopening date of March 15. The Carnival of 1545 meanwhile took place during the week of February 10 to February 17, thus occurring between those two dates in January and March, as positions hardened between the reform party and the papal party, the latter group intent on controlling what would happen at the council in a way that preserved all the accumulated rights and traditions of the church against any fundamental reforms, especially those that might imply the right of councils to determine affairs beyond the wishes of popes and their bureaucratic dependents.

After 1545, for as long as the double-minded Paul III was alive (d. 1549), the Testaccio as well as other people-pleasing or pope-glorifying rituals continued. Even the personally ascetic Carafa, who led the papal hierarchy toward Counter-Reformation rigidities as Pope Paul IV from 1555 to 1559, continued during his rule to entertain the College of Cardinals in the Vatican Palace for a last sumptuous banquet on Fat Tuesday evening. But there would be no more large public spectacles glorifying the popes and their families. Testaccio was not explicitly prohibited but was no longer noted in verbal accounts of the old festivity after the 1550s. Grand celebrations of Carnival went on but most sumptuously in the courtyards of ever-larger and more decorated cardinals' palaces. The merry bloodletting at the Testaccio was entirely discontinued, it seems, by the end of the sixteenth century.

### Fractions

Carnival is always political, both along its sensorially apprehended surface and in depth. There are always some mocking songs, some wild cries, some caricatural masks of politicians. But then when one looks around, one sees, as in the engravings of 1545, that someone has organized certain reserved spaces, certain pavilions of honor. Who did this organizing? Who are the patrons of these appearances, and indeed of all the parades and performances? One is led by these questions from surface to depths of prescriptive social status, to economic distributions, to political diplomacies and police-implemented repressions, which lead in turn to mindsets, to people's festive proclivities, and to mentally embedded symbolic obsessions.

Such lines of inquiry may come from extended study, or perhaps simply from going to a Carnival again and again. But on the first day of Carnival this occasion does not seem to be about any of that. Carnival is just about having a good time; it is about frivolity and conviviality, and looking around at who is doing what. Teufel's 1558 engraving of the 1545 occasion accents that view of Carnival: lots of people do lots of running and playing, fooling and visiting. That was also what the makers of Nuremberg's Schembart parade images generally expected the patrons of their richly illustrated manuscripts to wish to see: themselves and their festive doings on parade across a big public place.

"Een Benadering tot het oeuvre van Hendrik van Cleve III (ca. 1525-ca. 1590)" (master's thesis, Universiteit Gent, 2015).

65. In addition to the classic work of James S. Ackerman, see two articles by Charles Burroughs that relate this artistic work to socio-historical circumstances in ways similar to the argument that I offer at this point. James S. Ackerman, *The Architecture of Michelangelo* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Charles Burroughs, "Michelangelo at the Campidoglio: Artistic Identity, Patronage, and Manufacture," *Artibus et Historiae* 28 (1993): 85–111; and Charles Burroughs, "The Democratic Campidoglio: Ritual, Social Unrest, and a Case of Wizardry," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 49–50 (2006): 171–87. As I close discussion of the iconographical remnants of Rome's 1545 Testaccio Carnival, mention must be made of its chronological rhyme across the Alps. In a surreal engraving by Melchior Lorsch tentatively dated 1545–46, the pope is shown as a wildman masker with hairy costume and club, like those running through the marketplace of Nuremberg in 1539. Eight verses by Luther are signed and dated 1545 near the top of the print, the fifth of which affirms "the pope is rightly called the wildman." Capped with the pope's jewel-encrusted triple crown, the figure holds a huge key dissolving

This is not the view of Carnival encouraged by Galle's engraving. That print asks spectators to imagine the ambiance more than the action. Look at this scene of miniaturized objects: it offers you a clean and clearly articulated view of the whole. It is equipped with a title written in the internationally understood Latin of the time, and was included at some uncertain date in a set of thirty-eight engravings issued by Galle, titled *Views of Varied Ruins and Some Sketches of Rural Areas*.<sup>63</sup> May not those invited to look at this sophisticated production have been an educated elite, who were becoming interested in traveling, people like Michel de Montaigne, who visited Rome in 1581, or the later sixteenth-century Englishmen who began flocking to Venice's Carnival as part of an emergent tour for young gentlemen?

The undated extant copies of *Views of Varied Ruins and Sketches of Rural Areas* are variously ascribed to dates between 1557 and the 1580s. In 1587 Galle published another series, equally based on van Cleve's designs, which was titled *Varied and Charming Views of Rural Regions and Districts*.<sup>64</sup> The two sets indicate that in the later sixteenth century a market had emerged for visualizations of archaeologically and pastorally intriguing places. So whether the Testaccio scene was first sold as an isolated print or whether it was only engraved to be part of the *Views of Varied Ruins and Sketches of Rural Areas*, its inclusion in that series helps explain the distant view of the game, miniaturizing human and animal figures in and around the playing field so as to bring forward the grandly imposing Roman wall with its adjacent pyramid and the expansive landscape beyond the wall with its churches and vineyards. This view of Carnival was made to suit well-born tourists. It is well to remind ourselves, in any case, that neither Galle's print nor Teufel's should be analyzed as if they documented precisely what happened at the Testaccio in 1545. They were conceived not as journalistic or historical registers but as something like expensive postcards. They seem to have been designed to serve either as mementos or as reminders to be put in travelers' baggage as something of interest to see.

Canon Benedict of St. Peter's Cathedral, of course, wrote about Carnival from entirely different perspectives. I have suggested that short-term political implications, signaled among other things by the pope's appearance at the Testaccio escorted by cavalymen, emerge when one considers the probable date of Benedict's writing in relation to the commune revolution of 1143. The longer-term political meaning of Benedict's way of explaining the animal executions becomes clear by considering a broader framework, the Catholic hierarchy's enduring assertion of papal superiority to all earthly powers, whether local like the emergent commune or national and international like that of emperors and kings. These short-term and long-term contexts had shifted by 1545, although their symbolic representations had not entirely disappeared.

In 1545 the communal government of Rome still flew its SPQR banner adjacent to one of the pavilions of honor, but the banner represented no substantial independence. The civil government's chief officials were no longer elected by guilds or neighborhood wards but were either appointed or subject to papal approval. The chief senators, councilors and "standard-bearer of the Roman people" came without exception from a new composite aristocracy whose most prestigious members remained some twenty-five families called the "barons," who already in the thirteenth century were rising above other noble families. The popes themselves either came from these baronial families or used their new powers of largesse and marital politics to join them.

in flames below. The pope-wild-man serves the devil, lord of hell. For a reproduction and discussion of this print, See Kinser, "Presentation and Representation," 20–22.

66. Boiteux, "Chasse aux taureaux et jeux romains de la Renaissance," 40–41. A general acknowledgment is due here to the extensive work of Boiteux on the themes that I explore in Rome's fourteenth-, fifteenth-, and sixteenth-century Carnivals.

Although my views differ from hers on a number of particulars, it was her two broadly documented articles of 1976 ("Les Juifs dans le Carnaval de la Rome moderne [quinzième-dixhuitième siècles]," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome* 88 [1976]: 745–87) and 1982 that first surveyed some of the new pathways that many scholars at that time and since then began to pursue. Note the conjuncture of her 1982 article with the richly documented but less thematized work of Premoli, *Ludus carnelevarii* and Cruciani, *Teatro nel Rinascimento*, neither book apparently known to her when she prepared her 1982 article "Chasse aux taureaux et jeux romains de la Renaissance."

67. These six races were already assigned to the same eight days in 1466, date of a large Carnival celebration allegedly financed mainly by Paul II. Two accounts of the 1466 races and the palios awarded in some of them are printed in Premoli, *Ludus carnelevarii*, 31. On the Carnival of 1466, see also Cruciani, *Teatro nel Rinascimento*, 126–31. This makes more certain that the 1469 statute list was the endorsement of an already existing custom.

68. Premoli, *Ludus carnelevarii*, 6.

An even longer-term perspective than one stopping in 1545 allows one to perceive sociocultural transformations barely emergent in the politics of the Carnivals studied here. Between the 1530s and 1580s, the place and the buildings housing civic government on the Capitoline were being remodeled together with the inside of St. Peter's Cathedral on the basis of plans by the same artist, Michelangelo, in the same renaissance-of-antiquity manner of majestically proportioned shapes and decor. Church and state were becoming aesthetic replicas of each other, a congeniality also asserted in the Agone parade of 1539.<sup>65</sup>

—But wait a minute! Having stepped back so far from the show at the Testaccio and its visual representations, let's step back one bit further, beyond the edges of these prints and into the streets and alleys of the city. Martine Boiteux in 1982 drew attention to what was happening in those byways at Carnival time: fights between "strong fellows" (*gagliardi villani*), Swiss or Gascon, in the moats surrounding the Castel Sant'Angelo; battles between orange-throwing chamberlains and squires here and there around the Vatican; more serious confrontations between street toughs from one rione and others; sideshow acrobats and amateur bullfights; boisterous leapers for a strung-up fat goose, running after hedgehogs, pigs, and cats to catch and kill.<sup>66</sup> These activities all occurred in other parts of Europe as well, and everywhere they provoked actions by public authorities to repress them or at least to channel them. Just as I have suggested that organized parades to the Agone began well before their documented mention in the fifteenth century, so also I would suggest that new races for which money is allotted from papal and city coffers in the 1469 Carnival ordinances of Pope Paul II might represent some channeling of popular outbursts like those just listed, as well as officializing certain sporting customs that had existed informally for a considerable period. Six new races were financed and were assigned to take place over eight days preceding Ash Wednesday.<sup>67</sup> Where they were run is not specified in the 1469 ordinances, but by the early sixteenth century they were run in the straight, wide, and long Via Lata down the middle of the growing city, today's "Corso," where a much larger number of spectators could be accommodated.

The first race was to take place on the Monday preceding the Agone parade on Friday; it was to be run by the Jews whose community had already been burdened since 1363 and no doubt before that date with underwriting the expenses of the Agone and Testaccio.<sup>68</sup> This race was followed on Tuesday by one of "Christian boys" and on Wednesday by one of "Christian youth." No races were scheduled for Thursday but on Friday—the day of horse races and a parade of public officials to the Agone in Martin V's bull of 1425—another perhaps victimizing race was run, restricted to "old men in their sixties." Finally on the days after Sunday's Testaccio, two more races were run on Monday and Tuesday, certainly added for the sake of comedy, one for donkeys and one for buffalos on the two days respectively.<sup>69</sup>

The new races pandered to popular sentiments while at the same time, by offering public space and honor in some cases and mirthful denigration in others, papal and city authorities may have hoped to control people's displays of excess. There is no doubt that the explicit reference to Jewish and Christian races had connotations rooted in deep-lying feelings of Christian animosity toward Jews, although it is not clear from the scarce documentation that we have for this period whether the race was already the deeply cruel and humiliating spectacle that is attested from the last decades of the sixteenth century onward.<sup>70</sup> In 1555 Pope Paul IV consigned the Jewish

first lines of Statute 75: "Item stauimus et ordinamus quod omnis sive tota pecunias Judeorum que per ipsam communitatem Judeorum pro ludis agonis et testatie in camera Urbis actenus solvi consuevit perveniat ad consules bobacteriorum et mercantorum."

69. This is Statute 76, as printed in *ibid.*, 41, not Statute 72, as Boiteux refers to in "Les Juifs dans le Carnaval de la Rome moderne," 750:

"Item additum e. dicto festo ex gratia Sanctissimi domini nostri Pauli papa Secundi q. ex pecuniis camere fiant sex alia bravia unum pro judeis currentibus die lune ante dominicam carnisprivi: aliud pro pueris christianis martis; aliud pro iuvenibus christianis die mercurii sequenti: aliud pro antiquis sexagenariis: die veneris aliud pro asinis die lune carnisprivi aliud pro bufalis die martis carnisprivii."

70. That the new races were intended to produce laughter, whether sardonic and satiric or merely mirthful, seems to be substantiated by certain comments of Platina in his *Lives of the Popes* about the 1466 races (Premoli, *Ludus carnelevarii*, 39): "Correvano i vecchi, correvano i giovani ... correvano i Giudei, e li facevano ben saturare prima perche meno veloci corressero. Correvano ... gl'asini e i bufali con piacere di tutti, che per le risa grandi potevano a pena star le genti in piè."

71. E. Le Roy Ladurie cites an anonymous account of the council meeting (which Le Roy Ladurie proves to be by Judge Guérin) as follows: "On vit Paumier chargé d'une robe de la peau d'un ours venir dans la maison consulaire et prendre un rang et un siège qui ne lui étaient pas dus, et qu'il n'avait accoutumé de prendre aupara-

community to the ghetto. Only in 1668 would Pope Clement IX put an end to the "race of the Jews" but at the cost of an additional contribution to Carnival expenses.

After the Counter-Reformation repression of public spectacles like the Testaccio, Carnival nevertheless continued to be celebrated in Rome, as noted earlier. This was because it was integral to a system that in the course of the sixteenth century married old civic and old papal monarchic traditions to a newly broader Roman aristocracy with connections—economic, aesthetic, religious, and political—to wider worlds than Rome and its hinterlands. The same thing happened for the same conservative-aristocratic reasons in Nuremberg in the later sixteenth century, as was also noted earlier: Carnival continued after the repression of the Schembart parades while the overall sociopolitical situation remained unchanged.

The systems creaked on. But every system, to be a system, must have firm boundaries. As those boundaries over time are sharpened and set off cleanly from adjacent arenas, they tend to fracture at the edges, producing riotous recklessness on the inside and allowing unwanted incursions from the outside. A few minorities, frayed and frazzled by conditions in the system, put on strange clothes and cry out rashly. Wild things, reemerging on the sharpened boundaries, extend their snouts. The snouts are rapped smartly, and the wild things move on, trying to find another weak spot in the defenses of the tame.

Should it surprise us then that some remnants of old symbolic orders popped up from time to time in this bright and polished sixteenth-century world of crafted controls, mass enthusiasms, kowtowing, and indifference? All it took was a larger disintegrating sociocultural context, such as happened again and again in that century of Reformations and Counter-Reformations.

Jean Paumier, a draper of modest means in the town of Romans in eastern central France, walked into council chambers during one of the council's sessions in late January or early February of 1580 (some commentators say that it was Candlemas, also known as "Bear Day," February 2, when bears were said to emerge from hibernation to test the weather). Did Paumier walk across the room with a clumsy gait because, as the single source that we have about this event asserts, he had placed a bear pelt over his body? He walked in and sat down. The council members, who certainly knew him well because he had attended sessions before, watched him sit down in a chair that was not his usual place. About this move the source only states that he was watched as he sat down; it does not say anything about the quality or importance of the new chair that he took. But the source concludes the description of the incident with unmistakably indignant words: this fellow, sitting where he did, took "a rank and a seat that were not his due."<sup>71</sup>

With this move in this costume, undertaken at Carnival time in sixteenth-century Romans, Paumier renewed the tradition of wildmen invading the tame. Like the image of a medieval bear, he dared to menace takeover of the town's politics, or at least to act as an ungovernable intruder into an officiality whose workings he therewith put in question. Bear-man that he was, he was doing a devil's work (so Canon Benedict and St. Augustine might say) by unsettling the confident sense of superiority of these city patriarchs. A few days later, as Carnival time in Romans gathered full force in the town and as social fractions sharpened their differences and suspicions, this animal imitator was murdered at the door of his house by a well-instructed mob, a mob probably acting under the instructions of the very man who had recorded the bear-man incident

vant." See E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Le Carnaval de Romans: De la Chandeleur au mercredi des Cendres: 1579–1580* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 198–99.

72. Le Roy Ladurie describes Paumier's murder and recounts at length the reasons for suspecting that Judge Guérin was behind the mob action. The groups taking part in the Carnival games of 1580 at Romans made rich use of animals to symbolize their partisanship: eagle, partridge, hare, rooster, capon, sheep, bear, and donkey. The bear, if Le Roy Ladurie's reading of the sources can be trusted, was not used as an ongoing matrix by any of the contending factions. He provides a summary table of the animal symbols used by what he calls "high" and "low" classes. Neither Carnival politics nor city politics at Romans had only festive dimensions, as Le Roy Ladurie emphasizes. *Ibid.*, 245, 245–53, 220–42, 240. Essential for the situation at Romans were the chaotically worsening politico-economic conditions, rural no less than urban in the Romans area during the 1570s. The chaos stemmed not only but nonetheless predominantly from the political and military upheavals, the so-called Religious Wars, affecting all of France from the 1560s to the end of the century. Le Roy Ladurie's excellent book interweaves the larger contexts with the actions of the social factions disrupting Romans, actions that came to a head in the two weeks of Carnival manifestations in February 1580.

Those weeks ended in many more killings than that of Paumier who had emerged as one of the most prominent opponents of the upper-class oligarchy ruling the town.

and who was the town's leading judicial magistrate.<sup>72</sup>

However wildness comes in, whatever the final issue of its disorderly entry, it always provokes recognition and reevaluation of long-accepted inequalities. That is not the least considerable among the many effects of politics in Carnival. But such reevaluations and such occasional resurrections of old symbolic modes usually remain futile in political and social terms, and often murderously so, as in the case of Paumier and his adherents. Systems creak on, until they are done in by a mass of changes in which carnivalesque politics often play some small part.

Revolutions are rare. But during those rare moments, as in this carnivalesque moment, it is the functioning of plurally interacting sociabilities that counts. Community-focused sensibilities are what matters, even as the interacting world widens ever more disconcertingly, ever broadening a Carnival's contexts.

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## AUTHOR BIO

**Samuel Kinser**, Presidential Research Professor emeritus at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois, is Director of the Center for Research in Festive Culture ([festival-studies.org](http://festival-studies.org)). His publications treat the history of festive culture in Western Europe and the Americas from the Middle Ages to the present (see e.g., *Carnival American Style, Mardi Gras at New Orleans and Mobile*, Chicago, 1990, and *Rabelais's Carnival: Text, Context, Metatext*, Berkeley, 1990). Some recent publications are listed in the "Works Cited" section of his article for this journal.

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# Venice Carnival from the Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century: A Political Ritual Turned “Consumer Rite”?

**Gilles Bertrand**

University of Grenoble Alpes, France

## KEYWORDS

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## ABSTRACT

As with other carnivals around the world, the history of the Venetian Carnival sheds light on the complex dialectic between festivity and politics and more particularly on the growing need for political authorities to control the urban environment. This article provides a *longue durée* approach to carnival in Venice and unpacks the meaning of its successive metamorphoses. During the Middle Ages, Venetians used carnival as a defense strategy for their city, intended to ensure the cohesion of its various neighborhoods around a common destiny. In the fifteenth century, the legacy of public festivals for both rich and poor gave way to a more official celebration, which allowed Venice to outdo its European rivals. The civilized and policed expressions that were elaborated from the Renaissance until the eighteenth century gradually set Venetian Carnival apart from the exuberance and invertibility displayed by rustic carnivals in other parts of Europe. However watered-down and commodified present-day Venetian Carnival may seem, it continues to raise eminently political issues, most of which have to do with the appropriation of public space by private interests and the recreation of traditions for mass consumption.

1. Giustina Renier Michiel, *Origine delle feste veneziane*, 5 vols. (Venice: Tipografia di Alvisopoli, 1817).

All translations in the article are by the author unless otherwise noted.

2. Bianca Tamassia Mazzarotto, *Le feste veneziane: I giochi popolari, le cerimonie religiose e di governo* (Florence: Sansoni, 1961).

Urban Padoan published many books on Venice between 1966 and 1998, each of which focused on a particular aspect of Venetian festivals and masks. See, for instance, Lina Urban Padoan, *Processioni e feste dogali: "Venetia est mundus"* (Vicenza: N. Pozza, 1998). Stefania Bertelli, *Il Carnevale di Venezia nel Settecento* (Rome: Jouvence, 1992). Reato's series of illustrated books on the history of Venetian masks and carnival were published between 1981 and 1998.

3. See Pino Correnti, *Il carnevale di Venezia* (Milan: Ecotour, 1968); Maria Teresa Muraro, "La festa a Venezia e le sue manifestazioni rappresentative: Le compagnie della Calza e le Momarie," in *Storia della cultura veneta*, ed.

Girolamo Arnaldi and Manlio Pastore Stocchi, vol. 3, *Dal primo Quattrocento al Concilio di Trento*, no. 3 (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1981),

315–41; Lina Urban Padoan, "Feste ufficiali e trattenimenti privati," in *Storia della cultura veneta*, vol. 4, *Il Seicento*, no. 1 (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1983), 575–600;

Lina Urban Padoan, "Il carnevale veneziano," in *Storia della cultura veneta*, vol. 5, *Il Settecento*, no. 1 (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1985), 631–46; and Pompeo Molmenti, *Storia di Venezia nella vita privata dalle origini alla caduta della Repubblica* (1879; Bergamo: Istituto

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The political dimension of Venice Carnival has been a focus of academic and independent scholarship since at least the nineteenth century, when the female Venetian aristocrat Giustina Renier Michiel connected local festive dynamics to the commemorative politics of the (then deceased) Republic of Venice in *Origine delle feste veneziane*, published in 1817.<sup>1</sup> The typology of Venetian festivals laid out by Renier Michiel was refined in the 1960s by specialists in the history of Venetian culture Bianca Tamassia Mazzarotto and Lina Urban Padoan, while in the early 1990s, as a counterpoint to folklorist Danilo Reato's illustrated books, historian Stefania Bertelli published a critical book derived from her master's thesis (*tesi di laurea*) on the political meaning of Venice Carnival in the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Other twentieth-century works that commented on the festivity's political dimension (albeit without theorizing it) include Pino Correnti's 1968 synthesis, various contributions to the *Storia della cultura veneta* books, and several book chapters that relied on historian and politician Pompeo Molmenti's classic history of Venice (1879) for their descriptions of pre-1797 carnival.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1980s, the best scholarship on the consubstantial links between Venice Carnival and the political sphere has come from English-speaking scholars, including Edward Muir, Peter Burke, and James H. Johnson (see also Samuel Kinser's article in this issue).<sup>4</sup> However, these have mostly focused on the medieval and Renaissance periods and have consistently overlooked the contemporary period. To specialists of Venice, in fact, the history of carnival from the nineteenth to the twenty-first-century usually boils down to the following observations: carnival was prohibited by the French and Austrian authorities from 1797 to 1848, experienced a brief resurgence in unified Italy (1867) before evaporating for the remainder of the century, only to come back in 1980 as a commercialized festival deprived of any historical component (its 2020 theme for instance was "Game, Love, and Madness").<sup>5</sup>

While I agree that the recent period is not as conducive to a political history approach as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, I do think that the evolution of Venice Carnival should be studied over the long term if we are to grasp the full scope of its political meaning. First there was a medieval carnival, when Venice was still a *Comune* (township), from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries; then, under the leadership of the dominant aristocratic group, there was successively a Renaissance carnival and a baroque carnival; later still, there was a carnival of the Venetian "nation" that reappeared in the context of the Austrian domination of the nineteenth century. Let us not forget the twentieth-century carnival of aesthetes and exiled princes either, or the return of carnival in 1980, which is now compressed into about ten days leading up to Lent and has put Venice back in the running for winter capital of the world. Such continual transformations preclude any monolithic description of Venice Carnival, and we clearly need to distance ourselves from the images that the eighteenth century has etched into our minds.

As complex as the history of Venice Carnival is, it does not mean, however, that one should not look for long-term historical structures and overarching themes. Indeed, from its presumed birth in Venice at the end of the eleventh century until the nineteenth century at least, Venetians

italiano d'arti grafiche, 1927–29). Many recent works, such as those published by Alessandro Renier between 2007 and 2011, are based on an uncritical acceptance of Molmenti's account.

4. Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); Peter Burke, "Le carnaval de Venise: Esquisse pour une histoire de longue durée," in *Les jeux à la Renaissance*, ed. Philippe Ariès and Jean-Claude Margolin (Paris: J. Vrin, 1982), 55–64; and James H. Johnson, *Venice Incognito: Masks in the Serene Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

5. Nineteenth-century carnival has recently been the subject of a number of historical reassessments. See Alvisè Zorzi, *Venezia austriaca (1798–1866)* (1985; Gorizia: Libreria ed. Goriziana, 2000); Marco Fincardi, "I fasti della 'tradizione': Le cerimonie della nuova venezianità," in *La Storia di Venezia: L'Ottocento e il Novecento*, ed. Mario Isnenghi and Stuart J. Woolf (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2002), 2:1485–1522; and Giandomenico Romanelli, "Les fêtes du XIXe siècle," in *Venise en fêtes*, ed. Georges Herscher (Paris: Chêne, 1992), 141–88. Scholarship on twentieth-century carnival, however, remains quasi nonexistent. The only references are and Fiore Gandolfi, "Les fêtes du XXe siècle," in *Venise en fêtes*, 189–226, and Danilo Reato, *Storia del carnevale di Venezia* (Venice: Amministrazione della provincia di Venezia, Assessorato alla cultura, 1988); Herscher, ed., *Venise en fêtes*; Alessandro Renier, *Venezia '800: Il Carnevale. Primo '900. La Riva*

have constantly been concerned with sustaining a self-regulating community. Carnival was but one of the rules that the Venetian community set to itself, not just to punctuate the seasons—as did the popular liturgies studied by ethnologist and folklorist Claude Gaignebet—but also to combat hostile external forces and to build social harmony.<sup>6</sup> This does not make the history of Venice more linear, since no festive configuration has ever endured through the centuries. But it allows us to explore the many ways carnival may have contributed to the creation of a "Venetian community."

In the fifteenth century, having become one of the key civic rituals celebrating the political and economic successes of La Serenissima (the Most Serene Republic of Venice) for the whole world to see, carnival underwent a major transformation that paralleled the formation of a "Venetian myth" (studied in its successive phases by historians Élisabeth Crouzet-Pavan and Gino Benzoni).<sup>7</sup> Not until the late sixteenth century did the carnival practices that have become familiar to us become stable. While continuing to contribute to civic cohesion, carnival became increasingly controlled by the aristocracy. Its aesthetics became more and more refined, until, in the eighteenth century, it became the very symbol of urban carnivals, attended by princes and members of the elite from all over Europe, an emblem of the art of conversation and of the dynamics of secrecy stimulated by the "civilizing process" dear to sociologist Norbert Elias.<sup>8</sup>

More than the Renaissance, the Enlightenment is deemed to have been a sort of pinnacle for carnival, until, in 1797, the Republic of Venice ceased to exist. The centuries that followed ceaselessly memorialized the main aspects of this "golden age": courtesans, opera music and chamber concerts, the custom of wearing a mask and a tricorne with a lace shawl called *bautta*, and the freedom of going incognito. The association of Venetian Carnival with freedom—the freedom to transgress taboos and to be someone else without breaking the laws of the republic—remains strong today, probably because it has been popularized in literature, engravings, paintings, and music since the eighteenth century. Authors from the second half of the nineteenth century like the Goncourt brothers, Hugo von Hofmannstahl, and Arthur Schnitzler have, in particular, modeled our vision of the preceding centuries of carnival.<sup>9</sup> In the twentieth century, tourist advertising came to replace such media. Ironically, the eighteenth century was far from being an era of unbridled enjoyment, as carnival was then strictly controlled by the authorities. The seventeenth century, rather, and its attendant baroque carnival, is the one that most enduringly marked the history of the Venetian Carnival. That was the time when the state took on the festivities, when theater flourished, when the opera was launched, and when an iconographic system initiated by engraver Giacomo Franco (fig. 1) and extended by painters Joseph Heintz (1600–78) (fig. 2) and Luca Carlevarij (1663–1730) turned Venice into a major European festive center.

To analyze the changing meaning of Venice Carnival over the *longue durée*, one needs to escape the narrow theoretical model of a liberating festival, or that of pleasurable transgression, and reinscribe it into a social and political process spanning several centuries. Indeed, the expression "*fête à l'envers*" (upside-down festival), selected by anthropologist Daniel Fabre in 1992 to synthesize the essence of rural, urban, and court carnivals seems hopelessly inadequate when discussing Venice Carnival.<sup>10</sup> How can we imagine that everyday life was turned on its head in the "civilized" and "policed" city of Venice when the supposed "inversion" became almost permanent

degli Schiavoni. *I Pubblici Giardini* (Venice: La Toletta, 2013); Joseph Rubenstein. "Carnival Unmasked: Transformations of Performance in Venice," *Anthropology Humanism Quarterly* 15, nos. 2–3 (1990): 53–60; and Charles Arcordia and Chantal Dickinson, "Tourism Field Studies: Experiencing the Carnival of Venice," *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education* 25, no. 3 (2013): 146–55.

6. Claude Gaignebet, *Le Carnaval: Essais de mythologie populaire* (Paris: Payot, 1974) (text established by Marie-Claude Fromentin).

7. Élisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, *Venise triomphante: Les horizons d'un mythe* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999) (translated by Lydia G. Cochrane as *Venice Triumphant: The Horizons of a Myth* [Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002]); Gino Benzoni, "Venezia, ossia il mito modulato," in *Crisi e rinnovamenti nell'autunno del Rinascimento a Venezia*, ed. Vittore Branca and Carlo Ossola (Florence: Olschki, 1991), 43–59; and Gino Benzoni, ed., *Le metamorfosi di Venezia: Da capitale di stato a città del mondo* (Florence: Olschki, 2001).

8. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (New York: Urizen Books, 1978).

9. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *L'Italie d'hier, notes de voyage, 1855–1856* (Paris: G. Charpentier and E. Fasquelle, 1894); Hugo von Hofmannstahl, *Andreas or the United* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1936) (*Andreas oder die Vereinigten* was an unfinished novel, written between 1907 and 1927, and finally published



Figure 1. Giacomo Franco (1550–1620), *Ciarlatani in Piazza S. Marco* (Charlatans in Piazza S. Marco), from his *Habiti d'huomeni et donne Venetiane*, circa 1610. Engraving. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

in the modern era (from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries) and when carnival practices largely exceeded the traditional ten-day pre-Lenten period to spread through the famous "half-year" described in the age of Enlightenment? Far from being an exception, a "time out of time," carnival on the lagoon was clearly more like the rule, inspiring a new nickname for Venice: the "Republic of the Masks."<sup>11</sup>

With these preliminary remarks in mind, I now offer a broad synthesis of the politics of Venice Carnival from the medieval to the contemporary period, centering on four "moments" and ending on a reflection on twenty-first-century carnival as a rite of both consumption and commemoration.

in German in 1932); and Arthur Schnitzler, *Casanova's Homecoming* (New York: Priv. print for subscribers only, 1921) (first published in German as *Casanovas Heimfahrt* in 1918).

10. Daniel Fabre, *Carnaval ou la Fête à l'envers* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).

11. Alessandro Fontana, *Il vizio occulto* (Ancona: Transeuropa, 1989). See also, Alessandro Fontana, "La vérité des masques," in *Venise 1297–1797: La république des castors*, ed. Alessandro Fontana and Georges Saro (Saint-Cloud: ENS Editions Fontenay/Saint-Cloud, 1997), 235–61.

12. Burke, "Le carnaval de Venise."

13. *Ibid.*, 57.



Figure 2. Giuseppe Heintz II (circa 1600–78), *The Bull Hunt in Campo San Polo*, 1648. Oil on canvas. Museo Correr, Venice.

### An Instrument of Civic Defense Serving the Venetian Community (Thirteenth–Fifteenth Centuries)

As historian Peter Burke surmised in his 1982 essay, the physiognomy of twelfth-century Venetian Carnival was probably similar to that of other Mediterranean carnivals.<sup>12</sup> In Venice as much as in Florence, Barcelona, Seville, Rome, Naples, and Montpellier, medieval carnival was characterized by "the freedom to eat and drink gargantuan amounts, to wear a mask, to insult your neighbors, to pelt them with eggs, lemons, oranges, etc., and to sing songs full of political or sexual innuendos."<sup>13</sup> As early as the twelfth century, however, these conventional pre-Lenten expressions of gluttony and concupiscence combined with a commemoration of the milestones of local history, gradually turning carnival into a site of civic liturgy. Such a political appropriation explains why the festivities barely maintained themselves after the fall of the Republic of Venice in 1797.

In the absence of images and with only few written testimonies to rely on, delineating pre-sixteenth-century carnival is no small task. While the *Comune Veneciarum*, the people's assembly, lasted beyond the thirteenth century, its role kept decreasing as the oldest and richest families consolidated their own assemblies of "wise men": the Great Council or "Major Council," which stopped recruiting new members between 1297 and 1314, and the "Council of Ten," which became permanent after 1335. Based on the documents traditionally cited by scholars since Molmenti (1819–94)—starting from Doge Vitale Falier's 1094 edict granting the right to celebrate carnival in the run-up to Lent (*carnis laxatio*)—as well as on a few accounts handed down about carnival, the veracity of which cannot be established with certainty, it would seem that violence was a constant feature of carnival before and after the thirteenth century. A ban on egg throwing was thus issued in 1268, while a February 12, 1339, law denounced past misdemeanors committed by maskers. More significantly, a 1458 law forbade men from masking as women to enter female monasteries. Cruelty toward animals also seems to have been a feature of medieval

14. Giovanni Rossi, *Costumi Veneziani*, unpublished manuscript, vol. 12, Cod. Marc. It. VII 1397 (9288), folios 67–69, Biblioteca Marciana, Venice; and Michele Battaglia, *Cicalata sulle Cacce dei Tori Veneziane* (Venice: Tip. G. B. Merlo, 1844) (text was initially drafted in 1834).

15. This particular ritual took place at Campo San Luca, between St. Mark's Square and the Grand Canal.

16. Molmenti, *Storia di Venezia*, vol. 1, La grandezza.

carnival. It actually shocked chroniclers until the early nineteenth century. In the 1830s and 1840s, for instance, such scholars as Giovanni Rossi and Michele Battaglia remembered with horror the tortures inflicted on defenseless oxen during the bull hunts (*caccia al toro*), when the hounds weakened the animals by biting their ears, thereby simplifying the sportsman's task.<sup>14</sup> It would appear that geese and cats were not spared either.

Such violence, however, hardly aimed at overthrowing the social order: it was rooted in the tradition of military self-defense and sporting exercise that characterized male sociability in the city's various neighborhoods. This is probably why it was allowed to continue well into the eighteenth century. The stick fights—and later fist fights (*lotte dei pugni*)—that pitted two factions of the people, the Castellani and the Nicolotti, geographically located on either side of the Grand Canal (fig. 3), took place every year on the Ponte dei Pugni (Bridge of Fists) in San Barnaba, near Campo Santa Margherita, until 1705, when they were branded as “brawls” and suppressed.



Figure 3: Jacopo de' Barbari, Venice map, 1500. Woodblock printing. Museo Correr, Venice.

Despite the threat they posed to public safety, bull hunts were permitted from the first day of carnival, December 26, to the last Sunday of the season until 1802, when a platform collapsed due to an angered animal at Campo Santo Stefano, not far from the Academy Bridge, crushing a group of spectators. The Fat Thursday “Hercules's Strength” show, an acrobatic spectacle of men perched on the shoulders of other men in such a way as to form human pyramids, was only abolished six years after a tragic rumpus between the Nicolotti and the Castellani took place on May 31, 1810, killing a dozen people (fig. 4). Another violent ritual continued for a long time, namely, the mid-Lent grotesque buffoonery of “the Old Wife” (*della Vecchia*), during which respects were paid to a puppet old woman whose face was masked, before the people threw themselves on her, cut her belly in two, and, finally, burned her.<sup>15</sup>

Although no historian can accurately date the invention of carnival rituals in Venice, most have stressed the role these rituals have played in La Serenissima's festival system since the fourteenth century. Molmenti, for instance, argued in 1879 that their perpetuation was better explained by their patriotic dimension than by the character of Venice residents, the theatrical shape of the city, or the mildness of the climate conducive to alfresco living.<sup>16</sup> He added that the

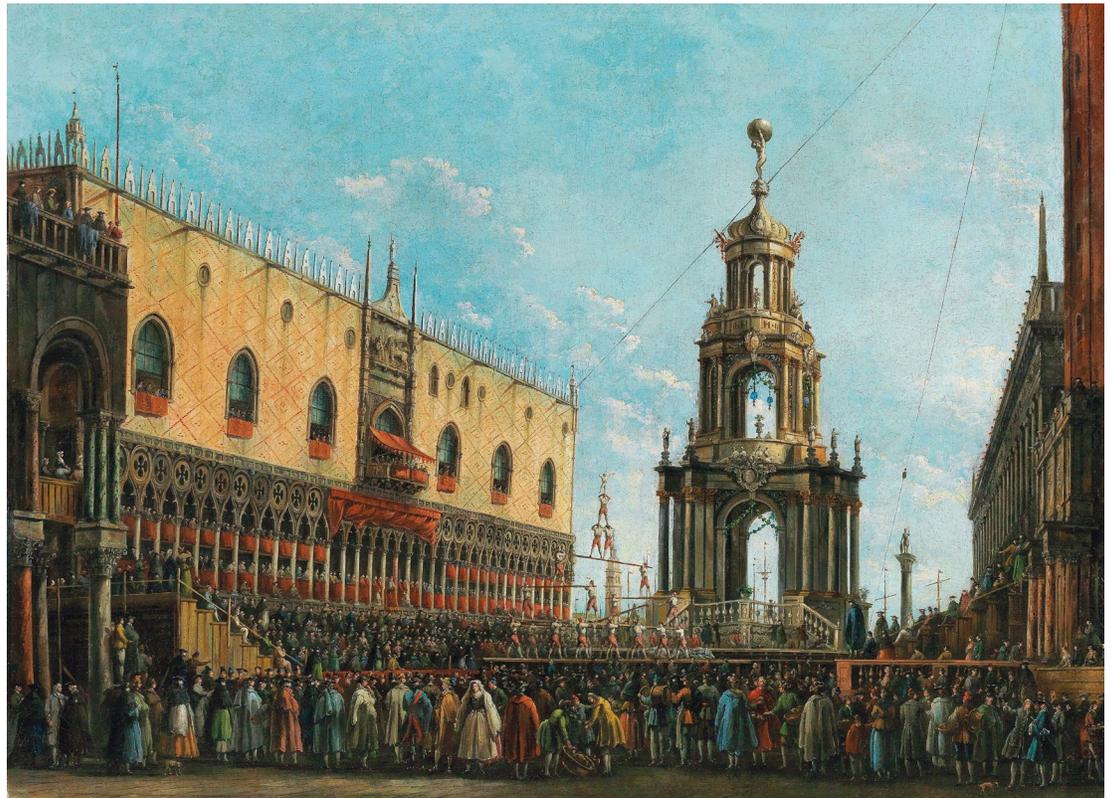


Figure 4. Giuseppe Bernardino Bison (1762–1844), *The “Giovedì Grasso” Festival before the Ducal Palace in Venice*, circa 1844. Oil on canvas. Private collection.

17. Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*; and Richard. C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

unification of Italy had especially contributed to the development of a patriotic culture, which Venice intended to dominate in a way appropriate to its former position. A century later, American historian and anthropologist Edward Muir, whose 1981 study of civic rituals in Venice preceded historian Richard C. Trexler’s on Florence by a few years, claimed that the ritualization of society and of politics in sixteenth-century Venice had largely contributed to strengthening the city’s republican constitution, which earned Venice a reputation for stability in Renaissance Europe.<sup>17</sup> Like Molmenti and Muir, I believe that the Venetian festival system, made up of carnival, lavish spectacles, parades, and doge coronations, made a major contribution to the city’s identity. I also believe that these civic rituals, whose form stabilized in the Renaissance, have had two main functions: first, to reinforce the well-defined roles of all citizens, thus raising Venetians’ awareness of themselves as a community that would look after its members; and second, to raise the city’s profile all over Europe by projecting its identity beyond its borders. Unlike Muir and Molmenti, however, I think such a dual use of festivals—for internal and external use—dates back to the medieval period.

Venetian Carnival took on a political significance as early as the twelfth century, since it not only constituted a moment of liberation on the eve of Lent but also became an opportunity to reinforce civic cohesion between all Venetians—nobles, citizens (*cittadini*) and commoners (*popolani*)—year-round. A carnivalesque spirit permeated, for instance, the feasting and revelry organized by the historical subdivisions (*contrade*) of Venice during the Festival of the Twelve Marys, attested from February 2, 1143, when Candlemas became the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary. This festival originally took the form of a waterborne procession of twelve richly

18. On this resurrection of the Festa delle Marie in 1930s Venice, see Kate Ferris, *Everyday Life in Fascist Venice, 1929–40* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 90–99.

adorned wooden effigies of the Virgin Mary from Venice to Santa Maria Formosa. It was meant to commemorate Venice's reprisals against Triestine pirates who, sometime in the tenth century (perhaps in 973), had supposedly abducted twelve poor girls whom the doge had dowered before they could be blessed at the Cathedral of San Pietro di Castello with their jewelry. From the twelfth century to its disappearance in 1379, the festival grew from one to three days (January 31 to February 2) and gradually incorporated land processions and banquets that foregrounded women and strengthened the relations between neighborhoods. Rooted in the seventy historical subdivisions of Venice, which organized the boat procession in turn, it came to be seen as such a symbol of social harmony that the fascist regime reinstated it in 1934 as a gondola pageant carrying twelve smiling young brides and their bridegrooms from the Dopolavoro headquarters at the Palazzo della Pescheria to the church of San Pietro.<sup>18</sup>

Interestingly, the Festival of the Twelve Marys was replaced toward the end of the fourteenth century by a new ritual, that of Fat Thursday. This feast, which followed the yearly variations of Lent and Easter, gradually became the main unifying moment of the year. Like its predecessor, it was invented with a view to strengthening social concord by commemorating victory over a common enemy. The event that it memorialized was, this time, the supposed defeat in 1162 of the patriarch of Aquileia and his twelve canons by Doge Vitale II Michiel, who had come to the aid of the patriarch of Grado. More specifically, it commemorated the former's obligation to pay an annual tribute of twelve pigs, symbolizing the twelve canons, and twelve large loaves (to which a bull was added as of 1312) in exchange for the patriarch's freedom. The pigs were tried by a court in the Ducal Palace, in a hall where small wooden castles with crenelated towers were erected to represent the castles of Friuli over which the Aquileia patriarch's temporal power had extended. In execution of the sentence, the pigs were then thrown on the Piazzetta adjoining the basilica where blacksmiths and butchers cut their throats and cut them up. Their meat was distributed to the senators and the bread to the prisoners. The doge and some of the senators later came back to the palace to demolish the wooden castles. Dating from the days of the commune, the ritual lasted until 1797 and emphasized the patriotic and warlike component of carnival's mythical development. The spectacles that were given on that day, including the Hercules's Strength shows, served to manifest and foster urban solidarities, while also celebrating the supremacy of Venice over its neighbors. The latter dimension of the Fat Thursday rituals hints at the second function of the medieval carnivalesque festivals in Venice, which was to stage the city's dynamism for the rest of the world to see.

Another mask-wearing period or "second carnival" thus took place in May or June, during the two-week Ascension Fair attended by the pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. The festival of La Sensa appears to have initially served to commemorate Doge Pietro II Orsoleo's victorious expedition to Dalmatia in 1000, which would suggest that it celebrated Venice's domination over the Adriatic. In the thirteenth century, its climax became the Marriage to the Sea ceremony, during which the doge was wedded to the ocean to mark the supposed "donation of 1177," whereby the pope, as a gesture of thanks to the Venetians for their assistance in a conflict against Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, conferred on the doge the symbols of his power, thus recognizing the city's jurisdictional autonomy of Venice. Attested by mid-thirteenth-century documents mentioning the building of the first "bucentaur" (master vessel) circa 1253–75, it remained unchanged from the early sixteenth century to the end of the republic in 1797, by which

19. To be fair, carnival jousting and tournaments had already been held on St. Mark's Square from the thirteenth century to the end of the fifteenth century to celebrate the great victories or the memorable episodes of the life of the doge. And it was only in 1647 that the favorite place for nobles to walk under the eyes of onlookers, called the Liston, was moved from Campo Santo Stefano to Piazza San Marco.

20. On this notion of world economy and its evolution in early modern times, see Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme: XVe–XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1967),

20. Translated by Siân Reynolds as *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982–84).

time it had become the favorite moment for foreigners to visit the city. The doge, as captain of Venice, embarked on his state barge, surrounded by a myriad of gondolas loaded with maskers. His trip took him from the historic center of the city, where Saint Mark supposedly repelled the demons, to its outskirts at San Nicolò del Lido, where the doge threw a gold ring into the sea to ward off enemies.

Fat Thursday and the festival of La Sensa both illustrate the desire of Venetians to assert, through carnivalesque entertainment, their supremacy over the Adriatic as well as their prosperity. Freed from the control of the Holy Roman Empire and the Byzantine Empire in 1177, the Venetian Republic held a preeminent position thanks to its trading activities. But the government was careful to mix the more overtly political rituals with popular festivities in order to unite the residents around the celebration of the city's power. It encouraged the competition between the Castellani and the Nicolotti, whose festive exploits took the dual form of military training exercises and demonstrations of strength and skill, such as the Hercules's Strength human pyramid contests on the Piazzetta, which continued beyond the fall of the republic.

The trauma of the War of Chioggia (1379–81), however, during which Venice was besieged by Genoese ships for almost a year before its control of the Adriatic was restored, precipitated the transformation of the *Comune*, with its contrade, into a *Signoria*, dominated by aristocrats who were wary of popular influence and sought to channel it. This transformation took place over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, while Venetian trade was enjoying its greatest expansion and the republic was beginning to assert its domination on terra firma. It had a huge influence on the city's festival system in general and on the management of carnival in particular. The spatial model of the Festival of the Twelve Marys, rooted in the contrade, was replaced with a new geography centering around the liturgical and political center of St. Mark's Square. As a consequence, the Piazza San Marco also became the focal point of the Fat Thursday celebrations.<sup>19</sup> Following the annexation of Friuli in 1420, the annual tribute of loaves and pigs was performed by the Venetian government and no longer symbolically by the patriarch of Aquileia as had been the case since 1222. Due to the consolidation of oligarchic institutions, carnival took on the form of a peaceful collective amusement that was increasingly closely controlled by the ruling classes.

### **A Focal Point in the Competition between European Capitals (Sixteenth–Seventeenth Centuries)**

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, after the Ottoman Empire and Spain gained the upper hand in the Mediterranean and the United Provinces became the center of gravity of the "world economy" (as defined by Fernand Braudel), Venice tried to offset its loss of influence and remain an attractive capital by promoting a carnival whose unrivalled resplendence and luxury became world famous.<sup>20</sup> From the mid-fifteenth century to 1564, the young noblemen who were members of the Compagnie della Calza had organized *momarie* (mimed and danced theatrical performances) and waterborne processions to welcome illustrious guests, as well as private balls, serenades, regattas, naumachiae, land processions, refreshments, and fireworks. After 1560, the Venetian state took over from them by offering Venetians and foreigners, such as Grand Duke Ferdinand II of Tuscany in 1628, an endless succession of regattas, "theaters of the world" on floating pontoons, masses, concerts, and bull hunts that lasted until the fall of

21. The capture of Constantinople (capital city of the Byzantine Empire) by the Ottoman army in 1453 was probably the reason behind the emergence of the *moresca* dance tradition, which would long pit Christians against Moors or Turks. For more details, see Lina Urban Padoan, *La festa del giovedì grasso* (Venice: Centro internazionale della grafica, 1988); John Forrest, *The History of Morris Dancing, 1458–1750* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); and Ralph P. Locke, *Music and the Exotic from the Renaissance to Mozart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

22. I wish to thank Mario Infelise for drawing my attention to the literary activities of this “Academy,” to Heintz’s painting, and to the motif of the cloister parlor, whose earliest formulation can be found in an opusculum titled *Il parlatorio delle monache*, published in 1650 by Stamperia di Pasquino.

23. Francesco Bertelli, *Il Carnevale Italiano Mascherato ove si Veggono in Figura Varie Inventioni di Capritii* (Venice: n.p., 1642).

the republic. The state also reformed the feast of Fat Thursday, central to carnival celebrations, by “civilizing” it. From 1520 on, pigs no longer entered the Ducal Palace, and, in 1525, their public execution was replaced by that of oxen, officially called “bulls.” At the same time, the Council of Ten abolished the legal and military parody commemorating the victory of the doge over the patriarch of Aquileia in 1162 and the conquest of Friuli in 1420. After 1550, the Fat Thursday festivities ceased to be a moment of physical exhibition by the patrician elite and became a public spectacle offered by the republic to the city and to a foreign audience. This signaled the beginning of a new era, that of “baroque carnival,” thanks to which the eyes of Europeans continued to focus on Venice, and the nobility, by controlling the festivities, was able to delude itself with the illusion that it was still holding the reins of power.

Though increasingly channeled by aristocratic authorities, popular joy did not entirely disappear from baroque festivals. For three centuries, the more spontaneous entertainments of the “popular” carnival continued to deploy themselves, adding an exuberant, sometimes, improper, cruel, and illicit dimension to the celebration of the carnival desired by the state. Sports and recreational exercises for the people actually grew more prominent during carnival time in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In addition to the bull’s execution in front of the Ducal Palace and to the Hercules’s Strength human pyramids, Fat Thursday was enriched with a fireworks display, a *moresca* (a dance miming the struggle between Christians and Moors or Turks), and a new show called “Flight of the Angel,” created by a Turkish tightrope walker in 1558, until an accident that occurred in 1759 led to the acrobat being replaced with a dove.<sup>21</sup> Scores of maskers joined the crowds, drawing inspiration from medieval disguises such as those of the wild man, the old woman, the devil, and animals, from the *commedia dell’arte* repertoire or from oriental exoticism. The stages set up on trestles by players, charlatans, and animal tamers turned the carnival into a *theatrum mundi*, a microcosm of the world. Banquets (*festini*), balls, and gambling in the private gaming rooms (*ridotti*) or at the public Ridotto di San Moisè, located halfway between St. Mark’s Square and Campo Santo Stefano, combined with licentious practices in the small private casinos, gambling dens, bars, cafés, and barber shops.

This baroque carnival dictated rules and practices, going so far as to limit the deployment of sartorial luxury through enforcement of sumptuary laws dating from the sixteenth century. This was the context in which a masking culture developed among the elite. From the 1630s to the 1660s, a leading freethinking or “libertine” learned society named the Accademia degli Incogniti (1630–62) placed the mask at the heart of its activities. Under the leadership of Gian Francesco Loredan, it adopted the motto “*Ex ignoto notus*” (Known from the Unknown), promoted the use of anagrams in texts, and advocated concealment for women and certain aristocrats attending its sessions. Via the mask, freethinking (or “libertinage” of the mind) evolved into “libertinage” of manners and morals. The Accademia thus participated in the dissemination of certain iconographic motifs, such as the masked visit to the cloister parlor, immortalized by a painting by Joseph Heintz circa 1650 and taken up successfully a century later by painters Pietro Longhi and Francesco Guardi.<sup>22</sup> During the same period, Heintz placed masks that were the forerunners of the *bautta* in his scenes of bull hunts on St. Mark’s Square, while the printer-bookseller Francesco Bertelli collected engravings of the Carnival of Venice that were to spread throughout Europe (fig. 5) and opera made a striking entrance in Venice with the performance of *Andromeda* in 1637 at San Cassiano’s Teatro Nuovo.<sup>23</sup>



Figure 5. Francesco Bertelli (late sixteenth century—circa 1656), *Maschare da ebrei* (Masks of the Jews), from his *Il Carnevale Italiano Mascherato Oue si Veggono in Figura Varie Inuentione di capritii Fra(nces)co Bert[elli]*, 1642. Engraved plate. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

All of this seems to indicate that Venice's long-standing passion for both profane or sacred spectacles, for masking among the elites, and for assumed identities in general was forged at that time, in other words, several decades before painter Luca Carlevarijs depicted the first truly stabilized *bautta* masks in his *vedute* (cityscapes) (fig. 6).



Figure 6. Luca Carlevarijs (1663–1730), *St. Mark's Square on the Side of the Basilica of St. Mark's*, 1725. The most frequent attribution is to Carlevarijs, but the Sarasota museum site attributes it to his disciple Johan Richter (1665–1745), dating it to around 1720. Oil on canvas. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota.

24. On the taste of Venetians and foreigners for musical shows during Lent, as indicating that a culture of pleasure was diluted throughout the year, see Caroline Giron-Panel, *Musique et musiciennes à Venise: Histoire sociale des ospedali* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2014), 203–6.

25. In 1686 the Duke of Brunswick-Lünebourg thus organized festivities for his own benefit on his way to the front in the war against the Turks.

26. See Gilles Bertrand, *Histoire du Carnaval de Venise, XIe–XXIe siècle* (Paris: Pygmalion, 2013).

The taste for the spectacular, which led to the dominance of opera in the seventeenth century and of theater in the eighteenth, largely contributed to the prestige of carnival. But Lent itself was not excluded from the world of enjoyment and pleasure. Though theaters were then closed, performances by choir girls in churches sometimes resembled those of vocalists in upper-class entertainment venues. By spilling out of carnival time, the carnivalesque spirit thus connected profane festive time and the religious time of Lent or Advent. As has been noted by historian Caroline Giron-Panel, it unified the whole calendric year in Venice.<sup>24</sup> The prestige associated with the office of governor of conservatories in the race for honors among the nobility testifies to the logic of pleasure that dominated Venetian society year-round.

In the seventeenth century, carnival came to merge with another type of festivity, that given in honor of foreign dignitaries (or which foreign princes gave to themselves during their visit).<sup>25</sup> Venetian Carnival was thus transformed into a major site of cultural competition between European capitals. Numerous German princes went there to show their rank, before importing the carnival to Munich, or even Hanover. Louis XIV's fascination for Venice was equivocal: on the one hand, he tried to wrestle from La Serenissima the primacy that it had among European sovereigns as an ideal setting for their manifestations of pomp and splendor; on the other, he drew inspiration from Venice and its festivals by encouraging the construction of a grand canal at Versailles and by underwriting a series of "Venetian" comic operas and ballets, with music by the likes of André Campra, between 1697 and 1710.

### **A Controlled Festival That Civilized and Policed Manners While Also Allowing Steam to Be Let Off (Eighteenth Century)**

In the Age of Enlightenment, carnival displayed yet another face, symbolized by the bautta mask. With the incognito, a new carnival emerged that shaped politics for internal use, controlled behaviors, and civilized and policed manners and morals, while also allowing the people—albeit less and less—a few opportunities for letting off steam. This controlled carnival fit into the ceremonial of the republic, with its strict rules and its control over people's movements. Far from equalizing social conditions, it appeared to be the exact opposite of a time of spontaneous or unbridled overturning of social hierarchies. Following in the footsteps of the baroque carnival and its profusion of musical, theatrical, or nautical spectacles present well beyond the winter period, the collective festive culture of the second half of the seventeenth century and of the eighteenth century stood out not only because of its ethics of pleasure, deemed to be a defining characteristic of Venice, but also because of its encouragement of the art of conversing, the regulation of passions, and the practice of concealment with a view to preserving the interests of the republic and its socially pacified image. During the era that I have dubbed "Republic of the Masks" in my history of Venetian Carnival, state surveillance was exercised over the masks for about four months of the year, well beyond the ten days leading up to Lent.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, after adjustments consolidated the political and social vocation of carnival in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, the "time of masks" ultimately came to refer to the period during which profane shows and spectacles were authorized as the theater season. That season extended from the beginning of October to Advent, from the Feast of Saint Stephen (the day after Christmas) to Fat Tuesday (Mardi Gras, or Shrove Tuesday), and finally for the fortnight around the Feast of Ascension, "so that" the magistrate and man of letters, Charles de Brosses, wrote in

27. Charles de Brosses, *Lettres d'Italie* (1799; Paris: Mercure de France, 1986), 242.

28. Montesquieu, *Mes voyages*, ed. Jean Ehrard, with the collaboration of Gilles Bertrand (Paris: Classiques Garnier; Lyon: ENS Editions, 2012); Cardinal de Bernis, *Mémoires et lettres*, ed. Frédéric Masson (Paris: Plon, 1878); and Jean-Claude Richard, Abbé de Saint-Non, *Panopticon italiano: Un diario di viaggio ritrovato, 1759–1761* (Rome: Ed. dell'elefante, 1986).

29. Braudel himself wrote about the “mixing of social conditions” in Enlightenment Venice. See Fernand Braudel, *Le modèle italien* (Paris: Arthaud, 1989). Originally published in 1974 under the title “L'Italia fuori d'Italia. Due secoli e tre Italie,” in *Storia d'Italia*, vol. 2, *Dalla caduta dell'impero romano al secolo XVIII*, ed. Ruggiero Romano, Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), 2092–2248. This idea can also be found in Braudel, *Venise* (Paris: Arthaud, 1984), 102.

30. Giovanni Rossi, *Costumi Veneziani*, vol. 11, Cod. Marc. It. VII 1396 (9287), folio 149, Biblioteca Marciana, Venice.

1739 with slight exaggeration, “one can therefore count about six months when everyone goes about masked, priests as well as others, even the Nuncio and the Superior of the Capucines.”<sup>27</sup> Such an extension of carnival time seriously challenged the ordinary definition of carnival as “time out of time.” What was the status of a pleasure that was becoming so diluted? Travelers such as Montesquieu and then those of the second half of the eighteenth century, from Cardinal de Bernis to Jean-Claude Richard, Abbé de Saint-Non, often emphasized the boredom and monotony of this prolonged carnival season, during which they felt excluded from Venetian society.<sup>28</sup>

In the eighteenth century, masks were also used in ceremonies greeting ambassadors and at the five ritual grand banquets offered each year to Venetian dignitaries by the doge. These banquets, which the people could attend until the end of the first course, were held on Saint Mark's Day (San Marco being the patron saint of the city), Ascension Day, Saint Vito's Day (the day when Baiamonte Tiepolo's conspiracy was discovered), Saint Jerome's Day (the day when the Great Council renewed the elections of the magistrates), and Saint Stephen's Day (to commemorate the transfer of the protomartyr's relics from Constantinople to Venice). Related to sumptuary laws, masks limited the conspicuous display of luxurious clothing in the name of republican (and gender) equality while making the wearers incognito, and thus immunity from prosecution.

Over the course of the century, out of the diversity of the masks, a particular form of carnival costume worn by the elite was gradually forged, namely, the future bautta. A guild of mask makers, whose professional album (*mariegola*) for the 1430–1620 period has been preserved, had been producing masks since the fifteenth century. After working inside the painters' guild alongside sign makers using papier mâché, they set up an independent corporation in 1683 that included papermakers, gilders, miniaturists, and makers of gold leaf-embossed leather. In 1773, the eighteen master mask makers, seven journeymen, and six apprentices formed a protected group that was well established.

If the republic encouraged Venetian noblemen and noblewomen to wear the costume made up of a white mask (*volto*), a tricorn, a bautta, and a loose-fitting cloak (the *tabarro*) in the eighteenth century, it was primarily to allow the dwindling aristocracy to conceal their identities behind an outfit common to many cittadini. It was also a way for Venice to limit the circulation of information between the nobility and foreigners, in particular diplomats (since everyone was masked, the latter could not know who they were talking to) (fig. 7).

However, far from mixing up social conditions entirely, as commonly thought, the bautta costume also worked as a social marker.<sup>29</sup> Subtle differences between noble and non-noble (cittadini or popolani), such as the way the tricorn was positioned *alla forestiera* or *il bautino calato* (the shawl falling onto the shoulders, as foreigners wore it during the Feast of Ascension to escape the heat), made it possible to temporarily avoid the breakdown of social barriers (fig. 8). In the bull hunts, the nobility wore white so that they could be distinguished from the common people and, as scholar Rossi pointed out in a manuscript from the 1840s, the bautta mask worn by the nobility contrasted with the predominant *maschere buffe* (playful masks).<sup>30</sup>



Figure 7. Francesco Guardi (1712–93), *Audience Granted by the Doge in the Hall of the College of the Ducal Palace*, 1770. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Figure 8. Rosalba Carriera (1675–1757), *Masquerade Costume Portrait of Gustavus Hamilton, 2nd Viscount Boyne* (1710–1746), between 1730 and 1731. Pastel on paper, laid down on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

31. *Casini* were small private apartments where Venetian nobles met, conversed, or played with friends.

Poles apart from the idea of carnivalesque transgression, the Venetian mask was in fact used to moralize social life, regulate admission to theaters, and confine pleasures to closely supervised places, such as the *ridotti*, *casini*, cafés, and gambling dens.<sup>31</sup> Admittedly, the difficulty of keeping misbehavior under control is attested by the repetition, throughout the modern era, of Council of

32. The reference edition to Casanova's memoirs is *Histoire de ma vie*, 12 vols. (Wiesbaden: F. A. Brockhaus, 1960–62).

33. Gilles Fermanel, Robert Fauvel, Baudouin de Launay, and Vincent Stochove, *Le voyage d'Italie et du Levant* (Rouen: C. Maurry, 1670), 467; and Alexandre-Toussaint Limojon de Saint-Disdier, *La ville et la République de Venise* (Paris: Guillaume de Luyne, 1680), 410.

34. See Carlo Goldoni, *Villeggiatura trilogy*, trans. Robert Cornthwaite (Lyme, NH: Smith and Kraus, 1994); and Antonio Longo, *Memorie della vita di Antonio Longo veneziano scritte e pubblicate da lui medesimo per umilta* (Venice: Antonio Curti, 1820).

35. Gabriel-François Coyer, *Voyages d'Italie et de Hollande*, 2 vols. (Paris: Duchesne, 1775). On carnival crowds in Venice, see Bertrand, *Histoire du Carnaval de Venise*, 47–48.

Ten edicts prohibiting maskers from carrying weapons, gambling to excess, wearing luxurious items of clothing, entering monasteries and churches, wandering about at night, and dressing as women. The authorities—with the aid of such “spies” as Casanova—insisted nonetheless on tracking down any action indicative of moral looseness.<sup>32</sup> Courtesans attracted foreigners, and gambling, it was said, was ruining Venetians. Ten years after closing the private *ridotti* in 1628, the government opened a public gambling room, the *Ridotto di San Moisè*, where players had to wear masks (fig. 9).



Figure 9. Francesco Guardi (1712–93), *The Ridotto of San Moisè*, 1746. Oil on canvas. Ca' Rezzonico, Venice.

Gambling was done there in silence, on authorized days, and bankers were selected among non-masked patricians to limit the risks of fraud. The state controlled the activities of all those who occupied a spot on St. Mark's Square, from charlatans to preachers.

Behind the façade of a gentle, submissive people, bound together in perfect harmony, the republic had, in fact, never solved the problem of violence that plagued agrarian carnivals. Regardless of the effectiveness of urban policing and the image of civility that Venice embodied abroad, the gap between the people and the elite had kept growing between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. In the sixteenth century, the nobility had started organizing private banquets that protected them from the rabble. In the early seventeenth century, travelers like Gilles Fermanel had been struck by “the incredibly large quantity of disguised people” on St. Mark's Square, which, according to Alexandre-Toussaint Limojon de Saint-Disdier in 1680, “could hardly contain the crowd of masks and of those who come to see them.”<sup>33</sup> In the second half of the eighteenth century, they took refuge in their country villas, such as those on the Riviera del Brenta depicted by Carlo Goldoni and Antonio Longo in his memoirs.<sup>34</sup> Perceived as tiresome rather than threatening, the crowds were deemed calm by Ambassador Bernis in 1752–55, dull by Saint-Non in 1761, and varied in its disguises by Abbot Gabriel-François Coyer in 1763.<sup>35</sup> But they could become dangerous in a space ill-suited to such a congregation of people. To allow the city to breathe, Napoleon I created the Venice Giardini, and in 1854, one year before work on the Lido began, plans were made (but never carried out) for a gigantic seaside resort called the

36. Maximilien Misson, *Nouveau Voyage d'Italie, fait en l'année 1688, avec un mémoire contenant des avis utiles à ceux qui voudront faire le mesme voyage* (La Haye: H. van Bulderen, 1691), 1:169. This formula was taken up verbatim by de Brosse in his letter to M. de Blancey dated August 13, 1739, in *ibid.*, 190–92.

37. For more details on this controversy, see Gigliola Fragnito and Alain Tallon, eds., *Hétérodoxies croisées, catholicismes pluriels entre France et Italie, XVIe–XVIIe siècles* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2017).

“Royal Palace” on the Riva degli Schiavoni waterfront. Not until art collector and decorator Carlos de Beistegui’s flamboyant 1951 masked costume ball at the Palazzo Labia would the city attempt to reestablish communication between private partying in palaces and popular festivities. Even after the return of the carnival in 1980, the collateral damage caused by the crowds on St. Mark’s Square generated so much criticism that the alderman Maurizio Cecconi imposed a one-way system for pedestrians in 1985.

Modern-era carnival fulfilled paradoxical functions, therefore. Beyond the entertainment and libertinage lay both a concern for security and a fear of reform. The anxieties of an inward-looking society ultimately resulted in encouraging licentiousness and pleasures, provided they did not call authority into question. “Do what you please provided that you do not flout the boundaries of [religious and political] decency,” summed up French traveler Maximilien Misson in 1691.<sup>36</sup> On the fringes of public space, a private space was being constructed where freedom was total, so that the paradox consisted in encouraging licentiousness while also combating it. On the one hand, masks were turned into an accessory for pleasure, as Casanova’s memoirs amply recounted; on the other hand, the state combated dissolution and sought to maintain law and order in Venice by using masks as instruments of political control. As for the church’s moralizing discourse on carnival, it bothered people little in Venice: the authorities had been used to distancing themselves from papal authority since the controversy that pitted Pope Paul V against theologian Paolo Sarpi in 1606.<sup>37</sup> Alongside these “functional” uses, carnival and its masks provided occasions for displays of creativity in the fields of music (Francesco Gasparini, Antonio Vivaldi, Baldassare Galuppi, Giovanni Paisiello); the theater (Goldoni); and above all painting, with Pietro Longhi, Francesco Guardi, and Giandomenico Tiepolo.

### **A Low-Key Festival Reflective of Venice’s New Political Status after 1797**

In the last section of this article, I want to reflect on the survival and evolution of Venetian Carnival beyond the eighteenth century. After the Enlightenment peak of carnivalesque fever, the pre-Lenten celebrations that had enjoyed so much success since the Middle Ages had to adapt to the city’s loss of independence after 1797. Venice Carnival could no longer serve to highlight the power of the aristocratic republic. What did it celebrate once Venice was no longer the heart of an autonomous state? What new political needs (if any) has it been meeting up until the present day?

In the first half of the nineteenth century, carnival was radically transformed in a context of submission to foreign powers—France in 1797 and from 1805 to 1814, and Austria from 1797 to 1805, from 1815 to 1848, and from 1849 to 1866—followed by integration into a new unified Italian state, the Kingdom of Italy (1861–1946). More than ever before, it was characterized by a retreat into private parties and by a primacy of imagination and memory over reality. Such features would later facilitate its commodification by the tourism industry at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century.

After a short moralizing pause (1802–16) during which entertainment deemed the most threatening to public order and safety was suppressed, the third decade of the nineteenth century saw the return of balls, spectacles, shows, and masquerades. Costumes enlivened the city in the run-up to Lent again, but, above all, carnival punctuated the theatrical and musical

season. It briefly acquired a political function again in the winter of 1867, when in the presence of the mythical hero of the Italian Risorgimento, General Giuseppe Garibaldi, and the king's son, Amedeo, Duke of Aosta, a moment of collective fervor turned the city into an epicenter of the new Italian patriotism. But enthusiasm for carnival did not last, and the following celebrations were lower key. Above all, following the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress of Italian Scientists in 1847 and the establishment of the Venice Biennale in 1895, the city's festive center of gravity shifted to seasons other than that of the Old Carnival.

For most writers, including Lord Byron and other Romantic poets, Venice was in fact associated with mourning rather than unbridled carnivalesque joy in the nineteenth century. In his 1825 series of engravings titled *Un mois à Venise*, Louis de Forbin contrasted the horror of old Venetian prisons and the city's festive pleasures. Painters Longhi and Guardi were no longer discussed until the 1840s. Carnival did not disappear entirely, but since the city was no longer able to celebrate its power, the commemorative system into which masquerades fit was devoid of its prior meaning. The festivals henceforth honored only foreign sovereigns. Winter carnival and even Ascension carnival were no longer the highlight of festive life, since the Festa del Redentore (Feast of the Most Holy Redeemer) took over this role on the third Sunday in July and henceforth attracted princely visitors in the summer. A clear sign of the embourgeoisement of the festivities was the disappearance of acrobatic feats in favor of the quiet pleasure of walking along the Riva degli Schiavoni. The bucentaur, robbed of its mast and mutilated, became a floating penitentiary. Street spectacles disappeared, as did the *bautte*, and novelist George Sand could not hide her disappointment after attending carnival in 1834: "Every Sunday we have masks on the docks and in the square.... They arrive on the lagoon in decorated boats, along with musicians. It pales by comparison with the fantastic descriptions we hear of ancient Venice and its festivals, and yet it is still beautiful enough to our Parisian eyes."<sup>38</sup>

38. George Sand to Jules Boucoiran [Venice], January 28 [1834], in *Correspondance*, vol. 2, (1832–June 1835), ed. Georges Lubin (Paris: Garnier frères, 1966), 480.

Of the apogee of Venetian Carnival, there remained few traces in the nineteenth century. Trestle stages were still erected on the Riva degli Schiavoni, close to the Ducal Palace. In 1818, they accommodated an elephant that, once carnival was over, escaped and fled through the little streets called *calli* in Venice until it was finally dispatched by a blast of cannon fire. Aside from ballets, puppet shows, and plays in Italian or in local dialect, operas by Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi, which all premiered at the La Fenice Theatre during carnival, confirmed Venice's vocation as musical capital. Lavish balls continued to be held at the salons of the Società Apollinea. Venetian high society found refuge in these pleasures, to which foreigners were no longer necessarily invited.

Although a carnival did exist in the nineteenth century, it was so different as to challenge our conception of the political entirely. Indeed, after foreigners like the Duchess of Berry and the Count of Chambord started purchasing Venetian palaces where they organized parties for the upper crust in the 1840s, carnival stopped being a festival for the entire city, and in the last decades of the nineteenth century, it even deserted the ballrooms and concert halls. This withdrawal from the public sphere was paralleled by a desire to memorialize and reenact Enlightenment-era carnival. Among such reenactments was the masquerade in *bautte* that was organized in 1899 by the Prince of Hohenlohe-Waldembourg and artist and fashion designer Mariano Fortuny, which became famous throughout Italy and was immortalized in his 1911

39. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *L'Italie d'hier*, Henri de Régner, *Esquisses vénitiennes* (Paris: L'Art décoratif, 1906); Henri de Régner, *L'Altana, ou la vie vénitienne* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1928); Aloysius Bertrand, "La chanson du masque," in *Gaspard de la nuit: Fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot*, bk. 5, ed. Louis Bertrand (Paris: Labitte; Angers: V. Pavie, 1842) (this was a posthumous volume, the author having died in 1841); Maurice Sand, *Masques et bouffons: Comédie italienne* (Paris: Michel-Lévy frères, 1860); and Théophile Gautier, *Italia* (Paris: V. Lecou, 1852).

40. On these nineteenth-century painters, see Giuseppe Pavanello and Giandomenico Romanelli, eds., *Venezia nell'Ottocento: Immagini e mito* (Milan: Electa, 1983).

41. Philippe Monnier's book was already in its sixteenth edition in 1937. It has been successively published by Payot, Perrin, Club du meilleur livre, Editions Complexe, and now Tallandier. Philippe Sollers, *La Fête à Venise* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991); and Philippe Sollers, *Dictionnaire amoureux de Venise* (Paris: Plon, 2004).

book, *Sous le manteau vénitien: Silhouettes de la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Under the Venetian cloak: Silhouettes of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century).

Such nostalgia for carnival in its eighteenth-century incarnation was the result of substantial research conducted between the 1850s and the 1920s by such Venetian scholars as Molmenti as well as by foreign writers. The Goncourt brothers and Henri de Régner, for instance, promoted Longhi as "the painter of carnival," and meditation on the Venetian mask was a lasting topos of nineteenth-century literature, from Aloysius Bertrand with "La chanson du masque" (the song of the mask) to George (and Maurice) Sand, from Théophile Gautier to Austrian writers who, in the late nineteenth century, sensed the impending collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>39</sup> The myth of Venetian Carnival thus fueled an obsession with political decadence. Meanwhile, Italian painters, such as Ippolito Caffi, Giacomo Favretto, and Vittorio Emanuele Bressanin (fig. 10), also cultivated a form of patriotic nostalgia.<sup>40</sup>



Figure 10. Vittorio Emanuele Bressanin (1860–1941), *Carnival in Venice*, signed and dated V. Bressanin (19)27. Oil on wood. Location unknown.

Nowhere was nostalgia for eighteenth-century Venetian Carnival stronger than in late nineteenth-century France, when champions of a "masculine" and "energetic" Third Republic deplored the vanishing pleasures of carnival. Even today, the French-speaking Swiss writer Philippe Monnier's 1907 book *Venise au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (published in English in 1910 as *Venice in the Eighteenth Century*) continues to sell well, while the success of the essayist Philippe Sollers's *La Fête à Venise* (1991) and *Dictionnaire amoureux de Venise* (2004) testifies to the durability of stereotypes forged in the 1880s.<sup>41</sup>

42. Indeed a PhD dissertation has used this title. See Louise-Marie Morgant, "Venise et ses masques: Étude de la résurgence du carnaval vénitien" (PhD diss., University of Rennes, 1987, Lille: Atelier National de Reproduction des Thèses).

43. Élisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, "Dynamiques de langages: Pour une relecture du système rituel vénitien (XIIIe–XVe siècle)," in *Le destin des rituels: Faire corps dans l'espace urbain, Italie-France-Allemagne*, ed. Gilles Bertrand and Ilaria Taddei (Rome: École française de Rome, 2008), 95–115, esp. 96.

44. Filippo Mariani, Francesco Stocco, and Giorgio Crovato, *La reinvenzione di Venezia: Tradizioni cittadine negli anni ruggenti* (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2007). See, in particular, the preface by Marco Fincardi, 9–16.

45. On the metamorphoses of the Unità festival, that is, of the Italian Communist Party in the 1970s, see Anna Tonelli, *Falce e tortello: Storia politica e sociale delle feste dell'Unità (1945–2011)* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2012).

In the twentieth century, carnival came to be associated with the words "death," "survival," and "resurgence," as if it were a stable social phenomenon passed from generation to generation.<sup>42</sup> This idea that carnival had a structure and a foundation date, and then developed to reach a zenith before slowly declining, always pointed to the eighteenth century as a crowning point. This owed much to the "gradual ceremonial glaciation of the modern era" observed by Crouzet-Pavan and to the publicity that Venice Carnival attracted after the seventeenth century.<sup>43</sup> Compared with the flamboyant festivities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, twentieth-century Venetian Carnival could not fail to disappoint. Against this scenario of decline, however, I believe that the "plasticity" of Venetian ceremonial culture, its capacity to adapt unceasingly to meet new needs, must be further investigated. Like all Venetian rituals, carnival has constantly morphed, and despite its apparent weakening after 1797, it may simply have adopted a new mask in the twentieth century.

Admittedly, carnival was less visible after World War I. But the idea that it disappeared entirely from Venice's festive landscape does not stand. One of the forms under which it survived was as an artistic display of creativity centering on the world of princely palaces, stimulated by rich patrons, and expressing itself both in summer and in winter. One of the most famous masked balls, the "Longhi ball" organized by Marchesa Casati, thus took place in August and September 1913.

Under the fascist regime, with its tendency to "reinvent" urban traditions, carnival survived not as a street celebration but as a social event tinged with charity, traces of which could be seen in the pomp and ceremony that accompanied the Biennale's art exhibitions and the film festival launched in 1932.<sup>44</sup> In the 1950s, carnival culture continued to inspire local society figures, such as Carlos de Beistigui. For his September 3, 1951, ball at the Palazzo Labia, the multimillionaire art collector asked his friends Emilio Terry, Salvador Dali, and Christian Dior to create scenery and costumes evocative of Longhi and Casanova's times. The result was striking, from the entrance of long thin giants on stilts wearing the bautta to the Hercules's Strength human pyramids featuring the Venice fire brigade dressed as Harlequins. Eventually, a series of artistic events paved the way for its return in 1980 as a spectacle directed by stage and film director Maurizio Scaparro: the creation of the environmentally friendly Vogalonga rowing regatta in 1974; choreographer Maurice Béjart's 1975 dance performance; the new festival model of the Unità, which revived the taste for the ephemeral and for theater disseminated all over the city's squares; and the success of Fellini's *Casanova* in 1976 and Aldo Rossi's Teatro del Mondo in 1979.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the twentieth century, carnival also continued to irrigate graphic and plastic arts production. Georges Barbier's drawings of Romantic and polite Venice, contemporaneous with Henry Régnier's *L'Altana ou la vie vénitienne* (1928), or the pictures of such 1980s photographers as Fulvio Roiter and his disciples were not merely the products of nostalgia. Rather, they testified to the fact that Venice Carnival had left the sphere of politics to become a major driver of artistic creation.

Parallel to this dual process of privatization and of creativity, carnival changed over the course of the twentieth century into a carnival of memory, boosted by a 1937 retrospective on "Venetian festivals and masks" at the Ca' Rezzonico, a palace that had just been acquired by the city of Venice to house eighteenth-century art collections. After World War II, a series of exhibitions

46. See Alessandro Bressanello, *Il carnevale in età moderna: 30 anni di carnevale a Venezia 1980–2010* (Venice: Studio LT2, 2010). On the revitalization of European festivals after World War II in places other than Venice, see Jeremy Boissevain, ed., *Revitalizing European Rituals* (London: Routledge, 1992); and Laurent-Sébastien Fournier, “Traditional Festivals: From European Ethnology to Festive Studies,” *Journal of Festive Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 11–26. On the opposite thesis of continuity in European ritual, see Jeremy MacClancy and Robert Parkin, “Revitalization or Continuity in European Ritual? The Case of San Bessu,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 3, no. 1 (March 1997): 61–78.

focused on carnival masks and “carnival painters,” including Giovanni Antonio Canal, known as Canaletto, the Guardi brothers, Pietro Longhi, and Gabriele Bella. Building on Venetian scholarly research of the nineteenth century, the twentieth century cultivated a largely philological interest in carnival, haunted by evocations of a supposed past golden age. Stripped of the disapproving, moralizing tone of nineteenth-century scholarship, however, the reference to Casanova and to the entertainment fever of the eighteenth century imbued the carnival practices of the late twentieth century with a sort of vital and liberating impetus that would be one of the determinants of its return.

Finally, twentieth-century carnival, like many other leisure activities, testified to the effects of commodification, which in Venice started with the creation of a road bridge in 1933 that supplemented the 1846 rail bridge. As “authentic” as the 1980 resurrection of carnival may have initially been perceived by the Venetians and foreigners who found themselves together again in the streets and palaces, this collective moment combining theatrical or musical performances with anonymous costumed players wandering about in search of an audience soon submitted to commercial imperatives, as the official programming devised by the authorities increasingly made clear.<sup>46</sup>

Today, Venetian Carnival juxtaposes the masked balls put on at great expense in aristocratic palaces with the return of the “Flight of the Angel” (now augmented with a “flight of the lion” and “flight of the eagle”) after more than two hundred years of absence. The advent of digital photography and social media has granted carnival a visual and instantaneous dimension, which might suggest a return to a baroque form of aesthetics if it were not deprived of a driving force, at the behest of which carnival would take place. Venice today is no longer ruled by a sovereign, unless one considers that the Consorzio Venezia Nuova and the bodies regulating the tourist trade perform that function.

Having lost its nineteenth-century ability to showcase the perfection of Venetian republican institutions to the rest of the world, contemporary carnival has thus become a combination of private parties highlighting the creative potential of artists and rites of mass consumption subject to festive dilution despite the reestablishment of the holiday in February. It mostly endures through photography, through the year-round exhibition of masks in shop windows, and through the image of the city promoted in touristic pamphlets. Faced with a myriad of street vendors selling the same glittering masks devoid of any philological intent, Venetians find it hard to identify what was and what could still be “their” carnival. Hence this paradox: on the one hand, carnival festivities have become omnipresent, with masks being visible in all seasons in Venice and in the advertisements intended to attract tourists; on the other hand, they are nowhere to be found, insofar as everyone desperately tries to locate the “true” carnival behind centuries of narratives and images. This paradox notwithstanding, the enigmatic Carnival of Venice remains a vibrant festival that feeds on people’s desires and dreams, thus testifying to the power of images (fig. 11).



Figure 11. Anonymous, Venice Carnival costume with mask and hat, 2017. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

### Conclusion

In the Middle Ages, Venice Carnival developed a unique set of characteristics that came to distinguish it from other European carnivals, both urban and rural.<sup>47</sup> In the centuries that followed, two forms of festivity actually coexisted within it: a popular one—relatively invisible but intent on breaking away from the hardships of daily life, in line with literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin and anthropologist Carlo Baroja’s theoretical models—and an upper-class one that sought to address the needs expressed by the common people while continuously distancing from them.<sup>48</sup> The gap between both was manifested during the sixteenth century in the organization of exclusive, aristocratic banquets and in the eighteenth century in the nobles’ escape from crowded places to their villas on the banks of the Brenta River during carnival time. Meanwhile, carnival became a political instrument for the Republic of Venice. Having been used to emphasize Venetian domination in the face of European competitors in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it allowed local artists to showcase the greatness of La Serenissima and conceal its weakening on the European stage in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Today, Venetian Carnival still constitutes a major reference in the global panorama of carnivals. It owes its popularity to its conversion into a commercial, touristic festivity, to the enduring need for citizens around the world to escape everyday drabness and grayness, and to its capacity to “recall” the past. Even though the historical reference is fading from year to year in the current carnival—to wit the theme chosen in 2015, “The world’s most delicious festival”—it maintains a strong connection with the past of the Venetian Republic, if only due to the surrounding urban and architectural scenery.

Taking the long view when discussing Venice Carnival is an invitation to reflect on the gap that exists between its medieval form and its more recent configuration, as well as on the various

47. The contrast was made especially obvious by the 2014 exhibition on European carnivals organized by the MuCEM (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations) in Marseille. See Marie-Pascale Mallé, ed., *Le monde à l'envers: Carnavals et mascarades d'Europe et de Méditerranée* (Paris: Flammarion; Marseille: MuCEM, 2014).

48. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (1968; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); and Carlo Baroja, *El Carnaval: Análisis histórico-cultural* (Madrid: Taurus, 1965).

49. Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (1981; New York: Verso Books, 2009).

50. Gino Benzoni, "Sfiorata l'utopia? Tra autoconsiderazione dello Stato marciano nel '500 e autoillusioni accademiche," in *L'utopia di cuccagna tra '500 e '700: Il caso della Fratta nel Polesine*, ed. Achille Olivieri and Massimo Rinaldi (Rovigo: Minelliana, 2011), 15–51.

functions the event has performed over time. At times, it has been a major source of civic cohesion, allowing residents to rub shoulders and brush past one another in alleyways, on bridges, on small squares, or on the expansive St. Mark's Square, where they converged to show off. At others, it has acted as a liberating safety valve, allowing for temporary transgression within a strict political and social framework. In the seventeenth century, for instance, it fit in a logic of social control and of policing of pleasures that hardly enabled it to be more an authorized break from hegemony.<sup>49</sup> At yet during other periods, it has been used by the elites as a showcase for Venetian splendor in a context of increasing competition between European cities. In the early modern era, its commodification thus turned it into a major source of revenue for the city. Throughout its history, however, it seems to have had a powerful commemorative and narrative dimension. It has indeed been a crucial part of the story Venice has devised about itself. Venice may no longer be Queen of the Seas, but carnival has allowed it to preserve its capacity to inspire and fascinate down to the age of mass tourism. Additionally, carnival has long entertained a relationship with curiosity, including scientific curiosity, and with unknown and exotic worlds, as revealed by the success of the Mondo Novo street plays performed on St. Mark's Square in the eighteenth century. Last but not least, one dimension that has stood the test of time is the utopian dimension of carnival, which transcends economic conditioning and tourism packaging. Venetian Carnival leads us back to Benzoni's concept of Venice as a "realized utopia," a sort of heaven on earth born from Erasmus's sixteenth-century utopian program and from the city's creative strength.<sup>50</sup> One can indeed find traces of Venice's capacity to fabricate space down to today's revived carnival, based on a power that, while being linked to the powers of the market economy, remains invisible and impossible to represent.

One question that this article does not presume to answer is the following: is the political dimension of the Carnival of Venice limited to the role that it played at the time of the Serenissima Republic, a paradoxical moment of putting in order the various categories of the population that took part in it—the nobility, the cittadini, the popolani—while foreigners flocked there from afar? In other words, is the political dimension of carnival a mere memory that, admittedly, can be awoken but remains a prisoner of history? Or conversely, does the way it is perceived and experienced today lead us to see the enduring nature of its power, which would continue to act through a form of dramatization and distancing that the mask would make possible?

The cancellation of the carnival festivities during the Gulf War in 1991, the debates that its organization generates every year among Venetian politicians, the impatience it creates among Venetians due to the fact that it has become a moment of tourist consumption that, in many ways, escapes them: all of these show that carnival still has an impact on collective life. However watered-down or questionable its manifestations might appear today in their commercial ritualization and loss of spontaneity, carnival continues to raise eminently political questions: Who produces it? Who gets to have fun? What purpose does it serve? What spaces for imagination or freedom does it generate? Should it be limited to Venice, or should it spread to terra firma? These questions take us to the very meaning of carnival in the age of the internet, to what it can still tell us about "sticking together," about being together, about the desire to have fun—whether at a private party or in the midst of a crowd in public space—and about the usefulness of any entertainment whatsoever.

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## AUTHOR BIO

**Gilles Bertrand** is professor of early modern history at the University of Grenoble Alpes, France, and works on Italy from a cultural history perspective. He has published books on Venetian Carnival (*Histoire du carnaval de Venise, XIe–XXIe siècle*, 2013 and 2017); on the relations between the Italian Peninsula and France (*La France et l'Italie: Histoire de deux nations sœurs, de 1660 à nos jours*, 2016, with Jean-Yves Frégné et Alessandro Giaccone); and on the seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and early nineteenth-century tradition of the Grand Tour in its material and epistemological dimensions (*Le Grand Tour revisité: Le voyage des Français en Italie, milieu XVIIIe–début XIXe siècle*, 2008). With Jean Ehrard he has coordinated the edition of Montesquieu's travels (*Mes voyages*, 2012) and with Marina Pieretti he has edited a late eighteenth-century account of a Roman marchioness's trip to northern and southern Italy (*Una marchesa in viaggio per l'Italia*, 2019).

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# The Twenty-First-Century Reinvention of Carnival Rituals in Paris and Cherbourg: Extending the Boundaries of Belonging via Politicized Ritual

**Monika Salzbrunn**

University of Lausanne, France

## KEYWORDS

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## ABSTRACT

Carnival as a research object has been studied from a multiplicity of perspectives: folklore studies, European ethnology, social and cultural anthropology, history, sociology, etc. Each of these disciplines has enriched the literature by focusing on different aspects of the event, such as its participatory nature, its transformative potential (at an individual or collective level), and its political dimension broadly conceived. The present article reviews this scholarship and uses it to analyze the contemporary Parisian Carnival, which has tried to revive the nineteenth-century Promenade du Boeuf Gras tradition on a local and translocal level through its creative collaboration with the carnival of Cherbourg, Normandy. I argue that, through satire and other politicized carnival rituals, the recent protagonists of Parisian Carnival (Les Fumantes de Pantruche) have reinvented the festivities and influenced Norman Carnival, thus extending the boundaries of belonging in both cities.

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2. Ursula Rao, ed., *Kulturelle Verwandlungen: Die Gestaltung sozialer Welten in der Performanz* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2006), 254.
3. Nira Yuval-Davis, Kalpana Kannabiran, and Ulrike M. Viethen, "Introduction: Situating Contemporary Politics of Belonging," in *The Situated Politics of Belonging*, ed. Nira Yuval-Davis, Kalpana Kannabiran, and Ulrike M. Viethen (London: Sage, 2006), 7.
4. Claude Romano, *L'Événement et le monde* (Paris: PUF, 1999), 163.
5. Milton B. Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization* (New York: Praeger, 1972), 71; and Max Gluckman, *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965).
6. Monika Salzbrunn, "Le carnaval et le carnavalesque face à une 'sécurisation' grandissante: Comment saisir la subversion?" (paper presented at the "Carnaval et Subversion" [Carnival and Subversion] symposium, Nice-Sophia-Anthipolis University, Nice, February 27, 2018).
7. Alban Bensa and Éric Fassin, "Qu'est-ce qu'un événement?" *Terrain* 38, no. 1 (2002): 5–20.
8. Arlette Farge, "Penser et définir l'événement en histoire: Approche

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### Introduction

Sociology as well as folklore studies often ask whether and how events produce, strengthen, and transform communities. Individual actors can subjectively perceive an event as disruptive and therefore important to their life course. They infuse it with meaning both in the course of their experience and in their post facto interpretations of it. Events can be unforeseen or organized and predictable, but even organized events can take an unpredicted turn: a peaceful festive event can, for instance, turn into a violent uprising.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, an individual actor can be oblivious to the transformative power of an event and only reflect upon it later. A participatory, co-constructed event such as carnival provides us with information regarding interactions, constructions, and relational shifts—and is thus about belonging. Hence, the event can be interpreted as an opportunity to display and perform various forms of belonging (to a locality, a group, a minority, etc.).<sup>2</sup> According to sociologists Nira Yuval-Davis, Kalpana Kannabiran, and Ulrike M. Viethen, the politics of belonging is situated temporally, spatially, and intersectionally.<sup>3</sup> Expectations and memories of previous events also shape the anticipation of forthcoming events.<sup>4</sup> Anthropologists Milton B. Singer and Max Gluckman saw cultural performances and events as paradigmatic, as they exhibit the "structure and organization of cultural relations in condensed form."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the situationist movement conceived of participation in "constructed situations" that could counter-influence the passive consumption of spectacles. In fact, during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, the situationists criticized the shift from individual expression toward a second-hand alienation in a capitalist society. Interestingly, today several carnivals increasingly resemble philosopher Guy Debord's definition of a "spectacle," with growing security measures limiting participation and obliging spectators to remain spatially, physically, and mentally distant from the main actors.<sup>6</sup>

While French historiography has deconstructed the concept of "event" over the course of the twentieth century, pleading for a global, holistic conception of history that is not limited to military events and diplomatic issues, ethnologists recently reexamined the concept in a 2002 collection of the journal *Terrain*. Anthropologist Alban Bensa and sociologist Éric Fassin, especially, illuminated different approaches to ordinary events and their mediation, arguing that social sciences often ignore events, preferring the banality of everyday life.<sup>7</sup> They also argued for a multilayered redefinition of the concept, related to people's individual and collective history, because, according to them, anthropological works tend to ignore history, and sociology tends to privilege the understanding of structures and general logics rather than individual ones. Bensa and Fassin gathered contributions, including one by historian Arlette Farge, that rearticulated the conceptualization of the notion, taking into consideration the disruptive dimension of events for individuals and groups in their ordinary lives.<sup>8</sup> In academic circles, this dimension was largely considered too banal for research until the 1960s. As French social sciences in general and ethnology in particular are heavily influenced by structuralism, Bensa and Fassin sought to focus on the significance of events for individuals, without seeking to develop general assumptions or models. Moreover, they pleaded for an approach to events as part of a series—a series to which an individual gives their specific importance, sometimes not during the experience itself

des situations et des acteurs sociaux," *Terrain* 38, no. 1 (2002): 67–78.

9. Salzbrunn, "Le carnaval et le carnavalesque face à une 'sécurisation' grandissante." Annie Sidro, a main actor and historian of the carnival of Nice, justifies the change over the last years, saying that "Nice Carnival should be savored" (*Le carnaval de Nice se déguste*). Annie Sidro, interview by Monika Salzbrunn and Federica Moretti, Nice, March 4, 2018. During the same interview, however, Sidro denounced another rule of Nice's official carnival, which is that float-building rights can only be granted to the male descendants of carnivalists.

