

RITUALISING IN CORONA TIMES

2021 2nd Symposium on Public Festivity



SATURDAY & SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18-19

Charles University
Voršilská 1, Prague 1, in the Chapel (5th floor)
ritualinmotion.org/symposium

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**CHARLES
UNIVERSITY**

RITUALISING IN CORONA TIMES, 2021



DAY 1

Chair: Aurelie Godet

Saturday, September 18, 10:00–13:00

OLGA CIESLAROVÁ, MARTIN PEHAL, ALESSANDRO TESTA

Charles University, Prague – Czechia

Opening

LAURENT S. FOURNIER

University Côte d'Azur, Nice – France

Resisting the pandemic through festivals and rituals

Since 2020 the pandemic has caused the cancellation of most public holidays. It is therefore legitimate to wonder what alternatives are imagined to resist this situation. Starting from the point of view that festive rituals are of great importance for collective socialization, social and cultural anthropologists do not wish to adopt a normative point of view. Rather, they wish to recall that, although festive rituals in a modern context had very often become supports for marketing or promoting places for tourism, they nevertheless retained a popular base which guaranteed their value and their success. In the absence of popular participation in the festive rituals, what happens? The observations made since 2020 indicate different possibilities of alternative ritualization: tiny or intimate parties, clandestine parties, ephemeral parties, framed parties take every possible opportunity to maintain a threatened sociability. The presentation will consider in turn the case of traditional festivals and that of contemporary festive events. The notions of celebration and ritual will be explored at various scales, between individual performances and collective belonging.

SARAH M. PIKE

California State University, Chico – USA

Weeping avatars and the work of memory in virtual Burning Man rituals

In April 2020, the organisers of Burning Man, a transformational festival in the western US, decided to go virtual. Some participants dismissed a virtual festival as a “video game version” of the real event, while programmers and artists quickly developed online venues that would facilitate transformation, a sense of community, and ritual activities, especially those around “The Temple,” the spiritual heart of Burning Man. Participants created and experienced sacred spaces and rituals through avatar bodies while their actual bodies wore virtual reality headsets. Based on twenty years of ethnography at Burning Man, including at this year’s virtual event, my paper will compare the event in Nevada’s Black Rock Desert to this year’s virtual version by focusing on central themes that speak to the effectiveness of online rituals in the time of Covid-19: the meaning of sacred space and ritual, accessibility and inclusion, the tension between materiality and ephemerality. My presentation will draw on theories of ritual effectiveness as well as interviews with digital designers of the Temple and participants who visited the Temple in their avatar bodies to mourn their dead. Through a variety of embodied practices that elicited sensual memories and emotions of past experiences at Burning Man, participants transposed the face-to-face event in the distant desert to the intimate spaces of their living rooms and offices.

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JOOST DE GROOT

St. Maartens Parade, Utrecht - Netherlands

St. Maartens parade in Utrecht in Covid times

COFFEE BREAK 11:15-11:45

MICHAEL FUCHS

Fasnachtsmuseum Schloss Langenstein, Radolfzell - Germany

Carnival customs in Corona times, between prohibition and resistance

Fasnacht - the intangible cultural heritage carnival, recognised by UNESCO, has been repeatedly banned in Central Europe since the late Middle Ages. From this, however, strategies have always developed that have kept the carnival alive to this day. There were also bans during the current pandemic. The question that Michael Fuchs investigates is how did the practitioners in southwest Germany deal with these regulations.

MARTIN PEHAL

Charles University, Prague - Czechia

Dancing to the sound of DISCOvid: pandemic mutations of one Prague carnival

A huge, mirror-encrusted model of the Coronavirus on legs is dancing through the lamp-lit streets of Prague, followed by a band of about twenty raggle-taggle beings, mutants with eerily shaped heads and bodies; the whole scene is enveloped in a haphazard mix of sounds, merging into one another... This was the 2020 take on the Corona pandemic by the organisers of an annually occurring Velvet Carnival, which takes place annually on 17 November during the festivities commemorating the fall of communist regime in 1989. The paper will briefly present the basic principles of the Velvet Carnival together with the various forms of improvisation the organisers had to perform to comply with the then strict anti-pandemic measures.

