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# Traditional Festivals: From European Ethnology to Festive Studies

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## KEYWORDS

festivals

Europe

ethnology

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## ABSTRACT

This essay considers both the history of the growing academic field of festive studies and the history of my own involvement in this field. I first rely on some of the major works of accepted scholarship to show that social scientists and ethnologists had been concerned with festivals and public celebrations for a very long time before this field transformed into a specific area of research. I then show how my own practice in the ethnology of European traditional festivals and rituals evolved toward the idea of interdisciplinary festive studies in the two last decades or so. After connecting these two scales of time—the history of social sciences and my own path as an individual researcher—I eventually suggest possible avenues for future research in festive studies.

## Traditional Festivals: From European Ethnology to Festive Studies

Laurent Sébastien Fournier

In this essay I would like to consider a complex set of questions that have structured the study of festivals and public celebrations in the last century or so, a long time before festive studies transformed into a specific area of research. Early folklorists first put the emphasis on traditional rituals as a whole, but it quickly became evident that many comparable social practices had to be taken into account, too. For instance, what distinguishes rituals from festivals, fairs, celebrations, and spectacles? Is it just a matter of categorizing things or are there deeper differences between these terms? Should we follow the accepted distinction between religious and secular festivals or propose other distinctions adapted to the different fields we study? Within the context of the new society of leisure, is the traditional opposition between work time and leisure time still valid? Furthermore, should researchers consider traditional festivals (when people do not work) and paid art festivals in the same way? All these questions progressively led my own research away from the ethnology of traditional festivals and rituals to more interdisciplinary festive studies. In the last two decades I have been especially concerned with the category of traditional festivals, looking at them in the context of traditional European societies as well as in contemporary societies where “traditions” are increasingly claimed as new cultural resources and eventually revitalized or invented. After connecting two different scales of time—the history of social sciences and my own path as an individual researcher—I will eventually suggest some possible avenues of research for festive studies.

### Origins and History

When I first became interested in the ethnology of festivals in the 1990s, I was struck by the fact that festivals, although often disregarded as nonserious and unimportant matters, had nevertheless generated a whole set of theories by some of the most prominent scholars worldwide. Tracing back to the origins of the fascination with festivals, it is striking to see classical poets like Ovid already finding an interest in calendric rituals.<sup>1</sup> The way Ovid describes the Roman months, the ritual values connected with the different festival days in Rome, and their various links with the planets and astronomical knowledge of the time shows how important festive systems were to the structuration of collective life in antiquity. To Ovid and his contemporaries, festivals were clearly connected with mythology and cosmology: they regulated time and were a direct result of the invention of the first calendars in the Neolithic period or in early Babylonian times.<sup>2</sup> Of course, as a form of collective behavior, festivals might be even older than that. They probably existed in nomadic and prehistoric societies, for instance, if we interpret correctly the dancing figures painted in some prehistoric caves like Lascaux.<sup>3</sup> But with the first agricultural settlements in the Neolithic period there was a new need to articulate the social year with the natural rhythm of the solar year, in order to keep in step with seasonal changes. The first calendars, up to the ancient Roman calendar, included some special days to make up for the gap between the cultural calendric year and the natural solar year. But with the introduction of the Julian calendar in the first century BC, men brought the calendar back in line with the exact 365.25-day length of the solar year and filled in the gap between the cultural and the natural year.

Since then, festivals have had this extraordinary potential to connect nature and culture. This feature helps to explain their ambiguous status. Throughout history, they have continuously been

1. Ovide, *Fastes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Belles-Lettres, 1992).

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

3. Fabienne Potherat, “Danser. Les représentations du corps en fête,” in *La fête au présent. Mutations des fêtes au sein des loisirs*, ed. Laurent Sébastien Fournier, Dominique Crozat, Catherine Bernié-Boissard, and Claude Chastagner (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2009), 357–67.

4. Anne Morelli, "La réinterprétation chrétienne des fêtes antérieures au christianisme," *Religiologiques*, 8 (1993), <http://www.religiologiques.uqam.ca/no8/morel.pdf>.
5. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972).
6. Erasme, *Eloge de la folie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 100–01.
7. Paul Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque* (Paris: Seuil, 1976).
8. Jean-Baptiste Lucotte Du Tilliot, *Mémoire pour servir à l'histoire de la fête des fous, qui se faisait autrefois dans plusieurs églises* (Lausanne: Marc-Michel Bousquet et Cie, in 4°, 1741).
9. Mona Ozouf, *La fête révolutionnaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).
10. Georges Vigarello, *Du jeu ancien au show sportif. La naissance d'un mythe* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

associated with the sacred and with otherness. The Christian church, in Europe, built up a very structured system in which each day was put under the patronage of a special saint. At a more global level, important days of the yearly cycle were merged with the most significant figures of Christianity: the birth of Christ, for instance, corresponds to the winter solstice, while the summer solstice became the day Christians celebrate the solar figure of John the Baptist. In the early Middle Ages the church progressively forbade older, pagan seasonal celebrations and replaced them with the new Christian rituals).<sup>4</sup> Today, the dates of all the main Christian festivals of the calendric year are still set by the pope, while Easter is fixed at the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox.