10. After the end of the official Nice Carnival, these criticisms became particularly intense, as the independent participative carnival of the harbor, organized by local associations, was forbidden by the prefect due to security measures—only a couple of hours before it was supposed to begin on March 4, 2018.

11. Klaus-Peter Köpping, "Fest," in *Handbuch Historische Anthropologie*, ed. Christoph Wulf (Weinheim: Beltz, 1997), 1048–65.

12. See different interactions with (colonial) power in the Caribbean as well as a historical analysis of the Dijon Carnival in Michaeline Crichlow, ed., *Carnival Art, Culture, Politics: Performing Life* (London: Routledge, 2012). Previously published in Michaeline Crichlow, ed., "Carnival Crossfire: Art, Culture, Politics," special issue, *Social Identities* 16 (2010).

13. Monika Salzbrunn, "How

but *ex post*. In the second part of this article, I will exemplify this new approach by focusing on the past and current Parisian Carnival—both centered on the Promenade du Bœuf Gras (literally: Promenade of the Fattened Bull). Its current organizers, who are connected to those of the Cherbourg Carnival in Normandy through personal and institutional relationships, are in turn part of a local, national, and transnational series of festive and political events that demonstrate reciprocal references. Furthermore, I will show to what extent the reinvention of the Parisian Carnival is an important event in the biography of its main actor, Basile Pachkoff.

## Theoretical Background

I consider carnival as a variety of festive events that have transformative potential thanks to the participating public. The lines between the main participants (who are part of the procession) and the participating public are often blurred and situational, so that roles can be shifted and spectators can be part of the performance. Nevertheless, there are carnivals that draw a clear line between protagonists and spectators, especially recently in Nice, where spectators have to buy tickets, follow strict security checks, and remain in restricted areas where their behavior is controlled by security and organizational staff.<sup>9</sup> These carnivals, which should instead be described as spectacles or consumption-oriented mega-events, have been harshly criticized due to their restrictive framing of the event.<sup>10</sup> Because space is clearly divided between inside and outside the carnival area (and, within the latter, between spectators and protagonists) in Nice, the festive space is not a space of transgression, contrary to what used to exist in other (historical) festive cultures. Ethnologist Klaus-Peter Köpping has discussed the problem of distinguishing between the (secular) feast and the (sacred) rite and highlighted many commonalities between the two domains: derision of the meaning of sacred texts and symbols by the Christians themselves, which was common in the medieval culture of festivals, and the temporary transgression of norms and rules or taboos in the current social practice, also outside the ritual context.<sup>11</sup> Even though norms can be temporarily transgressed, this experience does not necessarily lead to a transformation. Depending on the historical context, the feasts operate as events stabilizing or transforming the system, as different cases presented by Michaeline Crichlow have shown.<sup>12</sup> Often, parties create an arena in which participants commit to change or maintain the status quo, as has been the case in Cologne, one of my present research fields, where social movements have recently appropriated carnival in order to make political claims.<sup>13</sup> In his literary analysis of François Rabelais's Renaissance world, the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin considered medieval carnival as an event that could create *communitas* (community).<sup>14</sup> However, if there is a strong divide between spectators and actors, the feast is considered a spectacle (which can be consumed) rather than a carnival. Indeed, in Bakhtin's definition of "carnival," free interaction between people, encounters of opposite groups and elements (misalliances), and eccentric behavior are central elements. Nevertheless, Bakhtin's interpretation of carnival, drawn from his lectures on Rabelais's writings, has to be put in the context of his own biography.<sup>15</sup> Today, the question of whether and how *communitas* or a sense of belonging can be created through carnival remains an area of contention.

Similar to the construction of national or regional identity, in my empirical fields, historiography is selectively used to create city or city districts as a local singularity and to foster the participants' identification process with this locality.<sup>16</sup> Hence, belonging to this space becomes more

Diverse Is Cologne Carnival? How Migrants Appropriate Popular Art Spaces," *Identities* 21, no. 1 (2014): 92–106.

14. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

15. According to Samuel Kinser, "Bakhtin's carnivalesque interpretation of Rabelais's communalism was a supremely political act of communication in the sense in which we have used this phrase. It has more than any other single work dislodged Rabelaisian metatexts from their wonted individualist-humanist assumptions; with respect to Bakhtin's more immediate intellectual context, it has had wide-ranging influence as an effectively disguised voice of protest against Stalinist 'communism.'" Samuel Kinser, *Rabelais' Carnival: Text, Context, Metatext* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1990), 248.

16. Anne-Marie Thiesse mentions the importance of cultural heritage in the construction of a social group: "Many current examples ... clearly demonstrate that the cultural creation of a collective heritage plays an essential role in forming nationhood." Anne-Marie Thiesse, "How Countries Are Made: The Cultural Construction of European Nations," *Contexts/Understanding People in Their Social Worlds* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 32.

17. For a basic discussion of the emergence and transformation of spaces as well as the production of localities through ritualized actions, see Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin and Michael Dickhardt, eds., *Kulturelle Räume*

important than origin or individuals' religious belonging.<sup>17</sup> Sociologist Christian Rinaudo has already described such interactive creation of locality through ritual in his study of Nice street festivities.<sup>18</sup> Another empirical and analytical basis for my analysis of the Parisian Carnival has been laid out by the Research Center of the École d'Architecture of Paris-Belleville and the Réseau Socio-Economie de l'Habitat Paris, which have economically, politically, and artistically deconstructed the myths associated with the Belleville area, among which is the "Descente de la Courtille" that took place on Mardi Gras night. In the past, the "Courtille" was the place of today's Belleville Metro station, from where departed, to the north, "Haute Courtille" (today rue de Belleville) and, to the south, down the hill, "Basse Courtille" (today rue du Faubourg du Temple). Until the expansion of the city limits of Paris in 1860, famous wine taverns could be found beyond this crossroads. These would serve wine produced in the neighboring village of Belleville under much better tax conditions than inside the city walls of Paris.<sup>19</sup> Today various local event managers and groups still refer to the rich history of feasts and festivities of Belleville. The stalwart barricades from the times of the revolt of the Commune in 1871 are also proudly invoked. Since its reintroduction in the 1990s, the Parisian Carnival procession has been passing through parts of the old route from the nineteenth century, including the former "Basse Courtille." This choice is a first sign for the creation of local belonging through the identification with historic events and models. However, "the reference to the juxtaposition of manifestations and the assignation to different social groups should not be ignored," as historian Michael Matheus writes in his introduction to a comparative collection on carnival studies.<sup>20</sup> The empirical examples of the Cherbourg and Paris Carnivals allow for a comparative reflection on the staging of belonging during carnivals, although they are both shaped by their own particular regional history.

While there is heated debate within German folkloric studies (more specifically, among Hans Moser, Dietz-Rüdiger Moser, and Hermann Bausinger<sup>21</sup>) about whether carnival should be understood as a civil or as a Christian tradition, French scholar Jacques Heers distinguishes between the "Fête des fous" and carnival.<sup>22</sup> Even though Heers considers this separation to be artificial, he categorizes the "Fête des fous" as belonging to the ecclesial and extra-ecclesial, spontaneous, disorderly, popular feasts. He interprets carnival, on the other hand, as an aristocratic, secular, deliberate attempt to govern the city. However, the medievalist shies away from a strict separation between "medieval popular feasts" and "modern carnival."<sup>23</sup> Like Heers, French anthropologist Daniel Fabre distinguishes between rural, urban, and courtly carnival on the basis of iconographic and literary sources (including Goethe's famous 1788 description of Roman Carnival).<sup>24</sup> This distinction between rural and urban spaces and between disorderly popular feasts and celebrations meant to showcase the power of political stakeholders still carries analytic weight. The organizers of today's Parisian Carnival, for instance, proudly invoke the "popular" label, as we will see below.

Recent anthropological works have investigated hybridization in contemporary carnivals. In his book *Anthropologie du carnaval: La ville, la fête et l'Afrique à Bahia*, anthropologist Michel Agier shows how the group Ilê Aiyê, founded by descendants of African slaves in a marginalized district of Bahia, introduced references to the candomblé and slave history into Brazilian carnival starting in the 1970s.<sup>25</sup> Through the example of Nice, Rinaudo has shown the parallel existence of a highly commercialized urban carnival following the Christian calendar and the emergence of a local, political, community carnival initiated by artists and marginalized groups, which

– *räumliche Kultur: Zur Neubestimmung des Verhältnisses zweier fundamentaler Kategorien menschlicher Praxis* (Münster: LIT, 2003).

18. Christian Rinaudo, "Fêtes de rue, enfants d'immigrés et identité locale: Enquête dans la région niçoise," *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales* 16, no. 2 (2000): 43–57. For a historical overview about the carnival of Nice, see Annie Sidro, *Carnaval de Nice: Tradition et modernité* (Nice: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 2001).

19. See the detailed description of the "Descente de la Courtille" in the nineteenth century in Alain Faure, *Paris Carême-prenant: Du carnaval à Paris au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1978).

20. Michael Matheus, *Fastnacht/ Karneval im europäischen Vergleich* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999), 8.

21. See Hans Moser, "Die Geschichte der Fasnacht im Spiegel von Archivforschungen," in *Fasnacht: Beiträge des Tübinger Arbeitskreises für Fasnachtsforschung (= Volksleben. Untersuchungen des Ludwig-Uhland-Instituts der Universität Tübingen, Bd. 6)* (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 1964), 15–41; Hans Moser, "Kritisches zu neuen Hypothesen der Fastnachtforschung," *Jahrbuch für Volkskunde NF* 15 (1982): 9–50; Dietz-Rüdiger Moser, *Bräuche und Feste im christlichen Jahreslauf: Brauchformen der Gegenwart in kulturgeschichtlichen Zusammenhängen* (Graz: Styria, 1993), 135–50; and Hermann Bausinger, "Für eine komplexe Fastnachts-

takes place in May.<sup>26</sup> As for French political scientist Denis-Constant Martin, he has presented methodological and epistemological reflections on comparative carnival studies, arguing that the study of carnival could contribute significantly to the understanding of social change across the world.<sup>27</sup> By applying semiotic analysis, shifting power relations can be studied, notably, by focusing on (carnival) music, as Martin has done throughout his works on South African feasts.<sup>28</sup> Much of the recent research on festivals comes from the field of social geography. For instance, the Mutation des territoires en Europe (Territorial Changes in Europe) research group regularly organizes international conferences on local or regional festivals, with such titles as "La fête au présent" (The festival at present, 2006), "Le développement culturel: Un avenir pour les territoires?" (Cultural development: A future for the territories?, 2008), and "Patrimoine culturel et désirs de territoires: Vers quels développements?" (Cultural heritage and desires of territories: Toward which developments?, 2010).<sup>29</sup> The political and social geography perspective of these conferences implies the analysis of various topics related to regional and local development, such as the marketing of festive events for the purpose of tourism or the importance of festive events for local identification processes and the valorization of local politics (and politicians). Thus, French geography currently investigates the connections between cultural heritage and the staging of local and regional belonging during festive events. The Nîmes "feria," with their controversial bullfights, are thus being rediscovered as instruments to revalue local traditions or as festivals that make (and unmake) community. The decision to put "intangible heritage" on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2003 triggered a flood of investigations into festive events by the "Mission à l'ethnologie," the former research service for ethnology of the French Ministry of Culture.<sup>30</sup> Researchers who are specialists of certain events tend to be invited as experts by ministries or UNESCO to evaluate festival organizers' and/or cities' requests for the "collective memory" or "heritage" labels. As the labeling of festive events as "heritage" comprises the risk of submitting their organization to many constraints, only certain festival organizers aim at getting it. Although the organizers of Paris Carnival largely refer to the historical roots of the event in order to underline its importance, they do not intend to get a UNESCO label.

Whereas many anthropological scholars refer to the category of "tradition," as opposed to "modernity," and research the maintenance of particular festivals over time, other writers focus on innovative questions, such as those related to gender issues.<sup>31</sup> Thus, festive events, especially carnivals, are being investigated by young ethnologists and sociologists who concentrate on such new aspects as the impact of heteronormativity. Kerstin Bronner, for example, works on Swiss carnival groups and focuses on spaces for individual agency in the reproduction of social belonging—especially in reference to cultural assignation of gender and heteronormativity. She explains that "around the phenomenon of carnival exists a vivid culture of associations" but that there has been a lack of research on the "meaning of carnival for the individual, and their influence on biographical processes."<sup>32</sup> The second part of the present article on the reinvention process of the carnival of Paris seeks to fill this gap.

Referring to contemporary discussions within French ethnology on such terms as *événement* (event), *fête* (festival), *reconnaissance* (recognition), *appartenance* (belonging), and *communauté* (community), I will demonstrate in the following pages the hidden semantics of carnival on the basis of empirical examples from Paris and Cherbourg, as both cities' carnival associations have been partners. The investigation of performed expressions of belonging in festive situations

theorie," *Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* NF 16 (1983): 103. Bausinger criticizes Dietz-Rüdiger Moser for assuming that a sinful life was put on stage during carnival in order to ridicule it publicly. In Bausinger's opinion, theological sources rather indicate a plethora of ecclesiastical prohibitions and spiritual exhortations that oppose the rude and excessive practice of these customs.

22. On carnival as a civil or Christian tradition, see Konrad Köstlin, "Fastnacht und Volkskunde: Bemerkungen zum Verhältnis eines Fachs zu seinem Gegenstand," *Rheinisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 23 (1978): 7–22. *Fête des fous* can be translated as "Feast of Fools." The term *fou* is still in use today, for example, "Fou du Roi" as a noun (jester) or as an adjective (crazy).

23. Jacques Heers, *Fêtes des fous et carnivals* (Paris: Fayard, 1983), 300.

24. Daniel Fabre, *Carnaval ou la fête à l'envers* (1992; repr., Paris: Gallimard, 2003).

25. Michel Agier, *Anthropologie du carnaval: La ville, la fête et l'Afrique à Bahia* (Paris: Parenthèses, 2000).

26. Rinaudo, "Fêtes de rue," 43–57. Following the June 14, 2016, terrorist attacks in Nice, however, security measures have increased exponentially and almost all independent carnivals are now forbidden. The only opportunity for independent associations to participate in a carnival remains the "Parada Nissarda," created in 2015. It is part of the official carnival parades with

especially allows for insight into the messages that are mediated through speeches, music, costumes, and rituals. Thus, I will analyze how especially local, regional, and also political belonging are performed by referring to historical heritage. Such belongings are interactively and discursively created during the festive situation of the carnival and become manifest in the choice of the annual theme, the corresponding costumes, and especially the ironic depiction of recent history in pamphlets and speeches. I have followed the reinvention of Parisian Carnival for ten years by becoming an active member of the Fumantes de Pantruche. I have participated in their activities year-round and have accompanied its president, Basile Pachkoff, to numerous meetings and trips (most of them to Cherbourg).<sup>33</sup> In 2004 and 2005 I also created my own costume and mask during workshops led by artist KTY Catherine Poulain in her laboratory, applying the ethnographic methods of apprenticeship and multisensory analysis.

### A Brief Description of Parisian Carnival Today

For more than twenty years now, Paris has been hosting the Promenade du Bœuf Gras on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. According to its organizers, this tradition emulates a medieval ritual in which a fattened bull was led through the streets at the beginning of the Lenten season.<sup>34</sup> The procession is led by Pachkoff, a French artist of Russian-Jewish origin who created the Fumantes de Pantruche carnival club at the end of the 1990s to revive Parisian Carnival. Literally, the name of the carnival association means "the Parisian Socks," as "Pantruche" is an old, colloquial, and affectionate name for the city of Paris. *Fumantes* is an ironic appellation for socks (*chaussettes* in French, a word whose etymology goes back to the Latin word *calceus*, from which the Italian word *calza* is also derived. In the fifteenth century, the Compagnie della Calza [Companies of Socks] organized carnivalesque events in Venice).

From the beginning of his commitment to the renaissance of Parisian Carnival, Pachkoff has insisted on how central carnival used to be to the city in the nineteenth century. In 1993 he created the Initiative for the Renaissance of the Parisian Carnival and by 1998 he was finally successful, after the then-city councilman Alain Riou joined him. On material he has designed (flyers, pamphlets, a website), Pachkoff refers to the five-hundred-year-old tradition of Parisian Carnival and to the almost three-hundred-year-old ritual of the Promenade du Bœuf Gras.<sup>35</sup> In the nineteenth century it became de facto the *Fête de Paris* and was celebrated during carnival. The tradition was discontinued for forty-five years during the twentieth century. Thanks to his contacts with a veterinarian of the French Corrèze region, Pachkoff was able to revive the event, although not with a bull but with a cow named Pimprenelle (burnet in English), which now participates every year as the most important protagonist of the carnival procession. She even once delighted standing children and tourists with the presence of her calf. The second steady companion of the procession is "Pat the clown," a classical clown wandering about with his trumpet.

As the son of Russian-Jewish immigrants, Pachkoff may have envisioned carnival as a way to assimilate into the Parisian environment. On the other hand, he has tried to give new meaning to the idea of Paris as a multicultural metropolis, where diverse residents participate in festivities that foster understanding among peoples. Ever since the late 1990s, he has tried to create contacts with carnival associations abroad, namely, in Germany, Italy, and Hungary. In 2019, he was invited to an international meeting of carnival organizers in Berlin. The first participation of

official floats and invited groups  
and takes place on a Sunday  
afternoon.

27. Denis-Constant Martin, "Politics behind the Mask: Studying Contemporary Carnivals in Political Perspective; Theoretical and Methodological Suggestions," *Questions de Recherche*, no. 2 (2001): 1–34.

28. Denis-Constant Martin, "Le carnaval du Cap et l'Atlantique noir, un océan imaginaire," in *La construction transatlantique d'identités noires, entre Afrique et Amériques*, ed. Livio Sansone, Elysée Soumonni, and Babacar Barry (Paris: Karthala/Séphis, 2010), 56–70.

29. The proceedings of the first of these conferences were published as Laurent-Sébastien Fournier, Dominique Crozat, Catherine Bernie Boissard, and Claude Chastagner, eds., *La fête au présent: Mutations des fêtes au sein des loisirs* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009).

30. See "Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage," UNESCO, Intangible Cultural Heritage, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention> (accessed March 15, 2018); and "Mission à l'Ethnologie" archives (1980–2010) on the Ministère de la Culture (French Culture Ministry) website, <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Sites-thematiques/Patrimoine-ethnologique/Patrimoine-ethnologique/PortEthno-portail-pour-l-ethnologie-de-la-France/Archives-ethnologie-francaise-a-Paris/Archives-nationales-France/Fonds-de-la-Mission-a-l-Ethnologie-du-ministere-de-la-Cul>

the Fumantes de Pantruche outside of Paris was in Mulhouse Carnival in 2002.

Crucial to this resurrection of Parisian Carnival was a second member of the organization: Riou, a spokesman for the Green Party group in the Parisian city council, whose mediation with the chief of police was crucial to the granting of a parade permit. He used the procession through his electoral district (Saint Fargeau) as a way to court voters. On his webpage he declared that Parisian Carnival—much like "Black Pride," "Gay Pride," and "Ecoparade"—should serve as a platform for political expression for minorities, who historically were at the heart of the celebrations. The participation of a Capoeira group was secured through the politician's own initiative. When Riou suddenly died during the preparatory phase of the 2005 carnival, his parliamentary assistant, his widow, and the founder of Fumantes de Pantruche decided to go on with the festival and dedicated the 2005 procession to him. The politician's legacy was again honored in 2006, as the poster indicated. His fellow Green Party colleagues, as well as two other left-wing council members who represented northern Paris constituencies, followed his example and accompanied the carnival procession undisguised (!), in order to exchange views with the population. Throughout the year they supported the carnival logistically, especially through the financing of correspondence and photocopies. The letters of the Fumantes de Pantruche carnival association thus still carry "Le Conseil de Paris" in the sending address, even though this institutional support remains informal and no official statement about the event has ever been released by the Parisian city council. Since at least 2014, communication goes almost exclusively via the internet (mailing lists, websites run by different webmasters, etc.). These highly complex links cannot be analyzed with formalized categories. It has been shown that only intimate knowledge of the field and key actors can lead to an understanding of the processes of political negotiation as well as the individually and collectively expressed forms of belonging.<sup>36</sup> The members of the participating carnival associations have different cultural backgrounds and divergent political interests. Even though individual actors are themselves immigrants of the first or second generation, they identify first and foremost as Parisians and partly distinguish themselves from migrants of North African origin, by designating them as "immigrants" with whom they wish to "get into contact" by means of carnival. The analysis of such constructions of alterity that become visible through processes of interaction can expose complex identity politics. Furthermore, referring to Paris as a city of immigration as well as an open-minded, central cultural place, Pachkoff underlines the dynamic international network of carnivalists involved in past and present carnivals, as the table in the following section shows.

### The Staging of History

The main way the initiators of the contemporary Parisian Carnival legitimize their action is by referring to historic sources. On the flyers and pamphlets that are distributed by the members, various events of local Parisian—but also national—history are put into a series whose culmination is the present-day revival of carnival. The aim is to sensitize political decision-makers to support the festival by anchoring it into the official Parisian festive calendar. Against the wishes of some of the members, the president of the association, Pachkoff, values symbolic recognition (through gestures, correspondence, invitations, etc.) over financial support through subsidies, although he very recently distributed a circular asking for support, including funding.<sup>37</sup> His main motivation remains building public awareness for the subversive

[ture-1980-2010](#) (accessed June 12, 2020).

31. See the recent international and interdisciplinary conference “Feast as a Mirror of Social and Cultural Change” held at the Jagellonian University of Cracow in 2017, which focused on “feasts, festivals and festivities (with at least a 100-year tradition)” (<https://feastconference2017.wordpress.com/>). See also the paper I presented at this conference on the reinvention of carnival traditions. Monika Salzbrunn, “The Swiss Carnivals of Payerne and Lausanne: Place-making between the Mise en Scène of Self and the Other(s)” (publication of the conference proceedings “Feast as a Mirror of Social and Cultural Changes,” ed. Bożena Gierek, Academic Publishing, forthcoming). See also the recently published first issue of the *Journal of Festive Studies* 1, no. 1 (2019).

32. Kerstin Bronner, *Grenzenlos normal? Aushandlungen von Gender aus handlungspraktischer und biographischer Perspektive* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2011), 12, 13.

33. I am grateful to Pachkoff for accommodating my presence in the field and sharing with me the abundant archival material that he has collected over several decades.

34. Yves-Marie Bercé wrote about the relation between the semantic origin of the word *carne* (meat) and the Lenten period that starts after carnival. See Yves-Marie Bercé, *Fête et révolte: Des mentalités populaires du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1994).

actors in Parisian history, which is why he systematically refers to key dates related to carnival in his communication about the event (via social media, the website, speeches during cultural events, etc.).

1274	First procession of the “Bœuf Gras” in Paris.
1500s	“Carnival has been celebrated in Paris for 500 years,” says Pachkoff in a 2006 announcement for a carnival workshop.
1589	“Défilé de plus de 600 escoliers paillards” (Parade of 600 bawdy pupils) mentioned in an announcement for the 2005 Paris Carnival in <i>Politis</i> journal.
1739	The official flyer of the carnival of Paris mentions 1739 as the first appearance of the “Bœuf Gras” in the municipal archives.
1789	In an official letter to Pierre Mutz, police prefect of Paris, Pachkoff writes about the year 1789: “Les ennemis de la fête vivante et populaire (qui a pour qualité de ne pas être instrumentalisée à des fins politiques, commerciales ou publicitaires) vont prendre le pouvoir à Paris” (The enemies of living and popular festivals [which refuse to be instrumentalized for political, commercial, or advertising purposes] will take over in Paris).
1790	Carnival is banned.
1799	Parisian Carnival is allowed to take place again.
1840	Philippe Musard introduces the French Cancan at the Masquerade Ball of the Opera of Paris. A piece by Musard can be downloaded on the former website of the carnival association: <a href="http://www.carnaval-pantruche.org">www.carnaval-pantruche.org</a> .
1904–1914	Participation of the Buffalo Bill cavalry and the Carnival Queens of Turin, Milan, Rome, Madrid, and Prague at Paris Carnival.
1946	Last carnival parade in Paris before a long interruption.
1993	Pachkoff develops his project for the renaissance of Parisian Carnival.
1997	First attempt at a revival of Paris Carnival through the parading of a wooden bovine on wheels.
1998	Renaissance of the “Carnaval de Paris, dit de Saint Fargeau” (the Parisian Carnival, also known as Saint Fargeau Carnival) on September 27.
1999	The poster for the second parade is inspired by a well-known Russian copper engraving and shows a tribute to a cow. The parade takes place on September 26.
2000	Theme of the 3 <sup>rd</sup> parade: “L’Espace et le Temps” (Space and Time). Again, the parade takes place outside the carnival season, on the opening day of the Salon de l’Agriculture (French Agricultural Fair), on February 27.
2001	Theme of the 4 <sup>th</sup> parade: “L’Espagne et le Flamenco” (Spain and Flamenco). The parade takes place on February 27, carnival Sunday (before Ash Wednesday), which is also the opening day of the national agricultural fair.
2002	Theme of the 5 <sup>th</sup> parade: “La Lumière et le Soleil” (Light and Sun). The parade is said to “traditionally” take place on carnival Sunday.
2003	Theme of the 6 <sup>th</sup> parade: “Le Vice et la Vertu” (Vice and Virtue).
2004	First participation of the CUC (Comité de Carnaval de la Ville de Cherbourg-Octeville/Cherbourg-Octeville Carnival committee) in the Parisian festivities. Theme of the 7 <sup>th</sup> parade: “Le monde végétal et le monde animal” (Flora and Fauna).

See also Jean-Claude Carrière, *Le carnaval et la politique* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1983); Michel Feuillet, *Le carnaval* (Paris: Cerf, 1991); and Heers, *Fêtes des fous et carnivals*. Faure mentions the importance of the local butchers of Belleville and Ménilmontant, who gathered in the streets with their bulls during carnival, accompanying giant feasts and parading in *Paris Carême-prenant*, 25.

35. "500 ans de Carnaval de Paris et presque 300 ans que la Promenade du Bœuf Gras y est traditionnelle" (A5 flyer announcing the carnival of Paris 2006, in my personal possession).

36. See a collective article to which I contributed on the risks of doing research exclusively based on internet sources: Julien Laflaquiere et al., "Archiver le Web sur les migrations: Quelles approches techniques et scientifiques – rapport d'étape," *Migrance* 23 (2005): 72–93.

37. About recognition and public space, see Nancy Fraser, *Qu'est-ce que la justice sociale? Reconnaissance et redistribution* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005). See also the introduction by translator/editor Estelle Ferrarese.

38. Translocality is a specific form of "place-making," the creation of a living space in reference to further localities that influence each other—in part opposed—on different levels. For further detail, see Monika Salzbrunn, "Rescaling Processes in two 'Global' Cities: Festive Events as Pathways of Migrant Incorporation," in *Locating Migration: Rescaling Cities and Migrants*, ed. Nina Glick Schiller and Ayse Çağlar (Ithaca,

2005	Preparation of the carnival of Paris by two former interns of City Councilor Riou. Participation of Italian students, members of the Italian National Fine Arts Committee, and Turin's old Goliardi carnival organization. Security is provided by members of Mouvement d'animation culturelle et associative des quartiers (Movement for the Promotion of Cultural Activities in Neighborhoods, MACAQ), an association that then occupied a building in the 17th arrondissement (district) of Paris. Theme of the 8 <sup>th</sup> parade: "Les 1001 nuits" (1001 Nights).
2006	First participation of the association of disabled women "Femmes pour le dire, femmes pour agir" (Women who say it, women who act) in the parade. Theme of the 9 <sup>th</sup> parade: "Le Bœuf dans tous ses états" (Beef in a State).
2007	Theme of the 10 <sup>th</sup> parade: "Les 5 continents" (The Five Continents).
2008	Theme of the 11 <sup>th</sup> parade: "La Ronde des Beaux Arts" (The Dance of Fine Arts).
2009	Theme of the 12 <sup>th</sup> parade: "Le carnaval cosmique, astronautes et extra-terrestres" (Cosmic Carnival: Astronauts and Extra-terrestrials). The first Carnaval des Femmes (Women's Carnival) parade takes place three weeks into Lent ( <i>Mi-Carême</i> in French) and is organized by Cœurs Sœurs, a group created by Alexandra Bristiel. The organizers refer to the fact that <i>Mi-Carême</i> used to be a washerwomen's festival and was, at least from the eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century, characterized by strong female participation.
2010	Theme of the 13 <sup>th</sup> parade: "L'Amour" (Love).
2011	Theme of the 14 <sup>th</sup> parade: "La Ronde des Fleurs" (The Dance of Flowers).
2012	Theme of the 15 <sup>th</sup> parade: "L'Arche de Noé" (Noah's Ark).
2013	Theme of the 16 <sup>th</sup> parade: "Le monde des jouets" (The World of Toys).
2014	Theme of the 17 <sup>th</sup> parade: "Fées, trolls et compagnie" (Fairies, Trolls, etc.).
2015	Theme of the 18 <sup>th</sup> parade: "Chevaliers, dragons et chatelaines" (Knights, Dragons, and Chatelaines).
2016	Theme of the 19 <sup>th</sup> parade: "Le monde aquatique fantastique" (The Fantastic Aquatic World).
2017	Theme of the 20 <sup>th</sup> parade: "La Ronde des fruits et légumes autour du monde" (The Dance of Fruits and Vegetables around the World).
2018	Theme of the 21 <sup>st</sup> parade: "Les contes de Perrault et d'ailleurs" (Fairytales by Perrault and Others).
2019	Theme of the 22 <sup>nd</sup> parade: "Un pour tous et tous pour le sport" (One for All and All for Sport). Celebration of the 11 <sup>th</sup> Carnaval des Femmes.
2020	Theme of the 23 <sup>rd</sup> parade: "Un fabuleux monde aérien" (Fabulous Aerial World). Celebration of the 12 <sup>th</sup> Carnaval des Femmes.

Table 1. Landmarks of Parisian Carnival history as mentioned in advertising material.

The emphasis on certain historic key dates and selected quotations allows to identify a certain historical heritage and the expression of different local and political belongings. Through the identification with a global carnival community, Pachkoff establishes "translocal" connections with representatives of other carnival strongholds nationally as well as internationally.<sup>38</sup>

NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 170; and Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen, "Introduction: An Approach to Connection and Transfer in Area Studies," in *Trans-locality: The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective*, ed. Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 5.

39. See the backside of the flyer announcing the 2006 carnival parade: "[Le carnaval] exprime parfaitement le besoin de joie et de fraternité universelles propre à chacun de nous." (Flyer in my personal possession.)

40. Ibid. Each year this flyer is slightly changed, with the new theme on the front page and a modified synthesis of the history of the carnival of Paris on the backside.

41. See the OXFAM study presented by the French national newspaper: "Les 1 % les plus fortunés posséderont bientôt la moitié de la richesse mondiale," *Le Monde*, January 15, 2015, [http://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2015/01/19/les-1-les-plus-riches-possederont-bientot-la-moitie-de-la-richesse-mondiale\\_4558585\\_3234.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2015/01/19/les-1-les-plus-riches-possederont-bientot-la-moitie-de-la-richesse-mondiale_4558585_3234.html); and the election campaigns by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, <https://www.nouvelobs.com/politique/20120305.FAP1368/melenchon-plaide-pour-le-partage-de-la-richesse-question-numero-un-de-notre-societe.html>. (accessed March 15, 2018) (site discontinued).

42. Michel Pinçon and Monique Pinçon-Charlot, *Dans les beaux quartiers* (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

## An Apolitical Carnival?

Even though Pachkoff always responds to direct questions about the political content of Parisian Carnival by saying that carnival is apolitical, official presentations show a profound identification with pacifistic thought and solidarity with disadvantaged groups and minorities. To Pachkoff, Paris should serve as an example of coexistence between peoples, and carnival expresses "the universal need for joy and brotherhood that lives in all of us."<sup>39</sup> He laments the fact that carnival history has partly been erased and that it was really the only moment when gay men and women could emancipate and do whatever they wanted under the protection of the mask.<sup>40</sup> Another document sheds light on Pachkoff's political leanings: after the introduction of the euro, he drew "Meûhro" bills of different value. The name "Meûhro" stems from the word "euro" and the French term for the sound a cow makes, in other words, "meûh" (moo)—which is another allusion to the Bœuf Gras ritual. He distributed the bills during the carnival processions in Paris and Cherbourg. On the fifty-Meûhro bill one could see a big bull with an eye mask under which the following was written: "Plus cher qu'hier, moins cher que demain, grâce au Meûhro!!!" (More expensive than yesterday, less expensive than tomorrow, thanks to the Meûhro!!!). Underneath, one could read "1ère banque européenne: Banque Rupte" (1<sup>st</sup> European bank: Bank Rupt.). On the backside were similar predictions: "Grâce au Meûhro vos poches sont vides!" (Thanks to the Meûhro your pockets are empty!) or "Finis les soucis d'argent, vous n'avez plus d'argent, ouf!" (Cash-strapped? At least you won't have to worry about money any more, phew!). The one-hundred-Meûhro bill featured similar messages: next to a cat carrying a fish bone in a bucket one could read: "Si vous êtes gros, le Meûhro vous aide à maigrir! Si vous êtes maigres, vous n'avez pas besoin de Meuhros! Donc, tout va bien! Meûh-rci Meuhro!" (If you are fat, the Meûhro helps you lose weight! If you are thin, you don't need any Meûhros! So everything is fine! Thanks Meûhro!).

These euro-critical caricatures and puns aligned with Pachkoff's political positions on other issues: as an artist living on welfare, he presents his life of low consumption with self-confidence and calls for the redistribution of wealth. The "partage des richesses" slogan is very popular in France and is regularly quoted by the media as well as by various left-wing parties.<sup>41</sup> But, with a few exceptions, the board members of the Fumantes de Pantruche live in the wealthy "Beaux quartiers" and suburbs west of Paris, such as Versailles, not in the working-class and lower-middle-class neighborhoods of the East.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the socioeconomic range of the actors is very broad and, as Matheus notes, of "different social groups."<sup>43</sup> Common to all protagonists is a certain level of education, which prompts the question as to whether it is an event of the educated, middle-class elite. Also, due to a lack of a clearly discernible musical heritage, a certain popular culture "momentum" has not developed, an issue I have explored elsewhere.<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, Pachkoff works on the one hand toward identifying with Paris as an open-minded metropolis, and on the other hand toward the diffusion of universal, pacifist, fraternal, and emancipatory values. However, all members or even participants do not necessarily share this discourse.

## The Disputed Ownership of Carnival

As it is mainly Pachkoff's own opinions that are expressed in written and oral communication, it can be assumed that the spectators who do not read the flyers that are handed out by Pachkoff

43. Matheus, *Fastnacht/Karneval im europäischen Vergleich*, 7–9.

44. Monika Salzbrunn, “Le carnaval de Paris: Mise en scène de l’histoire et histoire de sa mise en scène,” in *La fête au présent: Mutations des fêtes au sein des loisirs*, ed. Laurent Sebastien Fournier, Dominique Crozat, Catherine Bernie-Boissard, and Claude Chastagner (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2009), 117–32.

45. In another coauthored publication I have taken the Parisian Carnival as an example of the methodological problems that can occur and the ways research results can be mistaken when the analysis is exclusively based on internet research, without any ethnographic fieldwork. See Laflaquiere et al., “Archiver le Web sur les migrations.”

46. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Osborne Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

47. My own field notes.

during the procession or talk to him directly or visit the association’s website know little about his idea for Parisian Carnival.<sup>45</sup> Besides, there are different currents among the members of the organizing associations. One group attaches great importance to the “(re)invention of tradition” and met regularly during the first years to create costumes and hats based on historic patterns.<sup>46</sup> The compositions and lyrics that the members of the group practiced under the lead of musicians were selected from the extensive archive material compiled by Pachkoff. Some of the choreographies—most of them for round dances—he found in the archives were learned and performed. While the production of the costumes is relatively simple, as they consist of single-colored, straight-cut mantles, the creation of a hat demands a lot of work. All sorts of objects are pinned to the top hat: inflatable cows, plastic flowers (especially sunflowers), cow figures made of wood or plastic, etc. To increase the recognizability of the group even more, members have created other accessories, such as a big neck brace made of yellow material that is reinforced with plastic and on which they have sprayed “Les Fumantes de Pantruche” in purple, or CDs with a colorful drawing by Pachkoff and the name of the group, which serve as earrings. One year, Pachkoff was able to convince a sponsor to make a series of condoms with a colorful drawing of a fattened bull and the name of the group, specially for the parade. Another year, tote bags shaped as big socks were sewn to reference the name of the association.

One of the results from my ethnographic work, however, was that there were competing subgroups within the Fumantes de Pantruche—one that aimed to reproduce nineteenth-century costumes, songs, dances, etc. as faithfully as possible, and another one that was more open to innovation. The proponents of the music and dances relying on original sources gradually lost influence. First, due to thin and sporadic participation at rehearsals, the musicians became discouraged and left the group. Then, with the increasing participation of brass bands and various musical groups (*batucadas*, mobile sound systems), the dances and songs of the Fumantes de Pantruche could no longer be distinguished from the overall ambient sound of carnival. Generally the living cow remains visible, with its owner at the beginning of the procession and a “Géant du Nord,” a classic giant animal puppet customarily used in the carnivals of northern France, and which is brought to Paris by truck especially for the occasion. This is one of the hybrid elements of this reinvented Parisian Carnival. The organizers have joined a translocal union of associations which drives such huge sculptures through the streets during carnival. The union is called La Ronde des Géants (The Round Dance of Giants) and publishes an annual calendar. The construction manual for giants published by Pachkoff and Rafael Esteve is based on a technique that is prevalent in Catalonia.

Parallel to these activities, freelance stage designer and makeup artist Poulain offers workshops for the fabrication of cardboard masks. As part of my multisensory ethnography, I participated in a mask and costume creation workshop. With the cooperation of workshop participants, the artist also created larger-than-life sculptures for the procession, which would be put either in her car or used for a performance halfway through the route. Such artistic currents have been met with suspicion by those who favor adherence to the original sources. They perceive her as a competitor, even though Poulain was elected vice president of the association in 2004. At the general assembly in 2004 the divergences became clearly visible and the president, Pachkoff, openly spoke of “different objectives,” according to which various individuals participate in the carnival, and which are actively created by their organizations.<sup>47</sup> Pachkoff, himself a visual artist

48. I received this information several times from students, members of the Faluchards (a student group whose name refers to the “Faluche,” a black velour beret), in Paris and in Poitiers during the 2000s. The reference can also be found on the official website of these student unions: <http://faluche.info/tag/rabelais/>.

49. Etymologically, the word “Goliardi” refers to a group of young clergy who wrote satirical Latin poetry in Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and criticized the contradictions within the church through music, songs, and other performances, leading up to the Feast of Fools. The term could also be related to the word “Gaillard,” a gay fellow.

50. A recent exhibition at Marseille’s Museum of European and Mediterranean civilizations (2014) provided many examples of the symbolic condemnation of a carnival figure at the end of the festivities. See page 226 on Jedlińsk, Poland, and page 281 on Marseille, France, from the catalog (to which I contributed): Marie-Pascale Mallé, ed., *Le Monde à l’Envers: Carnivals et Mascarades d’Europe et de Méditerranée* (Marseille: MuCEM; Paris: Flammarion, 2014).

who attended the Parisian *École des Beaux-Arts*, reacted liberally and in support of all currents.

As the parade was still quite small and unremarkable in those years, Pachkoff soon did research on carnival associations in France as well as in other European countries. Efforts to connect with other carnival associations led the founders to court medical student groups, which often cite Rabelais as a reference.<sup>48</sup> For several years, the Fumantes de Pantruche met at the same bar on Sully-Morland Boulevard as the Parisian “Goliardi.”<sup>49</sup> These meetings, however, did not lead to any long-lasting collaboration. Today, there are regular meetings of carnival participants in a self-managed café in the Montparnasse neighborhood. Friendly relations also exist between the organizers of the street carnival “Simplon en fête” that takes place in the 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement (district) of Paris and outside of the period set aside for carnival in the Christian calendar. The main organizer was a guest at the Fumantes de Pantruche’s general assembly on November 27, 2004. Problematic for Pachkoff, however, became his collaboration with the Mouvement d’animation culturelle et associative des quartiers (Movement for the Promotion of Cultural Activities in Neighborhoods, MACAQ) in 2005. Formed of both squatters and artists, the group occupied a building in the 17<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris and organized cultural events. Fascinated with their professionalism, efficiency, and creativity, Pachkoff reached out to a key person within the organization and held coordination meetings with the different participant groups at their headquarters. Due to their good relationship with the Parisian chief of police, MACAQ provided extremely efficient security services to the parade. Also, the participation of the movement in the form of spectacular marching groups was a success, and soon the spokesperson for MACAQ took over the coordination because of the substantially greater degree of professional organization the association could manage, while Pachkoff and the Fumantes de Pantruche felt their authorship and control over the reinstated Parisian Carnival threatened. Conflicts over authenticity and legitimacy intensified in 2005–6 and continued for several years, but more recently, Pachkoff has become more and more visible in the media so that his authorship and coordination have been reestablished and recognized.

### From Localized Carnival to Translocal Event

Over the past few years, the focus of much of Pachkoff’s work has been the *Droit à la Culture* (Right to Culture) association founded by the deceased council member Riou, which is the official organization behind the new Parisian Carnival. The Fumantes de Pantruche, still led by Pachkoff (with the exception of the 2010–13 period, when Alexandra Bristiel was the president of *Droit à la Culture*), is considered to be the main Parisian Carnival group. Newer is *Cœurs sœurs*, which organizes the *Carnaval des Femmes* (Women’s Carnival parade) with the cooperation of Fumantes de Pantruche. Bristiel is honorary president of *Cœurs sœurs* while Pachkoff is its president. The “*Cortège des Reines de blanchisseuses de la Mi-Carême*” (mid-Lenten washerwomen’s parade) takes place about one month after the “*Carnaval de Paris*,” roughly in the middle of the Lenten period between carnival and Easter, and contains elements of travesty that are reminiscent of Rhineland Carnival. Pachkoff usually leads the procession as a bride in a conspicuous white gown. Pat the clown wears a skirt, as do all other male participants.

In 2009 Bristiel and Pachkoff jointly recited the speech for the sentencing of “Carnival” at the partner event in Cherbourg.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, more fruitful and lasting than contacts with Parisian associations has been the relation with the organizers of the Cherbourg Carnival. This has led

to the regular participation of Norman music groups, marching groups, and giant puppets in Parisian Carnival since 2004. Especially at a time when only very few Parisian music groups participated, with the exception of a few student brass bands (who understand themselves as a parody of classical *fanfares*), their presence helped Parisian Carnival gain minimal visibility and audibility. The loud hybrid Normand-Caribbean music groups especially drew the attention of bystanders. Even though the Cherbourg groups, which self-finance their participation in Parisian Carnival, were very disappointed about the lack of institutional welcome from the Parisians—only Councilman Riou offered the Normans (but none of the other participants) an *apéritif* on the streets—they reacted with a generous invitation of their own for the Parisians to come to Cherbourg. Such striking contrast between the stinginess of the metropolitan institutions and the generosity of a small provincial city was the subject of many informal conversations and official speeches. It contributed to the shame of the Parisians and admiration and pride of the Normans themselves who saw their preconceived notions about the treatment of the province by the centralistic polity confirmed. Parisians also saw their vision of a city government that appears elitist and far away from its constituents confirmed in the lack of official recognition, for example, by the refusal of a reception at city hall.

Slowly, the reciprocal influence of the choreography of both carnivals increased. Today in Paris, the groups from Cherbourg are best visible from afar, thanks to their giant puppets. The strong and experienced music groups—especially the Norman-Caribbean group Kadouven (creole for “there is wind”)—also provide remarkable sonorous support for the procession. While the groups from Cherbourg became key participants in the Parisian parade, Parisian carnivalists also took over important tasks in the organization of Cherbourg Carnival. In the following section, I provide a concrete example of this fruitful cooperation between both carnival communities: the 2006 carnival festivities in Cherbourg, when the Parisian Fumantes de Pantruche were entrusted with writing the death sentence for “Carnival,” making them active participants in the most important ritual of the carnival season: the closing court hearing before the cremation of “Carnival” on the beach at night.<sup>51</sup>

### Villepintator in Cherbourg: A Collaborative Political Performance

Every year in Cherbourg, the carnival committee comes up with a new theme and creates corresponding costumes for the characters who accompany the “bonhomme carnaval” float.<sup>52</sup> The latter embodies evil, immorality, and perfidy; stands accused as chief culprit for all suffering of the carnival community; and must do public penance with his death. Such an interpretation, considering that the ritual delivers a moral message, may be seen as evidence of an ecclesiastic-theological influence, much like Dietz-Rüdiger Moser argued with his analysis of *Fastnacht*, for example. However, historian Norbert Schindler would probably consider this to be a gross overestimation.<sup>53</sup> The fact remains that “Carnival” serves as a scapegoat and that its burning has a cathartic, cleansing function. Carnivalists also regularly target the clergy during the court hearing concerning the crimes and the atonement of “Carnival.” However, one could ask whether the *communitas* is aware of this meaning, such as in the case of Cologne, for example, as I have shown elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> Despite the Catholic background of the great majority of the French population and despite the numerous witch hunts and Protestant persecutions that have punctuated French history (just think of the 1573 St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre), the

51. This is derived from my own field notes, collected during several participations in the carnival of Cherbourg with the Fumantes de Pantruche.

52. Such a character corresponds to the “Nubbel” in Rhenish Carnival tradition.

53. Norbert Schindler, “Karneval, Kirche und verkehrte Welt – Zur Funktion der Lachkultur im 16. Jahrhundert,” in *Widerspenstige Leute – Studien zur Volkskultur in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Norbert Schindler (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1992), 124.

54. Monika Salzbrunn, “L’événement festif comme théâtre de conflits en zone urbaine: Le carnaval des sans-papiers à Cologne,” in *Lectures du conflit*, ed. Myriam Klinger and Sébastien Schehr (Strasbourg: Néothèque, 2011), 111–26; and Salzbrunn, “How Diverse Is Cologne Carnival?”

55. CUC stands for Communauté Urbaine de Cherbourg-Octeville, which is the complete name for the Cherbourg metropolitan area.

56. The sentence "I want to be Caliph in place of the Caliph" is a famous line from the *Iznogoud* (pronounced "he's no good") French comics series created by writer René Goscinny and artist Jean Tabary in the 1960s.

country has been secularized so much that only a few protagonists—and scholars—understand the Catholic semantics of the ritual. The sarcastic jabs at the clergy, however, and the many ironic slurs directed at the government are well understood by the audience, which performatively participates in the ritual and loudly expresses approval.

The members of the Parisian Fumantes de Pantruche have been invited several times to participate in the writing and performance of the sentencing. In the following section, I analyze the details of their 2006 participation, because this year's court hearing was strongly influenced by political semantics, which was more or less hidden by the complex word play. Also, the choice of words in 2006 was significantly cruder, sometimes vulgar, in line with Pachkoff's desire to echo Rabelais's sixteenth-century writings.

The Judge (Pachkoff): Justice exists either too much or too little.

Sentence: We, the carnival brotherhood of the CUC,<sup>55</sup> through the voice of its highest judge. We, the princes of bottle-emptiers until the last drip, devourers of that which is forbidden on Friday, tireless cheer-uppers of cold fish and sad characters, inveterate red rags in the eyes of Holy Joes, who laugh uproariously at the risk of bursting, we who wear out quality mattresses, the great saviors of national birthrates, we the mockers of herring-biters, who trample on sacristy bugs and admire monastery-leavers, we the ass-blowers, the lunatics, the Harlequins, the Pierrots, all gropers of tempting tits, we the mockers of the swamped economy, we the sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons of Rabelais and Pantagruel, have the great honor to let you know that the reason why we have convened you here on the 8<sup>th</sup> of Germinal of the year 214 of the republic, and why we are momentarily keeping you away from your slippers and your TV, is that it seemed highly necessary, for the elevation of the gullible masses, who are shamelessly exploited even when they deserve it, to publicize the sentencing of Carnival's sad gossip commonly known as Villepintator ("Villepintator!") who, for one year now, has taken malicious pleasure in fomenting the worst crimes against our good city and in other places. As the reading of his deeds may cause the hardest souls to shiver, we advise sensitive people to plug their ears or walk away. Those who are hard of hearing should come closer. Now, good and brave citizens of Cherbourg-Octeville, Equeurdreuville, Tourlaville, La Glacerie, Querqueville, and other places: Listen!

According to the evidence we have received by means that are morally dubious, but have proved to be effective, Villepintator ("Villepintator!") was about to degrade our glorious republic to a modest developing country. At the very moment when we arrested him he was just about to get to the best of us, the elite of our nation. To be sure we understand each other: the ruse did not consist in doing them physical harm, no. But worse: he was trying to persuade them that they are extraordinarily incompetent. Villepintator ("Villepintator!") kidnapped the most famous TV hosts in order to take their place. By means of dubious questions and devious insinuations, he trapped the most important personalities of the state and made them say the most beautiful nonsense. For some time now, he has been getting at precarious artists with temporary contracts and has turned them into foolish puppets of culture. Luckily, we intervened just in time; otherwise our beautiful country would have irreversibly become the laughing stock of the entire planet. Here are some grievances that make clear the great danger we have just escaped.

"Dominique, I ask you for a rhyme for growth and you respond control, and then for the decrease of unemployment, you propose temporary contracts that want to create insecure work for the youth. Dominique, in a good dictionary you'd rather find incompetence."

"Nicolas, who wants to become Caliph in place of the Caliph? Everyone would normally answer 'Iznogoud'<sup>56</sup>; you, however, blush and ask me: do you have your papers?"

And this is only a glimpse of the gossip. (Yelling from the audience.) Really, I'm telling you, all the people

57. My own field notes and recordings, April 7–8, 2006, Cherbourg.

you look up to, whom you trust, they have all suffered the same sarcasm. Nobody dares to go out in public anymore.

As you can see, dear people of France and the CUC, without the successful intervention of our guard and our court, we would be going through difficult times. Therefore, after having concurred with the best in us, we, judge of our Almighty Court, sentence the horrible Villepintator ("Villepintator!") to have his gears, his instruments of deceit, torched until death comes. We, the noble people here present, mandate this execution to be celebrated with joy, with drinking to excess at every CUC tavern and with dancing until dark. The defendant and the audience are not authorized to appeal. The court only accepts bribes in the form of wine of the best vintage. The present conviction is to be executed immediately. The execution is public and gratuitous, only drinks will be charged. Executioner, carry out your duty! Hahahaha!

Executioner: Villepintator! Let him burn! Gather at the Quai de la Hune ("Into the fire! Into the fire!") in order to burn him. ("Into the fire!") Into the fire! Let the machine be destroyed! ("Destroy!") All to the sentencing and the execution ("Into the fire!").

Audience: Into the fire! Into the fire! Into the fire! Into the fire! Burn, sperm whale! Torch the big sperm whale! Into the fire! Into the fire!<sup>57</sup>

In this court hearing different levels and targets of sarcastic critique can be distinguished. Different forms of belonging—to the region, to the provinces (meaning all French regions outside of Paris), and to the nation—were also performed. On the regional level, the participation of the surrounding towns of the Cotentin region was highlighted. The inhabitants of the province see themselves as citizens who are dominated by the Parisian central power and upon whom (disadvantageous) decisions are imposed. The creation of an anticlerical and political *communitas* was especially strong that year and was expressed through particularly violent criticism of the government led by Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, renamed "Villepintator" ("Villepin, you're wrong" in French). It started with a jab at churchgoers (called *grenouilles de bénitier*, English for Holy Joes), for whom the immoral carnival community (with its rampant transgressive sexual practices) represents a perpetual red rag. In contrast, the carnivalists identified with Pantagruel, Rabelais's sixteenth-century protagonist. Concurrently, they referenced the late eighteenth-century French revolutionaries when using the revolutionary calendar to date the proceedings.

The main jab was at the prime minister and his plan to reform social security for artists. This plan would have abolished the special status that had been granted by socialist president François Mitterrand to artists working on a temporary basis. More specifically, it would have excluded many actors, stage designers, etc. from unemployment insurance in between contracts, leading them to rely on welfare benefits. According to the carnivalists, the government would have replaced them with loyal "puppets." TV hosts had already been replaced with sycophants anyway. "Villepintator" (a machine meant to lobotomize fine artists with temporary contracts) was a personification of the prime minister, who was supposedly trying to destroy artists' critical judgment. The Interior minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, was also criticized for his presidential ambitions (he would actually be elected president in 2007) and for his xenophobic and intimidating domestic policies. After the death sentence, "Villepintator" was carried to the beach, followed by the festive community, and burned (with firefighters keeping watch).

In the Cherbourg Carnival a sense of belonging, and thus a situational coherence, was produced

through discourse and performance. As religious and ethnic backgrounds did not play a primary role, participation in the festivities really produced a form of *communitas*. Identification with the locality of Cherbourg, the district town of Cherbourg-Octeville, the Cotentin Peninsula, and the Normandy region was expressed through amused references to their own cultural history. Even though carnival was never held continually in the area, the organizers built on cultural knowledge that they remobilized. Like Belgian towns, northern French towns stand as cradles of popular festive culture—in contrast with Nice and its particularly commercial carnival. I witnessed first-hand the residents' oft-mentioned capacity to invent spontaneous farces, to master a repertoire of (drinking) ballads, to engage in convivial folksiness in pubs and clubs, and to quickly come into contact with the public during the festive situation.

Moreover, in contrast to the Parisian metropolis, "provincial" organizers felt that they stood together and shared common conditions, which did not undermine their cultivated friendship with the Parisian Carnival members. Indeed, the opposite happened, as the performed political belongings also implied a critique of the (conservative) central Parisian government that was shared between the Parisian *Fumantes de Pantruche* and the Cherbourg carnivalists. Furthermore, both shared an anticlerical attitude that was expressed by mocking the church and criticizing the frightening figure of the church fathers. While in both cities rituals from a historic religious context mattered (the Parisian parade of the *Bœuf Gras* was originally a symbol of gluttony before Lent and the burning of the "bonhomme carnival" in Cherbourg is a cleansing ritual in which a martyr redeems the sins of the community), they were not explicitly presented as such.

In the last section of this article, I go back to the general questions raised by carnival studies, which I presented in the first section, and discuss the extent to which a renewed theoretical approach can enrich our understanding of the Parisian Carnival and its *Bœuf Gras*.

### **Contemporary Carnival: Spectacle or Participatory Event?**

In the first part of the present article, I provided an overview of the emergence of event, ritual, and carnival studies out of various disciplines and their possible application to the carnivals of Paris and Cherbourg. Is contemporary Parisian Carnival a transformative event? The answer depends on the level of analysis. Each festive event needs a public, but the level of participation varies according to the type of carnival, its historical context, and location. Whereas the situationists and many carnival studies scholars have established a rather radical difference between spectacles for consumption in a capitalist society and individual expressions and experiences, I would argue that contemporary carnivals unite both aspects but to various degrees. In the case of Parisian Carnival, the non-capitalistic attitude, leaving a maximum space for self-organization and individual expression, comes close to the idea of a transformative event. This is the case for the main actor's experience. Historical events are referenced to create and reinforce a feeling of belonging to the locality of Paris and its festive past. The individual experience shared with other actors can lead to a creation of a situational *communitas*. However, the public's participation is limited since the people on both sides of the street are at best curious spectators who take selfies with the cow, rather than co-constructors of the event. Therefore, the widespread belief that carnival is a transformative event barely concerns the spectators who feel more entertained than turned upside down. Nevertheless, the picture is more complex when it comes to the main

actors, and their individual and collective interactions and relationships as well as those with the city.

In the Parisian example, lines of conflict that traverse ethnic and religious characteristics of distinction become apparent through carnival. However, because of the complexity of the event, these have to be analytically divided into three levels: the processes of interaction within the organizing group, Fumantes de Pantruche; the relationships between the individual groups, especially with the artistic group MACAQ, which wants to preserve a squatted house as its creative home; and finally the relationships with local politicians and the city, who want to co-opt the festivities. In the Parisian case, conflict is more political than ethnic or religious. However, “youths” and “Muslims” are occasionally constructed as alterity through discourse. They are considered for recruitment, even though Muslims or youths already take part in the carnival as individuals (mostly as members of musical groups). After observing many informal and formal meetings and preliminary discussions, I determined that belonging to religious or ethnic groups was externally constructed through the discourse of some members of the association. In certain situations, individuals were perceived as Muslims or Arabs, but during the carnival parade, they were mainly conceived of as being part of collectives (for example, musical groups).

Furthermore, cultural brokers maintained key positions and played ambivalent roles depending on the context and the situation of interaction. These brokers and mediators included the organizer of the carnival; the spokesperson of the Green Party group in the Parisian council (who died during the observation period); and, finally, the representatives of the artistic group MACAQ, whose influence grew due to the ambivalent relationship that they maintained with the chief of police. The latter had no interest in the historic manifestations of the carnival but used the festive situation as a stage for their own cultural and political ambitions. Hence, carnival proved to have a transformative potential at an individual level. Furthermore, MACAQ’s participation in carnival was part of a broader set of political actions that aimed at transforming the city into a better place to live and fight against its marketization.

Parisian Carnival reflects social, political, economic, and creative processes of transformation and influences these retroactively. Therefore, I would not assume that this carnival has a subversive character. It rather illustrates societal change, which has proceeded rather smoothly, once the struggle for the permit of the organization was won in 1998. A couple of years after the first reinvented carnival, the participation of MACAQ as security staff was expressly commended by the police prefecture and showed an increasing tolerance of alternative cultural projects and their pragmatic use. MACAQ members were threatened by the police for being squatters and simultaneously held good personal relations with the police prefecture due to their professional and safe execution of cultural events. That is why the police readily fell back on the group as a reliable partner for the secure handling of festivities. Also, the cultural politics of the new city government facilitated the possibilities of expression of free artist groups and associations. Their successful activities in turn impelled the city to support them and led to the appropriation of carnival by the city in anticipation of the next municipal elections.

The city of Paris holds an interest in celebrating its multicultural plurality and thus creates a demand for presentable examples of peaceful cohabitation of residents of different origin and culture. However, the mayor has not yet responded to concrete requests for official support

made by the organizers. Only logistical help with the transport of the “Bœuf gras” from the Corrèze region has been provided. Individual city council members from the Socialist Party (PS), the Communist Party (PC), and the Greens have followed the example of the deceased organizer Riou and have used the parade as a campaigning platform for more than a decade. The Parisian carnivalists themselves do not receive subsidies and have thus only invited the people from Cherbourg in a private capacity, without welcoming them in an official manner. Over the years, participation from Cherbourg has declined and the visiting group has become so small as to disappear entirely.

In Cherbourg, carnival logistics are entirely subsidized and supported through the resources set aside by the localities for local activities. Also, the city theater is made available so that the court scene can be staged on its balcony. Through the parade through the tower blocks, a residential area of social housing in Octeville, and involvement in social projects, notably, with the construction of the “Carnival” puppet, carnival as an event has an important integrative function in the eyes of the city. The city thanks carnival participants through an official reception at Octeville city hall. Here, the fools do not really take over the city but rather direct their construction of a hostile alterity against the central government in Paris. Thus, the animosity between province, or periphery, and the center may be overcome through the friendly and ideologically shaped ties with the Parisian carnivalists. The people of Cherbourg even generously finance lodging for the Parisians in the shared rooms of a hostel and distribute meal coupons. Here, one could speak of a material and immaterial exchange relationship: the artistically bent Parisian carnivalists bring their capacity to write linguistically highly complex and intellectually playful speeches for the central court hearing. The people of Cherbourg bring their good mood and popular carnival culture (which the Parisians lack) as well as the highly visible and audible sophisticated marionettes and musical groups, which have made decisive contributions to Parisian Carnival.

In the case of the Parisian Carnival, the common political goals are only faintly discernible. The president of the organizing group has repeatedly explained that carnival is “not political,” but a pacifist and anti-globalization discourse has gained a central role in his communication and performance (the Meùhro bills are just one example). More abstractly, Pachkoff believes that common celebration may temporarily give birth to the utopia of a peaceful cohabitation without any discrimination on the grounds of gender, sex, religion, or nationality. In the opinion of the organizer, this model should be followed by the leading public officials and find its way into the organization of social conditions.<sup>58</sup>

In the festive situation, collective belonging (to a locality, to a political stance, to an anticlerical attitude, etc.) is performed and thus cohesion is created.<sup>59</sup> The success of the event leads to a recognition of the commitment of the individuals and groups involved (this search for recognition is what motivates them) and strengthens their political stance. Thus, a community within society is performed.<sup>60</sup> However, the experience of *communitas* is reduced to specific moments in time. Reciprocal observation during the event by and among the participating actors simultaneously builds the basis for conflicts that later erupt (as in the case of Paris).

The long-standing personal friendships between protagonists of the Cherbourg and the Parisian Carnivals also led to a substantive reciprocal institutional and performative influence on the

58. My own field notes, observations, and recordings during meetings and formal and informal interviews with Pachkoff, 2004–20, especially October 23, 2004, June 20, 2006, and February 15, 2015, Paris.

59. Emile Durkheim, “Cours sur les origines de la vie religieuse,” in *Textes*, vol. 2, *Religion, morale, anomie* (1907; repr., Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1975), 65–122.

60. On this idea, see the similarly titled collection Ivan Sainsaulieu, Monika Salzbrunn, and Laurent Amiotte-Suchet, *Faire communauté en société: Dynamique des appartenances collectives* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010).

choreography of the respective events. Thus, the Cherbourg music groups and giant puppets came to count among the most important participants of the Parisian Carnival parade for more than a decade. Conversely, the president of the Parisian association was regularly put in charge of the bill of indictment against “Carnival” that is read during the most significant ritual of the Cherbourg Carnival—the court hearing at the end of the festivities. Here, the respective belongings to a locality created a permanent connection within a larger festive community that exceeded the situationality of carnival. In the present time, however, Parisian Carnival has become much more diversified, with the participation of various music and folklore groups, of which some tend to stage their own invented culture, such as the Bolivian residents of France who perform UNESCO-labeled dances. It is not a masquerade that turns a local society upside down, but it is still a way of wearing costumes and performing belonging to an imagined hometown.

Finally, this case study hints at some of the ways complex contemporary carnivalesque events should be studied. First, each festive event should be contextualized, both from an emic point of view (when actors refer to the history of the event) and from an etic perspective (when actors ignore or do not refer to the history of the events they are organizing or [un]consciously [re] inventing). Second, carnival should not be considered as either a spectacle for consumption or a participatory popular event, since in most cases, both aspects are present, and empirical research should take them into consideration with a nuanced approach. Third, carnival is a moment of joy but also mirrors political, social, and economic conflicts; power relations; and local, regional, national, and global struggles, including issues related to gender, race, class, ethnicity, and sexual preferences. Therefore, it is as important to follow the event in itself as to conduct in-depth empirical research during the preparatory phase and after the event. Fourth, apprenticeship as a method allows researchers to experience the bodily and mental transformations intrinsic to ritual. As the empirical cases have shown, the festive event has a transformative potential on an individual and collective level, but it has also been constantly transformed and reinvented through individual and collective actions.<sup>61</sup> Fifth, therefore, networks and personal relations should be taken into consideration as well as institutional cooperation and the relation to the police and other executive authorities, notably, in a context of censorship. Finally, analyzing the evolving media through which festive messages are mediated (cartoons, floats, costumes, discourses, choreography, etc.) can lead to a fascinating study of political critique through carnival performances.

61. See the ERC ARTIVISM project led by me, in which apprenticeship and multisensory ethnography are applied for researching performances as creative means of political expression: Monika Salzbrunn, ARTIVISM, Art and Activism: Creativity and Performance as Subversive Forms of Political Expression in Super-Diverse Cities, European Research Council Consolidator Grant Project, 2015, [www.erc-activism.ch](http://www.erc-activism.ch), <https://www.unil.ch/jssr/home/menuguid/Projet-Europeen-ERC.html>.

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## AUTHOR BIO

**Monika Salzbrunn** is professor of religions, migration, and diasporas at the University of Lausanne and principal investigator of ARTIVISM (“Art and Activism: Creativity and Performance as Subversive Forms of Political Expression in Super-Diverse Cities”), a research project funded by the European Research Council (ERC). She has published numerous books and articles in English, French, Italian, German, Portuguese, and Japanese on political and religious performances as well as on carnivals and carnivalesque events in Cologne, Paris, Cherbourg, New York, Lausanne, and Payerne. She currently focuses on the French and Italian Mediterranean cities of Genoa, Viareggio, Nice, and Marseille.

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# Who Owns Carnival? Festive Tradition and Social Stratification in a Contemporary Greek Community

**Regina Zervou**

Ministry of Culture and Education, Athens, Greece

## KEYWORDS

carnival  
social class  
wage-earners  
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guardians of tradition

## ABSTRACT

In this article, I attempt to shed light on the complex relationship between class stratification and carnival performances in Agiasos, a mountainous village located on the Greek island of Lesbos. Rooted in fertility rites, early twentieth-century carnival there featured a collision of worldviews and attitudes between the “haves” of the village—landowners with strong links to the Church of Holy Mary, that is, one of the most important pilgrimage sites of the Aegean Sea—and the “have-nots,” the working class of the village. Following a turbulent period marked by World War II (1939–45), the Greek Civil War (1943–49), and military rule (1969–74), the return to democracy was marked by the emergence of a new white-collar class, consisting of people with academic titles who set about to create and manage popular culture. As a result, the carnival community became informally divided between manual laborers and “the creative class,” the latter of whom appointed themselves the “guardians” of carnival tradition, dictating the terms under which the ritual should be performed. Based on fieldwork carried out in the village of Agiasos, this essay highlights the way the economic elite of Agiasos has been using carnival performances to exclude undesirable, unruly individuals from the village.

1. See Elisabeth Kontogiorgi, *Population Exchange in Greek Macedonia: The Rural Settlement of Refugees 1922–1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).
2. Stratis Kolaxizelis, *Legends and History of Agiasos of the Island of Lesbos* [in Greek], photomechanical reprint of 1947 edition (Athens: Agiasos Association, 1997), 186.
3. Anthony Giddens, "Living in a Post-Traditional Society," in *Reflexive Modernisation: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, ed. Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).
4. See James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1990 [1890]); and Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1959).
5. In Don Handelman's taxonomy, carnival is described as "an event of re-presentation," meaning a festival which, unlike "events of presentation," involves flexible forms of organization, encourages participation, remains unstable and unpredictable, and can thus turn into an "arena of confrontation." Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
6. Alessandro Testa, "Rethinking the Festival: Power and Politics," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 26 (2014): 66.
7. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1968), 122.

## Who Owns Carnival? Festive Tradition and Social Stratification in a Contemporary Greek Community

Regina Zervou

### Introduction

This essay focuses on the carnival festivities organized in Agiasos, a village located on the North Aegean island of Lesbos, Greece. Located twenty kilometers away from the sea, it is relatively isolated from other rural communities on the island. Owing to its mountainous terrain (it sits at the foot of Mount Olympos), and to land distribution reforms dating from the 1920s,<sup>1</sup> the village's population consists mainly of small farmers engaged in olive cultivation or stockbreeding who supplement their income with other, nonrural activities.

Carnival has been celebrated in Agiasos since the eighteenth century, though performances took their current form in the 1930s.<sup>2</sup> Its central feature is the *satira*, satirical poems using iambic fifteen-syllable verse (*dekapentasyllavos*), that is, the meter of most Greek traditional oral poetry. These compositions usually reference social relations inside the community and political events at the national and international scale. *Satira* express beliefs and views long established in the collective conscience and are characterized by both radicalism in their general worldview and conservative attitudes towards everyday-life questions, such as gender and intergenerational relationships.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the way social stratification has been reflected in carnival from the pre-World War I period to today, and how it has affected both the content of satirical verses and the organization of carnival performances. Adopting a Bakhtinian perspective on carnival and culture, it tries to explore how literacy and school education in particular have complexified the relation between social class and cultural integration. It also relies on Anthony Giddens's concept of "guardians of tradition" to show that tradition may be utilized to correct and exclude.<sup>3</sup>

### On Carnival and Social Class

In Europe, carnivalesque events (which date back to the tenth century BCE<sup>4</sup>) have played a major role in the construction of communities. Given the relative freedom of expression they grant performers, they have often been used to "re-present" social relations and even class or racial conflict.<sup>5</sup> Alessandro Testa notes that "festivals are obviously charged with tensions embedded in social expectations, political claims, religious passions," tensions that can either support or destabilize "the hegemonic order and its functional imaginaries."<sup>6</sup>

In the Middle Ages carnival was a time for temporary reversal, when the popular worldview—about human relations, about the nature of power and of the divine—prevailed over that of the political, economic, and religious elites. As Mikhail Bakhtin explained in his magnum opus, "the historically determined culture of folk humor ... was not opposed to all seriousness in general. It was opposed to the intolerant, dogmatic seriousness of the Church, which also presented a historically determined form."<sup>7</sup> Carnival's joy and liberty preceded and contrasted with the austerity of Lent and with the Christian perception of the human body.

8. Ibid., 394.

9. Tony Bennett, "Popular Culture and the Turn to Gramsci," *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2006), 94.

10. Max Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 109.

11. Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1981).

12. Abner Cohen, *Masquerade Politics: Explorations in the Structure of Urban Cultural Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 3.

13. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 34.

14. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 3, italics mine.

Bakhtin described medieval and early Renaissance carnival as the unhindered, liberating, and catalytic expression of the oppressed and highlighted its inversive, rebellious, nonhierarchical, and subversive nature. The basic element of medieval carnival culture, according to him, was folk laughter, that is, a festive, universal, ambiguous, and derisive form of laughter based in the language of the "lower body," a grotesque version of the ideas and symbols of the dominant culture.<sup>8</sup>

Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci described popular culture as a privileged field of conflict between hegemonic and popular beliefs and worldviews, "a force field of relations shaped precisely by these by contradictory pressures and tendencies."<sup>9</sup> Gramsci's theories largely contributed to the emergence of cultural studies as an academic field following the end of World War II, refocusing the study of culture on its contentious political dimension.

Other scholars have stressed that rites of reversal, while an obvious manifestation of protest against the established order, serve as a form of safety valve through which subordinated groups can let off steam and then, relieved, return to their everyday life of inequality and injustice. The anthropologist Max Gluckman thus analyzed carnival rites as "intended to preserve and strengthen the established order,"<sup>10</sup> an interpretation backed by Terry Eagleton: "Carnival, after all, is ... a *licensed* affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively intellectual as a revolutionary work of art."<sup>11</sup> In his introduction to *Masquerade Politics*, Abner Cohen similarly stated that "every major carnival is precariously poised between the affirmation of the established order and its rejection."<sup>12</sup>

Adopting a sociological approach, Pierre Bourdieu pointed out the connection between popular culture and social class. He distinguished between high-bourgeois and low-popular culture in his work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, contrasting bourgeois courtesy, "a distancing, inherent in the calculated coldness of all formal exploration, a refusal to communicate concealed at the heart of the communication itself ... whose impeccable formalism is a permanent warning against the temptation of familiarity," with the "expressiveness of popular language" resulting in the assumption that different forms of popular art please working-class audiences as "they satisfy the taste and sense of revelry, the plain speaking and hearty laughter which liberate by setting the social world head over heels, overturning conventions and proprieties."<sup>13</sup> However, it was E. P. Thompson who really provided a cultural dimension to the concept of social class in his monumental work *The Making of the English Working Class*, from which the definition below is extracted:

Class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born—or enter involuntarily. *Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms.* If the experience appears as determined, class-consciousness does not. We can see a logic in the responses of similar occupational groups undergoing similar experiences, but we cannot predicate any law. Consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way.<sup>14</sup>

The expression of class claims through popular culture was an issue that troubled the Soviet Communist Party in the postrevolutionary Soviet Union, as its predominantly rural population

15. Felix J. Oinas, "Folklore Activities in Russia," *The Journal of American Folklore* 74, no. 294 (1961): 362.

16. Maxim Gorky, Karl Radek, Nikolai Bukharin, Andrey Zhdanov et al., *Soviet Writers' Congress 1934: The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism in the Soviet Union* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977).

17. Yiannis Zaimakis, "'Forbidden Fruits' and the Communist Paradise: Marxist Thinking on Greekness and Class in Rebetika," *Music and Politics* 4, no. 1 (2010): 1–25.

18. James H. Satterwhite, *Varieties of Marxist Humanism: Philosophical Revision in Postwar Eastern Europe* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 171.

19. "Tradition involves 'formulaic truth,' to which only certain persons have full access.... Tradition is unthinkable without guardians, because the guardians have privileged access to truth; truth cannot be demonstrated save in so far as it is manifest in the interpretations and practices of the guardians." Giddens, "Living in a Post-Traditional Society," 64, 79.

20. *Ibid.*, 104.

21. Cohen, *Masquerade Politics*, 8.

22. See Kathryn E. Holland Braund, "Guardians of Tradition and Handmaidens to Change: Women's Roles in Creek Economic and Social Life during the Eighteenth Century," *American Indian Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1990):

had a rich legacy of folk forms, notably tales and music.<sup>15</sup> At first, Communist intellectuals treated popular culture with some reservations, as they considered it connected to the old regime that had to "die." This posture radically changed in 1934 when Maxim Gorki stressed during the Soviet Writers' Congress that "the unwritten artistic compositions of the working people represented the sole organizer of their experience, the embodiment of ideas in imagery and the spur to the working energy of the collective body."<sup>16</sup> The traditions of ordinary people and the social content of folk culture were now perceived by Marxist intellectuals as a sort of "secondary" resistance in the battle against ruling-class domination.<sup>17</sup> The identity of the "new worker" would be based on popular, traditional culture, which would be molded according to socialist ideals.

Communist Parties asked people like Gorky to formulate and disseminate the principles of class struggle among the masses. Writing about the role of these "edifiers of the masses" in ex-Communist regimes, Czechoslovakian intellectual and academic Karel Kosík would later lament that "'edification' became here 'mystification,'"<sup>18</sup> meaning the creation of a false consciousness. In a way, edifiers were the prototypes of the "guardians of tradition," a term introduced by Giddens to discuss the normative power some people have over what should or should not be thought and done.<sup>19</sup> The party's edifiers were thought to have access to "formulaic truth" and were charged with monitoring any deviation from it and deliver it intact to the generations to come. They provided for the accurate observance of some practices that took the form of rites.

This detour via the Soviet Union makes clear that tradition and its cultural forms are connected to power. Tradition "incorporates power relations and tends to naturalize them," Giddens writes.<sup>20</sup> Thus it is deeply political, in the same way that "the political is constantly expressed, articulated and objectified in terms of cultural forms and performances."<sup>21</sup> The guardians of tradition determine the framework into which collective consciousness is constructed and they are entitled not only to have an opinion on "traditionality" but also to criticize, judge, and punish "transgressors." Though the term "guardians of tradition" has been employed in a variety of contexts,<sup>22</sup> it has mostly been used by scholars writing about modernity. Esther Peeren has thus examined the role of the Carnival and Arts Committee in Notting Hill Carnival in "propagating a 'need for some formality' in the planning and execution of the Carnival."<sup>23</sup> In this sense the committee acted as the guardian of Afro-Caribbean carnival tradition in London, although the term was not used by Peeren.

In this essay I examine how political subjects may turn into guardians of tradition and thus exert an ideological "hegemony" based on their own, established conceptions of tradition and popular culture. The period under examination goes from 1936 to 2008. It was marked by both international events such as World War II, which changed historical parameters globally, and local events such as the Greek Civil War (1946–49), the "Regime of the Colonels" (1967–74), and the return to democracy in 1974, which shaped modern Greek society. It was also marked by an increase in literacy. An education reform in 1976 made school attendance compulsory from the age of six and made education more accessible to a wider part of the population by replacing *katharevousa*, an artificial language based on ancient Greek, with *demotiki*, a popular language spoken by the majority of people.<sup>24</sup> As Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron argue, the efficacy of all pedagogic work depends on "the distance between the habitus it tends to inculcate" and "the habitus inculcated by all previous forms of pedagogic work and, ultimately, by the family."<sup>25</sup> Much

239–58; Judi Aubel, Ibrahima Touré, and Mamadou Diagne, “Senegalese Grandmothers Promote Improved Maternal and Child Nutrition Practices: The Guardians of Tradition Are not Averse to Change,” *Social Science & Medicine* 59, no. 5 (2004): 945–59; Amit Bein, *Ottoman Ulema, Turkish Republic: Agents of Change and Guardians of Tradition* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

23. Esther Peeren, “Carnival Politics and the Territory of the Street,” *Thamyris/Intersecting: Place, Sex and Race* 14 (2007): 76.

24. On the long-lasting conflict between the supporters of *katharevousa* and the proponents of *demotiki*, which overlapped with an ideological struggle between conservatives and progressives, see Christos Katsikas and Kostas Therianos, *History of the Greek Education System: From the Establishment of the Greek State to 2004* [in Greek] (Athens: Savalas, 2007).

25. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 72.

26. *Ibid.*, 115.

27. Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1978), 266.

28. Unlike other carnival practices, *satira* was an exclusively male affair until almost the twenty-first century. Men are therefore the ones most able to narrate and explain their stances and choices. Furthermore, most of the young women who participate in carnival

like the French students evoked by Passeron and Bourdieu, Greek public school students had to learn “university Greek,” a “timeless amalgam of former states of the history of the[ir] language” which was quite removed from their mother tongue.<sup>26</sup> Literacy changed the class structure of many rural communities. Rather than “qualify manual and mental labor in different ways,” it came to “disqualify manual labor (to subjugate it) by only qualifying mental labor,” to use Nicos Poulantzas’s words.<sup>27</sup> This essay will consider the impact that this reinforcement of the manual/intellectual labor division had on carnival *satira*.

My research strategy and theoretical model are based on Bourdieu’s symbolic anthropology and theory of practice, combined with analytical tools used in cultural studies. I first studied the Carnival of Agiasos synchronically in 2007–8, then diachronically from the 1930s through the twenty-first century. My observations are based on the archives of Agiasos Anagnostirion (the village’s cultural center), on local newspapers, on the study of carnival *satiras*, and on participant observation, which took place mainly during the preparation and performance of carnival. Additionally, this paper uses material from open-ended interviews with seven male members of the carnival community<sup>28</sup> in order to explore the following research questions: (1) To what degree does literacy affect carnival performance, and particularly *satira* verses? (2) Why do the more highly educated members of the carnival community become “guardians of tradition” and get to decide the terms under which tradition is experienced? (3) Does not modern carnival promote exclusion, correctness, and punishment rather than *communitas*?

### Agiasos and Its Carnival

Agiasos was first founded as a monastic community in the ninth century and its religious identity remains strong due to the omnipotent presence of the Church of Our Lady, the most important pilgrimage site of the North Aegean. The church lies in the central square of the village, the so-called marketplace (the designation, not common in Greek villages, evokes Bakhtin’s analysis about the birth of medieval carnival). It became a secular community in 1701 when it obtained a *firman*, an edict issued by Ottoman Sultan Mustafa II that exempted it from paying taxes. Due to that exemption, many newcomers settled on the steep slopes of the mountain, as the monastery monopolized the only plain in the area. The monastery’s commissioners demarcated the residential zone for newcomers, defining the limits between pious and savage, sacred and profane.

By the end of nineteenth century, industrialization had reached the island’s port towns. The circulation of products and commodities gradually connected local economies to regional and global networks.<sup>29</sup> Agiasos, as the second biggest settlement in Lesbos, experienced rapid economic growth due mostly to the development of a market for olive oil. As the village became larger and prosperous, newcomers who had settled on the outskirts of the monastery started to articulate their own discourse against the *kozambasides* (local notables) who negotiated with the Ottoman authorities. During carnival, the two different communities confronted each other, “constructing the same space at the same time into rival worlds.”<sup>30</sup> The dwellers of the mountainous part of the village descended to the monastery plain and celebrated by “forming bacchanalian parades and singing songs that praised male and female genitals.”<sup>31</sup> Based on oral testimonies, local folklorist Stratis Kolaxizelis has proposed the following description of carnival celebrations in the village towards the end of nineteenth century: men and women dressing up,

festivities today are the offspring of old carnivalists, meaning that their views tend to coincide with those of their fathers. The place that women have occupied in Agiasos Carnival throughout its history has been thoroughly studied in Regina Zervou, "Women and Carnival Space: Gender and Carnival in a North Aegean Island Community," *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 25, no. 2 (2016): 73–93. The men interviewed for this article include: Yiannis, an aged carpenter who built and decorated the first carnival floats; Panis, a middle-aged carnival *satira* writer; Vasilis, a middle-aged wagger and the most popular living *satira* reciter and member of the Satyros Carnival Club; Antonis, an elderly, very popular *satira* writer; Giorgos, a carpenter who has twice written carnival *satira*; Dimitris, a middle-aged civil servant who writes and recites *satira*; and Raphael, an adolescent who participated in carnival once, in 2007.

29. Christos Bakalis, "Tobacco Networks in the Aegean Islands," *Advances in Historical Studies* 5 (2016): 63–79.

30. Peeren, "Carnival Politics and the Territory of the Street." Though referring to the racially divided United Kingdom, Peeren's remark perfectly applies to the class-divided society in the Christian villages under Ottoman rule.

31. Stratis Kolaxizelis, *Legends and History of Agiasos of the Island of Lesbos*, 186.

32. On nineteenth-century ritual performances and popular theater in the Balkans see Walter Puchner, *Popular Theater in*

gathering in houses, eating special food, singing *tripsimata* (typical, derisive carnival songs), and performing skits parodying birth, weddings, and funerals (as in many other parts of island and mainland Greece during that period).<sup>32</sup> Carnival participants with the best voices would lead a small parade—*patinada*—that passed through the alleys of the village, heading toward the *kafeneions* (fig. 1).<sup>33</sup>



Figure 1. A *patinada* winds its way up the streets of Agiasos, 2001. Courtesy of Agiasos Anagnostirion's digital archives.

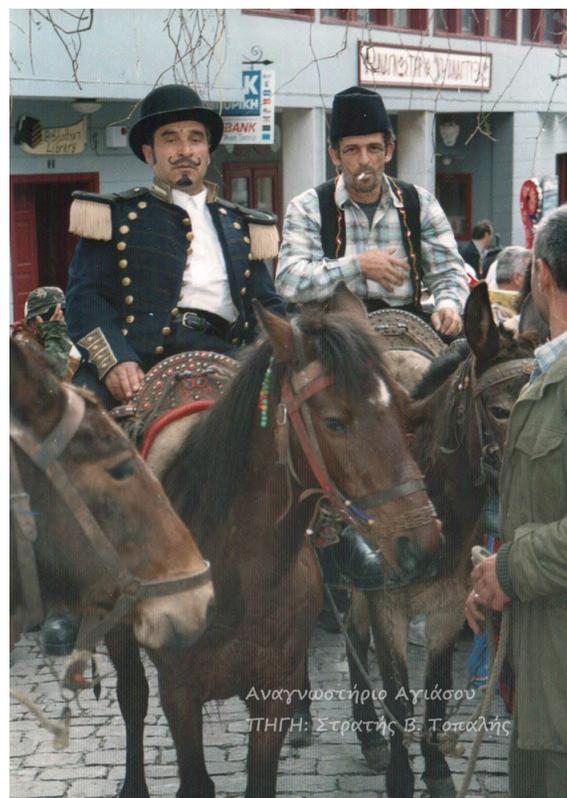


Figure 2. Carnival battles, 2001. Courtesy of Agiasos Anagnostirion's digital archives.

*Greece and in the Balkans* [in Greek] (Athens: Patakis, 1989).

33. *Kafeneion*, the Greek “coffee shop,” has become an international term in ethnology, mostly due to the particular role it has played (and continues to play) in the construction of male identity in the Mediterranean societies.

In Agiasos it was also called *kouitouki*.

34. For a more detailed description of these modern institutions that emerged in traditional communities, see Stathis Damianakos, Ersi Zakopoulou, Charalambos Kasimis, and Vasilis Nitsiakos, *Authority, Work and Memory in Three Villages of Epirus. The Local Power of Survival* [in Greek] (Athens: Plethron/EKKE, 1997), 20–21.

35. *Agiasos*, the longest-lived among them, was published from April 19, 1931, to April 8, 1933, and published essays dealing with various social concerns. Its January 15, 1933, issue, for instance, featured an article titled “Hod for Proletarian Intellectuals.”

36. *Meraki* is one of those idiomatic words that are extremely hard to translate into other languages and cultural systems.

It can mean love, passion, or longing, and is used in informal contexts.

37. Stratis Anastasellis, *My Friend Theofilos* [in Greek] (Athens: Keimena, 1981), 12–13.

Some years before the annexation of Lesbos by Greece in 1912, the lead singers started to wear helmets and people called them “Megalexandros” (Alexander the Great). In the early twentieth century jokers started to improvise verses mingled with the ones they read in magazines published by the Greek community in Istanbul, and they invented what came to be called *satira*, rhymed satirical verses. Mounted on donkeys and assisted by their respective *satira* writers, the best jokers gathered on the village marketplace and launched into “carnival battles.” They exchanged derisive verse, teasing each other, until one could no longer improvise rhymed jokes and the other was pronounced the winner. Following these changes in performance patterns, Agiasos Carnival started to attract a broader audience from rural Lesbos.

In 1894 a major event took place in the village: the establishment of Anagnostirion. Many cultural centers were concomitantly established in Lesbian villages and in other parts of Greece as well, a fact that has led Stathis Damianakos to challenge the notion that agricultural communities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were as backward and committed to tradition as generally assumed.<sup>34</sup> The activities of these institutions resulted in a business, artistic, and literary boom in their respective communities. From a space in an ironmonger’s workshop where craftsmen gathered to read and talk about books and magazines, Anagnostirion soon turned into a meeting point for scholars who had traveled in Europe for business or studies, as well as people from lower classes, who participated in theatrical performances, music and choir classes, and literature workshops. In 1914, shortly after the island was annexed by Greece, it was recognized as a cultural association by the First Instance Court in Mytilene. During the interwar period all the progressive forces of the village community, that is, those who questioned the social status quo and promoted arguments for equality and justice, were members. Radical ideas seemed to flourish in this remote community of ten thousand inhabitants, a hypothesis supported by the considerable number of newspapers that dealt with topics related to the social situation of peasants, refugees, and soldiers of the Greco-Turkish War (1919–22).<sup>35</sup>

In 1938, Agiasos Anagnostirion received a donation from an expatriate in the United States. As many of the organization’s members were carnival artists or participated in the theatrical plays performed at the center, the board decided to allocate the funds to the organization of an annual carnival competition named after the donor, Valians. The best *satira* writer and his carnival group would be rewarded and remunerated. The goal of Anagnostirion scholars was to strengthen carnival tradition, which they deemed to be a vital part of popular culture. The scholars who frequented the institution had visited Europe and were deeply influenced by progressive and Communist ideas that dominated both workers’ struggles and intellectual life. In his short treatise about the folk painter Theofilos, Stratis Anastasellis, a taxi driver who is also a *satira* writer, a member of the Communist Party, and a “popular scholar,” waxes lyrical about how popular culture expresses the lower social stratum’s worldview:

People’s passion (*meraki*<sup>36</sup>) and love for beauty is the leaven that ekes art and mitigates life’s tartness.

People ... transmute their pain and aspirations into art, they can tell good from bad and impose the sustainable.

Popular music, our folk poetry, popular handicraft, all these join hands with everyday reality and mark our level of culture.... Popular art gifts people with the key to paradise.<sup>37</sup>

The Anagnostirion board urged carnivalists to submit their satirical verses in writing. Crossing the barrier between orality and literacy embarrassed many *satira* writers, who were practically

38. Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices*, (London: Routledge, 1992).

39. When translating *satira* verses into English, I have tried to reflect the informal, vernacular nature of the originals.

40. *Lysistrata* is an ancient Greek comedy written by Aristophanes in 411 BC. The protagonist, Lysistrata, persuaded other women to abstain from sex in order to convince their husbands to stop the Peloponnesian War. She has often been seen as a feminist archetype.

illiterate. That obstacle was overcome when the board members allowed them to use the local idiom and to forgo established grammar, syntax, and spelling. In prewar *satiras* and those of the 1950s and 1960s, verses do not follow any of the rules of written language. This may be called a case of “literate orality,” a form of folk literature created orally by practically illiterate people, thus transcending Ruth Finnegan’s bipolar discussion of popular literature as either oral or written.<sup>38</sup> However, for the village community, *satira* remained a form of oral popular poetry, to be heard and not read.

Today, studying the *satiras* that can be found in the Agiasos Anagnostirion archives—the oldest of which dates from 1937—gives us insight into an oral tradition transcribed by those who created it. It also sheds light on the social conflicts and political tensions that pervaded the carnival celebrations. Through carnival verses, the “lower” stratum articulated their discourse and projected their worldview and values against those of the “upper” class, that is, the Greek Orthodox Church and its temporal representatives. The social groups that used carnival *satira* to make political claims did not remain the same over the twentieth century, however. They changed, much like the Greek countryside changed after World War II.

### From a Carnival of the Poor to Petty-Bourgeois Carnival

Prewar carnival in Agiasos was the cardinal time and place for the lower stratum to take to the streets and direct satirical attacks at the community’s leaders, the *kotzabasides* that were also in charge of the monastery. In other words, it pitted the marketplace against the church. This contentious relation is depicted in some verses of the *satiras* that participated in the first Valian competition in 1937:

He who was born on the Sabbath  
Lives a higher life in the village,  
He who came out from noble crotch.  
There are some kin  
Who have free access to the church’s purse  
When the nobles are on the lead  
Everything is so different.

They’ve learned the tricks from their grandpas  
How to rule the poor  
And how to deal  
With Holy Mary’s stuff.<sup>39</sup>

In the 1940s a man disguised as a modern Lysistrata<sup>40</sup> took the carnival stage to defend women’s rights, while at the same time promoting a newly founded cooperative olive mill that would shake off the church’s feudal domination of the local economy:

Long live the cooperative  
That makes wonders.  
Up to now it has pressed  
Six thousand *stamata* (local unit of measurement).

41. Quoted in Regina Zervou, "Agricultural Cooperatives as Expressed in Folk Culture," in *Agricultural Cooperatives in South and Central Europe, 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> Century: A Comparative Approach*, ed. Helen Gardikas-Katsiadakis and Katerina Bregianni (Athens: Academy of Athens, 2013), 267–96.

42. Patras is the third-largest city in Greece. Situated on the west coast, it is strongly influenced by Italian culture and developed an important urban carnival in the nineteenth century, with big parades and floats. See Nikos Politis, *Patras Carnival* [in Greek] (Patras: Achaian Editions, 1987).

43. Even though Greece experimented with parliamentary democracy in the years that followed the Civil War, Communists were still persecuted and censorship of public discourse was common.

44. Giannis Hatzivasileiou, interview with Vasilis Vayanas, *Agiastos* 10 (1982): 4.

45. Interview with Panis, Agiasos, February 20, 2007.

46. Interview with Vasilis, Agiasos, February 23, 2007.

47. Interview with Antonis, Mytilene, February 15, 2007.

If you want your accounts  
To be all right,  
Take your olives  
To the cooperative.<sup>41</sup>

The competition ran for three consecutive years (1938–40) and then stopped until 1955. The Greek-Italian War of 1940–41, followed by the Nazi occupation of Greece (1941–44) and a devastating civil war (1945–49) stripped the village of its progressive citizens, as most Anagnostirion members—and many of the lower-class carnivalists—faced persecution as members of the Communist Party or fellow travelers. "Masks were forbidden in those days [during the Civil War]. Poverty. Even with the Germans we were poor, but we felt much freer. Then it was terror, torture, exile.... Those who made carnival were fugitives or in prison," Yiannis remembers.