DISCUSSION

Aur lie Godet

5 min. opening, 30 min. discussion

LUNCH BREAK 13:00-15:00

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DAY 1

Chair: Laurent S. Fournier

Saturday, September 18, 15:00–18:30

DANIEL HANSSON

Conductor of the university ensemble Malmö Akademiska Kör: Malmö – Sweden

Luciatåg in Malmö in Covid times: a contemporary interpretation of a medieval ritual

Even though St. Lucia's Day is not an official holiday in Sweden, it is one of the most popular Christmas traditions for many Swedes. The Ritual evolves around the figure of Lucia, coming with light and song. However, the challenging circumstances surrounding the pandemic forced the Malmö University Choir to challenge the concept of Lucia and reform it into a safe ritual with a sustained atmosphere.

NICOLAS JORAY

Initiator of a replacement event for the Basler Fasnacht; author of the cinema documentary, "Yschtoo–get ready for the Carnival of Basle", Basel – Switzerland

Switzerland: Fasnacht locked up

It won't be a truly 30-minute film, rather a multimedia discussion piece film parts and photographs accompanied by a live spoken intro. A search for traces of questions that I would like to bring in: Whether and how traditional forms of social events can also take place digitally like a valve, how they can change and also open new ways and forms. How far will they be able to touch the viewer emotionally, but also those actively involved? What will change for the participants and collaborators? Did the Corona restriction also lead to a return to past and forgotten forms? I will try to shoot another one or two interviews on these questions during this spring and I will mainly focus on those actively involved, such as artists, clique members.

OLGA CIESLAROVÁ, JANA TINNER

Charles University, Prague – Czechia; Universität Basel – Switzerland

From ritual to museum: FasNicht carnival of Basel

As it was not possible to hold Fasnacht in its usual form in 2020 and 2021, the organisers, participants, as well as the onlookers, had to reflect on the role of traditional carnival in private and public life of the city and to respond to the pandemic in their own way.

COFFEE BREAK 16:10–16:45

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DAY 1

Chair: Laurent S. Fournier

Saturday, September 18, 15:00-18:30

JUDIT BALATONYI

University of Pécs – Hungary

From public to private, from “big fat” to “micro”-weddings: getting married in the time of COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic getting married has changed considerably all over the world. In Hungary strict restrictions with intermittent short relaxations of the regulations were applied. Consequently, many weddings were postponed, reorganised, or cancelled. In other cases couples got married at city hall in front of two witnesses or their immediate families, without a wedding reception. The weddings then continued with just the couple or with an intimate circle of family, or friends and/or neighbours. At the same time, the newly married couple also tried to carry out some of the ritual-like elements of ‘traditional’ weddings, for example the first dance as a married couple (even on the balcony of an apartment in a housing estate). Based on my digital anthropological research, starting from the beginning of the pandemic, this paper will examine how Hungarian wedding providers and couples reacted to the changing, uncertain situation brought about by the pandemic. I argue that under these circumstances weddings that were originally public rituals turned into private ones. I examine the arguments, and dilemmas leading to the reorganisation of wedding ceremonies; how the events that were originally designed to be public and were to include often lavish wedding feasts became private. I also ask by what means did the interested parties protect and advocate for their interests.

DANIELA STAVĚLOVÁ

Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague – Czechia

Music, dance and local festivities as a vehicle how to build the public space and local identity

The presentation will focus on different types of festivities in urban space which have their origins in the culture of the traditional rural society, their present form, however, is shaped by the current needs of local communities. We will be interested in how events are modified by the current pressure of external influence and authorities which handle and adapt their content to current requirements. These include the negotiation of cultural ownership, commodification, the process of hybridization and other phenomena associated with the representation and symbolic expression in the mirror of contemporary imagination. The contribution is based on the repeated qualitative research based on ethnographic data. The crucial starting point is the observation of the festivities by means of ethnochoreology and ethnomusicology, where the study of music and dance meanings contribute to understanding the implicit social relations of the local community that handles the cultural heritage or cultural memory in terms of its needs.

LAURA VILLARO VIVES, YA-KI-TU, ISIS ESTER COLILLES

Solsona – Spain

Solsona's carnival and Covid

20 minut performance. Introduction by Alessandro Testa.