Because festivals belong to the sacred sphere, they are also connected with representations of the invisible, the otherworld, and otherness in general. Festive imagery in the *longue durée* has been deeply influenced by notions of excess, violence, and therefore with madness, if we follow Foucault's views.<sup>5</sup> When Erasmus wrote his "Praise of Folly" in the early sixteenth century, he resuscitated the ancient taste for festivals after a long period of antipaganism. In a letter to his friend Martin Dorpius, he lauded Plato as a levelheaded man who "approve[d] of wine being poured at feasts because he kn[ew] that it c[ould] [bring] a merriment which can correct certain vices better than austerity."<sup>6</sup> "Voicing one's opinion with a joke," he added, "is no less effective than voicing it seriously." A few decades later, people such as the writer François Rabelais and the painter Pieter Breughel would perpetuate this view of festivals as paradoxical moments when wisdom intersected with madness, order with excess, and reform with revolutionary violence.

It is fascinating to trace the changing perceptions of festivals in history, the ways they have alternately been prized and disparaged. Until the eighteenth century, festivals were conceived of as a safety-valve mechanism, a means of restoring social order by giving vent to feelings of tension. Historians have shown that festivals were also connected with evergetism, which assumed that the *panem et circenses* given to the crowds by the powerful could keep the mass of people happy and docile, that is, buy social harmony.<sup>7</sup> But the twin Enlightenment principles of rationalism and individualism progressively led to sharp criticism of festivals. While some humanists still referred to the Renaissance tradition, arguing that festivals could help the people endure their miserable condition,<sup>8</sup> most eighteenth-century thinkers disapproved of traditional festivals. Rousseau and Montesquieu, for instance, thought they kept the people away from work and productivity, thereby delaying human progress. Moralists championed more serious activities, and both conservatives and progressives found festivals dangerous. According to conservatives, festivals were loci of debauchery and disorder and, as such, needed to be prohibited. According to progressives and revolutionaries, festivals made citizens lazy and sleepy and prevented political activism. In France, the revolutionaries ended up inventing a new calendar, with new deities and new festivals, in order to keep the boisterous crowds of the time in check.<sup>9</sup> Slowly, traditional festivals declined and were replaced by other activities such as modern sports and spectacles, which were centered around the individual more than around traditional communities.<sup>10</sup>

The nineteenth century was a moment when, simultaneously, traditional festivals started to change due to modernization, industrialization, and the development of new means of communication, and scholars became more and more concerned with documenting them.

11. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
12. Sir James Frazer, *Le Rameau d'or*, 4 vols. (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1981); Wilhelm Mannhardt, *Wald- und Feld-Kulte* (Berlin: Gebrüder Borntraeger, 1875–77).
13. Georges Foucart, *Histoire des religions et méthode comparative* (Paris: Picard, 1912).
14. Émile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (Paris: Alcan, 1912).
15. Sigmund Freud, *Totem und tabu* (Leipzig: Hugo Heller & Cie, 1913).
16. Victor W. Turner, *Le phénomène rituel. Structure et contre-structure* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990).
17. Claude Rivière, *Les rites profanes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995); Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
18. Erving Goffman, *Les rites d'interaction* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1974).

In European countries especially, the construction of new national identities generated a lot of interest in traditional festivals. Folklorists and antiquarians inventoried calendric customs among other popular cultural habits. In several European regions, their goal was to invent new popular epics likely to legitimize the newly born identities.<sup>11</sup>

Nineteenth-century social science literature included many influential studies of festivals, especially agrarian ones. Cultural anthropologists like James Frazer or Wilhelm Mannhardt thus referred to the “spirits of the corn and of the wild” and to the *Vegetationsdämonen* as evidence that all festivals were residues of times when nature and culture were connected more closely in the popular imagination.<sup>12</sup> Many of them relied on the more descriptive works of folklorists, or on more general studies by historians of religion.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the founding father of French sociology, Émile Durkheim, became preoccupied with Australian aboriginal festivals when writing his magnum opus on the elementary forms of religious life.<sup>14</sup> Durkheim defined festivals as a combination of celebration and entertainment, an original medium through which the sacred can come into contact with the profane. Only one year after Durkheim, the founding father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, added his own definition, considering festivals as permitted transgressions enabling the images of an original chaos to re-emerge.<sup>15</sup>