The island's administrative authorities suspended all Anagnostirion activities in 1946. The center reopened in 1952 without its former, leftist members on the board. In 1955 the Valian contest was organized again on an annual basis and Agiasos Carnival became the biggest public event in Lesbos during the politically unstable decades of the 1960s and 1970s. After the war performances took place in Agiasos's central bus station. As carnivalists started to build large floats following western standards and emulating Patras Carnival,<sup>42</sup> they needed a space bigger than the marketplace. Hundreds of people flocked to Agiasos to attend the festivities and hear the famous, caustic *satira* verses. At a time when radio receivers and newspapers were not yet commonplace in the Greek countryside, the inhabitants of other villages expected carnival participants to inform them of what had happened in Greece and in the rest of the world over the year. Moreover, they anticipated the comments by *satira* writers, who masterfully used allegory to transmit their hidden messages to their audience (figs. 3–7).<sup>43</sup>

The sociological profile of carnivalists in the abovementioned period was fairly similar: they were toilers who patronized the *kafeneions* in the upper part of the village. They lived on land granted in 1701 to the newcomers who did not belong to the church community. They were what people today would call "simple people," based on their place in the economic and social hierarchy of the community and on their nonattendance at educational institutions. One of the iconic figures of Agiasos's pre- and postwar carnival, Vasilis Vayanas, explained in one interview: "My school knowledge was practically nonexistent. I didn't like school. I practically never went to school. I hardly finished elementary school. And then I was a herdsman for my father's cattle. At sixteen I carried stuff with my father's mule."<sup>44</sup>

Even nowadays, members of the village carnival community and modern *satira* writers insist on the originality of elder carnivalists: "All these simple people were the protagonists of our popular culture. This does not refer only to carnival but to popular culture in general. They were practically illiterate but talented," Panis explained.<sup>45</sup> "Even now *satira* writers are ordinary people, illiterate toilers as Vasilis Vayanas was in his day. Antonis, our great *satira* writer, is a tailor. P. K. is a philologist, OK, but this is an exception," Vasilis confirmed.<sup>46</sup> Antonis, the living legend of Agiasos *satira*, summed up the argument as follows: "To write *satira*, you have to be human, you know, you have to be non-educated" (emphasis mine).<sup>47</sup>



Figure 3. "The Explorers of the Jungle" carnival group, 1954. Courtesy of Agiasos Anagnostirion's digital archives.



Figure 4. "The Rocket" carnival group, 1958. Courtesy of Agiasos Anagnostirion's digital archives.



Figure 5. "The Delphic Oracle" carnival group, 1967. Courtesy of Agiasos Anagnostirion's digital archives.



Figure 6. Carnivalist Kostas Voulvoulis, dressed as an Indian fortune teller, parodies speeches by dictator Georgios Papadopoulos, 1971. Courtesy of Agiasos Anagnostirion's digital archives.



Figure 7. "Fasoula's Funeral," 1977. Courtesy of Agiasos Anagnostirion's digital archives.

This fact changed drastically after the return to democracy in 1974. In those times of political stability many village youths moved to different cities in Greece to enroll in college. The academic degrees and institutionalized knowledge they brought back home helped them join a different social class, the new "petty bourgeoisie" of civil servants. University degrees were "not intended to guarantee this or that specialist knowledge but rather to locate them in the camp of mental labor and its specific hierarchy," recalls Nicos Poulantzas.<sup>48</sup>

48. Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, 268.

49. Panagiotis Koutskoudis, "The History of Agiasos Carnival," unedited text that was presented during the carnival festivities in the theater of Anagnostirion on February 21, 2004.

50. Stratis Vlastaris, "The Carnival today—The Crisis and Its Causes," *Agiasos 7* (1981): 7–9.

Upon their return to their hometown, some of them—often the offspring of carnival families—started to get involved in the organization and performance of carnival rites. Even though they had mastered the written, scholarly language far better than their parents, they cherished and respected the "old carnival guard," deemed to embody authenticity. Their nonetheless different approach to traditional rituals led them to found a new carnival organization in 1984.

### Satyros Carnival Club versus Anagnostirion: Manual versus Intellectual Labor?

On Ash Monday 1981, for the first time in fifteen years, carnival was not celebrated in Agiasos. According to Panis, a civil servant and carnival organizer who gave an extended lecture about the history of the festivities in 2004, "various organizational weaknesses ... impeded the custom."<sup>49</sup> That no carnival group submitted *satira* in order to claim the prize came as a shock to a community that considered carnival, along with the August 15th pilgrimage to the Church of Holy Mary, as its "brand." In the subsequent issue of the newly founded magazine *Agiasos*, which was published by villagers who had recently immigrated to Athens, columnist Stratis Vlastaris offered a solution to the crisis: carnival should be "weaned off" Anagnostirion in order to finally "come of age."<sup>50</sup> This would be achieved through the establishment of a club that would gather all members of the carnival community and take the lead in organizing festive performances.

51. Panagiotis Koutsikoudis, "1989 Agiasos Carnival: Proposal for a Quality Upgrade," *Agiasos* 51 (1989): 9–11.

52. *Ibid.*

The argument for a carnival club testified to a shift in the local perception of popular culture. As a new petty-bourgeois class embarked on the task of modernizing Greek society, they set out to transform carnival into an impressive spectacle that would attract visitors. Popular culture became something to be consumed. In "1989 Agiasos Carnival: Proposal for a Quality Upgrade," a text published in a 1989 issue of *Agiasos*, Panagiotis Koutsikoudis used terms like "symbolism" and "theatrical hero," a sure sign that an academic perspective now prevailed on what was used to be oral popular culture. His text ended this way: "*Satira* ... entertains and teaches or makes us think.... To achieve this goal, it must be fully understood by the public. This could be achieved by using a more common language, free of local idioms and foreign impurities."<sup>51</sup> The reference to language use, which mirrored the instructions issued by high school teachers of the time, widened the gap between those who had access to higher education and could handle scholarly language and the manual laborers who could only express their worldview through the local idiom.

The Satyros Carnival Club was founded in 1984 as a private entity "responsible for the organization of Carnival performances, to the exclusion of other kind of activities.... Every city, every village in Greece had clubs with similar goals.... Founding a Carnival Cultural Club was an urgent necessity," the founders explained.<sup>52</sup> At the club's first meetings a fruitful debate took place over the future of carnival and many decisions were made through democratic procedures. Indeed, in the first ten years following the establishment of the club, meetings of the board were very frequent, convening one to three times a month, and even more frequently before and during the carnival period (fig. 8). Civil servants cooperated with manual workers, although the former tended to monopolize administrative responsibilities and positions.

Over the years, however, the club's dynamism seemed to wane, until no carnival performances took place in the village at all in 1996. This led to a split within the club. Many of its members resigned from the board and started to collaborate with Anagnostirion instead. They initially co-organized a series of tributes to carnival history and later initiated a new festive event on the last Saturday of carnival. Held indoors, in the Anagnostirion hall, it took the form of a theatrical act, complete with *satira*. The older and more well-known carnivalists, who embodied the festival's history, soon followed them. As a result the Satyros Club was "left" in the hands of the wage-earners, who did not have access to institutional knowledge and had no experience in managing a club or in performing any of the following tasks: contacting other local agents and the state administration in Mytilene, the capital of the island; using the appropriate terminology when applying for European Union grants and subsidies; contracting with suppliers; purchasing the materials necessary to the construction of floats; compensating people for the labor offered. The thorny problem of financial compensation for the club members and outside workers involved in the construction of carnival floats caused a rift in the carnival community and was extensively mentioned in the interviews I conducted in 2007 and 2008.

In the prewar era, the "age of innocence" for popular culture, participation in carnival performances did not entail any kind of reward, let alone financial compensation. Prize money in the Valian competition was generally shared between two or three groups in an attempt to keep everyone satisfied. The prize was meant to reward the best *satira*, not to compensate for the work done. Even during the period that followed the Civil War, when the construction of



Figure 8. The headquarters of Satyros Carnival Club, located one story below those of the Greek Communist Party, 2000. Photograph courtesy of Tasos Kostopoulos.

53. Dora Konsola, *Cultural Development and Politics* [in Greek] (Athens: Papazisi, 2006), 108.

54. Interview with Giorgos, Agiasos, March 2, 2008.

large carnival floats required more capital and more working hours, nobody claimed financial compensation. Following the regime change in 1974, many residents of the Greek countryside started reviving their old traditional rites in a folklorist context, and the Ministry of Culture financed cultural activities from the country's periphery as part of a decentralization program meant to reduce inequalities between regions and to favor the balanced development of all territorial units.<sup>53</sup> Local government and prefectures also managed a portion of the subsidies for culture.

When interviewed in 2006–7, all members of the Satyros Club seemed to believe that the municipality of Agiasos, along with other public institutions, should finance carnival. In fact, the municipality had been co-organizing the festivities with the Satyros Club since 2001, disbursing funds directly to the suppliers of materials and construction work. The municipality, however, did not remunerate anyone for the work involved in the construction and decoration of the floats. Only the board of the Satyros Club, which received funds from the Ministry of the Aegean Sea and from the Northern Aegean Administration, could decide to remunerate anyone for the work done during carnival. This caused a lot of misunderstandings and resentment among the members of the club, most of whom were wage-earners. Some, like Giorgos, accused the board of favoritism:

The president calls me out of the blue and asks me to design big masks. How come? Do you want to make a carnival? Come and tell me, "Well, what do you want, make me the carnival, how much do you want to make it?" This guy painted a ball with a hairbrush and took three thousand. And he was a member of the club. I don't want to give out any names. Obviously, I don't want to get involved any longer.<sup>54</sup>

The issue of financial remuneration that troubled club members points to the ongoing

55. "State bureaucracy was... the medium of reproduction of petty bourgeois society, playing a central role in the process of building and consolidating unproductive strata." Andreas Moschonas, "Social Complexity and Modern Greek Reality: An Interpretive Approach," in *Modern Greek Society: Historic and Critical Approaches* [in Greek], ed. Theodoros Sakelaropoulos (Athens: Kritiki, 1993), 201.
56. Interview with Vasilis, Agiasos, February 23, 2007.
57. The conception of inherited cultural continuity is commonplace in Mediterranean societies. On this subject one may refer to the anthropological research done by Maria Papapavlou and Vasiliki Lalioti in Spain and Greece, respectively. Vasiliki Lalioti and Maria Papapavlou, "Because It Runs Through Our Veins." *From Ancient Drama to Flamenco, Anthropology Returns to the Field of Experience* [in Greek] (Athens: Kritiki, 2010).
58. Interview with Panis, Agiasos, February 25, 2007.
59. The year 1973 was marked by dozens of protests against the military dictatorship at various Greek universities. On November 14, 1973, hundreds of students occupied the Polytechnic school in downtown Athens. They were soon joined by thousands of people from all over Athens and the Attica region. On the night of November 17, military tanks were sent by the government and crashed through the building. The military and the police forces killed twenty-four people, while many students and workers were commercialization of carnival as a formal cultural expression of the community. The event had been turned into a community "brand" that addressed tourists. It also revealed the gap between the worlds of manual and knowledge labor. Petty-bourgeois carnivalists in Agiasos were predominantly civil servants, which meant that they held permanent jobs with a secure income, they benefited from a relatively flexible working schedule, and their salary was not indexed to productivity.<sup>55</sup> They differed from other carnivalists not only in their access to institutionalized knowledge but also in their living standards. Quite simply, they belonged to a different social class. On the subject of carnival, they shared very different opinions on issues of remuneration and time spent on preparations. This was, of course, a direct result of the former discrepancy. Civil servants, being paid a fixed amount as a salary, could afford meeting every day during the carnival season to discuss the upcoming festivities. If needed, they could easily get a leave of absence without any financial consequences. This puts them at odds with manual workers, for whom meeting every day generated a lot of stress and who felt that time dedicated to carnival was, at the end of the day, "stolen" from their work day. "Closing down my workshop for a month? Who would pay for the expense? Social security reimbursement doesn't stop. The last three days I didn't work at all, I'm all day around. Why am I doing this? To help the club make it until Monday. They won't say 'thank you.' It is for Agiasos, not for me," Giorgos acidly commented. Things were even more complicated for farm workers, since carnival coincided with the peak of olive gathering.
- Like Yorgos, many wagers started to reconsider the terms of their participation. "Today it is all about money. You cannot do anything without money. In the old days people would work for nothing, not even a cup of coffee.... I am a passerby, tomorrow I won't be here. But I will not stop loving the club. If we had plenty of money, that would be hunky dory. It was not like that before, carnival ran through their veins. Now it's not like that," Vasilis V. confirmed.<sup>56</sup> With the phrase "carnival ran through their veins," my informant summarized the shift in the way popular culture was perceived and performed: while it used to be seen as an organic part of everyday life, now carnival was considered as a ritual obligation requiring participants to sacrifice their time.<sup>57</sup> Since carnival was now experienced as a community "brand," a commodity to be consumed by tourists, laborers felt that they should also reap the benefits of their investment. In other words, laborers viewed their participation mostly in terms of extra work that had to be remunerated. Panis, a civil servant, naturally lamented this evolution: "Some people say, 'I won't come if I don't get paid, because I'll lose my wage.' Some are gathering olives, others work in construction. Now the club remunerates them."<sup>58</sup> Like him, Satyros board members acknowledged that manual workers were the heart and soul of carnival. However, coexisting with them under the same "roof" became impossible. The literate civil servants gradually withdrew from the club and switched their affiliation to Anagnostirion. Agiasos Carnival at the beginning of the twenty-first century thus became divided into two poles that respectively embodied manual and intellectual labor.

### Cultural Gatekeeping as the Petty Bourgeoisie's Ideology

Other than the divide between manual and knowledge labor, what distinguished the educated civil servants from the wage-earners was their ideological proclivity: most of them belonged to "the Polytechnion generation," a term used in Greece to single out the people whose youth coincided with the student rebellion that sealed the end of military dictatorship in 1973.<sup>59</sup> Their

arrested. The Polytechnic rebellion had a major impact on the young generation, and the people who participated in it or in the protests that led to the end of the dictatorship came to be called the "Polytechnic generation."

60. Dimitris Fyssas, *The Polytechnic Generation, 1973-1981. Members of the Students Movement and Other Students: A Biographical Dictionary* [in Greek] (Athens: Delfini, 1993).

61. Zaimakis, "Forbidden Fruits' and the Communist Paradise."

62. The carnival season in Greece traditionally begins ten weeks before Greek Orthodox Easter, and ends on the first day of Lent, also called "Clean Monday."

63. Interview with Dimitris, Agiasos, February 22, 2007.

64. In the first years after the return to democracy political activity was very intense, as evidenced by the number of strikes, student demonstrations, and political concerts and festivals that took place during the 1970s. The ideological dominance of the Left was obvious in unions, in university lecture halls, and in demonstrations.

Award-winning European director Nikos Koundouros captured the atmosphere of the period in his documentary film *Songs of Fire*, which premiered in Greece on February 10, 1975 ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-8kiKAXBIF4&list=RDg8kiKAXBIF4&start\\_radio=1&t=2808](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-8kiKAXBIF4&list=RDg8kiKAXBIF4&start_radio=1&t=2808)). For the first strikes in the 1970s see also [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DY700sZ\\_xNc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DY700sZ_xNc).

65. Extract from a *satira* titled

leftist stance and political involvement determined the dominant narrative in Greek public discourse during the last decades of the twentieth century.<sup>60</sup> In Agiasos the Polytechnic generation were the ones who joined forces to keep carnival alive after the return to democracy in 1974, when its political and subversive character started to fade. While other rural communities underscored their traditions through folkloristic revivals of old rituals, Agiasos Carnival stressed its heavily politicized discourse. Tradition in a community with a strong Communist and partisan history was determined by the new leftist local intellectual leadership that adopted a model of popular culture that has been constructed since the 1930s: popular art expresses the desires and needs of the people and at the same time contributes to its social and political formation.<sup>61</sup> Here is how one of my informants, Dimitris, remembered the carnival that immediately followed the return to democracy: "It was strict political *satira* at that time. We were talking about the tanks in the Polytechnic School. It was a pioneering act. It was in March. People did not speak, especially in the villages. We had to say what we had to say at any cost." He continued by describing his opinion about how carnival should be performed:

I have my views on carnival. Carnival meant protest, a banner, a loudspeaker, even during the Ottoman domination. I know how to write *satira* for the carnival. Partisan *satira*.... To make people's minds think, work. Since everything stultifies us, let us have something that we can use to make people think, put their head to work.

We have to keep our particularity, which is characterized by certain things. This particularity consists in the political references you may find in our *satira*. On "Clean Monday,"<sup>62</sup> we comment on the news from our political perspective, because this is what we are talking about. This is a characteristic that we had better not let go. That is, you cannot abstain from commenting [on] current political issues.<sup>63</sup>

Coming of age during a period characterized by turbulent political activity determined the frame into which Agiasos Carnival was set by the Polytechnic generation in the years that followed the return to democracy.<sup>64</sup> Current affairs, viewed through a purely ideological prism, largely pervaded the "Clean Monday" festivities, which in Greece are considered to be the apex of carnival:

Capitalist employers  
With the fat bellies,  
Give us back what you've stolen  
And stop fuzzing around.<sup>65</sup>

US foreign policy was another frequent topic, as it had been demonized in the last decades by the Greek Left. However, not all social events found their way into Agiasos satirical verses. During the 2009 carnival celebrations, for instance, there was hardly any mention of the youth riots that had shaken Greece just two months earlier, although they had been largely covered in the local (and international) media.<sup>66</sup> This was a clear reflection of the Communist Party's stance on the riots. According to Michalis Psimitis, "orthodox Communists found it hard to come to grips with the phenomenon of common action across heterogeneous social groups, with different incomes, class and cultural features. And, of course, they chose the easy way out by denouncing and stigmatizing a great part of the mobilizations."<sup>67</sup> Another event that was barely mentioned was the attempted murder of Bulgarian immigrant worker and unionist Constantina Kuneva, whose 2008 "accident" had brought precarious employment to light and turned her into a symbol of

"The First Topic," performed in 2008 during the Clean Monday festivities.

66. On these riots, see especially John Karamichas, "The December 2008 Riots in Greece: Profile," *Social Movement Studies* 8, no. 3 (2009): 289–93; and Spyros Sakellaropoulos, "On the Causes and Significance of the December 2008 Social Explosion in Greece," *Science & Society* 76, no. 3 (2012): 340–64.

67. Michalis Psimitis, "Collective Identities versus Social Exclusion: The December 2008 Greek Youth Movement," *Επιθεώρηση Κοινωνικών Ερευνών*, 136 (2011): 111–33.

68. Konstantina Kuneva was a Bulgarian citizen who had migrated to Greece with her son after the collapse of the Communist regime. She had been trained as a historian but ended up working as a janitor for a company that provided cleaning services to public and private clients. As the working conditions were very bad and the cleaners had to sign fake contracts, Kuneva decided to start a union with two of her co-workers, an initiative that was met with anger by their employers and fear by other employees.

Kuneva received numerous threats and on December 26, 2008, an unidentified person attacked her on her way back home, forcing her to swallow sulfuric acid. The news of the incident spread rapidly among the people involved in the 2008 Greek riots and there were many demonstrations and acts of solidarity.

After spending many months in the hospital, Kuneva was elected to the European Parliament as a

unionism and workers' struggles.<sup>68</sup>

To sum up, the representatives of the Polytechnion Generation in Agiasos, who had joined various leftists groups or the Communist Party in the 1970s, turned into "guardians of carnival tradition" when they got older. Either as members of the Satyros Club or, later, on the board of Anagnostirion or in municipal offices, they got to define the meaning of Agiasos Carnival and how it would be performed.

### A New Generation of Carnivalists

In the first years of the twenty-first century, the youth of the village started to demonstrate increasing interest in carnival, refuting older carnivalists' claims that young people only cared about having a good time and did not care about tradition. They took part in high school carnival performances on Fat Friday and in Anagnostirion's satirical plays on Fat Saturday. Some of them even participated in the "small carnival" that is performed on the village marketplace on the Sunday before Ash Monday. In 2007 an older *satira* writer wrote verses that served as an "initiation ceremony" to young carnivalists who wished to enter the carnival community.

Concomitantly, a middle-aged cafeteria patron named Giorgos—whom I previously referred to as one of my informants—wrote verses for "Birthing," an archetypical carnival rite that parodies childbirth.<sup>69</sup> A group of pupils then performed the parody in a cafeteria in 2004. In 2005 the same youths performed the "Occupation of the Cafeteria," referencing recent protests organized by high school students in many Greek cities to denounce the disastrous state of the Greek educational system. In 2007 Giorgos wrote a lengthy carnival sketch parodying the international television game show *Super Deal*. Performed exclusively by young people, it became part of the 2007 Ash Monday festivities. "*Super Deal* in Agiasos" was a pleasant surprise for those attending carnival in Agiasos that year. The scenario was as follows: a young man from Agiasos participates in *Super Deal*, escorted by his wife and mother-in-law, and the quarrels between them disorientate the performer, a well-known Greek comedian. Even though it was written by an adult, its topic and the way the performance was prepared—on the margins of established organizational structures—inspired the majority of high school pupils who participated either as reciters or extras. The performance had elements of spontaneity that the audience really enjoyed, and they participated by laughing and chatting with the carnivalists. Supervision of casting and rehearsals was led by two intermediaries—younger people who were on good terms with the "guardians" and, due to their age, had easier access to adolescents than the middle-aged guardians. They chose the ones capable of reciting in front of the large audience for Clean Monday festivities.

Although "*Super Deal*" was warmly received by the audience, it did not please the guardians, who soon zeroed in on how it deviated from tradition. "It was a parody, they were spoofing a TV show, okay. But that shouldn't affect our carnival. You start spoofing and then it is the topic that prevails on you. '*Super Deal* in Agiasos' didn't have the features of *satira*. And these features are part of tradition. It had its verses, intense dialogue parts, a plot that faithfully followed the show's form, but the verses didn't have wit," Panis complained. The reasons why the *satira* in question didn't "pass the test" were numerous and contradictory: it copied the TV show's structure, it was not faithful to the traditional deployment of text, it used prose excessively, it was not original as it repeated scenes from older *satiras*, and, more importantly, it did not incorporate social concerns:

candidate of the left-wing SYRIZA Party in 2014. See also Nelli Kambouri and Alexandra Zavos, "On the Frontiers of Citizenship: Considering the Case of Konstantina Kuneva and the Intersections between Gender, Migration and Labor in Greece," *Feminist Review* 94, no. 1 (2010): 148–55.

69. The carnival rite of birthing is described in Puchner, *Popular Theater*, 52, 78.

70. Interview with Panis, Agiasos, February 26, 2008.

71. That year scientists had discovered that juice from olive trees might cure various types of cancer. Media coverage of this alleged discovery was extensive. As Agiasos is an olive-cultivating area, news about the "miracle juice" was largely mocked in that year's *satiras*.

72. Interview with Panagiotis, Agiasos, March 5, 2007.

73. *Ibid.*

*Super Deal* was the most popular TV show that year, with the highest ratings. But one should not just copy. They copied the show and parodied it but something was missing: clever ideas, even a good scenic appearance. The part where the mother-in-law goes on a trip to an island inhabited by cannibals was presented years ago and it was copied. There is no harm in repeating, but I would like to see something new. This one was just copying. It is wrong to repeat a TV show in carnival. Should we be watching *Super Deal* again on Clean Monday? One may watch it on TV. If you take it as a topic you should at least include witty verses and convey messages to the audience.<sup>70</sup>

This was not, of course, the first time that TV topics had inspired carnival *satira* in Agiasos. Television had, after all, become a vital part of the village's everyday life since the 1970s. However, the guardians of tradition believed that they were entitled to control the extent to which television could inform carnivalesque performance:

As you noted, and I fully agree, tradition is not something constant and unvarying, it changes all the time. It is affected contextually, by the social conditions and the subjects, its protagonists. Now it seems that a new era will start in our carnival. I believe that the youths will draw on the old, traditional forms. But they shouldn't... You know what I mean. Yesterday's *satira* was a copy. They just replicated a TV show. Of course, as you said and this is very correct, it is their own life experience. They have been brought up with television, they may have seen the show dozens of times. They have lived with it and they parodied it in their way, but this is not enough. They have to move forward. The satirical element was missing. They opened so many boxes and in all of them there were only sexual hints: a condom, a banana. They could have taken something else out of the box, an olive leaf for instance; this way, they would have referred to the news about olive leaves supposedly curing cancer.<sup>71</sup> They didn't take full advantage of the circumstances. Of course one has to have experience to know how to write *satira*.<sup>72</sup>

The guardians, a limited group of people who controlled experience and knowledge, got to decide who had or did not have enough charisma. "Those youths [those who participated in "*Super Deal*" *satira*] weren't born in families with carnival culture, as T. or K. were. The latter are the offspring of carnivalists and that is very important," Panagiotis explained.<sup>73</sup> The youths who were relatives of the guardians had accepted the terms set by their fathers. As a result, they were seen as the promising young members of the carnival community, those who would guarantee its prosperous future. This often proved true, as carnival tradition within a family tended to strengthen children's talent, gave them opportunities to perform, and helped them gain symbolic capital within the community. However, there are always exceptions to the rule, as the next section will show.

### Outcasts of Tradition: The Case of Young Raphael

What happened in this case was that a gifted young carnivalist appeared out of the blue and his performance was as inspiring as that of the legendary reciters of the 1960s and 1970s. In "*Super Deal* in Agiasos" there were two main reciters, whose talent and improvising abilities gripped the audience, "rocked" the *satira*, and made people laugh heartily. One was the son of carnivalists who were very close to the guardians. His brother was one of the mediators mentioned above. The other one was a boy with no family ties to carnival. He was, however, a "natural" performer. I was expecting to see him in the following year's performances and when I did not, I went looking for him. I found him working in a cafeteria, in the upper part of the village. The answers he gave to my questions were, as often happens with adolescents, short and fragmentary. My interview with

74. This is an old warehouse at the entrance of the village that used to be a slaughterhouse and now serves as a place for the preparation of floats and as a dressing room for carnivalists.

75. Interview with Raphael, Agiasos, March 12, 2008.

him did, however, shed light on the nonhegemonic side of Agiasos Carnival. Here's an extract from our conversation:

Raphael: I began doing carnival when I was in school.... I left high school, I went to a vocational school in Mitilini, I knocked someone down, they threw me out and I came back here ... I've been doing carnival and theater since ninth grade. I performed in carnival last year ... in "*Deal*"...

... We had finished with the rehearsals, then Clean Monday came and we went to the abattoir.<sup>74</sup> They put makeup on us, we did one last dress rehearsal ... It was fun, we drank ouzo ... At the beginning I was very nervous. So I drank a lot of ouzo. The float's planks were half broken ... So we climbed on the stage and the van started to drive to the square, the speaker recited the names: who played, who did the scenery, etc., and then we started to recite ... and then I stopped feeling nervous ... Inside I was all in flames ... as if something was clutching me. I was stressed. People were looking at me and I blushed ... but I had makeup on, so no one could see.

They thought I was an experienced carnivalist, not a young boy. They had me in mind as if I had been in several carnivals before ... I recited really well, I moved so well that nobody believed it was my first carnival performance ... Nobody made me any comments. Only T. told me that it was good, that people liked it.

Me: Did they invite you to participate this year?

Raphael: No.

Me: Did T. ask you to play?

Raphael: No, he didn't. I wanted to, but he didn't ask me. He asked other boys he likes, but not me ... Now I don't care about carnival.... This year it was lousy, people didn't like it, they didn't laugh ... My friends came and asked me, "Why didn't you go to carnival?"... I'm mad, angry ... maybe I'll go next year, if they ask me ... If they plead, I'll go.

Me: Were any of your relatives a carnivalist?

Raphael: No, my father and mother had nothing to do with carnival. My grandpas weren't born here, anyway.<sup>75</sup>

Family qualifications were not a prerequisite for participating in carnival in the past. Carnival lineage did not exist as a concept in older generations, when learning was an organic function of the community and there was no need to construct an input-output system for data and humans. My fieldwork suggests that the "superiority" of the "inheritors," the differential value of family tradition, is a narrative that was constructed during the last decades of the twentieth century. As popular culture and its modes were declining, some believed that new ways needed to be found to revive rituals. The guardians of tradition, the ones who molded the framework of carnival performances, tried to safeguard their inclusion into the carnival community by giving priority to their own "blood," their family members and friends' family members, under the pretext that carnival inclination "runs through the veins." In that narrative, carnival descent could refer to the offspring of old, talented reciters but also to the children of painters, float-builders, and even to those of sponsors—that is, of anyone who played a role in carnival. There were cases in which carnivalists' children proved to be so talented as to guarantee them a brilliant "career" on the village's carnival scene. More than talent, however, what the guardians transmitted to their offspring was an unquestionable acceptance of the given rules as to what carnival should be about and look like. When interviewed in 2008 about the *Super Deal* parody they had performed the previous year, the "inheritors"—like the majority of their high school classmates—said that the *satira* was insufficient and bad, using the same arguments as their parents.

What happens then when natural talents with no family qualifications participate in carnival productions that are not sanctioned by the guardians? Transgressors are punished. Raphael's successful performance was not praised by anyone and was subsequently forgotten. He was not

76. Michel Agier, *Anthropologie du carnaval: la ville, la fête et l'Afrique à Bahia* (Marseille: Parenthèses, 2000), 29. See also Stavros Stavridis, *Suspended Spaces of Otherness* [in Greek] (Athens: Alexandria, 2010).

77. Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin*, 145.

encouraged, nor was he invited to participate in carnival the following year. He feels embittered and marginalized. Raphael belongs to the lower stratum in the village, as do many of the youths I met with and interviewed during field research. The village's carnival tradition seems today to concern only a part of its population, consigning many youths to the ranks of the wage-earners. As a result, many a talented performer will decline to express themselves through this traditional cultural ritual.

### Conclusion

In many European countries, carnival continues to be a time when the experiences and worldviews of most communities, especially the isolated ones, "get down to the streets." As Michel Agier wrote in 2000, "Carnival is a ritual space where everyday ideas, solidarities, and identities spring up and grow."<sup>76</sup> However, carnival performances, as an institutionalized festive time for the community, also result in hierarchical relations and practices of inclusion and exclusion. When, during field research, I asked myself the question, Who in the carnival community decides what Agiasos Carnival should look like?, I soon realized that this overlapped with another question: Which social group defines popular culture and tradition in Agiasos?

During the interwar period the residents of Agiasos manifested their aspirations for social justice and equality by joining the Communist Party, and Communist ideals therefore pervaded *satiras* until the Civil War. In the 1950s and 1960s, a time of great social and political turmoil in Greece, carnivalists used allegory to convey their messages so as to escape governmental censorship. Most carnivalists during that period were working-class people, called "wage-earners" because they received daily wages rather than a monthly salary. They could not, and would not, dictate what was right or wrong in terms of tradition, as carnival formed an organic part of their lives. The intellectuals of the village, mostly gathered on the board of Anagostirion, refrained from intervening in the carnival community, restricting themselves to awarding the prize for the best *satira*.

Following the return to democracy, young people who returned back home with a university degree took positions in the public sector and took over the organization of carnival. Their educational level, their clearly leftist political orientation, and their status as civil servants distinguished them from the world of manual labor, from the wagers who were still involved in carnival. Together, they made up a "new petty bourgeoisie," according to Poulantzas's terminology, and started to act as modern "guardians of tradition." Their academic status allowed them to impose their views and rules on the content and the form of *satira*.

While carnival usually "unhinges all transcendental signifiers and submits them to ridicule and relativism,"<sup>77</sup> the "guardians of tradition" in Agiasos Carnival opted for a more "politicized" version of the rite that would advance a leftist narrative (anti-Americanism, attacks on the government, reclamation of peasants' and workers' rights). They confined carnival laughter to the schemes that derived from tradition, that is, *dekapentasyllavos* verses and the use of the local idiom. However, these schemes could be overruled by them when considered appropriate. As we saw earlier, the "guardians" believed that local idiom should not be used extensively, as it might make Agiasos Carnival less attractive to tourists, and that theatrical performances given in Anagnostirion's hall should have more prose and fewer *dekapentasyllavos* verses than

“permitted” during the Clean Monday festivities. When a *satira* exceeded the limitations and outplaced political references with the element of play and pure laughter, as was the case with “*Super Deal* in Agiasos,” the guardians considered it out of the traditional frame due to its lack of “political references.” The youths had to choose between reciting the verses the guardians had written or corrected for them or leave the carnival world of transgression and return to a dull reality. Thus, carnival worked not as a universe of equality and inclusion but as one of correctness and ostracism.

Rural communities with a long carnival tradition rooted in the past, such as Agiasos in this case study, have responded to the challenges of modernity in various, unique ways. Most of the time, they have preserved strong elements of their past, while enriching the rituals with new elements derived from their rapidly changing reality. The group of individuals who take the initiative to organize the festivities, the protagonists of popular culture, has radically changed in the last decades of the twentieth century. As a consequence, it requires a deep and thorough study to reveal the context behind the appearances.

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## AUTHOR BIO

**Regina Zervou** holds a PhD in cultural sociology from Panteion University in Athens, Greece, and is currently a postdoctoral researcher at Patras University, where she taught a course on popular culture in 2018–19. She was a researcher with the Center for the Study of Modern Greek History at the Academy of Athens from 2009 to 2013. She has participated in many conferences on history and popular culture. Her research interests include urban street culture, festivities, and the cultural environment created by new media. For this article, she conducted fieldwork in Agiasos, a remote Greek island village.

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# “Living like Queens”: Gender Conflict and Female Counter-Hegemony in Contemporary Cádiz Carnival

**Katerina Sergidou**

Panteion University, Athens, Greece and University of the Basque Country, San Sebastián, Spain

## KEYWORDS

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## ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the feminist mobilization that has characterized Cádiz Carnival since 2011, leading to the elimination of the *Ninfas y Diosas* (Nymphs and Goddesses) custom, a variant of the *Reina de las Fiestas* (Queen of Traditional Fiestas) ceremony introduced under Francisco Franco’s dictatorship (1939–75). By calling into question the representation of women in Carnival celebrations, female festive organizations have challenged the old, male-dominated festival traditions and transformed Cádiz Carnival. Their activism has carried over into everyday life, as female Carnival groups have created their own community and translated the artistic manifestations of their desire for equality into public policy. Using oral testimonies and archival material gathered during ethnographic fieldwork in the city, I trace the history of the *reina* and *ninfas* customs and analyze a variety of material related to their birth, evolution, and recent discontinuation. The ultimate purpose of this article is to map the tensions embedded in both the festival and contemporary Spanish society and to show how the Carnival stage can become a space where embodied feminist counter-hegemony is performed, thus contributing to the slow democratization of Spanish society.

1. James W. Fernandez notes that “anthropology begins with revelatory incidents,” in his *Persuasions and Performances: The Play of Tropes in Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), xi. Based on this note, Margaret Bullen and Carmen Díez Mintegui describe this revelatory incident as ethnographic emergence (emergencia etnográfica), in *Fiestas, tradiciones e igualdad*, Kobie Serie Antropología Cultural, no. 16 (2012), 19. This moment of revelation is also described by Ruth Bejar as “anthropology’s epiphanies” in “Anthropology Epiphanies: Some Things I Learned from James Fernandez,” *Anthropology and Humanism* 25, no. 2 (2001): 183–88. All translations in the article are by the author unless otherwise noted.

2. A *pasodoble* is a fairly long song without a chorus, sung by *comparsas* (Carnival group of lyric style) and *chirigotas* (street Carnival humorous groups). A *pasodoble* is usually serious and topical.

3. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology* (London: Pluto Press, 1995).

4. Katerina Sergidou, “Can I Sing a Carnival Song? Listening to Ethnographic Sounds at a Pasodoble ¾ Rhythm,” *Entanglements* 1, no. 2 (2018): 62–66.

## “Living like Queens”: Gender Conflict and Female Counter-Hegemony in Contemporary Cádiz Carnival

Katerina Sergidou

The Carnival of Cádiz took me by surprise. I often think that, although I was not doing fieldwork at the time, my first experience of Carnival was a “revelatory incident” or a moment of “ethnographic emergence.”<sup>1</sup> While visiting the Andalusian city during the 2015 municipal election campaign, at a political rally, I heard the main contender for the mayoral office (fig. 1) begin his speech with a *pasodoble* titled “If I Were mayor.”<sup>2</sup> I was both impressed and moved, and suddenly felt the desire to learn more about the city’s history and music. Cádiz, Spain, seemed to be one of those “small places” where “large issues” emerge, in the words of anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen.<sup>3</sup> The idea of researching Cádiz Carnival had appeared out of the blue and hit a nerve through sound. From that moment on, listening would become an essential part of my research methodology.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 1. 2016, the Mayor of Cádiz José Maria Gonzalez is wearing the costume of Los Mendas Lerendas (“crazy men” in the local dialect). It is the same costume he was wearing back in 2008 when he performed as a mayor before actually becoming one. Source: Cata Zambrano, *El Mundo* February 2, 2016, <https://www.elmundo.es/espana/2016/02/07/56b64c7b46163f50498b4582.html>.

A year later, as I was conducting ethnographic research on municipal politics and popular participation in public policy, I witnessed an inter-Carnival and inter-community conflict around a Carnival custom known as *Ninfas y Diosas* (Nymphs and Goddesses), inspired by a former custom from Francisco Franco’s times called *Reina de las Fiestas Típicas* (Queen of Traditional Fiestas). A group of female Carnival participants and feminist collectives had come together to demand the elimination of this tradition, creating a political platform titled *Iniciativa Social: Por un Carnaval igualitario* (Social Initiative: For a Carnival of Equality). This conflict was more than

5. Teófila Martínez was the city mayor from 1995 to 2015. She was a member of the right-wing People's Party (PP) and she was mentioned in songs and oral histories as a "bad witch."

6. Marta, interview by author, July 2016, Cádiz. All interviews were conducted in Cádiz between 2016 and 2020. Since conversations were held in Spanish, quotes were translated into English by the author. Most interviewees' names have been changed. Real names are used only when women insisted that the author use them.

7. Archivo Histórico Municipal is the municipal archive located in the center of Cádiz. During research, I focused on the digitized collections that concerned Cádiz Carnival from 1950 to 1974.

8. The Unicaja Foundation building in Cádiz hosts a collection of photographs, Carnival *libretos* with lyrics, and all issues of the *Diario del Carnaval* newspaper, a special edition of *Diario de Cádiz* published every year during the three months of Carnival.

9. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968); Julio Caro Baroja, *El carnaval análisis histórico-cultural* (Madrid: Alianza, 2006); Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans: A People's Uprising at Romans 1579–1580* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981); Victor Witter Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982); and Victor Witter Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1992).

just my second entry into the Carnival world: it revealed a whole new reality to me. I discovered the Carnival of Cádiz to be not only a popular cultural event but also a gendered space, a place where feminists were demanding equality. Some women were singing proudly about their sexuality, while others were narrating the difficulties they had faced when previously entering the male-dominated Carnival during the 1980s and 1990s. All these different Carnival stories made me realize that Carnival was anything but an apolitical ritual. Marta, a fifty-two-year-old janitor, especially reminded me of its political and social significance:

It lasts all year long. We sing Carnival songs at weddings, political meetings.... You know, we were singing Carnival songs when we kicked Teófila out of city hall.<sup>5</sup> Mark my words. Those in power always fear what people will say. You only have to listen to four Carnival groups to know the political mood of the city each year.<sup>6</sup>

Desiring to further investigate the connections between Carnival and politics, I decided to write a doctoral thesis on women's participation in the Cádiz Carnival festivities, drawing on the twin disciplines of gender history and feminist anthropology. Part of my research would entail recovering buried aspects of local history, and part of it would mean creating the circumstances of an ethnographic present, which would allow me to study the Carnival in Cádiz as an insider. This is how I came to join a Carnival group two years later, in 2019.

## Methodology and Theoretical Background

The present article focuses on the gender dynamics at play during Cádiz Carnival and analyzes their change over time. Specific emphasis is placed on how these dynamics have led to the disappearance of certain practices, such as the Reina de las Fiestas custom, as well as the birth of new ones, such as the Ninfas y Diosas. To tell that story, I rely on interviews I conducted between 2016 and 2020 with three generations of women, some of whom experienced Carnival prohibition during the dictatorship while others joined Carnival groups during the transition to democracy or in the early twenty-first century. I also include archival material for the years 1950 to 1974, which I collected at the Municipal Historical Archives of Cádiz (Archivo Histórico Municipal de Cádiz).<sup>7</sup> Other primary sources were taken into consideration, such as the collections of the Center of Unicaja Foundation in Cádiz.<sup>8</sup>

The theoretical starting point for the present analysis is that Carnival and other festivals are not sacrosanct places that remain unchanged through ancient, medieval, and modern history. Historians and anthropologists, such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Julio Caro Baroja, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, and Victor Witter Turner, to name but a few, have underlined their deep connections with expressions of everyday life as well as the political realm, seeing it as space where power relations are played out.<sup>9</sup> Others, like Jerome R. Mintz, have understood Carnival as the theatricalization of life.<sup>10</sup> In "Rethinking the Festival: Power and Politics," Alessandro Testa managed to relay the playful and at the same time radical character of festivals when he offered this description:

Festivals, conceived as deeply codified and meaningful moments in the social life of a given community, are obviously charged with tensions embedded in social expectations, political claims, religious passions, individual emotions and so on; tensions whose force can either support or destabilize the hegemonic order and its functional imaginaries. Thus, the playground of festival is a catalyst of power, and history has shown us that,

10. Jerome R. Mintz, *Carnival Song and Society Gossip, Sexuality, and Creativity in Andalusia* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).
11. Alessandro Testa, "Rethinking the Festival: Power and Politics," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 26, no. 1 (2014): 66–67.
12. Teresa del Valle and Joxemartin Apalategi Begiristain, *Mujer Vasca: Imagen y Realidad* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1985).
13. Margaret Bullen and Carmen Díez Mintegui, *Fisiones/Fusiones: Mujeres, feminismos y orden social* (Donostia-San Sebastián: Ankulegi Antropologia Elkarte, 2010).
14. David D. Gilmore, *Carnival and Culture: Sex, Symbol, and Status in Spain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 3.
15. Valeria Sterzi, *Deconstructing Gender in Carnival: A Cross Cultural Investigation of a Social Ritual* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 15.
16. Kim Vaz-Deville, *Walking Raddy: The Baby Dolls of New Orleans* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018).
17. See especially Raymond Henry Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, vol. 392 (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1977); and Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence & Wishard, 2005).
18. During the 2008 San Fermin festival in Pamplona, a twenty-year-old student named Nagore Laffage was brutally murdered when she refused to have sexual

in the very moment of the "play" on the ground, this charge of power may be discharged, often with dramatic results.... The outcome ... of festivals is inherently unpredictable in spite of the usual fixity and apparently indolent, perpetual return of festivals in the circular time of seasons, culturally ratified by the calendar.<sup>11</sup>

Bearing Testa's words in mind, my purpose is to spotlight the expressions of gender power relations performed on the Carnival stage, using the history of the Ninfas y Diosas custom as an illustration of the tensions embedded in the festival.

My approach has been considerably influenced by the feminist anthropologists teaching at the University of the Basque Country, including Teresa del Valle and Margaret Bullen. Research conducted by Teresa del Valle, especially, has inspired many young researchers who work on the interactions and intersections of national and gender identities.<sup>12</sup> As for Bullen and Carmen Díez Mintegui, they have shown the fundamental role played by festival practices in the creation and recreation of collective identities.<sup>13</sup>

On the role of Carnival in the construction of gender, I have also used studies by anthropologist David D. Gilmore, sociologist Valeria Sterzi, and feminist art scholar Kim Vaz-Deville. Gilmore, after many years of ethnographic inquiry, came to the conclusion that "Andalusian ideas about sex, gender, and status are best and most accessibly expressed in the rituals of the February carnival."<sup>14</sup> Sterzi has argued that Carnival is not only a space of gender inequality but also "the medium through which intimacy, the unvoiced marginalization and violence, the 'natural' exclusion from the public becomes a political act, whose aim is to 'feminize' and 'equalize' the public male domain."<sup>15</sup> Finally, Vaz-Deville has highlighted the importance of Carnival spaces and ritualized cultural practices in expressing racialized women's desire for freedom and social justice.<sup>16</sup> Scholars from different parts of the world thus seem to understand Carnival as a space full of potential for challenging race, gender, and class inequalities.

One final reference has been crucial to my thinking: Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony and interpretations of his work that evolved into the notion of the counter-hegemony of subaltern groups.<sup>17</sup> In the wake of the 2016 San Fermin sexual assault case, feminist movements called for the transformation of Spanish fiestas into safe places for women.<sup>18</sup> Scholars and activists, such as Alejandra Castillo and Hester Eisenstein, have used the term "feminist hegemony" to describe the global movement designed to challenge masculine hegemony.<sup>19</sup> Feminist demands at Cádiz Carnival may thus be framed as part of a global counter-hegemonic movement, albeit performed in a singular, unique way.

### Three Hypotheses and One Clarification

Besides reconstructing the history of the Ninfas y Diosas custom (and analyzing reactions thereto), this article will explore three hypotheses:

1. Carnival is a stage where power relations are expressed and experienced. This stage can become a space where embodied feminist counter-hegemony is performed. Through this process, women become creators of pleasure instead of objects of desire.
2. By challenging male-dominated Carnival rituals, women create a "generic chronotope"—a notion Valle adapted from Russian scholar Bakhtin's concept of chronotope—which may expand from Carnival time and

intercourse with José Diego Yllanes. Eight years later at that same festival, a woman was gang-raped by five men calling themselves *la manada* (the wolf pack). A great wave of support developed under the slogan "I believe you, sister." In June 2018, the rapists were sentenced to nine years in prison by the Court of Navarra, which nonetheless cleared them of charges of sexual aggression and only found them guilty of sexual abuse. This led to a new wave of feminist demonstrations. One demand concerned safe spaces in festivities, and scholars and activists have come to refer to such demands as the "San Fermin Effect."

19. Alejandra Castillo, *Nudos feministas: Política, filosofía, democracia* (Santiago: Palinodia, 2011); and Hester Eisenstein, "Hegemonic Feminism, Neoliberalism and Womenomics: 'Empowerment' Instead of Liberation?" *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 91 (2017): 35–49.

20. Teresa del Valle, "Procesos de la memoria: Cronótopos genéricos," *Revista internacional de ciencias sociales*, no. 19 (1999): 211–26.

21. Laura Muelas de Ayala, "Una mirada a las fiestas desde la antropología feminista: El placer como proceso creativo y espacio político," in *Etnografías feministas: Una mirada al siglo XXI desde la antropología vasca*, ed. Mari Luz Esteban and Jone Miren Hernández García (Barcelona: Edicions bellaterra, 2018), 273.

22. Carnavaleros are people who systematically participate in Carnival festivities. Carnavaleros

space to everyday life and activism until it is translated into actual public policy.<sup>20</sup> In the words of anthropologist Laura Muelas de Ayala: "The personal is political, festivals are political, pleasure is political."<sup>21</sup>

3. By negotiating female representations in Carnival festivities, women and feminist groups contribute to the democratization of Spanish society.

Though the term "women" will sometimes be used generically in this article, my intention is to treat women not as a single social and natural category but as individual subjectivities expressing different ways of being female, feminists, and *carnavaleras*.<sup>22</sup> I will therefore consider Cádiz Carnival as a ritual in which women act, dramatize, and negotiate conflicts with other women as much as with men.<sup>23</sup>

### The Long History of Cádiz Carnival<sup>24</sup>

In his 2002 monograph on Cádiz Carnival, Caro Baroja reminds us that Carnival was originally a Christian creation dating back to the Feast of Fools (Fiesta de los locos) that was celebrated by the European clergy in medieval times.<sup>25</sup> The urban Carnival of Cádiz, however, was mostly a creation of Genoese merchants who chose the port of Cádiz (fig. 2) to trade with the north and south of Africa in the sixteenth century.<sup>26</sup>

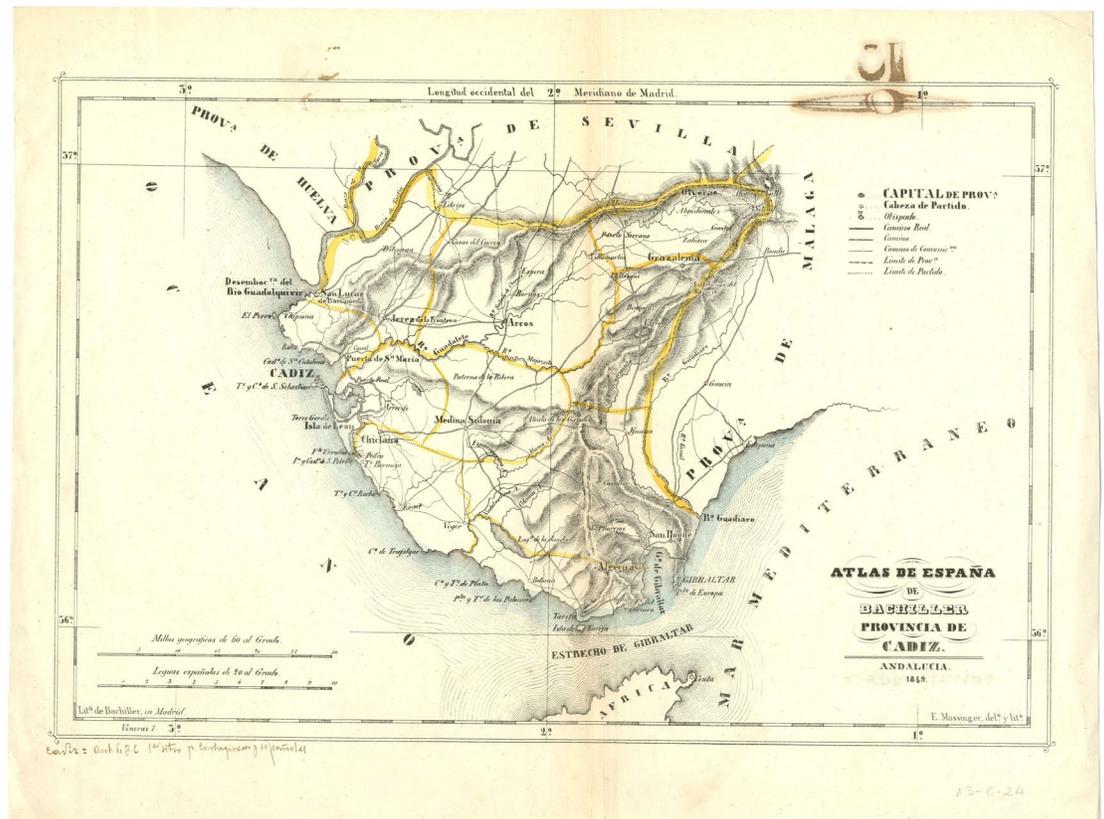


Figure 2: Map of Cádiz, 1849. Source: Instituto Geográfico Nacional, <https://www.ign.es/web/ign/portal>.

It also has its roots in the rhythms brought by African and Cuban slaves and workers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>27</sup>

and carnavaleras (female) are also famous local singers and songwriters.

23. The idea of women dramatizing and negotiating conflicts with other women during ritual time is mentioned in Christina Vlachoutsikou, "When Women Have Differences: Inhibitions and Openings," in *When Women Have Differences: Oppositions and Conflicts between Women in Contemporary Greece*, ed. Laurie Kain Hart and Christina Vlachoutsikou (Athens: Medousa-Sellas, 2003), 14–104.

24. So far, the history of Cádiz Carnival has mostly been told by local historians, such as Alberto Ramos Santana, Cuadrado Martínez, Felipe Barbosa, Ana Barceló, Santiago Moreno, and Marta Ginesta.

25. Baroja Caro, *El carnaval análisis histórico-cultural*, 29.

26. Ramos Santana, *El Carnaval secuestrado o historia del carnaval*.

27. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Cádiz was one of the biggest ports that connected Europe with the New World. See Ubaldo Cuadrado Martínez and Felipe Barbosa, *Orígenes y evolución del Carnaval de Cádiz, siglos XVI–XIX* (Cádiz: Publicaciones del Sur, 2002); and Amedeo Lepore, "The Port of Cadiz between the Modern and Contemporary Ages (17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries)," *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2012), 10.2139/ssrn.1979886.

28. Antonio María Galiano-Alcalá, *Recuerdos de un Anciano* (Madrid: Luis Navarro, 1878), quoted in Julio Caro Baroja and Antonio Carreira, *De etnología*

In the nineteenth century, Cádiz residents came to be known for their perpetual desire for fun and laughter, even under painful circumstances. It is said that during the Napoleonic Wars (1803–15), they continued celebrating Carnival. In the popular imagination, the 1812 victory that ended Napoleon's occupation of the Iberian Peninsula (1807–14) has been peppered with stories of strong winds that pushed French cannonballs away and with tales of Cádiz women singing the following verse in the streets:

Even if the French bring in artillery cannons,  
they will not take away my good mood and my desire to sing *alegrías*.  
With the bombs that the braggarts drop,  
Cádiz women curl their hair into ringlets.<sup>28</sup>

I discovered this song in 2019 after a conversation I had with Libertad, a woman who had been working in a tobacco factory for thirty years. She was trying to explain to me that the women of Cádiz (*gaditanas*) are defiant, strong, and happy, and she used the lines to illustrate her own determination to juggle long hours at the factory, family life (she was raising two children on her own), and Carnival participation (she told me she never missed a single celebration).<sup>29</sup>

Over the course of the nineteenth century, a more modern Carnival emerged in the city of Cádiz, whose liberal spirit had largely inspired the first Spanish constitution, promulgated in 1812. As anthropologist José María Manjavacas explains, "A decisive historical key [for understanding the contemporary Carnival of Cádiz] is the tension between popular, autonomous, transgressive participation and the institutionalization and officialization of the festivity."<sup>30</sup> Such tension especially developed in the second half of the century, when repeated interventions by bourgeois city officials, the church, and the Spanish Crown and legislators tried to refine the Carnival and eliminate some of the old customs. The anarchist bent of the city's population can be traced to lyrics of the time and to disobedient actions of Carnival groups who refused the restrictions of the municipal authorities. It carried on during most of the Second Republic (1931–39) and the early days of the Spanish Civil War (1936–39).

Up until the 1930s, women's Carnival groups occasionally appeared in the festivities but their participation was limited. These groups did not have a singing repertoire; they were dressed in traditional costumes and participated in Carnival parades known as *cabalgadas*. Women's participation increased noticeably during the Second Republic, while the king was in exile. Many women started working, participated in politics, and fought for suffrage, and a small number of them even joined the republican army. At that time, Carnival enjoyed greater freedom of speech and tolerance from the municipal authorities, although there were still cases of censorship and some acts were banned.<sup>31</sup>

The status of women deteriorated when the dictatorship came into force.<sup>32</sup> The Franco regime imposed strict sexual ethics that were reflected in many song lyrics, such as these: "The old hairstyles are gone, what a shame. How lovely my grandma used to look in the old days, with her hair tied at the back.... Our women are to blame, that this beauty is gone, for they copy the women from abroad."<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, the celebration of Carnival was banned throughout Spain via a 1937 governmental order of prohibition.<sup>34</sup> Although oral testimonies do mention some festivals in underground taverns, "outward expressions of joy" were mostly suppressed until

andaluza (Málaga: Servicio de publicaciones, Diputación Provincial de Málaga, 1993). I translated this song from the Spanish "Con las bombas que tiran los fanfarrones se hacen las gaditanas tirabuzones."

29. Libertad, interview by author, March 2019, Cádiz.

30. José María Manjavacas, *Documentación técnica para la incorporación del carnaval de Cádiz en el catálogo general del patrimonio histórico de Andalucía como bien de Interés Cultural, Tipología Actividad de Interés Etnológico* (Córdoba: Universidad De Córdoba, 2018), 33.

31. Santiago Moreno Tello, *La clase obrera gaditana (1949–1959): Una historia social a través de las fuentes populares* (Cádiz: Universidad de Cádiz, 2006).

32. Ibid.

33. For the entire text of this 1959 pasodoble, titled "Los peluqueros de la señora," see *ibid.*, 85.

34. Governmental order, March, 2, 1937, Federal Law Gazette (BOE).

35. Ramos Santana, *El Carnaval secuestrado*.

36. Maria, interview by author, November 2018, Cádiz.

37. Jacques Le Goff, *Enciclopedia Einaudi: Monumento-Documento* (Porto: Imprensa Nacional/Casa da Moeda, 1984).

38. The *Gran Teatro Falla* is a theater in the city of Cádiz. Located on the Plaza Fragela, it was built in Moorish style in 1910 and was named after the great

1947, when an explosion at the mines led to the reauthorization of festivities by civil governor Carlos María Rodríguez de Valcárcel. From 1948 to 1967, Carnival celebrations were replaced with "choral festivals" (*fiestas de coros*), later renamed "traditional festivals" (*fiestas típicas*). The lyrics of songs had to be submitted to what was known as "the red pencil," a term describing the censorship of the time. This period has been described by historian Alberto Ramos Santana as the era of "undercover Carnival."<sup>35</sup> Sixty-five-year-old Maria confirmed: "We always called it a Carnival. We used to say, in a couple of days, Carnival begins."<sup>36</sup> In 1967, the festival was moved from February to spring for "touristic" reasons. This decision provoked a reaction recorded in Carnival lyrics, reminiscent of historian Jacques Le Goff's study of subaltern resistance to calendric reforms.<sup>37</sup> In 1977, with the end of the dictatorship, the carnavaleros of the town laid fiestas típicas to rest in a symbolic ceremony in which they carried "the corpse" of the old festivity in a coffin. (fig. 3) That same year, Carnival was reborn and returned to its roots, once again being celebrated in February.



Figure 3. The funeral of the fiestas típicas, 1977. Source: Archivo Diario de Cádiz.

Today, what is extraordinary about Cádiz Carnival is its ability to dominate the time and space of the city. The Carnival festivities begin with gastronomic events in the middle of January and continue with the Carnival contest at the Falla theater, which lasts beyond Mardi Gras, until mid-March.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, the "real" (in local parlance) street Carnival known as the *ilegales* begins at the end of February and lasts until a few days after Palm Sunday, when Witch Piti (*Bruja Piti*) is burned.<sup>39</sup> Although Cádiz Carnival ends before Easter, its calendric boundaries exceed the mid-January/Palm Sunday period, as small-scale concerts, group rehearsals, and other Carnival events happen all year long. As a result, Carnival continuously moves from liminality to the heart of everyday life, when it takes over central urban spaces with its numerous activities. In this way, the town is converted into a stage where art and reality meet, intertwine, and become inseparable, a scene where political discourse is performed to a Carnival rhythm.

Although the politically rebellious character of Carnival is apparent through the topical lyrics created by performers since the 1970s, the festival has retained a very traditional structure that is hardly prone to change. This strict form includes the virtual exclusion of women from the official Carnival contest held at the Falla theater. In 2016, none of the Carnival groups that participated

Spanish composer Manuel de Falla (1876–1946), who was born in Cádiz. Every year for a month the Falla theater hosts the artistic competitions (*concurso*) of Cádiz Carnival.

39. *Ilegales* (illegal) or *callejeras* (street) is how people refer to the street Carnival. At the beginning of my research, I considered Carnival to be the entirety of the celebrations, that is, the official Carnival contest (*concurso oficial de agrupaciones del carnaval de Cádiz*) plus the parades and the street Carnival. However, all my informants insisted that what people actually mean by “Carnival” is just the street Carnival.

The ilegales last ten days and feature groups of men (and now increasingly women) dressed in original costumes, drinking alcohol, making jokes, and chatting in the narrow streets. We should not imagine this performance as a big, compact parade but as small, dispersed Carnival groups that stand on street corners singing their *coplas*, surrounded by spectators.

40. Figures taken from the manifesto of the movement for Carnival equality.

41. Carmen Guerrero Quintero and Abel Al Jende Medina, *En la calle nos vemos: Agrupaciones callejeras del carnaval de Cádiz* (Seville: Atrapasueños Editorial, 2012).

42. Figures taken from the Patronato de Fiestas del Cádiz City Council database.

43. The first female band to set foot on the stage of the Falla theater during the Carnival contest was El Show de Wald in 1969.

in the contest was 100 percent female.<sup>40</sup> Even when women participate, only a handful of them write lyrics as *autoras* (authors), in other words, songwriters, directors of Carnival performance, and leading figures of the Carnival group. In 2007, only 3 of the 297 members of the Association of Songwriters (Asociación de Autores del Carnaval de Cádiz, or AACCC) were women.<sup>41</sup> In 2018, among the 135 Carnival groups that participated in the contest, only 3 were led by female *autoras*.<sup>42</sup> The Carnival group *Coro mixto* (1981–97), which was at the vanguard of the fight for equality in the contest, and Adela del Moral, the songwriter for this now-extinct group, remains an exception as far as women’s participation in the Carnival contest is concerned.<sup>43</sup> When I inquired about this situation, many male participants—musicians especially—explained that the female voice is inadequate for the contest due to its being one octave higher than the male voice on average. A musicologist during an interview said that “the voice of women does not sound like Carnival, does not sound like it is from Cádiz ... although it sounds beautiful, well, our ears are not accustomed to this sound.”<sup>44</sup> This naturalization of gender differences constitutes the biggest ideological obstacle to the feminization (and therefore democratization) of Carnival. It also testifies to the way the social order and culture are perceived as well as to what most people think of as “tradition.”<sup>45</sup>

Women are nonetheless making inroads into the Carnival schedule. Since 1984, the year when the municipality of Cádiz took on the responsibility for organizing and financing most of the Carnival festivities the number of female-led street Carnival groups has steadily increased. At the same time, other women and men describe their participation in mixed Carnival bands as a very positive experience. Jesús, one of the most famous *carnavaleros* in the city, told me how proud he was of being an author for the first band to have included a woman.<sup>46</sup>

### The 2016 Controversy over the Ninfas y Diosas Tradition

In December 2016, a majority of the Cádiz municipal council decided (fig. 4) that the local government would cease to sponsor the *Ninfas y Diosas* contest, which it had been organizing since 2002 through the Carnival Commission (Patronato del Concurso Oficial de Agrupaciones Carnavalescas y Fiestas del Carnaval de Cádiz). It also decided to create an open and participatory commission that would work toward a better representation and integration of women into Carnival.

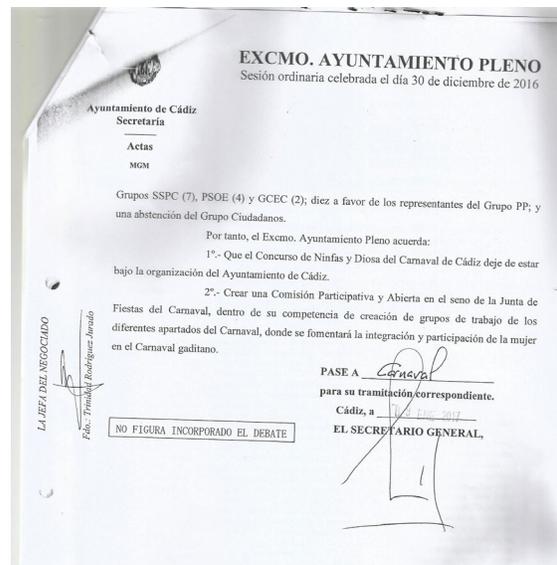


Figure 4. Municipal ordinance approved on December 30, 2016. Source: Secretariat of the Municipality of Cádiz.

Molondritas followed in 1980 and, in 1981, the legendary group Coro mixto appeared on the Falla stage.

44. Guerrero Quintero and Jende Medina, *En la calle nos vemos*, 63.

45. Bullen and Díez Mintegui, *Fisiones/Fusiones*.

46. Jesús, interview by author, August 2016, Cádiz.

47. Si Se Puede (Yes You Can) was the name of the Podemos municipal group and Ganar Gádiz (Let's Win Gádiz) was that of the United Left municipal group (Izquierda Unida).

48. Historian Ana Barceló, especially, has located a photograph of a woman with a crown in the 1920s festivities. Ana Barceló, "Mujeres en el Carnaval de Cádiz: Reina y damas, Diosa y Ninfa" (presentation given at the initial "Platform for Carnival Equality" press conference, Cádiz, December 2016).

This decision largely owed to the lobbying of two left-wing municipal groups, Si Se Puede Cádiz and Ganar Cádiz.<sup>47</sup> It also testified to the influence of the "Carnival of Equality" manifesto, which a feminist coalition had sent to all municipal groups. The left-wing groups had clearly incorporated the feminists' arguments, converting their motion into a political proposal to be voted on.

One of the main arguments formulated in the feminist proclamation was that the Ninfas y Diosas custom was a remnant of the dictatorship, a mere variant of the Reina de las Fiestas Típicas custom of the 1940s–70s. Photographic material that exists from the Second Republic actually shows that the custom of a female figure representing Carnival and taking part in official festivities already existed prior to Franco.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, it was indeed under his regime that the custom of Reina de las Fiestas Típicas was institutionalized. From 1954 on, a queen was selected locally, along with several ladies-in-waiting, thus reviving the old institution of the Spanish Damas de la Reina. The custom not only extended to adult women but was also duplicated for younger girls.

### The Reinas Tradition and the Patriarchal Power Structure

The majority of the girls and women chosen to reign over the celebrations were part of wealthy or powerful families. And yet, the first Reina de las Fiestas was actually a woman of humble origin: Rosa Terrada Doncelmoriano. (fig. 5)



Figure 5. Rosa Terrada Doncelmoriano, the first reina, 1954. Source: *Diario del Carnaval*, February 2, 1994, from the collections of the Center of Unicaja Foundation in Cádiz.

49. Maria, interview by author,  
November 2018, Cádiz.

50. *Reina en tiempos difíciles*,  
February 2, 1994, interview pub-  
lished in the *Diario del Carnaval*.

51. Memo, 1955, 4. C. 6261,  
Archivo Histórico Municipal.

Indeed, in what may have been a philanthropic gesture, the Festivities and Propaganda Committee (Comisión de Fiestas y Propaganda) selected its first reina among students of the city's educational institutions. Sadly, members of her family recall that she was soon forgotten because she was the daughter of a docker. As sixty-five-year-old Maria reasoned during our interview, "Those were daughters of the rich, the businessmen, the generals, we had nothing to do with them, as we were a family of workers."<sup>49</sup> As for Terrada Doncelmoriano, here is how she described her reign in a 1994 interview with the local newspaper *Diario de Carnaval*: "The whole family experienced that event with a lot of joy and expectation. For example, I remember that my high school classmates made the crown I wore with pieces of mirrors." Her sister Ana remembers how people called her names and insulted her because she was of humble origin. They were saying that she was the daughter of nobody but I was smiling thinking that my father was a proud dockworker."<sup>50</sup> More in line with the spirit of the tradition was the 1962 selection of María del Carmen Martínez Bordiú Franco, granddaughter of the head of the state, to be the child queen of Fiestas Típicas.

Regarding the reina's physical appearance, in the archival material, one can find a note from Casa Brotons, who organized the parades during which the reinas made their grand appearance. The memo, dated 1955, is addressed to the municipal government and advises the authorities to choose "good-looking women."<sup>51</sup>



Figure 6. The reina of 1957, attending the grand ball at the Falla theater.  
Source: Archivo Histórico Municipal.

What exactly were the duties of the festival queen? They seem to have included visiting poor neighborhoods and distributing alms, attending church services and laying wreaths for the Virgin Mary, and attending society dinners at city hall. The reina was also expected to attend at least two festive events: the ball held at the Falla theater (fig. 6) and the big parade. The instructions (fig. 7) sent to her and to her damas in 1971 give us a sense of the strict program the young women had to follow for nine days.

INSTRUCCIONES PARA LAS DAMAS DE LA CORTE DE HONOR DE LA REINA DE LAS FIESTAS TÍPICAS DE 1.971.-

=====

MARTES 18.-	22 horas.-	En el Ayuntamiento, para hacer ensayo general del acto de la Coronación.-
MIÉRCOLES 19.-	22,30 "	En el Gran Teatro Falla, a fin de presenciar la final del Concurso de Coros y Chirigotas.-
JUEVES 20.-	10,30 "	En el muelle de Ciudad, para embarcar en el vapor Adriano II, y efectuar el Paseo por la Bahía.-
	18,30 "	En el Hogar del Niño Jesús, para tomar parte en el desfile de coches veteranos y entrada triunfal de la Reina.
	22,30 "	Cena ofrecida por el Sr. Alcalde en el Real Club Nautico.- A continuación visita a las casetas premiadas.-
VIERNES 21.-	10, "	En el Ayuntamiento, para la salida de coches veteranos participantes en el II Rally Fiestas Típicas.
	11 "	Visita a centros benéficos acompañando a la Reina.
	13 "	Visita al Palacio de la Excm. Diputación Provinc.
	13,30 "	En el Torreón de Puertas de Tierra, Homenaje al Comparsista.-
	20,30 "	En el Ayuntamiento, entrando por la puerta de la calle S. Antonio Abad, para el acto de Coronación de la Reina e imposición de Bandas a la Corte de Honor.-
	23 "	En el Ayuntamiento.- Cena ofrecida por la Corporación Municipal, a la que deberán asistir acompañadas de sus padres o personas que las represente. (Estos acompañantes, deberán asistir, las señoras con traje de cocktail y los caballeros de smoking).
SABADO 22.-	10 "	En el Ayuntamiento para ser trasladadas a Jerez de la Frontera, donde serán obsequiadas por la Bodega Gonzalez Byass.-
	18 "	En la Cueva del Pájaro Azul, para acompañar a la Reina en su recorrido por los barrios populares.-
	20,30 "	En el Ayuntamiento, donde en su salón regio se proclamará el fallo del premio "Rodríguez Valcarlos".
	23 "	En la caseta que haya obtenido el Primer Premio, la fiesta del Gran Carnaval, donde deberán asistir disfrazadas.-
DOMINGO 23.-	11 "	Misa en el Santuario de la Patrona.-
	12 "	Estadio Ramón de Carranza, para presidir el III Festival de Majorettes, Hispano-francés.-
	17,30 "	En el Hogar del Niño Jesús, (Avda. Fernandez Ledrada) para en la carroza Trono, presidir la Cabalgata Maga.-
MARTES 25.-	23 "	Baile de disfraces en el Real Tennis Club de Cádiz.
JUEVES 27.-	23 "	Fiesta en honor de la Reina y su Corte en el Real Club Nautico.-
SABADO 29.-	23 "	Gran Baile de Gala en el Gran Teatro Falla.-

PARA LA MEJOR ORGANIZACION DE LOS ACTOS SE RUEGA LA MAS EXACTA PUNTUALIDAD.-

Figure 7. Instructions to the damas of the reina, 1971. Source: Archivo Histórico Municipal.

Participation in festivities was considered an honor for the queen's family, but there are recorded incidents of the family refusing the distinction. For instance, the 1962 *Diario de Cádiz* article that announced the selection of María del Carmen Martínez Bordiú Franco as child queen of the Fiestas Típicas also specified that the adult queen would be Milagrosa Moral Cabeza, a choice that was not accepted by her family:

The queen's father strongly objects, yet [Mayor Ramón de] Carranza confirmed that, with or without his permission, Milagrosa Moral would be the queen for 1963. This is a public display of gratitude to Moral's

52. The text of this decision was originally published in a December 1962 issue of the *Diario de Cádiz* and was republished fifty years later in the same newspaper. "1962 Una nieta de Franco, reina infantil de las Fiestas Típicas," *Diario de Cádiz*, July 12, 2012, [https://www.diariodecadiz.es/efemerides/Franco-reina-infantil-Fiestas-Tipicas\\_0\\_650035007.html](https://www.diariodecadiz.es/efemerides/Franco-reina-infantil-Fiestas-Tipicas_0_650035007.html).

53. Barcelo, "Mujeres en el Carnaval de Cádiz." Jimenez and Páramo have both published their thesis on Cádiz Carnival while Ginesta is currently writing her dissertation on women and Carnival in Cádiz. For more details, refer to Estrella Fernández Jiménez, *La final del Falla: Un estudio sobre la realización televisiva del COAC (Concurso Oficial de Agrupaciones Carnavalescas)* (Cádiz: Editorial UCA, 2018); and María Luisa Páramo, *El carnaval de las coplas, un arte de Cádiz* (Madrid: Izana, 2017).

54. Local students to Vicente Del Moral, 1973, C. 7268-09, Archivo Histórico Municipal.

decisive and enthusiastic work from the *Fiestas Típicas* organization. Finally, the mayor asked the band directors to preserve good taste in their lyrics and forget about vulgarities that insult morals.<sup>52</sup>

Unfortunately, we cannot know whether this refusal was motivated by hostility to the dictatorial regime or to some other personal or political feeling.

The vocabulary that accompanied the young women's existence as queens remained virtually unchanged from the 1940s to the 1970s. In letters, newspaper articles, and speeches, we come across such phrases as "during her reign," "the coronation of the Queen," the "triumphant entrance of the Queen," or "the ball is organized in honor of the Queen and her Court." The reina and her damas may not have had real power, but as the daughters of ministers and granddaughters of Franco himself, they were symbols of the regime. Their presence in the festivities testifies to the fact that Fiestas Típicas were more of a propagandist celebration of military men in power than a real carnivalesque display. Historian Ana Barceló—one of the few women who have researched Cádiz Carnival, together with María Luisa Páramo, Estrella Fernández Jiménez, and Marta Ginesta—suggests that the selection of the reinas was also a way for the municipal authorities to ensure the funding of the celebrations by the city's leading families.<sup>53</sup>

However, the popularity of the custom should not be underestimated. In a letter written in 1973 (fig. 8) and addressed to the councilor in charge of festivals, Vicente Del Moral, a group of young female pupils asked the municipal authorities for their teacher, Teresa Nuñez, to be chosen as reina. They did not describe her as good-looking, but set their own criteria: "She is 23 years old, she is very kind to us, and we love her a lot.... We want to see her happy for a few days."<sup>54</sup>

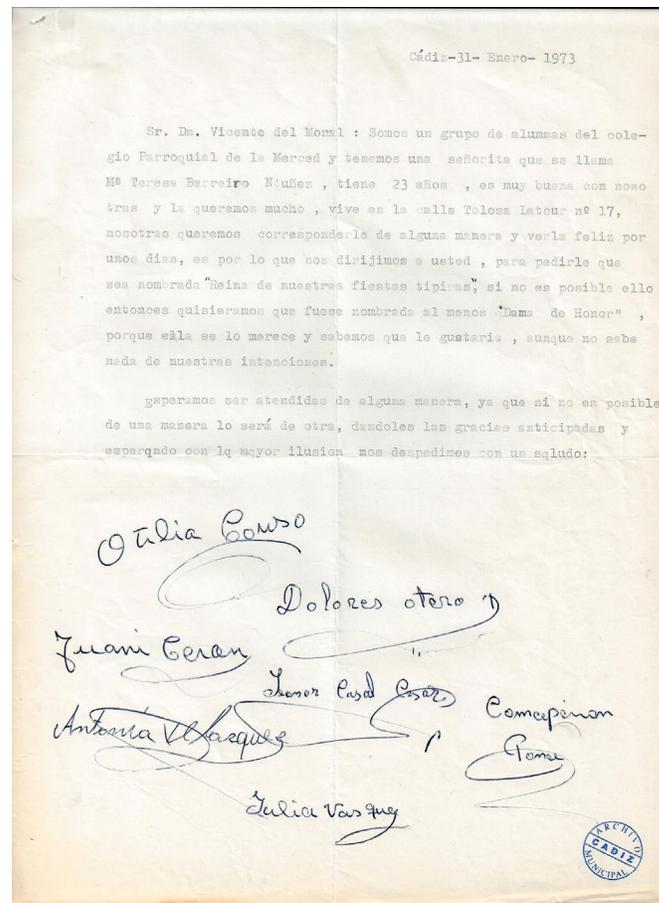


Figure 8. Local students to Vicente Del Moral, 1973. Source: Archivo Histórico Municipal.

55. Estrella, interview by author,  
November 2018, Cádiz.

56. Miguel, interview by author,  
July 2016, Cádiz.

Nuñez, however, was never crowned queen of the Fiestas Típicas. We can assume that she was the daughter neither of a minister nor of a member of the military or of a wealthy businessman. She was just a teacher to her loving students, Julia, Antonia, Dolores, Otilia, Juana, and Concepción.

Sometimes, the regime favored more modern traditions to rejuvenate the festival and provide “bread and circuses.” For instance, an impressed sixty-seven-year-old Estrella mentioned a municipal initiative to bring a group of French cheerleaders from Montpellier in 1968. (fig. 9) “We had never seen such short skirts. A few years prior, the authorities used to measure the length of our skirts in the streets!”<sup>55</sup>



Figure 9: Cheerleaders from Montpellier, 1968. Source: *Diario de Cádiz*, republished on May 21, 2018, [https://www.diariodecadiz.es/cadiz/anosDomingo-grande-cabalgata-Fiestas-Tipicas\\_0\\_1247275425.html](https://www.diariodecadiz.es/cadiz/anosDomingo-grande-cabalgata-Fiestas-Tipicas_0_1247275425.html).

Such innovations, however, never challenged the primacy of the reinas tradition under Franco’s regime.

### Democracy Comes to Carnival

After the first democratic municipal elections in 1980, the local sections of the Communist (PCE) and Socialist Parties (PSOE) introduced reforms to democratize the Carnival festivities. Pepa Mena, the new councilor in charge of festivals, replaced the Reina de las Fiestas Típicas custom with a tradition named Ninfas y Diosas. Women of all classes could now participate equally in the contest. Miguel, a Communist member of the municipal government, recalled the importance of this change and also revealed the way men in power perceived the change: “The goddess of the Carnival was an invention of ours so that we could substitute the bourgeois image of the Cádiz woman and convert her into a real woman.”<sup>56</sup>

The transformation of the one and only “queen” (reina) into the pagan “nymphs and goddesses” (plural) was politically symbolic, as it originated from a desire to abolish rituals that smacked of

57. On the uses of pagan symbols of antiquity in times of revolution, see Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

58. Katerina Sergidou, "Thoughts about Feminist Methodology in Historical Research" (paper presented at the 23<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting of the University of Crete post-graduate students in modern and contemporary history, University of Crete, Rethimno, July 2018).

59. Estrella, interview by author, November 2018, Cádiz.

60. Marta, interview by author, November 2018, Cádiz.

61. Several types of Carnival groups and songs are associated with Cádiz Carnival. The *comparsas*, *chirigotas*, *coros*, and *cuartetos* are the best known. *Comparsas* consist of singers who sing critical songs and perform in groups of around twelve to fifteen people. *Chirigotas* are humorous groups of around seven to ten people which perform satirical and carnivalesque pieces. In the Falla theater contest only men can participate as a *chirigota*. On the streets, however, most of the *chirigotas* that perform as *ilegales* are female. *Coros* are larger groups from twelve to forty-five people which perform both serious and humorous pieces. *Cuartetos* perform improvised comic scenes. They can be groups of three, four, or five.

62. Domingo Acedo Moreno, *Agrupaciones callejeras en el Carnaval de Cádiz* (Cádiz: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Diputación de Cádiz, 2014).

the *ancien régime* and to restore republican imagery (the symbolic association between antiquity and republicanism is an old one indeed).<sup>57</sup> The goddess still wore a crown, however, much like Spain remained a monarchy after 1975.<sup>58</sup> "The selection process [from 1980 and on] was less elitist, but [ninfas were] still beautiful figures who played supporting roles in parades and in other social settings," a member of the Carnival equality movement recalled.<sup>59</sup> During our conversation, Estrella expressed similar feelings about the change from one custom to the other under the local socialist government:

This custom was a little bit fairer. Okay, I never saw it positively because the women who participated were standing there, just being pretty. But still, all the girls could go, and instead of paying for the theater, they could watch all the theater performances for free. I sent my daughter when she was a little girl. And she won. When you are young, you do not think of all this. You know, we all signed for this custom to disappear. Everybody. My daughter, my coworkers. Everybody I know.<sup>60</sup>

Carnival was not just democratized from the top down. Women also occupied the festive arena by joining existing Carnival organizations or creating their own. During my fieldwork, a neighbor insisted that I talk with the members of the oldest feminist *chirigota* (humorous street Carnival band) in Cádiz.<sup>61</sup> Surprisingly enough, their story is mostly absent from the collective memory of Carnival and they are not even mentioned in local researcher's Domingo Acedo Moreno's book about the Carnival of Cádiz, which provides an impressive list of the *chirigotas* that performed between 1979 and 2013.<sup>62</sup> Herein is my attempt to reconstruct their history.

In 1986, a group of young women formed a band named Las Oh! Diosas (fig. 10), which became quite successful. It was not their first artistic endeavor. In 1984, they had sung during Carnival with a group named Las Brujas (The Witches). The band's name was an elaborate pun: they were the *diosas* (queens) but also the *odiosas* ("the odious ones" in Spanish). The exclamation "Oh!" was also meant to anticipate the audience's surprise when seeing their costumes and hearing their lyrics. As Maria Luisa and Puri explained during my interview with them, "we were not just *diosas*; we were the Oh! Diosas. There is an antithesis, an element of surprise, before our name. Because our name was *diosas*, and we dressed like *mamarrachas*."<sup>63</sup> At that time, the Ninfas y Diosas custom was not criticized, as it was considered a democratic transformation of the Reina de las Fiestas Típicas custom. Yet they daringly presented themselves as obnoxious women who teased men through their lyrics and costumes:

**Si tu sueño es participar** / If your dream is to participate

**Candando con un disfraz** / To sing in disguise

**Pasa del jurado** / To perform in front of a jury

**Pasa del Diario**, / To be featured in the *Diario*,<sup>64</sup>

**Móntate tu Carnaval.** / Create your own Carnival.

**Con unos años mas**, / A few years from now,

**Hasta barba tender** / I'll grow a beard

**Y mientras jugaré a ¡Oh Diosas! ¡Oh Diosas!** / Until then, I'm playing with the Carnival Goddesses.

They explicitly emulated the ninfas custom by wearing the same sashes the queen and her maids did. Instead of a wand, however, they carried a toilet brush, and their crown was a handmade helmet.

63. Maria Luiza and Puri, interview by author, April 2019, Cádiz.

"Mamarracho" is a term used to refer to someone's funny, ridiculous, or messy appearance.

64. The *Diario* (*Diario de Cádiz*) is the biggest local newspaper. It was founded in 1867.

65. M. Huguet, "Sólo ocho candidatas a ninfa un día antes del cierre del plazo del concurso," *La Voz de Cádiz*, November 26, 2008, <https://www.lavozdigital.es/cadiz/20081126/cadiz/solo-ocho-candidatas-ninfa-20081126.html>.

66. Marta Ginesta Gamaza, "Proyecto de tesis doctoral: Las mujeres en el Carnaval de Cádiz. Análisis de roles, espacios, estere-



Figure 10. The Oh! Diosas in 1986. Source: Maria Luisa de la Torre Villarica's personal archives.

Meanwhile, *ninfas* and *diosas* continued to wear *reina* crowns during the celebrations. Every year, the outgoing goddess passed on her crown to the new goddess. The way they were elected was similar to beauty contests, as women were selected for their beauty and communication skills. *Ninfas* and *diosas* attended Carnival events and the Carnival contest at the Falla theater as members of the audience, and they were seen as a symbol of beauty and tradition. A 2008 local newspaper report in *La Voz de Cádiz* offers a detailed description of the selection process:

In the meantime, and for as long as the current system lasts, everyone should know how to dance the *tanguillos* and get to know the fiesta, as well as the history and current affairs of Cádiz.... The selected women will be submitted again to the choice of the jury, which will choose the nine nymphs. From the moment they are chosen, they are in the running to be nominated Carnival Goddess. A group of specialists will accompany them to each event in which they participate and will assess which of these young women is best suited to play this role. The name of the chosen one will be announced on February 21 in San Antonio Square. In addition to a cash prize of 500 euros for the nymphs and 800 for the Goddess, the Cádiz women will be given a *piconera* costume. They will also be given a sash to be worn at all events.<sup>65</sup>

According to the report, the contestants were supposed to know how to dance, to have some basic historical knowledge, and to understand what "their role" entailed. They were taught by specialists and given a traditional *piconera* costume (fig. 11). What is not mentioned in the report, although it was mentioned to me during some of the conversations I had, is that they were expected to be good-looking and smiling. Their duties as *ninfas* and *diosas* would last a whole year. According to Ginesta, "the creation of a specific Carnival role for women has been the product of the desire to control them. Indeed, the more prestigious the role artificially created for women, the more they cling to it and the kinder public opinion is."<sup>66</sup>



Figure 11. Nymphs and goddesses dressed in the traditional female costume of the piconera, 2012.  
Source: *Diario de Cádiz*, February 2, 2012, from the collections of the Center of Unicaja Foundation in Cádiz.

### Moving toward the Elimination of the Ninfas y Diosas Custom

Calls for the abolition of the Ninfas y Diosas custom appeared in public discourse in 2011, that is, a few months after the emergence of the *Indignados* movement, which, according to one of my informants, began in Cádiz with a Carnival band marching toward the central square.<sup>67</sup> The demand to abolish the custom was accompanied by a request to eliminate another remnant of the dictatorship, the burning of the Witch Piti, which, in Trebujena, a province of Cádiz, dated back to 1961.

In 2012, four years before the eventual elimination of the custom, the female Carnival *comparsa* Living Like Queens (Las que viven como Reinas) (fig. 12), dressed as queen bees, sang the following lines from the song “Con toitos mis respetos” (“With All Due Respect”) on the stage of the Falla theater during the official annual Cádiz Carnival contest:

**Con toito mis respetos pa esas ninfas sandungueras** / With all due respect to these charming nymphs  
**Hoy le canto a otras mujeres** / Today I sing to other women  
**Que yo llamo compañeras,** / Whom I call comrades,  
**Que no quieren ser las diosas,** / Who do not want to be goddesses,  
**Que gobierne estas murallas.** / Who govern these walls.  
**Sólo sueñan una cosa** / They dream of only one thing  
**Y es cantar aquí en el Falla.** / And that is to sing here at Falla (theater).  
**Son compañeras de desengaños,** / They are my comrades in frustration,  
**Carnavaleras que por sus bocas mi Cádiz habla,** / Carnavaleras through whose lips my Cádiz speaks,  
**Y no requieren ningún enchufe pa estar aquí** / Who do not need the right connections to be here  
**Pa subirse cada año en estas tablas.** / To get up on this stage every year.  
**Son las mujeres de este Carnaval,** / They are the women of this Carnival,  
**Aquellas que yo llamo compañeras** / Those whom I call comrades

otipos y letras del Carnaval oficial y callejero,” in *XX Congreso del Carnaval, Diversión, prohibición y libertad en la fiesta de Febrero*, ed. Santiago Moreno Tello (Cádiz: Libro de Actas, 2017), 56.

67. Sandra, interview by author, July 2016, Cádiz. The *Indignados* or *Movimiento 15-M* was the name of the anti-austerity movement that emerged in Spain on May 15, 2011, in other words, one week before the local elections. The movement occupied central squares all over the country and resembled the Occupy Wall Street movement taking shape in the United States. There is a growing

literature about this movement.  
See, for instance, Óscar Pereira-Zazo and Steven L. Torres, eds.,

**Mujeres orgullosas de nacer**, / Who are proud to be born women,  
**Coristas, comparsistas y chirigoterías** / Women who sing in coros, comparsas, and chirigotas  
**Sin un palquito en el que figurar**, / Without a balcony to show off from,  
**Y sin lucir el traje de piconera**, / Who do not wear the piconera costume,  
**Tan sólo con su voz y su disfraz**, / Who only have their voice and their costume,  
**Todavía sin la Gloria**, / Who remain unrecognized,  
**Todavía sin un nombre**. / Who remain unnamed.  
**Y a pesar de las derrotas**, / And despite the defeats,  
**Una y otra y otra más**, / One after the other, over and over again,  
**Siguen cantando a su tierra** / They continue to sing about their land  
**Como le cantan los hombres**, / Like men do,  
**Sólo con su voz y su disfraz**, / Only with their voice and their costume,  
**Compañeras que se mueren por su fiesta soberana**, / Comrades who die for this sovereign celebration,  
**Y sin banda y sin corona**. / Without an orchestra or a crown.  
**Representan de verdad** / They truly represent  
**A la mujer gaditana, a la mujer gaditana**. / The women of Cádiz, the women of Cádiz.<sup>68</sup>



Figure 12: Living Like queens on the Falla theater stage, January 28, 2012.

Source: Video archive, local TV channel Onda Cádiz, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCYzNcvvIE>.

Members of Living Like Queens used the words “respect” and “comrades” as they addressed the nymphs and goddesses. Although their criticism was harsh, they used inclusive vocabulary, treating all women of Cádiz—be they “charming nymphs” or “comrades in frustration”—equally. All they “dreamed” of was to sing at the Falla theater as men did. They did not need crowns, an orchestra, or the traditional piconera costume uniform that ninfas and diosas wore, only “their voices and their costumes.” They were “proud to be born women.”

As soon as they finished their pasodoble, the whole theater got to its feet in a standing ovation. In the recorded visual archive of Cádiz’s local TV channel, one can see the “other” women elected as ninfas and diosas for the year 2012, sitting at the balcony and watching the stage nervously. The story of the comparsa’s performance can be seen as a moment when feminism took over, leaving a specific embodied imprint on the stage of the male-dominated Falla theater. Through the song, we understand the way particular groups of women felt about this custom long before its elimination.

Three years later, following the victory of the political party Podemos in the municipal elections, women of the city contributed to the movement for Carnival equality (fig. 13), collecting thousands of signatures and demanding that the municipal government stop financing the Ninfas y Diosas contest.



Figure 13. Feminist poster designed for the Carnival equality campaign and posted on social media. The witch says, "I do not want to pose. I want to write, play music, and sing." Source: Facebook page of Iniciativa Social Por un Carnaval Igualitario.

They faced opposition not just from men but also from "other" women who supported the continuation of the contest or its reform. During my participation in a feminist protest at the Falla theater, I met a young woman, Alicia, whom I recognized from an interview she had once given. She was the 2016 diosa, meaning she had been the first to be elected under Podemos's left-wing municipal government. She and her friend, Laura, who was one of the previous ninfas, positively described their experience and surprised me with their arguments in defense of a transformation rather than an elimination of the custom. During their participation in the contest, they explained, the municipal government had had the opportunity to witness a different way of being a ninfa or a diosa. During the selection process, they had not been obliged to dance the traditional piconera dance as used to be customary or to answer "silly questions," such as "which is your favorite color?" Instead, they were asked about Carnival culture and the history of the city, and they were not interviewed separately but in groups. They also had the freedom to present a Carnival performance of their choice, a *romancero* (Spanish folk ballad) or a play. Finally, they were given the possibility to attend the various Carnival fiestas, including the contest that takes place at the Falla theater, wearing any costume they liked, instead of the traditional piconera costume. During the selection process, Alicia remembered being relieved that someone from the jury told them that they could take off their high heels so that they could feel more comfortable. "We are also feminists," she explained: "But we wanted to enter the Falla theater every night and to be present for the final round of the contest. It was the price we had to pay."<sup>69</sup> It seems therefore that the left-wing municipal government experimented with a more democratic and progressive model of the custom after 2015. Despite these efforts, the tension remained unresolved.

One year after the elimination of the Ninfas y Diosas competition in 2016, some of the women who had supported the custom used their Carnival group to expound their arguments. They

Spain after the Indignados/15M  
Movement: The 99% Speaks Out

named their band *Las que salen de Luisita*, meaning “Those who come from Luisita’s” (the name of a famous flower shop in Cádiz). They dressed as flowerpots (fig. 14) to criticize the way they believed feminists saw them, which was as “ornamental flowers.”



Figure 14. *Las que salen de Luisita* on the Plaza de los floreros, 2017. Source: *Las que Salen de Luisitas* private archives.

