

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

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KEYWORDS

Carnival
Bœuf Gras
Paris
Cherbourg
political anthropology
folklore studies

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.

1. Laurent Amiotte-Suchet and Monika Salzbrunn, eds., *L'événement (im)prévisible: Mobilisations politiques et dynamiques religieuses* (Paris: Beauchesne, 2019).

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.¹ 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.).² According to sociologists Nira Yuval-Davis, Kalpana Kannabiran, and Ulrike M. Viethen, the politics of belonging is situated temporally, spatially, and intersectionally.³ Expectations and memories of previous events also shape the anticipation of forthcoming events.⁴ 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."⁵ 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.⁶

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.⁷ 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.⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³ 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).¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ Sociologist Christian Rinaudo has already described such interactive creation of locality through ritual in his study of Nice street festivities.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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 Bausinger²¹) 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.²² 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."²³ 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).²⁴ 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.²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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).²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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.³¹ 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."³² 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).³³ 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.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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-en-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.³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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: www.carnaval-pantruche.org .
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 rd 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 th 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 th 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 th 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 th 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 th 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 th parade: "Le Bœuf dans tous ses états" (Beef in a State).
2007	Theme of the 10 th parade: "Les 5 continents" (The Five Continents).
2008	Theme of the 11 th parade: "La Ronde des Beaux Arts" (The Dance of Fine Arts).
2009	Theme of the 12 th 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 th parade: "L'Amour" (Love).
2011	Theme of the 14 th parade: "La Ronde des Fleurs" (The Dance of Flowers).
2012	Theme of the 15 th parade: "L'Arche de Noé" (Noah's Ark).
2013	Theme of the 16 th parade: "Le monde des jouets" (The World of Toys).
2014	Theme of the 17 th parade: "Fées, trolls et compagnie" (Fairies, Trolls, etc.).
2015	Theme of the 18 th parade: "Chevaliers, dragons et chatelaines" (Knights, Dragons, and Chatelaines).
2016	Theme of the 19 th parade: "Le monde aquatique fantastique" (The Fantastic Aquatic World).
2017	Theme of the 20 th parade: "La Ronde des fruits et légumes autour du monde" (The Dance of Fruits and Vegetables around the World).
2018	Theme of the 21 st parade: "Les contes de Perrault et d'ailleurs" (Fairytales by Perrault and Others).
2019	Theme of the 22 nd parade: "Un pour tous et tous pour le sport" (One for All and All for Sport). Celebration of the 11 th Carnaval des Femmes.
2020	Theme of the 23 rd parade: "Un fabuleux monde aérien" (Fabulous Aerial World). Celebration of the 12 th 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.³⁸

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; 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."³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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" (1st 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.⁴¹ 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.⁴² Thus, the socioeconomic range of the actors is very broad and, as Matheus notes, of "different social groups."⁴³ 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.⁴⁴

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.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ For several years, the Fumantes de Pantruche met at the same bar on Sully-Morland Boulevard as the Parisian “Goliardi.”⁴⁹ 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 18th 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 17th 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.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹

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.⁵² 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.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ 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,⁵⁵ 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 8th 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'⁵⁶; 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!⁵⁷

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.⁵⁸

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.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ 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-artivism.ch, <https://www.unil.ch/issr/home/menuguid/Projet-Europeen-ERC.html>.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Serjara Aleman for helping to prepare the bibliographical research and translating certain parts of the present article and I thank Forrest Holmes and Blaise Strautmann for proofreading. The helpful comments provided by the editors of the *Journal of Festive Studies*, Aurélie Godet and Ellen Litwicki, and by the anonymous reviewers are greatly appreciated. My deepest thanks go to the organizers of the Paris and Cherbourg Carnivals (Basile Pachkoff, KTY Catherine Poulain, Christian and Armelle Pineau, and Josy Ondra), who always gave me a warm welcome. This research served as preparatory work for a larger project called ARTIVISM (“Art and Activism: Creativity and Performance as Subversive Forms of Political Expression in Super-Diverse Cities”), which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) and from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (ARTIVISM - grant agreement No 681880). All translations in the article are by the author unless otherwise noted.

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HOW TO CITE

Salzbrunn, Monika. “The Twenty-First-Century Reinvention of Carnival Rituals in Paris and Cherbourg: Extending the Boundaries of Belonging via Politicized Ritual.” *Journal of Festive Studies* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2020): 105–127. <https://doi.org/10.33823/jfs.2020.2.1.50>

The Journal of Festive Studies (ISSN 2641–9939) is a peer-reviewed open access journal from [H-Celebration](https://www.h-net.org/), a network of [H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online](https://www.h-net.org/), and is the inaugural journal published through the [H-Net Journals](https://www.h-net.org/journals) initiative. It can be found online at <https://journals.h-net.org/jfs>.