From then on, the study of festivals became a key chapter in European ethnology, either as a part of broader scholarship after empirical fieldwork became a staple of the discipline in the 1920s, or as a specialized area of religious and ritual studies. Three different traditions can be distinguished. The first, following Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and the French school of sociology, was more interested in festive events and festivals as periodical gatherings or specific moments of collective life. This tradition considered the relation of festivals to the structuration of time and calendars to be of particular significance. It opened to a study of the different festivals in a given society and considered festivals from the outside, in an objectivist manner, focusing on the different calendric systems and festival typologies. The second one, more connected with the Freudian hypothesis and its phenomenological developments, was more concerned with festivity as a mode of individual behavior and questioned how we can subjectively reach transgression during festivals. In this tradition festivals were grasped from the inside, with a focus on the emotions and individual experiences of the revelers. Lastly, a third tradition concentrated on the notion of ritual and was inspired by French folklorist Arnold Van Gennep, who coined the expression “rite of passage” as early as 1909. From this perspective, all festivals could be considered as implicit social structures that enable significant change in the lives of individuals or of the collective. Festivals were categorized as either life-cycle rituals or calendric rituals and the scholar’s task was to discern the structures inherent to them beyond their often chaotic appearance. Still productive today, this tradition was revived first by anthropologist Victor Turner, who opened it to performance studies in the 1970s,<sup>16</sup> then by other scholars who showed its importance to the study of contemporary “profane” or “political” rituals.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the ritual approach is important because it is based on the identification of sequences that can be examined in an interactionist manner as parts of a communication process.<sup>18</sup>

The combination of these different analytical traditions led ethnologists to pay special attention to festivals in traditional societies, but also in contemporary settings. As a matter of fact, social anthropology increasingly focused on the effects of modernity and globalization from the 1970s

19. Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques," *L'Année Sociologique*, seconde série, tome 1 (1923).

20. François-André Isambert, *Le sens du sacré. Fête et religion populaire* (Paris: Minuit, 1982).

onward. Innumerable anthropological works described and analyzed local festivals and their transformation in different parts of the world, using the different theoretical frameworks that were available. Festivals were deemed particularly relevant for anthropologists because they always included rituals, myths, sacrifices, or symbols. They revealed deeper elements such as social structures and their different components, age-group logics, and cultural relations with otherness. As Mauss put it when studying the famous example of the "potlatch," festivals could be considered as "total social facts" enabling the anthropologist to grasp many aspects of a local culture—including its political, economic, religious, and social organization—at once.<sup>19</sup>

In my first attempts to teach the ethnology of festivals, more than a decade ago, I tried to identify some of the most important characteristics of European traditional rituals. In so doing, I combined the different intellectual traditions just mentioned while also trying to keep in mind the originality of the different case studies I was documenting in the field. One such feature was the opposition between work and play. Working used to be strictly banned during Christian festivals in medieval and early modern times; contemporary laws forbidding work on Sundays in some countries bear witness to this prohibition. However, the situation is different for clergy or artists, for whom festivals are actual workspaces.

Another feature was the strong relationship between festivals and time, which has been thoroughly studied by François-André Isambert.<sup>20</sup> I have already recalled the importance of calendars in the history of festivals; it is important therefore to pay attention to the duration of festivals and their role in the structuration of time. Also of significance is the periodicity of festivals. Festivals are repeated, usually on a yearly (or biennial, triennial, etc.) basis. They mark a "holy" period that is not limited to the day of the festival itself but also often includes the preceding and following days.

Yet another important feature was that festivals always carry out special social functions: they can serve to commemorate certain events, or to gather specific groups like corporations, congregations, and families, or merely to release tensions and emotions. Lastly, festivals are extraordinary moments, cut off from the usual daily life; they allow participants to enter new states of consciousness and to create a new order, complete with new rules, new values, and new rituals. Participant observation of these different features in different festive settings can be considered as the inescapable starting point for a grounded empirical study of festivals from an ethnological or an anthropological perspective.

### Changes and Evolutions

As the previous section suggests, festivals belonged to the humanities before being used by the social sciences (cultural anthropology in particular) as a prism through which social life may be documented. Different intellectual traditions later developed to form the specific field of the ethnology of festivals. However, other considerations on festivals, coming from the fields of economics, political history, and philosophy, have proved to be relevant as well, which has allowed for an evolution from the disciplinary perspective of European ethnology to a more interdisciplinary study of festive practices. In this section I will show how the ethnology of festivals recently rediscovered other analytical pathways to initiate the emerging field of festive studies.