Through their lyrics, they spelled out their take on the event:

***De Cádi Cádi señores*** / From Cádiz, Cádiz, gentlemen

***De toa la vida de dios*** / Of a lifetime oh my God

***La Piconera goyesca*** / The goyesque Piconera

***Ha representado con gran honor*** / Represented with great honor

***A la mujer gaditana con arte y gracia y buen humor,*** / To the woman of Cádiz with humor and art,

***Aunque algunas gente*** / Although some people

***Se está empeñando en romper la tradición*** / Are set on breaking this tradition

***Y eso no va a pasar*** / And this will not happen

***Pa eso aquí estoy yo*** / This is why I am here

***Ya llegaron las mujeres floreros*** / The female flower pots are here

***Que tanto en Cadi han dado por culo.*** / The ones that were fucked up in Cádiz.

***Que somos unos ornamentos*** / They say we are ornaments

***Mu guapa y sin argumentos,*** / Beautiful and without arguments,

***Pa colarnos en el Teatro Falla*** / That we just stand in the line for the Falla theater

***Para lucir los bonitos cuerpos.*** / To show off our beautiful bodies.

***Y si veo a un comparsita ay*** / And if I see a fellow comparsa, oh!

***Que calor que me entra por dentro y mira lo bien que quedo yo aquí.*** / How hot I feel inside and look how nice I am standing here.

***Y al Kichi y a la concejala*** / And to Kichi [the mayor's nickname] and the female councilor [who eliminated the custom]

***Una cosita le voy a decir:*** / There's only one thing I want to say:

***Que me van a comer el madroño.*** / They will eat my pussy.

***Porque al final estamos aquí,*** / In the end we are here,

(London: Palgrave Macmillan,  
2019).

68. The song can be listened to  
at [https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=RCYzNcvvIE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCYzNcvvIE).

69. Alicia and Laura, interview by  
author, June 2019, Cádiz.

70. Quote from an official website  
dedicated to Andalusia, "Anda-  
lucía información," [https://andalu-  
ciainformacion.es/cadiz/642527/  
la-asociacion-de-ninfas-la-picon-  
era-entra-en-la-guerra](https://andaluciainformacion.es/cadiz/642527/la-asociacion-de-ninfas-la-piconera-entra-en-la-guerra).

71. Encarna Franco Piferrer, "Mi  
reinado representó el cambio y  
nada tenía que ver con el papel de  
las ninfas de ahora," interview by  
N. Agrafojo, *La Voz del Carnaval*,  
October 2015, <https://carnaval>.

**Y aunque digan las progresista y las feministas lo que quieran decir,** / *And whatever the progressive and the  
feminists say,*

**Yo me quiero y me adoro,** / *I love myself, I adore myself,*

**Y mira lo bien que quedo yo aquí.** / *And look how nice I am standing here.*

To further defend the custom, the "Flowers" joined other women in creating an association of former nymphs named La Piconera. One of their main arguments was that "it is a contest that generates employment and supports many professionals."<sup>70</sup>

Halfway between both sides in the debate, the first Carnival goddess (elected in 1980) espoused an interesting position. She recalled her experience from the perspective of the present discussion, in 2017. She defended the tradition while admitting that in the old days, "under [her] reign," things were different. Her narration is particularly relevant because her memories made room for a different interpretation of the tradition's original intention, which, in her view, was to democratize the festivities, in contrast to the feminist collectives that saw it exclusively as a remnant of Francoism:

All sides respected us. Everyone in the streets admired and supported us. We would only go where we wanted. The municipal authorities invited us, and we decided whether to go or not. We would dress in any way we liked, and we self-organized. Of course, we did not wear the *Piconera* costume or anything. Nobody was laughing at us. My reign was evidence of political change.<sup>71</sup>

Adela del Moral, one of the most admired Carnival songwriters, also understood why some women supported keeping up the custom but argued that it should not be financed by the city: "It would be a different matter if private sponsors supported the contest. Many women are in favor of the contest, and they have the right to find funding and support by sponsors. I am not interested in whether this is right or wrong, as far as it is not funded by public money."<sup>72</sup> This reasoning placed equality firmly in the public sphere, demanding that society through its authorities make a stand by refusing to fund discriminatory activities, while at the same time recognizing different points of view and allowing for their continuity.

Meanwhile, at a press conference organized by feminist collectives on December 19, 2016, the movement for Carnival equality referenced Barceló's idea of the Carnival song being the true ruler of Carnival by appointing a new Carnival goddess: "*la copla*." Silvia, a young woman from Seville who has been living in Cádiz for the last four years, recalled:

We collected more than three thousand signatures, and they collected around seven hundred. They did not have reasonable arguments. We expected that they would organize the contest themselves, but they did not do anything at all. A custom that had lasted decades was forgotten within a year. We also wanted to stop the burning of Witch Piti and change her role. But in the end, we could not do it; we lost in the city council vote. The burning of witches will not disappear so quickly.<sup>73</sup>

In 2017, the Ninfas y Diosas contest was effectively eliminated through the withdrawal of public subsidies, which, according to the municipal authorities, amounted to more than 35,700 euros. The rationale behind this decision was that it formed part of the Francoist tradition and that it had nothing to do with the "real tradition" of Cádiz Carnival—which, ironically, precluded women's participation. The argument of "real (masculine) culture" thus formed part of a counter-hegemonic feminist discourse that managed to convince the majority of the municipal council that the custom should be terminated.

[lavozdigital.es/noticia/mi-reinado-represento-el-cambio-y-nada-tenia-que-ver-con-el-papel-de-las-ninfas-de-ahora/](http://lavozdigital.es/noticia/mi-reinado-represento-el-cambio-y-nada-tenia-que-ver-con-el-papel-de-las-ninfas-de-ahora/)

72. Adela del Moral, interview by author, April 2018, Cádiz.

73. Silvia, interview by author, July

As ambiguous as it was, this “victory”—as many women referred to it—led to new changes in the Carnival community. In 2017, members of the movement for Carnival equality created a new award called the Antifaz Violeta (Purple Mask), in reference to the Golden Mask award that is presented to the best Carnival street band. They also chose to wear armbands and defend themselves from sexist attacks. Every time someone would harass a woman in any way, women wearing armbands would protect her. These “safe spaces” were created with the collaboration of the municipal government. The incorporation of the organization’s demands into public policy could be considered as another indication of a new feminist counter-hegemony.

Today more than ever, women are creating their own spaces, their language, their hierarchies, their Carnival. “We decide together on the lyrics of our songs. Men need a man to write the *coplas*. We do not. We help each other and decide together. We will soon have our goddess Moma, in place of god Momo,” a twenty-five-year-old comparsa member named Sara explained.<sup>74</sup> It is too early to assess whether women’s groups have lived up to their democratic promise, but what is certain is that through them, Carnival has been politicized along new lines.

### Conclusion

In the third section of this article, I mentioned three hypotheses, which the stories presented in this article could serve to explore. The first was that Carnival is a stage where power relations are expressed, experienced, and challenged. As a result, it can become the space where, at times, feminist hegemony is performed. The second was that women and feminists do not simply challenge the male-dominated Carnival rituals, they also create a “generic chronotope” that can carry over into public policy. The third hypothesis was that women’s Carnival participation and their everyday activism contributes to the democratization of Spanish society.

The various stories concerning the Ninfas y Diosas custom convincingly show, I think, how Carnival time and place can be gendered. Street Carnival is a space full of possibilities, in which the “odious goddesses” (Oh! Diosas) express their opinions or, to paraphrase the words of French feminist philosopher Hélène Cixous, in which women write themselves.<sup>75</sup> The Falla theater is a different space, more confined, where women manage to speak, singing about those “living like queens.” On both occasions, women manage to perform their embodied opposition to gender inequality, using their voices and costumes. Feminist social anthropologist Teresa del Valle describes this conjuncture of time, space, and gender (where gender includes the body) as a “generic chronotope,” borrowing from Bakhtin’s work. She writes:

By *generic chronotopes* I mean in the first place the points where time and space imbued with gender appear in a dynamic convergence. As powerful links charged with reflectivity and emotion, they can be recognized on the basis of the following characteristics: they act as syntheses of broader meanings; they are cathartic, catalytic; they condense creativity and are subject to continuous modifications and reinterpretations. They are temporary enclaves with complex activities and meanings in which identities are negotiated, where new interpretations of actions, symbols that create inequality, may be in conflict. Inequality can be negotiated and/or reaffirmed, expressed.<sup>76</sup>

Following this line of thought, we could say that women’s efforts to create spaces of debate and resistance result in generic chronotopes, in which feminist hegemony is expressed in-body and performed on stage. As scholar Ib Johansen notes in his essay “The Semiotics of Laughter”

2016, Cádiz.

74. Sara, interview by author, July 2016, Cádiz.

75. Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 875.

76. Valle, "Procesos de la memoria," 213.

77. Ib Johansen, "The Semiotics of Laughter," in *Signs of Change: Premodern -> Modern -> Postmodern*, ed. Stephen Barker (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 14.

78. About the transition process (*Transición*) from dictatorship to democracy, see Emmanuel Rodríguez López, *Por qué fracasó la democracia en España: La Transición y el régimen del '78* (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2015).

79. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*.

referencing Cixous, female laughter is correlated to the breakdown of patriarchal hegemony: culturally speaking, women have wept a great deal, but "once the tears are shed, there will be endless laughter."<sup>77</sup> Through carnivalesque laughter, women have rejected the name given to them by Father Franco: Reina de las Fiestas. They no longer want to be called "queens" nor "nymphs" nor "goddesses" nor "ladies of honor." Neither do they want to be called "ornaments," even when they wish the Ninfas y Diosas custom had been maintained. Differences in opinion between women are acted out on stage, but they all claim the feminist mantle, regardless of their specific stance concerning the elimination of the custom. In this sense, feminism has become hegemonic within all the different groups of women.

Beyond the Carnival setting, women have instigated significant change in public policy. For instance, the grievances formulated in the "Platform for Carnival Equality" were integrated into the municipal council's political agenda. More recently, Andalusian institutions, including the University of Cádiz's decisive involvement in the Municipality of Cádiz, have built on the "No Means No. Carnival without Violence" (*No es No. Carnaval sin Violencia*) campaign (fig. 15) to implement a series of measures to prevent violence against women and to transform festivals into safe spaces.



Figure 15. Poster for the municipal campaign "No Means No. Carnival without violence."

By eliminating a symbol that they considered a remnant of the dictatorship, women have also accelerated the transition from dictatorship to democracy, which many political scientists argue is still ongoing in Spain.<sup>78</sup>

All in all, female Carnival participation shows that feminism can become hegemonic, albeit temporarily (Marxist theorist Raymond Williams would say such hegemony can only be temporary), all while strengthening democracy and challenging Caro Baroja's assumption that Carnival is dead.<sup>79</sup> Through their conflicts and demands, through the transformations of their bodies, through the laughter provoked by their lyrics and costumes, women have injected new life into Carnival. They have proved that it can be alive, popular, subversive, and even feminist.

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## AUTHOR BIO

**Katerina Sergidou** grew up in Cyprus and lives in Athens. She studied history at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. She completed her MA in cultural studies at Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences in Athens, conducting ethnographic research in the city of Cádiz. She is currently a doctoral candidate in social anthropology and feminist and gender studies at Panteion University and at the University of the Basque Country in San Sebastián. Her dissertation investigates women's participation in Cádiz Carnival. Her PhD research is supported by the "Strengthening Human Resources Research Potential via Doctorate Research" (MIS-5000432) action of the Operational Program "Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning," implemented by the State Scholarships Foundation (IKY) and co-financed by Greece and the European Union (European Social Fund, ESF).

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# Carnival as Contentious Performance: A Comparison between Contemporary Fort-de-France, Pointe-à-Pitre, and London Carnivals

**Lionel Arnaud**

Institut d'Études politiques de Toulouse/Université Paul Sabatier, Toulouse, France

## KEYWORDS

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mobilization  
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resistance

## ABSTRACT

In the 1970s, in a context of increased racial tensions and growing nationalist claims, the use of rhythms, instruments, and clothing associated with Africa among the black populations of England, Guadeloupe, and Martinique became part of a cultural and political repertoire aimed at resurrecting and denouncing a long history of subordination. Similarly, the mobilization of carnival by Afro-Caribbean activists today can be considered as a tactical choice—that is to say, carnival has become part of the standardized, limited, context-dependent repertoires from which claim-making performances are drawn.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Fort-de-France, London, and Pointe-à-Pitre between 2000 and 2018, this article analyzes how cultural movements have drawn on carnivalesque aesthetics to both memorialize and display the complex history of black Caribbean populations. I argue that Caribbean carnival has been subject to constant reinterpretations since the eighteenth century and that, as such, this repertoire is not only a model or a set of limited means of action, but also a convention through which carnival groups constantly reinvent their skills and resources. Furthermore, this article shows that the repertoires mobilized by the carnival bands I study in Europe and in the Caribbean cannot be reduced to an aesthetic gesture that serves political claims, and that they are part of a historical genealogy that testifies to the irreducible character of a way of life.

1. Roger Bastide, *Les Amériques noires* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996 [1967]).
2. Denis-Constant Martin, "Je est un autre, nous est un même. Culture populaire, identités et politique à propos du carnaval de Trinidad." *Revue française de science politique* 42, no. 5 (1992): 183.
3. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).
4. In Guadeloupe and Martinique, the Creole expression *pwofitasyon* refers to the abuse of power by a powerful person over someone he already knows is weaker than he is, to make him even more subordinate.
5. Charles Tilly, *Trajectories of Change* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006), 50, 39.
6. Charles Tilly, "Repertoires of Contention in America and Britain, 1750-1830," in *The Dynamics of Social Movements: Resource Mobilization, Social Control, and Tactics*, ed. Mayer N. Zald and John David McCarthy (Cambridge: Winthrop, 1979), 131.
7. While these "sister islands" display a high degree of commonality, starting of course with their simultaneous integration into the French Republic after World War II, their histories are different. Occupied by the English from 1794 to 1802, Martinique in particular was exempted from the first abolition of slavery (1794), which in Guadeloupe resulted in a considerable weakening of planter hegemony. This historical divergence may explain why

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Lionel Arnaud

### Introduction

Following nineteenth-century emancipations, black populations remained marginalized across the American continent. Kept away from participation in the national economic and political systems, they often used carnival as a vehicle to assert their presence and to position themselves against the hegemonic projects of European societies.<sup>1</sup> While the legacy of slavery fueled a desire to emancipate from the norms and codes of white "civilization," carnival artists and participants rarely explicitly memorialized their past oppression. Across the continent, carnival was primarily perceived as a time and space for celebration and for individual or collective creation.<sup>2</sup> In the Caribbean, even though it provided a stage for free expression that sometimes bordered on the political—the burning of Vaval, the traditional cardboard and papier-mâché figure that reigns over the Guadeloupe and Martinique carnivals, may thus be interpreted as a way to wipe the slate clean and erase present inequalities—it was not a site for vocal claim-making.

In the 1970s, however, a variety of cultural movements challenged the "bourgeois" character of carnival and injected it with more militant undertones in a context of increased racial tensions and growing nationalist claims. Carnival thus left the "infrapolitical" sphere—where actions, gestures, and signs that criticized the dominant went mostly unnoticed—and grew into a "public transcript" of power relations that was more rebellious and subversive.<sup>3</sup> The use of rhythms, instruments, and clothing associated with Africa, especially, became part of a cultural and political repertoire aimed at resurrecting and denouncing a long history of subordination. Deemed more "authentic," African performance styles epitomized a desire to resist the neocolonial order, racism, assimilation, or, more largely, *pwofitasyon*.<sup>4</sup>

Charles Tilly's notion of "repertoires of contention," defined as "prevailing forms of [collective] action" that "characterize the interaction among a specified set of collective actors" seems particularly fruitful when analyzing the reasons why social movements put certain artistic traditions, including carnival, at the service of political battles.<sup>5</sup> The mobilization of the carnival performance repertoire can indeed be considered a "strategic choice" if we consider "the range of actions theoretically available" to Afro-Caribbean activists.<sup>6</sup> In the Caribbean context, however, the use of particular drums or costumes cannot be analyzed solely as a "tactic," insofar as slavery was not just a form of economic oppression: it also entailed a process of cultural dispossession (deculturation) and the imposition of an exogenous culture (enculturation). Consequently, carnival participation by Afro-Caribbean activists in Fort-de-France, Pointe-à-Pitre, and London is inseparable from a desire to expose the cultural dimension of neocolonialism, with a view to individual and collective empowerment.

To test this hypothesis, I will first review the history of carnival in Guadeloupe and Martinique—two former colonies that became overseas *départements* of France in 1946<sup>7</sup>—and in London, where Trinidadian migrants established and developed one of the largest carnivals in the world in

large-scale social, political, and cultural mobilizations such as the 2009 general strike have often started in Guadeloupe before spreading to Martinique. See Jean-Luc Bonniol, "Janvier-mars 2009, trois mois de lutte en Guadeloupe," *Les Temps Modernes* 1, nos. 662–63 (2011): 82–113. For further discussion, see Lionel Arnaud, *Les tambours de Bô Kan-nal. Mobilisations et résistances culturelles en Martinique* (Paris: Karthala, forthcoming).

8. Tilly, *Trajectories of Change*.

9. Howard S. Becker and Robert R. Faulkner, "Do You Know...?" *The Jazz Repertoire in Action* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

10. Charles Tilly, "Nineteenth-Century Origins of Our Twentieth-Century Collective-Action Repertoire," CRSO Working Paper No. 244 (University of Michigan, September 1981), 9–10.

11. Lilian Mathieu, *L'espace des mouvements sociaux* (Bellecombes-en-Bauges: Le Croquant, 2012).

12. On the general history of Afro-Caribbean carnivals, see Richard D. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018); Paul Rosele Chim and Joël Raboteur, eds., *Le Carnaval et la folie imaginaire des peuples* (Paris: Édition Publibook, 2012); Thierry L'Etang et André Lucrèce, eds., *Le Carnaval. Sources, traditions, modernité* (Fort-de-France: Les Cahiers du Patrimoine, 2007); Hollis Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion: The Carnival*

the post–World War II period. I will then analyze how groups organized in these three locations in the 1970s have drawn on carnivalesque aesthetics to both memorialize and display the complex history of black Caribbean populations. The third part of my essay will focus on the participatory nature of carnival and how it has fostered forms of resistance that are not only aesthetic but also social—that is, embedded in values of solidarity and community. Ultimately, I will highlight the "trajectories of change"<sup>8</sup> that have affected Afro-Caribbean carnival performances so as to refute the idea of fixed Afro-Caribbean cultural and political repertoire that can be learned and then known once and for all, and to present carnival as a *convention* through which carnival groups constantly reinvent their skills and resources.<sup>9</sup>

## 1. The Origins of the Carnival Action Repertoire in Guadeloupe, Martinique, and London

In its most interactionist sense, the word "repertoire" refers to a model "in which the accumulated experience ... of contenders interact with the strategies of authorities to make a limited number of forms of action more feasible, attractive, and frequent than many others which could, in principle, serve the same interests."<sup>10</sup> The choice of means of action is thus restricted by situational constraints, including cultural familiarity, the availability of certain resources to the group at a specific time, and the existence of "competing" claims by other groups.<sup>11</sup> Carnival provides an interesting vantage point from which to investigate the dynamics of the reconstruction and reappropriation of meaning, especially in contexts of cultural pluralism where various social groups are involved in uneven numerical, political, economic, or racial relationships. In order to better understand this process of constant reinterpretation, I will begin by briefly distinguishing three stages—from the arrival of carnival in the Caribbean to the development of street bands in the aftermath of abolition to its reinvention in the immediate postwar period.<sup>12</sup> I will then analyze how cultural movements have tried to reinvent carnival by subverting the hierarchy of values between European and African cultures.

### *Carnival: Between Freedom and Prohibition*

The first period started when European Christian settlers imported their carnivalesque traditions, including charivaris, cavalcades, balls, and masked receptions. Soon, carnival became a "Creole" celebration, organized by and for the exclusive enjoyment of European settlers: it consisted mainly of indoor parties, balls, and house-to-house visits, in which high-society men and women were costumed either as *neg' jardin* (black field workers) or *mulâtresses* (mulatto women), who embodied seduction and temptation in the white imagination.<sup>13</sup> In Trinidad and Tobago, where carnival arrived in the luggage of French colonists worried about the instability of the islands they had settled in, men went out at night with torches and drums to form *canboulay* (from *cannes brûlées*, burnt cane) processions in which they mimicked black activity when a cane fire broke out.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, free people of color were not allowed to mingle with whites, and therefore celebrated carnival more discreetly, away from the *habitations*. However, under mounting pressure from the black population in the early nineteenth century, whites let the *mûlatres* organize private dances, which they were forbidden to attend. As for slaves, they were banned from participating in the masquerade carnival events of the colonial elite, except to serve their masters.

After the abolition of slavery in 1838 (Trinidad and Tobago) and in 1848 (Martinique and

*Tradition in Trinidad and Tobago 1763-1962* (Chicago: Research Associates School Times, 2001); Biringanine Ndagano, *Penser le carnaval. Variations, discours et représentations* (Paris: Karthala, 2010); John W. Nunley and Judith Bettelheim, eds. *Caribbean Festival Arts: Each and Every Bit of Difference* (Seattle: St. Louis Art Museum/University of Washington Press, 1988); and Véronique Rochais and Patrick Bruneteaux, *Le Carnaval des travestis. Les travestis makoumè* (Case-Pilote: Lafontaine, 2006).

13. The word *mûlatres* comes from the late sixteenth-century Spanish word *mulato*, which meant “young mule.” It was the term enslavers used to refer to children born out of (mostly forced) intercourse with African slaves. In their minds, any union between whites and blacks was unnatural and could thus be compared to the progeny of two equine species. Owing to their European ancestry and to a generally lighter skin, however, mulatto children were often freed, educated, and could inherit their father’s estate. They thus became part of a small but relatively privileged socioeconomic class. On the specific figure of the *mulatta* in the Atlantic world, see Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Teresa C. Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010); and Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

Guadeloupe), a new period began. While the black bourgeoisie tried to imitate the white bourgeoisie by launching its own balls, where satin and velvet reigned supreme, former slaves left the houses to “occupy” the streets, a space where people with few resources could nevertheless celebrate.<sup>15</sup> Because colonial officials considered street carnival to be a threat to law and order, morality, and private property, masks and disguises were often prohibited, under penalty of imprisonment. In Trinidad, attempts were made as early as 1858 to prevent the canboulay processions, which since 1838 had become a symbolic celebration of black emancipation—even though they never took place on August 1, that is, the official day of the abolition of slavery. Canboulay was no longer allowed after 1881, while a ship from the British royal fleet would remain anchored off Port-of-Spain during the carnival period until the 1950s.

After the Second World War, carnival changed again. In 1946 the former French colonies of Martinique and Guadeloupe became French overseas *départements*, which meant that the residents of both islands now benefited from the same social and political rights as the rest of French citizens. From a simple popular celebration, carnival became a public affair. The city of Fort-de-France gradually got involved in its organization and consistently supported its development. Competitions were organized that allowed local artists and musicians to display their mastery of beguine,<sup>16</sup> mazurka,<sup>17</sup> and *valse creole* (Creole waltz), while in the countryside and in working-class neighborhoods people continued to organize satirical parades that mocked political figures and social actors who had “erred” (whether by committing adultery or engaging in so-called disreputable behavior) by burning them in effigy. But the emergence of organizing committees and carnival federations, along with the development of a Caribbean consumer society, partly converted carnival into a sedate, westernized celebration. In 1950s Fort-de-France and Pointe-à-Pitre, beautiful young women dressed in either traditional clothing or modern outfits now competed for the title of Queen of Carnival in the presence of the prefect and military authorities.<sup>18</sup> In Trinidad and Tobago, the independence gained from the United Kingdom in 1962 resulted in the recognition and institutionalization of carnival. Steel band<sup>19</sup> and calypso<sup>20</sup> competitions lost some of their critical edge to become instruments of nationalism.

### *The Two Faces of Carnival: “Pretty Mas” vs. “Traditional Mas”*

In Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Trinidad and Tobago today, carnival is a divided event: on the one hand, there is “Pretty Mas” (also called “Fancy Mas” or “bourgeois carnival”), the colorful and joyful festival during which well-organized walking bands dance one after another, displaying shimmering, richly decorated costumes; on the other hand, there is “Traditional Mas” (or “Ole Mas”), the carnival of the “dirty,” the celebration which showcases menacing, disruptive costumed figures (the Midnight Robber, Pierrot Grenade, etc.) and during which single maskers and small groups of men and women parade in cheap costumes that they have made with the means at their disposal. This duality of carnival, separating two audiences and two carnival repertoires—one static, aesthetically pleasing, and European in inspiration; the other ambulatory, vaguely threatening, and rooted in Afro-Creole culture—particularly manifested itself in the 1970s, with groups that sought to challenge the cultural hegemony of the bourgeois elites by occupying public space.

In the French West Indies some carnival groups indeed freed themselves from the rules set by the carnival federations. Emancipated from bourgeois conventions, much like their fugitive-

14. Trinidad was a Spanish colony from 1498 to 1797. During the latter part of the eighteenth century, an influx of white and “colored” French planters and their black slaves transformed Trinidad into a Spanish colony run by Frenchmen and worked by African slaves. In 1797, when the island came under British control, it hosted 250 white French planters, 150 Spanish residents, 4,700 mulattoes, and nearly 100,000 slaves. For about a century, from the end of the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century, the French plantocracy dominated Trinidad and Tobago. Planters spoke French or a Creolized French, and they mainly attended Catholic churches.

15. On postemancipation carnival in Trinidad, see especially Ana Maria Alonso, “Men in ‘Rags’ and the Devil on the Throne: A Study of Protest and Inversion in the Carnival of Post-Emancipation Trinidad,” in “Carnival in Perspective,” special issue, *Plantation Society in the Americas: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Tropical and Subtropical History and Culture* 3, no. 1: 73–120.

16. *Beguine* (or *biguine*) is a Caribbean musical and choreographic genre that developed in Martinique after 1848. With the creation of musical societies and the organization of concerts, the cities of Martinique and Guadeloupe saw the emergence of ball orchestras identical to the jazz orchestras of New Orleans. Composed of clarinets, drums, and banjos, later associated with drums, these orchestras popularized *biguine* in Parisian clubs of the 1920s. For a study of twentieth-century *biguine*, see

slave ancestors (*maroons*) had freed themselves from slavery, they went off the beaten track, both in the literal and figurative sense, since they did not allow themselves to be constricted by any itinerary or any way of experiencing carnival. “A form of physical and symbolic violence exuded from the[ir] bodies through the virulent determination to speak out against, mock, and stigmatize power-brokers of any kind. This was their opportunity to give corporeal expression to their dissatisfaction.”<sup>21</sup> If maskers often came off as “*méchant*,” (nasty) in their politicized use of carnival, they nevertheless submitted to the rules of conduct set by the groups they joined. They also conformed to carefully defined musical identities and ritualized outfits whose primary goal was to showcase their attachment to African roots. In Guadeloupe and Martinique, the *mas a Kongo* (Congo masking) and the “*Neg Gwo Siwo*” (from *nègres gros-sirop*) thus involved coating their bodies and faces with a mixture of *sirop de batterie* (sugarcane syrup) and soot or coal, giving their skins a darker, shiny aspect (fig. 1). The body thus disguised, sometimes dressed in a short loincloth made with banana leaves, was supposed to enhance the memory of Africa in a context where it was often denied, or simply despised. The deprecated link to Africa was thus transformed into the affirmation of a glorious identity, in an interesting reversal of the ordinary hierarchy of values between European and African performance cultures.



Figure 1. The “*Neg Gwo Siwo*” tradition revisited by a group of young activists in the colors of the Martinique flag during Fort-de-France Carnival, 2020. Credit: Benny Photo.

Édouard Benoît, "Biguine: Popular Music of Guadeloupe, 1940-1960," in *Zouk: World Music in the West Indies*, ed. Jocelyne Guilbaud (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

17. Mazurka is a style of music and dance that originated from Poland. It arrived in Martinique at the very beginning of the twentieth century. It was the favorite dance of the French army officers, who were soon imitated by the residents of the city of Saint-Pierre, the former capital of Martinique.

18. In this new configuration resulting from *départementalisation*, that is, the 1946 incorporation of the "old colonies" (Guadeloupe, Martinique, Reunion Island, and French Guiana) into France as *départements*, the prefect became the main representative of the French state, as he already was in other French departments. His authority gradually replaced that of the all-powerful governor, who symbolized the colonial administration. Martinicans overwhelmingly voted for this change, expecting this supposed administrative standardization to break with the colonial tradition of using the "peculiar" nature of overseas countries as an excuse for setting specific legal rules.

19. A steel band is an orchestra made up of percussion instruments such as drums and metal containers. Steel bands often play calypso melodies, but calypso singers tend to be also accompanied by instruments such as the guitar, the trumpet, and the saxophone.

20. The word "calypso" supposedly derives from the West

However, it should be noted that, before the 1960s and 1970s, the use of the *masque à goudron* (tar mask) in Guadeloupe and Martinique carnivals was not necessarily related to African ancestry but was rather meant to frighten children and bystanders—especially those wearing elegant carnival outfits—who feared being soiled by the *siwo batri*. In other words, even though the color black was activated as a symbolic marker, *mas a Kongo* did not necessarily constitute a political claim or an act of "resistance" as conceptualized by James Scott.<sup>22</sup> The practice of black body make-up, as well as the use of foliage, was actually a crucial aspect of Indo-European carnival, with its attendant cult of the bear and the wild man.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the *djab wouj* (red devil) and *ti djab* (little devil) figures which, today, are said to refer to positive African gods (similar to the masks of the Casamance harvest in Senegal), could also be found in many European carnivals (fig. 2).<sup>24</sup> Even the use of the whip in contemporary Guadeloupe Carnival, said to be a reminder of slavery and subjugation, is nevertheless present in Indo-European carnival as a way to improve soil (and female) fertility and ward off evil spirits.<sup>25</sup>



Figure 2. The Red Devils of the Tanbo Bô Kannal walking group in Fort-de-France Carnival, 2013. Author's photograph.

The same type of tradition also existed in Trinidad and Tobago Carnival, especially during Jouvay (or J'Ouvert), when gangs of young people imitated devils, demons, monsters, and goblins by soiling themselves with chocolate, fat, oil and paint, tar, and molasses to symbolize the shedding of all inhibitions and exorcize their fear of death. But these traditions echoed not only the happy and festive celebrations of slaves after they gained their freedom in 1838, but also the spirit of civil unrest in Port-of-Spain, when people covered themselves in oil or paint or tar to avoid being recognized, without any reference to an African past.

The desire to promote Afro-Caribbean culture and traditions in Trinidad only became explicit in the 1950s, with the making of increasingly spectacular costumes that would later become tourist

African term *kaiso*, used as an expression of admiration similar to “Bravo!” In West Africa (present-day Nigeria), people would gather in *kaiso* tents where a griot would lead them in song.

In pre-emancipation Trinidad captive Africans brought to work on sugar plantations would gather during carnival and mix African singing, dancing, and drumming with “patois” (Trinidadian French Creole) to mock their masters and to communicate with each other. To stand out, each singer adopted a stage name and a recognizable style. Today, the word “calypso” refers to any song that is performed in the streets by carnival-goers, or on stage by professional or semi-professional singers. For further detail, see John Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso: Traditions in the Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Jocelyne Guilbaud, *Governing Sound: The Cultural Politics of Trinidad’s Carnival Musics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007).

21. Jérôme Pruneau, Melyon-Reinette Stéphanie, and Agnès Danielle, “*Maché an Mas-la !*” Ethnographie de l’usage symbolique du corps ‘charnel’ dans le carnaval guadeloupéen,” *Caribbean Studies* 37, no. 1 (2009): 53. My translation.

22. When analyzing the notion of resistance, James Scott distinguishes between “*real* resistance,” which “embodies ideas or intentions that negate the basis of domination itself” and has revolutionary potential, and “token, incidental, or epiphenomenal activities,” which lack the organized, systematic, and cooperative character of true resistance and

attractions. In 1957, a nineteen-year-old bandleader named George Bailey revolutionized carnival with his “Back to Africa” organization, which presented a “Pretty” version of the African roots of Trinidadians, hitherto perceived through the prism of the Western or even Hollywood imagination, in a sumptuous show inspired by the traditions of West Africa.<sup>26</sup>

Intended to offset the pejorative image of Africa conveyed by the colonial imagination, this performance repertoire was imported to London in 1959 by Trinidadian activist Claudia Jones (1915–64). The founding editor of the *West Indian Gazette*, a monthly newspaper with a circulation of fifteen thousand established in London in March 1958, she led the first West Indian delegation to the Home Office to deal with the racist violence that had then been shaking the Notting Hill district.<sup>27</sup> Four months later, on January 30, 1959, in order to bring the Caribbean community together and encourage friendship based on equality and human dignity with the English, she took the initiative in organizing London’s first Afro-Caribbean carnival in the St. Pancras festival hall, north of the British capital city.<sup>28</sup> A thousand people attended the event, which featured steel bands, calypso singers, and a lavish costume competition. The celebration soon spilled over when steel band players decided to organize an impromptu parade during the event, creating tensions with some residents. In 1964, Rhaunee Laslett, a social worker and community activist who had been born in London to an American Indian mother and a Russian father, reshaped the event around the prevention of racial tensions and the rapprochement of a divided community. With the help of a social work organization, the North Kensington Amenity Trust, she transformed Notting Hill Carnival from a simple competition of calypso masks and singers into a vast public event. In the early 1970s, the advent of sound systems, but also of Rastafarian culture from Jamaica, boosted the event but also its communal dimension by attracting many participants, particularly young blacks from the various segregated districts of London.

## 2. From the Promotion of Caribbean Culture to Political Mobilization

In London, Fort-de-France, and Pointe-à-Pitre, the 1970s were a time when the carnival repertoire was reconfigured. In a context of growing “identity” claims and political radicalization, attested by the diffusion and success of Black Power ideas among Afro-descendants around the world, the opposition between Pretty Mas and Traditional Mas was replayed to serve more openly militant agendas.<sup>29</sup> A “third way” of sorts between the self-regulated, “civilized” celebration of the “bourgeois” (whites) and the unruly charivari of the (black) masses was devised. It combined a supposed African and popular “authenticity” with careful, even spectacular staging.

Among the “new” carnival bands that emerged at the time, carnival was seen as a way not only to reclaim and celebrate black culture but also to psychologically and somatically awaken Afro-Caribbean people to the need for political or, more specifically, identity-based claims. As such, the repertoire was not solely meant to mobilize: it was rooted in action-based pedagogy, meaning in a willingness, endogenous to the collective, to deepen its understanding of itself, of others, and of their political, social, and cultural environment.

### *Skin Drums and Colonial Helmets as Vehicles of Cultural Revival*

In Fort-de-France, the Tanbo Bô Kannal walking band (TBK) has strived for more than forty years to promote not just Martinican carnival, but also, and above all, black Martinican music and

therefore cannot effect significant change. See James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 292.

23. See Samuel Kinser's essay in this issue and Marie-Pascale Mallé, ed., *Le Monde à l'envers* (Paris: Mucem/Flammarion, 2014).

24. Aimé Césaire, the poet who was elected mayor of Fort-de-France in 1945 and remained deputy to the French National Assembly for Martinique from 1945 to 1993, is often presented as the first, if not the first, to have highlighted the African ancestry of the Martinican red devil: "One day, I had a shock, I was in Senegal, in Casamance, during a great village festival. Suddenly, I saw the Martinican Mardi-Gras fat ox coming in with its red suit studded with mirrors, its tail and its bovine horns. I ran up to a villager, asked him what it was, what this mask was, and what it meant to him. He told me that it was the mask of those who have undergone the initiation. He explained to me that the bovine horns were the symbol of temporal wealth, and that the mirrors placed side by side were the symbol of knowledge, in other words the symbol of spiritual wealth." Cited in Thierry L'Étang et André Lucrèce, eds., *Le Carnaval. Sources, traditions, modernité* (Fort-de-France: Les Cahiers du Patrimoine, 2007), 106. My translation.

25. Stéphanie Mulot, "La trace des Masques. Identité guadeloupéenne entre pratiques et discours." *Ethnologie française* 33, no. 1 (2003): 111–22.

dances such as *bèlè* and *kalenda*, inherited from the former plantation complex and whose main characteristic is that they involve skin drums (*tambours a po* in Martinican Creole).<sup>30</sup> TBK was born in one of the most disadvantaged districts of Martinican capital, the Rive Droite-Levassor district, also known as "Bô Kannal": members wanted to improve the image of this area of ill repute while claiming their nonconformity, in a sort of reversal of the stigma.<sup>31</sup> Concerned with the gradual disappearance in his neighborhood of a number of cultural traditions such as the Papa Djab figure (an emblematic red devil that used to be an essential figure in Martinique Carnival) and of *danmyé* (a martial art and dance form similar to Brazilian *capoeira*, in which two men clash to the rhythm of the drum), a young slaughterhouse worker named Victor Treffre (born in 1941) started to publicize the work of various informal artistic collectives in the early 1960s. He later strove to collect traditional musical and choreographic know-how in order to transmit and disseminate them among the younger generations. In February 1973, these initiatives acquired a spectacular dimension as youths from Rive Droite decided to display their singing and drumming skills in the streets of Fort-de-France. Denigrated by the mulatto class, pushed off the podium by the organizers of carnival, they improvised a vindictive chorus (*Comité bourgeois, carnaval bidon!* [Bourgeois committee, fake carnival!]) and vowed to restore carnival to its former "authenticity," which, according to them, was threatened by the "flowery floats" of the assimilated elites.

Hooked on the idea, they started rehearsing with new instruments adapted to street-walking, created by recycling old plastic cans on which they fixed the skins of young goats recovered from the slaughterhouse in Fort-de-France where some of them worked. Rather than just imitate the scorned music of the "old negroes" (*bagay vié neg*), they created a new type of performance, the *kalenbwa*, inspired by *kalenda* dancing<sup>32</sup> and by the music of the *chwal bwa* (wooden horse).<sup>33</sup> The overall atmosphere was one of celebration and mockery, with the participants being mainly there to "let off steam" and to make their "sound" heard. However, a series of tragic events—including the police murder of a young student at Schoelcher High School in 1971<sup>34</sup> and the bloody repression of the February 1974 strike in Chalvet<sup>35</sup>—led to a reorientation of the practice. Cultural and political activists started to envision the cultural initiatives of Bô Kannal youths as a potential mechanism for popular political mobilization.

Today, TBK is present at most events that commemorate slavery, be it the "Convoy for Reparation" (initiated in 2000 by Garcin Malsa, founder of the Movement for the Independence of Martinique), the events organized for the fiftieth anniversary of Frantz Fanon's death in 2011, or the commemorations of the popular revolt of December 1959 when three young demonstrators were killed by the police (fig. 3).<sup>36</sup> In 2015, TBK was particularly active in the May 22 celebrations that, in Martinique, commemorate the abolition of slavery by the French Republic.<sup>37</sup> So was Voukoum, a guest Guadeloupean organization created in 1988 with which it maintains close relations. Originally from Basse-Terre (the main island of Guadeloupe), Voukoum is in many respects comparable to TBK, due to its popular origins and its use of so-called *a po* (skin) drums. What is original about this walking group's carnival work is their desire to honor Guadeloupean culture heritage through masks and traditional costumes (such as *mas a Kongo*). To them, these are emblems of a Guadeloupean identity and, more broadly, of its African roots, which the group considers to be in jeopardy and would like to see acknowledged, supported, and strengthened.

26. Garth L. Green and Philip W. Scher, eds., *Trinidad Carnival: The Cultural Politics of a Transnational Festival* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 35.

27. On August 17, 1958, a hateful crowd broke the windows of a black-occupied house on Stowe Road in the Shepherd's Bush neighborhood. A few days later, a black man was savagely attacked in a North Kensington pub. From August to September 1958, these racist attacks occurred daily, day and night, causing dozens of injuries. Eight months later, a young Caribbean carpenter was beaten to death. These riots, known as the "Notting Hill white riots," galvanized the black community and strongly contributed to its mobilization throughout the 1960s. See Edward Pilkington, *Beyond the Mother Country. West Indians and the Notting Hill White Riots* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988).

28. Bill Schwarz, "Claudia Jones and the *West Indian Gazette*: Reflections on the Emergence of Post-colonial Britain," *Twentieth Century British History* 14, no. 3 (2003): 264–85.

29. As Stuart Hall has argued, "Black is not a question of pigmentation ... [It] is a historical category, a political category, a cultural category." Stuart Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities," in *Theories of Race and Racism*, ed. John Solomos and Les Back (London: Routledge, 2000), 149. According to Claire Alexander, British "blackness" has its own specific history that can be broadly divided into two phases: one that ran from the 1960s to the mid-1980s and which should be understood as a political commitment to bringing



Figure 3. Tanbo Bô Kannal's 2011 parade through the streets of Fort-de-France to commemorate the December 1959 popular uprising. Author's photograph.

As emblematic of the Antillean cultural revival is Akiyo (Creole for "Who are they?"), a carnival group initiated in 1979 by anticolonial activists concerned with promoting Guadeloupean culture for a Guadeloupean audience. Taking up the formula initiated by TBK in the early 1970s, this self-identified *Mouvman kiltiré* (cultural movement) reclaims the streets with skin drums and rhythms from the *gwo ka* (literally, big drum) repertoire, a musical genre inherited from the plantation complex and similar to *bèlè*, but specific to Guadeloupe. Akiyo differs from TBK, however, in its organization and its openly political commitment to wrest Guadeloupean culture from local and national public authorities. Some of its founding members were actually activists associated with the *Mouvement populaire pour une Guadeloupe indépendante* (MPGI), while others belonged to clandestine political groups.<sup>38</sup> While TBK members have become more or less politicized over time, trading their red *kaban* costumes (old nightgowns or sheets traditionally stored under the bed as a draw sheet) for African outfits and later costumes bearing the colors of the Martinican flag (black, red, and green), Akiyo members immediately considered the mobilization of previously banned music and instruments as anticolonial action. In the early 1980s, its participants went so far as to mock the French state by wearing military fatigues and colonial helmets. Believing that the group was damaging the reputation of the French army, the subprefect issued an order in 1985 prohibiting the band from performing in public. In reaction, more than eight thousand people demonstrated in the streets of Pointe-à-Pitre along with Akiyo. Since then, colonial outfits have become a trademark of the band. Combined with the beat of dozens of skin drums, played in unison while performing a fast-paced march (the *déboulé*), they reinforce the group's warlike character and never fail to impress audiences. Today, Akiyo's stated objective is to turn carnival into a place of expression, derision, an outlet for youth, where it is possible to denounce colonization, slavery, and the excess of assimilation without replacing the politics of protest (fig. 4).

together all the “nonwhite” populations of England; and a second, from the mid-1980s to the very early 2000s, which saw “the fracturing of this coalition” over the identity claims of various ethnic (and later, religious) groups. Claire Alexander, “Breaking Black: The Death of Ethnic and Racial Studies in Britain,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 6 (2018): 1038. A comparable analysis and chronology could be applied to the French West Indies.

30. Philip Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

31. While the name “Bô kannal” sounds like an abbreviated form of *Bord de canal* (canal’s edge), that is, the name given to the initially illegal neighborhood located along the Levassor canal, “bo” more commonly refers to a kiss, which gives the term a very affectionate dimension.

32. Kalenda is said to be the oldest of the African dances in Martinique. It is more improvisational than *bèlè*, as the dancer is alone in front of the drum. On the complexities of contemporary kalenda in the French Antilles, see Julian Gerstin, “The Allure of Origins. Neo-African Dances in the French Caribbean and the Southern United States,” in *Just Below South: Intercultural Performance in the Caribbean and the U.S. South*, ed. Jessica Adams, Michael P. Bibler, and Cécile Accilien (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007): 123–45.

33. *Chwal bwa* music owes its name to the eponymous merry-



Figure 4. Akyio’s *déboulé* on January 7, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vi3wWBSOKo>

### Sound Systems and the Celebration of Black Community

In the French overseas departments, the 1970s were characterized by the growth of a pro-independence, even nationalist, rhetoric that fostered a rediscovery of African music and dance as well as renewed interest in carnival, particularly among students. In contrast, young Afro-Caribbean people based in Paris or in the rest of France had little interest in festive traditions, and the same was true with English youths, especially those born in Jamaica.<sup>39</sup> Since most of them had been born and educated in London’s inner city neighborhoods, their cultural self-expression tended to favor the lyrics and rhythms of reggae as well as the concepts, beliefs, symbols, and practices of Rastafarianism, two forms popularized and conflated by Bob Marley and his band, the Wailers, who quickly became icons comparable to Marcus Garvey or Malcolm X. Marley’s songs spoke of violence, blood, fire, police, oppression, and revolt; but also of love and Jah Rastafari, the black God who would come to save black people and take them to the promised land, Africa. Indeed, reggae and Rastafarianism developed particularly in the 1960s in the poor districts of Kingston, the Jamaican capital, before spreading throughout the black diaspora, and young West Indians born in Britain, facing racism and segregation, soon identified with these movements. Gradually, reggae based in Great Britain began to emerge in the music and songs of Caribbean bands such as Aswad, Cimarons, Misty in Roots, and Steel Pulse, which tried to reflect in part the personal experience of black people in England. In this sense, reggae and Rastafarianism provided London’s Caribbean youth with a worldview, a political philosophy, and an exclusive language, as well as a set of rituals rooted in music, dance, and marijuana use.<sup>40</sup> More significantly, both participated in the formation of neighborhood groups that would gather around sound systems, allowing them to recreate forms of sociability away from the London’s nightclubs, from which they were generally excluded (although the 1968 and 1976 Race Relations Act had theoretically banned such discriminatory practices). Introduced in the 1974 Notting Hill Carnival, sound systems symbolically “took possession” of the city’s space-time, while the exhilaration triggered by the gathering, exacerbated by the massive consumption of alcohol and “God’s herb,” broke with contemporary norms of behavior. Made up of one or more turntables,

go-round that turns only with the strength of the men who push it to give it the necessary impetus.

In the center, musicians play traditional instruments such as the *chacha*, *ti-bwa*, the accordion, the Martinican flute, or the drum. Until the 1970s, this small wooden carousel was a feature of all local festivals in Martinique.

34. On May 14, 1971, during a demonstration by students of the Schœlcher High School against the visit of the minister of the interior, Pierre Messmer, a clash with the police led to the death of a high school student named Gérard Nouvet. The outcry that followed forced the minister to shorten part of his stay.

35. In early 1974, agricultural workers went on strike to obtain a five-franc wage increase. On February 14, 1974, a group of demonstrators headed north of the island. On the Chalvet plateau, they fell into an ambush set up by the French police, which surrounded the strikers with a helicopter and more than two hundred gendarmes. Stones were thrown against police officers, who responded with bullets. The confrontation left one worker dead and several injured. On February 16, the tortured body of a young man from Marigot was found abandoned on a beach.

36. On these events, see Louis-Georges Placide, *Les émeutes de décembre 1959 en Martinique. Un repère historique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009).

37. On May 22, 1848, some sixty thousand slaves from Martinique rebelled to enforce the abolition decree signed a month earlier by

an amplifier, numerous speakers, and an extensive collection of vinyl records, the sound system allowed the disc jockey to adjust the sounds to the tastes and moods of his audience, which made it an extremely powerful medium within the Afro-Caribbean community (fig. 5). In their presence, the streets were charged with unusual, frenetic energy.



Figure 5. Gladly Wax sound system, Notting Hill Carnival, August 2000. Author's photograph.

However, the multiplication of sound systems in carnival parades, the volume of the music they played, and the crowds they generated made them an increasingly problematic aspect of the festivities to residents and participants alike. The 1975 carnival was thus marked by an upsurge in pickpocketing, snatching, illegal alcohol sales, and damage to the gardens of residential areas, while only about sixty police officers were in attendance to ensure the safety of a demonstration previously perceived as anecdotal to London life. To meet these new challenges, various artists who participated in the Notting Hill Carnival came together in 1975 as an organization, the Carnival Development Committee (CDC), which encouraged the creation of new steel bands and masking groups and eventually redirected the carnival towards the Trinidad and Tobago tradition. In April 1976, the CDC met with the Council of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea as well as with the Metropolitan Police to discuss how to make the festivities safer. Its leaders then decided to increase the number of police officers to twelve hundred during the two days of carnival, a deployment of force that was quickly considered a provocation by many young West Indians, who already considered the police to be fundamentally racist. Some of them, loosely organized into gangs, started to harass police officers with stones and bottles before dispersing into the crowd. Hundreds of police officers and a few civilians were wounded and taken to the

members of the French government. In memory of this uprising, May 22 has become the day Martinicans commemorate abolition.

The date of May 10 was chosen for metropolitan France.

38. A founding member of the Akiyo collective, Joël Nankin, was convicted in 1983 for having committed attacks and violating the integrity of French territory, and was imprisoned until 1989.

39. There is a festival in Paris that owes a lot to the mobilization of the Caribbean people who live in metropolitan France. However, besides the fact that the Parisian city council of Paris largely initiated its creation in 2001, it should be noted that the "Carnaval Tropical de Paris" welcomes an ever-increasing variety of other countries and cultures and that the history of the Caribbean populations living in mainland France is, from this point of view, very different from that of black Britons. Broadly speaking, each group has much more in common with the population of the country in which it lives than with the Caribbean populations of other European countries. See Stéphanie Condon and Margaret Byron, *Migration in Comparative Perspective: Caribbean Communities in Britain and France* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

40. See the famous study by Dick Hebdige, "Reggae, Rastas and Rudies," in *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, ed. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1975), 135–55.

41. On the general history of Notting Hill Carnival, see Abner Cohen, "Drama and Politics in

hospital. The media and the government quickly escalated this confrontation, and carnival was from then on systematically associated with disorder and violence, while the general population's hostility increased.<sup>41</sup>

Two approaches to carnival emerged following the 1970s confrontations.<sup>42</sup> On the one hand, the CDC tried to strengthen its artistic dimension by drawing inspiration from the innovations introduced by Peter Minshall in the 1975 Trinidad Carnival. A former student of the Central School of Art and Design in London, this spiritual heir of George Bailey surprised by presenting a revolutionary scenography entitled "Paradise Lost," in reference to the famous epic poem by seventeenth-century English poet John Milton, with a group of two hundred carnival artists who walked around the streets of Port-of-Spain with huge, spectacular costumes. On the other hand, the Carnival and Arts Committee set out to turn Notting Hill Carnival into "a celebration of the Black community" that would reflect the needs and aspirations of Afro-Caribbean youth and allow them to express their latent frustrations. The violence of young blacks during the 1976 carnival was interpreted by these cultural activists as a symbolic attack on the British state. They therefore criticized any artistic approach as a form of depoliticization. In reaction to their criticisms, the CDC reorganized in 1977 under the authority of Darcus Howe, a Trinidadian who was also editor-in-chief of a Marxist magazine, *Race Today*. According to this influential advocate from the London West Indian community, the risk was, on the contrary, that the masses would turn away from anyone who tried to turn carnival into a political demonstration. This was summarized in 1977 by Linton Kwesi Johnson, a poet, singer, and member of the *Race Today* collective: "If politics creeps into art unconsciously, without the writer trying anything, it is often the most powerful political expression; but when artists try to be political in their art, it generally ends badly, whether in poetry or literature or in other art forms. People don't like to be lectured."<sup>43</sup> According to this perspective, any attempt at instrumentalizing carnival might end up killing it or at least blunting its political edge. Its organizers and participants had to remain focused on maintaining their autonomy from the authorities. Consequently, CDC officials in the 1980s condemned both the repeated attacks against Notting Hill Carnival launched by the Tory government and interference by the Labour Party, which was then ruling the Greater London Council and whose leader, Ken Livingstone, was working to rebrand the celebration as a symbol of true multiculturalism and an outpost of resistance to Margaret Thatcher's politics.<sup>44</sup>

### 3. Marronage and Cultural Resistance: The Invention of New Forms of Collective Action

Since the eighteenth century, the carnivalesque repertoire and the meaning of carnival itself have constantly been reconceptualized and redesigned in the Caribbean to serve the political needs and goals of various groups and individual actors. Carnival is not merely a spectacle; it is a celebration in which everyone is called upon to participate and express themselves. Unlike the fine arts, which foreground the eye as the main channel through which people can experience beauty and maintain a distance between the viewer and the artist's work, carnival arts celebrate interaction and a diversity of viewpoints.<sup>45</sup> Like other popular festivals, carnival allows Afro-Caribbean people to attest to their mutual presence—to see, hear, feel, touch, rub shoulders, and support each other. In this way, carnival appears as a survival of traditional cultures, which, unlike modern societies, did not experience such a clear division between the cultural, social, economic, and political spheres.<sup>46</sup>

the Development of a London Carnival," in *Custom and Conflict in British Society*, ed. Ronald Frankenberg (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1982), 313–44; and Lionel Arnaud, "À qui appartient le carnaval? Circulations, (ré)appropriations et résistances à Notting Hill (Londres, 1958-2008)," in *Les capitales européennes de la culture depuis 1945: Berlin, Londres, Madrid, Paris*, ed. Françoise Taliano-Des Garets (Bordeaux: PUG, 2020, forthcoming).

42. Everton A. Pryce, "The Notting Hill Gate Carnival. Black Politics, Resistance, and Leadership 1976-1978," *Caribbean Quarterly* 2, no. 31 (1995): 35–52.

43. Linton Kwesi Johnson, "Jamaican Rebel Music," *Race and Class* 17, no. 4 (1976): 411.

44. Lionel Arnaud, *Réinventer la ville. Artistes, minorités ethniques et militants au service des politiques de développement urbain. Une comparaison franco-britannique* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008).

45. On the inherently dialogic dimension of carnival, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helen Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984); and Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

46. Émile Durkheim, *De la division du travail social* (Paris: PUF, 2004 [1893]).

47. On maroon communities throughout the Americas, see Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities*

In the Caribbean, the conjunction of social and cultural claims has to do with colonial history and slavery. Thus, one of the specificities of the Caribbean is undoubtedly that social struggles have been built in close connection with cultural practices. Much like the use of the Creole language has been erected as an act of political resistance—especially when it takes written forms that were unknown until about thirty years ago—carnival bands today use "country" food, certain forms of social assistance, and traditional music based on skin drums to revive the more or less mythicized economic, social, and cultural resistance capability of the maroons. Hence the need to shift our gaze from the mere processes of aesthetic and identity reinterpretation to the repertoires that are part of their practical organization.

### *Marronage Practices in Caribbean Cultural Movements*

To groups like Akiyo or Tanbo Bô Kannal, the reference to marronage is central. Marronage refers to the seventeenth- to nineteenth-century phenomenon of slaves running away from the plantations to join independent communities of fugitive slaves in inaccessible, inhospitable environments (swamps in the southern United States, canyons in Jamaica, forests in Suriname, jungles in the Guianas).<sup>47</sup> Cultural life in these settlements was often rooted in Africa. Today, the most militant carnival bands call for a new kind of marronage, "cultural marronage," equating *gwoka* and *bèlè* with resistance practices.<sup>48</sup> Akiyo often retells the history of abolition, declaring that it was not truly the French abolitionist Victor Schœlcher who freed the slaves, but rather the maroons who fought for liberty for generations. The question of whether statistically significant marronage practices actually existed in Guadeloupe and Martinique is of little relevance here. As with the African masks used by Voukoum, the reconstruction of history consolidates Afro-Caribbean identity around the pride of having had enslaved, but rebellious and free-spirited, ancestors.<sup>49</sup>

This dynamic was first inspired by folk musicians such as Vélo in Guadeloupe or Ti Emile in Martinique, who conceptualized the practice of Afro-Caribbean drumming and dancing from an "existential" point of view, as a way of "retaining the old world," more than as a strictly political positioning. Michel Halley, one of Akiyo's founders who developed his drumming skills in contact with Vélo, explains that "for a man like Vélo, independent or non-independent, colonial or noncolonial, white or nonwhite Guadeloupe ... it was not his concern, it never was his concern. His concern was to play, to be able to sleep and eat, and to practice freely (as much as he could) his art of Ka, that's all."<sup>50</sup> Gradually, however, and in a context of increasing nationalist and identity-based claims, the approach inherited from these "ordinary" musicians<sup>51</sup> was mobilized and transformed into acts of cultural and political resistance toward the French state by the generations born after the war (fig. 6). The slave, the maroon, and the *morne* (small mountain) farmer were conflated in the collective imagination into a single mythical character whose drumming skills allowed him to free himself spiritually and physically from the plantation system. In this respect, the practice of *bèlè* and *gwoka* became associated with a call for cultural independence meant to combat the "Frenchification" of Martinican and Guadeloupean societies generated by the transformation of the islands into French departments in 1946.

in the Americas (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and Alvin O. Thompson, *Flight to Freedom: African Runaways and Maroons in the Americas* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2006). On the Martinican case, see Gabriel Debien, "Le Maronnage aux Antilles françaises au XVIIIe siècle," *Caribbean Studies* 6, no. 3 (Oct. 1966): 3–43.

48. On cultural marronage from the West Indies to Madagascar to Brazil, see Stéphanie Melyon-Reinette, ed., *Maronnage and Arts: Revolts in Bodies and Voices* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012).

49. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

50. Michel Halley interviewed by Gustav Michaux-Vignes, *La Médiathèque Caraïbe*, 2001, accessed November 16, 2018, <http://www.lameca.org/publications-numeriques/interviews-audio/michel-halley-2003/> (my translation). In Antillean Creole the particle "ka" expresses the fact that an action is being performed, but it also refers to the art of drumming, or to the drum itself, which is single-headed, barrel-shaped and stretched with goat- (or kid-)skin.

51. Marc Perrenoud, *Les Musicos. Enquête sur des musiciens ordinaires* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007).

52. Luciani Lanoir L'Etang, *Réseaux de solidarité dans la Guadeloupe d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005).



Figure 6. Public performance by Akiyo in the pedestrian streets of Pointe-à-Pitre, where they perform every Saturday morning. Credit: Otto Von Viani, 2020. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=86799984>

While a new musical and choreographic repertoire was added to Antillean Carnival, transforming it into a place of cultural reinvention and political expression, modes of social organization more or less inherited from the experience of slavery such as the *Koudmen* (helping hand), which consisted in freely offering one's services to lighten the burden of someone building their house or farming a piece of land, were increasingly championed by cultural movements as a way to counter Antillean societies' growing individualism and consumerism.<sup>52</sup>

Today, the workshops organized in preparation for carnival provide an introduction to the musical style of each band, as well as to the fabrication of musical instruments or costumes. This informal transmission process takes place in two stages: during the period leading to the fat days, when advice and assistance can be obtained for the preparation of new outfits or for the improvement of instrumental practice; and during the rest of the year, when the groups' performance calendar clears up, allowing outsiders to take part in the social and leisure activities offered to members.

Though rooted in the experience of slavery, cultural marronage cannot fail to recall other artistic practices that have generated new forms of sociability and blurred the lines between the politics of protest and cultural revival, such as the artistic squats of large contemporary cities and the rural communities that emerged after May 1968 in France.<sup>53</sup> In 1980s London, preparations for Notting Hill Carnival took place within the framework of community centers that were often run by activists close to the British New Left, who wanted to fight social and racial segregation while demystifying the cultural structures that conditioned social relations.<sup>54</sup> Gradually, and as the civil rights movement became more radical in the United States, these community centers became the nexus of Afro-Caribbean life. Costume workshops, concerts, and plays inspired by the Black Arts Movement were organized to raise local residents' social and cultural awareness.<sup>55</sup> Some centers explicitly engaged in memory work aimed at reclaiming a connection to Africa while promoting a kind of cultural nationalism that came out of the independence movements. For instance, the Yaa Asantewaa Arts & Community Center located in the Paddington district took the name of Ghanaian Queen Yaa Asantewaa (1850–1921) in 1985, thus honoring the woman "who successfully led the heroic and ultimate struggle to maintain the national integrity and

53. See George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1997); and Laura Portwood-Stacer, *Lifestyle Politics and Radical Activism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

54. Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

55. Presented as the artistic branch of the Black Power Movement, the Black Arts Movement emerged in the mid-1960s in New York's Harlem district. Its founders insisted on the need to forge an art that acts, creates, and fights ("We want poems that kill"), making the artist a major actor of black political resistance. See Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation. Amiri Baraka and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

56. Yaa Asantewaa Arts & Cultural Centre website, accessed July 8, 2020, <https://yaacentrew9.com/about-us/>.

57. The notion of "conscientization" is part of the classical repertoire of popular and political education activists who, from Mao-Zedong to Augusto Boal, have used knowledge and culture in general as instruments of militancy and political awakening of the oppressed masses. In Martinique, this approach has been taken up by various cultural movements such as the Groupe Culturel 22 Mai 1848 or An Lòt Chimen Pou la Jénès (ALCPJ,

ancient cultural heritage of her people."<sup>56</sup> Today, the wall of the vast courtyard where most of the Notting Hill Carnival parades are prepared remains adorned with portraits of great black leaders—including Claudia Jones, Amillar Cabral, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, Bob Marley, Queen Nzinga, Walter Rodney, and Sojourner Truth—painted in black against a background of green, yellow and red, that is, the three colors of the Pan-African flag (fig. 7).



Figure 7. Fabrication of a costume in the main hall at the Yaa Asantewaa Arts & Community Center, London, August 2002. Author's photograph.

### *Mobilizing Traditions and Popular Culture to Sustain a Protest Agenda*

Since the 1970s Antillean political activists have gradually turned away from overt political action and have immersed themselves in the social reality of the working classes, speaking Creole and adopting their cultural practices, in order to offer in return a revolutionary struggle agenda rooted in their daily lives. Together with singers and *bèlè/gwoka* musicians, they have contributed to reviving clandestine *swaré bèlè* and *léwòz*, night parties that used to punctuate rural and mountain life and which they now use to raise political consciousness among the black inhabitants of Guadeloupe and Martinique.<sup>57</sup> This way of mobilizing traditions and popular culture for protest purposes became particularly manifest during the 2009 general strike against *pwofitasyon*. Originating in Guadeloupe at the beginning of December 2008 at the initiative of the LKP (Liyannaj Kont Pwofitasyon, or Alliance against Exploitation), a large coalition of trade unions and associations, this protest movement spread to Martinique on February 5, 2009, and continued until March 5 as part of an unprecedented social movement against the high cost of living and, more generally, the economic and cultural dispossession that overseas inhabitants experience daily.<sup>58</sup> Akiyo and Voukoum took part in the negotiations with the French government,

Another Path for Youth), which in the 1970s set out to reconquer the consciences and bodies of the Martinican “people” by revalorizing certain artistic practices such as dance and the *bèlè* drum. See Lionel Arnaud, “Une conscientisation ‘pratique.’ Les mobilisations culturelles des habitants d’un quartier populaire de Fort-de-France, entre autonomisation et politisation,” *Sociétés contemporaines* (forthcoming).

58. Yarimar Bonilla, *Non-sovereign Futures: French Caribbean Politics in the Wake of Disenchantment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Pierre Odin, *Pwofitasyon. Luttes syndicales et anticolonialisme en Guadeloupe et en Martinique* (Paris: La Découverte, 2019).

59. From slave cemeteries to *habitations*, from Fort Delgrès to the streets of Pointe-à-Pitre where the drums of the *gwo-ka* resound, from the Schoelcher Museum to the ACTe Memorial, the memory sites scattered across Guadeloupe are now part of a “Slave Route” itinerary. Interpreters tell visitors about slavery and the imprint it has left everywhere, on the territory and on people’s minds. This enables Guadeloupeans to reclaim their history by searching for their roots and ancestors.

acting as lead mediators on societal—more precisely, cultural—issues. Among their demands: that the language and culture of Guadeloupe be taken into account in media programming, that popular memory sites be rehabilitated, and that a cultural institute be created to celebrate Guadeloupean popular culture and preserve the memory of slavery.<sup>59</sup> During demonstrations, the two groups initiated and supervised major *déboulés* (*mas a konsyans* or “carnival of conscience,” and *mas a pwofitasyon* or “carnival of profiteering,” which to many looked and sounded like political marches.)

This mobilization of *kiltir* (culture) and of the carnival reference has now clearly become part of the “repertoire of contention” promoted by trade unions and revolutionary and/or nationalist parties, both in Martinique and in Guadeloupe. In Fort-de-France, TBK members accompanied the demonstrations that took place in February 2009 as an extension of the general strike that had started in Guadeloupe two months earlier. Thirty-seven years after its writing, the carnival song “Tchè Nou Blindé” (Our heart is armored) became the anthem of the protesters, and is still played nowadays in the meetings of the pro-independence parties and movements (fig. 8).



Figure 8. Tanbo Bô Kannal and demonstrators singing “Tchè Nou Blindé” in the streets of Fort-de-France during the 2009 general strike. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YsTZF8N6-E0>

On May 9, 2015, on the eve of the inauguration of the ACTe Memorial (a monumental museum located in Pointe-à-Pitre and dedicated to the memory of the slave trade and slavery) by French president François Hollande, the LKP organized a ceremony in honor of the “slave ancestors” at the Palais de la Mutualité (Trade Union House) in Pointe-à-Pitre. In the tradition of mortuary vigils, activists followed one another to perform texts and poems to the rhythm of drums. Fruits and flowers were placed on a specially arranged altar before being transported by the crowd to the fishing port, where they were thrown into the ocean. Accompanied by the songs and music of Akiyo, the ritual clearly highlighted the blurring of the commonly accepted boundaries between

60. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 19.
61. Erik Neveu, *Sociologie des mouvements sociaux*, 3rd ed. (Paris: La Découverte, 2002), 24.
62. Becker and Faulkner, "Do You Know...?"
63. Roy Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
64. Lionel Arnaud, "The Marketing of Diversity and the Aestheticization of Differences. The Cultural Expressions of Ethnic Minorities Put to the Test of New Urban Cultural Policies," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 22, no. 1 (2016): 9–26.

social and cultural mobilizations, political action and cultural action, as well as the extent to which carnival repertoires are subject to constant attention and mobilization.

## Conclusion

Because it is largely based on double entendre, distortion, and inversion, carnival perfectly illustrates the "infrapolitics of subordinate groups" studied by James Scott, that is, "a wide variety of low-profile forms of resistance that dare not speak in their own name" and that develop only because they cannot challenge the existing social and political order.<sup>60</sup>

Among the descendants of Africans deported to the Americas, carnival was quickly seen as an equivocal, contentious performance that, though inscribed in dominant forms, could nonetheless be used to challenge social and racial positions and "reinvent a symbolic activity to perform group identity."<sup>61</sup> As such, American carnival has always been subject to reinterpretation based on the actors' interests and purposes, leading to alliances or confrontations. The constitution of the carnival action repertoire is a complex phenomenon, which does not always draw on a reservoir of stable actions but rather proceeds from permanent reinventions and reappropriations. Like the constitution of the jazz repertoire described by Howard Becker and Robert Faulkner, it requires the participation of a vast number of people, each bringing their own conceptions of their history and geographical location, which involves more or less explicit discussions and negotiations about what participants can and should do, given the pressure exerted by the context and the other people involved.<sup>62</sup>

But the repertoires mobilized today by the carnival bands of Fort-de-France, London, and Pointe-à-Pitre are not only "means" or mere aesthetic forms: they are also their own ends. Or rather, they are part of an act of identity affirmation that is supposed to exemplify a society in the making. In other words, the mobilization of a *tambour a po* or of a sound system is not only an aesthetic gesture, any more than the valorization of the *Kouidmen* can only be explained by economic contingency: all these cultural practices are part of a historical genealogy and affirm a way of life. "As Martinican activists often explain, *Bèlè, Danmyé, sé dansé, sé mizik, sé an manniè viv* [*Bèlè, danmyé, they're about dancing, about music, they're a way of life*]." These features are the hallmark of the specificity of cultural movements; their repertoires of action do not only aim at mobilizing or supporting the struggle, but also contain a philosophy and a set of principles of action with the potential to play a catalytic role in the transformation of cultural preferences, measures, and values.<sup>63</sup>

The free-floating nature of the carnival repertoire also means that it can be interpreted and appropriated in ways that sometimes contradict the objectives of cultural movements. Indeed, while I have highlighted the growing mobilization of carnival in Fort-de-France, London, and Pointe-à-Pitre for protest purposes, I also want to acknowledge that the repertoires of cultural movements that seek to revalue the African past, and more properly Caribbean history (and therefore the fight against the oversight of crimes related to slavery and colonization) can also be recruited by local governments in order to promote tourism. This is particularly well illustrated by the London case, where a cultural movement rooted in an experience of racism and segregation has been converted into a mega-event designed and organized for the benefit of the city's social and economic development.<sup>64</sup> In this case, the objective is less to "raise consciousness,"

65. Kevin Fox Gotham, "Marketing Mardi Gras: Commodification, Spectacle and the Political Economy of Tourism in New Orleans," *Urban Studies* 39, no. 10 (2002): 1735–56

66. Michel Giraud, "La patrimonialisation des cultures antillaises," *Ethnologie française* 29, no. 3 (1999): 375–86.

and even less to protest, than to assemble, acknowledge, and turn cultural and social identities into "heritage"—in other words, to reduce them to cultural objects or even to (multicultural) spectacles.<sup>65</sup> Such a transformation is far from benign: it turns Afro-Caribbean populations into powerless spectators of what is proclaimed to be *their* culture, as if it were no longer a question of renewing, challenging, or enriching it.<sup>66</sup> It reminds us that the mobilization of the carnival repertoire for political purposes does not necessarily affirm an existence that is subject to any form of interpretation but can also contribute to transforming cultural dynamics into inert knowledge, ossified traditions, aesthetics detached from a sociohistorical substrate that remains, at heart, necessarily contentious.

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## AUTHOR BIO

**Lionel Arnaud** is Professor of Sociology at Paul Sabatier University in Toulouse, France, and a member of the Laboratoire des Sciences Sociales du Politique (Sc Po Toulouse/ Université Toulouse 3). He is currently leading an international research team comparing the implementation of cultural rights in the cities of Cape Town (South Africa), Salvador de Bahia (Brazil), and Toulouse (France). His research interests focus more broadly on cultural movements and development policies in Europe and the rest of the world. He is particularly interested in the ways culture can be politicized or depoliticized and in the cultural practices of racialized and ethnicized populations. He recently published *Agir par la culture. Acteurs, enjeux et mutations des mouvements culturels* (Toulouse: L'Attribut, 2018) and *Les Tambours de Bô Kannal. Mobilisations et résistances culturelles en Martinique* (Paris: Karthala, 2020). More information can be found on his web page: <http://lassp.sciencespo-toulouse.fr/Lionel-ARNAUD-239>.

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# Playing and Praying: The Politics of Race, Religion, and Respectability in Trinidad Carnival

**Milla Cozart Riggio**

Trinity College, Hartford, CT, United States

## KEYWORDS

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## ABSTRACT

Theorizing carnival throughout the Americas means dealing not only with class and social issues in the context of modernity but also with the complexities of slavery, indentureship, colonialism, and neocolonialism reflected in this pre-Lenten festival. Dealing with carnival generally, it is impossible to separate its Christian, primarily Catholic, framework from the politics of its evolution and development. In the Americas, and in the island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in particular, the carnival story is further complicated by deeply embedded African and Asian influences. In a nation in which political parties are still largely race-based, with the division identified as “Afro-” or “Indo-,” politics are entwined not only with race and religion but also with class distinctions that realign supposed antagonists. This article traces the Afro-Trinidadian People’s National Movement (PNM) party’s paradoxical attempt to claim carnival as a national festival, while negating the essence of the emancipation carnival narrative that underlay its claim. It then examines warrior traditions crucial to that narrative. Afro-based *kalinda*, the martial art form that spawned stickfighting (or *bois*, as it is called in patois, with the fighters known as “boismen”) intermingled with Indo-identified stickfighting known as *gatka*, and the Indo-based, whipcracking *jab jabs* (devil-devils). Though racially distinct, these Afro- and Indo- traditions, which are actively being revived today, share world views (radically different from the ethos of Christian “respectability”) that honor the living presence of ancestors, acknowledge conflict as basic to life, respect nature as a living partner in human community, and practice rituals that are as sacred and protective as they are fundamentally violent.

1. This essay is dedicated to my close friend and academic partner Tony Hall, who died unexpectedly on April 27, 2020. A Trinidadian filmmaker, playwright, and teacher extraordinaire, he assisted me throughout the research for this article.

2. Initially colonized by the Spanish, Trinidad was ceded to the English by the Treaty of Amiens in 1802, after a virtually bloodless invasion by General Abercrombie in 1797. However, in an attempt to keep the sparsely settled island, known in the eighteenth century mainly as the Gateway to El Dorado, the famed city of gold, in Catholic hands, the Spanish had in 1783 signed a Cedula of population, granting land to any Catholic settlers, with additional land for each enslaved worker. French Creoles answered this call, so that by the time the English controlled the island, the largest free population was French Creole (with a mixture of what were known as “free coloureds,” whom the English did not want to enfranchise). The history of Trinidad throughout the nineteenth century was, thus, distinctive as it did not have a single colonizing hegemony. It was governed by the Protestant English who created the Crown colony system for this colony, governing from England through a governor rather than an elected parliamentary body, in order to avoid the problem of the numerous “free coloureds.” The English made the laws, but remained in differing degrees of tension with the Catholic French and Spanish elites. There were also both English- and French patois-speaking underclasses. Following emancipation, which was completed in 1838, beginning

## Playing and Praying: The Politics of Race, Religion, and Respectability in Trinidad Carnival<sup>1</sup>

Milla Cozart Riggio

*The Trinidad Carnival carries a heavy symbolic, economic, and political burden: it is a “national theatre,” the foundation of cultural heritage, and the centerpiece of a tourism industry.*

—John Hearne, *Trinidad Guardian*, 1962

*A gayelle is like a portal, a place to access transcendence ... kalinda and jab are their own thing. Beyond religion and politics.*

—John Stewart, 2013

Theorizing carnival throughout the Americas means dealing not only with class and social issues in the context of the industrializing forces of modernity but also with the complexities of enslavement, indentureship, colonialism, and neocolonialism reflected in this pre-Lenten spring festival. Dealing with carnival in general, it is impossible to separate its Christian, primarily Catholic, framework from the politics of its evolution and development. In the Americas, and in the island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) in particular, the carnival story is further complicated not only by competing European elites (Spanish and French, Catholic and Protestant English), but also by deeply embedded African and Asian influences.<sup>2</sup> In a nation in which political parties are still to some extent race-based, with the division identified primarily as “Afro-” or “Indo-,”<sup>3</sup> politics are entwined not only with race and religion but also with class distinctions that realign supposed antagonists.

In the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane, pre-Lenten carnival is characteristically figured as profane, the last carnivorous hurrah before the ascetic discipline of Lent. However, reflecting what Aisha Khan calls “the deeply religious character of Trinidadian society,” in T&T this formula does not hold.<sup>4</sup> The Afro-Trinidadian People’s National Movement (PNM) party, led by Oxford PhD and ex-Howard University professor Eric Williams, sacralized carnival itself as the symbol of the new nation that gained its independence in 1962. At the heart of that claim lay a contradiction. The 1956 “Trinidad Carnival Issue” of the *Caribbean Quarterly*, which identified carnival with its nineteenth-century “traditional” origins, solidified the idealization of T&T Carnival as an Afro-Trinidadian emancipation festival. However, political governance was firmly in middle-class hands. According to Scott B. McDonald, “by 1962 party politics were firmly established as a middle sector realm. Both the PNM and the D[emocratic] L[abour] P[arty] were nationalistic, largely pro-capitalist, and led by elites that were overwhelmingly middle class in composition. During a brief period of accommodation between the two parties, a tacit, yet uneasy class ‘alliance’ emerged.”<sup>5</sup> Claiming a carnival that had been shaped in the cauldron of resistance, the PNM attempted to impose on that festival the sober work ethic of its puritanical, British-educated, middle-class “Afro-Saxon” government.<sup>6</sup>

Acting almost as an arm of the government, the *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper in the decade leading up to independence repeatedly reinforced PNM exhortations to good behavior. Established in 1917, the *Guardian* is the longest continuously running T&T newspaper. After World War I, the conservative *Port of Spain Gazette* continued to denounce carnival. The Port of Spain evening paper, *Argos*, with a publisher of “Chinese ancestry” whose “editor and staff were black

in 1845, Hindu and (lesser numbers of) Muslim Indian indentured workers replaced the Africans on estates, thus further complicating the racial and religious distinctions. Tobago, which in 1976 became a partner in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, has a separate history. Though conquered by many different European powers, its primary population is Afro- in origin, with English as the primary language and Britain as the main colonizing power. Tobago did not celebrate carnival until the 1920s. Thus, its history is distinct and will not be considered in detail in this study.

3. Throughout this article, "Indian" refers to those whose ancestors came from the subcontinent of India (largely from the north), not to indigenous populations. Indian and African refer to sites of origin and will usually be identified as Indo- and Afro-.

4. *Callaloo Nation: Metaphors of Race and Religious Identity among South Asians in Trinidad* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) 19. Such expressions thread through Carnival mas (illustrated by Peter Minshall), music (Andre Tanker, Ataklan, Brother Resistance, David Rudder all sing songs of the divine), and even, as will be illustrated in this paper, Power Soca.

5. Scott B. McDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago: Democracy and Development in the Caribbean* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986), 145.

6. Economist Lloyd Best coined the term "Afro-Saxon" (1965) to designate those of African descent who identify with the ruling white colonial class. See Lise

creoles of liberal persuasion," was, in the terms of Philip W. Scher, "the mouthpiece of the colored middle classes," urging Governor Chancellor to resume carnival in 1919 but insisting on reform while billing itself as the voice of the people against the *Guardian* (representing the elite), which sponsored the "Victory Carnival" of 1919, in Port of Spain at the Queen's Park Savannah and in San Fernando. *Argos* "was eventually forced to cease publication." The *Trinidad Guardian*, still publishing, reinforced the focus on Europeanized, middle-class "respectability."

Using the *Guardian* archives as a primary source, this article first traces the PNM's paradoxical attempt to claim carnival as a national festival, while negating the essence of its history. Then, calling on my nearly three decades of experience, field work/interviews, and research in Trinidad (1991–2019), I examine warrior traditions crucial to the emancipation carnival narrative, which undermined the attempt to enshrine as Afro-Trinidadian a politely tamed, European-influenced festival. Afro-based *kalinda*, the martial art form that spawned stickfighting (or *bois*, as it is called in patois, with the fighters known as "boismen"), intermingled with Indo-identified stickfighting known as *gatka* and the Indo-based, whipcracking *jab jabs* (devil-devils). Though racially distinct, these Afro- and Indo- traditions, which are actively being revived today, share a worldview radically different from the ethos of Christian "respectability." Despite differences in origin, these traditions share beliefs in the ancestral presence that guides the present path, follow similar processes of spiritual preparation, and collectively pay homage to human community as a component of the natural environment.

Neither stickfighting nor whipcracking originated in carnival. The traditions from which they derived were carried to Trinidad, where they evolved within the local Afro- and Indo- communities. T&T Carnival provided the opportunity to publicly perform ritualized martial arts that were in essence religious rites, throughout the island of Trinidad (and ultimately Tobago) in "rings" and "gayelles" (stickfighting rings). In the southern fishing village of Cedros, both stick- and whipfighting occurred as part of the nominally Shi'ite Muharram festival of Hosay. While *kalinda* and *jab*, unlike *gatka*, have for well over a century evolved as forms of carnival mas, they exemplify the ritual practices and religious enactments of enslaved and indentured workers and their descendants, for whom playing is inevitably a form of praying.



Figure 1. Keegan Taylor, co-founder and a current director of the Bois Academy of Trinidad and Tobago, Stickfighting Finals at Skinner Park, San Fernando, 2015. Note that the National Carnival Commission-organized finals are not in a gayelle. Photograph by Maria Nunes. All Nunes photographs used by permission of photographer.

Winer, "Afro-Saxon," *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad and Tobago: On Historical Principles* (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press), 7. For a discussion of the ambiguous middle-class attempts to regulate carnival, in relationship to the emergence of "the spirit of canboulay" in the second half of the twentieth century, see Pater van Koningsbruggen, *Trinidad Carnival: The Quest for National Identity* (London: MacMillan Education Ltd., 1997), esp. 240–56.

7. See John Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso: Traditions in the Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 208–22, quotations 208, 211, 222, for the post-World War I information; see Philip W. Scher, *Carnival and the Formation of a Caribbean Transnation* (Gainesboro: University Press of Florida, 2003), 45–49, quotation on 46.

8. Quoted in the *Trinidad Guardian*, Friday, March 2, 1962, 1.

9. Jocelyne Guilbaut, *Governing Sound: The Cultural Politics of Trinidad's Carnival Musics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 223.

10. Though this division has been recognized for a few years, 2019 was the first year in which there were two separate Monarchs, one for Power Soca and one for Groovy Soca.

11. "Iwer George - Water Blessings - International Soca Monarch Finals 2019 - Trinidad Carnival 2019," Soca Nation Live, YouTube video, March 2, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-dlSKVOUqf4&list=RDXdlSKVOUqf4&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-dlSKVOUqf4&list=RDXdlSKVOUqf4&start_radio=1).

## "Fun without Violence": Cleaning Up and Claiming Carnival as a National Festival

"Play mask, stay sober, and do not misbehave."

—Eric Williams, 1962<sup>8</sup>

There is now both a calypso monarch and a soca monarch in Trinidad Carnival each year. Soca, a term derived from "soul calypso," is, as Jocelyn Guilbault has called it, a "musical offshoot" of calypso:

with which it shares the same space, namely, carnival. Since 1993, soca has used the conceptual framework and infrastructure of competitions that informs the calypso music industry to gain legitimacy and recognition... [S]oca's sounds ... perform their own version of nation in carnival.<sup>9</sup>

Soca has recently been divided into two categories, "power soca," with a pounding, driving beat, and "groovy soca," somewhat more mellow and melodic.<sup>10</sup> In 2019, each had its own champion, with competitions in the same venue on the same day. The finals took place as usual on the Friday before Carnival Tuesday.

In the International Soca Monarch Finals on March 1, 2019, Trinidadian (Neil) Iwer George began his performance draped in a long robe, before a large, projected Trinidad flag, proclaiming: "I am a king. I came because I had no choice. I came to save Power Soca, my home and the people I love, my country." A female back-up chorus then sang, "When Jesus say it, no one can say no ... because I am blest," before George, divested of his robe, began to sing, positioned before a screen portraying him as Neptune, God-King of the Sea, below "WaTerblessing," the name of his soca, the "t" modified as a cross.<sup>11</sup> As he made clear throughout the performance, George portrayed himself as an already crowned king/god-figure, a Jesus of the sea, savior of his island, while appealing to national loyalty to defeat the leading contender, Mr. Killa (Grenadian Hollice Jonah Mapp). As powerful as it was, this combination of religion and nationalism did not earn him the crown. Killa took it home to Grenada, along with the TT \$1,000,000 prize.

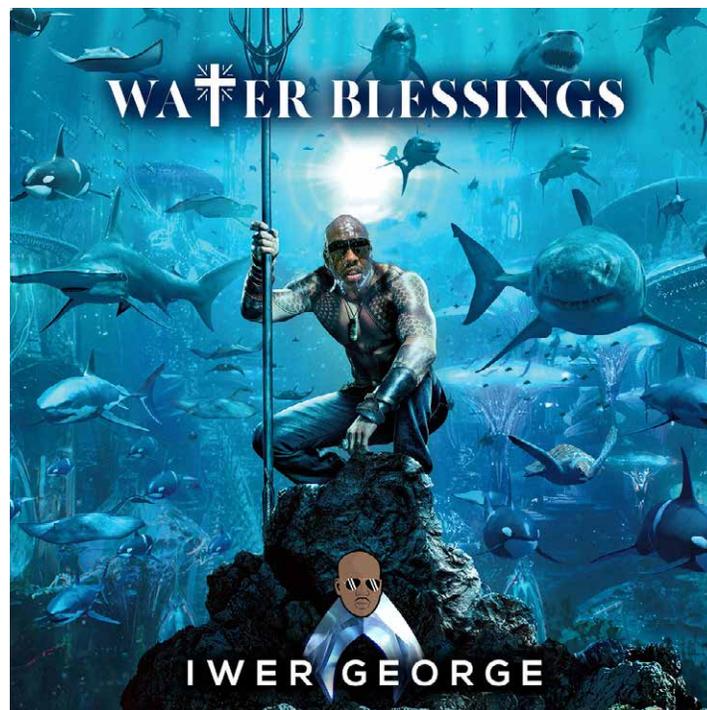


Figure 2. "WaTerblessings," Iwer George projected as Neptune, International Soca Monarch Finals, March 1, 2019. Image designed for singles CD cover for "WaTerblessings." Graphic Designer Kyle Awon. Used with Permission.

12. Grenada, an island close to Trinidad, has had its own Caribbean-style carnival for many decades; one of Trinidad's leading calypsonians, (the Mighty)

Sparrow (Slinger Francisco), is Grenadian. Indeed, Point Fortin, lower George's home, is a locus of Grenadian immigrants, as critics were quick to point out, raising questions about George's own ancestry.

13. Woodford Square is a large, central, park-like square in Port of Spain, across from both City Hall and the Red House, which served as the seat of government for many years. Williams created this "university," as he called it, by lecturing to masses of people in the square in 1955, consolidating his political base. His first lecture was said to have drawn 20,000 people.

14. Thirteen years before the creation of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in 1976.

15. The Carnival Queen competition was essentially a beauty contest (which added a costume component), "part of [a] programme of moral and cultural 'cleaning.'" See Rochelle Rowe, *Imagining Caribbean Womanhood: Race, Nation and Beauty Contests, 1929–70* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1988), chapter 2.

16. Rex Nettleford, "Implications for Caribbean Development," in *Caribbean Festival Arts: Every Little Piece of Difference*, ed. John Nunley and Judith Bettleheim (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 183.

17. Statement in the *Trinidad Guardian*, March 2, 1962, 1.

Mr. Killa was not the only Grenadian to score big in the "International Soca Monarch" competition in Port of Spain, Trinidad, in 2019, nor was he the first.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, the combination with which George chose to make his plea—claiming carnival (and soca) for Trinidad, while using the medium to confer a "waTerblessing" on his island, partly for commercial reasons (to win the prize and keep the money home)—captures the religious fervor with which this festival has been embraced as the "national" celebration of T&T, conferring blessings on this favored isle, but with commercially inflected conditions.

Claiming carnival as the national festival did not originate in the 1950s, but it was highlighted in the process of declaring independence. As the short-lived, ten-island Federation of the West Indies stumbled toward its dissolution in the early 1960s, in Trinidad the newly established PNM (Afro-based) party won the national election in 1956, with Oxford PhD, ex-Howard University history professor, and self-professed lecturer to the people in the "University of Woodford Square"<sup>13</sup> Dr. Eric Williams assuming his two-year role as chief minister. Then, rebounding from an electoral loss, in 1961 Williams was elected prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, which would become independent in August 1962.<sup>14</sup>

In 1957, the year following the first PNM victory, Williams's government established the Carnival Development Committee and created the Band of the Year judging category, with the Queen of the (Mas) Bands competition to begin in 1959 (as a rival to the Jaycees ballgown Carnival Queen competition that had begun after World War II, initially sponsored by the *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper<sup>15</sup>). Though the PNM lost the election in 1958 to the rival Democratic Labour Party (DLP), in the next few years, "developing" carnival—both artistically and economically—became part of what Rex Nettleford would later call "nation-building," with "the manipulation of symbols, festivals included," clearly in Afro-Trinidadian hands.<sup>16</sup> By 1962, the year of independence, Williams claimed carnival as Trinidad's "national festival":

I hope that every one, citizen and foreigner, hosts and guests, masqueraders and spectators, will enjoy every minute of our national festival, and contribute to making this year's Carnival as colourful, as spectacular, as law-abiding, as orderly and as successful as anyone can reasonably ask for. Play mask, stay sober, and do not misbehave.<sup>17</sup>

The following year, in the first postindependence (1963) carnival, Afro-Trinidad playwright and carnival scholar Errol Hill directed and Chinese-Trinidad artist Carlisle Chang designed the Sunday-night gala known as Dimanche Gras,<sup>18</sup> using "traditional" carnival characters as a base to inaugurate the new nation. The recently instituted Queen of the Bands and the Calypso King competitions were the capstones of a carefully orchestrated show. A traditional carnival character called the Baby Doll gave birth on stage.<sup>19</sup> The newly crowned Calypso King (Sparrow, singing "Dan is the man in the van" and "Kennedy and Khrushchev") and the Queen of Carnival bands (Miss Kay Christopher, portraying a high priestess of the Etruscans from Edmond Hart's historical mas band) were named "godparents" of this infant, signifying T&T itself. The birth of the nation was memorialized in carnival drama drawing heavily on Trinidadian folklore:

By winning their respective crowns, King Sparrow and Queen Kay earned the right to be godparents of Baby Doll's infant, who was named by Papa Bois, the Independent Nation of Trinidad and Tobago, in Errol Hill's well-co-ordinated extravangaza [sic]. The capacity audience, which included the Governor-General and Lady Hochoy

18. Errol Hill's *Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1972), was a seminal history, though its focus on carnival as a "mandate for a national theatre" somewhat underplayed the street carnival. Chang also designed carnival mas, particularly for bands led by another Chinese-Trinidadian, Stephen Lee Yeung. He headed the group that designed the Trinidad and Tobago flag, red, white, and black instead of blue. Chang is one of a number of Chinese artists, masmen, and designers to participate in Trinidad Carnival. In 1998, he traced their presence in an article entitled "Chinese in Trinidad Carnival," in *Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience*, ed. Milla Cozart Riggio (London: Routledge Press, 2004).

19. The customary form of this mas is for a woman to carry a doll "baby" on the street, accosting random men and asking them to acknowledge the child as theirs, and to pay for it. There is a similar character in New Orleans Mardi Gras.

20. *Trinidad Guardian*, February 26, 1963, 2. Douæna are mythically unborn children who have lost their way; Pierrot Grenades are carnival figures dressed in patchy strips of cloth who "spell" words creatively, a variant of the Pierrot figure; soucouyants are blood-sucking females, who shed their skin. They represent a combination of folklore figures and carnival characters.

21. "The Usual Medley of Vigour," *Trinidad Guardian*, March 15, 1962, 5; note that the merger of steel and tribal drums with "the

and the Prime Minister Dr. Eric Williams, saw earth spirits, douæna, Pierrot Grenades, soucouyants, and a host of dancers.<sup>20</sup>

Adopting carnival as the national festival meant self-consciously revisiting carnival history, particularly the nineteenth century when the significant Afro-presence in carnival was established, and—as evidenced in the 1963 Dimanche Gras—reviving the "traditional carnival characters" or the "culture bearers." Performances focusing on the "traditional characters" sometimes merged T&T steel drums with European instruments, as for instance, Beryl McBurnie's 1962 pre-carnival dance concert *Quibama*, at the Little Carib Theater, in which, according to Derek Walcott, "[McBurnie] has now been able to cohere such instruments as the fiddle, the steel drum, the tribal drum and a choir, and when these are used together, as they are in the most successful item of the show, 'African,' the effect is powerful and moving."<sup>21</sup>

Significantly, 1956, the year that the PNM won its first election, was also the year in which the *Caribbean Quarterly* (CQ) brought out its special "Trinidad Carnival Issue," in which Andrew Pearse focused on "Carnival in Nineteenth-Century Trinidad" while Daniel Crowley catalogued "The Traditional Masques of Carnival," the two events coalescing around each other. As the editor of the 1988 CQ reprint, Kim Johnson, puts it:

In 1956 the People's National Movement won the elections. And if this represented, in Ivar Oxaal's phrase, "black intellectuals come to power," the cement for this nationalist movement was, to a great extent provided by carnival. If, in every other West Indian territory the nationalist movement had its trade union arm, in Trinidad the PNM had the steelbands. This relationship, unseen by most sociologists and political analysts, lies at the heart of Trinidad and Tobago's modern history.<sup>22</sup>

Johnson might well have added mas bands and calypso, which along with steel (or pan) bands constitute the major divisions of Trinidad Carnival competition. However, the contradiction at the heart of the PNM nationalist claim may be illustrated by looking at how the Steel Band Association urged its members to modify their behavior during carnival. Steel band performances had typically included "clashes" on the street, which at times could turn violent. Pan yards themselves had initially been regarded as "bad john" enclaves, with "respectable" middle-class youth forced to sneak off to play pan. Now pan itself was on the verge of being declared the "national instrument" of the new nation. This called for a change of behavior. Steel band leaders in 1962 met with the police to assist in regulating the carnival;<sup>23</sup> in 1963 the Steel Band Association sent "a special notice to members, urging them to conform to the type of behavior which should be coupled with the new status of steelbandmen and of our country." Trophies were offered for good behavior. In making these accommodations, neither the government nor the steel bandmen took into account the distinction between what is called "bad john" behavior—thug-like, unruly, chaotic violence—and the ritualized ethos of contestation and challenge at the heart of the emancipation carnival, from which steel bands had directly descended.<sup>24</sup>

According to Rondel Benjamin, founder of the Bois Academy of Trinidad and Tobago, as steel drums became "respectable," gaining sponsorship and status within the ruling middle class, kalinda was—in contrast—pushed aside; stickfighters essentially went underground (in Benjamin's estimation, possibly protecting them from gentrification; see the appendix to this essay). Williams and the PNM made their alliance with the increasingly "respectable" steel band movement.

fiddle" and a "choir" is named  
"African."