DISCUSSION

Laurent S. Fournier

5 min. opening, 30 min. discussion

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DAY 2

Chair: Jack Santino

Sunday, September 19, 10:00–13:00

VIOLA TEISENHOFFER

Charles University, Prague – Czechia

Tacit trust: reflections on the relational implications of the Covid-19 pandemic in contemporary Pagan revival

Persons engaged in contemporary Pagan renewal in Hungary coped with the restrictions implemented during the first and second waves of the Covid-19 pandemic (March–June 2020, October 2020–February 2021) mostly by virtue of electronic means. Complying with government decrees, during the first and second waves, the collective rituals held by shamanic leaders and the large historical reenactment festival Kurultaj they take part in were considerably restricted. While shamanic gatherings were mostly replaced by weekly live streams of drumming and singing on social media, the 2020 Kurultaj festival was limited to a “fire ritual” involving selected participants later broadcasted on social media as well. However, while the third wave proved to be deadlier than the previous ones, some leaders seemed much less worried with the protective measures. They resumed their usual ritual activities (sweat lodges, healing ceremonies, offline shamanic teachings, etc.), which obviously require proximity in often reduced spaces, without masks or social distancing they in some way suspended the pandemic. In the same vein, although the Kurultaj festival was cancelled because of the impossibility of safely organising large public events even outdoors, the footage of the private celebration clearly shows that participants deliberately disregarded protective measures. Drawing on the analysis of the relational dynamics of Neopagan rituals, this presentation will explore how the dismissal of safety rules may contribute to ritual effectiveness, i.e. to the experience of belonging to a united and solidary national community.

ILONA VOJANCOVÁ

Open-air Museum Vysocina – Czechia

Restrictions during the pandemic and their impact on specific traditions in Eastern Bohemia

The Open-air museum Vysocina is engaged in research of traditional folk culture and is an Assigned regional specialised centre of care for traditional folk culture in the Pardubice Region in the spirit of the government resolution – Strategy of Improved Care for Traditional Folk Culture in the Czech Republic. It continuously monitors the Shrovetide door-to-door processions and masks of the Hlinecko area, which have been part of the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity since 2010. At the same time, it is engaged in research of other customs that have survived in some areas of the Pardubice region, “velikonoční vodění jidáše”, “kácení máje”, etc. In 2020 and at the present time, government restrictions made it impossible for these traditions to take place and we can observe how the Bearers of the Folk Craft Tradition (hereinafter referred to as “bearers”) themselves and the community cope with this fact. Our contribution summarizes the research of the response of bearers and communities in the case of the spring customs of 2020. During a time when the pandemic situation took everyone by surprise and quick solutions were sought. In 2021, we focused mainly on research of the approach of organizers and holders of the Shrovetide door-to-door processions and masks of the Hlinecko area. We observe how the fact that processions could not take place in a traditional form affects them and what solutions they sought. In the end, the paper focuses on the role of memory institutions in this – for all unusual – situation. It questions whether and, if so, how these institutions can help bearers and organizers in presenting the customs in another form. How open-air museums approach this on an example of the Open-air museum Vysocina.

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DAY 2

Chair: Jack Santino

Sunday, September 19, 10:00–13:00

VITAL SCHRAENEN

Brussels – Belgium

Zinneke Parade in Covid Times

COFFEE BREAK 11:20–11:50

JOANNA MALITA-KRÓL

Jagiellonian University, Kraków – Poland

Strategies of adopting to the COVID-19 pandemic among different Pagan groups in Krakow

Most of religious milieus were forced to rearrange their rituals practices in the face of the world-wide COVID-19 pandemic. In the Polish context, as in many others, it meant establishing certain limits of the believers present at the ceremony along with social distance and obligatory masks for everyone except for the person conducting the ceremony.

These restrictions affected both officially registered religious associations and those more informal ones. Most Pagan groups in Poland fall in the latter category and that includes all the groups I am currently researching. Namely, these are groups following different Pagan paths in the city of Kraków – among them Reformed Druids of Gaia Poland, Native Polish Church (and other Native Faith groups). In this paper, I will present three strategies of adopting the rituals to new pandemic circumstances: firstly, adjusting to the restrictions in offline, actual rituals; secondly, relocating rituals to online sphere, using Zoom or similar platforms and thirdly, refraining from rituals at all, with suggestions to celebrate privately at home instead. I will also discuss the reasons for choosing a particular strategy in case of every group. My analysis is based on my ongoing field research (participant observation during rituals combined with semi-structured interviews with participants) among Pagans of Kraków.