21. Jean Cazeneuve, *Sociologie du rite* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971).
22. Michel Vovelle, *Les métamorphoses de la fête en Provence de 1750 à 1820* (Poitiers: Aubier-Flammarion, 1976); Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Le Carnaval de Romans* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979).
23. Francisco Cruces and Angel Diaz de Rada, "Public Celebrations in a Spanish Valley," in *Revitalizing European Rituals*, ed. Jeremy Boissevain (London: Routledge, 1992), 62–79.
24. Monika Salzbrunn, "How Diverse is Cologne Carnival? How Migrants Appropriate Popular Art Spaces," *Identities* 21, no. 1 (2014): 92–106.
25. Jeremy Boissevain, ed., *Revitalizing European Rituals*.
26. Jeremy Boissevain, ed., *Coping with Tourists: European Reactions to Mass Tourism* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1996).

As I noted earlier, most of the twentieth-century ethnology of festivals was influenced by the French school of sociology, Freudian psychology, and the English structural-functional paradigm of participant observation in fieldwork. This triple legacy resulted in a rejection of the more universalistic and humanistic traditions carried over by comparative anthropologists and historians of religion. It also encouraged research focusing on specific features such as time, rituals, and the sacred in the study of festivals.<sup>21</sup>

One of the tasks of the ethnologists of festivals in the 1970s was to go beyond these accepted features and try to identify aspects of festivals that had previously been neglected or undervalued. This led to interesting examinations of other types of celebrations such as festivals of death (Holy Friday, All Saints Eve, burials) or private festivals (candlelit dinners, intimate or corporate parties). Festivals could then be defined empirically, based on what people considered a festival, rather than in relation to any predefined standard typology. Thanks to social and cultural historians, new research also considered the history of festivals and the political myths behind them.<sup>22</sup> Some studies tried to pay more attention to individual spontaneity in festivals, which had been underestimated by academics interested in more solemn and public ritualized celebrations. Another trend was to insist on the spectacular instead of the ritual, for instance emphasizing the role of tourists in festivals that were aimed more at an outside audience than at the organizing community itself.<sup>23</sup> Lastly, gender and ethnic studies increasingly influenced the ethnology of festivals.<sup>24</sup>

All of these new areas of interest renewed European ethnology and especially led scholars to reconsider the relationship between the social sciences and the humanities in the study of festivals. Beyond the social and cultural value of festivals, ethnologists progressively learned how to document their economic and political uses. Tourism studies—for example, Jeremy Boissevain's works on the revitalization of festivals in Mediterranean Europe—played a key role in this change.<sup>25</sup> As an ethnologist Boissevain first concentrated on Maltese traditional rituals and then became interested in the impact of developers and tourists on local societies.<sup>26</sup> In 1992 he put together nine European case studies to document the unexpected vitality of the field of traditional festivals in this part of the world. Due to the tourism economy, Boissevain suggested, local Mediterranean communities in search of new development resources after the oil crisis unexpectedly went back to their traditional cultures and began revitalizing their local festivals. Boissevain's greatest contribution was to identify various modes of renewal of local festivals, including revitalization, revival, reanimation, restoration, resurrection, re-traditionalization, and folklorization. Applying Hobsbawm and Ranger's notion of "the invention of tradition" to local festivals, Boissevain showed that village festivals that had faded in times of urbanization and industrialization flourished again when the economic context changed. Since the 1980s, numerous case studies have similarly shown the relevance for communities of restoring their local traditional festivals or creating new ones, most of them in connection with the valorization of their local past or of local agricultural products. However, since the structure and social meaning of these new festivals have changed significantly in the last decades, new analyses from an ethnological point of view are needed.

Boissevain's work highlighted the possibility for ethnologists to study festivals in both an empirical and comparative manner, insisting on the changes incurred by traditional festivals in a modern, globalized context. In the last two decades, many conferences have assessed the extent

27. Laurent Sébastien Fournier, Dominique Crozat, Catherine Bernié-Boissard, and Claude Chastagner, eds., *La fête au présent. Mutations des fêtes au sein des loisirs* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009).

28. Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors. Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 2003); Gilles Pronovost, *The Sociology of Leisure* (London: Sage Publications, 1998).