22. Kim Johnson, introduction to *Trinidad Carnival: A Republication of the Caribbean Quarterly Trinidad Carnival Issue (Vol. 4, Nos. 3–4 of 1956)* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: Paria Publishing Company, 1988), xxii.
23. *Trinidad Guardian*, March 3, 1962, 2.
24. The steel bands were not so easily reined in. There was, for instance, a violent clash at carnival in 1965 between steel bands Tokyo and Casablanca in which several were wounded. See *Trinidad Guardian*, March 2, 1965, 1.
25. Pamela Franco, "The Invention of Traditional Mas and the Politics of Gender," in *Trinidad Carnival*, ed. Garth L. Green and Philip W. Scher (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 36.
26. Calypso Sparrow, 1963, quoted in Louis Regis, *The Political Calypso: True Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago, 1962–1987* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida and The Press University of the West Indies, 1999), 16–17.
27. See Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso*; Bridget Brereton, "Carnival in Nineteenth-Century Trinidad," in *Carnival: Culture in Action*, 5; for a history of race relations, see also Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad, 1870–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

However, Williams's exhortations to "stay sober" had been directed primarily at foreign as well as local masqueraders in mas bands, not in steel bands. The Afro-centric PNM nationalist theme was perhaps reinforced most effectively in George Bailey's 1957 mas band "Back to Africa," the winner of the Band of the Year award, beating out Harold Saldenah's "The Glory That Was Greece." Bailey had dignified the return to the mythically evoked, reimagined homeland of "Africa," portraying it not as a society of "Juju" warriors but in the style of elegantly costumed European (especially Greek and Roman) history bands, like Saldenah's. As Pamela Franco explains, "Some carnival aficionados interpreted Bailey's triumph over Saldenah as Africa's triumph over Europe (colonialism)."<sup>25</sup>

Williams's political victory, as the first Afro-Trinidadian chief minister, was symbolically reinforced by "Africa's triumph over Europe," highlighting the Afro-base of both Williams's constituency and of carnival. However, the Africa that triumphed was far different from the African presence that in the nineteenth century took to the streets in what came to be known as the *jamette* (beyond the boundary) street carnival or the predawn *cannes brûlées* (*canboulay*, burning of the cane) or *jour ouvert* (break of day, now called *jouvay*) celebration, all components of emancipation carnival, with its emphasis on resistance and ritualized violence, claiming power as one's right, despite authorities who would deny that power. The street carnival (as distinct from the Euro-centric carnival balls and house visitations) had from the mid-nineteenth century taken on the character of an Afro-Trinidadian emancipation festival, essentially using the period of license allowed for masking on the two or three days before Ash Wednesday as an opportunity to celebrate and effectively to reclaim emancipation, which had been finalized on August 1, 1838 (after a four-year phasing in).

Now, by claiming carnival as the signifier of the new nation, Afro-Creole Trinidadians, under the leadership of Dr. Williams and the PNM government, configured the move into independent nationhood as firmly in Afro-Trinidadian control, but with an eye always on internationally marketing both carnival and Trinidad itself, as what calypsonian (The Mighty) Sparrow in 1963 designated as a "model nation."

*Trinidad and Tobago will always live on  
Colonialism gone, our Nation is born...  
Spread the word anywhere you pass  
Tell the world there's a model nation at last.*<sup>26</sup>

Herein lies the paradox at the heart of what it meant for a new government to claim, attempt to regulate, and most of all *market* a carnival that had evolved from the festive resistance of an oppressed, formerly enslaved population. Williams's appeal for good behavior—"Play mask, stay sober, and don't misbehave"—ironically echoed a theme sounded frequently in Trinidad Carnival from the mid-nineteenth century on and aimed at Afro-Creoles. The bands of "vagabonds" who established the emancipation carnival, idealized in the 1950s and 60s as heroic ancestors, had been denounced as "vile wretches," singing "obscene songs" and performing "lewd dances," "howling like demons," or "exhibiting hellish scenes."<sup>27</sup> Now, although the accusations were muted in appeals directly to revelers, a similar moral standard was being used by an Afro-Trinidadian government to control a portion of its own racial constituency.

At the time of independence, the PNM's appeal for good behavior became a virtual law-and-order mantra, the clarion call of Puritan-influenced, middle-class ruling elites taking their cue from their

28. To provide just one example of many, a *Trinidad Guardian* editorial in 1965 suggested “that the Tourist Board really throw its weight into realizing the tremendous amount of publicity to be gained for the country by the proper promotion of Carnival abroad” (“For Bleary Eyes,” March 1, 1965, 6).

29. Peter J. Wilson, *Crab Antics: The Social Anthropology of English-speaking Negro Societies of the Caribbean* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), 233, quoted in Richard D. E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 158.

30. For a discussion of Wilson in relationship to T&T Carnival, see Scher, *Carnival and the Formation of A Caribbean Transnation*, 31–53; see also Koningsbruggen, *Trinidad Carnival*, 177–91.

colonial predecessors. The *Trinidad Guardian*, a sponsor of the 1919 Victory Carnival and first sponsor of the Carnival Queen (essentially beauty) contest, was the self-appointed promoter of carnival as virtually everything that the explosive, resistant, Afro-derived emancipation festival was not: “respectable,” well-mannered, “fun without violence,” nothing risked.

The impulse to claim the festival nationally involved marketing T&T Carnival to tourists (and measuring its success by the number of filled hotel rooms).<sup>28</sup> This heightened the stakes for taming carnival, in the name of the nation and its commerce. “Senator Ronnie Williams, chairman of the CDC, yesterday reminded masqueraders: ‘Play mask but play it in the spirit of give and take. Let us maintain our reputation for fun without violence,’” announced the *Guardian* front page on February 24, 1963. Eight years earlier, on February 20, 1955, a *Guardian* editorial had framed this issue thus:

Carnival and calypso in Trinidad have received so much favourable publicity of late that it behooves us to make special endeavours to prove that we can really keep this season free of the grosser undesirable features....We wish Carnival to be bright, gay and agreeable, with a twinkle of mischief in its eye and a fascinating insouciance in the tilt of its nose and the toss of its head. But we wish no steelband clashes, no broken pates, no obscenity. Regulations ought to be obeyed; they should not have to be enforced. In this connection we commend the Port-of-Spain City Council’s Carnival Improvement Committee for offering trophies for the best-behaved band of masqueraders as well as the best-dressed band. (p. 6)

Carnival was here anthropomorphized, described as if it were a charming lass, little Miss Jekyll, as it were, whose toss of the head, tilt of the nose, and safely mischievous “twinkle” in her eye concealed a Mr. Hyde whose “grosser undesirable features” had to be hidden from public view. However, Trinidad Carnival was not a single festival with a split personality, one charmingly benign and one monstrous. It was at the very least an amalgam of two different celebrations: the “respectable” one originating in Europe as a pre-Lenten carnival replete with masquerade balls, affirming class and status in its well-behaved elegance; the other, the “steelband clashes, broken pates, and [presumed] obscenity,” was the festival of the “vagabonds.” It owed its origins to enslaved Africans. Bred in conditions of deprivation and oppression, it produced kalinda, calypso, and steel drums.

The effort to make carnival “respectable” may have driven kalinda temporarily underground. However, “respectability” itself is, in colonial terms, a suspect concept. Peter J. Wilson defines “respectability” as “the normal force behind the coercive power of colonialism and neo-colonialism.”<sup>29</sup> Wilson’s paradigm of “respectability” versus “reputation” is relevant here; “reputation” in a warrior context signifies honor and respect, key concepts in the emerging jayette carnival world. However, Wilson’s gender binary, which defines “respectability” as feminine and “reputation” as masculine and which underlies many heroic representations of masculinity (such as US Western films), is troubled in this context. While the form of combat was masculine, the Afro-emancipation celebrations themselves were communal, celebrating communities of men, women, and children still in many ways under siege after emancipation. Conversely, the 1950s–60s nationalist effort insisting on “respectability” was, to a large extent, in the hands of men.<sup>30</sup>

In the beating of its sacred rhythms on often forbidden drums and in the clashing of its sticks and whips, the nineteenth-century Afro-emancipation festival had precisely resisted

“respectability” as the despised moral veneer of enslavement. This was the festival—with its ritualized forms of violence—that underlay the emancipation carnival narrative, evoked at a time of new emancipation from colonialism to nationhood, but with a clear mandate to take the celebration to the higher, safer “moral” ground. The internal contradictions, which seem now so clear, were not registered in the naïve assumption that a history of resistance could be quietly defanged, sanitized, and put on public display.

The divide between the Afro- and the Indo- political elements remained, though the DLP deconstructed in the 1960s. Indeed, the history of political parties and elections in Trinidad remains embroiled in the presumed opposition between the Indo- and Afro- elements, which in 2005 Lloyd Best had said existed mainly during elections. In 2010, the People’s Partnership (PP), a political coalition in Trinidad and Tobago between four political parties (United National Congress, Congress of the People, Tobago Organization of the People, National Joint Action Committee) formed as a multiethnic opposition bloc against the PNM government of Patrick Manning. The PP won the election, bringing into power Kamla Bissessar-Prasad, the first female prime minister of T&T. This political history continues to impact carnival in ways that have not yet been fully explored.

However, one of the biggest challenges to the PNM/Williams government came from Afro-Trinidadians. The steel bands that Williams had championed turned on him, as the Black Power revolution began during carnival, February 9, 1970, when a group called Pinetoppers portrayed revolutionary leaders like Stokeley Carmichael, a Trinidadian, in the mas band “The Truth about Africa.” The newly created National Joint Action Committee insisted on recognition and authority that were not cloaked in the polite moralities of political rhetoric.<sup>31</sup> It may well be that Williams’s model of good behavior, based essentially on the Puritan ethics of the British colonizers, eventually provoked more than it persuaded significant portions of his Afro-power base.

The nationalistic rhetoric of the ‘50s and ‘60s devolved into widespread self-congratulation and celebration, accompanied by an echoing call to “decency.” On the eve of the first postindependence carnival, Sunday, February 24, 1963, a *Guardian* editorial entitled “A Crowning Achievement” contained the following exhortation:

The joy of the festival can be spoiled quite easily if participants lose their heads or abandon *their customary sense of decency*. We are confident, ourselves, that Carnival, 1963, will give no grounds for regret—except, that is, the usual one: that it is rather a long wait for next Carnival. (p. 10; emphasis mine)

There were, however, countering voices. This editorial appeared alongside a column by Derek Walcott, a regular *Guardian* contributor (subsequently the 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature winner), in which Walcott lamented what he felt was diminished linguistic sting in satirical carnival forms:

The polysyllable, surrealist, free-form rhetoric of robber talk is a parody of Biblical or English literature, just as the involved infinite spelling examination of the Pierrot Grenade is parody of mission school education and the magistrate’s court.

The source of the calypso, everyone knows, is in the slaves or the descendants of slaves guying or piconging each other, in mock quarrels, which are indirectly aimed at owners, high society or Government....

This element is dying, since there is nothing left to mock now but ourselves. The satiric sting has gone out of the old mas’ costume, since it lacks enemies....

31. Kirk Meighoo, *Politics in a Half-Made Society: Trinidad and Tobago, 1925–2001* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers; Oxford: James Currey; Princeton, NJ: M. Wiener Publishers, 2003), 62–78; and Kate Quinn, “Conventional Politics or Revolution: Black Power and the Radical Challenge to the Westminster Model in the Caribbean.” *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 53, no. 1 (January 2015): 71–94.

The old mas' has deteriorated into mild, off-colour humour. Much of the bite has gone out of the satiric calypso as well and sung picong is practically dead...

Because Carnival has grown more commercial, a source of tourist revenue, Government-controlled, and a tie-in for recording companies, radio, merchants, advertising, etc, the nature of the calypso has changed.

There are several fakes in the art, and its ephemeral or topical nature is being devoured in the carnival machine. (p. 10)

Resistance requires an authority to resist. Colonialism had provided that authority. Once it disappeared, taking the "enemy" with it, it was only a matter of time before core energy would have to be redirected. Thinking that time had already come, Walcott pinpointed the contradiction at the heart of the nationalist claim.

Two years later, in 1965, Walcott himself designed the Dimanche Gras presentation, which he titled *Batai* (Battle) in homage to the struggle of the nineteenth-century stickmen battling "for their right to play mas." "Decency" was presented as the weapon of the enemy, not an ideal. The *Trinidadian Guardian* described the action thus:

[A] Grenadian called Napoleon Small [described] the way in which Carnival began; how the Napo gate crashed the Governor's Ball in 1785; how he later led the slaves in the battle for their right to play mas' and the eventual victory of the slaves.

Throughout the whole setting a *prophetess of gloom and anti-carnivalist "decent citizen"* Miss Cassandra George, did her best to try to get the Governor to ban the bacchanal, while Julian White Rose [an early twentieth-century calypsonian, chantwell, and stickfighter, one of the first to sing and record in English], Aeneas Bat, a blind beggar and former stick-fighting king, took it all in with the aid of Douxdoux, a flower seller.<sup>32</sup>

32. *Trinidadian Guardian*, March 2, 1965, emphasis mine.

33. Rondel Benjamin, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, Chaguanas, Trinidad, January 7, 2020.

By portraying the "decent citizen" as an "anti-carnivalist" and locating the essential energy of carnival in battle rather than in good behavior, Walcott took aim at the "carnival machine." *Batai* staked its carnival claims on the kalinda of the nineteenth century. According to Benjamin, Walcott understood the link "between the ancestral world and the now world." The calypsonian, chantwell and stickfighter ally with the "former stick-fighting king" who classically learns to see when he has been physically blinded, seeing through the spirit. The flower girl, recalling a "famous lavway called 'Rosie,' a flower girl, a bunch of roses coming down," reminds one of the way in which, according to Benjamin, in kalinda "internal beauty is reflected in the external": Grace under pressure imbued with power.<sup>33</sup>

From this perspective, the "play" of carnival is not "fun without violence." It is ritualized, even sacralized violence that positions itself in resistance to oppressive authority. Kinesthetically encoding a remembered, transnational, to some extent essentialized ancestral past that crosses the diasporic lines from one location to another, from Haiti to Trinidad to Brazil, for instance, the kalinda of Trinidad's batonniers arose in circumstances that distinguish Trinidad among Anglophone Caribbean colonies. This article will now focus on the Afro- boismen and the Indo- jab jabs, two warrior-oriented forms of resistance play. These derive from disparate origins with much in common, in which the Indo- and Afro- underclasses, on the surface so much at odds with each other, joined in a kinship of the oppressed to create mas, now being revived, which is as spiritually significant as it is physically violent.



Figure 3. Rondel Benjamin and Keegan Taylor, co-founders of Bois Academy of Trinidad and Tobago, in the Alfred yard, the garden site of the Original Jab Jabs (or Whipmasters) in Perseverance Village, Couva. Photograph by Maria Nunes.

### **Kalinda and Jab Jab: Finding the Common Ancestral Path**

*If you don't understand the spiritual aspect you won't last long in a gayelle.*  
—Nolan Cummings, *Our Souls Turned Inside Out*, 2015

*The focus was on the African ... so we [jab jabs] had the opportunity to showcase our worship without being noticed.*  
—Ronald Alfred, Interview, Dec. 22, 2019

Talparo, Trinidad, Carnival Monday morning, sometime before the early 1990s:

From Talparo Junction, there is a good view of the road coming down the hill. And a crowd is waiting, the moment is charged with the light of dawn, but even more with the magic of the moment. All night long, you would hear them, maybe five of them, say the Frederick Brothers, getting ready. They are taking their last bush bath; they are singing lawways. All night long, lawway. No drums, just the song so you know they are getting ready. From the Sunday evening, they are preparing what they do when they are going through the night, that is like taking the final bath. They go into a ritual forty days before carnival, during that time they have a specific number of bush baths to take. The cleanliness is very important, clean up the interior and outside. Perhaps they are sewing beads on the fals [mirror-shaped fols] on their chests, the mirrors, and other things. But always singing the lawway, without drum.

When they are ready, you will see the door push open. A blaze glitters when the door is opened. You would see the blaze. You are anxious to see who is wearing the kandal [the fancy stickfighter clothes]; not everyone will. Those who do will have a ribbon belt that flies over the pants, the front of the pants will be laced with beads and mirrors and ribbons of all different colors. And then the head tie. You spread a cloth over the two ends and tie a

34. Lord Kitchener calypso 1963, which has become iconic. Elder Felix “George” Defour, who is quoted here, thinks it refers particularly to stickfighters taking the road.

35. This description has been distilled from the author’s interviews (January 4 and 7, 2020) with Defour, who has for many years prepared the Talparo gayelle, as well as working with the NCC to organize stickfighting. For a narrative that captures what he called the “transcendence” boismen reach, while also portraying the movement between the Caribbean and the United States, see John Stewart, “Stick Song,” in *Curving Road: Stories* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), reprinted in *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean*, ed. Arlene Torres and Norman E. Whitten Jr., vol. 2. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

36. Quoted in Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso*, 60.

knot so that the cloth will cover the ears. Moses [Ralph] would always wear the head tie. That is how the head player would prepare.

They will come to the door and come down the steps and then they will turn around and jump on the earth, one by one. When they hit the earth like a springboard, they would just keep jumping. They would dance and intermingle with one another in the yard. Dancing and singing the lavway and the woolloo bells on the pants, the English bells, making all the noise. Leave the house and go up in the road. No lash flying there, everybody just dancing and singing. No drums there, just lavway from the mouth and the bells. Singing loud. People will help them with the lavway also. When they reach the road, on the pitch, they will dance and dance and dance. Other stickfighters who might be dressed on the road, they will try hard to meet them there rather than higher up on the road. You might see stickfight, because the one that came to meet them, “Take stick like rain,” he will have to play—he can’t just come and meet them. They will charge him, so he has to fight there just in the road in front of the house. They join and things. And then they will march to go into the road. That is the time the Kitchener tune jump in—“the road make to walk on Carnival day.”<sup>34</sup> That’s what this is about. They will take the whole road, jumping from side to side, who going straight, some jumping around and the crowd will follow them singing the lavway. Coming from the road coming down the hill—everyone looking to see them. They have a long view of them coming down the road. A car coming down has to pull aside and park. They really using the road. The drums will be at the junction. From the time they reach the foot of the hill, the drums will cut in and give rhythm to the tune. That is where you will know how important stickfighting is and that it is born of one of the most authentic African rituals imported to Trinidad and infused into the carnival tradition. You will understand how stickfighting can entice a crowd; when they reach the hill, they form one line, and then the crowd doing the same thing, forms the gayelle, in themselves. One line and then circle back to be by the drums; the crowd follows them and make the gayelle. From that point the real battle starts—stick like rain...<sup>35</sup>

In 1871, the *Trinidad Echo* newspaper described “the barbarous *Cane-bouler* of the lower orders, by which Sunday night was made so hideous.”<sup>36</sup> Contrasting that characterization to Defour’s memories of the “magic” of Carnival Sunday night and Monday morning in Talparo, Trinidad, reminds us of the limitations of histories written only from the perspective of Christian colonizers, encoding Victorian codes of decency and respectability even fiercer than those that drove the rhetoric of independence in the 1950s–60s.



Figure 4. King Rato, Peter Noel (also a master drummer), from Talparo, Stickfighting Finals at Mayaro, Trinidad, 2012. Photograph by Maria Nunes.

37. The concept of the “plantation economy” was defined by the New World Group, led by Lloyd Best, in the 1960s. See Best, “Outline of a Model of Plantation Economy,” *Social and Economic Studies* 17, no. 3 (1968): 283–326, and “A Caribbean Life: An Interview with Lloyd Best,” in *The Thought of the New World: The Quest for Decolonization*, ed. Anthony Bogues and Brian Meeks (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2010), 284–85.

38. See Karen S. Dhandu, “Labor and Place in Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad,” *New West Indian Guide* 75, no. 3–4 (2001): 233–35; Eric Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1942; repr. Brooklyn, NY: A&P Books Publishers, 1993), 83.

39. See Dhandu, “Labor and Place,” 240, for a description of the free labor force and the forms of interaction between the enslaved and free laborers in pre-emancipation Trinidad. See Williams, *History*, 70–71, for documents relating to the importance of “free coloureds” in creating the “Crown colony” system of government; see also Carl Campbell, “The Rise of a Free Coloured Plantocracy in Trinidad 1783–1813,” *Boletín de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, no. 29 (Diciembre 1980): 33–53.

40. Quoted in Williams, *History*, 96.

41. Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso*, 74.

42. See diagram in J. D. Elder, “Cannes Brûlées,” in “Trinidad and Tobago Carival,” ed. Milla C.

Enslaved Afro-Creoles across the British Caribbean had been emancipated in 1838 into stratified plantation economies, whose sole function was to fuel and feed an industrial revolution in faraway Europe.<sup>37</sup> Among these, Trinidad was distinguished by crossed lines of colonial elites (Catholic French-Spanish/Protestant English); fewer, though more commercially “valuable,” emancipated enslaved laborers (c. 20,000, “valued” at £56 each, compared to 65,000 in tiny Barbados, £25 each, and c. 500,000, £34 each in larger Jamaica);<sup>38</sup> “free coloureds,” ranging from day laborers to estate owners fighting to restore rights the English had curtailed;<sup>39</sup> and after 1845 the increasing presence of indentured Indian laborers. Governed by the priorities, prejudices, and at times whims of various Crown-appointed governors acting on behalf of a distant colonial power, Trinidad was a place of which the governor Lord Harris said in 1848 that “a race has been freed but a society has not yet been formed.”<sup>40</sup>

Within this context, Afro-Creole stickbands emerged as territorial, protective groups, their sponsorship divided “along linguistic lines” into the French and English, although “fights between bands did not always conform to this pattern.”<sup>41</sup> In the predawn light of Carnival Monday, 1881, according to an eyewitness, a large “*neg jardin* stickband” with revelers from outside and inside Port of Spain came together. Their king and queen were in the second rank, fronted and flanked by stickmen with flambeaux and bois, their drums and musicians protected in the center of their formation, followed by children and women carrying extra bois and “some other kinds of weapons, stones and all.”<sup>42</sup> This was the inclusive act of resistance against police captain Arthur Baker, a Barbadian immigrant, immortalized in the history of Afro-emancipation carnival as the “Canboulay Riot.”

This description speaks to the social, as well as processional, structure of an Afro-Creole stickfighting “band”: centered on a king (and, here at least, apparently also a queen), led by boismen with flambeaux, accompanied by drums, drummers, and chantwells, and supported by women and children. This historical confrontation has in perpetuity enshrined boismen and their stickbands in the T&T Carnival story. Each year, early on the Friday morning before carnival, this event is reenacted “behind the bridge” on Picadilly Greens, the section of Port of Spain where the emancipation carnival is said to have started (close to but no longer at the corner of the original clash).<sup>43</sup>

However, this martial art predates its relationship to carnival. Its form is kalinda, a West African ritual of music and dance that added the stickfight in the Caribbean, while embedding the Afro-imported notion of kingship: “To earn the right to be king means to earn respect that has nothing to do with economic success.”<sup>44</sup> Long before bois became a carnival form, “Kalinda Secret Societies (formed before and after emancipation [as part of African resistance and cultural retention]) ... deriving from West African Fraternal Societies, [were] critical in the development of Slave Networks—for planting, music, fighting, mutual aid, education, and community outreach.”<sup>45</sup>

In *The Festive State*, David Guss reminds that “the same form ... can easily oscillate between religious devotion, ethnic solidarity, political resistance, national identity, and even commercial spectacle.... In each case, the festive form will remain what Mikhail Bakhtin claimed it was: ‘a powerful means of grasping reality ... the very process of becoming, its meaning and direction.’”<sup>46</sup> Transformed from its hybrid West African origins, Trinidad kalinda is such a form: a warrior sport, a dangerous, aggressive form of play that is in its essence an act of religious devotion, political

Riggio, special issue, *The Drama Review* 42, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 39, based on information from Edric Connor. The rare description of the procession and event is from Tony Hall's 1990 interview with Lenox Pierre, based on a first-person witness account. Lennox Pierre, interview with Tony Hall, "Late Night Lime," *Banyon*, Trinidad, 1990, published in "Trinidad and Tobago Carnival," ed. Milla Cozart Riggio, special issue, *TDR: The Drama Review* 42, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 41.

43. This event has been reenacted each Carnival Friday morning since 1999, initially directed by Tony Hall, of Lordstreet Theatre and Trinity College in Hartford, CT, and Norvan Fullerton of the Malick Folk Performance group, with Professor Milla Riggio, Trinity-in-Trinidad students, and Malick dancers, at that time reenacted in front of Hell Yard (a barracks now torn down), on the actual historical location, reinforced by traditional Carnival character performances; now scripted and directed by Pearl Eintou Springer on Picadilly Greens where a reviewing stand accommodates an increasingly large crowd.

44. Benjamin, interview, March 22, 2019.

45. Benjamin, "The Four Phases of Kalinda in Trinidad," appendix.

46. David M. Guss, *The Festive State: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism as Cultural Performance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 9, 12.

47. Benjamin, interview, March 22, 2019.

resistance, and a marker of cultural identity, carried across the Middle Passage. But it is also a ritual of containment, violence governed by rules to create a safe space where young men learn to manage the aggression that is an essential aspect of life.<sup>47</sup> Such a concept of containment reinforces René Girard's 1972 identification of religion itself as a vehicle designed to ritualize and, thus, contain inevitable violence.<sup>48</sup> Jibari Stewart claims that "Combat dancing can serve a beneficial function in human societies, providing ... a larger sense of community, a means of releasing real transgressive violence detrimental to the well-being of a society."<sup>49</sup>

The spirit of kalinda is invested as much in its music as in its fighting. The drums call the fight; the fight ends when the drums stop, though of course, the drums stop when one fighter legitimately cuts his opponent, drawing blood. The chantwells with their lavways invoke the spirit. "How," Benjamin asks, "do you balance the warrior and the singer? This mystical warrior who was both performer and martial artist? Fathers of the bois, we call them."<sup>50</sup>



Figure 5. Drummer Cindy Noel, master drummer Desmond Noel's daughter, with Kwasi Noel, King Rato's son and Desmond Noel's grandson (on the left), with drummers from Mayaro, Stickfighting Finals at Skinner Park, San Fernando, in 2015. Photograph by Maria Nunes.

According to Andy Patrick, who for the past fifteen years has organized "Black Indian" bands in Port of Spain and is also great-grandson to boisman "Bad Jerry" (Jeremiah Trim), who took stickfighting with him when he moved from Toco on the north coast of Trinidad to Canaan, Tobago:

Stickfighting is a spiritual thing that comes with the drums, the natural ability to fight, but in the gayelle with training... [There are] three people in the gayelle, the chantwell (the fellow who sings), the fellow who plays the drums, and the fellow who fight the stick. The man who play the drums right, he could put the energy in the man who dancing stick by the way he beating drums. He could also get the man playing stick cut now, if he playing a

48. *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). Girard's analysis has been criticized for the extent to which it makes Christianity itself the paradigm for his concept.

49. E. (Jibari) Stewart, "The Soft Power of Violence: Towards a Definition of Combat Dancing," PhD diss., University of Washington, 2009, abstract.

50. Benjamin, interview, March 22, 2019.

51. Andy Patrick, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, Santa Cruz, Trinidad, December 31, 2019.

52. Shamsu Dean, a T&T expert in tracing indenture roots, personal communication with Ravindranath Maharaj (Raviji), January 7, 2020. See also the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, <http://www.natt.gov.tt/node/133>; and Sherry-Ann Singh, "The Experience of Indian Indenture in Trinidad: Arrival and Settlement," 2013, The Caribbean Atlas Project website, ed. Romain Cruse and Kevon Rhiney, <http://www.caribbean-atlas.com/en/themes/waves-of-colonization-and-control-in-the-caribbean/waves-of-colonization/the-experience-of-indian-indenture-in-trinidad-arrival-and-settlement.html>.

53. [https://www.indexmundi.com/trinidad\\_and\\_tobago/ethnic\\_groups.html](https://www.indexmundi.com/trinidad_and_tobago/ethnic_groups.html)

54. Errol ("Toy") Bunsee, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, Dow Village, Trinidad, December 22, 2019.

bad note on the drum, if he don't like the stick man, he very important. The drummer. The chantwell, sometimes the man dancing the stick, he calls the song. So he calls the chantwell to sing for him. The fourth person is the audience, the crowd.<sup>51</sup>

Patrick's family, as he describes it, is Yoruba; his grandmother's husband's mother came "straight from Africa," though he is not quite sure exactly where in Africa. This side of his family also "has some white in it," and on his father's side, there are Amerindian (or as they are called in T&T, "first people") ancestors.

This family history is characteristic of the racial intermixtures in Trinidad, though the two largest ethnic groups with the greatest dominance culturally, politically, and in the festive history of the island are the Afro- and Indo-. First brought in as indentured laborers in 1845 on the *Fatel Razack*, by the time the practice ended in 1917, roughly 150,000 Indians had been indentured in Trinidad, some voluntarily, some by force. Contracts were generally for five years, with a first placement of three years. However, to get the promised free ticket home, another five years had to be served. Relatively few returned after ten years. Recruitment was suspended on March 12, 1917; the last arrival came on April 22, 1917. Suspended because of the demands of World War I, the practice was not resumed. All contractual obligations of indentured laborers were ended three years later, on January 1, 1920. A total of 147,592 indentured workers were brought to Trinidad on 327 voyages.<sup>52</sup> Most remained in Trinidad. These two groups constitute about 75 to 80 percent of the T&T population (as of December 2019, Indian, 35.4 percent; African, 34.2 percent; with mixed African-Indian, known as dougla, 7.7 percent, according to the *CIA World Factbook*).<sup>53</sup>

While Afro-Trinidadians born in the Caribbean were identified as African Creoles, Indian laborers—the *jahaji bhai* (the brotherhood of the boat)—were called "Coolies." Nominally separate, these two laboring forces, the Afro-Creoles and the indentured Indians who lived in barracks and worked under conditions not much better than enslavement, were in practice often entwined with each other, particularly through their festivals, in ways that the rest of this report will explore through the personal narratives and memories of practitioners and their heirs.

There is a form of stickfighting, called gatka, which the Indians brought with them from northern India and developed in Trinidad. According to Errol Bunsee (known as "Toy"), the son of a gatka fighter from Rousillac in the south of Trinidad, close to San Fernando: "The bois is a different game; they use a shorter stick. Gatka has a longer stick; you can hit with both hands. You could only hit with one arm with the bois."<sup>54</sup> As Toy explains, in the south, Indians and Africans played together, bois and gatka side by side, though never in the same fight. Both used goatskin drums, usually African keg drums (bullah, fullah, or cuttah) for bois and Indian tassa drums for gatka.<sup>55</sup>

They played both sticks—took part in both games. Two boismen in a ring at one time; the next fight will be two gatka men. No more than two in the ring. I know it as a ring—the ringmaster would start off with the drum. They called it the keg. The gatka was on the Hosay side. This is what was the difference in the two games. Stickfighting now is for carnival only.

The mention of Hosay highlights both the separation and the intermingling of the Afro- and Indo-laborers in colonial Trinidad. If carnival is in many ways the foundational festival for Afro-Creoles, the nominally Shi'ite Muslim Hosay is the celebration that seems to have most united Indo-Trinidadian indentured workers in the nineteenth century. Unlike carnival, Hosay—which

55. Lorna McDonald, "Trinidad and Tobago," in Terry E. Miller et al., *The Garland Encyclopedia of Music: Southeast Asia* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1998), 959; also private communication with Ron-del Benjamin, January 7, 2020.

56. See Frank J. Korom, *Hosay Trinidad: Muharram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); see also Milla Cozart Riggio, "For the Sake of Allah and All Humanity: A Jihaji Journey into Trinidad," in *Muraqqa'e Sharqi: Studies in Honor of Peter Chelkowski*, ed. Soussie Rastegar and Anna Vanzan (Repubblica San Marino: AIEP, 2007).

57. Benjamin, interview by Milla Cozart Riggio, December 22, 2019.

58. See McDonald, "Trinidad and Tobago."

brought me to Trinidad for the first time in 1991—is funereal, its processions commemorating the assassination of Hussein, the grandson of Mohammad, and his family and followers on the plain of Kerbala (in modern-day Iraq) during the first ten days of the first Muslim month Muharram in 61 AH (680 CE), as well as honoring his brother Hasan, who was poisoned in Mecca. Carried to Trinidad from northern India, Hosay engaged the more numerous Hindus as well as Muslims.

Though it was widely celebrated in the nineteenth century, particularly in the south, there are today only two major commemorations: Cedros in the south and St. James in Port of Spain. In Cedros, Hosay is still commemorated almost entirely by Hindus, whereas in St. James, a Port of Spain suburb, those who honor it are largely Muslim. Though in itself both religious and funereal, it draws a large crowd of revelers, often drinking alcohol forbidden by the ritual. The assassination of Hussein and his family is the seminal event that historically distinguishes Shi's from Sunnis. Because it is in its origins Shi'ite, a distinction from Sunnis that is not always clearly marked in Trinidad, the festival, in fact, is critiqued and even rejected more by Muslims than by Hindus, for whom it seems to have served as an event tying indentured laborers to their Indian homeland. Because it follows the entirely lunar Muslim calendar, Hosay is not seasonal; it moves through the entire year.<sup>56</sup>

Like the Afro-Creole jayette carnival, Hosay ran afoul of police captain Baker and the British authorities. In 1884, three years after the first canboulay riot and the same year as the smaller but more lethal second canboulay riots (in San Fernando and Princes Town), the so-called "Jihaji [or Hosay] massacre" occurred in San Fernando, when authorities killed twenty-four celebrants in an assault on the procession they had attempted to outlaw. Two factors make this commemoration and this event important in this study: The first is not only that those killed in the Hosay massacre were largely Hindu, but that they also included Afro-Creoles. Benjamin explains this as an expression of brotherhood:

In 1884, Africans always played stick in Hosay, so the Indians knew to call them [when they were in trouble]. When you fight someone for a long time, you become friends. Our bond as warriors is more important than our racial identity. Less to do with politics, race or religion, our sharing is about a deeper kinship—if I see someone who understands the source of my soul. Jab jabs are spurned by the Indians; stickfighters are spurned by the Africans. But we love each other. We understand the sacred shared community; we broke bread together and drank wine together. We have in common a shared mystical world.<sup>57</sup>

Secondly, Hosay in the south was an event that brought kalinda and gatka together as joint celebrations, while also including whipmasters, all as warriors whose fighting was thought to symbolize the conflict on the plain of Kerbala.<sup>58</sup> Ronald Alfred, from Central, knows nothing about this participation in Hosay, but growing up close to San Fernando and going each year with his father to Cedros for Hosay, Toy identifies this processional ritual as the "religious" occasion for practicing stick, in contrast to carnival, which he considers profane, a view concentrated among Hindus in the south and not shared by boismen. According to Toy:

Many different class of people—Indian, Africans, all used to join in. They have plenty people fighting stick [everywhere around].... You have to buss one another's head in order to fulfill the game. Boullas Village, Cedros ... Moruga, Rio Clara, Sangre Grande. They come down and used to have a wonderful time. Competition and money.... The Hosay was the religious part of it. They build the castle [the tomb of Hussein, known as a *tadjeh*]. We are Hindus, and my grandfather was one of the Hosay builders: Gildarry Bunsee. He was also a class

59. Toy, interview, December 22, 2019. Identifying the tadjeh as the “Taj Mahal,” a sacred Indian palatial tomb having nothing to do with Muharram, is unusual. I have not heard this identification before.

60. Daniel Crowley, in the 1956 special issue of the *Caribbean Quarterly*, used the term “Coolie devil,” which is popularly assumed to have originated decades earlier; see Crowley, “Traditional Masques of Trinidad and Tobago,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 4, nos. 3–4 (1956) (repr., *Trinidad Carnival*, Trinidad: Paria Publishing, 1988), 74.

61. Though essentially imported from India, jab jab did consistently have Afro-Creole practitioners, and those of other ethnicities, who now in its revival phase are being invited to join the Original Jab Jabs, in a typically T&T show of inclusiveness.

62. Ronald Alfred, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, Couva, Trinidad, December 22, 2019.

stickman. Used to be taking part—we used to go see them. I myself ended up playing stick—different game with whipmasters (such as Phaye, pronounced *Peou*) ... who cut one another (a dangerous game that stopped for a while. But coming back on the scene). The stickfight started on the first day [of Hosay processions]—when they come out on the street, the stickfight start. A big yard and they play. Tassa men waiting. The kegmasters. The ringmaster’s drum to start the stickfight was an African keg. They draw a big circle in the yard where the tadjehs would be brought out. For carnival a different thing, they have a ring in a yard where they have alcohol. Without any substance of Hosay.... The true meaning of the stickfight, the bois and the gatka, you have to watch it through the Hosay aspect of the game. One would know where it originated from—when the two brothers, Hasan and Hussain were fighting. One drop of blood on the ground, appears, do not know where it comes from. When it appears, they know to move the Taj Mahal [tadjeh].<sup>59</sup>

As Toy implies, gatka was never centrally a carnival form. However, the whipcracking martial art called jab jab or “rope jab,” popularly known throughout Trinidad in the first half of the twentieth century as “Coolie mas” or “Coolie devils,”<sup>60</sup> became associated with carnival early on as an Indo-Trinidad tradition. As Ronald Alfred, the current whipmaster of the Original Jab Jabs,<sup>61</sup> says: “The rope jab mas in Trinidad and Tobago was right through an Indian mas. Many people in the outside world have whips in one form or another, but the rope jab mas in T&T is the contribution of the Indian people.”<sup>62</sup>



Figure 6. Ronald Alfred, the Original Whipmaster, Traditional Mas Competition, Adam Smith Square, Port of Spain, 2017. Photograph by Maria Nunes.

Unlike kalinda, which still has practitioners in what are called “action gayelles” throughout T&T, the form of which can still be differentiated from region to region, jab jab at the present time is sustained by Alfred’s Original Jab Jabs, a family-led team that traces its performance history through four Indo-Trinidad generations: grandfather Alfred Bachu; father Winston Alfred (whose surname was mistakenly inscribed in his birth registration as Alfred, rather than Bachu); the

63. Ibid.

64. Ronald Alfred, interview, January 7, 2020. Also information provided by Ravindranath Maharaj (Raviji), private communication January 8, 2020.

current whipmaster (jab jab equivalent of the king) Ronald Alfred and his family, including his wife, Shalima (the first woman to play jab jab) and children, sons Ronaldo (twenty-two) and Revaldo (thirteen) and daughter Renella (nineteen), all of whom play jab. Ronald says:

My father told me that my grandfather, who lived in Central, was part of a jab jab group. They went to San Juan, to Diego Martin, then back to Central. He left a jab jab band everywhere he went. It was an indigenous martial art form. (Riggio: When in Trinidad did it start?) Alfred: Three generations. Back it up. It was the time when they came from India with it. They used to practice it in the barracks where they were living. In the village, in the barracks, in the bush. They practiced wherever they were. Before the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>63</sup>

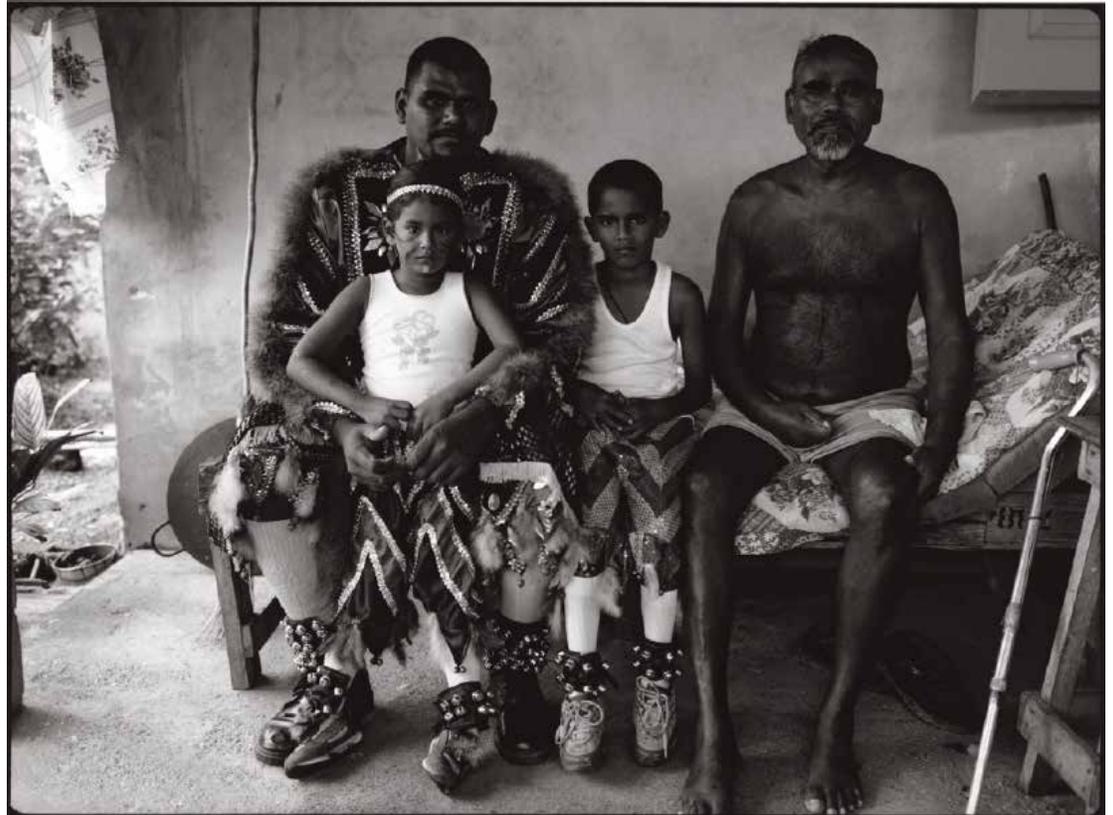


Figure 7. Ronald Alfred, the Original Whipmaster, with his daughter Renella, now Whip Princess, and son Ronaldo, now Whipmaster d 2nd, and his father, Winston Alfred, the Original Whipmaster before Ronald, at home in Couva, January 2004. Photograph by Pablo Delano. Used by permission of the photographer.

As Alfred insists, like kalinda, this whipcracking martial art predates carnival. The Alfred family attributes its origins to the “Kali worship” of their Indian ancestors, which Ronald says distinguished them from other Hindus. Processions honoring Kali (or other female devis) generally, it is said, included whipcracking as an essential component.<sup>64</sup> As part of their current effort to sustain and grow this tradition, the Alfreds are attempting to trace their history back to India. But it has been difficult. They believe themselves to be Madrassi (coming from Madras, in the south of India from which indentured workers were brought relatively late, now known as Chennai, the capital city of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu; in appearance Ronald appears to be Madrassi), but they also believe they are from northern India; the name Bachu is a northern Indian name, and their own oral tradition identifies Bhojpuri, northern India (in Bihar) as their region of origin.

65. This phenomenon is also characteristic of diasporic Africans. For a discussion of what Michael Hanchard called the “supranational formulation of people of African descent as an ‘imaginary community’ that is not territorially demarcated but based on the shared belief in the commonalities of Western oppression,” see Milla Cozart Riggio, “The Power of Play: Time and Space in the Caribbean Carnival World,” *The Caribbean Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (2019): 95–122, esp.104–5. See Michael Hanchard, “Afro-Modernity: Temporality, Politics, and the African Diaspora,” *Public Culture* 11, no. 1 (1999): 248.

66. Camille A. Brown, interviewed by Audra McDonald, February 1, 2020, as part of the HD live simulcast performance of the Metropolitan Opera revival of *Porgy and Bess*, of which Brown is the choreographer.

67. Leda Martins, “Performances of Spiral Time,” in *Performing Religion in the Americas: Media, Politics, and Devotional Practices of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Alyshia Galvez (London: Seagull Books, 2007), 174.

68. Ronald Alfred, interview, January 5, 2020.

69. Alfred goes on to say, “It died out because all the older fellows would never talk about the mas outside the circle. Could not take the story outside—if you keep it yourself and have no children, then it dies. Them fellows—ask them a question and they would not answer you. ‘Go back and play. What you want to know that for?’ They hid the tradition. If I should

The mystery shrouding this family history characterizes the cultural retention that this tradition embodies. Crossing what the Indo-Trinidadians called the “dark waters” often blurred memories of precise places of origin, which were further complicated by intermingling and intermarrying (which might account, for instance, for the Alfred family’s apparent identification with both northern and southern India).<sup>65</sup> The crucial point, however, is the importance of the ancestral presence in the lives of both the Indo- and Afro- communities, whatever their place of origin, together with the kinesthetic “memories” of the body (“memories of the blood,” according to choreographer Camille A. Brown).<sup>66</sup> These reinforce the retention of cultural practices, such as African kalinda or the Indian use of whips in religious processions that traveled across the dark waters, to be transformed in the new home. So important were the ancestors that “it has been said that, for a long time, African slaves in the Americas drew cosmograms of their original cultures on turtle shells and bird feathers, so as to indicate to their ancestors, who were buried in Africa, the location of their exile in the faraway American landscape.”<sup>67</sup> Ronald Alfred says that their ancestors play *jab jab* with them, even now: “My father and my grandfather [both deceased]; they walk with us; they play with us.”<sup>68</sup>

The survival of *jab jab* is now largely in the hands of the Alfred family, who welcome others into their “yard,” as the gathering place for *jab jabs* is commonly known. In 2019 this group numbered more than sixty. Alfred says that in the past, “*Jab jabs* were called by the name of the towns—Princes Town *Jabs Jabs*.” But so far as Alfred knows, these groups are now gone:

The only other group—the old fellow died. He came to me to ask for help. Gilbert—that is what we knew him as. He moved from one area to another, he came by us but he did not finish the training. The fasting and everything. He went out. That band squashed. So as far as I know there is no other group now. There are a few small groups in different areas—community centers. I go to the schools and community centers and some people come by me. We call it a yard. They come by me and practice. We are trying to bring back bands. We need someone to go in different areas to bring back bands.<sup>69</sup>

The Alfreds weave whips for others, feed them during the carnival season, and train them through the year. Rondel Benjamin, too, has through the Bois Academy undertaken a program of training and retention designed to honor a martial arts form that, like *jab jab*, is also a sacred communal rite. (Benjamin and Alfred are, in fact, now working actively together for mutual development and preservation).<sup>70</sup>



Figure 8. Rondel Benjamin, co-founder and Chief Dreamer of the Bois Academy of Trinidad and Tobago, teaching the basics of stickfighting in the Alfred yard in Perseverance Village, Couva. Photograph by Maria Nunes.

die with this knowledge and don't share it, it will be a great loss for the art form" (interview, January 5, 2020).

70. Peter Noel, King Rato, has youth groups he trains as part of the effort across Trinidad to revive kalinda.

71. Benjamin, interview, January 7, 2020.

72. Defour, interview, January 4, 7, 2020.

73. Though these bells are in appearance identical to those worn on the pants of the stick-fighting kandal, they are assumed to have different origins: Defour identifies the bells as English, Alfred and Raviji are certain that they are Indian. The same may be said of other costume decorations—the fols (or, as boismen call them, "fals") worn on the chest, which resemble European (primarily French) Pierrot costumes, but also are characteristic of and claimed as Indian by jab jabs.

74. Benjamin, interview, January 10, 2020.

However, kalinda is more dispersed and differentiated. Differences in kalinda traditions still exist in various regions of T&T. Benjamin's family settled in the Moruga region, where Afro-Americans who had fought with the British in the war of 1812 were given land to cultivate. His traditions, he says, are largely from the Congo, which has a style of its own. Boismen from Moruga, for instance, do not wear the kandal, so characteristic of Talparo fighters, and Benjamin believes they never did. Their sticks are somewhat different; they hold them in a different way. Similar distinctions may be found in action gayelles throughout T&T. Moreover, each gayelle (often in front of a rum shop, frequently with a Chinese owner) will have its own kalinda society, headed by a king whose title must be consistently defended, including drummers and chantwells. Though they will practice together, sometimes even fighting each other, the main focus, according to Benjamin, is to show the "supremacy of their own gayelle, their jumbi, their Wanga (energetic force) and their king."<sup>71</sup> To this end, they "roam" or travel and welcome boismen from other gayelles. As Defour puts it:

We started a group in 1994. They had a gayelle in Brazil (the club would have been Parliament Cub). The Fredericks [brothers from Talparo] had already stopped fighting. But Joey [Sanchez, known as Bangoes] was going strong. He did a lot of fight with Hector Frederick (died now), the last of the Fredericks. The eldest was Bertie, Sonny, Henry, Hector, and Sammy, the youngest. They used to roam. When the time came for the people who reach, they start their rituals, a week or two after New Year's, according to what time carnival falling (in early March or February). They practice every weekend by going from gayelle to gayelle. When it reaches the highest pitch, they know there is a king in Couva, they will get ready to match that king in Couva. If they play and don't cut the king, or fulfill what they went to do, it would have been trouble for anyone who tried to play them. When they reached back and had a victory, they would be more calm. But if they did not win—they were sullen and dangerous.<sup>72</sup>

Kalinda and jab jab are distinct traditions, coming from different continents (Africa and Asia). One of the major differences is their music, kalinda involving lavways, drums, and chantwells (as does gatka, though its drums are different). Jab jabs also chant lavways, but their music is provided by the gungaroo, the bells worn around their ankles that resound as they move, clearly announcing jab jab presence.<sup>73</sup> What may seem to be the central distinction, the contrast between sticks and whips, however, is to some extent illusory, as often stick play and whip play are practiced by the same people (Alfred's father practiced both whip and stick, as did Toy's grandfather). Now stickfighters from the Bois Academy meet each Sunday in the Alfred jab jab yard, to be trained with whips and also in the healing traditions of herbs grown in the Alfred garden. Moreover, the rituals and sacred practices—the cutting and preparation of the stick and whip, the consecration of the instrument, the fasting and cleansing bush baths of the warriors—so strongly resemble each other that Benjamin and Alfred are speculatively certain that the connections began before they arrived in the Caribbean:

[We are sure that they were] interacting as martial forms for a long time before coming to Caribbean. We speak two different languages, but we have certain things in common—they knew how to enter the ring, how to interact, how to seek the blessings. Some common "warrior" language.... This is less about accommodation and more about seeking respect.<sup>74</sup>

As communal rituals and sacred rites that bind communities together, kalinda (also gatka) and jab jab follow similar patterns of prayer, fasting, preparation, and performance outlined below:

75. Toy, interview, December 22, 2019.

76. Angenie Lee, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, Dow Village, Trinidad, December 22, 2019.

77. Toy, interview, December 22, 2019.

78. Oliver Pierre, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, Manzanilla, Trinidad, March 3, 1997.

79. Patrick, interview, December 31, 2019.

1. *Cutting the stick or material for the whip.* This is a ritual that takes place in the forest during “the dark moon,” linked both to the lunar cycle and, in the spring, the vernal equinox. The stick is cut mainly from hardwood Pou trees (yellow or black), the material for the whip from what Alfred calls a hemplike “lash plant.” The cutting is an act of respect, taking place only after the warrior talks to the forest, asks permission to cut, and pays for the stick or the lash cutting (either in silver or gold coins, or according to Toy, sixty cents if you cannot afford more). The weapon is cut with a special cutlass (machete), used for no other purpose. A respect for the forest as part of the living world, of which humans are themselves only one of the blessed creatures, characterizes both traditions.

2. *Preparation of the weapon.* After cutting, there is a process of tempering the weapon, one version of which is described by Toy:

Used to dry for 3–4 days in the sun. Then they peel off the skin and get a smooth finish. The hand would not slip out. Use a knife or bottles, sandpaper to smooth it. That was the preparation of the stick. When they finish with the stick, they hang the stick on the wall. No one could touch it until the stickman would come for it.<sup>75</sup>

A similar process is used for the whips:

Some of them would make it from rope—would use the agave plant, the ones that the Mexicans make the tequila with, the leaves. They would take the leaves and dry it and then strip it, soak it in water, and then plait it. It would cut into rope. It is very strong. They did say prayers—when they make anything to do with the Hosay. They used to pray over the whips and the stick as well. They had prayers for protection ... fasting and mantras, recited for protection. Some people used tantric mantra (dark side of mantra) as well as the other side. To harm people.<sup>76</sup>

3. *Christening of the weapon and drums.* These traditions do not link godliness with self-righteous denial of the body, which—so long as it is “clean” and respected—is perceived instead as a conduit to the soul. In kalinda and gatka the sacred liquid is not wine that, in transubstantiation, becomes the blood of Christ, or “holy water.” Puncheon Rum is the “spirit” used to christen both the sticks and the drums (a tradition not followed, as far as I know, by jab jabs), recognizing always that the first sip of rum must be offered to the ancestors.

4. *Living partners.* Both the sticks and the drums are imbued with life. The sticks must prove their mettle, either (according to Toy), by standing up when they are thrown down (“only the stick that stands up will be chosen”) or, according to Benjamin, floating when thrown into the water. They are cut when the moon is dark, I am told, to ensure that they do not die.<sup>77</sup> An old stickfighting king named Victory (Oliver Pierre) from Manzanilla, ninety-five years old in 1997, told me that he once hung a stick over his bed while he went to purchase puncheon rum with which to christen it. When he returned home, the thirsty stick had gotten off the hook, rolled to the door and was bouncing up and down, waiting for its rum.<sup>78</sup>

According to Patrick, sticks can themselves be protectors, particularly if they are “mounted,” that is, made lethal by a process of burying them in a cemetery, ordinarily beside the grave of a stickmaster and sometimes rubbing them with frog guts or other toxic substances: “My ancestors would have a mounted stick in the house. That stick will beat you if you come in the house and damage the people.”<sup>79</sup> “Mounting” a stick is considered “bad obeah,” the practice of

80. Quoted in the film by Christopher Laird, dir., *No Bois Man, No Fraud* (Port of Spain: Banyan and the Bois Academy, 2013).

81. Benjamin, interview, March 22, 2019.

82. Benjamin says, "Stickfighters were never just drunk men fighting with a stick" (interview, March 22, 2019). However, he started the Bois Academy in Port of Spain in the 1980s because he perceived that the martial art itself had begun to degenerate, with the result that it was devolving into something like drunken fighting, at times, without the ritual base so essential to its meaning.

which is often hidden, even from family members. Patrick's grandfather had hidden a mounted stick and a mounted ring together in the attic of his house, which was not discovered until the roof was replaced about ten years ago, long after his death.

Like the sticks, the drums are also imbued with life; according to Desmond Noel, the drum, which like the stick must be anointed with rum, "this too, this have life." A guitar?—no, that is lifeless, but though the "goat done been et," the drum covered with the goat skin is, like the stick, a living thing, a participant in the mystical partnership between chantwell, drummer, and stickfighter.<sup>80</sup>



Figure 9: Desmond Noel (center), master drummer from Talparo, Stickfighting Finals at Skinner Park, San Fernando, Trinidad, 2015. Photograph by Maria Nunes.

5. *Rituals of fasting and purification.* As Benjamin says, "you cannot play stick (or whip) with a dirty soul—or dirty hands."<sup>81</sup> Cleansing oneself is crucial. Kalinda, gatka, and jab jab all require periods of fasting—forty days for kalinda and gatka, fifty-two days, according to Alfred, for jab jab. During this period, they all abstain from eating meat and having sex, the jab jabs, at least, also eschewing eggs and dairy products. They take a specified number of bush baths, using special cleansing oils, the last of which is taken on the night of Dimanche Gras (the Sunday night before carnival). Where they differ is in respect to alcohol. Whereas jab jabs refrain from alcohol during their fast, stickfighters continue to use what Benjamin calls "high spirits" (not corn-based liquor), not for recreation purposes or to get drunk, but as essential components of the ritual process.<sup>82</sup>

6. *Ritual of containment.* Ritual violence must follow the rules. Even though, like all forms of the sacred, these warrior rituals can be turned to evil uses, the fighters are not bad Johns wreaking havoc for its own sake. Theirs is a structured and disciplined world, guided by rituals and a sense of respect, not chaos. The blood that is shed in the gayelle has a sacramental quality, in establishing the brotherhood of the bois.

83. Benjamin, interview, January 6, 2020.

84. Ibid.

85. Marisa Lee, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, St. Augustine, Trinidad, December 20, 2020.

86. All quotations from Shalima Alfred, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, Couva, Trinidad, January 5, 2020.

One year, following the jab jabs from their home to a demonstration in Talparo, I discovered that they had packed up and gone home. Later, I learned that a group of young thugs (“bad Johns”) had begun pelting rocks at their maxi (short for maxi-taxi, a bus-like van in which they travel). Rather than engage in undisciplined, senseless fighting, they had simply left.

7. *Role of women.* Women have in different ways supported both kalinda and jab jab from the beginning, in a union dependent on the alliance of male warrior energy with a “comparable female spirit.”<sup>83</sup> In the past there have been women stickfighters, known in the nineteenth century as “matadors.” And it is said that a woman named Sophie Belle organized the 1881 canboulay procession.<sup>84</sup> During that procession the formation of stickfighters was followed by women (and children), carrying additional supplies. Though women did not typically accompany the jab jabs, Ronald Alfred’s mother, Doolan, performs a *pooja* (Hindu prayer) around their maxi before it leaves for any encounter, battle, or demonstration.

However, just as women now claim the right to do battle as members of military units, so too the situation with kalinda and jab jab is changing. Many of Benjamin’s students, including artist Marissa Lee, are women, learning not only stick but also other forms of martial arts.<sup>85</sup> Alfred’s wife, Shalima, is the first woman to play jab jab, which she has been doing since she was sixteen, for twenty-four years (one year before her marriage to Ronald). She says:

I contested with my father-in-law, and maybe because I am stubborn. I believe in half and half, Ronald and I live like that. After marriage I get to find out about rituals and the dos and the don’ts. And who knows it open up a new door for female on the whole and it opens up a new door of empowerment. It was a nice experience for me, to come out and be in competition. For me and other women—kind of opened up a way. If I could do, they could do it too.<sup>86</sup>



Figure 10. Ronald Alfred, the Original Whipmaster and his wife, Shamila, Whip Queen, with their eldest son Ronaldo, Whip Master d 2nd, at Traditional Mas Competition, Adam Smith Square, 2016. Photograph by Marie Nunes.

There is now a female unit in the jab jab yard, in which Shalima and her daughter Ranella teach other women each Sunday, not only how to “play” whip but also how to develop strategies of self-protection:

The whip give you the energy to know how you could protect yourself. We living in a time, when women are in danger—not me, but I hear the stories, about women and abuse. We had a few women coming to our yard to learn how to handle themselves with the whips, to give them a little comfort, not to stand up and be bullied ... [or] going down the road [to protect your bag]. The actual ritual becomes protective in regular life.... You don’t necessarily have to have a whip; you could use your belt; your bag have a strap.<sup>87</sup>

87. Ibid.

Though their unit is separate from the men’s, they also fast and take their own bush baths. Their numbers include women with diabetes and at least one with cancer, who just keep coming. Asked how the purification process has transformed her life, Shalima says: “I don’t know how to explain that feeling to you. I eating just vegetables. We just relaxing, praying, asking god to guide you.” For the women, as for the men, these rituals are as meditative as they are combative. When effective, they encourage a surrender to forces larger than the single self.



Figure 11: Renella Alfred, Whip Princess, performing Kali. Traditional Character Competition, Adam Smith Square, February 18, 2020. Photograph by Marissa Lee, used with permission.

## Conclusion

Pamela R. Franco argues that the “return to Africa” was a gender-based, masculine construction essential to the move to national independence during the 1950s:

[I]n their articles Pearse and Crowley tacitly molded our perception and thus understanding of the origins of the modern Carnival.... Applying ... a West African model of masquerade, they constructed a particular

88. Franco, "The Invention of Traditional Mas," 43.

89. "It is as though there are here two major 'models' for human interrelated-ness.... The first is of society [societas] as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of 'more' or 'less.'

The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured ... and relatively undifferentiated ... community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders. I prefer the Latin term 'communitas' to 'community.'" Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977 [1969]), 96. See also Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 93–111.

90. Benjamin, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, Port of Spain, Trinidad, February 13, 2020.

91. Of course, the Obeah of the stick and whip may be malevolent as well as benevolent, as in the case of mounted sticks and whips, in the hands of those who use the power in a dark way. This was true for none of my informants, who see their traditions as sacred, honorable, and beneficial.

92. Benjamin, interview, March 22, 2019.

93. Shalima Alfred, interview, January 5, 2020.

image of Carnival in which black men were the preeminent performers.... The hallmarks of performance were a combination of aggression ... stylized movements ... verbal artistry ... and theatrical reenactments.... This particular construction of the authentic mas is heavily indebted to the 1950s political climate, which required efficacious images of blacks that paralleled the imaginings of a new nation.<sup>88</sup>

However, though unquestioningly under the control of Afro-Trinidadian men, the carnival enshrined in the independence movement was not based on the "West African model of masquerade" with its combination of "aggression" and "artistry." Quite the contrary. The aim was to cleanse carnival of all aggression, essentially negating its emancipation resistance energies, while celebrating and marketing it as the signature festival of the new nation.

In 1965, Derek Walcott had identified the "decent citizen" who wants to "ban the bacchanal" as the enemy of a carnival ethos that sees conflict as basic to life. The T&T emancipation carnival looked both inward to the community it was designed to honor and protect, and outward to the oppressive structure of servitude it resisted, not only subverting or temporarily inverting the energies of what Victor Turner called "societas" in favor of "communitas," but staking a larger claim both to the festival and to the emerging nation.<sup>89</sup>

This model of resistance is also in tension with Bakhtin's notion that the essence of carnival is located in the "laughter of the marketplace," expressed grotesquely and satirically. While both the grotesque and the satirical are components of Caribbean carnival, its epic beauty as well as its combative energy are grounded in a more profound sense of the sacred. Building on the work of John Stewart, Benjamin identifies the gayelle as "a portal of shared experience, the mystical and the now, the spiritual and the physical.... John Stewart would say you enter space where you become stalwart.... Through music, alcohol, dance, you experience an integrated self... [you enter] sacred spaces where you can access your ancestral self.... For a brief second you become a glorious representation of all your ancestral glory."<sup>90</sup>

Kalinda, gatka, and jab jab are ritual performances of the sacred, portals through which to achieve "transcendence."<sup>91</sup> Typical of intercultural Trinidad with its many faiths, they cohabit with other religions. Boismen may be Orisha worshippers, Spiritual Baptists, or Catholics (though Benjamin says that "Christianity is the biggest impediment to our work").<sup>92</sup> Gatka fighters and jab jabs are often practicing Hindus, though the jab jabs now welcome into their ranks people of all religions: "We have Muslims who play; Baptists; Christians, Hindus, Pentecostal; we have everybody.... A lot of people from our band invite us to Baptist prayers, Muslim prayers. We as Hindu people respect their faith. We as Trinidadians respect all their faiths."<sup>93</sup>

These traditions honor the stalwart, both in body and spirit. Taking a lash without flinching determines your place in the Original Jab Jab band. The Kalinda King takes his licks without complaint. They wear their battle scars proudly. The stoic bearing of blows may well reflect the experiences of enslavement and servitude in which these rituals evolved, unflinchingly standing up under extreme conditions of oppression and abuse while maintaining a stalwart inner self with its pride and dignity intact. Lavways frequently speak of death: "When I dead bury my clothes / I don't want no sweetman to wear me clothes." And of loss, with an emphasis especially on maternal loss: "Mooma Mooma, yuh son in de grave already / take a towel and ban yuh belly." According to Benjamin, "Someone is trying to kill you, but you must transcend this moment of

94. Benjamin, interview, February 13, 2020. These lyrics are from traditional lavways, sung by kalinda fighters and chantwells for well over a century.

95. See Stewart, "The Soft Power of Violence."

96. This is an alternate name, now used along with the Original Jab Jabs.

mortality and show us your beauty."<sup>94</sup>

However, such heroic pride is leveraged by a kind of humility, what Jibari Stewart calls the "soft power" of "combat dance," which both releases and contains destructive energy.<sup>95</sup> The self is defined in relationship to the larger world not only of ancestors but of community shared with Nature. The warriors speak to the forest, from which they claim their weapons. The Alfred garden contains herbs designed to cleanse both the inside and the outside; for bush tea as well as oils for bush baths and to heal the wounds inflicted in battle. Artificially generated "competitions" with monetary prizes belie the essence of a martial art that does not gain its value from the world of profit and loss. Rich in their art and powerful in their practice, the Alfreds are, economically, a poor family, their lives given to sustaining their jab jab tradition. Without money, they plait whips for those who join them; they feed more than sixty people for the two days of carnival. If they have to put off the telephone bill, they willingly do so.

The Bois Academy of Trinidad and Tobago and the Original Whipmasters,<sup>96</sup> under the direction of Benjamin and Alfred, are now actively reviving kalinda and jab jab. They are nurturing the reality of Indo- and Afro- brotherhood, which began under conditions of oppression but expresses itself in a shared, partially essentialized worldview that sees destruction as a form of transformation in a cosmos in which nothing is ever truly destroyed. Using the locus and the multigenerational jab jab lineage of the Alfred yard, they are reviving traditions that honor and respect the natural world as part of a sacred mission. This is timely. Only too aware of the costs of global warming and climate change, we live in a time in which respect for the natural environment, so crucial to both these traditions, is required for survival. It may be that boismen and jab jabs, openly acknowledging conflict, containing combat within rules of respect, while recognizing the forest, the trees, the mountains, and the ancestors as living partners could point the way to a reconceptualized modernity.



Figure 12. Ronaldo Alfred, Whipmaster d 2nd, son of Ronald and Shalima Alfred, bandleaders of the Original Whipmasters, demonstrating how a whip is made. Alfred yard, Perseverance Village, Couva. Photograph by Maria Nunes.

**The Four Phases of Kalinda in Trinidad**

Prepared by Rondel Benjamin, founder of the Bois Academy

- I. Resistance and retention: 1600 to 1880–81/84.  
A critical part of African Resistance and Cultural Retention, Kalinda secret societies (formed before and after emancipation) were fraternal orders, deriving from West African fraternal societies, critical in the development of slave networks—for planting, music, fighting, mutual aid, education, and community outreach. Territorial stickbands appear on the streets from the 1850s on during carnival.
- II. Transformation: 1880–1940.  
Kalinda practiced during key festivals including Easter, Emancipation, and Cane Harvest begins to influence carnival music. Chantwells/Singers lend voice to emerging calypso, both men and women. After 1884, the Government begins active suppression, driving participants to transition Kalinda and its complex social network into other forms, pre-pan drumming (tamboo bamboo, biscuit tin), labour movement, calypso and masquerade.
- III. Rejection: 1940–60.  
A time of political turmoil and radical cultural change for Trinidad. The British actively attempt to fight the labor movement in conjunction with the US-led anticommunist/anti-labor activities, part of their regional policy. It becomes politically expedient for the PNM under Williams to drop Kalinda and suppress the influence of mutual aid societies in an effort to gain the necessary support of Britain in the move to independence. This drives Kalinda underground and, oddly, may have protected the form from political manipulation and gentrification. Kalinda is even pushed out of the pan movement at the request of sponsors.
- IV. Reemergence in 1962 and postindependence takeover of Carnival.  
The government begins using Carnival and Culture as tools in the formation of a new national identity. Initially Kalinda does not fit well with the story they chose to tell. At the grassroots level Kalinda communities keep the form alive. Key figures in the CDC recognize that omitting Kalinda would be a critical error and begin to include Kalinda as part of the CDC/NCC Regional Carnival program. Slowly the form begins to reemerge, demanding its space on the national and world stage.

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## AUTHOR BIO

**Milla Cozart Riggio**, James J. Goodwin Professor of English, Emerita, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, received her PhD from Harvard University. Since 1995, she has focused on Trinidad Carnival and culture. Among her edited books and monographs are *Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran* (1988); *The Play of Wisdom: Its Text and Contexts* (1990); a special issue of *TDR: The Drama Review* on Trinidad and Tobago Carnival (1998); *Teaching Shakespeare through Performance* (1999); *Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience* (2004); *Festive Devils of the Americas* (lead editor, 2015); and *Turning Tides: Caribbean Intersections in the Americas and Beyond* (co-edited with Heather Cateau, 2019). She co-edited *Medieval and Early Renaissance Drama: Reconsiderations* (special issue of *Mediaevalia*, 1995); *Renegades: The History of the Renegades Steel Orchestra* (2002); and *In Trinidad: Photographs by Pablo Delano* (2008). She has also written on Hindu Ramleela performances in Trinidad and gave a plenary presentation at *Power, Performance and Play*, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Leeds Carnival, Leeds, England, 2017.

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# The Equivocal Politics of Carnival: The Forms and Discourses of Carnavalesque Theater in Contemporary Uruguay

**Gustavo A. Remedi**

Universidad de la República, Uruguay

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## ABSTRACT

This article reflects on the political, social, and cultural institutionality of carnival in Uruguay and on its growing centrality as a means of expression and space of popular enunciation since the return to democracy in the 1980s. It also argues that the “field” of carnival is a site of constant negotiation with both the state and nongovernmental sources of power (economic groups, the media, churches, etc.) and can thus accommodate various political proposals, leading to constant symbolic-discursive reconfiguration. A detailed analysis of three carnivalesque performances belonging to the *murga* genre—*La caldera de los diablos* by Diablos Verdes (2003), *Los Sueños* by Agarrate Catalina (2005), and *Creer o reventar* by Don Timoteo (2014)—highlights how carnival has responded to, and has been reconfigured by, three recent circumstances: the apogee of neoliberalism and “the crisis of 2002,” the election of a “broad front” leftist government in 2005, and the end of this government’s second term in 2014.

1. See Mijaíl Bajtín, *Problemas de la poética de Dostoievski* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993); Mijaíl Bajtín, *La cultura popular en la Edad Media y el Renacimiento* (Buenos Aires: Alianza, 1987); Roberto Da Matta, *Carnavais, malandros e heróis* (Rio de Janeiro: Guanabara, 1990); and Roberto Da Matta, *Universo do carnaval* (Rio de Janeiro: Pinakotheque, 1981). On the romantic populist view, see Néstor García Canclini, *Las culturas populares en el capitalismo* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Imagen, 1981); and Néstor García Canclini, *¿De qué estamos hablando cuando hablamos de lo popular?* Materiales para el debate contemporáneo 7 (Montevideo: Cuadernos del CLAEH, 1986). All translations in the article are by the author unless otherwise noted.

2. See, for example, María I. Pereira de Queiroz, *Carnaval brasileiro: O vívido e o mito* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1992); Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (New York: Verso, 2009); and James C. Scott, *Los dominados y el arte de la resistencia* (Mexico City: Era, 2000).

3. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialéctica de la ilustración* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1998).

4. On the idea of the artistic field, see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). On the popular sphere, see Gustavo Remedi, "Esfera pública popular y transculturadores populares: Propuesta de interpretación y crítica de la cultura nacional desde las

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### Preliminary Theoretical Musings: Carnival as a Popular Public Sphere

By focusing on three *murgas*—one of the various genres of carnivalesque theater in Uruguay—produced in three distinct historical and political periods, this article investigates the ideological maneuverings and shifting political positionings of carnivalesque discourse and troupes in recent decades. In doing so, it argues that carnival should be conceptualized as a medium that can be used to convey a variety of ideological and political messages, against those who view carnival as inherently confrontational and revolutionary or conservative and reactionary.

Indeed, discourses referring to the carnivalesque as poetics, as a worldview, and as a form of theater—that is, as a kind of popular theater that takes place during carnival time—tend to fall within two traditions. Some, following Mijaíl Bajtín, Roberto Da Matta, or a romantic populist view, stress its intrinsically defiant orientation (highlighting, for example, its dialogical and parodic mode, its utopian edge, the destabilizing powers of humor and laughter, and its popular origins and working-class pedigree).<sup>1</sup> Others, following María I. Pereira de Queiroz, Terry Eagleton, and James C. Scott, ascribe it an essentially conservative vocation and social function, emphasizing its subaltern character, and the ways, by merely echoing common sense or providing a safety valve, it ultimately reproduces and reaffirms the existing order and hegemony; that is, offering a temporary inversion and interruption of the social and symbolic order, carnival makes such order possible.<sup>2</sup> This is further reinforced by its increasing professionalization, commodification, and cooptation by the institutions of the market, the mass media, or the state.<sup>3</sup>

Contrary to these two views, I find it more productive to think of carnival theater—and, in fact, of all carnivalesque production—as a heterogenous, conflictual, and undetermined artistic field, and as a “popular” or “plebeian” public sphere.<sup>4</sup> That is, I think of it as a public sphere existing in opposition to the lettered, legitimate public sphere that Jürgen Habermas had in mind.<sup>5</sup> Above all, I see it as a medium, a form of art, a type of discourse, and a social and cultural space that is truly accessible (in Uruguay at least) to the popular classes, which effectively use it extensively to express their views and to intervene in public life. Carnavalesque theater is thus both a language and a social space wherein popular “transculturators” operate, translating the political into cultural terms, into the masked and ambivalent languages and games of carnival.<sup>6</sup> The “carnivalization of the political scene” is thus the obverse side of the politicization of carnival.<sup>7</sup>

If we think of the public sphere as a combination of media (the press, the printed word, literary reviews) and locales of sociability (London coffeehouses, men’s clubs, literary societies, French salons, German dinners [*Tischgesellschaften*]), we can then think of carnival as constituting quite a different kind of public sphere, resulting from the combination of another set of media (carnavalesque theater and song, radio and TV programs devoted to it, etc.) and a second set of locales: for example, carnival stages, the clubs where actors gather and rehearse, and the pubs where folks drink and meet afterward. It is through these popular practices and these other set of social and cultural experiences that popular forms of discourse and consciousness—a carnivalesque view of life and the world, a popular concept of life and world—are not only

prácticas culturales de las clases subalternas," in *Hermenéuticas de los populares*, ed. Hernán Vidal (Minneapolis, MN: Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literature, 1992), 127–202; Gustavo Remedi, *Murga: El teatro de los tablados: Crítica de la cultura nacional desde las prácticas culturales de las clases populares* (Montevideo: Trilce, 1996); and Gustavo Remedi, "The Production of Local Public Spheres: Community Radio Stations," in *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Ana del Sarto, Abril Trigo, and Alicia Rios (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 513–33. On the plebian sphere, see Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Towards an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Spheres* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

5. See Jürgen Habermas, *Historia y crítica de la opinión pública: La transformación estructural de la vida pública* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1981); John B. Thompson, "La teoría de la esfera pública," *Voces y cultura*, no. 10 (1996), 1–10; and Angel Rama, *La ciudad letrada* (Hanover, NH: Ediciones del Norte, 1984).

6. On transculturation, see Remedi, "Esfera pública popular." On translating the political into cultural terms, see Stuart Hall, "Notas sobre la deconstrucción de lo popular," in *Historia popular y teoría socialista*, ed. Raphael Samuel (Barcelona: Crítica, 1984), 1–10.

7. Milita Alfaro, *Carnaval: Una historia social de Montevideo desde la perspectiva de la fiesta*, vol. 1, *El carnaval "heroico" (1800–1872)* (Montevideo: Trilce, 1991), 79.

expressed but also actually formed differentially.<sup>8</sup> However, such "popular" worldview and practices are often heterogeneous and contradictory.<sup>9</sup> They often express multiple, conflicting ideologies and politics.

I borrow the term "transculturation" from Angel Rama, who himself adapted it from Fernando Ortiz, in order to highlight a new kind of narrative structure, language, and worldview he saw emerging in Latin America.<sup>10</sup> Similar to Rama's "literary transculturators," popular transculturators—carnavalesque theater practitioners—also perform the work of transculturation, that is, the task of selecting and combining elements taken from different archives and repertoires (high culture, low culture, mass culture, folklore, everyday life, art, politics, etc.). As opposed to their lettered/literary counterparts, they work within the popular public sphere—in our case, the field of carnival—and they need to translate and re-elaborate everything into carnivalesque terms and codes. Transculturation does not simply refer to the process of selecting and rearticulating elements of one's own culture with the culture of others. It also implies overcoming and diluting distinctions, such as high and low culture, literary and oral, mass and folk, local and global, and art's autonomy and heteronomy. Performing the task of transculturation, actors keep alive and bring back repressed and excluded cultural traditions and forms, giving form to and merging in the project of cultural decolonization and transmodernity.<sup>11</sup>

Popular acts of transculturation achieve something that was of concern for both Walter Benjamin and Antonio Gramsci. Influenced by Bertolt Brecht, Benjamin criticized the elitism of the intellectual Left and highlighted the need for critical and progressive ideas to be discussed, appropriated by, and incarnated in the popular masses in order to be able to transform society.<sup>12</sup> As for Gramsci, he understood folklore to be both an expression of hegemony—past and present—and a creative and "deviant" production by means of which the popular classes manage to smuggle in, even if in subordinated form, elements of their own alternative experience and worldview, which consequently survived, permeated, and shaped society and culture.<sup>13</sup>

As occurs in any social and cultural space in which the popular classes participate almost exclusively, both as producers and spectators, another experience of life, social reality, and nation takes place, and a differentiated sensibility, aesthetics, and worldview are brewed.<sup>14</sup> This is, perhaps, the most significant political substance and content of Uruguayan carnival theater, whose main political challenge nowadays comes from excessive regulation, professionalization, and industrialization. Carnival practitioners have so far been able to meet this challenge creatively, by either resorting to existing modes of production (such as the murga, albeit in renovated forms, such as the *murga joven*<sup>15</sup>) or using forms not entirely in compliance with the conventions of the genre or the rules of official carnival contests.

Thus, thinking about carnival as a field prevents us from slipping into essentialisms and ahistorical generalizations of various kinds. Firstly, it allows us to account for changes that have occurred over the years, in tandem with the historical and political process. Secondly, it enables us to capture its heterogeneous, contradictory, and indeterminate character, something that is in the nature of popular culture.<sup>16</sup> More to the point, it serves to visualize the tensions, conflicts, and disputes that take place within the field of carnival and to identify competing poetic and ideological forms.

8. On a carnivalesque view of life and the world, see Bajtin, *Problemas de la poética de Dostoievski*. On a popular view, see Antonio Gramsci, "Canciones populares" (vol. 2, notebook 5, 361), "Observaciones sobre el folclore" (vol. 6, notebook 27 [XI], 203–6), and "Concepto de nacional-popular" (vol. 6, notebook 21 [XVII], 40–43), all in *Cuadernos de la cárcel* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1986). On the different formation, see Edward P. Thompson, *La formación de la clase obrera en Inglaterra* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1989); and Thompson, "La teoría de la esfera pública."
9. Gramsci, "Observaciones sobre el folclore"; and Gramsci, "Canciones populares."
10. Angel Rama, *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1982).
11. See, for example, Aníbal Quijano, "Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina," in *La colonialidad del saber: Eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales*, ed. Edgardo Lander (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2000), 201–45; Enrique Dussel, "Europa, modernidad, eurocentrismo," in Lander, *La colonialidad del saber*, 41–53; and Enrique Dussel, "Sistema mundo y transmodernidad," in *Modernidades coloniales*, ed. Ishita Banerjee, Saurabh Dube, and Walter Mignolo (Mexico City: Editorial El Colegio de México, 2004), 201–26.
12. Walter Benjamin, "El autor como productor," in *Brecht, ensayos y conversaciones* (Montevideo: Arca, 1966), 77–98.
13. Gramsci, "Observaciones sobre el folclore."

I also intend to establish the study of carnival—and of carnivalesque theater—as a subfield of theater studies in Uruguay, highlighting the fact that, according to José Pedro Barrán, carnival in Uruguay has been historically “disciplined” and, as was pointed out by Paulo Carvalho Neto and Milita Alfaro, altogether “theatricalized.”<sup>17</sup> Hence, the various genres of carnivalesque theater—murgas among them—are the kind of “*teatro tosco*” Peter Brook had in mind and praised, or a type of “third theater,” a theater outside and “off” the official or legitimate theater stages in the tradition of the ancient satires, parodies, and farces, the Italian *commedia dell’arte*, Lope de Rueda’s *pasos*, the comic *sainete*, Valdes’s *actos*—all examples of *género chico* and *teatro breve*—as well as many forms of musical theater, such as the *zarzuela*, or the *revista de variedades* (or *varieté*).<sup>18</sup>

Yet, with only rare exceptions, Uruguayan carnival has not been thought of and studied as theater, or as a type of popular theater, not even as a kind of musical theater.<sup>19</sup> Rather, it has been approached and studied from disciplines other than theatrical studies, such as anthropology, ethno-musicology, history (especially social history), sociology, and political science, focusing on its role in the context of the authoritarian crisis of the early 1970s, the following military dictatorship, and censorship.<sup>20</sup>

With these premises and goals in mind, I then pose a series of questions: What can we say about the ways carnival has adapted to, has responded to, and has been involved in the changing political scenarios of the past two decades? How has carnivalesque theater translated politics into its own language, terms, and space? To what extent has carnivalesque discourse provided a language and a worldview critical of both the (neo)liberal regime (up to 2005) and the governing Left (after 2005)?

### Carnival Formation in Uruguay: A Personal/Historical Narrative

When I was a child, in the middle of summer—that is, February—the children on my block would sometime gather on the sidewalk to throw “water bombs” (*bombitas de agua*) at passersby. We also aimed our water streams (*pomos*) at them, as well as into the open windows of buses and trolleys, where folks were surprised, and quite upset, to find their office clothes suddenly soaked.

On any given evening during those days in February, my family would attend a highly crowded carnival inaugural parade on the capital’s main artery, 18 de Julio Avenue. Most of us were standing amid—and somewhat smashed by—the attending multitude. The luckier ones among us were comfortably seated in chairs rented by City Hall, which organized this official parade. Running up and down, sitting on the street, and teasing the paraders, kids were the protagonists in the *proscenium*. More than just the thrill of seeing the carnival queens waving at the crowd, preceded and followed by hundreds of carnival troupes of all kinds, the parade offered the occasion to buy and wear our favorite masks and become, for a short while, “somebody else.” In the 1960s and 1970s this meant buying and wearing masks based on characters from comic books, cartoons, and TV series: Batman, Wonder Woman, mummies, princesses, vampires, and so on. Protected by such anonymity, we could perform mischievous tricks, which basically consisted of watering people and throwing confetti (*serpentina*) and foam.

The parade, which was long and to a certain extent boring for kids, offered a second pleasure.

14. Thompson, *La formación de la clase obrera en Inglaterra*.

15. See Julio Brum, *Comparando la alegría de cantar: La experiencia de la murga joven en Montevideo* (Montevideo: IM/TUMP, 2001); and Guzmán Ramos and Alejandro Scherzer, *Destino: Murga joven. Espacio, tiempo, circunstancias* (Montevideo: Medio & Medio, 2010).

16. Gramsci, "Canciones populares"; and Gramsci, "Observaciones sobre el folclore."

17. José Pedro Barrán, *Historia de la sensibilidad en el Uruguay*, vol. 1, *La cultura bárbara* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1989); José Pedro Barrán, *Historia de la sensibilidad en el Uruguay*, vol. 2, *El disciplinamiento* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1990); Paulo Carvalho Neto, *El carnaval de Montevideo: Folklore, historia, sociología* (Seville: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 1967); Alfaro, *Carnaval... (1800–1872)*; Milita Alfaro, *Carnaval: Una historia social de Montevideo desde la perspectiva de la fiesta*, vol. 2, *Carnaval y modernización: Impulso y freno del disciplinamiento (1873–1904)* (Montevideo: Trilce, 1998); and Milita Alfaro and Antonio Di Candia, *Carnaval y otras fiestas* (Montevideo: Comisión del Bicentenario, 2013).

18. On third theater, see Peter Brook, "El teatro tosco," in *El espacio vacío: Arte y técnica del teatro* (Barcelona: Península, 1994), 93–135; and Eugenio Barba, "Tercer teatro," in *Teatro: Soledad, oficio y revuelta* (Buenos Aires: Catálogos, 1997); 203–5. On theater outside the legitimate

This included teasing and running away from the "cabezudos": big-headed creatures with no arms that went up and down the street in sudden fits of running, and whose only reason for existence was to make children laugh and cry by approaching them with their scary big heads and mouths and making threatening gestures.

By the 1960s and 1970s, the neighborhood dance parties of yesterday were pretty much gone, though they would reemerge as New Year's Eve block parties. Gone as well were the "assaults" (*asaltos*), which consisted of neighbors crashing other people's homes. I know of this only through older folks' memories and accounts. We, for our part, attended a neighborhood show called "*tablado*," organized and run by ad hoc committees of neighbors and merchants, who built a stage where carnival theater troupes would perform (figs. 1–4).



Figure 1. *Tablado del Museo del Carnaval*. Photo by Juan Samuelle, from *El Observador*. Courtesy of the photographer.



Figure 2. *Tablado barrial*. Source: Intendencia de Paysandú, <https://www.paysandu.gub.uy/destacadas/3635-intendencia-y-comision-de-carnaval-destacan-exitoso-comienzo-de-tablados-barriales>.

stage, see Gustavo Remedi, ed., *El teatro fuera de los teatros: Apuntes desde el archipiélago teatral* (Montevideo: CSIC-Udelar, 2014); and Gustavo Remedi, "Teatro de frontera/espacios contaminados: Argumentos desde la transmodernidad," in *Teatro, memoria, identidad*, ed. Roger Mirza (Montevideo: FHCE/CSIC, 2009), 83–99.

19. See Gustavo Diverso, *Murgas: La representación del Carnaval* (Montevideo: Imprenta Coopren, 1989); Gustavo Diverso, "Lo murguístico es el cuplé," *la diaria* (January 31, 2014), <https://ladiaria.com.uy/articulo/2014/1/lo-murguistico-es-el-cuple/>. Remedi, *Murga*; Isabel Sans, *Identidad y globalización en el carnaval* (Montevideo: Fin de siglo, 2008); and Cecilia Carriquiry, "Poéticas de la murga uruguaya: Tradición, profesionalismo y rupturas. Estudio comparado temático-formal de cuatro casos entre 2005 y 2010" (master's thesis, Universidad de la República, 2018).

20. On ethno-musicology, see Lauro Ayestarán, *El folklore musical uruguayo* (Montevideo: Arca, 1997); Couriún Aharonián, "La murga, lo murguístico," in *Músicas populares del Uruguay* (Montevideo: Tacuabé, 2007), 165–82; Marita Fornaro, "Los cantos inmigrantes se mezclaron: La murga uruguaya: Encuentro de orígenes y lenguajes," in *Trans Revista transcultural de música*, no. 6 (2002), <http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/articulo/230/los-cantos-inmigrantes-se-mezclaron-la-murga-uruguayana-en-encuentro-de-origenes-y-lenguajes>; Gustavo Goldman, *Salve Baltasar: La fiesta de reyes en el barrio sur de Montevideo* (Montevideo:



Figure 3. Tablado. Photo Municipio "A" de Montevideo.

Source: <https://municipioa.montevideo.gub.uy/comunicacion/noticias/que-lindo-el-tablado-de-mi-barrio>.



Figure 4. Tablado de Verano del Parque Rodó. El País Archive.

Source: <https://www.tvshow.com.uy/novedades-carnaval-tablados-nuevo-reglamento-bus-gratuito.html>.

The acts were of different kinds or genres: there were murgas, *parodistas*, *humoristas*, *escolas do samba*, *comparsas de negros* (groups of black drummers and *candombe* dancers), folk singers, stand-up comedians, and *payadores* (singers who improvised musical dialogues). At that time, I enjoyed the parodists, humorists, and stand-up comedians the most, because of their

CSIC-EUM-FONAM, 1997); Brum, *Compartiendo la alegría de cantar*; and Clara Biermann, "Faut-il avoir des *bolas* pour faire une 'vraie' *murga*? Comique de genre et transgression dans le Carnaval de Montevideo (Uruguay)," in *Cahiers d'ethnomusicologie*, no. 26 (2013): 111–28. On social history, see Barrán, *Historia de la sensibilidad en el Uruguay*, vols. 1 and 2; Alfaro, *Carnaval*, parts 1 and 2; and Alfaro and Di Candia, *Carnaval y otras fiestas*. On censorship, see Dorothée Chouitem, *Carnaval, dictadura y después: Decir y no decir bajo censura* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 2018); and Gabriela Rivera, *Carnaval y dictadura: Los mecanismos de elusión de la censura* (Vigo: Escola Internacional de Doutorado-Universidad de Vigo, 2019).

21. "Baile de más caras" is by the group Los que iban cantando (Jorge Lazaroff, Luis Trochón, Jorge Bonaldi, and Carlos da Silveira). "Para abrir la noche" and "A redoblar" were written by Ruben Olivera and Mauricio Ubal and were performed by a band named Rumbo. "Brindis por Pierrot" and "Aquello" were written by Jaime Roos, and "Brindis por Pierrot" was performed by Washington "Canario" Luna.

22. Eduardo Restrepo, *Antropología y estudios culturales: Disputas y confluencias desde la periferia* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2012); 205–6.

silly double entendre jokes, usually of a sexual nature, some offensive, and most rather childish and naive. Besides the spectacle itself, we enjoyed being with our peers, the social intermingling and the romancing, and eventually, catching the eye of somebody from outside our inner circle. Girls, for their part, had their eyes and hearts out for the (rather few) good-looking actors and stars on stage.

In the early 1980s, I turned eighteen and went to college. Like many, I became increasingly politically conscious and active. In 1980 I voted in the plebiscite against the dictatorship, and carnival provided secondary, yet crucial, avenues of activism. For instance, in Sur and Palermo, two neighborhoods historically inhabited by Afro-Uruguayans, the end of the *Desfile de Llamadas* (the parade of the black *comparsas*) turned into a demonstration against the military, and moments later, into a clash with the police. The 1980s *murgas* and other carnival theatrical performances reflected a similar political consciousness, managing to convey hidden—and sometimes not-so-hidden—political messages, or so we believed. Radio stations started to broadcast songs (of the rather vague genre we called *canto popular*) built around carnivalesque rhythms, sounds, and poetics, with mild, implicit, or imagined social and political messages.

Increasingly, social and political mobilizations started to be preceded, accompanied, or crowned by carnival songs and carnival theatrical representations. Some of these, such as "Baile de más caras," "Para abrir la noche," "A redoblar," "Brindis por Pierrot," and "Aquello," became anthems of the mobilization against the military and offered ways of imagining other realities: a future different from and better than the present.<sup>21</sup> Neighbors, housing co-ops, and students formed their own improvised carnivalesque groups to appear in public to express their views, critiques, and hopes.

A few years later, as I was completing my undergraduate studies in Latin American literature, I rediscovered Uruguayan carnival, this time from a literary and theater studies angle, and I got interested in the relationship between culture, ideology, aesthetics, history, and society and politics, in other words, what Eduardo Restrepo later called "the cultural dimension of politics and the political dimension of culture."<sup>22</sup> As I was researching forms of popular literature and theater, I argued that carnival theater and carnivalesque theatricalities constituted a legitimate object of literary/cultural study (something that, to this day, is rejected in Uruguay). I thus made the Uruguayan carnival of the mid-1980s the focus of my dissertation.

By then Uruguayan carnival had become, as Uruguayans like to think, one of the longest if not *the* longest carnival in the world, extending from February until well into March. Actually, some early parades and public appearances even take place in January, rehearsals begin several months before, and plays continue to be performed well past March. Some say it is a year-round affair.

