INTRODUCTION

Behind the Masks,
The Politics of Carnival

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"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[1]

"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[2]

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.[3] Much like natural disasters used to be blamed on masquerades in eighteenth-century Europe,[4] our propensity to engage in public displays of joy has accordingly become a target of many a political speech or media column.[5] Why are some people unable to resist crowds despite the pandemic? some ask, ignoring decades of findings in evolutionary anthropology and psychology.[6]

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 *Carnaval!*, 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,

Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque 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/1lDxLgl-raRbJm. 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/pageId/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.[7] 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.[8]

With cancellations (or postponements) mounting, 2020 and 2021 may well become known as the years without festivals.[9] 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.[10] 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.[11] In this issue's inaugural piece, ethnographer Emmanuelle Lallement investigates some of the "homemade" 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.[12] 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.

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 Carnivalesque

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[13]—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 "carnivalesque" (i.e., boisterous) fertility rituals and seasonal events associated with ancient Rome.[14] 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[15]).

Overall, however, they are distinct notions. The carnivalesque may be found outside of the "fifth season"[16] and outside of the Christian sphere of influence. As such, it may characterize any "ritual of rebellion"[17] 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."[18] 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.[19] 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,[20] and following Philip Scher's argument that "whatever soil they germinate from tends to influence their final colors,"[21] 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, "Protestival: 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, Carnivalesque 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.[22] More recently, Teofilo Ruiz has documented the recurrent manipulation of carnival for political assertion and for interclass intimidation in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain.[23]

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.[24] 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"[25]), 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"[26] of European culture.[27] 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.[28] 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 vivio 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[29] and the carnival celebrations of Mayan groups in Chiapas, Mexico, during which dancers regularly impersonated Blacks, Jews, whites, and even monkeys[30]—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.[31]

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.[32] 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. Fulcra of musical, visual, gestural, and material innovations,[33] 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."[34] 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."[35] 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,[36] 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."[37] 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."[38]

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,"[39] 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.[40] Zemon Davis analyzed a few examples of violent uprising at carnival time led by sixteenth-century youth-abbeys. "Not surprisingly," she concluded, "the charivari and Carnival license to deride could also be turned against the political authorities."[41] 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.[42]

Later scholars looked beyond early modern Europe for connections between the "voluptuous panic" of carnival *Ilinx*[43] 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."[44]

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 McAlister, *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.[45]

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.[46] 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.[47]

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.[48] 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.[49] 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."[50] 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.[51] Sometimes carnival participants have subversively embraced the idea of what Peter Stallybrass and Allan White have call "the low-Other"[52] 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-Îris: Homosexualidade 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).[53] 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.[54]

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.[55] 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.[56] 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.[57] 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.[58]

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."[59] 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.[61] 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.[62] 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.[63] 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.[64]

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,[65] 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.[66] 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.[67] 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 Morais 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 Morais, *História do carnaval carioca* (Rio de Janeiro: Editôra 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.[68] 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."[69] 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.[70] 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.[71]

Similarly, Haitian Carnival served to consolidate state power on a cruder level.[72] 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.[73] 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 Sofía 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.[74]

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 carnavals 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 Gonzáles Cueto, "El Carnaval de la via 40, un vistazo en contravia," *Memorias: Revista Digital de Historia y Arqueologia desde en Caribe*, no. 13 (July–December 2010), http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1794-888620100002-00008.

75. Piers Armstrong, "Bahian Carnival and Social Carnivalesque 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.[75]

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.'"[76] 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."[77]

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.[78] "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.[79] 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, Carnivalesque Strategies and Atlantic Interstices," 403.

81. Katarina Real, "Evoe! The Carnival of Recife and Olinda in Pernambuco, Brazil," in *Carnaval!*, 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.[80]

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.[81]

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.[82] 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"[83] 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.[84] In 1990 Samuel Kinser described carnival interactions as "a way of dreaming with others, publicly and responsively,"[85] 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,[86] 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.[87] 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.[88]

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."[89]

A study that did succeed in exploring the full historical contingency of carnival performance was the pioneering work of Abner Cohen.[90] 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.[91]

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.[92] 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.[93] 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."[94]

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."[95] Understandably, therefore, most theoretical discussions of carnival dissolve into discussions of concrete instances.

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[96]—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 *entrudo* 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

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

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,[97] 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 Sohos during the same period.[98]

Referencing Anthony Gidden'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.

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,[99] 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.[100]

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

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).

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-Africani-zation" 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.[101] 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,[102] 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,[103] 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-

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."[104] 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*.[105] 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.[106] 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

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.

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.[107] 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

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? Carnivalesque as Protest Sensibility," *e-flux* 30 (December 2011), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/30/68148/occupy-wall-street-carnival-against-capital-carnivalesque-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.

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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