29. Laurent Sébastien Fournier, "Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Birth of International Festival Politics," in *Politics, Feasts, Festivals*, ed. Gabor Barna and István Povedák (Szeged: Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, 2014), 111–20.

of those modifications and the new sort of "traditional" festivals emerging from today's world. Comparisons help to show that festival tourism is much more than an economic resource. More consequential than the amount of money injected by festival tourism into the local economies may be the qualitative impact of festivals on local cultures. At a time when festivals have become a new cultural resource used by local communities to valorize their past or current activities, it is of crucial importance to scholars to keep in mind the old connection between festivals and local worldviews and contexts. Today, this relationship has dramatically changed: the public may enjoy a one-day fair or an invented thematic festival devoted to olive oil tasting during a short-term vacation without knowing a thing about the symbolical importance of the olive cycle in a Mediterranean community. But even if tourists do not know much about the old community-based harvesting systems, they nevertheless find interest in the new festivals when they come as tourists or short-term visitors. Moreover, not all festivals have followed this path: in some cases, old festivals have been revitalized for tourists while in other cases wholly invented traditions have been promoted, sometimes by the state, sometimes by the tourist industry. Interestingly, however, many of these new festivals claim to be traditional, which calls for ethnological interpretation.

Because festivals have changed and because they have taken on new functions and new meanings in our contemporary societies, a growing number of academic disciplines have been concerned with their study in the last decades. I myself contributed to developing a new approach to festivals a few years ago, based on a combination of European ethnology, cultural geography, cultural economy, and cultural studies.<sup>27</sup> This first attempt to open up the accepted field of the ethnology of festivals to other disciplines proved to be productive, as it opened up new and unexpected vistas. For instance, it showed that festivals in the twenty-first century fall increasingly under the category of leisure. This is not to say that they do not contribute to the creation of individual identities any more, or that they do not reinforce corporality through food, drink, and drug consumption. But they are now more connected with territorial ideologies and with the entertainment market. Moreover, this convergence of festivals and individual leisure activities leads to a paradox: festivals are simultaneously places of commodification and moments when the traditional representations of pleasure are still extremely strong. In other words, festivals connect the local and the global in a very modern fashion but they also perpetuate older myths and beliefs. It is therefore interesting to focus on the different actors involved in the organization of festivals: some of them are professionals who comply with the requirements of the new field of leisure marketing, while others remain amateurs who simply participate on a local level. Progressively getting into an interdisciplinary discussion about festivals eventually involves several academic disciplines (European ethnology and folklore, anthropology, sociology, geography, history, economics) but also thematic studies (public events studies, performance studies, leisure studies, body studies, subaltern studies, etc.).<sup>28</sup>

Another notable evolution in the field of festivals is related to its recognition within the frame of the 2003 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. I have suggested elsewhere that this convention was a first step toward the institutionalization of international festival politics.<sup>29</sup> Since 2003, traditional rituals and festivals from all countries that have ratified the convention can be included on either the Representative or the Urgent Safeguarding lists of UNESCO. For the



30. Dorothy Noyes, *Fire in the Plaça: Catalan Festival Politics after Franco* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Markus Tauschek, *Wertschöpfung aus Tradition. Der Karneval von Binche und die Konstituierung kulturellen Erbes*, Studien zur Kultur- und Ethnologie 3 (Berlin: Lit, 2010); Laurent Sébastien Fournier, "La Tarasque métamorphosée," in *Le patrimoine culturel immatériel. Enjeux d'une nouvelle catégorie*, ed. Chiara Bortolotto (Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2011), 149–66.

31. Hobsbawm and Ranger, *Invention of Tradition*.

communities that want their festivals to appear on these lists, this process involves filling out nomination forms at a national and then an international level and documenting their practices in order to achieve UNESCO recognition. Such a process requires candidates to develop special technical skills to fill out the forms and to show UNESCO that the practices they support for recognition do not infringe on the organization's main values. The festivals, then, must prove they contribute to reinforcing social cohesion, cultural diversity, intergenerational transmission, and local creativity. The 2003 convention, whose aim was to support cultural heritage in places or countries where material or architectural cultural heritage is absent, has led to sharp competition among countries. Each candidate tries to present its rituals and festivals in the most favorable light. Several ethnologists have pointed out the problems arising from a situation in which communities tend to valorize their rituals and festivals rather than present them in a neutral, factual way. According to them, the UNESCO convention encourages stereotypes, folklorization, and political correctness. They have also warned that, once on the lists, the different rituals and festivals will attract more and more tourists and thereby lose their traditional meanings. Several case studies<sup>30</sup> have insisted on the threats inherent to the heritagization of traditional festivals, which can clearly be interpreted as a new means of inventing traditions.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, scholars are asked to contribute their expertise to the evaluation process and may find in the new, intangible cultural heritage politics a good opportunity to find jobs for themselves and for their students. Moreover, UNESCO values are those of cultural diversity, sustainable development, and ethical responsibility, which gives a political objective for the scholars involved in the field of intangible cultural heritage. In any case, the UNESCO convention has raised a lot of discussion among ethnologists and anthropologists of festivals, many of whom are critical of the new category of "intangible cultural heritage." At the same time, the field of "heritage studies" is growing and scholars from various disciplines have become interested in rituals and festivals, thus becoming part and parcel of this new international cultural policy.