In February and March, when carnival festivities are most intense, there are regular parades and spectacles of various kinds and in different places. Many thousands of people partake in the production of carnival, either as actors, directors, playwrights, designers, singers, dancers, and more. Most, however, attend these parades mainly as spectators. Indeed, as it has been "theatricalized," contemporary carnival has become less "lived" and more watched and listened to.

23. The eight private stages are:

Velódromo Municipal (Parque Batlle), 1° de Mayo (across from Palacio Legislativo), Club Malvín, Rural del Prado, Monumental de la Costa (Parque Roosevelt), Buceo (across from Buceo Cemetery), Parque Rodó (in front of Defensor's Stadium), and Club Rentistas (Cerrito de la Victoria).

The sixteen public stages are:

Anfiteatro Washington "Canario" Luna (next to Antel Arena), Jardines de Manga, Las Acacias, Club Arbolito (La Teja), Lucho "El Tío" Suárez (Cerro), Museo del Carnaval (Ciudad Vieja), Las Torres - Juan Taranto (Francisco de Quevedo y Granados), Jardín de Nuevo París/Club Salus, Escenario Popular Daniel Viglietti, Teatro Barrio Lavalleja, Escenario Pablo Estramín, Monte de la Francesa, Almacén Cultural Macanudos, Molino del Galgo, Flor de Maroñas, and Punta de Rieles.

24. *Lubolos* are whites who, historically, painted their faces black (like minstrels) in order to participate in this Afro-Uruguayan theatrical form. See George Reid Andrews, *Blackness in the White Nation: A History of Afro-Uruguay* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 50–84.

As spectacles, carnival performances take place on two kinds of stages: the street, where several kinds of parades take place, and the *tablados* (built stages). Nowadays, in Montevideo alone, there are eight such privately run stages, attended by thousands of folks every night; sixteen public stages (*tablados populares*) set up by the city; and four itinerant ones (*Rondamomo*), to which residents need to bring their chairs.<sup>23</sup> The symbolic center of it all, however, is the open amphitheater at Parque Rodó (Teatro de Verano) where the official contest takes place.

Adding up all the genres (*categorías*) of carnivalesque theater, including murgas, parodists, humorists, *revistas*, and *sociedades de negros y lubolos*, more than fifty companies perform several acts, and in different places, every day.<sup>24</sup> This is without counting the many groups participating in the murga joven circuit and other amateur circles. Each group performs on various stages each night, going from one stage to another. Each presentation lasts somewhere between forty and fifty minutes. Each stage offers as many as six or seven groups per night. Spectacles begin in the evening and do not end until well past midnight (at 1:00 a.m. or 2:00 a.m.). Just as many groups of *comparsas* participate in the two-night-long *Desfile de Llamadas*.

In the past decades, carnival has also been turned into a media event, broadcast through radio and television networks. This growing exposure has transformed the concept, nature, and experience of public space and of carnival, as some attend the *tablados*, others watch them on television or on the internet, and yet others do both. Some stages, such as the Teatro de Verano or Isla de Flores Street (where the *Llamadas* parade takes place), have become virtual open-air TV studios.

The murga, the genre of carnivalesque theater I am focusing on, is the most popular of them all. Structurally, the murga genre is made up of the following sections: the entrance (*saludo*) and the exit (*retirada* or *despedida*) at both ends, and in between a number of short segments of various kinds (*canción*, *popurrí*, *cuplés*, etc.), either developing a single and overarching theme, or presenting a number of different ones (the *popurrí* taking this to its extreme). These are performed by the chorus (*coro de murga*), led by a director (*corifeo*), and a body of three musicians on stage (*la batería de murga*). In addition, there are a small number of individualized characters, more or less developed depending on the situation and theme of the short act in question, which engage in a dialogue with the chorus and other characters (as in the case of the *cupleteros*—main characters). These traditional parts and forms have been played with, altered, and mixed in recent years, sometimes as a result of the genre's own reflexivity and self-critique in the spirit of the carnivalesque poetics, and sometimes as a result of formal experimentation and the pursuit of innovation.

If in the first half of the twentieth century carnival performed an essentially comic, cathartic function, contributing to the ultimate restoration of the social, political, and cultural order, by the late 1960s, some interventions within the field began challenging the existing social, political, cultural, or symbolic order. This was reinforced during the military dictatorship, particularly in the late 1970s and early 1980s, after the years of the harsher repression (1974–77) had passed, as more and more troupes dared to question the regime in veiled terms (though, importantly, not all of them did so). In any case, carnival was then perceived to be somehow situated

25. Gustavo Remedi, "Del carnaval como 'metáfora' al teatro de carnaval," in *Latin American Theatre Review* 34, no. 2 (2001): 127–52; and Remedi, *Murga*.

26. During 1986–94 inequality in Uruguay remained almost unchanged, whereas it grew in 1994–2007 and started to fall in 2007–9. See Guillermo Alves, Verónica Amarante, Gonzalo Salas, and Andrea Vigorito, "La desigualdad del ingreso en Uruguay entre 1986 y 2009" (working paper, School of Economics, Universidad de la República, Montevideo, Uruguay, 2012). <http://www.iecon.ccee.edu.uy/dt-03-12-la-desigualdad-del-ingreso-en-uruguay-entre-1986-y-2009-publicacion/286/es/>.

27. The banking crisis of 2002 in Uruguay was a socioeconomic cataclysm similar to the crisis of 1929 in the United States or the crisis of 2001 in Argentina. See Carlos Staneri, *Al borde del abismo: Uruguay y la gran crisis de 2002–2003* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 2011). For a quicker look, see Raúl Zibechi, "The Crisis in Uruguay: The Long View," *NACLA* (September 25, 2007): <https://nacla.org/article/crisis-uruguay-long-view>.

outside the ordinary time and space—a site where one could distance and estrange oneself from the official discourse, where one could rethink national culture from below. Ironically, in a country that likes to think of itself as secular, carnival was re-functionalized as a pagan ritual and restored a sense of the sacred against the background of the profane order of the dictatorship. Yet carnival as a religious mask could not but be a tricky space, as it celebrated a variety of gods, beliefs, and sects—not just one—which competed for the hearts and minds of the national popular body.<sup>25</sup>

Building on the preceding ways of thinking of carnival in Uruguay, as well as having in mind its current configuration and character, I now turn to a discussion of three spectacles, performed under different circumstances, with the purpose of exploring how carnivalesque theater has reacted to the changing historical and political process over the last fifteen years. I will pursue mostly a discursive analysis, yet I will also dwell and reflect on significant devices of this carnivalesque theatrical form and *mise-en-scène*.

### **A (Neoliberal) Hell with a View: Diablos Verdes's *The Devils' Cauldron* (2003)**

With the end of the civic-military dictatorship and the restoration of democracy in 1985, the popular classes faced a new challenge, that of a new wave of capitalist modernization. The so-called neoliberal reforms of the 1990s implemented by a number of Latin American governments aimed to open the economy to global market forces while reducing the welfare state, freeing the "invisible hand" of the market and, in the process, the power and reach of imperial international political and economic agents (and their local partners). The neoliberal governments that came to power in the 1990s (including those of Carlos Menem in Argentina, Collor de Melo in Brazil, Carlos Salinas de Gortari in Mexico, Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada in Bolivia, and Luis Lacalle in Uruguay) sought to privatize the profitable public companies, weaken labor organizations to lower the costs of labor, and strengthen the hand of capital (its power, its rule, its profits), mostly associated with agribusiness, the export of raw materials, and the financial sector.

Gravitating around the notion of consumption—participating in the market as "equal free sellers and buyers"—neoliberalism sought to meet social needs and achieve individual satisfaction by increasing economic activity and hoping for a trickle-down effect in lieu of wealth redistribution policies. It meant importing consumer goods from the global market and, above all, adopting a culture of unrestrained and compulsive consumption. In the context of struggling underdeveloped economies, price asymmetries, trade imbalances of all sorts, and increased indebtedness, this only increased economic and social inequalities.<sup>26</sup> A brief period of apparent bonanza proved to be a mirage with fatal consequences.

The beginning of the millennium could not have started worse: the neoliberal model imploded in 2002. While the dictatorship had proved to be a political and moral catastrophe, the neoliberal experiment caused the Uruguayan economy to fall into a general crisis that destroyed the productive apparatus, set historic unemployment and emigration records, and impoverished most of its middle-class and working-class population.<sup>27</sup>

In the subsequent carnival, Diablos Verdes (Green Devils), a murga troupe formed in the late 1930s in the working-class neighborhood of La Teja, presented a spectacle called *La caldera*

28. My analysis is based on the recording of *La caldera de los diablos* edited and published by Ayuí/Tacuabé in 2003 (Serie de la Brillantina A/E 265 CD) and on the complete audiovisual record available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNpw-85cJTL8>.

29. Analía Camargo, "Diablos Verdes, Pare de sufrir: Entrevista a Leo Preziosi y Charly Álvarez," *SieteNotas* (February 17, 2003): <http://sietenotas.com/Inicio/contenido.aspx?i=6B6ADB35-8CCB-4090-8150-9A335BA05C4D>.

*de los diablos* (The Devils' Cauldron) and referred to "the hell" created by the neoliberal crisis.<sup>28</sup> Written by actor, playwright, and director Leonardo Preziosi, *Diablos* won the 2003 official contest. According to Preziosi, the idea was to represent the hell that the popular classes were experiencing ("what is taking place in reality") through the distorting and distancing lenses of carnival's deformation and laughter. Quoting Brecht, Preziosi believed that "once the people in the audience see themselves on stage and manage to laugh at their situation, they can start overcoming it."<sup>29</sup>

The spectacle was made up of the usual segments (*saludo, canción, cuplés, retirada*), this time organized around a single theme: the severe economic and social crisis. Presided over by a devil on an elevated platform on one side and amid a heavy screen of smoke, in the opening scene, song, and choreography, a chorus of devils—dressed in robes and horns—introduced themselves as "devils of the twenty-first century that condemn injustice and sadness," and inaugurated "in this hell crowned by a starry night" a time of celebration, wherein people regained their power to speak out, to sing, to dream, to laugh. They also brought the good news of a day when reason and justice would be reestablished, when poverty would be defeated, and human dignity restored.

The second act introduced the main character (*cupletero*) of the sinner, interpreted by comic actor Charly Álvarez. Dressed in grey suit, white shirt, and tie, he entered the stage singing and describing himself as someone who had voted for President Jorge Batlle's neoliberal government in 1999, had deposited his savings in local banks as well as in fishy off-shore bank accounts, and, as a result, had become a victim of the financial collapse. The chorus of devils stood still in the now unlit background. The sinner was an ambiguous character, though; at the same time as he appeared as a victim—representing the suffering of the common folks—he also symbolized the kind of subjectivity and behavior promoted by neoliberalism, thus eliciting both empathy and condemnation from the audience.

In the third scene, "The Sinner Has Arrived," the sinner was greeted by the chorus of devils, now dancing around him. Different members of the chorus moved forward and alternated to sing the different verses and stanzas (as is characteristic of this genre), and they finished by opening the gate to him. Forming a compact mass that moved back and forth from left to right, the chorus enumerated to the sinner the various "floors of the Inferno": first floor, the Bank of Hell; second floor, the Prison of Hell; third floor, the Hospital of Hell, and so on. It also referred to "the world above" as a world in ruins, as a world of total scarcity: no electricity, no gas, no water, no food—words reminiscent of "I'm Black/Ain't Got No," one of the songs from the rock musical *Hair*. As the chorus engaged in a counterpoint with the sinner, it embodied the polyphonic voice of the people's perspective.

The fourth part recreated the "Bank of Hell" (or "International Infernal Bank"), "straight as the Tower of Pisa" and "as solid as the towers of the World Trade Center." It was a satire of the speculation craze that had led to the 2002 financial collapse and of the corrupt maneuvers that had caused it. It poked fun at those who enriched themselves as well as at those who had lost their savings, their jobs, and homes and had seen their lives ruined. Gathered together like a football team posing for a picture, the chorus narrated what had happened to the sinner by resorting to the usual device of substituting new, made-up lyrics to those of popular songs (*contrafactum*). Piece by piece, the sinner lost nearly all his clothes, and at the end, reappeared

almost naked on an elevated side platform, miming various situations: such as crucifixion, prostitution, and dispossession. In the end, the police arrived, and the sinner was detained for stealing and walking around naked, and the judge sent him to jail.

In the following scene, titled “The Prison of Hell” and modeled after Elvis Presley’s musical *Jailhouse Rock*, the chorus described and criticized both the judicial system and the penitentiary system. While white-collar thieves were placed in “a summer residence” where prisoners “live[d] like kings and g[o]t fat” (“justice for the rich”), the poor were sent to quite a different prison—inhuman and cruel. Dressed in stereotypical prison clothes (black and white horizontal stripes), the chorus alternated between common prison cap and crowns as they commented sarcastically on these two opposite places and treatments.

When the sinner got sick he was sent to “Hell’s Hospital” and appeared center stage, seated on an emergency bed. Now wearing the usual white nurse uniforms and caps, the chorus focused on the critical situation of Uruguay’s public health system, affected by a scarcity of resources, strikes, and lack of staff discipline. The sinner needed surgery but all he got was a giant Band-Aid. Employees were depicted playing card games of various kinds while a number of antics typical of a madhouse took place. “Better start praying” when entering an emergency room, the chorus advised the audience.



Figure 5. Diablos Verdes murga (2003). Still from video recording broadcasted by TV Ciudad, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNpw85cJTL8>.

The last segment, “Hell’s Soup Kitchen” (*El Merendero del Infierno*), was the apotheosis of the representation. The image and mise-en-scène directly alluded to *The Last Supper* by Leonardo Da Vinci, or better still, to Luis Buñuel’s grotesque version of it in *Viridiana*, when the poor took over the scene, or to Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s rendition of it in the eponymous film, in which the apostles were replaced by slaves. A table stretching all along the stage was surrounded by a

30. General Pinochet was arrested in London in October 1998, where he remained under house arrest until March 2000. After being authorized to return to Chile, Pinochet was indicted there by Judge Juan Guzmán Tapia and charged with several crimes, before dying in December 2006 without having been convicted.

31. On the notion of “structure of feeling,” see Raymond Williams, *La larga revolución* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 2003).

number of “hungry monstrous beings” of impoverished folks. The factory scene from Georges Bizet’s opera *Carmen* and a variety of other folkloric songs and carnival classics provided the musical background to the “counterfeit” lyrics.

Part dinner, part mass and prayer (“in the name of [President] Batlle, [Minister of Economy Alejandro] Achugarry, and the IMF [International Monetary Fund]”), this scene served to congregate the group and to deploy, albeit in comic and grotesque format, a sequence of grievances and demands directed at government officials and international financial institutions. Yet, as dinner was served, they discovered and exhibited their empty plates for all to see (“empty as [Augusto] Pinochet’s memory,” who was testifying in London at the time<sup>30</sup>). With gargantuan melancholy, they remembered “the food of the good old times” and complained that there were not even bones to gnaw on since “grandma ate them all.” As dessert time approached, the negative stance turned into a biblical call to come and share the table of the poor as well as their dreams, a call to sensibility and solidarity with the dispossessed, to stand up “against the empire” and in favor of hope, to resist in spite of the flames of this inferno, etc. The true “miserable,” the chorus explained, were not those lacking wealth but those causing the poverty and hunger of the people.

In the end, the sinner pleaded to leave this hell and, in a parody of Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, “to get back home.” The devils granted him “a second opportunity on earth,” this time referencing the ending of Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The *retirada* began with a Brazilian samba rhythm and a happier mood, followed by a more nostalgic second part based on the popular Uruguayan rock band NTVG’s song “Clara” and the classic, exuberant farewell song and dance promising to return the following year.

Historically, religions have created fabulous places, such as heaven or paradise, where, in contrast with the real world, life is as should be and desires come true. Diablos Verdes’s farewell inverted the metaphor, as heaven was displaced by hell. The distorted “view from hell” stands as a carnivalesque view of life and the world. Because of the monstrous and crooked character of the social and cultural order, it was in this imaginary hell of carnival, ruled by the Green Devils, that human values were spoken of, celebrated, and taken as principles to guide action and the dream and struggle for a different social world.

If carnival is a field of dispute, that year *Diablos* managed to symbolically conquer the field, setting the tone and semantic value of carnival. The previous concern with dictatorship and democracy was now displaced by a parody and critique of consumer society and capitalist globalization and their fatal social and economic consequences in Uruguay and the region, pointing to an alternative social and cultural project vaguely imagined as a carnivalesque utopia.

The proposal, reception, and success (it won first prize after all) of *Diablos* mirrored the configuration of yet another “structure of feeling” and sensibility, critical of, and contrary to, the neoliberal discourse and reality.<sup>31</sup> This fed a tension and confrontation at two levels, first, between the two political models and forces (Batlle’s government, on the one hand, and the Center-Left coalition headed by Tabaré Vázquez, governing the capital city, on the other), and second, between the here and now of the utopian moment come true in carnival and the more abstract and alien premises of global capitalism responsible for the miseries of real life due to the

32. Bertolt Brecht, *El compromiso en literatura y arte*, Historia, ciencia y sociedad 102, ed. Werner Hecht (Barcelona: Península, 1973), 234–43.

33. Remedi, *Murga*, esp. part 3.

34. Bajtín, *Problemas de la poética de Dostoievski*, 149–200.

35. See Brum, *Compartiendo la alegría de cantar*, and Ramos and Scherzer, *Destino*.

36. Joaquín de León, Ariel Cancio, and Helen Mondada, "El Encuentro de Murga Joven como fiesta popular," Monografía del Curso Carnaval y fiestas populares, Cátedra UNESCO Carnaval, December 2014, in my personal possession.

collapse of the neoliberal regime. By making use of a formally fanciful mode of representation and discourse such as the carnivalesque, *Diablos* managed to produce the kind of realism that Brecht advocated.<sup>32</sup>

### Agarrate Catalina's *Los Sueños* (2005): Challenging the Rules of Both Carnival and Political Orthodoxy

By the 1980s, the carnival field saw greater competition between various kinds of carnivalesque discourses, religiosities, and deities. Some were less willing than others to accept the confined space and time of carnival, and less willing to conform to the rules of the official contest, or the forms traditionally governing carnivalesque genres or categories.<sup>33</sup> The most overtly confrontational types of murgas were called *murga-pueblo* and *anti-murga*, as opposed to the more traditional *murga-murga* (with such troupes as Patos Cabreros, Curtidores de Hongos, Saltimbanquis, and La Gran Muñeca). Questioning and confronting the culture of dictatorship and seeking to establish an alternative cultural order, the *murga-pueblo* (represented by such troupes as Reina de la Teja, Araca la Cana, Falta y Resto, and Diablos Verdes) was an especially rebellious carnivalesque form. It was sometimes characterized as "epic" in the sense that it displaced the dialogical, polyphonic, and irreverent qualities of carnival in favor of a more stable notion of truth, or more evident ethical and political standings, all of which eroded ambivalence and relativism, sometimes at the expense of humor as well.<sup>34</sup> In addition to its defiant discourse, it did not restrict itself to the time and place of carnival, performing throughout the year and venturing well beyond the carnival stage, as it accompanied a wide range of social and political events. The *anti-murga* also challenged the restrictive conventions, rules, and commonplaces of the carnival form as codified and imposed by tradition—and militantly embraced by the *murga-murga*—and the contest itself. Its practitioners were younger, and many came from the theater world or from the amateur university murgas. Predictably, the *anti-murga* was often penalized and disqualified by official carnival organizers, yet it opened a venue for a new conception and mode of practicing carnival that eventually led to the *murga joven* movement.

Against the background of a perceived regression of carnivalesque discourse into traditional and official forms and conventions as it sought to conform to the jury's expectations and thus do well in the official contest, the *murga joven* movement emerged in the 1990s. More than a type, it emerged as yet another carnivalesque field existing around but outside the professional, commercial circuit and the official contest. This peripheral subsystem was formed by a number of student-run carnivalesque troupes that gathered at an annual encounter.<sup>35</sup> In the *murga joven* movement there were fewer rules, and emphasis was placed on the experience and the process. As it was more playful and experimental, the *murga joven* introduced new forms, poetics, and themes.<sup>36</sup> To the traditional political criticism—national or international—and social satire, it added a different and wider range of social topics: gender concerns, issues of discrimination, a broader human rights agenda, and even a critique of weakened traditional political parties and language, which were more in tune with the new generation's mindset and sensibilities. It also questioned the increasing commercialization, formulaic nature, and conformism of the more well-funded and professionalized troupes, be they of the *murga-murga* or the *murga-pueblo* types.

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw an increase in the influence of the *murga joven* circuit and forms, and some of the most prominent and influential troupes, as well as some of

the most memorable plays came from it. La Mojigata, Agarrate Catalina, Queso Magro, and Demimurga are some examples of troupes that originated from this movement. Yet the decade was artistically and symbolically ruled by Agarrate Catalina, which began participating in murga joven in 2001 and moved to “the big stage” in 2003 (fig. 6).



Figure 6. Agarrate Catalina murga: A “murga joven” that triumphed in the major league. Source: <https://www.emol.com/fotos/27895/#1248374/La-murga-uruguaya-m%C3%A1s-exitosa-de-los-%C3%BAltimos-tiempos-en-Nescaf%C3%A9-de-las-Artes>.

37. Founded in 1971, the Broad Front was an electoral coalition created to challenge the hegemony of the traditional two-party system formed by the Colorado Party and the Blanco Party (one more urban and reformist, the other more rural and conservative). It was joined by the Center-Left wings of the two traditional parties, plus the Christian Democrats, the Socialists, the Communists, and other smaller groups. The Front was severely persecuted and repressed during the dictatorship (1973–84), and thousands of its members were jailed, tortured, exiled, and murdered, when they did not simply disappear. In 1989 the Broad Front won a local election in Montevideo and in 2005 they won the national elections.

38. My analysis is based on the recording of Agarrate Catalina’s *Los Sueños* released by Montevideo Music Group in 2005.

Following the 2002 neoliberal debacle, the Center-Left Broad Front coalition won the 2004 national election for the first time in Uruguayan history.<sup>37</sup> Capitalizing on the crisis of neoliberalism, this political triumph of the electoral Left made a century-old dream come true and opened new political horizons. It also set the stage for one of the best-accomplished spectacles in decades, Agarrate Catalina’s play *Los Sueños* (Dreams), written by Yamandú Cardozo, Tabaré Cardozo, and Carlos Tanco. Agarrate Catalina’s memorable performance won the prize in 2005, only two years after this formerly murga joven arrived to the grown-ups’ carnival stage.<sup>38</sup> Catalina also won first prize the following year for “The End of the World” (2006), two years later for “The Journey” (2008), and in 2011 for “The Community.” Due to their affinity with then senator José “Pepe” Mujica’s political style, their participation in his political campaign, and their frequent and grotesque, yet tender, characterizations of this political figure, they became known as “Pepe’s troupe.”

*Los Sueños* consisted of seven parts. The introduction or *saludo* (“Dreams have returned”) combined the notion of carnivalesque space and time as the brief materialization and embodiment of a world of dreams and imagination—“a theater of the poor”—and the arrival of the murga as the embodiment of the people and the *barrio*, with the possibility of dreaming or

daydreaming once again—in the aftermath of the 2002 crisis. The transition to the second part invited the audience to enter “the mysterious world of dreams,” a world that “escape[d] reason,” yet wherein any similarity with reality was, however, real. It also set a premise: that we get to know people...by their dreams.

The introduction was followed by a brief counterpoint between the chorus and a character with exaggeratedly hairy eyebrows named Julio Ma[g]ía, a clear reference to the historical leader of the Colorado Party and two-time president, Julio María Sanguinetti. By means of a play on pronunciation—he had difficulties rolling the “r” and replaced it with a “g”—this character was meant to parody Sanguinetti. Julio Ma[g]ía mentioned that “he had a dream,” indeed, a nightmare. He had dreamt of “a horrendous monstrous being” (referring to then senator Mujica), surrounded by “a horde of dirty and bearded creatures” coming to power, speaking of “revolution” and seeking to distribute wealth: “My wealth!” Julio Ma[g]ía added. The following *cuplé*, “The Nightmare” (Sanguinetti’s nightmare), paved the way for the appearance of a second character, “Pepe” Mujica, the object of a superb and hilarious imitation by Martín Cardozo.



Figure 7. Caricatures of president José Mujica and Hugo Chávez by Agarrate Catalina, *Los sueños* (2005).  
Source: <https://murgaagarratecatalina.wordpress.com/2008/05/28/la-pesadilla-de-los-guerrilleros-pepe-mujica/>.

This folkloric figure symbolized the changing profile of the leftist coalition, traditionally urban and middle class, as the Broad Front grew by incorporating larger sectors of the popular classes (including the impoverished working class, rural residents, and the unemployed squatters). The power of the segment resided in the successful caricature of Mujica’s look, gestures, voice, mode of speaking, and figurative language (closer to that of the working classes and rural folks), all of which resulted in self-recognition and laughter. What was said amounted to a play on words that articulated a mild political-economic critique while using double entendre as a second source of laughter. (Mujica himself attended these performances and was caught laughing at his caricature.)

39. The name Ronald Guevara Vázquez combines the names of three political figures: Ronald Arismendi, a historical leader of the Uruguayan Communist Party, who died in 1989; Ernesto Che Guevara, the Argentinian leader and symbol of the Cuban Revolution; and Tabaré Vázquez, the Broad Front coalition candidate who was elected mayor of Montevideo in 1989 and president of Uruguay in 2004.

In the third part, “The Lost Dreams of the Blanco Party Youth,” the object of parody this time was the Nationalist (or Blanco) Party. The actors made fun of President Lacalle’s sympathizers, his wife, Senator Julia Pou (“Julita Puuuuu”), and Senator Jorge Larrañaga and his followers, as they were all traveling to a party meeting in the legendary and faraway site of Masoller.

The fourth and most climactic part was a parody of McDonald’s as a symbol of corporate culture and of “the American dream,” that is the dream of “climbing up the capitalist ladder by stepping on and crushing other people’s heads,” as the chorus stated. The chorus now wore the typical McDonald’s uniform, and the emblematic clown Ronald McDonald—the main character in this segment—was replaced with “*compañero* Ronald Guevara Vázquez,” played by theater actor Iván Solarich.<sup>39</sup> Acknowledging the change in Uruguayan politics, the multinational developed a strategy to adapt to the new climate by apparently turning to the Left and adopting a series of leftist slogans and actions, existing ambiguously as a sign of “cultural revolution” but mostly of opportunistic accommodation. For example, McDonald’s was renamed Marx Donald and the employee of the month became “comrade” of the month. Its employers demanded “the end of the bourgeois hamburger” (“*la hamburguesa...burguesa*”), and advocated becoming a workers’ cooperative; forming a union; and offering “a proletarian menu,” the collectivization of cups and straws, and other disparate ideas that made people roar with laughter.

At one point, however, a character reacted to these new values and changes, rejecting them as “messing with *my* stuff,” and expressed that he did not like this “game” any longer and wanted *his own* individual hamburger and his Happy Meal box (*cajita feliz*), thus establishing a conflict or tension. Yet another voice, calm and cynical, reassured him that, in reality, nothing had changed that much, that *he* still called the shots, that “by serving you, *you* serve their purposes,” and by selling you, they actually buy you, hence casting a dark cloud of irony above it all. In the end, the chorus reminded the audience that “if *you* don’t change, *nothing* changes,...not even with Fidel [Castro] as your president.”

The fifth act was an emotive segment in which the members of the murga, all children and grandchildren of 1960s and 1970s activists, paid homage to “their parents’ dreams,” the dreams they had fought for and suffered so much for in the preceding decades, hopes and goals that had collapsed and had to be picked back up many times finally come true in this brief window—or eschatological “lightening flash,” as Benjamin would put it—of triumph at last and hope. The kids reflected on the times ahead and the illusion and joy of now having the chance to live in a society their parents dreamt for them: a society “that w[ould] have to be built,” the chorus warned. A brief sixth segment further delineated this utopian moment as one member of the chorus sang a song. In it, a poetic voice wandered through the corridors of a surreal mansion and walked into the room of “forgotten dreams” to remember and pay homage to “impossible dreams,” which, overcoming a number of barriers and tricking a myriad of sentinels, managed nonetheless to return and “come looking for me.” This voice figuratively opened an imaginary window that led to such a domain and invited the audience to venture through. In the final farewell, Agarrate Catalina referred to the greatest and most important dream of all, “the dream that makes all the other dreams possible”: the dream of coming back next February, for the subsequent carnival.

*Los Sueños* gave near-perfect expression to some of the most critical functions of carnival. It offered a transcendental and satirical critique of the established order and mode of thought. It

was a time where a “world upside down” came true, only this time, the dream, the unthinkable—and the nightmare for others—became reality, and was not simply a brief interruption of the established order. The performance was a celebration of the triumph and crowning of the people, as had been once suggested by playwright and comedian Jorge Esmóris, director of the anti-murga BCG: “Murga, the peoples’ queen, if the people reign” (*murga, del pueblo reina, si reina el pueblo*), as Araca la Cana’s classic verse went.

### **Don Timoteo’s *Creer o reventar* (2014): Pointing Out the Contradictions of the Uruguayan Left**

Having been in the opposition for so long, once in government the leftist coalition had to learn how to continue to be critical and avoid the trappings of conservatism, orthodoxy, and officialdom. Suddenly, it found itself in the position of not only having to defend and run the state but also administering the (capitalist) economy and making compromises with the dominant classes. Socially and culturally speaking, leftist culture also proved to be quite traditionalist and conservative as a result of decades of middle-class hegemony, fairly conservative subcultures (in guilds and unions, the press, churches, traditional parties, and so on), and an invasive global culture, both high and low. This set the background for a growing critical stance toward the governmental Left from within the social Left, which found its expression in the field of carnival. Yet, with some exceptions, carnivalesque theater had a difficult time combining a critical perspective on power, on capitalism, and on the capitalist state, with a critique (or self-critique) of a government led by popular forces, without crossing a line and being interpreted as siding with the conservative and reactionary forces that sought to regain control of the nation. Ten years into leftist dominance, criticism of the Broad Front government became more biting, highlighting the bureaucratic, technocratic, and sometimes corrupt practices of some government officials; the numerous errors caused by deficient, inept, management; the inability to think outside the capitalist box and the contradictions of official ideology as it promoted a sort of “friendly capitalism”; and, last but not least, the lack of attention paid to a new agenda of social and cultural rights (for example, gender issues, minority rights, and environmental concerns).

In 2014, while Cayó la Cabra, Queso Magro, and other representatives of the murga joven movement tended to promote this new social and cultural agenda, the first prize went to Don Timoteo, a murga troupe of an older, traditional kind (*murga-murga*), which originated in the historically more conservative Unión neighborhood (when compared with the more militantly working-class neighborhood of La Teja). Bought and managed by soccer stars and buddies Álvaro Recoba and Rafael Perrone, Don Timoteo privileged a critique of a number of social issues and a critique of the “contradictions of the state,” while still reaffirming the overall moderate and reformist political course (that is, advocating neither a radical leftist turn nor a return to neoliberalism).

Don Timoteo’s performance also consisted of the traditional seven parts.<sup>40</sup> After hesitantly establishing the beginning of carnival time and logic (“it seems that carnival is on”) the introduction made room for a character, “Pablo” (interpreted by comic actor Pablo Aguirrezábal) who represented both “the average citizen” and common sense, and who playfully established a philosophical and political tension or dilemma between being and seeming (“either it *is* or it *is not*”). From a dramatic point of view, the whole representation rested on the dialogue between Pablo (*cupletero*), the chorus, and occasionally other individual voices and interlocutors—such as Diego Bello—stepping forward from the chorus.

40. Here I use the recording of Don Timoteo’s 2014 murga released by Montevideo Music Group in 2014. Script writers: Carlos Tanco, Pablo “Pinocho” Routin, and Pablo Aguirrezábal. Both the text and the video recording of the entire spectacle are also available at <https://carnavaldeluruguay.com/>.



Figure 8. Don Timoteo murga, *Creer o reventar* (2014). Photo by Juan Samuelle, from *El Observador*, March 8, 2014, <https://www.elobservador.com.uy/nota/don-timoteo-logro-el-primer-premio-en-murgas-20143816350>.

41. Here, Bajtín's concept of dialogism and the carnivalesque concept of truth meets Jacques Derrida's critique of Western *logos* and its accompanying anxiety about presences, binary oppositions, clearly delimited identities and terms, stable and unquestioned truths, and so on. See: See Culler, Jonathan. "La crítica postestructuralista," *Criterios*, nos. 21–24 (January 1987–December 1988), 33–43.

42. Coined by Max Horkheimer, the term "instrumental reason" refers to the thinking and the actions of those in power that turn anybody or anything into "things" and instruments of their own objectives. Things and people have value only in terms of its "instrumentality" or use by others, and do not have value or meaning in themselves. Max Horkheimer, *Crítica de la razón instrumental* (Buenos Aires: Sur, 1973).

Pablo requested a positive and unambiguous resolution to all matters that contradicted then president Mujica's ambivalent logic ("while I tell you one thing, I also tell you the opposite"), adhering to a traditional Western "notion of truth" and *logos*, where there is no place for ambivalence or dialectics and "two opposing things *can't* both be true." In his longing for "presence" and certainty—"I need something to *be*" (*necesito algo que sea*)—Pablo seemed to forget that identity was more often than not "a relation," an opposition to and a negation of something else: an absence, a desire, a project.<sup>41</sup> The same went for bringing together and forging "the people," but negatively, that is, based on an opposition to something or someone else (be it the upper classes, bourgeois culture, or instrumental reasoning<sup>42</sup>). This led to the four motifs—and object of parody—that organized the representation: the search for and, ultimately, the fabrication of an enemy; the dangerous transformation of oneself into the other, that is, into the very enemy one used to fight and that defined oneself; the contradictions between state and society; and the emergence of negative forces from within "the people."

Likewise, the anxiety and feeling of loss caused by the perception—or confirmation—that "the people" are not as united and monolithic as they used to be (or as we liked to imagine) led, by means of satire, to a renewed awareness of the relational and negative notion of being, and thus of "the necessity of an enemy" ("Batman needs the Penguin," as the chorus put it). Or of the function of negative feelings, such as hate, in order to unite the people once again: "Hate lasts longer than love...and is more participative," the chorus noted ironically.

This need for an enemy, in turn, led to the search for and "the invention of the enemy," which was the theme of the song of the following segment. Yet this enemy was an entity brewing in everyday life: "The taxi driver, the hospital clerk, the person who calls you on the phone just

when you are watching the game. There are real as well as imaginary enemies, like the person who steals your socks. The owner of the academy who teaches your daughter how to dance reggaeton is an enemy too." In sum, "enemies are everywhere."

The "Delinquents of Yesterday" *cuplé*—a development of this "search for an enemy"—addressed the topic of crime and insecurity by creating a racialized enemy of recent Caribbean immigrants. It longed for "the thieves of yesterday" and their civilized codes and morals, as opposed to the ruthless robbers of today who "talk[ed] with a Caribbean accent"—here mocking racist and xenophobic discourses—and "under the influence of crack cocaine, do not hesitate to steal from a neighbor or a public school, aggressively rob an old lady's pension, and are willing to kill you just for your cell phone." A dialogical exchange between Pablo, two other delinquent characters (Diego Bello and Gonzalo Imbert), and the chorus sarcastically proposed to "get closer and to *understand* the thief" and requested that he use his manners and be gentle so that you could have a nice memory of the crime. Lastly, the chorus offered "a new robber etiquette," or "stealing with values." Yet, as the chorus lamented, these values were taught when it was already too late. Their treatment of the problem of delinquency then became a self-critique of the way society raises and educates children and youth.

The next segment, "Our Neighbors," moved from the thief to the neighbor—and returned to the level of everyday life—in order to identify a number of likely and usual petty conflicts among neighbors, such as the taste and volume of their music; the way their car is parked; their dog; and various kinds of noises caused by home repairs, the washing machine, or frenetic sex. The act then shifted scale and referred to conflicts with neighboring Brazil and Argentina, while reviewing a number of episodes when Uruguayan presidents Batlle, Vázquez, and Mujica made gross—and hilarious—diplomatic mistakes.

At this point, one got the idea that society—"the people"—was or had become merely a messy mass of egocentric and antisocial individuals, and that "individualism" was perhaps the worst enemy of all. "When left alone and on their own, people behave like bastards"—a Hobbesian view indeed.

The sixth part was the climax of the performance and focused on the state (and "statism") as yet another enemy, while navigating a number of facets of this problem: the necessity of the state, the contradictions of the state, the deformations and deviations of the state, and above all, "the parasites of the state." It explored what the state represented, offered, and solved, while highlighting its abuses, its lack of piety, and the pain it caused. It was a many-layered text that walked a thin line between a call "to start all over again" (entertaining the idea of stateless primitive communism) and to embrace and accept the state as "the social contract that organizes society and the imaginary" and "makes us productive and good," despite all its problems and contradictions. Interestingly enough, when Pablo demanded "the dissolution of the state," he encountered silence and disapproval from the chorus, implying that in spite of everything, people may still need, desire, and rely on the state (an idea that can be interpreted in many contradictory ways, ranging from republicanism and socialism to fascism).

In this segment, the state was represented by a rope held by the entire troupe—as a sort of umbilical cord "that keeps us together"—while the chorus sang: "The state organizes us,

establishes an order, provides a meaning. It is the people at its best, the God of the atheists.... It gives as much as it takes.” (fig. 9) Yet this notion of a “powerful” state fell rather short of understanding contemporary society and culture inasmuch as the political and symbolic order were established by actors and forces that transcend the national state (especially in small nations like Uruguay), such as transnational corporations, globalized media and networks, and geopolitical games. Something like this was indeed inscribed in the segment where the state failed to confront Tenfield boss “Paco” Casal, a powerful entrepreneur, owner of soccer players, a TV channel (VTV), and the rights to soccer, basketball, and carnival broadcasting itself.



Figure 9. The rope as symbol of the state that binds society. Don Timoteo murga (2014).

Photo by Juan Samuelle, from *El Observador*, January 22, 2015,

<https://www.observador.com.uy/nota/arranca-la-venta-de-entradas-para-el-teatro-de-verano-20151221890>.

The murga also pinpointed a number of contradictions. The media criticize the state but they make use of and profit from the airwaves that are public property. Likewise, agribusiness demands lower taxes while at the same time requiring subsidies and logistical infrastructure and demanding that the state find new markets for them. A small number of bad investments and decisions sit alongside successful public companies that enrich the state’s coffers and finance social programs and public investments. The murga did not fail to criticize carnival itself, which is not only organized and regulated by the state but also heavily sponsored and promoted by public companies, such as the State Electricity Company, the State Oil Refinery, and the State Insurance Company, and city government funds as well. The chorus warned: how much can we criticize the state if, in the end, we all depend on it, and in one way or another, we seek its aid and protection? “Among firefighters we do not step on each other’s water hoses—as the proverb goes—...and among urologists, we don’t shake hands,” the chorus jokingly reminded the audience. In sum, Don Timoteo succeeded in touching many sensitive nerves both in favor of and against the state and statism, thus creating a humorous and satirical play full of tension, sarcasm, and irony.

43. Bajtín, *Problemas de la poética de Dostoievski*; and Bajtín, *La cultura popular en la Edad Media*.

44. Gustavo Espinosa, "De la obscenidad a la retórica (poética del Carnaval)," in *Revista Crac*, no. 1 (July 2001), <https://carnavaldefuturo.uy/2006/10/12/de-la-obscenidad-a-la-retorica-poetica-de-carnaval/>. See also Hernán Vidal, "La noción de otredad en el marco de las culturas nacionales," in *Hermenéuticas de lo popular*, ed. Hernán Vidal (Minneapolis, MN: Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literature, 1992), 43–71.

45. Here it is important to stress, once again, that Habermas's notion of the public sphere is a relational one. The rising bourgeoisie developed a number of social and cultural institutions and practices (publishing houses, newspapers and magazines, places to meet, elaborate ideas, discussion of these writings, etc.) in order to organize themselves socially and symbolically as a class and to contest and challenge *both* the ancien régime and the popular classes. Likewise, the popular public sphere is also organized outside and directed against a number of social, political, and cultural actors and formations: the dominant classes, as well as, for example, the intellectual Left, the middle classes, civil servants, the "alienated" or corporatist working class, and the lumpenproletariat.

A first-person and highly philosophical "Farewell Song" summed up all these facets and contradictions. It stressed the many uses and benefits obtained from having and constructing an enemy, including hiding our own miseries, shortcomings, and wrongdoings from ourselves. It demonstrated how, little by little, we become much like the enemy we criticize and want to confront, resorting to the same arguments and excuses used by our enemies. The song showed that once the imaginary monster-enemy evaporates, we find ourselves alone and naked in front of the mirror, free at last. Lastly, it demonstrated the pain that we, too, cause to others. The final lyrics warned the audience against seeking the false and harmful protection of lies and blind faith in whatever we believed in order to sustain and reproduce the order of things and our sense of reality.

## Conclusions

While the intention of this article was to explore the changing politics of carnival in relation to a series of contextual shifts, the relationship between carnival and politics cannot be reduced to the explicit positioning and verbal expressions and discourses of carnivalesque troupes. Carnival is a complex, multilayered social phenomenon and possesses a number of structural traits, all of which have political meaning and value.

To begin with, as pointed out by Bajtín, carnival time and its festivities create an interruption in everyday life and norms, a suspension, a critique, and an inversion of present reality, opening up other horizons and possibilities that transcend, call into question, and diverge from existing reality.<sup>43</sup> Also, it temporarily offers "a second life," a less alienated one: an inverted yet "straightened" reality where humanity, reason, human values, and human personhood are restored. Indeed, it is a place where a more sensual, joyful, down-to-earth, and better-balanced "carnavalesque concept of life and the world" reigns. During this time, popular sectors take over the public sphere, become cultural actors and producers, and make use of it, albeit in a non-determined form, since carnival is merely "a field."

If obscenity has taken over the real world and the entire social scene, as Gustavo Espinosa points out, and that which is excluded and repressed is always context-dependent, carnival would not perform its "work" by replicating *that* which is already present everywhere.<sup>44</sup> Instead, carnival offers a place and an opportunity for the popular sectors to stage and voice their concerns, views, and critiques *in opposition to* the dominant sectors and forces as well as to the state, the government of the Left, the formal political organizations and authorities, the media, and "common sense" and "normal" behaviors and customs, making use of carnivalesque polyphonic and dialogic structure (even if sometimes this may be more apparent than real).<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, Uruguayan carnival, carnival theater, and the murga genre in particular, have acquired certain structural features and different political meanings and values over time. Until the 1960s, it performed a mildly critical, yet cathartic, function. By the early 1970s, *some* groups within the field became increasingly hostile to the power structure and to hegemonic culture. Carnival provided the occasion for the crafting of an alternative cultural formation in tandem with the opposition movement (for example, the leftist political coalition, the Central Workers Union, the student movement). Between 1973 and 1985, the military dictatorship repressed and restricted the cultural field in general, and the field of carnival in particular. Yet the military could not shut

down carnival—or any other cultural space or manifestation—altogether. Hence, by the end of the 1970s, the field of carnival saw the reemergence of more defiant carnivalesque troupes (Falta y Resto, Reina de la Teja, Araca la Cana, Diablos Verdes, La Soberana) that played their part in the struggle against the authoritarian state. As that state suffered a couple of political defeats in 1980 and 1982, carnival also became a cultural space for popular celebration (something better performed by the more playful and festive anti-murga BCG), for continued political criticism and action, for the imagination and proposition of alternative scenarios, or for thoughts beyond dictatorship. Lastly, in the two decades that followed, carnival found itself amid, and taking part in, a number of processes and struggles yet to be fought: the struggle “for truth and justice” and against impunity for crimes committed during the dictatorship; the need to consolidate democracy and contain the possibility of a military comeback; the need to confront the neoliberal offensive of the 1990s; and the need to articulate an alternative imaginary and project—that is, post-capitalist political language, values, desires, goals, attitudes, and practices. The first decade of the new millennium, however, presented a set of new and complex circumstances for carnival. While the Left governed the capital city and carnival became a cultural apparatus of some force—what Espinosa called an “ideological reproduction apparatus of the City-State”<sup>46</sup>—the Right still controlled the finances, the military, most of the media apparatus, the government, and the state apparatus. Left-leaning carnivalesque troupes and discourses imposed their presence—and at times, their prevalence—in the field of carnival and, without ceasing to be critical of everything (as the genre mandates), they targeted, mocked, and challenged the forces perceived to be responsible for the status quo (the national government, the global capitalist system, the media) and aligned themselves with the leftist forces, and the local and the popular sectors within the nation.

Such was the situation until the crisis of 2002 signaled both the failure of neoliberal capitalism and the exhaustion of the traditional two-party system. In this context, backed up and sustained by the social, political, and cultural capital accumulated in decades of social struggle, Diablos Verdes seized the moment and put forward a critical depiction of reality, launching a symbolic assault on the already breached neoliberal fortress. This was accentuated by the disaster of Batlle’s government, which caused the triumph of the leftist coalition in 2004 for the first time ever. Once again, carnival could perform one of its most ancient functions, that of the “coronation ceremony” of the people and the corresponding celebration. However, it was a different kind of festivity, for this time it was not merely a foolish act, or a comic parenthesis after which things returned to normal, but was one of epic dimensions for it meant a turning point and the beginning of a different era—albeit uncertain and, needless to say, never as imagined or desired.

In addition to making fun of the defeated, as expected, and laughing at the new and monstrous face of the Left—the invigorating custom of laughing at oneself—*Los Sueños* by Agarrate Catalina invited spectators to celebrate this triumph. But it also resorted to a romantic call to dream—yet another facet of carnival, that of daydreaming or *rêverie*—and to commit to the building of this dream. It also warned of some of the perils ahead: the corporate structures that remained intact and tended to adapt opportunistically.

After ten years in government and having had to run the economy within a capitalist framework—even if in a more redistributive and social democratic fashion—the Left found itself in many

47. Espinosa, "De la obscenidad a la retórica"; and Emiliano Tuala, "Adiós carnaval," *La diaria* (March 17, 2014).

contradictory situations and blind alleys. By the end of the second term, it showed signs of deviation and disorientation of various sorts, within the government, its political organizations, and their social base. As was to be expected, this was the source of a number of disillusionments with, and critiques of, leftist discourse and practice, both from within the Left and from the popular sectors themselves. Don Timoteo's 2014 performance testified to the changing climate, translating the signs of the times into the language of carnival. Thus, while in 2001 Espinosa had complained that carnival had become an official propaganda machine of the Left, in 2014, Emiliano Tuala, for his part, noticed—and admired—a "*desfrenteamplización*": that is, the emergence of a critical distance between carnival and the government of the leftist coalition.<sup>47</sup>

Don Timoteo's spectacle began by playing with the need for questioning absolutes, presences, stable identities, and certainties, all of which could be taken as a warning against demagogic positions and solutions. It was also a lamentation for having slowly become the other ("when the monster is gone, I have to face myself in the mirror") and also a cause of suffering ("the broken flowers in my garden"). It did not hesitate to parody a number of emerging social and ideological phenomena, such as the need to find an enemy to blame, a widespread moral and social crisis, and a number of conflicts at the level of everyday life. It was also critical of the contradictory discourse that called "to get rid of the state" (in favor of "the rule of the market"), while at the same time demanding and expecting the state to provide justice, jobs, better salaries, services, protections, securities, markets, investments, and much more. Don Timoteo's vindication of the need and value of the state, symbolized by the rope "that ties everybody together," may sound like pro-government rhetoric. Yet it also ventured and invited a never-ending critique of the state and its related political pathologies (authoritarianism, bureaucracy, parasitism, corruption, lack of soul and piety), stressing the contradictions of a government of the popular sectors forced to operate within circumstances neither of their own choice nor under their control. From below, and using popular language, Don Timoteo thus posed a number of unresolvable questions, something inherent to the dialogical, carnivalesque form.

In sum, in Uruguay, carnival is a form of popular theater, and therefore it should be a subject for theater studies, independent of and in addition to other disciplinary perspectives. The political sign and value of carnivalesque theater is neither substantive nor predictable. It needs to be thought of as a field, characterized by poetic and ideological diversity, opposition and conflict, inasmuch as each group responds creatively and distinctively to changing contexts and circumstances, with one eye on reality and official discourse and the other on the aesthetic and ideological reconfigurations of the field. The form and ideology of carnival cannot be established other than by studying particular representations. Even then, given the polyphonic, dialogical, masked, and contradictory traits of this kind of theatrical discourse, one needs to surmount a number of trappings and mirages in order to establish its true face, ideology, and ultimate political value. While I chose a diachronic approach, a synchronic study would reveal a wider range of positions at any given time.

The three murgas analyzed here, all of which were awarded first prize in the official contest (in 2003, 2005, and 2014 respectively), are examples of how particular troupes have responded to specific conjunctures: Diablos Verdes to the neoliberal economic and social collapse of 2002, Agarrate Catalina to the perspective of the Left coming to power in 2005, and Don Timoteo in

48. Murga costumes can be thematic and referential (connected to the theme of the part or the theme of the overall spectacle) or non-referential (non-figurative). A single spectacle can alternate between these two kinds of costumes.

49. Carriquiry, *Poéticas de la murga uruguaya*.

2014 to the shortcomings and contradictions of the Left after two terms in government, and more particularly to questions of being in power and running the country. Formally speaking, all three cases opted to develop a single theme (structuring the spectacle from beginning to end, including the *popurrí*) and privileged the *cuplé* as the main theatrical medium, opting for expert *cupleteros* and comic actors (such as Charly Álvarez, Pablo Aguirrezábal, Diego Bello, and Iván Solarich). Diablos and Catalina made extensive use of special effects, accessories, costumes, and masks (other than the usual fantasy murga costume, mask, and makeup<sup>48</sup>). However, while Don Timoteo was more metaphorical (making use of the rope as symbol of the state), Diablos and Catalina were more literal in their representation of situations and characters, as noted by Cecilia Carriquiry.<sup>49</sup>

While carnival is constantly under threat of being captured or coopted by economic or political agents and logics (cultural entrepreneurs, state officials, the mass media), it nevertheless remains popular in form and content: subaltern but not entirely controlled. If some troupes express a certain alignment with the Left, others remain distant to, critical of, and even in opposition to it. To the perceived risk of institutionalization or professionalization (as in Don Timoteo's costly production), carnival has responded by creating less formal circuits, such as *murga joven*, forms not entirely in compliance with the official rules, and more artisanal modes of production and representation, in an attempt to remain a cultural form that is accessible to common people. As a result, carnival remains both a highly popular and political theatrical field, playing an important part in Uruguayan culture and society.

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## AUTHOR BIO

**Gustavo A. Remedi** obtained his master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. Between 1994 and 2011, he was professor of Hispanic literature and culture at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. Since 2012, he has been professor in the Literary Theory Department at the Institute of Literary Studies and in the Master's Program in Theatre Studies at the University of the Republic in Montevideo, Uruguay. One of his research interests is the study of popular culture, Uruguayan popular theater, and carnival theater. On these topics, he has published *Murga: El teatro de los tablados* (Montevideo: Trilce, 1996), edited *El teatro fuera de los teatros* (Montevideo: FHCE-CSIC-Universidad de la República, 2015), and written a number of journal articles and book chapters. Presently, he is preparing a collection on contemporary Uruguayan carnivalesque theatricalities.

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# Carnival against the Capital of Capital: Carnavalesque Protest in Occupy Wall Street

**John L. Hammond**

Hunter College and Graduate Center, CUNY, United States

## KEYWORDS

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## ABSTRACT

The medieval carnival, according to Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, was a public festivity of excess in which people were free to violate social norms and subvert prevailing authority. Recent analysts have applied Bakhtin's concept of carnival to contemporary political protests that incorporate a playful, culture-defying element. But the term has been used in multiple and contradictory ways. For Bakhtin, carnival is an expressive pattern pervasive in a culture and has no instrumental purpose (what I call "communal carnival"), while carnivalesque protest consists of specific practices with an explicit political agenda ("intentional carnival"). The Occupy Wall Street movement can be analyzed as both communal and intentional carnival. Protest movements use humor to subvert received doctrines; humorous performances are addressed to participants, the public, and repressive forces. Some critics regard carnivalesque performances as frivolous and demeaning of serious political causes. I conclude by discussing the effect of carnival on the Occupy movement.

## **Carnival against the Capital of Capital: Carnavalesque Protest in Occupy Wall Street**

John L. Hammond

Festive and playful activities have had an increasingly prominent part in street protest in recent years, especially since the Global Justice Movement of the 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century. Such elements were also present in Occupy Wall Street (OWS), which spread from the eponymous center of the US financial system in New York City to hundreds of cities and towns across the United States in 2011. OWS protested growing economic inequality, the power of financial institutions, and the sway of big money in politics. Among other tactics, protesters used humor to raise these issues, hoping to encourage optimism and empowerment with acts of levity and celebration. Playfulness and defiance of official culture gave these acts a carnival atmosphere. Many activists and scholars have analyzed them applying the Soviet-era linguist and literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of carnival.

This article examines Bakhtin's concept of carnival and its application to humorous elements in contemporary protest movements. For Bakhtin, "carnival" was a festivity that inverted social ranks, unmasked the mystifications of establishment hegemony, and revealed a different truth about power relations. People participated without distinction between performers and spectators, creating a community of celebration. Contemporary carnivalesque political protests likewise inject a celebratory element into criticism of established authority and institutions. However, in these activities performances are explicitly intended to express a political position and there is a relatively clear line between participants and spectators. I therefore distinguish between the communal carnival of Bakhtin's analysis and intentional carnival deployed for a political goal. Intentional carnival arises from communal carnival—it appeals to participants' sense of humor and playfulness—but it is designed to persuade the spectators of a political point (expressed in humorous, often self-deprecating terms). I discuss the Occupy Wall Street movement in relation to the communal and the intentional, and show that it partakes of both. Finally, I consider the functions of carnival-like behavior in political movements generally and its limitations.

The research reported in this paper consisted of participation and the study of graphics and videos on the internet. I was a peripheral participant in Occupy Wall Street, and my characterization of the occupation as communal carnival is based largely on that experience: I hung out periodically in Zuccotti Park, joined in several marches, and shared in the exuberant, carnival-like spirit. I did not witness directly the examples of intentional carnival that I discuss here (except for the hand-painted signs examined below). I found many examples of carnival performances on the internet and chose to analyze several that clearly portrayed the themes of OWS's protest.

### **Bakhtin's Communal Carnival**

Bakhtin (1895–1975) came of age during the Russian Revolution and lived the heightened intellectual atmosphere of the postrevolutionary 1920s, when avant-garde art and literature and new philosophical thought flourished. Arrested in 1929, he spent many years in internal exile as a professor at a teachers' college in Kazakhstan. His major book, *Rabelais and His World*, written

1. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); cf. Michael Holquist, prologue to *Rabelais and His World*, by Mikhail Bakhtin, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), xiii-xxiii; Renate Lachman, "Bakhtin and Carnival: Culture as Counter-culture," *Cultural Critique*, 11 (1988-89): 115-52.
2. Roberto DaMatta, *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes: An Interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991); *Trinidad Carnival: The Cultural Politics of a Transnational Festival*, ed. Garth L. Green and Philip W. Scher (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Claire Tancons, "Occupy Wall Street: Carnival against Capital? Carnavalesque as Protest Sensibility," *e-flux*, 30, December, 2011, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/occupy-wall-street-carnival-against-capital-carnavalesque-as-protest-sensibility/>.
3. Natalie Zemon Davis. "The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-Century France," *Past & Present*, 50 (February, 1971): 41-75; Samuel Kinser, *Rabelais's Carnival: Text, Context, Metatext* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Dominick LaCapra, "Bakhtin, Marxism, and the Carnavalesque," in *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* by Dominick LaCapra (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).
4. For example, Benjamin Shepard, L. M. Bogad, and Stephen Duncombe, "Performing vs. the Insurmountable: Theatrics, Activism, and Social Movements," *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance*

in the 1930s as a thesis, was not published until 1965.<sup>1</sup> *Rabelais and His World* is a study of Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, a lengthy sixteenth-century novel composed of fantastic stories of a race of giants based on medieval legends. Throughout the novel, grotesqueness and debauchery stand as a critique of the stifling, hierarchical medieval society. Carnival plays a big role in Rabelais's novel and an even bigger one in Bakhtin's analysis. Carnival is the period immediately before Lent when people in the Middle Ages, in anticipation of the deprivation of forty days of fasting, indulged in excess: gluttony, licentiousness, and mockery of secular and religious authorities. Where carnival is still practiced today, in such places as Brazil, New Orleans (as Mardi Gras), and Trinidad, it has lost its critical edge against either state or church, and even much of its debauchery, now mostly exercised only symbolically, but it is still timed to coincide with the church calendar.<sup>2</sup>

The historical accuracy of Bakhtin's representation of the medieval carnival has been challenged,<sup>3</sup> but *Rabelais and His World* gave critics of the Soviet system a resource with which to criticize their own society, in Aesopian language. His depiction of the subterranean and subversive nature of carnival is widely regarded as a covert attack on Stalinist repression and the suppression of the creative urges that had flourished in the revolution's immediate aftermath. Bakhtin achieved recognition and almost cult status in the 1960s and 1970s in the Soviet Union because he provided a metaphor for circumventing the lack of freedom to criticize and organize around alternative ideologies, however indirectly.

That same work has been applied to ludic protest in the very different political context of the capitalist West in recent years. In these societies, challenges do not have to be masked in Aesopian code; protest is public and open and has acquired standard routines. But they attack a pervasive conformity to the dominant ideology. New forms of protest emerge, the better to challenge a society in which a democratic shell encases an increasingly oligarchical, money-driven form of rule. The term "carnival," however, has been applied capaciously with selective incorporation of Bakhtin's concept. In certain respects present-day political protest that is tinged with humor and irony follows the pattern identified by Bakhtin, but in others it is quite different. Scholars tend to invoke the idea of carnival indiscriminately for any public political demonstration that incorporates humor or play.<sup>4</sup>

In Bakhtin's analysis, carnival gave common people an opportunity to depart from their prescribed roles and mock the powers that ruled them. It occurred on a regular basis, conforming to the liturgical calendar of feast days, but it subverted their sacred nature. Carnival was celebratory and iconoclastic at the same time: "As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrates temporary liberation from the prevailing truth of the established order; it marks the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions."<sup>5</sup> The essential spirit of carnival was expressed in laughter. Public laughter is an expression of joy. It is also physical. It requires physical motion and is often involuntary, a surrender of one's conscious, rational self to the unexpected. Laughter is not an individual act but "the subjective consciousness of all the people."<sup>6</sup>

There were no spectators at carnival: "Carnival does not know footlights ... it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators." All were equal—except the rulers. Carnival reversed roles: the lords of state and church were ridiculed by the popular

*Studies*, 4 (2008): 1–30; Christopher Smith, "Whose Streets? Urban Social Movements and the Politicization of Space," n.d., [http://www.yorku.ca/jmarches/visiblecity/Whose\\_Streets.pdf](http://www.yorku.ca/jmarches/visiblecity/Whose_Streets.pdf).

5. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 7.

6. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 10, 92.

7. *Ibid.*, 7, 90, 339–40, 394.

8. *Ibid.*, 6, 315–22. Cf. Gavin Grindon, "Carnival against Capital: A Comparison of Bakhtin, Vaneigem, and Bey," *Anarchist Studies* 12 (2004): 149; Lachman, "Bakhtin and Carnival."

crowd. Carnival subverted the "official and authoritarian" culture that, combined with "violence, prohibitions, limitations, and ... an element of fear and intimidation," threatened the sinner with eternal damnation. In carnival people conquered "cosmic terror" and overcame "all the central ideas, images and symbols of official cultures" with (collective) laughter.<sup>7</sup>

The popular classes acted in concert to exercise dominion over the authorities, both in performance, by showing them in humiliating effigy, and in thought, by overturning the ruling ideas of hierarchy, decorum, rigidity, and modesty. In "liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order," carnival implicitly propounded a rival truth. The foibles of the rich and powerful, both secular and religious, were lampooned dramatically and graphically in bold, satirical strokes.

Carnival offered "grotesque realism": its images and enactments privileged the relation of the physical body, especially the lower body, to the real world. The spirit of carnival was portrayed as a fat, lascivious man who consumed great quantities of food and alcohol and was prodigiously sexual (most famously in the painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Fight Between Carnival and Lent* [fig. 1]).



Figure 1. *The Fight Between Carnival and Lent* (detail). Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1558. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Bakhtin contrasted the classical exaltation of the individual to the carnivalesque presence of the crowd: in artistic representations, the classical sculpture shows the perfect individual body, while in late medieval paintings, the crowd indulges in sloth and licentiousness. All these inversions were played out in public performances in the street. The common folk who flocked to watch and take part created a community that cast off the shackles of authority. Carnival offered them an all-encompassing experience, "a second world and a second life outside officialdom." It embodied an entire folk culture, and preserved that culture's independence from the high culture.<sup>8</sup>

9. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 362–5.

10. Esther Peeren, "Carnival Politics and the Territory of the Street," *Thamyris/Intersecting*, 14 (2007): 78; Notes From Nowhere, *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism* (London: Verso, 2003), 180. Cf. Katharine Ainger, "Global Carnival against Capital," *Z Magazine*, September, 1999. Third World Traveler, [http://www.third-worldtraveler.com/Global\\_Economy/GlobalCarnival.html](http://www.third-worldtraveler.com/Global_Economy/GlobalCarnival.html); L. M. Bogad, "Tactical Carnival: Social Movements, Demonstrations, and Dialogical Performance," in *A Boal Companion: Dialogues on Theater and Cultural Politics*, ed. Mady Schutzman and Jan Cohen-Cruz (London: Routledge, 2006); 46–58; Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital: Radical Clowning and the Global Justice Movement," *Social Identities*, 16 (2010): 537–57; Graham St John, "Protestival: Global Days of Action and Carnivalized Politics in the Present," *Social Movement Studies*, 7 (2008): 167–90.

Bakhtin argued that carnival was an important source for a major historical transformation, the intellectual breakthrough from medieval obscurantism to Renaissance humanism. It provided people with the resources to challenge medieval dogma and assert the value of popular thought. In the end, though, the freedom of the Renaissance became individualized and sanitized, and as it was elevated to official culture, carnival lost its subversive edge.<sup>9</sup>

### The Carnavalesque in Contemporary Protest

Many recent protest movements have engaged in carnivalesque performances. The first major protest to call itself a carnival in recent times was the Carnival against Capital in London on June 18, 1999. It was organized by the British group Reclaim the Streets in coordination with worldwide antiglobalization protests called by the international network People's Global Action during the G-8 summit meeting in Cologne, Germany. Another protest group, the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) in the UK, marched in clown costumes and staged elaborate open-air performances, usually without permit, as part of the Carnival for Full Enjoyment protesting the Edinburgh G-8 meeting in 2005 (fig. 2).



Figure 2. Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army. Photo courtesy of Tactical Media Files.  
<http://www.tacticalmediafiles.net/picture?pic=2426>

The combination of political protest and colorful party "exploits the ambivalent position of carnival as poised between aesthetics and politics," according to Esther Peeren; for Katharine Ainger and colleagues, "Carnival works all over the world, as political action, as festive celebration, as cathartic release, as wild abandonment of the status quo, as networking tool, as a way to create a new world."<sup>10</sup>

11. Stephen Duncombe, *Dream: Re-imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* (New York: New Press, 2007), 22.

12. Wayne Gytting, "Gandhi Meets Monty Python: The Comedic Turn in Nonviolent Tactics," *Waging Nonviolence*, October 28, 2011, <http://waging-nonviolence.org/feature/gandhi-meets-monty-python-the-comedic-turn-in-nonviolent-tactics/>.

13. Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital," M. Lane Bruner, "Carnavalesque Protest and the Humorous State," *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 25 (2005): 136–55; Gytting, "Gandhi Meets Monty Python," Angeliqe Haugerud, *No Billionaire Left Behind: Satirical Activism in America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013); Janjira Sombatpoonsiri, "'Excorporation' and 'Carnival' in Humorous Street Actions Staged for Nonviolent Struggle: The 1996-7 Student Protests and the Resistance Movement (Otpor), Serbia," *Thamasat Review*, 14 (2010–11): 13–34.

14. For dozens more examples, see Andrew Boyd, *Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution* (New York: OR Books, 2012); Steve Crawshaw and John Jackson, *Small Acts of Resistance: How Courage, Tenacity, and Ingenuity Can Change the World* (New York: Union Square Press, 2010).

Advocates believe that this ambivalence is a strength of carnival protest. If carnival activities offer a vehicle for unmasking the pretensions and obfuscations of authority, they are also directed against the self-imposed gravitas of traditional left activism. One reason for the growth of carnivalesque protest in this century is that many activists are increasingly disenchanted with the rigidity, dogma, and dullness of what Stephen Duncombe calls an "old model of protest [that] was simple and staid: march, chant, and listen (to the truth from the leaders)."<sup>11</sup> Thus intentional carnival grows out of communal carnival. Protesters deliberately inject the carnivalesque spirit into their own practice, and then deploy it to appeal to a larger public. (As we will see, however, this in turn can generate opposition to the frivolity of the carnivalesque from those who feel that it undercuts the political seriousness of protest.)

Many other protests were carnivalesque without adopting the name. In the 1980s, when Polish police systematically painted over Solidarity's graffiti, they left big white blotches on the walls. To highlight the erasures, the Orange Alternative covered them with outlines of elves; later they marched in parades dressed as elves and chanting, "Elves are real."<sup>12</sup>

Many carnivalesque performances make an explicit, though distorted, reference to the object of a protest. Often they engage in exaggerated displays of obedience, exposing the pretensions of authorities to ridicule. Otpor, the Serbian nonviolent movement that protested (and ultimately defeated) the government of Slobodan Milosevic, was one of the pioneers of carnivalesque practices and an important inspiration of the carnival attitude for movements around the world. Among its many playful performances was a march in which Otpor paraded a herd of sheep wearing signs that read, "We support the Socialist Party" (Milosevic's party). To "express its love" for the Polish government, the Orange Alternative cleaned up the central square in Wroclaw by scrubbing it with toothbrushes while dressed up like the heroic workers portrayed in 1930s films. Billionaires for Bush appeared in elaborate evening dress and jewels at the 2004 Republican National Convention in a mock demonstration applauding George W. Bush's tax cuts.<sup>13</sup>

These are just a sampling of many recent instances of exuberantly creative political protest.<sup>14</sup> Otpor's sheep and Billionaires for Bush's formal wear were symbols clearly referring to the objects of protest; the Orange Alternative and CIRCA were more nearly pure carnival, assembly for the joy of laughing together. Carnavalesque protest is especially effective in societies where political demonstrations are routinely repressed; protesters hope to circumvent the threat by pretending obedience or espousing a cause that seems harmless. Police inadvertently collaborate when they repress an ostensibly harmless protest, arousing indignation and heightening the sense of ridiculousness.

Many such activities have been compared to carnival, but with different meanings, some at variance with Bakhtin's original meaning. The two fundamental elements of Bakhtin's carnival, in my view, are festivity and subversion of authority. Contemporary political carnivals likewise involve these elements. But for Bakhtin, carnival was all-encompassing and created a community, a way of life lived in rejection of received routines and doctrines; it could not be reduced to particular humorous or festival performances. Protest performances, in contrast, have an explicitly political purpose—to convey a specific message of opposition to the prevailing order. They are consciously planned, organized, and carried out by a politically organized group. While those who plan and choreograph protest events may seek to capture the spontaneity

15. Geoph Kozeny, *Intentional Communities: Lifestyles Based on Ideals* (Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, MO: Foundation for Intentional Community, 1996).

16. Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital," 550–1.

17. For general accounts of Occupy Wall Street, see Todd Gitlin, *Occupy Nation: The Roots, the Spirit, and the Promise of Occupy Wall Street* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012); Michael A. Gould-Wartofsky, *The Occupiers: The Making of the 99 Percent Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2013); John L. Hammond, "The Arab (and European) Spring and Occupy Wall Street," in *The Birth of the Arab Citizen and the Changing of the Middle East*, ed. Stuart Schaar and Mohsin El Ahmadi (Northampton, MA: InterlinkPublishing Group, 2015), 283–98.

18. John L. Hammond, "The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street," *Science and Society*, 79 (2015): 288–313.

of carnival and attempt to erase the distinction between performers and audience, there are footlights, at least metaphorical ones, separating them.

I adopt the term "communal carnival" to represent the first pattern: a total way of life in which everyone is a participant and no one is a spectator, and in which the participants are there to engage in play. When performances have an explicit political purpose, promote a cause, and are performed by activists for a target audience, I use the term "intentional carnival" by analogy to intentional communities, which differ from spontaneously occurring communities in that they unite "people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values."<sup>15</sup>

Most invocations of Bakhtin in recent literature in fact refer to intentional manifestations rather than communal carnival. But intentional carnival performances generally arise from a spirit created by communal carnival. Overt performances will generally embody a pervasive rejection by participants of conventional culture, and any such rejection, if it occurs, will necessarily issue in specific acts that can be identified as carnival-like. Some contemporary activists offer their practice as more than an overt political intervention. They intend to offer a transformative experience for the participants: CIRCA (the clown army) held training sessions for aspiring clowns, encouraging them to develop "their own clown persona" by choosing an appropriate name, physicality, and costume; on a tour through the UK, CIRCA held a public performance in each town and then remained for two days, offering training in clowning for interested locals.<sup>16</sup>

### The Carnival in Zuccotti Park

The movement that came to be known as Occupy Wall Street (OWS) manifested both communal and intentional carnival. On September 17, 2011, convoked by a call in the Canadian anticapitalist magazine *Adbusters*, a small group gathered to occupy Wall Street—the capital of capital—and attack the financial system at its heart, protesting escalating economic inequality, the growing power of money in politics (ratified by the Supreme Court in the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision of 2010), and the government's subservience to financial institutions by bailing out the major banks after the 2008 financial crisis. The slogan "We are the 99 Percent" drew attention to these issues; the idea of the 99 percent took hold in public consciousness and drew attention to the growing riches of the few in contrast to economic stagnation, or worse, for the many.

On the day of the announced occupation, Wall Street was heavily guarded, so the occupiers marched instead to nearby Zuccotti Park in lower Manhattan and set up camp. Their numbers grew rapidly, and spinoffs occupied public spaces in hundreds of cities and towns in the United States and abroad.<sup>17</sup> OWS attracted activists from the entire spectrum of progressive causes and organizations. But (as I have shown elsewhere), the dominant ethos was anarchist: it rejected conventional politics of both the mainstream and the Left, declaring itself opposed to capitalism and the state, and practiced prefigurative politics, attempting to create in Zuccotti Park a vibrant community in which people forged a collective life even as they protested institutions that oppressed them.<sup>18</sup> This Do-It-Yourself (DIY), anti-institutional ethos had strong affinities both for the idea of the occupation as a communal carnival—a living community that created and controlled its own institutions—and for the practice of intentional carnival—a multivocal expression of political opposition to hegemonic capitalism.

19. Actually a privately owned public space; John L. Hammond, "The Significance of Space in Occupy Wall Street," *Interface* 5 (2013): 514.

20. Mark Bray, *Translating Anarchy: The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2013); Graeber, *The Democracy Project*, Hammond, "The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street."

21. Ginia Bellafante, "Gunning for Wall Street, With Faulty Aim." *New York Times*, September 25, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/25/nyregion/protesters-are-gunning-for-wall-street-with-faulty-aim.html>; Laura Bly, "Wall St. Rallies Are New Brand of Tourism; Arrests Drive Interest in Anti greed Protests," *USA Today*, October 4, 2011; *New York Post*, "Occupy' Goes Big Tent" (editorial), November 8, 2011, <https://nypost.com/2011/11/08/occupy-goes-big-tent/>.

22. Sarah Knuckey, Katherine Glenn, and Emi MacLean, *Suppressing Protest: Human Rights Violations in the US Response to Occupy Wall Street* (New York: NYU Law School and Fordham Law School, 2012); John McQuaid, "Why the Brutal Police Tactics at Occupy Protests?" *Forbes.com*, November 20, 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/johnmcquaid/2011/11/20/why-the-brutal-police-tactics-at-occupy-protests/>; David Seifman, "City Settles 'Occupy' Lawsuit for \$350K," *New York Post*, April 9, 2013, [http://www.nypost.com/p/news/local/city\\_settles\\_occupy\\_lawsuit\\_for\\_UwR3B1903hSHd0L-o4DRpeO](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/local/city_settles_occupy_lawsuit_for_UwR3B1903hSHd0L-o4DRpeO); Alain Sherter, "In Day

I will examine the movement in the light of my characterization of communal and intentional carnival. First, the whole occupation can be seen as a communal carnival. Within the space of Zuccotti Park, people were free to live together while rejecting the norms of bourgeois society. The occupation liberated a forbidden space—a public park,<sup>19</sup> but one that was not meant for camping out and at a location where an invasion by a declaredly anticapitalist force seemed (at least to the authorities) to pose a threat to the financial district and the national financial system.

The anarchist spirit that prevailed in OWS entailed the tenets of horizontality, mutual aid, and prefiguration. The idea of horizontality embodied the pledge that everyone shared authority equally; no one had a privileged leadership status. Food, tents, and other services were freely offered to everyone, provided by donations and voluntary labor. Horizontality and mutuality were meant to prefigure the social relations that would prevail in a future emancipated society. The occupation thus challenged not only the capitalist system in its headquarters but the capitalist ethos of possessive individualism.<sup>20</sup> People came to the occupation, as full-time occupiers or as visitors, to join in the act of transgression against conventional restrictions on the use of public space.

Though far from fully realized in practice, these anarchistic ideals underlay the pleasure of participation and encouraged a lighthearted attitude embodying the carnival spirit. Interaction was festive. Constant conversations addressed public issues, personal troubles, and the link between them; visiting activists and academics gave talks, and debates occurred in endless General Assembly meetings. But there was also music and dance. Parents, seizing a teachable moment, brought their children and sometimes camped out overnight. The atmosphere was exhilarating. Several media accounts called it a carnival, although not always favorably.<sup>21</sup>

Carnival festivity was limited in at least two ways, however: first, the police surrounded and watched over the site permanently and went on rampages when occupiers marched on streets and sidewalks outside of the park, clubbing, pepper spraying, and arresting demonstrators. In Bakhtin's telling, carnival was ambivalently tolerated by authorities, who allowed it to occur even though it ostensibly threatened their power over the people, because they assumed that it would end in due course. The occupation of Zuccotti Park faced constant police harassment and, after two months, was violently evicted.<sup>22</sup> The second limitation was internal: while nearly all occupiers luxuriated in the festive spirit, some were at least relatively more determined than others to maintain order and political seriousness. In this regard the occupation tested the limits of carnival as an intentional political action, reflecting the disjunction between humor and celebration, on the one hand, and the serious business of political protest, on the other.

While occupiers joined in a communal carnival as a festival of subversion and defiance of authority, they also put on many intentional carnival performances. Some were brief and spontaneous; others were elaborate and carefully prepared. Some did not occur in public, but were broadcast on the internet, the modern agora. They addressed several different audiences. Some were internal, meant for the movement itself. Some were performed for the public. Some were addressed to the police. (Some targeted more than one audience.) OWS brought forth a festive outburst of creative energy. Among many examples, I will discuss the use of hand-painted signs; an ostensible attempt to move into a bank; a gathering of superheroes;

of Protests, 'Occupy Wall Street'  
Faces Police Violence," CBS  
News, November 17, 2011, [https://  
www.cbsnews.com/news/in-day-  
of-protests-occupy-wall-street-  
faces-police-violence/](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/in-day-of-protests-occupy-wall-street-faces-police-violence/).

23. John L. Hammond, "Relations  
of Media Production in Occupy  
Wall Street," *International Journal  
of Communication*, 13 (2019):  
904–05.

24. These and other examples  
can be found at [http://www.  
damncoolpictures.com/2011/10/  
best-signs-from-occupy-wall-  
street.html](http://www.damncoolpictures.com/2011/10/best-signs-from-occupy-wall-street.html).

and a parody of *West Side Story*. They all used the themes of Occupy in mocking (but serious) condemnation of the dominant financial sector and those who were complicit with it; but they also mocked Occupy Wall Street itself. They exemplify the conviction that some issues are too serious to be dealt with only with ponderous denunciation.

**Hand-painted signs.** People marching in demonstrations carry signs proclaiming their cause. Often an organization calling a demonstration preprints signs with a uniform format and approved slogans. It hands them out to members to carry on the march, and may even exclude people carrying unapproved signs. The signs carried in OWS's marches were different. Many marchers made their own signs (fig. 3).



Figure 3. Marchers with hand-painted signs. Courtesy of "Best Signs from Occupy Wall Street Protests" website. [http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-3iO100gH5ys/TpS1m\\_CtzPI/AAAAAAAAACbf0/wP\\_lrztJTZ8/s1600/  
occupy-wall-street-protest-signs-26.jpg](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-3iO100gH5ys/TpS1m_CtzPI/AAAAAAAAACbf0/wP_lrztJTZ8/s1600/occupy-wall-street-protest-signs-26.jpg)

Some were made by individuals, but others (as well as banners and other art works displayed in marches) were collaborative projects, made in Zuccotti Park where professional artists, amateurs, and others who had never even dabbled in art worked together.<sup>23</sup>

Many, but not all, were humorous; those that were carried diverse messages, sometimes self-mocking ("I'm so angry I made a sign"), sometimes gentle ("Ignore me/go shopping"), sometimes pointed ("I won't believe corporations are people until Texas executes one").<sup>24</sup> But they were all expressions of autonomy and creativity by people who wanted to contribute their imagination to the cause. In their diversity, they allowed each occupier to speak in a unique voice and were an implicit protest against the attempt by political organizations to stage-manage events, with signs that all too frequently carried ponderous, jargon-laden messages. Almost four years later, an art

25. Martha Schwendener, "Seeing the Power of the Political Poster," *New York Times*, July 31, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/31/arts/design/seeing-the-power-of-political-posters.html>.

26. Corelogic, "United States Residential Foreclosure Crisis: Ten Years Later," March, 2017, <https://www.corelogic.com/research/foreclosure-report/national-foreclosure-report-10-year.pdf>; *The Week*, "The Federal Reserve's 'Breathhtaking' \$7.7 Trillion Bank Bailout," November 28, 2011, <http://theweek.com/articles/479867/federal-reserve-breathhtaking-77-trillion-bank-bailout>

27. "Occupy Wall Street Sets up Living Room in Lobby of Bank of America," YouTube video, March 17, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0AP1RsIWZs>.

critic for the *New York Times* called the signs carried in Occupy's marches "the signature of the Occupy movement."<sup>25</sup>

**Occupying a bank.** The financial crisis of 2008–09 was the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. The immediate cause was an epidemic of mortgage foreclosures, due largely to the irresponsible and often fraudulent lending practices on the part of banks. Banks received a \$7.7 trillion bailout, while over 4 million homeowners lost their homes to foreclosure between 2008 and 2011; a mortgage assistance program for homeowners was weak and ineffective.<sup>26</sup> Though the banks were responsible for the crisis, they received much more favorable treatment than the homeowners.

The Bank of America was a main nemesis of Occupy, accused of responsibility, even more than other big banks, for the foreclosure crisis. Early in 2012 a small group of occupiers carried furniture into a Bank of America branch, claiming that they were moving in because they had lost their home to foreclosure (fig. 4).<sup>27</sup>



Figure 4. Moving into the Bank of America. Screenshot from "Occupy Wall Street Sets up Living Room in Lobby of Bank of America," YouTube video, March 17, 2012. Courtesy of OccupyTVNY. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0AP1RsIWZs>

This "occupation" laid bare the absurdity of the government's support for the guilty parties while the innocent were punished (validating Thucydides' maxim, "The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must"). Occupiers made vivid the loss of homes by many impoverished citizens. They subverted the logic of capitalism (if you don't keep up payments on your mortgage, you lose your home) with a different logic: we don't live in banks, but we rely on banks to help us acquire a place to live. When the bank takes our home, we must turn to it to provide shelter directly. This message bore an implicit Polanyian anticommodity logic. In the normal case, a bank helps a family find shelter by lending the family money that it can then pay to buy a home. The occupiers symbolically short-circuited that process by eliminating the cash transaction. Instead of using the bank's money to acquire shelter, they demanded that the bank actually provide shelter outside of the housing market.

**Superheroes.** Carnavalesque protest often appropriates well-known cultural items. Superheroes—Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman—are the folk heroes of our age, always ready to combat the forces of evil, and always wearing a costume and a cape. On Halloween, 2011, demonstrators staged a Superhero March on Wall Street. People dressed as superheroes representing various effects of the financial crisis: Unemployed Man, fighting for the rights of the unemployed, the underemployed, and the creatively self-employed; Wonder Mother, who is like Wonder Woman, except that she has to fight villains with a baby strapped to her chest; Master of Degrees, whose power is that he is super-overeducated for any jobs available—shackled by debt, he carries around a giant ball and chain; Fantasma, the first undocumented immigrant superhero—her power is that she is invisible to those who hire her; and several others (fig. 5).



Figure 5. Superheroes' March on Wall Street. Screenshot from video accompanying the article "Occupy Halloween: The Occupy Super Heroes Fight Evil on Wall Street," by Deanna Gillen, October 31, 2011, Mic.com. <https://www.mic.com/articles/2227/occupy-halloween-the-occupy-super-heroes-fight-evil-on-wall-street>

28. Voice of Art, "Tax Dodgers, Pt. 1," YouTube video, July 27, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEyV-IRDuVU>; Nicole Martinelli, "Unemployed Man Is the Unofficial Superhero of Occupy Wall Street," Wired.com, October 31, 2011, <https://www.wired.com/2011/10/unemployed-man-occupy/>.

29. The superhero Batman was also alluded to by the projection of a "Bat Signal" bearing Occupy slogans on a New York high-rise building during a march; Hammond, "Relations of Media Production," 909.

After a rally in Zuccotti Park, they marched to the New York Stock Exchange for a showdown of Superheroes against Wall Street. Wall Street was heavily guarded, as it was throughout the occupation, but since they looked not like demonstrators but like people in Halloween costume, they were let through the barricades and spoke out in front of the stock exchange building.<sup>28</sup>

The superhero theme has a contradictory resonance. Looking for magic resolution of our problems is appealing, but we know it is a fantasy. These superheroes, whose roles are derived from conditions of poverty and exploitation, represent in caricature what a movement hopes to accomplish in fact: to turn oppression into a source of strength by mobilizing the victims against it. So while the idea of the superhero is recognized as a joking fantasy, it bears a deeper truth.<sup>29</sup>

**Occupy West Side Story.** Adapting another element of common culture, a small group of occupiers dubbed parody lyrics of two songs into clips from the film *West Side Story*. Even though the film is fifty years old, it is well known; its story of young people who are considered juvenile delinquents and subject to police harassment is readily adaptable to OW's themes of inversion and transgression.

30. "Occupy West Side Story - Officer Winski," YouTube video, April 15, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wGZR-JG4ZJE>; "Occupy West Side Story - Debt Song," YouTube video, April 19, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WZ2Hla2cPs>.

31. Lauri Apple, "Hey, Occupy Wall Street: Dressing Up Like Zombies Is Dumb," Gawker.com, October 3, 2011, <http://gawker.com/5846013/hey-occupy-wall-street-dressing-up-like-zombies-is-dumb>; Harry Lee, "Occupy Wall Street International Day of Action: Students from across the City Rally at Union Square, NYULocal," November, 18, 2011, <https://nyulocal.com/occupy-wall-street-international-day-of-action-students-from-across-the-city-rally-at-union-square-426096f0023b>; Revolutionary Games, "Bed-in, Asks Who are You in Bed With." OWS - Revolutionary Games Newsletter, January 19, 2012, YouTube video, February 12, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TW6x2dvALo>.

32. Michael Reay, "Humor," in *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. George Ritzer (Blackwell Publishing, 2009), Blackwell Reference Online, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosh064>; Mary Douglas, "The Social Control of Cognition: Some Factors in Joke Perception," *Man*, New Series, 3 (1968): 373; Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 126–8. Cf. Tad Friend, "What's So Funny?" *The New Yorker*, November 11, 2002; John Morreall, "Philosophy of Humor," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. N.

Officer Krupke became Officer Winski, a real-life NYPD officer and nemesis of the occupiers:

Gee, Officer Winski, the laws are unjust.  
You can't arrest us all, soon there'll be no one to bust.  
The charges are trumped up, they'll all be dismissed.  
That's why the people are so pissed.

The Jet Song became the Debt Song: "When you're in debt you're in debt all the way / from your first student loan to the mortgage you pay." The two song parodies transform Stephen Sondheim's original lyrics to refer to two of the main targets of Occupy's protest.<sup>30</sup>

These are only a few examples of the many carnivalesque performances staged by groups in the name of Occupy Wall Street, for the festive spirit in the service of subversion was pervasive throughout Occupy. On "Corporate Zombie Day" (October 3, 2011), demonstrators marched on Wall Street in whiteface and ghoulishly altered business suits to mock the "corporate zombies" (appropriating an already existing anticorporate trope) in the high-rise office buildings. On November 17, 2011, students at New York University "castrated" a paper-mâché bull named Wally, symbolizing Wall Street; they invoked "a glamorous phrase for what [the one percent] do: creative destruction. We can do that better than they can." Revolutionary Play, or RevGames, a subgroup of Occupy, promoted glitter-bombing of political candidates and staged "bed-ins," carrying mattresses to public places and lying down to provoke discussion of the question, "Who Are You in Bed With?" The Tax Dodgers, a fully uniformed baseball team whose members represented the corporations that had avoided paying any taxes in recent years, played against teams representing the 99 Percent and always won because, according to one of them, "We suck at baseball, but it doesn't matter because we pay the ump."<sup>31</sup>

These performances, produced in the name of the Occupy movement, were actually put on by small groups who took it upon themselves to stage a show to present a message, make an impression on some public, and provide fun for the participants. In a sense all of Occupy operated this way, adhering to the DIY principle. Individuals or small groups were free to Do It Themselves in the name of Occupy Wall Street, affirming again their autonomy from any imposed leadership.

In a Bakhtinian inversion, these performances expose the discrepancy between the claims of authority to benevolent legitimacy and the truth of oligarchical domination. This inversion provokes laughter. According to the incongruity theory of humor, "Events are potentially amusing if they upset taken-for-granted interpretations of a situation or utterance and highlight other valid but contradictory interpretations." For Mary Douglas, "[a] joke consists in challenging a dominant structure and belittling it.... [The joker's] jokes expose the inadequacy of realist structurings of experience and so release the pent-up power of the imagination." Murray Edelman, drawing on Bakhtin, argues that art and humor can serve as an antidote to official political discourse; art can liberate by elevating popular conceptions over official mystifications.<sup>32</sup>

In each of OWS's performances, what Bakhtin calls the "prevailing truth"—people must pay their debts to the bank, the laws are just, police officers are your friends, and they enforce the laws fairly—is unmasked.<sup>33</sup> All these interventions enact the essence of Bakhtin's carnival: the "truth" propounded by authority figures is exposed and the authority thereby overturned, if only

Zalta, Spring 2013 edition, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/humor/>.

33. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 10. The superheroes and the signs carried in demonstrations unmask multiple truths. Their explication is left as an exercise for the reader.

34. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987).

35. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 94.

36. James M. Jasper, "The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions in and around Social Movements," *Sociological Forum* 13, no. 3 (September, 1998): 413, 418.

37. Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital," 542–3; Noël Carroll, *Humour: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 84; Cristina Flesher Fominaya, "The Role of Humour in the Process of Collective Identity Formation in Autonomous Social Movement Groups in Contemporary Madrid," *International Review of Social History*, 52 (2007): 245–6; Shepard, Bogad, and Duncombe, "Performing vs. the Insurmountable," 2; Smith, "Whose Streets?" 164.

38. Eduardo Romanos, "The Strategic Use of Humor in the Spanish Indignados/15M Movement," in *Crisis and Social Mobilization in Contemporary Spain: The 15M Movement*, ed. Benjamín Tejerina and Ignacia Perugorria (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2017).

39. Bruner, "Carnavalesque Protest," 139; cf. Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital," 542.

momentarily. These enactments are a weapon of the weak, asserting their claim against the strong who dominate them. In James Scott's analysis, they can at least on occasion move the weak to challenge their superiors more overtly.<sup>34</sup>

If these intentional interventions represent an inversion, what about the communal carnival, the occupation itself? Its festivity, its laughter, also derived from giving the lie to several prevailing truths: the sanctity of property, invaded by occupiers; the omnipotence of the financial system, shaken by a handful of challengers and requiring the full strength of militarized forces to protect it; capitalist rationality, exploded by communal sharing of goods and labor. The fact of the occupation was a testament to the power of the imagination and the capacity of people to act together against hegemonic restraints.

### The Audiences of Carnival

Carnavalesque activities may be directed at several audiences: sometimes at movement participants, sometimes at spectators (including the media), and sometimes at authorities, notably the police. In their variety, they may have both communal and intentional aspects.

**For participants.** For Bakhtin, the main function of carnival is release from inhibitions: in laughing, people free themselves from psychological and social constraints, and overcome fear: "Laughter liberates not only from the external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor."<sup>35</sup> To laugh at an oppressor is an optimistic assertion that one can defy the oppressor's power. To challenge the status quo, a movement must break the hold of the rules so that people will embrace the alternative order that offers them a better life.

Outrageous, flamboyant actions can erase the lines separating politics, art, and everyday life. The visual, auditory, and dramatic elements of carnival appeal to people seeking to integrate their political activity with their personal lives and creative processes. These processes have an emotional as well as a rational element. They can strengthen a social movement's mobilizing capacity. People may participate out of an emotional reaction to injustice, and participation can itself engender emotional involvement with the cause of a protest.<sup>36</sup> Having fun together can be an incentive for people to participate. It can create a social cement and contribute to the building of community.<sup>37</sup> It can also be a welcome change from the solemnity of conventional political protest and draw more people in.

Overarching all of these functions, collective laughter provides tension release. Eduardo Romanos shows that humor can relieve the internal tensions that arise in a movement in the heat of political arguments.<sup>38</sup> It can also soften the tension of living in a world in which contradictions are laid bare but not resolved: playful interaction offers some relief to people who feel that the only possible response is to laugh at rulers' destructive or negligent behavior.

**For spectators.** Humor unmask the claim of the powerful to power, and of authorities to knowledge. It exposes them to ridicule and rebuts their pretensions of superiority. It challenges hegemonic discourse and produces "creative disrespect."<sup>39</sup> As Bakhtin argues, laughter makes everyone equal, but paradoxically elevates the lowly above their superiors. A message conveyed humorously, moreover, can appeal to people who are turned off by preaching and denunciation

40. Bleuwend Lechaux, "Non-Preaching Activism in New York: The Theatrical Militancy of Billionaires for Bush and Reverend Billy," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 23, no. 2 (2010): 176.

41. Voice of Art, "Tax Dodgers, Pt. 1."

42. Marjolein 't Hart, "Humour and Social Protest: An Introduction," *International Review of Social History*, 52 (2007): 17; cf. Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 291; Dieter Rucht, "The Quadruple 'A': Media Strategies of Protest Movements since the 1960's," in *Cyberprotest*, ed. Wim Van De Donk, Brian D. Loader, Paul G. Nixon, and Dieter Rucht (New York: Routledge, 2004).

43. Bruner, "Carnavalesque Protest," 144; Saul D. Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), 127; Graeber, *The Democracy Project*, 255.

44. Knuckey et al., *Suppressing Protest*; Moynihan, "Officials Cast Wide Net"; *New York Times*, "Government Surveillance of the Occupy Protests," May 23, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/05/23/us/23occupy-docs.html>.

45. Richard Feloni, "The Mainstreaming of Occupy Wall Street: How Rethinking American Capitalism Became the Most Important Debate of the 2010s," *Business Insider*, December 4, 2019, <https://markets.businessinsider.com/>

but respond to what Bleuwend Lechaux calls "non-preaching activism," playful and ironic messages instead of guilt-tripping and fear.<sup>40</sup>

A comedic message may evoke a response based on recognizable elements of the culture. According to Gan Golan, guiding spirit of the Superhero march and the Tax Dodgers, "That stuff really works because it was fun, entertaining. Rather than depress people with these realities, we realized that trying to elevate their spirits through humor actually allowed them to engage the issue [and] have the conversation that we wanted to have about what was causing all these problems."<sup>41</sup> Some performances appeal to members of the public to become participants.