### Festivals Today

Due to revitalization, commodification, and heritagization, traditional festivals and rituals have changed considerably in the last decades. It is therefore urgent to find new means to grasp their new cultural significance and to adapt the accepted ethnological methods to the contemporary situation. In order to fully grasp the issues related to festive studies, I would like to explore a few examples and to suggest possible avenues of research.

First, it is important to keep in mind that despite recent changes, many traditional festivals are still performed in different societies around the world. Even if the context has in some cases dramatically changed, with new economies, new towns and metropolitan areas, and new communication networks, many people still celebrate major life-cycle and yearly rituals. In some cases traditionalism has led to maintaining unchanged ritual schemes; in other cases adaptations have led to syncretistic practices blending the old with the new. The example of carnivals is a good one to illustrate the sort of evolutions that can affect traditional festivals. Looking at carnivals in different places around the world sheds light on some of the traditional features that have been typically maintained: mumming, masking, wearing showy costumes, performing mock marriages, playing animal roles, killing King Carnival, and so on. These features seem universal and raise many questions regarding their spatial diffusion in traditional times.

32. Felipe Ferreira, *L'invention du carnaval au XIXe siècle: Paris, Nice, Rio de Janeiro* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013).
33. Jack Santino, "The Carnavalesque and the Ritualesque," *Journal of American Folklore* 124, no. 491 (2011): 61–73.
34. Richard Sennett, *La chair et la pierre* (Paris: Editions de la Passion, 2002); Lita Crociani-Windland, *Festivals, Affect and Identity: A Deleuzian Apprenticeship in Central Italian Communities* (New York and London: Anthem Press, 2011); Dorothy Noyes, *Humble Theory: Folklore's Grasp on Social Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).
35. Anaïs Fléchet, Pascale Goetschel, Patricia Hidirolou, Sophie Jacotot, Caroline Moine, and Julie Verlaine, eds., *Une histoire des festivals. XXe-XXIe siècle* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013).

They form a first layer upon which contemporary carnivals have developed. Another layer is connected with the modern globalization of carnivals. This globalization was first connected with the transatlantic diffusion of elite tastes. One Brazilian researcher has for instance documented the co-optation of Nice carnival's flower-battle feature by Paris's carnival, then by Rio de Janeiro's carnival in the nineteenth century.<sup>32</sup> Today, cultural diffusion takes other routes. Festivals, being very susceptible to the influence of mass popular culture, continually integrate new elements brought by the media and the world economy, bringing Disney masks to the most remote areas. The relationship between festivals and globalization is extremely complex, as is globalization itself, and includes dynamic processes such as diffusion, imitation, acculturation, miscegenation, hybridization, and folklorization. As loci of freedom and individual creativity, festivals also exhibit forms of resistance to globalization. Carnivals are therefore places where mass culture is diffused and places where people struggle against this mass culture, inventing new styles and making claims to cultural originality.

Interestingly, the mass media add to the confusion by documenting "carnavalesque" and other festive modes of behavior in sport fandom or in political contests, thus subsuming events like the football World Cup or Gay Pride celebrations under traditional festive categories.<sup>33</sup> Concerning carnival itself, with its dispersion and its transformation into a metaphor for inversion and contestation, new approaches to contemporary festive cultures are from now on required. Indeed, it is impossible to analyze contemporary carnivals with the same methods as traditional ones. The new traditional carnivals are not as connected with spatial identities as they used to be and they are increasingly commoditized and mediatized. New theories are therefore needed to explain the connections with their environment. More broadly speaking, new methods and theories are required to analyze the transformations of traditional festivals and rituals today. Some researchers have revisited Mikhail Bakhtin and put the emphasis on the body or on psychological affects; others have used Antonio Gramsci or Homi Bhabha and insisted on the politics and on the importance of festive culture for the subaltern.<sup>34</sup> In any case, the transformation of traditional festivals has led to a profound questioning of the accepted paradigms in the ethnology of festivals and opened a larger field for festive studies.

Apart from the changes in traditional festivals, it is important to question the changes in the meaning of the word *festival* itself, leading to the creation of new, invented festivals. Of course, festivals have been invented at all times and in all societies, but in the twentieth century the impact of these inventions dramatically increased. Since the middle of the twentieth century, for instance, historians have studied the significance of newly created art, theater, and music or movie festivals in places such as Avignon, Edinburgh, Cannes, Venice, Bayreuth, Newport, and Woodstock.<sup>35</sup> The new arts festivals, especially, have pioneered a new formula based on thematic events, usually around a program of paying concerts or spectacles, in which anybody can participate on the basis of individual taste. Whereas traditional festive rituals involved homogeneous, predefined social groups, usually local communities or families, the new art festivals target individual aesthetes and people of taste, in such a way that they match the notion of the modern, educated individual. This model was inherited from the theaters, operas, and concert halls of the nineteenth century and it is still popular, attracting hundreds of thousands each year at Burning Man in the Nevada desert or Sziget in Hungary.

Looking more specifically at local festivals in France today, it is striking to observe how the word *festival* has recently been adapted to a whole set of local fairs, festive or leisure events that have gradually replaced traditional festivals. In many rural villages where the traditional communities were weakened by urbanization and industrialization in the middle of the twentieth century, the revitalization of local festivals has taken an unexpected turn, not reviving the older festivals but organizing totally new ones, with other dates and other themes. Many events have thus been created since the 1970s, with most of them focusing on the valorization of agricultural products and overtly aimed at local economic development. Most of these new festivals use a theme connected with the place, for instance a product that used to be cultivated in the village, but the connection of the festival with the theme is often very loose. In Mediterranean France, where I have collected most of my data, several hundred festivals have been created, celebrating olives, almonds, cherries, apricots, chestnuts, pumpkins, etc. Even without taking a normative view of festivals, it is interesting to note how most of these newly created events are organized. As they celebrate rural products, these events do not have any connection to the sacred, even if a priest is sometimes invited to bless the products on display. They openly target a tourist audience and do not concern exclusively the local community, as traditional festivals did. They are pure inventions, while the traditional festivals used to have a more structural role in the transmission of local values. Last but not least, they are increasingly scripted by specialized stage directors and managers whose professional skills allow them to attract the maximum number of people.

These features have major consequences for the programs and the meanings of these new festivals. The programs usually combine various elements that do not have any special relation with the central theme. For instance, at a pumpkin festival I recently attended, I observed a combination of circus, falconry, medieval tournaments, regional folklore, and a carnival parade with local street artists. Pumpkins were only a pretext for a more general celebration. Many new festivals also have schedules in which the entertainment program is repeated five or six times a day to ensure that everybody can watch the spectacle. This is precisely what differentiates these new events from the traditional festivals, which addressed smaller and more homogeneous groups. Instead of a festival, the new events propose a “festive kit” within which anybody can participate at their own level.<sup>36</sup> Participants mostly come from outside the community and do not care about public perceptions of their performance. There is no pressure on participants except to contribute money, as festivals are being turned into fairs or open-air markets. Media presence is constant at these events: for example, dozens of announcements are made over the loudspeaker, telling participants what is going on and what to do.

The word *festival* remains because of its positive values, but the content has dramatically changed as festivals have adapted to a new world in which the family and the community have been replaced by the media and the market. A problem raised by this new category of festivals is that they keep the same name but do not adhere to the values traditionally associated with festivals. For instance, where are spontaneity and transgression to be found if the festival becomes a staged event? Where can gratuitousness be found if the only objective of the festival is to make money? Is there not a shift from festival to spectacle if the event is passively consumed rather than actively engaged?

When festivals become sites for local marketing, it is urgent to question the meaning of festive behavior in our modern societies. This issue is all the more important as it is also connected

36. Claire Guiu, *Naissance d'une autre Catalogne* (Paris: CTHS, 2008).

37. Laurent Sébastien Fournier, *Mêlée générale. Du jeu de soule au folk-football* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012).

with the tendency to forbid many traditional customs because of the dangers they supposedly represent. Countless traditional festivals have been overtly criticized because they were said to raise security problems. Political changes have led to the regulation of traditional games involving animals and to the watering down of many festivals, either because they displeased the new urban elites or because they raised liability issues with insurance companies. In France and in Spain, for instance, street bull games have been progressively tamed, whereas in Great Britain traditional sports such as rugby and football have been confined to stadiums because they could not be organized in the streets anymore for legal reasons. In Jedburgh, Scotland, for instance, a court tried to cancel the traditional handball game for “health and security” reasons during the foot-and-mouth-disease crisis a few years ago. Players then had to invoke an older nineteenth-century law act to keep on with the practice.<sup>37</sup>

Festive studies ultimately raise fundamental questions concerning public liberties, the acceptance of modern standards, and the ability of the people to subvert political discourses and the establishment today. Festive behavior today has dramatically changed. Traditional festivals get folklorized and stereotyped, while festive behavior has found a new home in political protest movements and parades. Despite such changes, however, festivals still exist, which leads to an interesting question: what directions should festive studies take in the near future?