Both the content and the style of a performance may differ depending on the primary target. Though the line between participants and spectators is not always clear, I suggest that when the target is already-mobilized participants, a performance can be more extreme both in dissent from officially prevailing views and in the exercise of a flamboyant, disruptive style. Most activists will be happy to challenge the "prevailing truth of the established order" in both style and content. A performance directed at uninitiated bystanders may have to be more restrained to be effective.

This difference creates a challenge for protest movements that aim to attract the attention of the media. It is not easy to win their coverage. Media rarely pay attention to the conventional forms of protest. They are more likely to report events that shock or surprise. But appealing to the media with novelty presents the danger that newsgatherers will seek out the bizarre and curious and emphasize the deviant aspects of movement activity. Indeed, spectacular, disruptive performances are often the easiest way to offer "good copy" and get media attention, but the coverage may well ignore the issues that the protesters want to call attention to. It may even produce hostility rather than sympathy.<sup>42</sup>

**The forces of repression.** Carnavalesque protest can also deflect repression. It is less easily repressed than more ordinary forms of protest in part because it is cloaked in innocence, in part because it parodies obedience (like Otpor's sheep), and even more to the point, because police departments simply do not know how to respond to situations for which they do not have a standard operating procedure in place. M. Lane Bruner observes that authorities may prove "nearly helpless in the face of ... carnivalesque absurdities," which can deflect their attention, at least temporarily, while they decide whether to come down hard. In his "third rule" for radicals, Saul Alinsky counseled, "Wherever possible, go outside the experience of the enemy." According to David Graeber, "the most effective method of dealing with police is always to do something they have not been trained to respond to."<sup>43</sup>

If carnivalesque protest is especially effective under the conditions of totalitarianism, what about Western liberal democracies? While the level of repression of political activity in general is not comparable, police repression of public protest has escalated significantly at least since September 11, 2001 (in contrast to the more tolerant style of protest policing of previous years). Wall Street occupiers pushed back hard against police surveillance and repression, and the police responded not only with brutal tactics but with a program coordinated nationwide to demolish the occupations and eviscerate the protest.<sup>44</sup>

[news/stocks/how-2010s-established-a-path-to-better-capitalism-in-us-2019-12-1028738839](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/stocks/how-2010s-established-a-path-to-better-capitalism-in-us-2019-12-1028738839);

Steve Kornacki, "The One Indisputable Triumph of Occupy Wall Street," *Salon*, November 12, 2011, [https://www.salon.com/2011/11/11/the\\_one\\_indisputable\\_triumph\\_of\\_occupy\\_wall\\_street/](https://www.salon.com/2011/11/11/the_one_indisputable_triumph_of_occupy_wall_street/); Linette Lopez, "How Occupy Wall Street Won In One Chart," *Business Insider*, January 16, 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com.au/how-occupy-wall-street-won-in-one-chart-2014-1>; Jesse Myerson, "Occupy Didn't Just 'Change the Conversation.' It Laid the Foundation for a New Era of Radical Protest: Measuring Occupy Wall Street's Impact, 5 Years Later," *In These Times*, September 17, 2016, <http://inthesetimes.com/features/occupy-legacy-five-year-anniversary-mayday.html>; Emily Stewart, "We Are (Still) the 99 Percent: Occupy Wall Street Was Seen as a Failure when It Ended in 2011. But It's Helped Transform the American Left," *Vox.com*, April 30, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/the-high-light/2019/4/23/18284303/occupy-wall-street-bernie-sanders-dsa-socialism>.

46 . Rachel Abrams, "States' Minimum Wages Rise, Helping Millions of Workers," *New York Times*, December 31, 2014. Lydia DePillis, "The Volcker Rule Cites the Occupy Movement 284 Times," *Washingtonpost.com*, December 11, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2013/12/11/the-volcker-rule-cites-the-occupy-movement-284-times/>; Jonathan Smucker, "Occupy the White House: The Bernie Sanders campaign is the next phase of a movement that started eight

Did the carnival performances and the carnival atmosphere in Occupy achieve any political gains? Occupy may appear to have failed because banks were not nationalized and taxes were not raised on the super-rich. But that is an impossibly high standard. The movement did provoke discussion of inequality in the United States after 2011. It focused attention on the unjust distribution of income and the power of the banks, which had long been facts of life but all too easily ignored. Discourse shifted from the period before to after the occupation, as revealed by a Lexis Nexis search of the *New York Times*: the term "inequality" appeared in 30 articles in July, 2011, and rose to 108 in January, 2012, giving the issue probably more attention than it had received during three decades of skyrocketing inequality. Journalists unhesitatingly credit this growing attention to economic inequality in the United States to the Occupy movement, at least one calling it the movement's "one indisputable triumph." News articles, some as recent as 2019, have continued to credit Occupy for the change in political discourse.<sup>45</sup>

Real political gains have followed: the election of progressive candidates Elizabeth Warren as senator from Massachusetts in 2012 and the new members of Congress in 2018 on platforms denouncing inequality; intervention by Occupy the SEC, an offshoot of OWS, in the regulatory process set in place by the Dodd-Frank Act; and strikes by minimum wage workers in fast food and retail sales, which won raises in individual companies and legislation increasing the minimum wage in many states and cities. Bernie Sanders's presidential campaigns, fueled by many veterans of Occupy as volunteers, highlighted economic inequality and his denunciation of the "one percent." By 2020, nearly all the candidates in the Democratic presidential primary followed.<sup>46</sup> While it is difficult to establish a direct effect, it seems reasonable to conclude that Occupy at least played a part.

### Objections to Carnival

The political use of carnival has been challenged. Some critics argue that far from channeling discontent into political change, it co-opts protesters' energy by allowing a discontented population to let off steam so that their protest loses its force. Others see it as frivolous and say that it demeans the seriousness of a cause.

The first criticism holds that carnival raises no serious opposition to the dominant forces in society. On the contrary, it functions as a safety valve with no lasting effect. Anthropologists have investigated inversion rituals, notably in Africa, and concluded that they fall far short of being revolutionary, even though they involve the denigration of established authorities. For Max Gluckman, rites of reversal "are intended to preserve and strengthen the established order." Similarly, according to Terry Eagleton, "Carnival, after all, is a *licensed* affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off." Secular and religious authorities only tolerated the medieval carnival, in this view, because they believed it presented no serious threat. Revelers' mocking of authority figures merely reaffirmed their authority and thereby reinforced the status quo.<sup>47</sup>

But it is incorrect to say that contemporary carnivalesque protests are tolerated; they have been repressed. As already noted, Occupy Wall Street and its offshoots in other cities were infiltrated, systematically harassed, and violently evicted. Authorities apparently took them quite seriously.

years ago in Zuccotti Park," *The Nation*, September 16, 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/occupy-sanders/>; Astra Taylor, "Occupy Wall Street's Legacy Runs Deeper Than You Think," *Teen Vogue*, December 17, 2019, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/occupy-wall-street-legacy>.

47. Max Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 109; Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin: Or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: Verso, 1981), 148; Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 13. Cf. Andrew Robinson, "Bakhtin: Carnival against Capital, Carnival against Power," *Ceasefire Magazine*, September 9, 2011; Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995).

48. Ashley Frawley, "Questioning the Carnavalesque: Is Feudal Ritual Really a Convincing Model for Contemporary Revolution?" *Culture Wars*, January 7, 2010, [http://www.culturewars.org/uk/index.php/site/article/questioning\\_the\\_carnavalesque/](http://www.culturewars.org/uk/index.php/site/article/questioning_the_carnavalesque/) (site discontinued).

49. Apple, "Hey, Occupy Wall Street," Sarahana, "Slavoj Žižek speaks at Occupy Wall Street: Transcript," *The Parallax* (blog), Impose, n.d., 2011, <https://imposemagazine.com/bytes/slavoj-zizek-at-occupy-wall-street-transcript>; Barney Frank, *A Life in Politics from the Great Society to Same-sex Marriage* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 156.

50. Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital," Duncombe, *Dream*;

Another criticism of carnivalesque protest finds it ineffective for a different reason: that it undercuts the serious purpose of political protest. These performances are usually put on by groups loosely associated with larger political movements that pursue the same goals without the taint of frivolity. To those in the broader movements, carnival antics may seem like a sideshow, demeaning and counterproductive. For example, Ashley Frawley expresses disdain for what she calls "ritualised displays" that claim to be revolutionary:

Many of the valuable elements revealed in contemporary protest movements—the creativity of direct action tactics, the sheer mass of people who care enough to leave their houses, the value and necessity inherent in opposition itself—are ultimately diffused and dispersed through aimless activity that can name no common enemy and thus claim no common goals except to share in collective discontent.<sup>48</sup>

Some pointed to this danger of diffusion and dispersion in Occupy Wall Street. After Corporate Zombie Day, a commentator on Gawker.com mocked the protesters in an article headlined, "Hey Occupy Wall Street: Dressing up Like Zombies Is Dumb." In a talk at Zuccotti Park, while clearly identifying with the occupation, Slavoj Žižek nevertheless warned the occupiers, "Don't fall in love with yourselves. We have a nice time here. But remember, carnivals come cheap." Former congressman Barney Frank offered a similar condemnation of the intrusion of a spirit of fun into politics (though not addressing OWS): "If you care deeply about an issue, and are engaged in group activity on its behalf that is fun and inspiring and heightens your sense of solidarity with others, you are almost certainly not doing your cause any good."<sup>49</sup>

But for advocates, fun, inspiration, and solidarity are precisely the point. When the immediate target of carnivalesque protest is not only oppressive authority but its own progenitor, conventional political protest, it subverts not only the fear and oppression imposed by authorities but the dreariness of a humor-challenged Left. It draws strength from its rejection of the somber and humdrum political repertoire of marches and demonstrations. Robert Stam argues that the attitude of much of the Left stems from a "refusal of pleasure" by a "puritanical Marxism;" for Benjamin Shepard and his colleagues, it reflects an overemphasis on human rationality, ignoring the nonrational motives that often guide behavior—"the joy of protest is often why people get involved."<sup>50</sup> The tension between believers in carnival and those who find it unduly frivolous arose in Occupy Wall Street. It was not dominant, however. A lighthearted spirit prevailed in general, and while some wanted to concentrate on serious politics, most participants also joined in the fun.

## A Utopian Coda

In Occupy Wall Street, communal carnival was practiced in the occupation and also gave rise to specific performances that simultaneously expressed the solidarity of the group and addressed outside publics with a message intended to be persuasive. The carnival that was the occupation was a zone of fun, inspiration, and solidarity (inverting, once again, Barney Frank's triad). During two months, it allowed the participants to conceive of being part of a different world—"a freedom from corporate fundamentalism [enabled] a freedom to experiment with alternatives."<sup>51</sup> The carnival was punctuated by intentional acts of protest, but the performances cannot be separated from the life experience. They occurred within a total community, a second life; the performances in turn informed the life.

Flesher Fominaya, "The Role of Humour;" Haugerud, *No Billionaire Left Behind*; Robert Stam, "Mikhail Bakhtin and Left Cultural Critique," in *Postmodernism and its Discontents*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London: Verso, 1988), 142; Shepard et al., "Performing vs. the Insurmountable," 5.

51. St John, "Protestival," 182.

52. Benjamin Franks, "The Direct Action Ethic: From 59 Upwards," *Anarchist Studies* 11, no. 1 (2003): 13–41; Benjamin Franks, "Postanarchism and Meta-ethics," *Anarchist Studies* 16, no. 2 (2008): 135–53; David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009), 210; Hammond, "The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street."

53. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 315.

54. Ibid.

55. Craig Brandist, "Gramsci, Bakhtin and the Semiotics of Hegemony," *New Left Review*, 216 (1996): 94–109; Ken Hirschkop, *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

56. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 154–67.

57. Michael Gardiner, "Bakhtin's Carnival: Utopia as Critique," *Utopian Studies* 3, no. 2 (1992): 40.

58. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 89. Cf. Gardiner, "Bakhtin's Carnival," 39–40; Robinson, "Bakhtin: Carnival against Capital;" Stam, "Mikhail Bakhtin and Left Cultural Critique," 134.

59. Gardiner, "Bakhtin's Carnival: Utopia as Critique," 40.

This mutuality was consistent with the prevailing DIY ethos of Occupy. Its anarchism included the principle that the means used to achieve any end must be consistent with that end; means and ends are inseparable.<sup>52</sup> Carnival as a calculated political act and carnival as a way of life shared by all in the occupation were integrally related. For Bakhtin, carnival did not pursue any end. He saw it as self-contained: people escaped from the confines of everyday life, found unalienated participation, and envisioned the possibility of an alternative life. Yet it was an affirmative, democratic experience. Its integrity was also due to the truth it proclaimed, contradicting the prevailing truth that is shown on exposure to be false and a mystification.

Bakhtin's analysis of carnival is closely related to his theory of language. Carnavalesque protest is multivocal (or in Bakhtin's term, heteroglossic<sup>53</sup>): it speaks in multiple voices, not necessarily in agreement with each other. This analysis reveals Bakhtin's democratic spirit. In his theory, language was like carnival itself: he rejected the prevailing structuralist analysis derived from Ferdinand de Saussure that studied language's formal structure, the monoglossic, authoritative language. Instead he analyzed actual utterances, the spontaneous outpourings of the popular classes that refused to be bound by formal rules. In those heteroglossic outpourings, everyone speaks at once, cacophonously. Each voice represents the speaker's particular point of view, and all of them are equally legitimate and entitled to a hearing.<sup>54</sup> In their utterances as in their carnival revelry they reject hegemonic culture.<sup>55</sup> Bakhtin found in Rabelais's language the popular language of the marketplace; in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* Rabelais introduced its vocabulary into the literature of high culture, thus validating the voice of the people.<sup>56</sup> Democratic, popular speech and democratic, popular participation are both opposed to the hegemony of rulers, and monoglossic dogma yields to cognitive liberation. Carnival frees the revelers from restraints both in society and in thought, a process necessary to achieve "a truly egalitarian, radical democratic community."<sup>57</sup>

Bakhtin saw the life of carnival as utopian: "Life came out of its usual, legalized and consecrated furrows and entered the sphere of utopian freedom."<sup>58</sup> In this utopianism carnival reveals a truth normally obscured by official or hegemonic doctrines, and affirms and points to the possibility of a life emancipated from oppressive, stultifying conformity. Bakhtin maintained the utopian dimension—the faith in the liberating potential of popular cultural forms, even during darkest Stalinist repression.<sup>59</sup> Carnival allows us to laugh, and, as Bakhtin teaches us, laughter liberates.

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## AUTHOR BIO

**John L. Hammond** is professor of sociology at Hunter College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He is the author of *Building Popular Power: Workers' and Neighborhood Movements in the Portuguese Revolution* and *Fighting to Learn: Popular Education and Guerrilla War in El Salvador*. He has published studies of popular movements in the United States, Europe, and Latin America. He is the former chair of the Task Force on Human Rights and Academic Freedom of the Latin American Studies Association. He can be reached at [jhammond@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:jhammond@hunter.cuny.edu).

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# Ephemeropolis: Burning Man, Transformation, and Heterotopia

**Graham St John**

University of Fribourg, Switzerland

## KEYWORDS

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## ABSTRACT

Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia is adapted to comprehend events with intentional transformational agendas. An ephemeral community installed annually in Nevada's Black Rock Desert, Burning Man is an exemplary *evental heterotopia*. With the shortcomings of the romantic-utopian "transformational festival" label identified, the article considers Black Rock City as a heterogeneous threshold and contested space. This hyperliminal weave is redolent in a complex ethos known as the "Ten Principles." Informed by Foucault's ambiguous entry on heteroclite spatialization, the article explores the paradoxical "other space" of Burning Man in which the "default world" is simultaneously neutralized, mirrored, and resisted. If Burning Man is transformative, this is therefore an enigmatic aesthetic. Adapting Foucault's six "principles of heterotopia" and modulating Victor Turner's "liminality," the article navigates the hyperliminal dynamics of Burning Man. In the process, a provisional framework is suggested for the study of transformative events.

1. "Leave No Trace," *Burning Man 2019 Survival Guide*, <https://survival.burningman.org/leave-no-trace>.
2. Graham St John, "Dramatic Heterotopia: The Participatory Spectacle of Burning Man," in *Interrupting Globalisation: Heterotopia in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Simon Ferdinand, Irina Souch, and Daan Wesselman (New York: Routledge, 2020, forthcoming).
3. These terms are the author's abridgements.
4. Observations and materials presented in this article derive from the author's eight visits to Black Rock City since 2003 and from field research of Burning Man Regional Events performed as part of the SNSF-supported project "Burning Progeny: The European Efflorescence of Burning Man," the Department of Social Science, University of Fribourg, Switzerland (January 2016–December 2019): <https://www.burningprogeny.org>.
5. Judi Neal, ed., *Handbook of Personal and Organizational Transformation* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017).
6. Jennifer Laing and Warwick Frost, "Nature and Well-being: Explorer Travel Narratives of Transformation," in *Nature Tourism*, ed. Joseph S. Chen and Nina K. Prebensen (New York: Routledge, 2017), 11–22.
7. T. J. Weisbecker, "Hallucinogenic Metamorphosis: An Overview of Hallucinogen-Induced Transformative Mystical Experience," in *Metamorphosis through Conscious Living: A Transper-*

## Ephemeropolis: Burning Man, Transformation, and Heterotopia

Graham St John

### Introduction

Otherwise known as Black Rock City (BRC), Burning Man is an epic participatory arts gathering installed annually in Nevada's remote Black Rock Desert. Claimed as "the largest Leave No Trace event in the world,"<sup>1</sup> BRC is the model for a global network of Burning Man Regional Events. Over three decades, Burning Man has evolved from a small-scale cultural event into a consciously liminal event culture. While Burning Man has been considered a model "transformational festival," its complex spatio-temporality problematizes this logic. This article adapts Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia as mused in his 1967 lecture "Des espaces autres" (Of other spaces) to assist comprehension of the meta-transformativity of Burning Man, both in BRC and Regional Events. While elsewhere "heterotopia" has been deployed to illuminate Burning Man as a context for the dramatization of paradox,<sup>2</sup> the current article explores the value of the heuristic for navigating the spatio-temporal dynamics of a complex event culture.

The article begins by introducing the idea of the "transformational festival." While typecast as the model event in this class, the concept is demonstrably ill-suited to the "placeless place" of Burning Man. Heterotopia is then introduced to illuminate the experimental mosaic of BRC, an "other space" that simultaneously mirrors, resists, and subverts "default world" culture. The article recognizes the ambiguity inherent to a concept implying both a space or object (*heterotopia*) as well as a process (*heterotopic*). Drawing from theater, performance, festival, and other studies of the "other spaces" of play, the hyperliminal aesthetic of Burning Man is interpolated with the assistance of Foucault's six "principles" of heterotopia: universality, mutability, heterogeneity, heterochronicity, zonality, and reflexivity.<sup>3</sup> In the playful spirit of "Of other spaces," each of these principles is adapted to navigate BRC. This approach benefits from qualitative research involving an in-depth review of scholarly literature on Burning Man, analysis of Burning Man Project media, and semi-structured interviews and participant observation conducted during longitudinal field research.<sup>4</sup> Serving as an introduction to Burning Man and providing an update on liminality appropriate to transformational events, the article illustrates the applicability of heterotopia for event studies, and notably the study of events with transformational intentions and agendas.

### Transformational Festivalization

In current scholarship, "transformation" is reclaimed as something of a buzzword. With regard to leadership and organization,<sup>5</sup> tourism,<sup>6</sup> psychedelics,<sup>7</sup> and contemporary pilgrimage,<sup>8</sup> for example, the appellation is widely applied. It is a persistent theme among philosophers, especially those seeking solutions to the human predicament,<sup>9</sup> a motivation also inhering in its application to public events with proactive agendas. The concept of the "transformational festival" was first promulgated by documentary filmmaker Jeet-Kei Leung in a 2010 TEDx talk and later popularized via *The Bloom* webseries, which is now also in development as a twelve-part TV series.<sup>10</sup> Compiled in 2012–13, the original webpage for The Bloom charted the scope of the phenomenon, in which Leung used a set of criteria to include approximately one hundred events, most of them in West Coast North America. Involving multiday camping in natural sites

sonal Psychology Perspective, ed. Lindy McMullin, Regina U. Hess, and Marcie Boucouvalas (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 71–80.

8. John Hornblow and Jenny Boyack, "Pilgrimages of Transformation and Reconciliation: Maori and Pakeha Walking Together in Aotearoa New Zealand," in *The Many Voices of Pilgrimage and Reconciliation*, ed. Ian S. McIntosh and Lesley D. Harman (Wallingford, UK: CAB International, 2017), 19–30.

9. Grant Maxwell, *The Dynamics of Transformation: Tracing an Emerging World View* (Nashville, TN: Persistent Press, 2017).

10. Jeet-Kei Leung and Akira Chan, *The Bloom: A Journey through Transformational Festivals*, webseries, 2014, Bloom TV, <https://www.thebloom.tv>.

11. The Bloom, "Guidelines for Inclusion," accessed February 12, 2018, <http://thebloomseries.com/guidelines-for-inclusion-transformational-festivals-map>.

12. Burning Man, *2018 Annual Report*, 3.

13. Caveat Magister (a.k.a. Benjamin Wachs), *The Scene That Became Cities: What Burning Man Philosophy Can Teach Us about Building Better Communities* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2019), 45, 105.

14. Ibid, 201.

15. Larry Harvey, personal communication, March 16, 2018.

16. Robert V. Kozinets, "Can Consumers Escape the Market?"

remote from populated urban regions, these participatory events are promoted as featuring an "ecstatic core ritual" provided through electronic dance music, visionary art and performance, workshops on new paradigm subjects, the creation of "sacred space," and a social economy of artisans and vendors. These events are further stated to implement sustainability practices with a "minimal environmental footprint," support participants in "healing processes," and exhibit a conscious intention to "support personal and social transformation."<sup>11</sup>

While Burning Man is showcased by Leung as a watershed in "transformational festivals," this proposition is not without complications. To begin with, as its organizing body the Burning Man Project (BMP) communicates, Burning Man is not a "festival." In response to the controversial increase of convenience, or "plug-n-play," camping in breach of a core participatory ethos, and via efforts in "preserving and protecting the values that set us apart from mainstream culture," the BMP has been vociferous in attempting to distinguish Burning Man from mass-produced events, notably commercial music and dance festivals.<sup>12</sup> In his roving discourse on the philosophy of Burning Man, Caveat Magister insists that "Burning Man spaces" are not "consequence-free entertainment venues" but spaces of "applied existentialism" compelling participants to make meaningful collaborations and build authentic communities.<sup>13</sup> Importantly, this community thrives on the tensions that run through its core.

Tension is embedded in the bricks and DNA of Burning Man, as is the clear belief, demonstrated through practice, that properly handled creative tension enhances culture.... Much of the joy that people find in this environment comes from their unique inspirations and their unique humanity bouncing into one another in unexpected ways.<sup>14</sup>

The position echoes the views of primary founder Larry Harvey, who returned repeatedly to the point that paradox is the engine that powers the potential of Burning Man. As Harvey communicated in an email to the author (weeks before he succumbed to the effects of a stroke):

The commonest form of festival, at least in America, is a commercial music festival. We don't want to be conflated with that, and most contemporary festivals are choked with commerce. We hardly fit this model ... and it is a rare festival indeed that aspires to effect world culture, that sees itself as an agent of change. I suppose we think of our event as something more than spectacle and entertainment, and do not want to be confused with the Iowa State Hog Festival (though we do love bacon).<sup>15</sup>

The comment arose in the context of an exchange about "why," as I put it to Harvey, "this festival isn't a festival." His response reflected on the absence of commercial sponsorship, and on the fact that, consistent with the principle of *Decommodification*, there is no venter marketplace in BRC—although, as has been cogently argued, BRC cannot exist beyond commerce.<sup>16</sup> Although ethnographic comparisons are scarce, Burning Man deviates from other events to which the "transformational" label has been applied—many featuring marketplaces and lacking the "applied existentialism" that provokes "do-ocratic"<sup>17</sup> outcomes.

Transformational festivals are manifold. Rainbow Gatherings, UK Free Festivals, Australia's ConFest, Germany's Fusion, and Portugal's Boom, along with many events deemed "transformational" in North America and around the world, from Lucidity in California to Tribal Gathering in Panama, are models for conscious living informed by post-1960s adaptations of

Emancipatory Illuminations from  
Burning Man," *Journal of Consumer Research* 29, no. 1 (2002):  
20–38.

17. Katherine K. Chen, *Enabling Creative Chaos: The Organization behind the Burning Man Event* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 55.

18. See Jemayel Khawaja, "Symbiosis Gathering Co-Owner Wants to Ditch the Term 'Transformational Festival,'" *VICE*, September 10, 2016, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/8q7mek/symbiosis-gathering-2016-interview](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/8q7mek/symbiosis-gathering-2016-interview).

19. Kitt Doucette, "7 Wildest Transformational Festivals: From Burning Man to Shambhala Gathering," *Rolling Stone*, May 11, 2016, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-lists/7-wildest-transformational-festivals-68486/>.

20. B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre and Every Business a Stage* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999).

21. The Ten Principles are *Radical Inclusion*, *Gifting*, *Decommodification*, *Radical Self-reliance*, *Radical Self-expression*, *Communal Effort*, *Civic Responsibility*, *Leaving No Trace*, *Participation*, and *Immediacy* (for an explanation of each, see <https://burningman.org/culture/philosophical-center/10-principles>, accessed May 7, 2019). In this article, all principles are capitalized and italicized.

22. Chris Rojek, "Leaderless Organization, World Historical

the *rites of passage* model. Intentionally responsive to a convolution of modern crises (from ecological to existential), they are designed to orchestrate transition. Each instance features a unique weave of liminal characteristics animated by diverse movements, seeding hybrid cultures. Evolving in recurrent events optimized over seasons and through the decades, emergent event cultures are hyperliminal vehicles for conduct that can be revolutionary and recreational, leisurely and spiritual, celebratory and activist.

The "transformational festival" label is debated among eventgoers and within event organizations.<sup>18</sup> Chief among concerns is the superficiality presumed to adhere to a label glossed in *Rolling Stone* and other publications promoting hyperindividualist event "bucket lists."<sup>19</sup> The promotion of consumer transformation in such lists is not far removed from the "produced experience" that arrives complete with product interaction and customized outcomes thought integral to the "experience economy."<sup>20</sup> If we recognize concurrently that the transformative experience is typically offered to affluent white event tourists, some entertaining neoprimitivist sensibilities, "transformation" appears to be shaped by race and class privilege. *Radical Self-expression and Radical Self-reliance*—among the Ten Principles of Burning Man<sup>21</sup>—appear to be codifications of privileged white individualism. And yet, since Burning Man also codes values in eight other principles, including *Gifting*, *Decommodification*, and *Communal Effort*, a nuanced framework is necessary. As signaled by its paradoxical ethos, the "transformational" profile of Burning Man is complicated—a circumstance neglected by critics and exponents alike. For instance, while Rojek has argued that Burning Man is the "modern equivalent of fiddling while Rome burns,"<sup>22</sup> that analysis founders on an oversimplified formulation that is bereft of empirical insight. On the other hand, although Burning Man is celebrated by other commentators as the festive front of the human potential movement, the approach is reductionist. For example, while Burning Man is imagined as a transmodern platform for consciousness evolution through self-actualization,<sup>23</sup> it is irreducible to the objectives of transpersonal psychology. Burning Man may be an "optimally situated environment for reflexive self-discovery,"<sup>24</sup> but self-transformation under extreme physical conditions cannot be accomplished without cooperation with others.

Although events can be labeled, and self-identify, as "transformational," their complex charter, and schizoid aesthetics, is routinely neglected. This is partially attributable to an essentializing tendency in Victor Turner's influential conceptualization of social liminality: *communitas*. Notably deployed in pilgrimage studies, *communitas* glosses over the agonistic sociality in sacred destinations among habitués jostling for control over meaning, resources, and space. If a pilgrimage destination is considered a "realm of competing discourse"<sup>25</sup> as much as—or more than—a "realm of pure possibility,"<sup>26</sup> such contestation is heightened in festivals and gatherings that become *transformational* destinations for eventgoers who behave like pilgrims. If BRC and other events like Glastonbury Festival are populated by disparate stakeholders contesting the significance of the event, such complexity is elided in approaches desiring to capture *the* experience purportedly intrinsic to an event. For example, despite claims that Burning Man is a performance culture with "multiple meanings," one study pursues "the Burner experience," and even imagines a "six-stage" rite of passage "that an individual may go through on their journey from spectator to participant."<sup>27</sup>

Burning Man commenced in 1986 when Larry Harvey and Jerry James torched an eight-foot effigy on Baker Beach, San Francisco, at summer solstice. When authorities intervened to

Events and Their Contradictions:  
The 'Burning Man City' Case,"  
*Cultural Sociology* 8, no. 3 (2014):  
361.

23. David L. Bottorff, "Emerging  
Influence of Transmodernism  
and Transpersonal Psychology  
Reflected in Rising Popularity of  
Transformational Festivals," *Journal  
of Spirituality in Mental Health*  
17, no. 1 (2015): 50–74.

24. Jeremy Hockett, "Participant  
Observation and the Study of  
Self: Burning Man as Ethno-  
graphic Experience," in *AfterBurn:  
Reflections on Burning Man*, ed.  
Lee Gilmore and Mark Van Proyen  
(Albuquerque: University of New  
Mexico Press, 2005), 76.

25. John Eade and Michael J. Sall-  
now, "Introduction," in *Contesting  
the Sacred: The Anthropology of  
Christian Pilgrimage*, ed. John  
Eade and Michael J. Sallnow  
(London: Routledge, 1991), 5.

26. Turner's description of liminal-  
ity in Victor Turner, "Betwixt and  
Between: The Liminal Period in  
Rites de Passage," in *The Forest  
of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu  
Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univer-  
sity Press, 1967), 97.

27. Wendy Clupper, "Burning Man:  
Festival Culture in the United  
States, Festival Culture in a Global  
Perspective," in *Festivalising!  
Theatrical Events, Politics and  
Culture*, ed. Temple Hauptfleisch,  
Shulamith Lev-Aladgem, Jacque-  
line Martin, Willmar Sauter, and  
Henri Schoenmakers (New York:  
Rodopoi, 2007), 237, 230.

28. Kevin Evans, Carrie Galbraith,  
and John Law, *Tales of the San  
Francisco Cacophony Society*

prevent the annual burning of "the Man" in 1990, the San Francisco Cacophony Society invited Harvey to burn the effigy in Nevada's Black Rock Desert, the subsequent stage for the annual reenactment of a theater of creative destruction. Historically, Burning Man is nurtured by a vast cultural mycelium. While its immediate background is apparent in the Dadaist and prankster eventalism of the Cacophony Society,<sup>28</sup> deeper roots lie in West Coast North American freak and festival culture,<sup>29</sup> other utopian experiments in California and elsewhere,<sup>30</sup> the "metaphysical America" percolating in Chautauquas dating back to the nineteenth century,<sup>31</sup> and a frontier settlement legacy integral to the American character.<sup>32</sup>

While ethnographies of Burning Man are quick to observe a transformative logic in its design, commentators struggle to parse the tensions fueling its aesthetic. In her monograph on ritualization at Burning Man, Lee Gilmore<sup>33</sup> explored how the rites of passage model, with its tripartite phases of transition (Arnold van Gennep adapted by Turner)<sup>34</sup> permeates the phenomenon. Seemingly hewn from this model, Burning Man is consciously transitional. The model has clearly influenced the artistic direction of BRC. For example, a little over a century after the original publication of Van Gennep's *Rites de Passage* (1909), the 2011 BRC art theme was "Rites of Passage." In recognition of the criticisms leveled at Turner, Gilmore is nevertheless cautious to adopt a template. There can be no singular passage transpiring among the "spiritual but not religious" who gravitate to this dusty expanse. As for "the Man," the eponymous effigy embodies an interpretative free-for-all encouraged by the BMP. The Man is, if anything, a symbol of hyper-reflexivity.



Figure 1. Burning Man, Black Rock Desert, 1990. Photo by Danger Ranger. Source: Burning Man Project.

(San Francisco: Last Gasp Publishing, 2013).

29. Erik Davis, "Beyond Belief: The Cults of Burning Man," in *Afterburn: Reflections on Burning Man*, 15–40; Erik Davis, *The Visionary State: A Journey through California's Spiritual Landscape* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006), and *Tribal Revival: West Coast Festival Culture* (San Francisco: Lovelution Press, 2009).

30. Rachel Bowditch, *On the Edge of Utopia: Performance and Ritual at Burning Man* (London: Seagull Books, 2010), chapter 2; Kerry Rohrmeier and Paul Starrs, "The Paradoxical Black Rock City: All Cities Are Mad," *Geographical Review* 104, no. 2 (2014): 153–73.

31. Sarah M. Pike, "Desert Goddesses and Apocalyptic Art: Making Sacred Space at the Burning Man Festival," in *God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture*, ed. Eric Mazur and Kate McCarthy (New York: Routledge, 2001), 155–76.

32. Ronnie Diehl, "The American Frontier in Acoustic Space" (MA thesis, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2010).

33. Lee Gilmore, *Theater in a Crowded Fire: Ritual and Spirituality at the Burning Man Festival* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

34. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).

While identified as transformational, or a "transformational space,"<sup>35</sup> this status is compounded by a phenomenon in possession of multiple identities. Burning Man is a unique space (the Black Rock Desert playa<sup>36</sup>); a festive fire-arts gathering with distinct burn rituals; a temporary settlement (Black Rock City, 2019 pop. 80,000); a nonprofit organization (the Burning Man Project, which transitioned from an LLC in 2014); a global cultural movement (with a network of more than ninety official Regional Events in over thirty-five countries); and a land steward (owner of Fly Ranch, Nevada).<sup>37</sup> Adding to this imbroglio, Burning Man is animated by the Ten Principles—the replicable and mutable DNA of Burning Man.

## Burning Man Project's purpose is to uphold and manifest the values described in the Ten Principles of Burning Man.

### 1 Radical Inclusion

Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community.

### 2 Gifting

Burning Man is devoted to acts of gift giving. The value of a gift is unconditional. Gifting does not contemplate a return or an exchange for something of equal value.

### 3 Decommodification

In order to preserve the spirit of gifting, our community seeks to create social environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising. We stand ready to protect our culture from such exploitation. We resist the substitution of consumption for participatory experience.

### 4 Radical Self-reliance

Burning Man encourages the individual to discover, exercise and rely on his or her inner resources.

### 5 Radical Self-expression

Radical self-expression arises from the unique gifts of the individual. No one other than the individual or a collaborating group can determine its content. It is offered as a gift to others. In this spirit, the giver should respect the rights and liberties of the recipient.

### 6 Communal Effort

Our community values creative cooperation and collaboration. We strive to produce, promote and protect social networks, public spaces, works of art, and methods of communication that support such interaction.

### 7 Civic Responsibility

We value civil society. Community members who organize events should assume responsibility for public welfare and endeavor to communicate civic responsibilities to participants. They must also assume responsibility for conducting events in accordance with local, state and federal laws.

### 8 Leaving No Trace

Our community respects the environment. We are committed to leaving no physical trace of our activities wherever we gather. We clean up after ourselves and endeavor, whenever possible, to leave such places in a better state than when we found them.

### 9 Participation

Our community is committed to a radically participatory ethic. We believe that transformative change, whether in the individual or in society, can occur only through the medium of deeply personal participation. We achieve being through doing. Everyone is invited to work. Everyone is invited to play. We make the world real through actions that open the heart.

### 10 Immediacy

Immediate experience is, in many ways, the most important touchstone of value in our culture. We seek to overcome barriers that stand between us and a recognition of our inner selves, the reality of those around us, participation in society, and contact with a natural world exceeding human powers. No idea can substitute for this experience.



Figure 2. The Ten Principles of Burning Man. Source: Burning Man Project..

35. See Denise Nicole Green and Susan B. Kaiser, "From Ephemeral to Everyday Costuming: Negotiations in Masculine Identities at the Burning Man Project," *Dress* 34, no. 1 (2011): 1–22.

36. Graham St John, "At Home in the Big Empty: Burning Man and the Playa Sublime," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 13, no. 3 (2019): 286–313.

37. Further dimensions include the virtual, represented by forums such as [eplaya.burningman.org](http://eplaya.burningman.org) and social media. One notable development is *Burn2* (formerly *Burning Life*) a "virtual playa" created in 2003 by Philip (Linden) Rosedale within the virtual world of *Second Life* and promoted as "an officially sanctioned Burning Man Regional," <https://www.burn2.org/>.

38. Michael Ventimiglia, "A Tale of Two (Impossible) Cities: Plato's Republic and Black Rock City, NV," *The Towner*, June 8, 2016, <http://www.thetowner.com/two-impossible-cities/>.

39. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," trans. Lieven De Cauter and Michiel Dehaene, in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, ed. Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter (New York: Routledge, 2008), 16. The text was originally published in French as "Des Espace Autres," *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, no. 5 (October 1984): 46–49. It was first translated into English as "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22–7. The version cited throughout this article is "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 13–29.

This background shows that Burning Man is a complex evental phenomenon (and more than simply an *event*). Heterotopology, as we will see, lends weight to this analysis while highlighting a simple fact: BRC is a potent threshold. In response to rebukes that BRC is unsustainable beyond its eight days of operation, as Michael Ventimiglia has related, it is not intended to be a more permanent social order: "Its purpose is to provide perspective on this order, to carve an exceptional space from which this order can be reimagined." In pushing the imagination, not unlike Plato's Republic, Burning Man serves to "awaken us to our own potentialities."<sup>38</sup>

### Transformational Event Heterotopology

Due to its shifting and piecemeal figuration, Foucault's "heterotopia" is an enduring source of misunderstanding among scholars. Shaped by material originally presented on a radio show on December 7, 1966, the concept became the subject of the lecture "Of other spaces" delivered in the spring of 1967 to the Cercle d'études architecturales (Circle of Architectural Studies) in Paris. In this lecture, Foucault expressed an interest in sites that have the "curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relations designated, mirrored, or reflected by them."<sup>39</sup> Foucault sought to distinguish between two types of such prismatic sites. The first were "emplacements with no real place"—that is, "utopias," which are "emplacements that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society. It is society itself perfected, or else it is society turned upside down." By contrast, there are real places "that are a sort of counter-emplacements, a sort of effectively realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted." He referred to these sites as "absolutely other than all the emplacements that they reflect."<sup>40</sup> Amid a playful narrative, Foucault addressed various examples of heterotopias—including the cemetery, garden, museum, prison, festival, ship—that elicited some or all of six "principles" (discussed below).

While inspiring interdisciplinary scholarship, the notion of heterotopia is plagued by incoherence and inconsistency,<sup>41</sup> resulting in confusion and bewilderment.<sup>42</sup> It has been remarked that a multiplicity of meanings renders heterotopia "an essentially ambivalent and radically open concept associated generically to exception and abnormality."<sup>43</sup> A liberal romantic tendency, notably in the wake of Edward Soja's transcendent "thirdspace,"<sup>44</sup> sees the concept deployed as a sign of the spatial resistance possible within postmodernity. As Heidi Sohn argues, heterotopia appears to represent for many "the only realizable space of material and social possibility: the virtual possibility of a space of openness, and of radical social transformation." This tendency to treat "all spaces and human groups that deviate from the established order as potentially subversive, challenging and resistant formations, and hence reading into them all sorts of positive, utopian transformative powers endowed by their liminality" fails to understand a formulation intended to destabilize discourse and which defies clarity, logic, and order.<sup>45</sup> As a further and not unrelated problem, given its inherent ambiguity and rolling conflation of significance, the concept could be applied to almost any space, from Viennese Gardens<sup>46</sup> to Zapitista spatial politics,<sup>47</sup> Facebook,<sup>48</sup> video games,<sup>49</sup> and "ostalgic" sites.<sup>50</sup>

Compounding matters, in the original usage—in the preface to *The Order of Things*<sup>51</sup>—Foucault's heterotopias are literary depictions of space, not actual sociocultural spaces. In an attempt to formulate "a unified theory of the heterotopia," notably through Foucault's reading of Maurice

40. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 16.
41. Benjamin Genocchio, "Dis-course, Discontinuity, Difference: The Question of 'Other Spaces,'" in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), 35–46.
42. Peter Johnson, "The Geographies of Heterotopia," *Geography Compass* 7, no. 11 (2013): 790–803.
43. Heidi Sohn, "Heterotopia: Anamnesis of a Medical Term," in *Heterotopia and the City*, 41–50; 46.
44. Edward J. Soja, "Heterotopologies: A Remembrance of Other Spaces in the Citadel-LA," in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, 13–34.
45. Sohn, "Heterotopia," 48.
46. Robert Rotenberg, *Landscape and Power in Vienna* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).
47. Anthony Faramelli, "Mirror Masks: The Political Space of Zapatismo," in *Spaces of Crisis and Critique: Heterotopias beyond Foucault*, ed. Anthony Faramelli, David Hancock, and Robert G. White (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 131–52.
48. Robin Rymarczuk and Maarten Derksen, "Different Spaces: Exploring Facebook as Heterotopia," *First Monday* 19, no. 6 (June 2014), <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v19i6.5006>.
49. rhetoricalquestions, "Video Games as Heterotopias: On

Blanchot, where "the simultaneous presence of incompatible descriptions of space...negate each other, completely effacing the possibility of the space that is ostensibly described," Kelvin Knight concludes that the term was "never intended as a tool for the study of real material sites."<sup>52</sup> And yet, if heterotopia signifies "a set of literary motifs used by writers to present an alternative configuration of space,"<sup>53</sup> texts *do* shape the way space is conceived, mapped, and occupied. This is most notable in theater—thought to be "the heterotopia par excellence"<sup>54</sup>—but also in games, festivals, and other scripted events that blur the lines of myth and reality in the configuration of space. As performance frameworks that serve to disturb the fixed and the finished, the spaces of theater and festival are vehicles for an imaginary that retains the heuristic potential of heterotopia as discontinuous and unsettling. In the case of the experimental space of BRC and its progeny, we observe an unparalleled play space where the borderland between fantasy and reality is remarkably fuzzy.

The congruence of heterotopia with play space is apt when returning to the original 1966 radio show in which Foucault adopted "the tone of an old traveller telling children amusing stories about the marvelous places he has visited."<sup>55</sup> Before turning to the "counter-spaces" that adults invent and which gave him pause "to dream of a science that would take for its object these absolutely 'other' spaces," Foucault touched on "localized utopias" of which "children know very well."

They lie at the bottom of the garden, up in the attic, or in the parents' great bed. In this bed a child can discover the ocean by swimming between the covers or the sky by bouncing on the springs and leaping into the air; the great bed becomes a forest where one can hide or a zone of titillating pleasure because the child knows that punishment will follow when the parents return.<sup>56</sup>

While the parallel with Johan Huizinga's spaces of play is noteworthy,<sup>57</sup> Foucault's original playful oratory carries over into his account of heterotopia. The oratory is charged with the impulsive, the improvisatory, and the "carefree gaiety" characteristic of "paidia," which Roger Caillois<sup>58</sup> contrasts with the discipline of "ludus." While named as such, the themes Foucault presented are thereby tentatively "principles."

It has been suggested that heterotopia is best understood as both empirical *and* conceptual. Using another of Foucault's terms, as a kind of *dispositif*, Peter Johnson writes that heterotopian space "combines method and object, generating new effects, experiences, openings and dangers." It encourages sites "to be used as a starting point for research as both a conceptual method and object; it helps disrupt established thought, practice and human subjectivities; it resists the settling of binary thinking; and it assists in formulating new relationships and alliances."<sup>59</sup> An influential treatment is found in *The Badlands of Modernity*, where Kevin Hetherington refigures Foucault on heterotopia and Louis Marin on "utopics" to provide a nuanced exploration of modernity's spaces of "alternate ordering."<sup>60</sup> Accommodating a unique mix of rational debate and hedonistic pleasures, the Palais Royal of eighteenth-century Paris is regarded as one of the first sites for the expression of "the utopics of modernity, the ambivalent interplay of freedom and control."<sup>61</sup> The Palais Royal, along with other spaces like the Masonic lodge and the factory are considered to have "acted as obligatory points of passage, in producing a spatiality that expressed the utopic ideas of freedom and order through which we might begin to understand modernity."<sup>62</sup> Akin to "laboratories," these

Magic Circles and Other Spaces,"  
posted on rhetoricalquestions,  
February 28, 2016, [https://  
rhetoricalquestions2016.  
wordpress.com/2016/02/28/  
video-games-as-heterotopi-  
as-on-magic-circles-and-oth-  
er-spaces/](https://rhetoricalquestions2016.wordpress.com/2016/02/28/video-games-as-heterotopias-on-magic-circles-and-other-spaces/).

50. Petr Gibas and Blanka Nyk-  
lová, "Staying in a Fallout Shelter:  
Exploring Ostalgia Through  
Post-Socialist Heterotopia,"  
*Cultural Geographies*, 26, no. 4  
(2019): 519–26.

51. Michel Foucault, *The Order of  
Things* (Andover: Tavistock, 1970  
[1966]).

52. Kelvin T. Knight, "Placeless  
Places: Resolving the Paradox of  
Foucault's Heterotopia," *Textual  
Practice*, 31, no. 1 (2017): 141–58;  
155, 154, 142.

53. Ibid, 147.

54. Lieven De Cauter and Michiel  
Dehaene, "The Space of Play:  
Towards a General Theory of  
Heterotopia," in *Heterotopia and  
the City*, 87–102; 94.

55. From De Cauter and  
Dehaene's introductory notes  
to Foucault, "Of Other Spaces  
(1967)," 13.

56. Christine M. Boyer, "The Many  
Mirrors of Foucault and Their  
Architectural Reflections," in  
*Heterotopia and the City*, 53–74;  
54, 53.

57. See De Cauter and Dehaene,  
"The Space of Play."

58. Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and  
Games*, trans. Meyer Barash  
(Urbana: University of Illinois  
Press, 2001 [1958]), 13.

heterotopias are conceptualized as experimental sites for ordering society. This research recognizes sites through which social and cultural order—the utopics of modernity—is performed, with Hetherington remarking that heterotopia is "a process rather than a thing."<sup>63</sup> Building on this approach and exploring heterotopia as a "technique," Joanne Tompkins addresses "theatre heterotopia" in which actual and conjured locations coexist. Contemporary theater serves as a "laboratory in which other spaces—and therefore other possibilities for socio-political alternatives to the existing order—can be performed."<sup>64</sup>

Amid ongoing interpretative labors, ethnographers have paid closer attention to the heterotopic formulation of events, and notably festivals as sites that facilitate transformations in time, space, and culture.<sup>65</sup> In a comparative study of rural folk festivals—Sidmouth Folk Week in southern England and Feakle Traditional Music Festival in western Ireland—Bernadette Quinn and Linda Wilks sought to shape a coherent theoretical framework for festival analysis, embracing Foucault's ideas to form "principles" of "festival heterotopia."<sup>66</sup>

The study of festive heterotopias nevertheless remains fragmentary, with event cultures pursuing conscious transformational agendas receiving limited critical attention. What "transformation" is implied for participants of populous large-scale events claiming inclusivity and featuring heterogeneous alterity remains largely undocumented. While such events are noticeably "utopian" in intent, their utopics are typically multidimensional and paradoxical. In an early investigation of the multiplicity native to transformational events, the author undertook field research at an alternative-lifestyle gathering.<sup>67</sup> In that study, "heterotopia" was devised to elucidate how stakeholders in an authenticity conflict mobilized to articulate competing versions of the event, and how the event community sought to resolve tensions over its contested significance. The hyperliminal character of transformational events was further explored in a study of psychedelic trance events. An experimental environment for disparate conduct, Portugal's Boom Festival was observed to juxtapose the transgressive and progressive inclinations of eventgoers,<sup>68</sup> with Boom illustrating the complex liminal aesthetics of psytrance.<sup>69</sup> In further research, rave, techno, and other dance music events illustrated that the socio-aesthetic of the "vibe" endogenous to these event cultures is shaped by differential modes of responsibility.<sup>70</sup> While competing modes of liminal being may cause anxieties, both internal to events and in their external reception, successful events provide participants access to diverse "transformative" repertoires. Rather than dismissing events and their communities as suffering from irresolvable contradictions, irreconcilable differences, or crippling paradox, a more assiduous approach recognizes that events are shaped by a diversity of movement agendas.

In Quinn and Wilks's analysis of folk festivals, "transformation" (and thus heterotopia) is ultimately synonymous with the regeneration of social order and revitalization of identity. Transformation has a different valence in events consciously identifying with a "transformational" zeitgeist. Often identifying as "gatherings" and not "festivals," operating independently from commercial, political, and religious agendas, such events are typically managed by nonprofit and cooperative organizations with a strong volunteer base. Such event communities have solid roots in alternative culture movements, nurture grassroots media and communications departments, and encourage nonconfrontational community mediation. Heterotopology illuminates this eventual development, notably in relation to the polydimensional, paradoxical, and indeterminate character of "transformation."

59. Johnson, "The Geographies of Heterotopia," 800.
60. Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (Routledge: London, 1997); Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (London: Macmillan, 1984).
61. Hetherington, *Badlands of Modernity*, 17.
62. Ibid, 12–13.
63. Ibid, ix.
64. Joanne Tompkins, *Theatre's Heterotopias: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Space* (Sydney: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 6. The figuration of heterotopias as spaces, methods, and technologies of performance grows apparent in wide-ranging research, including that conducted on "performance heterotopias" like those manifesting as national incidents morphing into media events that were integral to the bicentennial re-imagining of Chile. Néstor Bravo Goldsmith, "Heterotopias of Power: Miners, Mapuche, and Soldiers in the Production of the Utopian Chile," in *Performing Utopia*, ed. Rachel Bowditch and Pegge Vissicaro (London: Seagull Books, 2018), 223–58.
65. See Graham St John, "Alternative Cultural Heterotopia and the Liminoid Body: Beyond Turner at ConFest," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 12, no. 1 (2001): 47–66; Neil Ravenscroft and Xavier Matteucci, "The Festival as Carnavalesque: Social Governance and Control at Pamplona's San Fermin Fiestas," *Tourism*,

To assist comprehension of the paradoxical aesthetic of Burning Man, I now attempt to navigate a path informed by Foucault's six "principles of heterotopia." These spatial characteristics include universality, mutability, heterogeneity, heterochronicity, zonality, and reflexivity. Each is addressed in the following. While not deployed to provide a comprehensive map of the burner mosaic, heterotopia does offer a language with which to navigate the Burning Man labyrinth. At the same time, this interpretation and adaptation of Foucault's text helps reshape heuristics—notably *liminality*—useful to the study of events and festivals.

### Hyperliminality

While heterotopias are "constant in every human group," Foucault postulated that they are varied, stating that "perhaps one would not find one single form of heterotopia that is absolutely universal." That said, in an approach both revealing and wanting, "two major types" are entertained. The first, common to "primitive" societies, are "heterotopias of crisis," said to be "privileged, or sacred, or forbidden" places for individuals in a state of social crisis such as adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, and the elderly.<sup>71</sup> Here, Foucault identifies those spaces integral to passage rites, also known as "life crisis" rituals. While these "crisis" spaces are said to be disappearing in the modern era, boarding rooms and honeymoon hotels are named as nondomestic sites of sexual encounter in the modern coming-of-age process. The second category of these spaces are "heterotopias of deviation," such as psychiatric hospitals, prisons, and rest homes.<sup>72</sup> This sketch foreshadows Foucault's obsession with cartographies of power, and specifically, carceral technologies for the mad, sick, criminal, and perverse. Despite its offhand style, the approach denotes the universality of what Van Gennep understood as the "liminal" phase of rites of passage—from the Latin *limen*, or threshold—extrapolated by Turner as "liminality,"<sup>73</sup> the interstitial aesthetic of ritual, theater, carnival, pilgrimage, games, and cultural celebrations. Even though Foucault offered little direct contribution to the theory of ritual, public events, and event spaces, this fleeting attestation of the foremost "principle" of heterotopia conveys an understanding of the panhuman status of passage rites. This is important, given that the anthropology and sociology of events is indebted to the study of ritualized transition. Getz based his "model of the planned event experience"<sup>74</sup>—foundational to event studies—largely on the rites of passage model. More importantly, the approach forecasts a nonessentialist attitude towards liminality, which appears suffused with ambivalence. Single events, notably festivals, are invariably messy and indeterminate. Such is known to festival scholars, for whom seasonally recurrent events possess a range of liminal modalities, the complex variations of which constitute an event's distinct "morphology."<sup>75</sup> That festivals typically interweave ritualesque and carnivalesque<sup>76</sup> elements is germane to their aesthetic. As has been concluded, festivals "bring together multiplicity, particularly conflicting and oppositional ideas, in order to create potential. The outcome, however, is ambiguous and not predetermined."<sup>77</sup> Tracing the complex spatial contours of the liminal, heterotopia evokes an uncertain threshold.

### From Beach to Burnerverse

Referring to the second "principle" of heterotopia, Foucault stated that "in the course of its history...a society can make a heterotopia that exists, and has not ceased to exist, function in a very different way."<sup>78</sup> Evental heterotopias alter their purpose or attract complementary or competing significance over time. Foucault offered the example of the cemetery, which until the

*Culture and Communication* 4, no. 1 (2003): 1–15; Defne Karaosmanoglu, "Nostalgic Spaces of Consumption and Heterotopia: Ramadan Festivities in Istanbul," *Culture Unbound* 2 (2010): 283–302; Mahmoud Yazbak, "The Muslim Festival of Nabi Rubin in Palestine: From Religious Festival to Summer Resort," *Holy Land Studies* 10, no. 2 (2011): 169–98; Francesca C. Howell, "Sense of Place, Heterotopia, and Community: Performing Land and Folding Time in the Badalisc Festival of Northern Italy," *Folklore* 124 (2013): 45–63; Nadeem Karkabi, "Staging Particular Difference: Politics of Space in the Palestinian Alternative Music Scene," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 6 (2013): 308–28; Jorge Pérez Falconi, "The Festivals Internacional de Teatro de la Habana (FITH) and the Festival of Mexico (fmx): Between Place and Placelessness," *Lat. Am. Theatre Rev.* 48 (2014): 181–93; Lindiwe Dovey and Federico Olivieri, "Festivals and the Politics of Space and Mobility: The Tarifa/Cordoba African Film Festival (FCAT) as Nomadic Heterotopia," *Screen* 56, no. 1 (2015), 142–48.

66. Bernadette Quinn and Linda L. Wilks, "Festival Heterotopias: Spatial and Temporal Transformations in Two Small-Scale Settlements," *Journal of Rural Studies* 53 (2017): 35–44.

67. St John, "Alternative Cultural Heterotopia."

68. Graham St John, "The Logics of Sacrifice at Visionary Arts Festivals," in *The Festivalisation of Culture*, ed. Andy Bennett, Jodie Taylor, and Ian Woodward (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 49–68.

end of the eighteenth century was positioned in the heart of the city, next to the church. Over time, in response to hygiene concerns, cemeteries became marginal "other cities" peripheral to population centers. Events, notably festivals, similarly change their function over time. More specifically, as events attract multiple meanings their purpose grows mixed, with different, sometimes competing, purposes coinciding or predominating at different times.

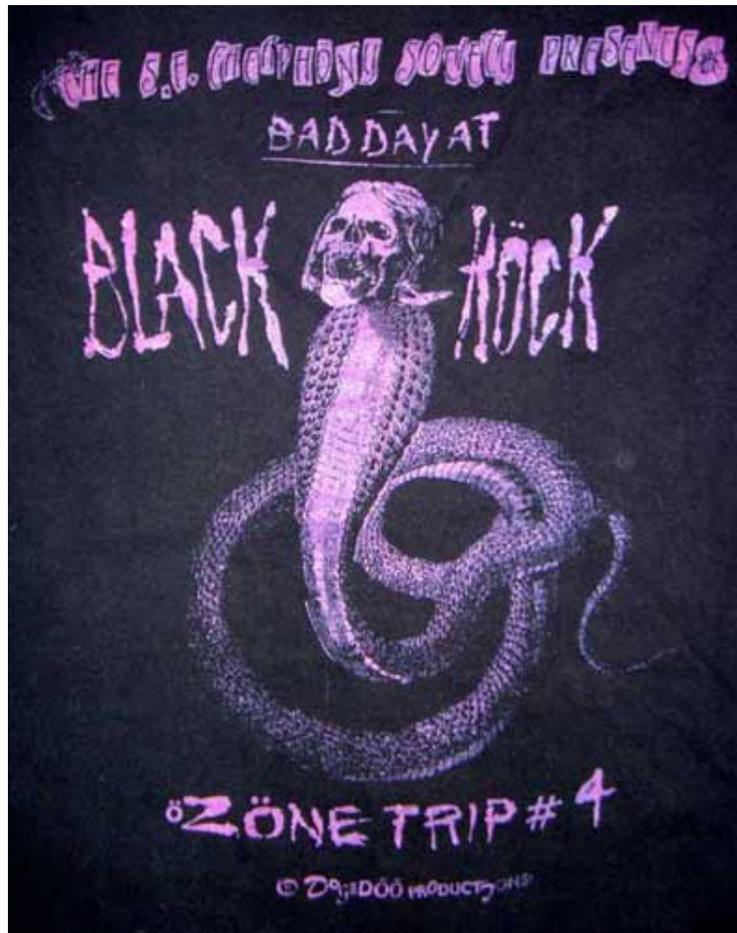


Figure 3. Zone Trip #4—Bad Day at Black Rock. T-Shirt design by Sebastian Hyde and Kevin Evans.

Since its inception in 1986, Burning Man has mutated dramatically. In the first five years, crowds gravitated to an enflamed wooden effigy dubbed "The Man" on summer solstice at San Francisco's Baker Beach in visual proximity of the iconic Golden Gate Bridge. The nonpermitted ritual was repeated and the population expanded annually until police prevented the torching of the effigy in 1990. That year, Harvey and his friends were invited to burn an effigy in Nevada's Black Rock Desert playa as part of "Zone Trip #4: Bad Day at Black Rock" organized by the Cacophony Society<sup>79</sup> (fig. 3). This flat, two-hundred-square-mile expanse refreshes seasonally as mountain runoff evaporates, exposing a plane of encrusted white dust. The harsh conditions of this playa became the context in which a community of artists reassembled a settlement that by 1996 had a total population of eight thousand (by 2017, eighty thousand). Over three decades, the weeklong event over Labor Day attracted a growing population from locations across North America and around the world—a population that, under the guidance of the BMP, formed a network of Regional Events. Speaking to this cultural mobilization, Harvey announced

69. Graham St John, *Global Tribe: Technology, Spirituality and Psytrance* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2012).

70. Graham St John, *Technomad: Global Raving Countercultures* (London: Equinox, 2009).

71. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 18.

72. Ibid.

73. Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982).

74. Donald Getz, *Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy for Planned Events* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2007), 170; Donald Getz, "Event Studies: Discourses and Future Directions," *Event Management* 16, no. 2 (2012): 171–87.

75. Alessandro Falassi, *Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987).

76. Jack Santino, "From Carnivalesque to Ritualesque: Public Ritual and the Theater of the Street," in *Public Performances: Studies in the Carnivalesque and Ritualesque*, ed. Jack Santino (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2017), 3–15.

77. Lisa Gabbert, "American Festival and Folk Drama," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Folklore and Folklife Studies*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 283.

78. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 18.

79. Evans et al., *Tales of the San*

in 2000 that "we are no longer staging an event; we're coordinating a global community."<sup>80</sup> Over three decades, the phenomenon mutated from a small beach burn into a fire-arts gathering, and from a temporary desert city to a global cultural movement. Through the cultivation of the Ten Principles in a transnational network, and in offshoot events like Washington DC's Catharsis on the Mall,<sup>81</sup> the liminal culture of Burning Man has transmigrated far from its marginal roots.

### Frontier Carnival

The third characteristic emphasizes composite and incongruous spatial elements. In gardens, Oriental carpets, theater, and cinemas, heterotopia are said to be capable of "juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several emplacements that are themselves incompatible."<sup>82</sup> Hetherington notably writes that heterotopias are contexts for "unsettling juxtapositions of incommensurate 'objects' which challenge the way we think."<sup>83</sup> Monstrous incongruities may appear in these preposterous spaces since the internal organization of "texts" and "objects" derives from similitude rather than resemblance. "Like a collage," heterotopia "brings forward the out-of-place and offers it up as a basis for alternative perspectives and orderings, revealing what is hidden among the ruins: little fragments of past, forgotten lives, found objects, strange, unsettling novel things that have a poetic wonder about them."<sup>84</sup> Istanbul's Sultanahmet, notably during the festival of Ramadan, is regarded in one study as a heterotopic space where Islamicist and secular discourses, the global and local, East and West, interface, and "where a utopian future is inscribed."<sup>85</sup> Spectacular concurrences like this are believed to be pivotal to tolerance and diversity in a multi-religious state. In commentary on the "multidirectionality" of the Festival Internacional de Teatro de La Habana and the Festival de México, arts and theater festivals in Mexico and Cuba are said to "juxtapose one and many spaces, real and unreal, normal and extraordinary, chaotic and ordered."<sup>86</sup> Embodying the ambivalence native to heterotopias, while these festivals are appraised as standardized and "placeless," they nevertheless enable the celebration of local cultures and places.

Black Rock City has attracted a whirlwind of signs spiraling like dust devils around its *axis mundi*. From its inception, a surrealist impulse for adventure and unpredictability reigned, a legacy of the Dadaesque Cacophonists. But in repeated installments on-playa, the reproduction of chaos necessitated planning and organizational management—a form of governance. Sometimes symbiotic, other times tense, these ludic and civic tendencies have interfaced to shape an immediate civilization recurring in an unforgiving natural theater. A hard-won confluence of licentiousness and pragmatism underlies the freak logic of this strange flowering in the void.

By 1996, participants were privileged to a "drive-by shooting range," a rough satellite conurbation of rave camps called the Techno Ghetto, Pepe Ozan's Desert Opera, and extreme artworks destined for the flame—not least of all "The Man," whose dimensions expanded each year in relative proportion to event population. Anxieties grew over increased media coverage. Concerns were lodged about the proliferation of "frat boys," "ravers," and other predators thought to extract more from the experience than they contributed. At the same time, there were anxious reactions to the formation of a managerial class and concerns about elitism. Camps formed around divergent philosophies and visions. While for defenders the event would expand in perpetuity, others believed it had a use-by date. BRC had become the urbanity they had sought to escape. A divide separated managers (led by Harvey) seeking legitimacy, from detractors (notably,

Francisco Cacophony Society.

80. Larry Harvey, "La Vie Boheme: A History of Burning Man," lecture at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, February 24, 2000, <https://burningman.org/culture/philosophical-center/founders-voices/larry-harveys-writings/la-vie-boheme/>.

81. Graham St John, "The Cultural Heroes of Do-ocracy: Burning Man, Catharsis on the Mall and Caps of Liberty," *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 15, no. 1 (2019), <http://liminalities.net/15-1/burning.pdf>.

82. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 19.

83. Hetherington, *Badlands of Modernity*, 42.

84. Ibid, 50.

85. Karaosmanoglu, "Nostalgic Spaces," 297.

86. Falconi, "The Festivals," 191.

87. Hakim Bey, *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone—Ontological Anarchy and Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 1991).

88. Larry Harvey, "How the West Was Won: Anarchy Vs. Civic Responsibility," *Burning Man Journal*, November 12, 2013, <http://journal.burningman.org/2013/11/philosophical-center/tenprinciples/how-the-west-was-won-anarchy-vs-civic-responsibility>.

89. Brian Doherty, *This Is Burning Man: The Rise of a New American Underground* (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2006), 105.

Burning Man co-founder John Law) relishing impermanence. The former vision necessitated a legal entity (i.e., Black Rock City LLC, founded in 1999), a formal staff structure with operation manuals, financial oversight, health and safety planning, insurance, dialogue with county sheriffs and the permit-issuing Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and media liaison protocols. The latter camp required that Burning Man remain clandestine and, not unlike the concept of the "temporary autonomous zone" (TAZ),<sup>87</sup> vanish. While the event *would* indeed vanish on a seasonal basis, the conviction here was to resist formalization, incorporation, spectacularization.

Tensions flared in 1996 when the first annual art theme—"The Inferno"—dramatized the corporate takeover of Burning Man. As Harvey explained, the theme "substituted corporate-induced consumerism for metaphysical evil."<sup>88</sup> Evoking anxieties over corruption and the "selling out" of the community "to large, sinister, forces,"<sup>89</sup> the theme invited manifold interpretations. As the character based on Law (Moustachio) performing in the stage play *How to Survive the Apocalypse*,<sup>90</sup> announced:

Culture dies the moment you name it  
The moment you tie it down  
You are building another cage here  
Another scam for another age here  
Another spectacular con  
But the Cacophony is gone.

In a nod to Guy Debord, Law admonished the event for having become a spectacle, far removed from its roots in the Cacophony Society. For Harvey, however, "The Inferno" strengthened community—and indeed, forged a movement—in the face of commodification. Burning Man rose from the ashes. As the character based on Harvey (Stetson) would expound in the same stage play:

We are giving light to culture  
Thousands will hear the call  
If we build the man, they will come  
If we burn the man  
Then everyone will see the smoke.

That the vast playa could be a "world of discipline or emancipation, resistance or sedation"<sup>91</sup> illustrates the aporia that heterotopias often generate.

Arguably, with each passing year, Burning Man had become a controlled event. Early participants sought freedom from depredations by the state, religion, and media—liberties inherent to the principle of *Radical Self-reliance* in which the individual is encouraged "to discover, exercise and rely on his or her inner resources." But as Harvey recalled, "slowly, step-by-step, circumstances drove us to invent a government."<sup>92</sup> The story recounts the fate of pioneers settling a new frontier. Throughout the 1990s, this "settlement began to leapfrog outward, forming a dispersed archipelago of separate campsites—a sort of gold rush in pursuit of individual autonomy."<sup>93</sup> But if it was to survive, and thrive, this rogue outpost needed rules, roles, and roads. It required borders, official communications channels, urban planning, and risk management strategies. Founded by

90. First performed at Stage Werks, San Francisco, in 2008, *How to Survive the Apocalypse* featured the music of Mark Nichols, lyrics by Erik Davis, and was produced by Dana Harrison and directed by Christopher Fülling.

91. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 25n15. The passage is from Dehaene and De Cauter's clarifying comments to their translation of Foucault's original text.

92. Harvey, "How the West Was Won."

93. Ibid.

94. Jon Mitchell, "Mayors of U.S. Cities Visit Black Rock City," *Burning Man Journal*, October 23, 2018, <https://journal.burningman.org/2018/10/news/brc-news/mayors-of-u-s-cities-visit-black-rock-city/>.

95. Steven Raspa, "From Apotheosis to Artful Cities: Ra\$pa's Ride through Burning Man's Evolution," *Burning Man Journal*, October 20, 2019, <https://journal.burningman.org/2019/10/black-rock-city/building-brc-from-apotheosis-to-artful-cities/>.

96. Rachel Bowditch, "The Inferno: Burning Man and the Tipping Point," in *Festive Devils of the Americas*, ed. Milla Cozart Riggio, Angela Marino, and Paolo Vignolo (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 305.

97. Larry Harvey, interviewed by the author, April 8, 2016.

98. Olivier Bonin, dir., *Dust & Illusions*, DVD, Madnomad Films, 2009.

Michael Mikel, the Black Rock Rangers was the first of many volunteer services that commenced as provisional experiments. Services initially labeled with comic irony, and in parody of official culture, including the Department of Public Works and the Department of Mutant Vehicles, would become fully-fledged departments integral to a growing "city," which would lose the scare quotes to behave like an actual city. Indeed, the US Conference of Mayors sent a delegation of eleven mayors to BRC in 2018.<sup>94</sup> By 2019, according to associate director of community events Steven Raspa, "we had more mayors, urban planners, architects, representatives from embassies and cultural institutions than perhaps ever before"<sup>95</sup> (fig. 4).



Figure 4. Black Rock City, Nevada, 2015. Source: Burning Man Project.

The Inferno not only staged a theatrical performance of hell, it manifested a real-life version. That Black Rock City had spiraled out of control and reached its "tipping point" was evident in tragic accidents including that befalling crew member Michael Fury, who was decapitated on his motorcycle playing a high-speed game of road chicken.<sup>96</sup>

In subsequent years, a scalable concentric grid designed by Rod Garrett was implemented, encouraging neighborhoods, restricting motor-vehicle activity, and promoting bicycles. Ironically, while many anarchists had sought freedom from all rules and laws, "it turned out that from the very beginning, instinctively, they needed order."<sup>97</sup> As Harvey stated in the film *Dust & Illusions*, the BMP was not devised to "exterminate freedom"<sup>98</sup> but extended permissions to greater numbers. Celebrating "belonging on a civic scale," the 2010 art theme, "Metropolis," was a powerful evocation of this civic imperative.<sup>99</sup> By this time, concerns continued to circulate that Burning Man had strayed far from its roots, that the effigy had been built taller, more spectacular and removed from the populace, and that its ceremonial destruction had become regimented and liturgical. A testimony to this fear that the Man had grown to symbolize an organization taking itself too seriously was the official reaction to a 2007 incident when the effigy was completely rebuilt after the Man pavilion was set alight and damaged five nights before its preordained

99. Burning Man, "2010 Art Theme: Metropolis—Life of Cities," accessed January 6, 2020, [https://burningman.org/culture/history/brc-history/event-archives/2010-2/10\\_theme/](https://burningman.org/culture/history/brc-history/event-archives/2010-2/10_theme/).

100. Joe Garofoli and Leslie Fulbright, "Burning Man is Burned too Soon—Arson Arrest," *SFGATE.COM*, August 28, 2007, <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Burning-Man-is-bumed-too-soon-arson-arrest-2524487.php>.

101. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94–130.

102. Graham St John, "Blazing Grace: The Gifted Culture of Burning Man," *NANO: New American Notes Online* 11 (2017), <https://nanocrit.com/issues/issue11/Blazing-Grace-The-Gifted-Culture-of-Burning-Man>.

103. Hetherington, *Badlands of Modernity*, 51.

104. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 20.

105. Ibid.

106. Quinn and Wilks, "Festival Heterotopias," 42.

destruction on Burn Night. Lamenting the event's lost heritage of chaos and absurdist humor, the "prank" was performed by Cacophonist Paul Addis, who was charged and later convicted of the felonies of arson and destruction of property. Addis served two years in a Nevada prison and later committed suicide.<sup>100</sup> For critics, the resurrection of the Man and the criminalization of the prank exposed what Addis sought to demonstrate: that chaos had become institutionalized. Resembling the process where religious organizations evolve into normative versions of their origins in "spontaneous communitas,"<sup>101</sup> the episode revealed that Burning Man had grown committed to replicating the foundational event in accord with ceremonial procedure protected by law. Further, it illustrated how the disruptive imagination of the trickster clashed with civic imperatives that became essential to the proliferation of Burning Man.

Addis's disruption exposed how Burning Man is fraught with tensions operating at the core of its ethos. Indeed, the Ten Principles are nothing if not paradoxical. On the one hand, there are principles like *Immediacy*, in which the virtue of lived experience is esteemed above ideas and beliefs, and *Radical Self-expression*, which champions individual expression as a virtuous performance of the authentic self. On the other, there is *Civic Responsibility*, which values "civil society," "public welfare," and compliance with local, state and federal laws, and *Communal Effort*, which values "creative cooperation and collaboration." A successful "burn" will navigate the terrain between immediacy and cooperation, play and work, freedom and control. This ludic–civic tension makes for a necessary paradox, with serious implications if either tendency gains ascendancy. At one extreme, where self-indulgence, transgression, and carefree abandon predominate, a culture of convenience may thrive where principles like *Gifting* and *Radical Self-reliance* are outsourced to experiential service providers, as evident in the "plug-n-play" camp controversy.<sup>102</sup> At the other, governance and micromanagement presages bureaucratization. The Addis incident exhibited the broiling of a long-simmering standoff between liberty and governance in BRC, a tension incidentally pivotal to the "utopian idea of modern society."<sup>103</sup> As Hetherington argues, this idea, which unfolds in the context of heterotopias, demonstrates the process of social ordering more than the establishment of a new order, where utopia is always deferred, never arrived at, never finished.

### Monument to Impermanence

Thought to possess multiple orders of temporality, heterotopic sites "function fully when people find themselves in a sort of absolute break with their traditional time."<sup>104</sup> This fourth contemplation is of notable interest to the study of transformational events. Here, libraries and museums (spaces that accumulate time) are specifically contrasted with festivals—events "linked to time in its most futile, most transitory, most precarious aspect." These heterotopias are not "eternitary" (like cemeteries) but are "absolutely chronic." Foucault refers to "fairgrounds, these marvellous empty emplacements at the outskirts of cities, which fill up, once or twice a year, with stands, displays, heteroclitic objects, wrestlers, snake women, fortune tellers."<sup>105</sup> Drawing on his idea that they are host to "heterochronisms," festivals are said to "break or disrupt traditional concepts of time by interrupting present time and accumulating past times."<sup>106</sup> That is, not only do event heterotopias inaugurate a disruption of routine temporality; within festive time, participants may dwell within, or relive, the historic "moment" of an event that is seasonally recurrent over many years. How festivals are host to—and how rituals enable participants to embody—"other" temporalities has been a subject of considerable interest in anthropology,

107. Howell, "Sense of Place," 47.

108. Christopher L. Witmore, "Vision, Media, Noise and the Percolation of Time: Symmetrical Approaches Mediation of the Material World," *Journal of Material Culture* 11, no. 3 (2006): 267–92.

109. Howell, "Sense of Place," 57.

110. Larry Harvey, "Radical Ritual: Spirit and Soul," *Burning Man Journal*, January 30, 2017, <https://journal.burningman.org/2017/01/philosophical-center/spirituality/radical-ritual-spirit-and-soul/>.

ethnology, and folklore studies. In her study of the Festa del Badalisc, an Epiphany festival in Andrista, a high mountain village in northern Lombardy, Italy, Francesca Howell emphasizes that this event possesses a "mysterious polychronic ambience" because it takes place within a region where multiple temporalities "percolate," "stimulating a complex temporal brew."<sup>107</sup> Drawing on Christopher Witmore's concept of time "percolation,"<sup>108</sup> she holds that when "a sense of polychronicity is found in a heterotopic festival space it can allow for an acute and tangible awareness of sense of place in festival participants. As the Badalisc festival unfolds in the wintry Alpine night, a sense of the liminal allows other times and influences to bubble up into the present, 'percolating' through it."<sup>109</sup> Howell's study serves to highlight how seasonally recurrent ritual and performance enables the embodiment of the past in the present.

The primary rite of BRC—Burn Night—is illustrative. Ceremonial *and* festal, this event enables the populace to inhabit a break in time that has been recycled since the inaugural burn in 1986, with each occasion signaling an accumulation of novelty but at the same time enabling a return to a fixed tradition. At various stages in the event's history, art themes—which shape the design of the Man and BRC's interactive program—have highlighted these divergent perspectives (evolutionary/traditional) on time. For instance, the 2009 event had a Darwinian theme ("Evolution"), and other themes have celebrated the maturation of Burning Man from a remote gathering to a city ("Metropolis" in 2010), to a culture with global pretensions ("Caravansary" in 2014), to a cultural chrysalis in the wake of the passing of the event's primary founder ("Metamorphosis" in 2019). On the other hand, the 2017 theme, "Radical Ritual," underlined tradition and the rituals integral to ensuring a cyclical return. Harvey's commentary explained that the word "radical" in "Radical Ritual" inferred "all that is fixed and fundamental in human nature"<sup>110</sup> (fig. 5). Harvey earlier stated this intent in commentary on the "Wheel of Time" theme of 1999, writing that in returning to the playa after a year's absence, "it sometimes feels as if one had never left the desert. Within this



Figure 5. "Radical Ritual," 2017. Photo by Graham St John.

111. Larry Harvey, "1999 Art Theme: The Wheel of Time," [https://burningman.org/culture/history/brc-history/event-archives/1999-2/99\\_theme/](https://burningman.org/culture/history/brc-history/event-archives/1999-2/99_theme/).
112. Stewart Harvey, "Black Rock Dawn," in *Playa Dust: Collected Stories from Burning Man*, ed. Samantha Krukowski (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2014), 47.
113. Quote included in the newsletter's call for volunteers, *Building/Burning/Man*, June 1992, [https://z9hbb3mwou383x-1930ve0uqg-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/BBM\\_1992.pdf](https://z9hbb3mwou383x-1930ve0uqg-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/BBM_1992.pdf).
114. Buck A. E. Down, "The Art of Nothing: The Aesthetic Legacy of Larry Harvey," *Burning Man Journal*, May 22, 2018, <https://journal.burningman.org/2018/05/opinion/serious-stuff/the-art-of-nothing-the-aesthetic-legacy-of-larry-harvey>.
115. D. S. Black, "Postscript," in *Desert to Dream: A Dozen Years of Burning Man Photography*, ed. Barbara Traub (San Francisco: Immedium, 2011 [2006]), 176.
116. Rod Garrett, "Designing Black Rock City," *Burning Man Journal*, April 20, 2010, <http://journal.burningman.org/2010/04/black-rock-city/building-brc/designing-black-rock-city/>.
117. James H. Carrott and Brian David Johnson, *Vintage Tomorrows: A Historian and a Futurist Journey through Steampunk into the Future of Technology* (Sebastopol, CA: Maker Media, 2013).

changeless world time seems suspended. We build the same city, we burn the same Man, and by these actions we are changed. Ritual time is cyclical time and quite unlike the ordinary measure that divides our daily lives."<sup>111</sup>

The distinctly *other* spatio-temporality of the playa is pivotal to the chronic ambiance of BRC. The playa is the bed of an ancient inland sea that covered much of present-day Nevada for about two million years. The Pleistocene-epoch Lake Lahonton has long since vanished, though it has flooded the imagination of humans ranging into the region some twelve thousand years after its desiccation: "That was a world thousands of years removed from our own," imagines Stewart Harvey, "but you can still feel its presence in the shifting playa sand and the timeless wind."<sup>112</sup> To inhabit this primordial wilderness is to occupy a "timeless" place. At the same time, when inhabiting *playaspace*, one is also inhabiting an *other-time* shaped not only by the primordality of the space but also by the temporality of the festive, the going beyond routine time and into sacred time, sometimes called "playa time."

The ephemeral character of BRC is also an effect of fire arts, with signature installations the Man and the Temple destroyed by fire in rituals dedicated to the celebration of impermanence. In the second edition of the BMP newsletter, *Building/Burning/Man*, Larry Harvey expounded that the Man was a "monument to transience,"<sup>113</sup> an allegory for life itself. This sentiment, which could be extended to the entire event, is fitting in the wake of Harvey's death on April 28, 2018: "An entire city—with all its noise and bustle and teeming humanity, its monumental works of art, humans being and humans doing—is only in full flower for a week, and then is quickly and anonymously whisked away, an analog for life itself. It's a temporary, albeit noisy blip that gives way to the great nothingness in a relative blink of an eye, barely an interruption geologically speaking"<sup>114</sup> (fig. 6).

As this comment implies, BRC is completely rebuilt each year, following its total de-installment the year prior. Such perennality is not unique in the world of events, and nor is the commitment to return event spaces to pre-event conditions. What is unusual here is that a city-sized event is assembled upon the seasonally refreshed "canvas" of a state-managed wilderness area. The dutiful dedication to restore an absolute desert to pre-event conditions is unparalleled in the world of events. That burners are obliged toward *Leaving No Trace* at this scale has earned BRC the mantel "ephemeropolis."<sup>115</sup> What's more, this dedication to event dis/semblage on scales equally grand and minute relies upon an uncompromising effort to keep time. That this ephemeral city is operationally reliant upon chronic scheduling, that immediacy depends on administrative protocols and extensive mediation, are hallmarks of an enigma. The orchestration of timelessness (the sacred) in BRC is a remarkable feat of engineering, as measured in the spatial design of the city: a clock face. A twelve-hour clock map design with radial streets named by the hour was implemented in 1999<sup>116</sup> in conjunction with that year's "The Wheel of Time" theme. As stated in the theme description, with the Man as the axis and an enormous clock dial spanning nearly half a mile of desert terrain, BRC became a "living timepiece."

The spatio-temporal conditions of the playa enable the performance of alternate time periods, a possibility apparent in steampunk, a futurist-vintage style combining historical elements with anachronistic technological features. As materials "recombobulators" and eccentric inventors showcase steam-powered contraptions referencing Jules Verne, they reclaim a history that never existed.<sup>117</sup> Influenced by Survival Research Labs projects that are said to have inspired



Figure 6. The Temple, 2016. Photo by Rand Larson.

118. John Law in Piero Scaruffi, "John Law interview: Part2 cacophony society," published on YouTube, November 6, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cacdr0MukVU>.

119. <http://www.uchronians.org/>, accessed June 13, 2009.

steampunk subculture,<sup>118</sup> such contraptions have included a self-propelled three-story Victorian house, "The Neverwas Haul," appearing on-playa in 2006, also the year of "Uchronia." A 200-foot-long, 100-foot-wide, and 50-foot-high installation that appeared to me like a gigantic haystack winking in green luminescence, the immense Uchronia was funded by Belgian artists and built using rejected pinewood. The work was inspired by French philosopher Charles Renouvier's 1876 novel *Uchronie (L'Utopie dans l'histoire)*, which replaced *topos* (from "utopia," literally "no place") with *chronos* to generate a word denoting *no time* or *beyond time*. For the installation's creators, "uchronic" signaled an "alternate history" intended to challenge the "reality" of its temporally displaced populace. Rather than an effort to create an alternate history, Uchronia (literally a no-time place) appeared to signal the possibility of entering time outside history, a temporality that, not unlike its spatial precursor—utopia—is motivated by hope: a "portal, showing us what the world could be like if creativity ruled supreme" and time were altered.<sup>119</sup> This gigantic "what if?" sculpted upon the playa's blank canvas was consistent with the altered temporality endogenous to festive consciousness. Despite the fact that most burners knew little of the concept behind what was dubbed the "Belgian Waffle," the installation became a familiar feature of playa space for a week. With the desert night a welcome reprieve from the frying sun and whiteouts, with its occupants bathed in neon green, Uchronia metamorphosed into a dance club. And, on the final night, it burned. With its image seared into my retinas for weeks, Uchronia became a cavernous conflagration, an allegory of impermanence, the flaming whispers of which engulfed all who witnessed. In the wake of its desolation, on the celebratory margins of its dissolution, sensual acts of beauty conspired in blinking conclaves upon the playa.

It has been suggested that variable temporalities are associated with distinct heterotopic spaces that "form an absolute break with time (the cemetery), accumulate time (the library) or are linked to time fleetingly (the festival or fair)."<sup>120</sup> While this is indubitable, events are contexts for multiple temporalities. As we have seen, the festive chronotope of BRC is layered with times primordial, traditional, evolutionary, immediate, organized, and imaginary. It is also a context in which festive abandonment coincides with the accumulation of time. The selective archiving of playa-time is

120. Johnson, "The Geographies of Heterotopia," 794.

121. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 20.

122. See Davia Nelson and Nikki Silva (The Kitchen Sisters), "Burning Man—Archiving the Ephemeral," *The Keepers Story #25, The Kitchen Sisters Present* podcast, accessed January 6, 2020.

123. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 21.

apparent in "City of Dust: The Evolution of Burning Man," an exhibition and series of lectures at the Nevada Museum of Art, Reno in 2017–18. That exhibit, which subsequently traveled to the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, DC in 2018 as part of the exhibition "No Spectators: The Art of Burning Man," is an effort to inscribe impermanence with permanence (fig. 7). The strategy appears more overt in the glass enclosures of "swag" and other items of historical interest that have been displayed in BRC's Center Camp over many years. The commitment to exhibit collections of significant historical objects, the accumulation of which are like "heterotopias in which time never ceases to pile up,"<sup>121</sup> is converse to the virtue of immediacy, a paradox recognized by Burning Man rogue archivist Christine Kristen (aka Lady Bee) and education director Stuart Mangrum, who in recent years have advanced documentation and archival efforts.<sup>122</sup> While this distinction is faithful to Foucault's contrast in spatial attitudes toward time between the museum and library on the one hand and the festival on the other, here disparate chronicities coexist within the same festive space.

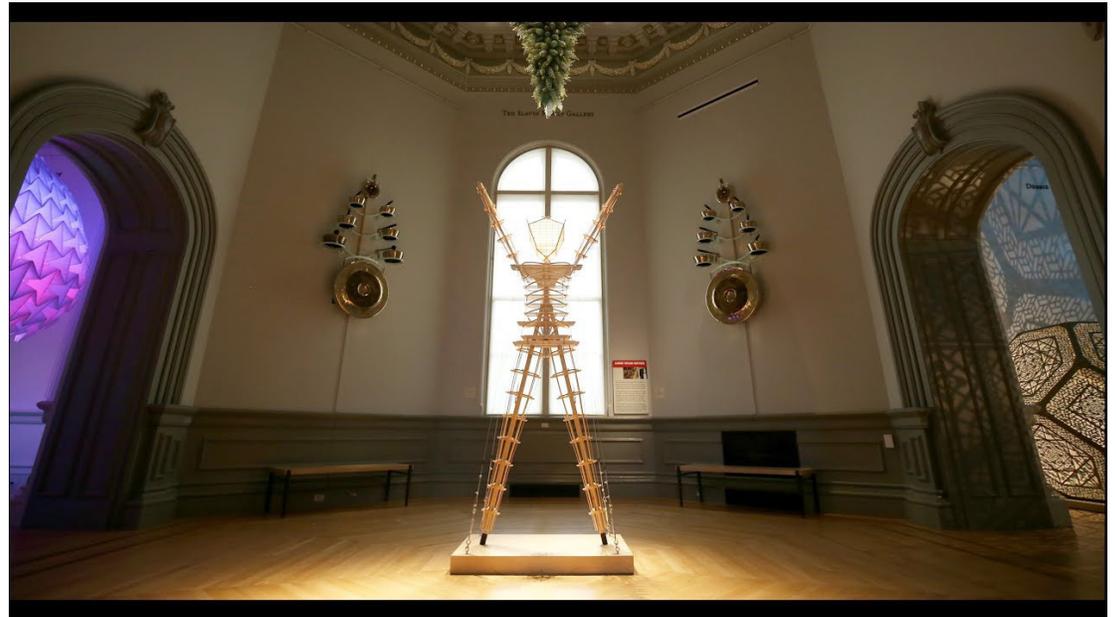


Figure 7. "No Spectators: The Art of Burning Man." Exhibition at Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian, Washington, DC, 2018. Source: Burning Man Project.

### Zone Trip

Heterotopias are identified as zonal spaces that always "presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable."<sup>123</sup> That is, in this fifth "principle," heterotopias are zones with access governed by practices and rituals making them simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. In the first instance, one may be constrained, "as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else one has to submit to rites and to purifications." In these examples, accessibility relies on the granting of permissions or the performance of appropriate gestures. Indicating the Muslim hammam and Scandinavian sauna, Foucault suggests that heterotopias are consecrated entirely by "activities of purification" that are part religious and part hygienic. In the second instance, he refers to "emplacements" that appear to be inclusive but "conceal curious exclusions," such as rooms accommodating travelers on large farms in Brazil and elsewhere in South America. While "guests" are entitled to occupy these

124. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 21.
125. Quinn and Wilks, "Festival Heterotopias," 42.
126. Jenny Kane, "Burning Man at 30: How a Group of Radical Pranksters Built a City in the Desert," *Reno Gazette Journal*, August 9, 2017.
127. All editions of *Rough Draft* are available at <https://archive.org/details/roughdraftofficial171vari>.
128. Evans et al., *Tales of the San Francisco Cacophony Society*, xiii.

rooms and stay overnight, they are not granted access to the family court.<sup>124</sup>

While this is an irritatingly piecemeal approach to a complex subject, it is a theme of direct relevance to those demarcated zones we know as public events, and notably, festivals. And not unlike festivals, transformational events possess jurisdictional spatio-temporal boundaries, often at considerable remove from participants' places of residence, zoned off from the non-event world with gates through which entrants or members must pass. Ticket holders gaining access to these event precincts are not only made liable to state laws as a condition of entry; they are also typically expected to observe zone lore, including tacit rules and event principles. Not only must entrants be sufficiently networked, possess economic and social capital, and hold a ticket to gain admission, but they also "must continue to respect the necessary rites and perform the required gestures."<sup>125</sup> Events are sites of contention between the included and the excluded, a struggle between those who belong and those who do not. In the case presented by Quinn and Wilks, folk festivals contextualize tension between amateur and professional musicians. Larger-scale events possess manifold internal boundaries and potentially, multiple heterotopias. While access to interior evental zones or districts may require specific passage rites, gestures, and status achievements denoting membership, openness, fluidity and boundary disruptions are characteristic of festive zones with permissive agendas, especially given the unusual in-situ overlap between private and public space. Such internal boundary confusion enables a relaxation of societal norms. As surveyed and emplaced units of zoned autonomy on-playa, camps (notably "theme camps") encourage disruptive (and notoriously, *camp*) aesthetics.

To be in the zone burners call "on-playa" requires passage across a physical threshold. The symbolic power of the threshold was recognized in the inaugural desert sojourn of 1990. Driving onto the playa having convoyed overnight from San Francisco, eighty-nine intrepids exited their vehicles, joined hands, and stepped over a line on the playa surface. Michael Mikel (aka Danger Ranger) recounts this moment: "I took a stick and I drew a line in the ground and I had everybody line up, and I said, 'On the other side of this line, everything will be different. Reality itself will change.' We all stepped across that line together and things have been different."<sup>126</sup> As promoted in the September 1990 edition (issue #48) of the Cacophony Society newsletter, *Rough Draft*, this excursion—dubbed "Zone Trip #4"—was "an opportunity to leave your old self and be reborn through the cleansing fires of the trackless, pure desert."<sup>127</sup> Rooted in the Dada-inspired events of the San Francisco Suicide Club, Cacophony Zone Trips were adventures "beyond normal time and place." In the occupation, reclamation, and subversion of cemeteries, underground sewers, disused morgues, and army barracks, among other adventures in the San Francisco Bay Area and further afield, spatio-temporal norms were subverted and burlesqued in surrealist rites of passage across and beyond territorial and temporal conventions. While scaling the spans of the Golden Gate Bridge was among the most spectacularly sublime of these sublegal explorations of urban space, zone ventures included roller skating on the Embarcadero Freeway, formalwear sewer walks, urban spelunking in subterranean causeways, and partying in abandoned bunkers, as occurred with the Atomic Café events.<sup>128</sup> Making these nonpermitted sojourns into urban *terra incognita*, participants passed across thresholds marking limits as social as they were physical. Simply put, their trespasses licensed the abandonment of rules defining appropriate conduct in specified spaces. In these temporary zones where conventional rules of etiquette were inverted and confounded, the border between reality and imagination grew ambiguous.

129. Evans et al., *Tales of the San Francisco Cacophony Society*, 3.

130. Hakim Bey, *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone—Ontological Anarchy and Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 1991).

131. Burning Man, "Camp Placement Criteria," <https://burningman.org/event/camps/criteria/>.

132. Manuel A. Gómez, "Order in the Desert: Law Abiding Behavior at Burning Man," *Journal of Disruptive Resolution* (2013): 349–73; 353.

133. Sybil Hatch, "A Brief History (and Future) of Leaving No Trace," *Burning Man Journal*, July 11, 2016, <https://journal.burningman.org/2016/07/black-rock-city/leaving-no-trace/a-brief-history-and-future-of-leaving-no-trace/>.