### **Future Directions for Festive Studies**

In spite of all the changes met by traditional festivals, I would like to insist on their continued importance to participants today. In this concluding section I will suggest that festivals are especially relevant to understand sociability, interculturality, social tastes and fashions, and the construction of cultural identities. It is therefore urgent to keep festivals and festive behaviors on our research agenda.

The importance of festivals is connected with a complex set of hypotheses explaining why people celebrate. As mentioned before, festivals can be interpreted as transgressive behavior in a psychological way. Festival-goers blow off steam by ritually breaking accepted social standards. But festivals also enable the ritual expression of beliefs and are therefore connected with the celebration of the sacred, in a more Durkheimian way. Moreover, festivals are connected with the celebration of the dead, of ancestors, and of seasonal changes. They have a fundamental anthropological meaning. But they also play a role in the resolution of conflicts and have a strong connection with local identities, in a political way. They reinforce local powers and enable the powerful to show their prestige or to convince an electorate. As sites of ritual and performance, they involve social interactions engaging different individual actors. For economists, festivals can be considered as moments when resources are consumed or when money is raised. All of these different interpretations show that festivals are connected with major scientific fields in psychology, sociology, ethnology, anthropology, political sciences, and economics.

Through their various types, the various changes they face, and the various research fields they concern, festivals eventually appear as a basic social fact. They have existed among all societies and in all times, even if some religious groups have strongly resisted festivities here and there, like the Puritans in colonial America for instance. It is then important to address festivals in themselves, as practices that cannot be cut off from different scholarly traditions.

Even if organized celebrations become less important due to individualism in the future, people may continue to celebrate on an individual level. On the other hand, it is possible to imagine a dystopian scenario in which innumerable festivals exist but nobody has fun because festivals are perceived as artificial. Interestingly, historians have noted that people have always complained about the disappearance of traditional festivals, but history has shown that new festivals systematically appeared to replace older ones.<sup>38</sup> Even if we can be shocked by some of the changes brought by the commodification, standardization, and media coverage of festivals today, I would rather end on an optimistic note, thinking about the inventiveness of new generations and their great ability to celebrate.

Of course festivals have met considerable changes in the last decades due to global contextual evolutions, but it is surprising and interesting to observe how small groups still locally use festivals to affirm their identities or to resist external political pressure. Such a statement clearly encourages the development of festive studies in the present and in the future. Indeed, if festivals still exist in today's world, their meaning has considerably changed, which requires us to invent new approaches and new methods to study them. The main difficulty is then to grasp both the old imaginary of the traditional festivals and the new practices. If festivals are still connected in the imaginary with notions of transgression, subversion, and excess for instance, I have shown above that they also move toward more commercial aspects when they use professional artists or managers today. This situation is a challenging one for festive studies, which need to keep in mind both the example of the older festivals and the ways new commercial festivals still try to refer to them while inventing new festive formulas.

In order to summarize the key challenges faced by scholars in festive studies, I would suggest that a first direction concerns understanding the evolution of the notion of the festival itself, from traditional to globalized societies and from the community to the individual. Another direction concerns methodology. Through participant observation and fieldwork, cultural anthropologists and ethnologists have given an important impulsion to empirical festive studies, which require deep involvement of the researcher in his field of study. Festivals, therefore, can no longer be studied from a distance, which gives a distinctive value to the researcher's experience in festive studies. Last, but not least, because of this necessary involvement of researchers in the festivals they study, and because they share a true festive experience with their informants, sometimes staying up late into the night, reaching altered states of consciousness, drinking, dancing, and celebrating, festive studies require from researchers an ability not only to explain from the outside the revelers' point of view, but also to understand it from the inside. One cannot study festivals today the way one would study the techniques of weaving or potato-growing in traditional societies. Because festivals are supposed to open the minds of their participants, scholars' first task in festive studies might be to open their own minds and accept the seeming nonsense of the situations they document, instead of trying to rationalize the different festive behaviors. In this respect, studying festivals is maybe one of the best ways to understand otherness.

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