Integral to the guerrilla art practice of the Cacophonists was the philosophy of leaving a zone without a trace of one's presence. The practice of temporarily occupying a space in a sublegal context and then disappearing before the authorities arrive had been integral to the strange urban *dérives* of the Suicide Club, where "leave no trace" amounted to a necessary ethos of self-preservation.<sup>129</sup> These groups had been practicing what Hakim Bey might have called "poetic terrorism," a guerrilla practice abjuring permanent occupation and rejecting anything smacking of hierarchy, ideology, and dogma.<sup>130</sup>

In the context of the *playa*, resettled annually and subject to local and federal law enforcement and public risk management requirements, as well as BMP "placement" policy protocols, the anarchist philosophy of the Temporary Autonomous Zone became unfeasible. By the mid-1990s, securing a ticket was a first-order priority for admission to the "special event" zone of BRC, a circumstance complicated by the advent of ticket scarcity in 2011. At the same time, official "placement" depends upon participants (as members of theme camps) demonstrating a persistent commitment to *zone lore* criteria: that is, "interactivity" and event principles, notably *Leaving No Trace* (see below). In other words, access to prized locations in the surveyed grid of BRC relies upon the recurrent performance of appropriate gestures.<sup>131</sup>

Accessibility is today compounded not only by ticket scarcity and placement requirements but by the interference of internet bots generating long wait queues and rejections at the point of online ticket sales. Regulating physical access, members of the Department of Gate, Perimeter & Exodus are delegated to oversee all logistics related to access, departure, and boundary security.<sup>132</sup> The Gate is a threshold that officially converts entrants into "participants," a procedure accelerated if arriving via Burner Express (bus) or Burner Express Air (flight). After tickets have been displayed, entrants will next encounter Greeters, who may welcome them "home" with a hug, induct "virgin" eventgoers (often required to lie in the dust and perform "angel wing" gestures), and distribute a "Survival Guide" canvassing cautions, practicalities, and principles. Not only do ingress and official placement upon the *playa* require familiarity with the Ten Principles; successful egress (or "exodus") also depends on the community's careful observance of these coded virtues and values.

Notable among these principles is *Leaving No Trace* (LNT). For the BMP to obtain the BLM-issued Special Recreation Permit, the *playa* must be annually restored to its pre-event condition. Identified as "the one principle that is absolutely mandatory,"<sup>133</sup> LNT is a practice of the United States Forest Service and the National Park Service, as well as a standard measured by the BLM, required under the National Environmental Policy Act to conduct environmental impact analyses for projects it permits on federal land. The BLM's standard is that residue debris should not exceed an average of one square foot per acre during the BLM inspection—and the BMP has passed every post-event silt inspection since these inspections commenced in 1999. Where "leave no trace" originally connoted activities necessary for an illegal occupation of space sans detection by authorities, in the contemporary period of zonal occupation downstream from the activities of the Cacophony Society, the practice had become, quite ironically, a standard enforced by governing agencies to which the BMP must comply. In the former instance, departing without evidence of spatial occupation would allow occupants future illicit incursions. In the latter, leaving no or little trace permits future sanctioned use of space.

134. As explained in more detail  
in St John, "At Home in the Big  
Empty."

135. Chen, *Enabling Creative  
Chaos*, 67.

LNT is a purification ritual complex that has become integral to the ethos of Burning Man. Restoring the playa to its pre-event condition is the goal of the Playa Restoration team in collusion with the entire event population, who are made aware that the seasonal reproduction of BRC relies on eliminating "MOOP" ("matter out of place"): essentially all non-dust, including all material waste. Prior to departure, careful "demooping" of camp, a ritualized observance known as "detailing"—and a performance inscribed in the "MOOP Map" (fig. 8)—is essential for future placement in BRC.<sup>134</sup>

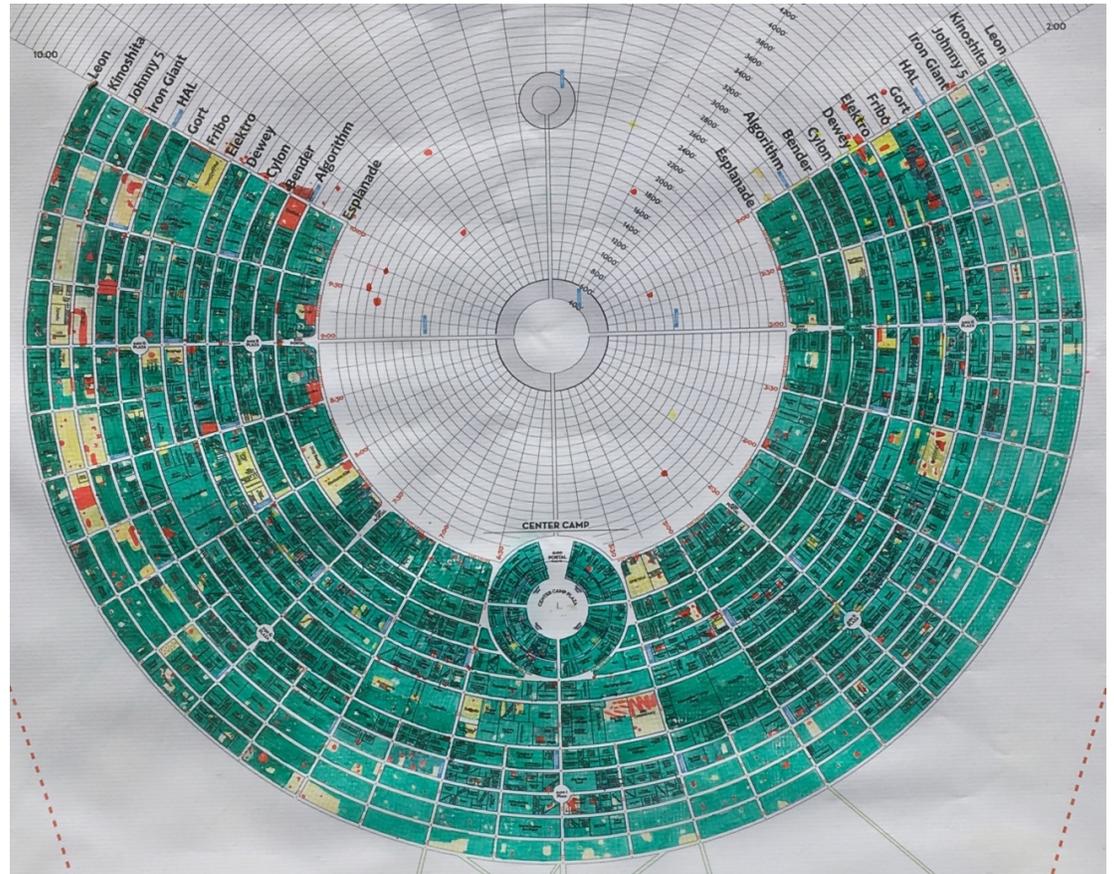


Figure 8. MOOP Map, 2018. Source: Burning Man Project.

While demonstrable knowledge of the ethos of the playa event space is a requirement for belonging to a no-place called "home," accessibility is fraught with paradox. Listed first among the Ten Principles is *Radical Inclusion*: "Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community." This principle, as Katherine Chen observed, derived from an understanding acquired on-playa in the mid-1990s that recruiting volunteers through exclusive friend networks was unsustainable, as there was need for volunteers with a wider variety of skills and professions. Encoded in *Radical Inclusion*, standardized procedures "relieved the bottleneck on recruitment and diversified an otherwise homogenous and insular membership."<sup>135</sup> The collectivist practice allowed more people to become involved in the organization, explore their hidden potential, invent new roles, even redesign entire departments. At the same time, as socioeconomic conditions and race relations are known to limit access, *Radical Inclusion* belies an exclusive inclusivity. Marlon Williams, a burner of color, addresses this point: "People often say, 'Burning Man is on another planet.' I really

136. In Dominique Debucquoy-Dodley, "Diversity & Radical Inclusion: Marlon Williams on the 10 Principles' Racial Limits," *Burning Man Journal*, May 3, 2019, <https://journal.burning-man.org/2019/05/opinion/serious-stuff/diversity-radical-inclusion-marlon-williams-on-the-10-principles-racial-limits/>.
137. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 21.
138. Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 60.
139. Ravenscroft and Matteucci, "The Festival as Carnavalesque," 13.
140. Ibid, 2.
141. Gazi Islam, Michael Zyphur, and David Boje, "Carnival and Spectacle in Krewe De Vieux and the Mystic Krewe of Spermes: The Mingling of Organization and Celebration," *Organization Studies* 29 (2008), 1565–89.
142. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968).

like to remind folks that...trying to have inclusion, without affirmatively trying to move forward on that ethos...replicate[s] all the things that already exist within the default world. Black Rock City is not on another planet. It's very much on Earth, and specifically the United States, with all the challenges of our racial histories." Interpreting *Radical Inclusion* as a form of inclusivity for the privileged "who have felt excluded from a lot of other experiences," Williams deems the Ten Principles an expression of white privilege.<sup>136</sup> This perspective prompts an inquiry concerning events with transformational agendas: transformational for whom?

### Impossible City

Foucault's final "principle" considers heterotopias "in relation to the rest of space," which are purposive at two extremes. At one extreme, they create "a space of illusion that exposes all real space, all the emplacements in the interior of which human life is enclosed and partitioned, as even more illusory." At the other, they create "another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is disorderly, ill construed and sketchy." Exemplary of the illusory character of heterotopia is the historical role of the brothel (and Foucault appears to have in mind the traditional French "house of illusion"). Exemplary of the other extreme—the heterotopia of "compensation"—is the colony, like the seventeenth-century colonies founded by Jesuits in South America, where all aspects of life were regulated in minute detail.<sup>137</sup> Here we approach the reflexive aspect of heterotopia, though more accurately spaces by which culture is illuminated and refracted, made transparent and distorted, like a hall of magic mirrors.

This spectrum is useful in the study of event spaces. While event heterotopias exist "in relation to all other sites and spaces," that they vary considerably was understood by Don Handelman, who detailed three types of public events, each possessing an "internal logic of design," or "meta-design." These are events that "model," "present" and "represent" the "lived-in world." Events that "model," such as rites of passage and shamanic rites, effect a change of status and identity, or influence the cosmos, via the resolution or synthesis of contradictions and uncertainty. Events that "present," like parades, state funerals, and royal pageants, are occasions mirroring politics and symbolism, replicating social order. And events that "represent," like carnivals and festivals, are unpredictable, often inverting and even subverting cultural and political order. Handelman qualified that "the probability of a given, real event fitting neatly within one type is necessarily small."<sup>138</sup>

Festive events are notable for their disciplinary and/or transgressive extremes. Take for example, the San Fermin fiesta in Pamplona, Spain, now commodified as a major tourist event. In one study, the "freedoms" of the fiesta are thought illusory, serving as "a significant device for maintaining community governance and social control."<sup>139</sup> While this event is considered an example of a "disciplinary heterotopia,"<sup>140</sup> "krewes" opposing the commercial direction of the Mardi Gras in New Orleans adopt grotesque political satire in their ambivalent protests.<sup>141</sup> Most festive events, especially carnivals—as ambiguous contexts in which freedom and governance interface—can be spaces of illusion *and* compensation, a circumstance echoing the liberatory and disciplinary interpretations of Bakhtin's "second world" of the people.<sup>142</sup>

As unique platforms for such complexities, transformational events are busy hives for the expression of agendas with varying outcomes. BRC is recognizable between the polar extremes

143. Victor Turner, "Morality and Liminality," in *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols*, ed. Edith Turner (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 149.

144. Wendy Clupper, "The Erotic Politics of *Critical Tits*: Exhibitionism or Feminist Statement?" in *Political Performances: Theory and Practice*, ed. Susan C. Hagedicke, Deirdre Heddon, Avraham Oz, and E. J. Westlake (New York: Rodopi Press, 2009), 251–68.

145. Ned Howey, "Gay, Straight... Playa-Sexual?" *Piss Clear* no. 27, August 31–September 1, 2005, 6.

146. Green and Kaiser, "From Ephemeral to Everyday Costuming," 7.

147. *Ibid.*, 11.

148. Shalaco, "The Point of Black Rock City," *Burning Man Journal*, August 7, 2018, <https://journal.burningman.org/2018/08/black-rock-city/building-brc/the-point-of-black-rock-city/>.

149. In Jeremy Hockett, "Reckoning Ritual and Counterculture in the Burning Man Community: Communication, Ethnography, and the Self in Reflexive Modernism," (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 2004), 10–11.

("brothel" and "colony") identified by Foucault, with some qualification. With the example of the brothel, Foucault appears to be highlighting the role of the imaginative and corporeality in other spaces. If our goal is to understand the other-space of *events*, a more telling example is not the brothel, but that temporary eruption of eros and licentiousness we already know as carnival. BRC is a carnivalesque production whose co-creators are permitted to act "as if" the world were different, an experimentalism casting prismatic light on what burners call the "default" world. The event space permits what Turner called the "subjunctive mood," which ranges from "scientific hypothesis to festive fantasy," the mood of *were*, as in "if I were you."<sup>143</sup> The queering of the familiar appears in liberating and disruptive forms of *Radical Self-expression*, such as public nudity and erotic pageantry,<sup>144</sup> "hetero-flexible" behavior,<sup>145</sup> and "gender terrorism." In a study of visible resistance to hegemonic masculinity on-playa, Green and Kaiser<sup>146</sup> make use of heterotopia to investigate the implications of a hyperbolic *camp*-site where men can without reserve "explore femininity, and articulate appearance styles that draw from multiple genders." Male outfits incorporating leather chaps with women's lingerie, "furkinis," spandex leggings, utilikilts, playa-skirts: such sartorial disruptions "deploy incongruity and ironic juxtapositions in order to produce new ideas...about gender, or perhaps, to even transcend gender altogether."<sup>147</sup>

To address Foucault's other reflexive pole, while BRC is not a "colony" in the conventional sense, it is a frontier settlement sometimes likened in its early desert phase to a colony for Bay Area bohemians. Carved into the Black Rock Desert wilderness, where order was improvised upon a near-lunar landscape, the frontier event holds memories of other frontiers in the settlement of the American West. Among the most unique aspects of this "settlement" is that it is completely disassembled and then resettled annually (since 1990), with each on-playa "build" advancing upon previous editions. This recurrent re/settlement makes for a unique experience:

Black Rock City is an Impossible City....One impossible aspect about Black Rock City, and part of the nature of a city that is born every year, is that you can visit it at different times in its growth and development. Each and every year I visit, Black Rock City it is younger and younger. You can never visit New York when it was a colony or San Francisco before the gold rush, but you can do that with Black Rock City.<sup>148</sup>

Of the earliest editions of this resettlement, Harvey has stated, "there was no context to define what you were doing. So with a few simple props you could create your own context and generate a world-ordering *gesture*." Then he added, "there was also some irony in this,"<sup>149</sup> something of an understatement given how satire has permeated the re-creation of civilization on-playa. As an environment where men wear skirts, where camps are camp, and where official culture is relentlessly lampooned, BRC has long been a carnival on the frontier. At the same time, the event scaled in response to requirements to manage health and safety matters, address the concerns of the local population and law enforcement, liaise with media representatives, coordinate volunteers, and develop civic responsibility. Along the way, Burning Man achieved diplomatic inroads in relations with local government and law enforcement. Moreover, through means civic and carnivalesque, the BMP has committed to "leaving a trace" beyond the event in the desert. Through the Global Leadership Conference (GLC) held in the Bay Area from 2007–17, and other annual meetings like the European Leadership Summit, the BMP fosters the culture of Burning Man reckoned by CEO Marian Goodell in her 2017 GLC plenary speech to be a "platform for change." Far beyond maintaining an outpost of the Cacophony Society, the BMP is committed to ensuring that "the values born of the playa" are transmitted, according to

150. Burning Man, "Burning Man Transitions to Non-Profit Organization," *Burning Man Journal*, March 3, 2014, <https://journal.burningman.org/2014/03/news/global-news/burning-man-transitions-to-non-profit-organization/>.

151. Burners Without Borders, <https://www.burnerswithoutborders.org/>.

152. Burning Man Regional Network, <https://regionals.burningman.org/>.

Goodell, to "The Grand Playa" of the world.<sup>150</sup> The sentiment speaks to the widening movement of burner initiatives apparent, for example, in the application of the Ten Principles in the daily lives of participants, the disaster relief and community engagement activities of Burners Without Borders,<sup>151</sup> the "Leave a Positive Trace—Global Weekend of Action" (June 21–23, 2019), and in a panoply of events within the regional network<sup>152</sup> (fig. 9).



Figure 9. Burning Man Regional Network map. Source: Burning Man Project.

## Conclusion

Heterotopology has been found useful in application to Burning Man, an evental movement widely regarded as prototypically transformational. Deployed to frame core features of Burning Man, each of Foucault's six paidian musings on heterotopia have facilitated exploration of the history and culture of the movement's desert home, Black Rock City, while at the same time fashioning understanding of BRC's complex transformational profile. As discussed, while BRC may be archetypically liminal, its liminality is heterogeneous and paradoxical. While Burning Man remains notoriously unclassifiable, the *evental heterotopia* frame has assisted comprehension of its hyperliminal quality, notably as this event-culture movement has evolved through event reproduction and augmentation in a seasonal cycle. Comprised of a multitude of "other spaces," heterotopia within heterotopia, laden with incongruities, layered with temporalities, zoned with exclusive inclusivities, a mosaic of illusion and control, BRC mirrors and mutates the "default" world. Although given little attention here, while the playa models and defies the lifeworld of participants, satellite burns in turn replicate and subvert the BRC model. Not only a prismatic "ephemeropolis" in Nevada's Black Rock Desert, Burning Man has evolved as a cornucopia of centrifugal "other spaces" that have variably transposed the "playa" in regions worldwide. This freakish multiplication of burn culture and principles will be the subject of future outputs emerging from the Burning Progeny project.

While this approach has room for development, this case study on the complex spatio-temporality of a transformational evental movement offers a valuable contribution to event

studies. Notably, through revisiting and revisioning the rites of passage model in which event studies is grounded, heterotopology assists comprehension of the dynamic vicissitudes of “transformation.” The heterotopic approach to event space enhances awareness of an event’s multidimensionality; of the confluence of freedom and governance, struggles over definition, disparate chronicities, contested utopias, zone disputes, culture wars, all contributing to the identity of an event. While *evental heterotopia* offers an approach for the study of intentionally transformative events, it has applications across the interdisciplinary study of events. To that end, the “principles” of heterotopia warrant further critical application in the ethnography of public events.

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## AUTHOR BIO

**Graham St John** was recently a senior research fellow in the Department of Social Science, University of Fribourg, Switzerland. Research for this article was largely conducted during a four-year project on Burning Man ("Burning Progeny: The European Efflorescence of Burning Man," Jan. 2016–Dec. 2019, <https://www.burningprogeny.org>), sponsored by the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, and supported by a Swiss National Science Foundation. The author wishes to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments.

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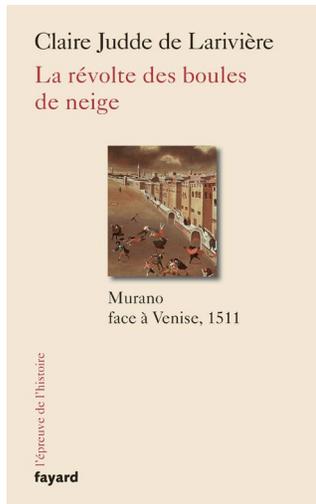
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## KEYWORDS

Carnival  
Venice  
revolt  
microhistory

1. Since the original publication of this review, the reviewer was commissioned to produce an English translation of Judde de Larivière's book, which came out under the title *The Revolt of Snowballs: Murano Confronts Venice 1511* with Routledge in 2018.

## REVIEW

**Judde de Larivière, Claire.** *La révolte des boules de neige*. Paris: Fayard (Hachette Book Group), 2014. 368 pp. EUR 22.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-2-213-67814-6.<sup>1</sup>

**Thomas V. Cohen**

York University, Canada

With this book Claire Judde de Larivière offers us a handsome microhistory about a curious event on Murano. The story goes as follows: On January 27, 1511, when Venice installed a new *podestà* to preside over the island's governance, after the placid ceremony's usual end, as officials left the church countless snowballs flew, pelting Vitale Vitturi, the outgoing official. Campanile bells clattered out rebellion; youngsters and, perhaps, grown men sang subversive chants or jeered and hooted; and the victim and his entourage, in chilly darkness, fled back to Venice, bombarded still, in an open gondola. A revolt? Perhaps, but barely; and then, on the island, and shortly later, in court on Murano and then in Venice, very little came of it. The muffled nature of that outcome, as much as the event itself, is the subject, and indeed the question, of this book. Or, said better, the pair of questions. First, just whatever was that event that indeed did happen on that snowy night? And, second, why so much, and then so little? By and large, Judde de Larivière argues, this revolt, if revolt it was, was destined to belittlement and grateful oblivion, as Venice rushed to conserve its stabilizing myth of social and political tranquility. So courts and councils had good motive to see little more to the evening's doings than a lot of flying snow.

So why make so much of so little? Now this is a microhistory, and, as all know, microhistory's custom is to magnify the small, the better to see large lessons. And, by the habits of this genre, these lessons are always double, first internal and then external. The internal lesson comes thanks to magnification. By climbing inside a moment, a person, or an object or procedure well ensconced and utterly entangled in its world, the scholar works out the fine structure, the complex internal mechanisms, the impulses, bargains, and emotions that gave shape and meaning to the subject of research. The external lesson arises from the scholar's campaign to lodge the moment, person, thing, or process, now well described and thoroughly understood, in the larger structures of its time and place. What then of this snowball moment?

Judde de Larivière's book seems to my eye less given to the internal question than are many microhistories. That fact may owe to a weakness in the documents: the tribunal that investigated the event left only twenty folios of interrogations; many microhistories batten off a dossier far thicker and far richer in details. For whatever reason, whether she could not, or just chose not to, the author offers what is for microhistory a fairly thin description of the fine texture of what went on. Meanwhile, the external question—how did this event sit in larger things?—brings her to a rich, enlightening discussion. This fight was in its way, she argues, if not utterly overdetermined, at least as thoroughly shaped by its time and social-cultural place as was ever any well-crafted snowball by mischievous and cunning young Murano hands.

To make her case for context and determination, Judde de Larivière first sets sights on the island, with its population of market-gardeners, fishermen, and glass-makers, some of them long-time residents and others immigrants from either the mainland or the Adriatic. She wants us readers to have good local knowledge, so she thickens the description. The author makes elegant use of the archival record to bring the island economy to life, mustering resonant lists of active trades and of goods sold in the markets. She has used the papers cleverly, catching hints that let her know the island in rich and subtle ways, and the writing does a handsomely openhanded job of showing readers how a scholar might acquire such understanding.

One theme, throughout the book's clear argument, is political subordination. Murano is not entirely master of itself, and its inhabitants, most of them, are not full masters of their political fate. The snowball moment, whatever it was, expressed rebellion, or indignation, against an official imposed by the metropolis across the wave-chopped channel. Nevertheless, in Judde de Larivière's eyes, the islanders, even the poor and the young and the women, are not scholarship's familiar mere subalterns, restricted to weapons of the weak. Rather, as she sees them, they are eternally and assertively political and deeply involved in a many-layered, incessant, subtly emergent life of civic action, expressed in countless ways on many scales and levels. I find this position very plausible; it certainly sits snugly with the Romans I study. Italian politics and social life, in the widest, most eclectic sense of "politics," mingled everywhere. The author's vision here mixes structure with process, privileging the latter—the less formal—always in restless dialogue with the more crystallized institutions laid out by statutes and by custom.

Meanwhile, the islanders do have their local structures, and, although mere minutes from Venice itself, they inhabit a subject territory, with its semi-autonomous internal institutions and its outsider, the *podestà*, who runs justice and administers the island colony. Much of Murano's dependency runs through him. There comes the question, never resolved: to what degree did these snowballs address the man they pelted, and to what degree did they fly, instead, at the mother city that hovered over Murano and called on its resources?

The times themselves shape the event. In the small, it is Carnival, the prime season for obstreperous behavior. But, in the large and far more importantly, Venice is rough-tossed and tested severely in the War of the League of Cambrai. Having lost badly at Agnadello, it has been impressing boats and fishermen to supply its struggling armies. And the Lagoon islands are awash in refugees from the mainland. The stresses of the war color the local regime and make its hand lie heavier on the island. Still, we never learn what it was about *podestà* Vitale Vitturi that made him unpopular with the inhabitants of Murano. Nothing in his personality or his actions sets him out as odious or contemptible. He himself, and his conduct, are among the several odd mysteries at the center of the story.

One of the best parts of the book is the description, blow by blow, of a lively, contested election, three years earlier, of the parish priest for Santi Maria e Donato, the island's chief church. Here we have the thick description the snowball fight itself does not receive. It is a brilliant account of all the passions, bluster, legal shenanigans, and skullduggery that went into a hard-fought but probably "normal-exceptional" electoral meeting. The connection here with the main story is only tenuous; the tale serves to show off the political alertness and busy entanglement of island life. Sadly, we can see this parish wrangle far more clearly than we can discern the alert discussions

in island council after the snowball event.

After January's insurrection came February's investigation, carried out by the Avogadori de Commun. It ended in April with acquittals all around. The author argues that one job of a tribunal, always, is to make a fitting story, and that Venice, committed as it was to a myth of peace, had good reason to see even less in the little uprising than was ever there. Then comes a puzzle for the author: if the court wanted the suspects to come out innocent, why then did it torture all of them (except the town crier, already freed)? She gives no good answer. I ask, might the court have tortured not in pursuit of a confession, as the author assumes, but out of confidence that the suspects would stand fast and thereby, thanks to having withstood the pain, help firm up the prosecution's desired failure? In early modern Italian courts, pro-forma torture on a witness's behalf did happen.

The book has one flaw not easily corrected: it lacks the original Latin and Italian of the sources. Fayard has aimed for sales: big print, lots of white on every page, and spare, lean notes to suppress both weight and price. But Fayard and mass market are not alone here; there is a general pressure among publishers to strip bare the notes, and, of course, to banish them to the back as if they barely mattered. But few historians so depend on close and careful readings of shades of meaning as do microhistorians. Judde de Larivière does offer snatches of the original, but mostly we have to trust her French translations, and from what I do see of the original, or just know of the old habits of the language, I am aware that she sometimes slips (the *iocularius*, on p. 192, probably makes jewelry, and not eyeglasses, the *publico homicida* is not an *assassin public*—whatever that expression means—but rather, a man with a wide public reputation as a killer). Even the most adroit translator, in a book like this, would do best, if possible, by showing critical readers, experts especially but eager amateurs as well, the originals on which so much argument rests.

In sum, this is a book of many virtues, among them lively style, an eye for local color, a good feel for the tangled social and political world of early modern Venice, and a canny sense of the latest good historical theory. It has many graces and few flaws. Most Italians can read the French already. If it ever aimed for translation into Italian, English, or other languages, I would recommend revision too, to weed out a few errors and, if possible, to snuggle closer to that snowball fight itself, the riddle wrapped in a mystery at the very center of the book.

## EDITORIAL NOTE

This review was originally commissioned by Maartje van Gelder and published on [H-Italy](#) under the banner of [H-Net Reviews](#). The original review can be found at <https://networks.h-net.org/node/7651/reviews/86900/cohen-judde-de-larivi%C3%A8re-la-r%C3%A9volte-des-boules-de-neige>. The editors have selected it for inclusion in this issue of *The Journal of Festive Studies*.

## AUTHOR BIO

**Thomas V. Cohen** is Professor Emeritus in the Department of History and the Department of Humanities, York University, Canada.

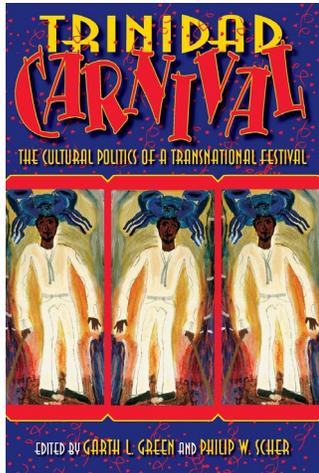
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## KEYWORDS

Trinidad  
music  
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Carnival  
Calypso  
diaspora  
internationalization

## REVIEW

**Green, Garth L. and Philip W. Scher, eds.** *Trinidad Carnival: The Cultural Politics of a Transnational Festival*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007. 240 pp. \$21.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-253-21883-4.

### John W. Nunley

Morton D. May Curator Emeritus of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, Saint Louis Art Museum

Before setting forth this reflection and review, I would like to acknowledge the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Fulbright Program (Post-Doctoral Research) for supporting my many projects in Trinidad and Tobago as well as other West Indian countries and places where Trinidad Carnival variations have emerged in the metropolises of North America. Since 1983, I have been living in and traveling back and forth to the Caribbean Basin. With the help and friendship of many people, I have obtained a broadly based experience in Carnival and, indeed, many other festivals in Trinidad and Tobago. My oldest son Boyd has become a consummate tenor Pan artist and he played with Phase II Pan Grove at Panorama in 1998. Boyd was lucky enough to work with Boogsie Sharpe. Boyd and his brother Avery played in Kiddies Carnival in the band Kites directed by renowned artist Albert Bailey. Through Raoul Patin, I met the great Soca artist David Rubber who then resided in the projects in Belmont. I worked with many band leaders, including Wayne Berkeley who celebrated his fiftieth birthday in 1990 with a party of three hundred. Peter Minshall and I have argued over the nature of Carnival and his role in it for many years. Our heated debates accompanied by feasting have taken place in Washington DC and St. Louis as well as Trinidad and Tobago. As editors of this book under review might say, our discussions were transnational!

The constructs of *us* and *other*, or *insider-outsider*, never framed my working relationships in an anthropological way. Yet these constructs appear to dominate many of the interesting and revealing essays in this book. Perhaps as a consequence of an obsession with classification constructs, the magic of Carnival and the imbedded memories of it that make it so transcending are never magically conveyed. The reader must find the *engine room* of the phenomenon elsewhere. As a discursive text, the publication is comprehensive regarding the various realms of Carnival. In general, the essays dealing with music are excellent and those concerning the visual arts much less so.

Garth L. Green and Philip W. Scher's introduction follows Carnival from the nineteenth century to its present global complexion. They move from descriptions of early European style inside balls, through post-emancipation and the Jamette scene, and the developments of Calypso, Pan, and Soca, to the greater role of women in the festival. This is followed by Pamela Franco's chapter on gender politics and Carnival. Franco concludes that men have controlled its scholarly production as well as the event itself. She cites essays by Daniel Crowley and Andrew Pearse published in the 1956 issue of *Caribbean Quarterly*, where, she claims, Mas or Carnival is defined as the rightful turf of men as it grew out of the suppressive colonial experience. Expressing the

opposition of black males to the dominant white upper class are such male Carnival characters as Midnight Robber, Dragon, and Pierrot Grenade. Franco posits that the *Caribbean Quarterly* labels these as authentic and the most traditional characters, and therefore maintains that they constitute the real Carnival. Toward the end of her essay, she focuses on the resistance of men to women's greater participation in Carnival, as they "rebel," wearing skimpy suits in pretty Mas, and rejecting the older, traditional male characters (p. 39). Franco quotes many newspaper articles that condemn the lewd display and sexually aggressive behavior of women, who, according to the author, emasculate men. I would argue that many Trinidadians, especially those reporting in the media, are ironically the "other," playing up emotional issues like sex and gender for commercial reasons. I limed, or partied, in pretty Mas bands in 1987 and 1988, and it was great fun for both men and women from the inside. The gender revolution was being combusted within the bands, not on the written page created by "outsiders." Calypso artist Denise Plumber enjoyed a great hit in the late 1980s entitled "Woman is Boss"; it was enjoyed by both men and women.

The following chapter written by Patricia A. De Freitas concerns her participation in Jouvay; as both a native of Port of Spain and an anthropologist, she struggles with her "us" and "other" identities in feeling and covering this opening event to Carnival Monday. A good discussion of the politics of insider-outsider, positions from above and below, and "us" and "other" follow. She calls for more anthropology by locals, but seems not to know of the many "amateur" anthropologists, whose names I will not mention, who have collaborated with me on many cultural projects in Trinidad. De Freitas offers the only narrative description of participation (hers) in a Carnival event, although it is somewhat academic. Jouvay is the heart and soul of Carnival, as it builds on so many imbedded memories of the slave trade. I have many times been swept away by its power and the feeling of liberation it generates as I, with so many thousands of revelers, have descended on Independence Square as the sun rises over the Lavantile Hills lighting up our stained and painted bodies. The pan, iron, and tassa drums, the scrap bands, and the smeared imagery of bodies in motion mark the rite of passage into Carnival. Albert Bailey once told me that "Jouvay is opening the genie's lantern, filling the air with magic."

Green's chapter examines the role of nostalgia in the Carnival Commission's desire to bring back into the spectacle the characters of "the old yard," such as jab jab, robber, devils, imps, jumbies, clowns, and pierrots (p. 66). He argues here that this hegemonic nostalgia derives from the middle-class memory of the event and the desire to control Carnival for commercial purposes. Most interestingly, he introduces into his discussion an elaborate diorama that includes several hundred carvings of steel band players and masqueraders from the famous 1959 band Flowers and Fruits constructed by Geraldo Veira. He labels the nostalgia associated with this experience as "resistant," and argues that its purpose is to capture the existential moment of that great band (p.78).

Scher focuses in chapter 4 on Trinidadians returning home to play Mas and as expatriates who have created their own versions of Carnival in such places as Toronto, New York City, and Nottinghill Gate. He views this diaspora project as transnational. His treatment of Jason Griffith and his late assistant Jim Harding and their fancy sailor band is excellent. I have spent many nights at Jason's place on Pelham Street in Belmont, talking with makers including the late Jim Harding, who I may add was nicknamed Diamond Jim because he still holds the record for

the number of soccer points scored in a season in the city league. Jason brought out a band dedicated to Diamond Jim in the year 2000. A good discussion of the impact of the oil boom and the shift from Pan to Soca follows.

Scher also discusses the internationalization of Carnival cultural products, such as the *susu*, roti skins, and Carib beer. The *susu* is a Yoruba based banking system resembling a credit union where members take out loans for various projects. In this regard, I once met a Trinidadian woman from Toronto who was stopping in Miami on the way to Trinidad to get a *susu* loan to mount a Carnival band. This person seems to personify Scher's notion of transnational. Moreover, she exemplifies women's greater participation in the nuts and bolts of Carnival. Lacking in many of these essays, however, is the mention that women, at least since the 1950s, have played a major role in producing the costumes.

Lyndon Phillips's essay on the Toronto Caribana of 1997 is excellent for many reasons. First, he presents a complete review of the origins of the festival using the words and points of view of key individuals involved, such as Charles Roach who organized the first Mas in an old fire station—not unlike the master of Fancy Indian bands in Port of Spain known as Bonaparte. After laying the foundations of "traditional" Mas in Toronto, which includes Soca, Mas on the road, competitions, and ferry boat rides, he introduces the controversial new element of rap and hip hop, which in that year focused on the American singer Puff Daddy. Incidentally I limed on the ferry boats for several years in the 1980s with great food, dance, and Soca. That journey at night across the waters, for West Indians, is charged with imbedded memory.

In a discussion about the nature of "tradition," Phillip concludes that the resistance of loyalists to hip hop is nothing new in Carnival and that indeed such tensions resulting from the introduction of new elements is simply a part of it. By comparison I attended Mas in Port of Spain in 1983, and witnessed the introduction of East Indian tassa drums in Minshall's River Band. The next day the media questioned: "Can this really be Carnival?" Today, tassa is part of the "tradition" of Carnival.

Victoria M. Kazak offers an interesting variation of Carnival in the former Dutch island of Aruba. This essay on the pre-Lenten festival looks at the origins of the event in association with "native" Arubians and then its further development by black English islanders arriving in the early twentieth century to work in the oil fields. Many of these newcomers were from Trinidad. A very good description of the events of Carnival follows with attention given to clashes of cultures.

Shannon Dudley presents a richly textured chapter on the Steel Band and one of its star arrangers and writers, Ray Holman. In wonderful detail, the history of Pan is presented by its very agents. We learn that Holman as an artist became critical of the rule that only Calypso arrangements could be played at the Panorama competitions. Holman eventually broke with that tradition and wrote "Pan on the Run." This caused great controversy, but set a precedent for future competitions for which composers and arrangers were freed to write "we own tune" (p. 176). One of those artists was Boogie Sharpe. I was lucky to attend one of his concerts in Port of Spain in 1991 where he played on double tenor pans "I Did It My Way," in reference to himself and Holman. The performance was breathtaking, as if the jumbies had entered the space. This

essay offers an absorbing view of music in Trinidad and its performers all within the social context without overbearing academic theoretical agendas.

Ray Funk and Donald Hill write a lively and engaging account of the international Calypso craze of 1957 centered on the actor/singer Harry Belafonte. They first present the history of Calypso and then show how it influenced music and musicians in the United States, covering performances in the Catskills and New York clubs, like the Village Vanguard, and providing great quotes from Belafonte, Dick Clark, and Geoffrey Holder. As a baby boomer, I was struck by the accounts of such songs as “Matilda,” “Day-O,” “Marianne,” and “Jamaica Farwell.” Oh what nostalgia! When I first listened to “Marianne” at age twelve, I did not know, as Holder states, that Marianne was actually a prostitute and the shifting sands represented all the sailors who were her clients. In closing, the authors provide a brilliant analysis of the failure of Calypso to maintain the craze, citing its disconnect from rhythm and blues, country and western, and its then considered too sexual content (how things have changed) and its inability to be danced by teens. This wonderful essay reveals the fascinating world of Belafonte and the New York scene of the 1950s. Calypso fizzled, Harry went on—and I might add—Buddy Holly dropped by: “Maybe Baby.”

The essay on the politics of cultural value and the value of cultural politics by Robin Balliger explores copyright, intellectual property, and culture as commodity in association with the music of Trinidad and Tobago. The author considers copyright from the respective views of such dominant countries as the United States and such smaller players as Trinidad. She informatively draws from John Locke and Immanuel Kant, whose thoughts concerning property and labor inform copyright law and our present understanding of intellectual property. The author includes discussions by Trinidad’s members of Parliament that reveal how the state seeks legislation to serve its own interests. Included is a fascinating narrative concerning the song “Rum and Coca Cola,” which American Mori Amsterdam stole from Lionel Belasco and Lord Invader who respectively wrote the melody and lyrics. They sued in court but the financial gain was minimal. Although Balliger writes an interesting essay, she fails to explore the visual arts of Carnival, which in recent years have become a major consideration of copyright law in the country.

Roger Abrahams in his afterward discusses each essay in the context of past contributions to the subject and the most recent trends in scholarship. He ingeniously questions the concept of the black diaspora given the electronically connected world where e-mail, cell phones, and jet transportation keeps West Indians, in particular, in constant touch. Perhaps the notion of national borders, culturally speaking, is becoming blurred as West Indian nationals develop their festivals in the metropolises. Abraham’s notion of *trance-nation* is more to the point, for in most Caribbean festivals high affect experience is often considered more important than national identity. Even more, the folklorist points out that Carnival is not only an event, but also a year-round state of mind. In most Mas camps, plans and preparations for the next Carnival begin soon after the current one finishes. I was amazed during my first Carnival in 1983 to see band leaders swarming into Norton’s photographic studio at 4 Marli Street, and critiquing each other while planning for the next year. I should note that Noel and Mary Norton have an excellent photo archive related to Carnival. Their publications are missed here.

The folklorist adds that these holiday traditions have been shaped by the original work of agriculture on the estates and, at one time, the master-slave relationship. The late Holder, who

often held court at his Belmont home where the in and out flow of all characters maintained the lime, once explained to me that the power of the British could be summed up by “their” expression of negation: “I’m afraid I can’t.” The imbedded memory of these relationships for each generation, Abrahams points out, provides the power of transcendence for the participants.

Abrahams laments the passing of the savants of Carnival who played such a vital role in describing and clarifying the phenomenon for scholars of earlier times. A current list of savants includes Trinidadian author Earl Lovelace and Gerry Besson, who has published and republished many books on the subject. Works missing from this list include many published through Paria Publications. This company was founded by Besson in the 1980s. Its mission has been to publish books and reprint books concerned with Caribbean topics, especially related to Trinidad and Tobago. Other significant books on the subject not mentioned include *The Dragon Can’t Dance* (1998) by Lovelace; *Carnival!* (2004), edited by Barbara Mauldin; and *Black Power Day* (1990) by Patin.

In conclusion, this book is a must-read for scholars and fans of West Indian culture and particularly Trinidad Carnival and its visual and musical components. It delivers a vast field of information from both a deep historical as well as a contemporary perspective. The vitality of such a complex artistic tradition, however, gets lost in rigid academic constructs, which frame the subject. It is always a challenge to write about affective behavior, for writing is a form of discursive translation and translation is imperial, by its nature.

## EDITORIAL NOTE

This review was originally commissioned by Jean M. Borgatti and published on [H-AfrArts](#) under the banner of [H-Net Reviews](#). The original review can be found at <https://networks.h-net.org/node/167585/reviews/3670993/brittingham-koehler-mouse-and-myth-sacred-art-and-secular-ritual>. The editors have selected it for inclusion in this issue of *The Journal of Festive Studies*.

## AUTHOR BIO

**John W. Nunley** is the former Morton D. May Curator of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas at the Saint Louis Art Museum and is now retired. In 2009, he received a Guggenheim Grant for a project entitled "African Art and the Experience of Slavery." He is the author of *Moving with the Face of the Devil: Art and Politics in Urban West Africa* (University of Illinois Press, 1987); *Caribbean Festival Arts* (University of Washington Press, 1988); and *Masks: Faces of Culture* (Harry N. Abrams, 1999).

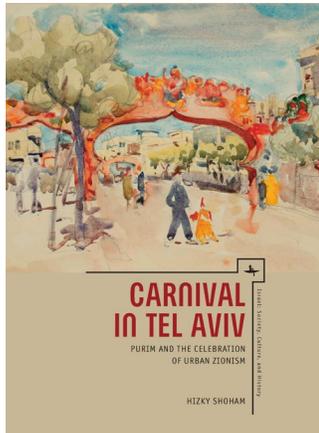
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## HOW TO CITE

Nunley, John. Review of *Trinidad Carnival: The Cultural Politics of a Transnational Festival*, edited by Garth L. Green and Philip W. Scher. *Journal of Festive Studies* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2020): 327–332. <https://doi.org/10.33823/jfs.2020.2.1.67>

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## KEYWORDS

Purim  
Zionism  
Palestine  
Tel Aviv  
nationalism  
bourgeoisie  
carnival

1. The term derives from the Talmudic phrase that one should drink on Purim “until one does not know” (*ad de-lo yada*) the difference between Haman and Mordecai.

## REVIEW

**Shoham, Hizky.** *Carnival in Tel Aviv: Purim and the Celebration of Urban Zionism*. Brighton: Academic Studies Press, 2014. 275 pp. \$59.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-61811-351-1.

**Rachel S. Harris**

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, United States

Hizky Shoham offers a charming exploration of the Purim carnival that was the highlight of the interwar calendar in mandate Palestine. Through meticulous archival research he reconstructs the atmosphere, at once celebratory and restrained, of the balls, parades, and public spectacles that drove spectators in thousands to the burgeoning city of Tel Aviv.

In the innumerable details of petty squabbles, local gossip, devious underhanded maneuvering, and the newly modern conceptions of public entertainment we are offered a path into the mindset of the Yishuv. Tel Aviv was a place at once determined to invent new folk traditions that celebrated a nationalist ethos and the center of capitalist bourgeois *kultur*. The city's events, and particularly its parade known as the *adloyada*,<sup>1</sup> represented the formulation of urban Zionist ideals, which included a celebration of capitalism and local commerce—*totzeret ha'aretz* (local products), a code of civility, entertainment that elevated “the public spirit,” (p. 24), and the invention of cultural tradition. This ideology, if studied as mere doctrine, “seems an unclear conglomerate of unreasonable contradictions” (p. 186); however, “studied as a socio-cultural practice, it is understood as a diversified and vivacious life form, with unexpected powers of subsistence” (pp. 186–187).

That the audiences and the organizers found no contradiction in these differing agendas is a testament to the popularity of the occasion and the deft handling of it by the many actors in positions of leadership. The heroes of this story are H. N. Bialik, the esteemed poet; Meir Dizengoff, the city's mayor; and Baruch Agadati, impresario extraordinaire whose eye for the newest fad and vision of an anti-hierarchical engagement with mass culture would establish and shape many of the most recognized aspects of the celebrations, including the costume balls, the Queen Esther pageant, and the carnival procession. These luminaries who believed in the creation of an authentic local Hebrew identity by way of popular entertainment were not oblivious to the financial advantages of doing so. Yet nor were these events purely for-profit, private affairs; they also became the chief fundraising operations for Zionist charities, particularly the Jewish National Fund (JNF).

As a historical account of the rapidly evolving practices and ideologies involved in the creation of the events, the book provides a microcosm for considering the development of urban Zionism. From year to year, changes in the funding structures, the kinds of events, their management, and their popularity reveal the ongoing negotiation that took place in the country's symbolic center between an ideological vision that informed the national narrative, and the material

reality of changing political and social relationships, Zionist values, and the sheer growth of the urban center. But this local evolution, even at the time, was obscured by the larger ideological symbolism that the festivities represented for the wider community of Jews. Ahad Ha'am's Zionist vision of a Jewish homeland that would serve as a progenitor of national culture which would influence world Jewry and create an identification across the Diaspora with a Jewish homeland and its people was realized in the adoption (and adaptation) of the Purim celebrations across Jewish communities throughout the world who held masquerade balls, anointed Queen Esthers, and raised money for JNF long after these activities no longer took place in mandate Palestine.

The book's layout guides the reader through different aspects of the Purim celebrations and examines the nuanced meanings of its symbols, reconstructing the events' cultural capital for the reader. The introduction considers the symbiotic relationship between public (the parade) and private (the balls) events that worked together as a cultural exchange to construct a local Hebrew identity—"despite the differences between the two categories, both were part of the same cultural site, which integrated capitalist mass entertainment with nationalist ideology" (p. 2).

Chapter 1 lays out the ways in which the carnival served as a field of cultural production, considering particularly the role of Agadati in shaping and secularizing traditional Purim elements such as the *purimshpiel* (parodies of local leaders and politics traditionally performed by yeshiva students), *mishloach manot* (food parcels), and *matanot la'evyonim* (charitable contributions) into modern Zionist equivalencies. He "was ahead of his competitors not only in the techniques of entertainment, but also in the commercial use of nationalist ideology" (p. 21); ultimately Agadati became a brand, and his name was used to sell the newfangled ideas that entire committees innovated.

The carnival served to mythologize Tel Aviv. Chapter 2 explores the pilgrimic qualities of the event, its role as both contemporary tourist experience and religious journey, not as the "Jewish" observance of the holiday, but as the "Zionist" rite of passage. In chapter 3 Shoham explores the contradictory ideas of invented tradition. The Zionist culture makers believed that they were replacing two thousand years of rituals with new, contemporary customs. In their haste to create a sense of authenticity, for many even a couple of years was enough to regard an occasion as a tradition! Yet as the book clearly shows, just as practices had been in flux over the previous millennia, particularly between Jews in different regions but also in response to differing political situations, Tel Aviv's new rituals would also continue to evolve.

The convention of the processional as a sacred space and the Bakhtinian notion of the carnivalesque, with its inversion of power structures and its lewd, drunken, liberated merriment, are confronted in chapter 4. Tel Aviv's fundamentally egalitarian society and obsessive discourse about civility meant that the celebrations were actually the model of law and order. If the space was sanctified, it occurred in the worship of the national, and in this respect Tel Aviv as the first Hebrew city served as the Yishuv's Madonna.

Historically, the book of Esther, whose rich cast of characters had served as the basis for multiple aspects of Jewish tradition, was also central to the Tel Aviv celebrations. Chapter 5

explores the figure of Mordecai as an allegory of politics and power in the Yishuv, which stood in contradistinction to the effigy of Haman and his sons that had played a central role in Diasporic observance of the religious holiday. By selecting different aspects of the traditional Purim narrative to celebrate that supported a Zionist ethos and reflected the politics of the day Jews in Palestine found original and subversive ways to attack British rule. However, as Shoham explains, the reintroduction of Haman and scenes of his demise, which had never been a part of the carnival, following Hitler's ascendancy to power in Germany, and the displacement of the story's traditional antagonist by the Jewish enemy of the present served as a return of the repressed and showed the ongoing contemporaneity that characterized the ideology of the carnival.

Chapter 6 refocuses the book by highlighting the gendered nature of the entire affair. The absence of women's voices and the expectations of a passive and beautiful Queen Esther who would do nothing to disrupt Jewish male fantasies expose the racist and sexist underpinnings of the entire enterprise. Whilst women no less than men enjoyed the spectacle, it reinforced gender roles and maintained the bourgeois value system that would continue to dominate the Jewish presence in the country at least until the advent of second-wave feminism in the late 1970s.

*Carnival in Tel Aviv* is an engaging volume which provides real insight into the formative period of the city's development and the conscious arbitration of its role within the Zionist enterprise by those who believed in its ideological purpose. The book's clarity and lively tone are a pleasure and this reader certainly enjoyed the absence of disciplinary jargon. The occasional typographical error did little to mar what proved a fascinating and highly enjoyable read.

## EDITORIAL NOTE

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## AUTHOR BIO

**Rachel S. Harris** is Associate Professor of Israeli Literature and Culture in Comparative and World Literature and the Program in Jewish Culture and Society at the University Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Her recent publications include *An Ideological Death: Suicide in Israeli Literature* (2014) and *Warriors, Witches, Whores: Women in Israeli Cinema* (2017). She is the book review editor for the *Journal of Jewish Identities*, and Chair of the Women's Caucus of the AJS (Association for Jewish Studies) 2018–2020.

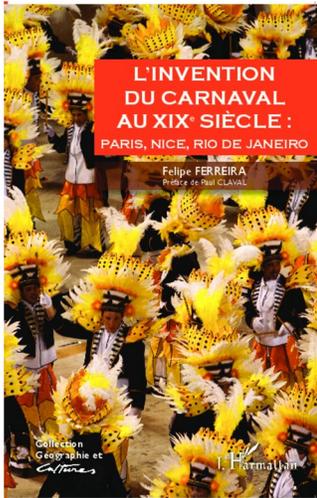
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## KEYWORDS

Carnival

Paris

Rio de Janeiro

Nice

domestication

bourgeoisie

1. Roberto DaMatta, *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes: An Interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991). The quote is from another text on Carnival by DaMatta: Roberto Da Matta, "An Interpretation of Carnival," trans.

## REVIEW

**Ferreira, Felipe.** *L'Invention du carnaval au XIXe siècle: Paris, Nice, Rio de Janeiro*. Translated from Portuguese by Patricia A. Ramos Reuillard and Pascal Reuillard. Geography and Culture series. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014. 276 pp. EUR 28.50 (paperback), ISBN 978-2-343-04313-5

**Aurélie Godet**

Université de Paris, France

The literature on Carioca carnival (and Brazilian carnival in general) is copious, as the bibliography located at the end of this volume reminds us. The originality of historian Felipe Ferreira's contribution lies in its reliance on transatlantic comparison to analyze the festival's evolution from 1840 to 1930. Admittedly, cross-cultural comparison has long been favored by scholars working on festivities. However, it has often served to reinforce more than to challenge the accepted boundaries between cities, regions, nations, and cultures. In his well-known *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes: An Interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma* (1991), anthropologist Roberto DaMatta thus used New Orleans carnival as a foil for Rio carnival, leading him to gloss over aspects that did not fit his conclusion that "in New Orleans, carnival permits the creation of a hierarchy and a gradation among normally equal spaces, while in Rio de Janeiro, a city in which domains are normally arranged hierarchically, carnival makes fragmentation of these domains possible, creating an opening so that the entire city becomes filled with carnivalesque possibilities."<sup>1</sup> Unlike DaMatta, Ferreira takes the three carnivals that he studies—Paris, Nice, and Rio de Janeiro—seriously, devoting an extensively researched chapter to each.<sup>2</sup> Rather than merely contrasting them, he points out the many ways they influenced one another, or more exactly, how Carioca carnival cherry-picked elements from both in order to devise a distinctive festive form rooted in the particular geography and history of the city. In other words, his approach is resonant with connected history more than with comparative history.

The guiding thread of the book is the process of *embourgeoisement* undergone by carnival on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1840–1930 period. More precisely, Ferreira is interested in how the (re-)“invention” of tradition advocated by the Nice, Paris, and Rio bourgeoisies affected both the meaning of the celebrations and the residents' “sense of place.”

In chapter 1, Ferreira builds on historians Yves-Marie Bercé's, Peter Burke's, and Alain Faure's excellent studies of French/European carnival practices during the early modern and modern periods to show how the popular elements of Parisian carnival came to be domesticated through the action of the new urban elites. While Burke argued that the “Triumph of Lent” proceeded in two phases of reform, the first from 1500 to 1650, the second from 1650 to 1800, Ferreira seems to side with Faure who claimed that it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that Parisian festivities were taken over and made “respectable.”<sup>3</sup> Ferreira chronicles the growing cultural influence of the Parisian middle class and the way the rowdy street celebrations dating from the medieval period were pushed outside the official boundaries of the city, beyond the *barrières* (toll gates) of Montparnasse, Clichy, Montmartre, and Belleville, where alcohol

Ray Green, *SubStance* 11–12, nos. 4–1, Issue 37–38: A Special Issue from the Center for Twentieth Century Studies (1982–83): 166.

2. The chapter on Rio Carnival is by far the longest, however (120 pages, in contrast to the 32 pages and 35 pages respectively devoted to Paris and Nice pre-Lenten celebrations).

3. Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 207–43; and Alain Faure, *Paris Carême-Prenant: Du Carnaval à Paris au XIXe siècle, 1800–1914* (Paris: Hachette, 1978), 167. See also Yves-Marie Bercé, *Fête et révolte: Des mentalités populaires du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1974).

4. Faure called this in-between landscape—part country, part city—a “topsy-turvy” city (*ville à l’envers*). Faure, *Paris Carême-Prenant*, 16.

5. Antonio Arantes, “The War of Places: Symbolic Boundaries and Liminalities in Urban Space,” *Theory Culture Society* 13, no. 4 (1996): 81–92. Of these, *cordões* were regarded with the most hostility by the authorities and actually disappeared by 1911, only to be replaced by the *ranchos* (groups that paraded to the sound of Carnival marches played by

was notoriously cheaper.<sup>4</sup> He describes how the Parisian elite increasingly controlled its festive environment by organizing exclusive balls (which did not prevent male youths from occasionally “slumming it” at popular riverbank dance halls called *guinguettes*) and by reviving dignified parades like the Boeuf Gras procession, which traced its path along the newly built boulevards designed by Georges-Eugène Haussmann. After Belleville and other *faubourgs* (suburbs) were annexed to Paris in 1860, popular festive traditions declined quickly and the triumph of bourgeois carnival became complete. This victory was short-lived, however, as Parisian carnival soon lost its allure due to a combination of factors: the turbulent history of the city in the 1870s, declining interest in what came to be seen as “folklore,” and the emergence of Nice as the new French capital of carnival.

Chapter 2 focuses on Rio de Janeiro and describes how mid-nineteenth-century Parisian carnival gradually displaced the Portuguese festive model among Brazilian elites. In its most recent bourgeois form, Paris carnival was thought to embody the values of civility and refinement which post-independence Brazil intended to exemplify. By contrast, the raucous street celebrations known as *Entrudo*, in which revelers performed pranks like throwing lime-scented wax balls or foul-smelling fluids at the faces of passing pedestrians, came to be seen as an embarrassing reminder of colonial “primitiveness.” In 1851, the first carnival association of the upper classes was founded. By 1855, not only were private masked balls an essential part of carnival merry-making but the upper class itself also organized a parade through the streets of Rio de Janeiro. The procession of the *Sumidades Carnavalescas* (Carnival Experts) gathered a large crowd, and in the following decades the *Grandes Sociedades* (Great Societies), such as the famous *Tenetes do Diabo* (The Devil’s Lieutenants), *Os Democraticos* (The Democrats), and *Os Fenianos* (The Fenians), organized enormous parades of allegorical floats.

Unlike what happened in Paris, however, bourgeois carnival never became hegemonic in Rio during the 1850–1930 period. Instead, a century-long “war of places” took place between the bourgeoisie and the popular classes, who returned every year as *blocos* (groups of people who paraded in a semi-organized way), *cucumbi* (groups of black revelers playing instruments of African origin), and *cordões* (groups of young men dressed as devils, kings, Indians, bats, or old men who danced in line—and sometimes clashed—to the sounds of percussion).<sup>5</sup> In the absence of historical photographs, the maps provided by Ferreira help the reader visualize the spatial stakes of this battle, that is, control of streets like Ouvidor, Violas, Ourives, do Hospicio, or Rosario, and later Avenida Central (today’s Avenida Rio Branco), the major thoroughfare built during the tenure of Mayor Francisco Franco Pereira Passos (1902–6). Paradoxically, by focusing on controlling the city center through well-organized allegorical parades, the elites allowed popular carnival practices (which continued to be called *Entrudo* until the late nineteenth century) to subsist in surrounding areas. Rejecting the “hegemony and decadence” model that he uses when discussing Parisian carnival, Ferreira concludes that the meaning of Carioca carnival was constantly contested throughout the 1850–1930 period and that, due to the diversity of Rio’s elites and popular classes, some kind of accommodation had to be found. This lay the groundwork for another reframing of carnival in the 1910s–30s, this time as the symbol of a multiethnic, socially diverse Brazilian society.

In chapter 3, Ferreira delineates the history of Nice carnival, which came to supersede Parisian carnival in notoriety in the late nineteenth century. Initially modeled on Turin carnival and

wind instruments and percussion), which gave way to the samba schools in the 1920s.

6. On the concept of "place promotion," see for instance Stephen Ward, *Selling Places: The Marketing and Promotion of Towns and Cities, 1850–2000* (London: Routledge, 2005); and Waldemar Cudny, ed., *Urban Events, Place Branding and Promotion: Place Event Marketing* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

7. See David Waldstreicher, "Rites of Rebellion, Rites of Assent: Celebrations, Print Culture, and the Origins of American Nationalism," *Journal of American History* 82, no. 1 (June 1995): 37–61; and Aurélie Godet, "U.S. Festivities: An Introduction," *Revue française d'études américaines* 146 (2016): 3–25.

therefore Italian in style, the celebration was reinvented in 1873 by the municipality's Comité des fêtes (festivals committee) so as to entertain the cosmopolitan elite (bankers, consuls, and aristocrats) who resided in the city during the winter season. In the process, the popular festivities that existed among the local fishermen's community were circumscribed to the streets of old Nice before effectively disappearing. They resurfaced in the early twentieth century but only as a nostalgic backdrop in touristic material promoting Nice carnival to an international audience. In the "place promotion" contest that set Nice against its rivals (Paris, Menton, Cannes, etc.), Nice the Beautiful (Nissa la Bella) came out a clear winner by the 1900s.<sup>6</sup> To the Rio urban elite, its flower parades became the "perfect" carnival, an elegant solution to the disruptions caused by the Entrudo. In the late 1900s, the municipality started sponsoring a fancy automotive promenade (*corso*) on the seaside Beira-Mar Avenue, during which the elite partied in their open cars, shouting and tossing handfuls of confetti to vehicles in the next lane. This adaptation of Nice's "battle of flowers" (established in 1876) reinforced the rigorous fragmentation of festive spaces started in the 1850s.

Taken together, these three case studies confirm what has been observed in other European and American locales over the course of the long nineteenth century. In the United States, for instance, several factors combined to blunt the disorderly dimension of colonial-era festive practices. Chief among these were a wave of patriotism (which led civic elites to transform rowdy parades into dignified events, "rites of assent" paradoxically inspired by British royal progress) and industrialization (which increased the gap between the rich and the poor, inspired the former to withdraw their patronage from traditional forms of popular leisure, and encouraged the emerging middle class to adopt the Victorian values shared by their social superiors).<sup>7</sup>

The fourth and final chapter of the book usefully incorporates the conclusions of the previous chapters into a theoretical discussion of the meaning of carnival and festivity in general. Ferreira provides an effective and wide-ranging review of the existing literature and rightly zeroes in on the lack of attention paid to the symbolic and physical geography of carnivalesque events. To him, the notions of space, place, and scale are crucial to escape the traditional generalizations about carnival in terms of inversion, *communitas* (temporary equality generated by a common experience, notably a rite of passage), or safety valve. His redefinition of carnival as "a power struggle over the ownership of festive space" is, however, problematic (pp. 235–36). First, it strips carnival of its semantic specificity, downplaying the differences between, say, religious processions and Mardi Gras masquerading. Second, it is oblivious to other dimensions of the carnivalesque phenomenon, such as the feelings of exhilaration and liberation it often generates among participants. Can a festivity without joy still be called a carnival? Finally, it minimizes the time constraints that bear on carnival: Carnival does not just involve a battle over space but also involves a battle over time, as festive organizations try to parade as close to Lent as possible or try to leave a durable imprint in the city's collective memory, for instance.

In conclusion, *L'Invention du carnaval* is a stimulating volume that draws interesting connections between festivals that have rarely been studied together and adds to our understanding of the rise of bourgeois modernity on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1840–1930 period. Its unsatisfactory attempt at redefining carnival should not detract from its success as a historical and geographical exploration of festive practices in European and American urban modernity. If only for that reason, it deserves an English translation.

## AUTHOR BIO

**Aurélie Godet** is associate professor of US history at the Université de Paris (formerly Paris Diderot University). Since releasing a book on the Tea Party movement in 2012 (*Le Tea Party: Portrait d'une Amérique désorientée*), she has been working on the history of Louisiana and of festive practices in the United States. Her next volume will be a political history of New Orleans Mardi Gras from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century. She was a Fulbright visiting researcher at Tulane University in 2018.

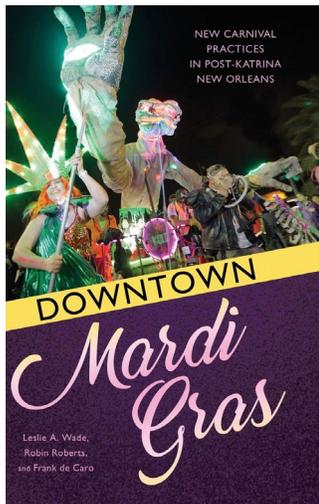
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## KEYWORDS

Carnival

New Orleans

## REVIEW

**Wade, Leslie A., Robin Roberts, and Frank de Caro.** *Downtown Mardi Gras: New Carnival Practices in Post-Katrina New Orleans*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2019. 256 pp. \$99.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-4968-2378-6; \$30.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-4968-2384-7

**Vaz-Deville, Kim, ed.** *Walking Raddy: The New Orleans Baby Dolls*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018. 384 pp. \$90.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-4968-1739-6; \$30.00m ISBN 978-1-4968-1740-2

**Aurélie Godet**

Université de Paris, France

One of the few positive consequences of Hurricane Katrina (2005) has been a surge of interest in Louisiana cultural traditions among local and nonlocal anthropologists, historians, folklorists, geographers, and sociologists. Unsurprisingly, New Orleans Carnival has received the lion's share of those scholarly efforts, and a number of books have explored its complex history and contemporary manifestations.<sup>1</sup> In this review I focus on two of the most recent: Leslie A. Wade, Robin Roberts, and Frank de Caro's ethnographic study of new carnival practices in the city's downtown area and Kim Vaz-Deville's edited collection on the New Orleans "Baby Dolls," an African American female performance tradition that has experienced a remarkable renaissance in the twenty-first century. Though different in goal, scope, and methodology, both volumes contribute significantly to our understanding of the "city that care forgot."<sup>2</sup>

In the introduction to *Downtown Mardi Gras*, Wade dwells on the significance of carnival for both residents and the outside world in a post-Katrina context. To New Orleanians, the festive season "functions as a touchstone, organizing relationships and rivalries between its citizens." In other words, it stands as a "key constituent of identity and belonging" (p. 7). To the rest of the nation and abroad, Mardi Gras symbolizes New Orleans's supposed flair for celebration, performative exuberance, and laissez-faire disregard for a mainstream American ethos—a perception that feeds the city's tourism engine and brings in millions of visitors every year. Beyond such observations about the event's "double audience" (a distinction somewhat complicated by the fact that residents are encouraged to experience their city as tourists do), it can be hard to generalize about New Orleans Carnival.<sup>3</sup> "There are as many versions of Mardi Gras as there are revelers," Wade rightly points out. Such complexity does not detract the authors from distinguishing between various sets of festive performances. The book thus pits the big uptown carnival parades organized by exclusive clubs (most of them established prior to 2005) against the more democratic walking parades organized by small "krewes" in the neighborhoods of Tremé, Marigny, and Bywater, which have welcomed many transplants since Katrina. In the six chapters that follow, the authors spotlight seven of these "downtown" groups (the Krewe de Jeanne d'Arc, Skinz n Bonez, 'tit Rex, the Krewe of Red Beans, the Intergalactic Krewe of Chewbacchus, the Amazons, and the Black Storyville Baby Dolls) and analyze their positioning in terms of gender, class, and race and the way they operate under a shared umbrella of civic identity while embodying negotiations of urban space, including neighborhood rivalries for status and resources in a gentrifying city.

Baby Dolls

performance tradition

commodification

cultural appropriation

gentrification

1. See especially Roger D. Abrahams, with Nick Spitzer, John F. Swed, and Robert Farris Thompson, *Blues for New Orleans: Mardi Gras and America's Creole Soul* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Rachel Breunlin, ed., *The House of Dance and Feathers: A Museum* by Ronald W. Lewis (New Orleans: UNO Press/Neighborhood Story Project, 2009); Kim Marie Vaz, *The "Baby Dolls": Breaking the Race and Gender Barriers of the New Orleans Mardi Gras* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013); Errol Laborde, *Mardi Gras: Chronicles of the New Orleans Carnival* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2013); Rosary O'Neill, *New Orleans Carnival Krewes: The History, Spirit & Secrets of Mardi Gras* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2014); Howard Philips-Smith, *Unveiling the Muse: The Lost History of Gay Carnival in New Orleans* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017); Jennifer Atkins, *New Orleans Carnival Balls: The Secret Side of Mardi Gras, 1870–1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univer-

Based on a combination of participant observation and interviews conducted over a period of ten years (from the beginnings of the Joan of Arc parade in 2008 to the 2017 carnival season), each chapter delves in depth into the biographies and motivations of the groups' founders as well as into the experiences of regular members. It also pays significant attention to the materiality of the parades and to their spatial inscription. Such meticulous ethnographic work, enhanced by color photographs, allows the reader to take in the celebratory atmosphere, while fully conveying the amount of commitment and headache involved in creating a new parading organization (something that, incidentally, complicates the leisure/work divide). It is buttressed by a solid theoretical structure that combines theater historian Joseph Roach's concept of "surrogation" (the process by which people deal with the unspeakability of loss or social turbulence in the circum-Atlantic world by engaging in performances that act as living effigies) with performance studies scholar Diana Taylor's distinction between authorized, sanctioned stagings that are written into histories (the archive) and the more ephemeral performances of the street that enact embodied memory (the repertoire).<sup>4</sup> To Wade, Roberts, and De Caro, New Orleans contemporary carnival practices consist in performing memory work in the shadow of disaster while inventing new ways of being together. By recasting the traditions of Mardi Gras, by setting themselves in relation to past practices (and the citizens who performed them), and by advancing new performance styles and new civic identities, the downtown marching krewes are said to be filling the "cavities" created by Katrina.<sup>5</sup>

Surrogation, however, raises issues that nearly all the groups discussed in the book have had to navigate: concerns over cultural appropriation (especially sensitive in a postcolonial city like New Orleans), commodification (groups that perform for money or seek corporate sponsorship have been accused of "selling out"), and gentrification (which has resulted in the displacement of residents deemed to be "culture bearers" and the arrival of new "cultural entrepreneurs"). On all of these topics, the authors adopt nuanced positions, suggesting, for instance, the possibility of "good-natured borrowing" and of non-exploitative festive work.<sup>6</sup>

In the book's conclusion, Wade reflects on what has been termed "the new golden age of Mardi Gras" and wonders whether the increasing popularity of downtown carnival and its democratic ethos will contribute to a citywide shift toward social progressivism, or whether the admission of certain carnival performances into "the archive" will turn certain individuals into "guardians of tradition," leading to yet another period of stasis. Yet he refuses to be cynical and, rather than focus on the adversarial nexus of carnival (debates over lineage and authenticity, cultural-capital envy, internal bickering, battles over turf, individualistic status-seeking, etc.), he prefers to dwell on carnival's utopian dimension as an escape from the status quo. To all three authors, downtown Mardi Gras is "a vast piece of egalitarian street theater," a laboratory of civic life, where new forms of sociability are constantly invented and collective identities forged (p. 223). This willingness to explore unmaterialized futures and blend the real with the imaginary sets New Orleans apart from many US cities, they argue. A few caveats aside, Wade, Roberts, and De Caro thus end up siding with the "exceptionalists" who see New Orleans as one of the very few cities in the nation that fosters an "irrefutable sense of place" (p. 224). Such an outlook, while bracing for all those who love New Orleans, feels a bit undue, as nowhere in the book do the authors compare New Orleans with other US cities, or Mardi Gras with other urban US (or world) festivities. Contrasting New Orleans's downtown carnival krewes with some of the newly established mummies'

city Press, 2017); Brian Costello, *Carnival in Louisiana: Celebrating Mardi Gras from the French Quarter to the Red River* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017); Ottmar Ette and Gesine Müller, eds., *New Orleans and the Global South: Caribbean, Creolization, Carnival* (Hildesheim: George Olms Verlag, 2017); Jeroen Dewulf, *From the Kingdom of Kongo to Congo Square: Kongo Dances and the Origins of the Mardi Gras Indians* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2017); and Shane Lief and John McCusker, *Jockomo: The Native Roots of Mardi Gras Indians* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2019).

2. Steve Ingersoll, "New Orleans—'The City That Care Forgot' and Other Nicknames, A Preliminary Investigation," Louisiana Division Fact Finder, New Orleans Public Library, March 2004, <http://archives.nolalibrary.org/~nopl/facts/careforgot.pdf>.
3. On the way residents have been prompted to behave like tourists in their own land since the early twentieth century and the way this has fueled carnival spectatorship rather than participation, see Catherine Cocks, "The Chamber of Commerce's Carnival: City Festivals and Urban Tourism in the United States, 1890–1915," in *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity*

groups in Philadelphia, *Bloco de Carnaval* in Brazilian cities, or indeed with Mardi Gras-inspired endeavors in such cities as Galveston, Pensacola, Orlando, Tampa, St. Louis, Tulsa, Portland, San Diego, and San Luis Obispo might have challenged (or perhaps strengthened) the argument.<sup>7</sup>

Aside from this reluctance to embrace a more comparative/global approach to urban festivity, other aspects of the book beg for debate. For instance, it is not clear how the authors came to select the seven groups they focus on. Were they deemed especially representative of the whole downtown Mardi Gras scene or were these groups to which the authors had the best access? Either way, the readers may wish to know more about the sampling methodology. Wade rightly acknowledges the relativity of their conclusions in the book's introduction. Listing the reasons that might have led them to look at some parades more than others might have enriched this discussion on positionality.

Although the book does a great job of studying the production of carnival parades, it says little on how these parades are perceived by those who watch them. Do tourists consider the Chewbacchus and the Joan of Arc processions to be radically different from, say, the Bacchus parade? Do local spectators really tend to favor the former over the latter? A focus on reception (using either closed or open-ended questionnaires) might force a reexamination of the uptown/downtown divide on which the book's thesis rests.

The singularity of the post-Katrina downtown carnival practices might also be relativized by looking at their roots in the alternative theatrical scene of the 1960s (Amy Kirk-DuVoisin and Ryan Ballard, by the way, were both involved with puppetry before they founded carnival krewes). At that time, countercultural artists tried to foster greater audience involvement by promoting alternative processional styles (community lantern processions, parades of large puppets, stilt-walking, and street animations), which were "informally organized, with a hazily defined route and a constant interchange between performers and spectators, which makes all of them equal players in the event."<sup>8</sup> These have since become the standard vocabulary of participatory and celebratory arts practice in civic contexts, and may thus explain the onus that contemporary downtown krewes place on participation. More generally, greater historical sensibility would have helped improve the book. Without necessarily wedging three hundred years of Mardi Gras history into a preliminary chapter, a closer inspection of the dialectics between carnival and context over a longer span of time (say, from the 1970s to today) would have helped explain how the meaning of carnival has changed over time and the extent to which Katrina can really be said to constitute a watershed in carnival history.

These criticisms notwithstanding, the book is convincing and enjoyably drives home the message that "anyone looking to certify the energy and evidence of recovery in New Orleans could today look at the city's skyline, with its signs of remodeling and new construction [but that] better advice would be to cast an eye lower, to the Downtown streets of New Orleans and its parades of motley revelers, who in feathers, beads, horns, face, paint, and glitter, repair and reimagine the life of the city through the labor of play" (p. 26).

Vaz-Deville's edited collection takes up where Wade, Roberts, and De Caro's book leaves off: with the "Baby Doll" masking tradition and its contribution to New Orleans Carnival culture since the early twentieth century. While significant books on the history and genealogy of black male

- in *Modern Europe and North America*, ed. Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 89–107. See also Kevin Fox Gotham, *Authentic New Orleans: Tourism, Culture, and Race in the Big Easy* (New York: New York University Press, 2007): 133–35; and Richard Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 208.
4. Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); and Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
5. "Into the cavities created by loss through death or other forms of departure ... survivors attempt to fit satisfactory alternatives."  
Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 2.
6. On "good-natured borrowing," see Rachel Carrico, "On Thieves, Spiritless Bodies, and Creole Soul: Dancing through the Streets of New Orleans," *The Drama Review* 57 (2013): 70–87.
7. On Philadelphia, see Christian DuComb, *Haunted City: Three Centuries of Racial Impersonation in Philadelphia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017). Interestingly, the post-Katrina influx of Brazilian workers has led to the

festive practices in New Orleans have been published since the 1990s, the way women have behaved in the streets of the Crescent City since colonial times remains a blind spot, due mostly to a lack of documentation and long-standing restrictions on women's access to public space.<sup>9</sup> *Walking Raddy* thus comes as a much-needed study of how intersectional oppression has worked in New Orleans since at least 1912 (the agreed-upon start of the tradition) and of how black women (be they Afro-Creole matriarchs, prostitutes, or sassy entrepreneurs) have resisted their marginalization. While building on Vaz-Deville's pioneering historical study of the Baby Dolls, it is more ambitious in scope in the sense that it integrates a contemporary approach to the tradition via interviews with its current practitioners, as well as responses to it by local artists.<sup>10</sup> These voices make the book fundamentally transdisciplinary and polyphonic, a real community effort that says a lot about contemporary New Orleans social life.

The volume starts with a genealogy of Baby Doll masking since the 1910s, centering on the figure of Henrietta Hayes Warrick (1923–2014), who was pictured on a 1940s Mardi Gras Day wearing the iconic Baby Doll costume (short dress, bloomer, bonnet, and garter). Warrick was part of a tradition whose origins are disputed: it may have emerged from New Orleans's legalized vice district before it was permanently shut down in 1917, or it may have been the brainchild of prominent Sixth and Seventh Ward Afro-Creole families, such as the Batistes. One thing we know for sure is that the tradition has experienced a significant revival in the twenty-first century after a near-total eclipse from the 1950s to the 1970s. Vaz-Deville credits various phenomena for the invisibilization, rediscovery, and recent popularity of Baby Doll masking: "the politics of respectability" that dominated black life in New Orleans during the height of the Jim Crow era, increased interest in African American cultural traditions in the wake of the civil rights and Black Arts movements, the heated 1991–93 municipal controversy over discrimination in Mardi Gras celebrations, and the growing defiance of prescribed gender roles among African American women. She then describes her own work as both an academic exploration of an understudied cultural phenomenon and an homage to a long history of "unruly women." This prolegomenon is followed by two interviews conducted by Megan Holt and Vaz-Deville with prominent Baby Doll maskers, Merline Kimble and Resa W. "Cinnamon Black" Bazile, which serve to introduce many of the topics discussed later in the book: the ethics and aesthetics of resistance, the preservation and evolution of tradition, race relations, the commodification of African American cultural traditions, and competition between Baby Doll groups.

In a section titled "Claiming Their Own Mardi Gras," three historians contextualize the emergence and endurance of Baby Doll masking practices by looking at the history of how African American women have "practiced freedom" in New Orleans from the French colonial period until today. Jessica Marie Johnson, author of *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (2020), focuses on the way eighteenth- and nineteenth-century free women of African descent acquired property, challenged slaveholders and city officials, circulated between Atlantic ports, and supported each other socially, financially, and emotionally in New Orleans despite the institutional pressures bearing upon them. LaKisha Michelle Simmons, author of *Crescent City Girls: The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans* (2015), discusses the connection between the modernization of New Orleans in the early twentieth century and the gradual segregation of public space. Clearly, starting in the 1900s, city officials and businessmen drew a line between those who belonged on the street and could freely enjoy the city and those who did not and could not. Faced with such exclusionary practices,

creation of *bloco*-style carnival celebrations in New Orleans. See Annie McNeill Gibson, "Performing Cultural Visibility: Brazilian Immigrants, Mardi Gras, and New Orleans," in *Performing Brazil: Essays on Culture, Identity, and the Performing Arts*, ed. Severino J. Albuquerque and Kathryn Bishop-Sanchez (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 144–69.

8. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Brooks McNamara, "Processional Performance: An Introduction," *The Drama Review* 29, no. 3 (1985): 2–5.

9. On black male festive practices, see especially Samuel Kinser, *Carnival, American Style: Mardi Gras at New Orleans and Mobile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); William D. Piersen, "The Hidden Heritage of Mardi Gras," in *Black Legacy: America's Hidden Heritage* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 121–36; Reid Mitchell, *All on a Mardi Gras Day: Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Abrahams, *Blues for New Orleans*; Rachel Breunlin, ed., *House of Dance and Feathers*; Dewulf, *From the Kingdom of Kongo to Congo Square*; and Lief and McCusker, *Jockomo*.  
On the issue of women's "right to the city," see among others Christine Stansell, "Women, Chil-

middle-class blacks recast the ideal black female body as one that remained sexually pure and protected from Jim Crow violence. Meanwhile, black women of all classes recreated "pleasure geographies" in nightclubs like the Caldonia Inn, the Dew Drop Inn, or Tijuana Club, but also in the streets of Tremé on Mardi Gras Day, as the pictures taken by white artist Ralston Crawford from 1949 to 1962 assiduously documented (p. 31).<sup>11</sup> The women in Baby Doll outfits captured by Crawford in 1953 clearly challenged the racial-sexual domination (the "geographies of pain") imposed by the white city elite and internalized by a large segment of the black population. In the final essay of this section, "Protectors of the Inheritance," New Orleans literature scholar Violet Harrington Bryan approaches New Orleans history and culture from the perspective of women writers and poets like Alice Dunbar-Nelson (1875–1935), Sybil Kein, Mona Lisa Saloy, and Brenda Marie Osbey. Each of them, Bryan argues, has connected family masking traditions with the preservation of Louisiana Creole culture and folklore and community healing.

Once the foundations of the Baby Doll tradition have been laid, the next four essays focus on black female carnival performances and their specific ethics and aesthetics. To Pamela Franco, a specialist of Trinidad Carnival, black female carnival performances in the Caribbean area are doubly political as they challenge a patriarchal model that devalues women and implicitly reference the mistreatment of black bodies before and after emancipation. She then argues that black women's masquerade style usually falls into one of two categories: "the sartorial body" and "the unruly woman." In Trinidad, late nineteenth-century free women of color often basked in the opportunity to create an alternate, dignified self-image during carnival. The nineteenth-century "Martiniquan" dress style (featuring a bodice and skirt ensemble, a fancy head tie, a profusion of jewelry, and a slow gait) allowed such a transformation of black women into Victorian "ladies." Meanwhile, working-class women in Trinidad toyed with the festive character of the unruly woman, which "provide[d] them with enormous latitude to push the envelope of transgression" as well as a way to supplement their income by extracting money from their viewers (p. 66). Ironically, their performance often reinforced stereotypes of black women as promiscuous and immoral among the white middle class. In the conclusion to her essay, Franco sees the contemporary trend toward bodily exposure and the sexualized dance known as "wining" (the Trinidadian equivalent of "walking raddy") as an attempt by women to redefine themselves as the ones in control of their sexuality and to "symbolically shame men for their inability to perform sexually and judicially" (p. 72). Contemporary black female maskers would thus be heirs to the unruly woman more than to the sartorial body tradition. In the next essay, Melanie Bratcher analyzes lyrics from early twentieth-century songs that contain the words "baby," "doll," or "baby doll" (including those of "My Little Zulu Babe," composed circa 1897–1900). To her, they testify to the objectification of black female bodies by both black and white Tin Pan Alley songwriters. At a time when the "Cult of True Womanhood" was at its apex in the US South, it was understood that black women could never achieve the status of true women, that is, "ladies." Such belittlement might paradoxically have led some of them to embrace a performance style emphasizing wildness and provocation. Following this musical interlude, historian Jennifer Atkins, author of *New Orleans Carnival Balls: The Secret Side of Mardi Gras, 1870–1920* (2017), emphasizes a crucial aspect of Baby Doll performance style: dancing. More precisely, she connects the Baby Doll dance style with the bamboulas, calendas, and chica-congos performed in various locations (including Congo Square from 1817 to the 1840s) and with the West African dance culture, which emphasizes aliveness through asymmetry and angularity as well as an

dren, and the Uses of the Streets: Class and Gender Conflict in New York City, 1850–1860,” *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 2 (1982): 309–35; Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Samuel Cohn Jr., *Women in the Streets: Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Sylvette Deneffe, ed., *Utopies féministes et expérimentations urbaines* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009); Guy DiMeo, “Les femmes et la ville: Pour une géographie sociale du genre,” *Annales de géographie* 684 (2012): 107–27; Marylène Lieber, *Genre, violence et espaces publics: La vulnérabilité des femmes en question* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2008); Elizabeth Currans, *Marching Dykes, Liberated Sluts, and Concerned Mothers: Women Transforming Public Space* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017); and Katie Jarvis, *Politics in the Marketplace: Work, Gender, and Citizenship in Revolutionary France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

10. Vaz, “Baby Dolls.”

11. A selection of these pictures can be seen on the website of Tulane University’s Hogan Jazz Archive, Ralston Crawford Collection of New Orleans

“aesthetics of cool” combining control and smoothness. She also reflects on the impact that white spectatorship, interactions with European dance styles, and ragtime had on the creation of the improvisational boasting moves (shaking, butting, and strutting) that prevailed among the early Baby Dolls. To her, “walking raddy” allowed black women of New Orleans to reclaim ownership of the space they inhabited, engendering “a strong sense of belonging” in the face of daily oppression (p. 104). Finally, in her essay “Is the Unruly Woman Masker Still Relevant?,” Vaz-Deville comments on the long-standing emphasis on elite male carnival organizations at the expense of other carnival traditions in tourist guides, municipal rhetoric, and even scholarship. She then proceeds to trace the contours of an “alternative” carnival landscape comprising truck parades, black Indian processions, skeleton krewes, satirical antics put on by various walking groups, and of course the Baby Dolls. To the question of whether black women still need to mask as “unruly women” even though some of them have become successful entrepreneurs, business owners, or professionals, she answers that public power is largely predicated on visibility and that performing in public allows the Baby Dolls to achieve “spectacular dominance” rather than just economic success (p. 124).

The third section of the book, appropriately titled “Memoirs and Musings,” starts with an extremely useful review of dozens of oral testimonies collected over the years by Vaz-Deville and previous scholars, such as black writer and journalist Robert McKinney in the 1930s. Some of them shed light on the early years of the tradition, others on its subsequent evolution from the 1940s to the 1970s (before the rise of the black power movement made it unfashionable and the construction of the I-10 interstate overpass destroyed the prime site of black Mardi Gras festivities), yet others on the efflorescence of the tradition since the 2000s. All together, they contribute to a nuanced portrait of the motivations that have attracted women (most of them black, some of them white) to the tradition and of the performance styles they have developed. They also reveal fault lines within the Baby Doll community, some of which have to do with race, others with class, physical appearance, or just temperament (most Baby Dolls prefer to mask as a group, some prefer to remain “free spirits”; some Baby Dolls associate with Mardi Gras Indian groups, most wish to remain distinct, etc.).

In the next two essays, self-styled “media activist” Jerry Brock highlights the contributions of the Batiste Family to the Baby Doll tradition and the participation of four Baby Dolls in a 1949 Caldonia Inn concert during which Henry Byrd, later known as Professor Longhair, gave his first carnival season performance (maybe performing “Mardi Gras in New Orleans,” his personal celebration of the festivity and the Zulu King). DeriAnne Meilleure Honora offers a useful synthesis of Afro-Creole views of the Baby Dolls by interviewing seven Seventh Ward residents. Both dance scholar Rachel Carrico and playwright Rob Florence mention the key role Antoinette K-Doe played in reviving the Baby Doll tradition in 2004, and the onus she put on diversity and benevolence to detach it from any lingering association with prostitution or black exclusivity. Finally, Xavier University staff member Daniele Gair synthesizes her brief experience as a Baby Doll masker on a cold Mardi Gras Day in 2014 and her surprise at seeing so many men supporting the tradition, despite knowing that men often participated in the ritual in the 1920s to the 1960s as well.

The last section focuses on visual artists’ responses to the New Orleans Baby Dolls and greatly

- Jazz Photography: <https://jazz.tulane.edu/collections/graphics/ralston-crawford-collection-new-orleans-jazz-photography>. The Baby Doll photographic archive also includes pictures taken by photojournalist Bradley Smith and various Works Progress Administration (WPA) photographers, all of which can be perused on the Louisiana Digital Library website: <https://louisianadigitallibrary.org>.
12. See Sabrina Lynette Thomas, "Black Dolls as Racial Uplift: A Preliminary Report," *Transforming Anthropology* 13, no. 1 (2005): 55–56; Anthony Martin, "Toys with Professions: Racialized Black Dolls, 1850–1940," *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage* 3, no. 2 (2014): 137–58; Julian K. Jarboe, "The Racial Symbolism of the Topsy-Turvy Doll," *The Atlantic* (2015), <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/11/the-racial-symbolism-of-the-toppsy-turvy-doll/416985/>; Frank Maresca, *Black Dolls: Unique African American Dolls, 1850–1930* (Santa Fe, NM: Radius Books; San Diego, CA: Mingei International Museum, 2015); and Nora Philippe, ed., *Black Dolls, la collection Deborah Neff* (Paris: Fage Éditions/La maison rouge, 2018).
13. On "commodified personae," see Matt Sakakeeny, "Playing for Work: Music as a Form of

benefits from the inclusion of high-quality pictures (themselves enhanced by the use of glossy paper). Art historian Mora Beauchamp-Byrd analyzes one of the most famous renditions of the historical Baby Dolls, a 1948 drawing of "Negro Maskers" by artist John McCrady, as a great illustration of the "southern strange" aesthetics, which depicted the US South as an exotic, eminently carnivalesque, region (p. 255). Next, Ron Bechet, co-curator of the *Contemporary Artists Respond to the New Orleans Baby Dolls* exhibition that took place in 2015 at the George and Leah McKenna Museum of African American Art in New Orleans, provides a brief overview of the works exhibited and draws interesting parallels between the poses favored by Baby Doll maskers and those struck by voguing aficionados in New York or by Kongo Mangaaka power figures. Sarah Anita Clunis, director of Xavier University's Louisiana Art Gallery, supplements Bechet's text by focusing on the ambiguous perception of the Baby Dolls that transpires through the artists' pieces. Seemingly "docile" bodies captured in defiant attitudes, the Baby Dolls seem to belong to a liminal sphere of their own, "where there exists a temporal loss of boundaries and certain taboos concerning the female body are" challenged (p. 276). The fifteen artist statements that conclude the section testify to the many ways street performances are perceived, interpreted, and reconstructed by those who watch them. From Ann Bruce's pillows to Annie Odell's quilt to Nathan Haynes Scott's hand-carved figures to Ruth Owens's figurative paintings—one of which graces the cover of the book—the reader is left with the conviction that artists have as much to contribute to a scholarly discussion of performance as art scholars themselves.

In an afterword, Tia L. Smith shares the lessons she learned from filming one Baby Doll group and explains how the project moved from a focus on performance to a discussion of the many issues that black women are confronted with in New Orleans: gentrification, rising rents, a struggling school system, and what many perceive to be cultural appropriation. Clearly, masking as Baby Dolls is not a form of escapism to these "unruly women." Much like in the 1910s, it is an opportunity to comment on racial, class, and gender inequalities that plague postcolonial cities like New Orleans.

As hinted earlier, the book is a visual and intellectual feast and provides a comprehensive survey of the Baby Doll performance style. From its complex genealogy to its choreographic, musical, and visual characteristics to its insertion in the social geography of the city, almost no stone is left unturned. Given the paucity of sources, that is a signal feat indeed. While mostly celebratory in tone, the collection does not shirk from mentioning the frictions that exist between Baby Dolls groups and individuals (much like the Mardi Gras Indians, the Baby Dolls can be fiercely competitive), or between them and New Orleans's political and economic elite. As a result, it provides an excellent probe into the city's current power structure and its complexities.

Given this general assessment, my list of criticisms will naturally be short. *Walking Raddy* could probably have engaged more with the historiography of the black Atlantic. Trinidad and New Orleans, after all, are not the only places where Baby Doll-style masking has been found to exist. Lafcadio Hearn's Martinican writings and the Jamaican "Set Girls" painted by Isaac M. Belisario in 1837 testify to something like a pan-Caribbean, maybe pan-American (if one also includes the female Jonkonnu masquerades performed in nineteenth-century North Carolina) phenomenon. Connections could also have been drawn between the Baby Dolls and the ideology of racial uplift (or, on the contrary, racial inferiority) conveyed by actual black dolls made and sold in New

Labor in New Orleans," *Oxford Handbooks Online* (2015), <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxford-hb/9780199935321.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935321-e-23?print=pdf>.

14. French publisher Albin Michel did a great service to the reader by including a companion soundtrack in Bernard Hermann's book of photographs of black New Orleans from the late 1970s to early 1980s. See Bernard Hermann, *Bon Temps Roulés: Dans la Nouvelle-Orléans noire disparue, 1979–1982* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2015). Adapted as *The Good Times Rolled: Black New Orleans, 1978–1982* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2015). On collaborative ethnography, see Rachel Breunlin and Helen Regis, "Can There Be a Critical Collaborative Ethnography?" *Collaborative Anthropologies 2* (2009): 115–46; and Karen Celestan (narrator) and Eric Waters (photographer), *Freedom's Dance: Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs in New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018).

Orleans and in the rest of the United States.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the book would have benefited from a critical reflection on the "discourse of authenticity" used by practitioners of the Baby Doll tradition as well as on the concept of "culture bearer" (which, some argue, turns people into "commodified personae" birthed in the community but cultivated in the market).<sup>13</sup>

Barring these quibbles (to which I would add the lack of a companion soundtrack), I can only commend Vaz-Deville for assembling such a wonderful collection and demonstrating the value of collaborative ethnography (also practiced in New Orleans by scholars Rachel Breunlin, Helen Regis, and Karen Celestan) as a remedy against the invisibilization and marginalization of black festive practices.<sup>14</sup>

## EDITORIAL NOTE

Since the writing of this review, Frank de Caro has died from COVID-19 in New Orleans. His contribution to the field of folklore studies was movingly summarized by English professor Marcia Gaudet in a March 22, 2020, obituary: <https://www.afsnet.org/news/495273/Frank-de-Caro-1943-2020.htm>.

## AUTHOR BIO

**Aurélie Godet** is associate professor of US history at the Université de Paris (formerly Paris Diderot University). Since releasing a book on the Tea Party movement in 2012 (*Le Tea Party: Portrait d'une Amérique désorientée*), she has been working on the history of Louisiana and of festive practices in the United States. Her next volume will be a political history of New Orleans Mardi Gras from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century. She was a Fulbright visiting researcher at Tulane University in 2018.

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