MARK TEEUWEN

Oslo University – Norway

Gion matsuri in Kyoto

Kyoto's *Gion matsuri* is one of Japan's most prestigious festivals. With a history that goes back to the tenth century, it has served as an emblem of Kyoto culture and influenced shrine festivals throughout Japan. In the postwar period, the *Gion* festival has been at the forefront of the transformation of shrine festivals into national heritage. As heritage, all parts of the festival are held to strict requirements of "authenticity" by the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs; in return, the festival caretakers receive subsidies. Under Japan's secular constitution, this implies that the festival has to split into religious and non-religious parts, with only the latter receiving public money. In 2020, COVID-19 necessitated the cancellation of all public events, including the *Gion* festival. Uniquely among Japan's matsuri, caretakers did not give up and pioneered an alternative way to bring the gods to the city. Both during and after the festival, the 2020 *Gion* festival was presented as uniquely true to festival's "true meaning" (*hongi*), in spite of the fact that everything about the alternative festival was new. This meaning was defined in terms of faith and prayer, in contrast to the secular signification of the festival as "traditional culture" in the heritage narrative of normal years. The 2020 *Gion* festival offers a striking example of the ways authenticity can be successfully redefined and projected in a context where historical traditions must be abandoned.

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DAY 2

Chair: Jack Santino

Sunday, September 19, 10:00-13:00

DISCUSSION

Jack Santino

5 min. opening, 30 min. discussion

LUNCH BREAK 13:00-15:00

DAY 2

Chair: Sarah M. Pike

Sunday, September 19, 15:00-19:00

VASILIKI SIRAKOULI

Democritus University of Thrace, Duth - Greece

When the carnival stopped: the struggle for cultural life in the city of Xanthi

When the pandemic began, carnivals were the first cultural performances to get cancelled in Greece, since they coincided with the pre-lent celebration period in the country. Xanthi's Carnival, the oldest one in Northern Greece taking place since 1966, was also interrupted for the first time in its 54 years old history. The Carnival, the central festival of the city, is crucial for its cultural and economic life. A network of dozens of cultural institutes, clubs, museums, carnival and cultural societies are working during the whole year to present their work at the Carnival. 2021 is the second year in a row that the Carnival will not take place as it used to do. In this paper, I will deconstruct how the mechanism of the aforementioned network worked and evolved through the Carnival's history. Following, I will describe how the Carnival responded to the new conditions of this two-year disruption, focusing on the problems of the pause that was imposed and presenting the consequences of the numerous cancellations of public performances at the city's cultural actors. My analysis will be also accompanied by a commentary on the ways my current ethnographic work on Carnival was affected by the pandemics.

[video/online]

AILEEN DILLANE

University of Limerick - Ireland

Ritual, remixing, recalibration, and renewal?: 'Éiru's Threshold'

When Ireland went into a full lockdown (March to May 2020), there was much uncertainty about the festive calendar for the rest of 2020, given a rolling ban on large public gatherings. For the summer solstice festival, Body & Soul, a music and creative arts weekend event held on a 17th century estate an hour outside of Dublin, the dye seemed cast. The organisers chose not to maintain a strong online presence through a presentation of the festival in hybrid, compromised form. Instead, B&S entered into a fallow period until an announcement in late January 2021 heralded news of a multimodal commission supported by the Irish government. An 8-minute film, entitled "Éiru's Threshold", featured music, choreography and costuming dealing with the themes of dying and renewal, drawing from Purcell's 'Dido's Lament' and Celtic mythology. This paper offers a critical reading of the work in the context of the turmoil of 2020. Drawing on interviews with team members, the manner in which this piece was largely assembled in disparate locations while drawing inspiration from the landscape and energy of the festival site, speaks to the power of the arts to mark and assist collective grieving while pointing towards hope. Further, the paper illustrates the ways in which this liminal 'threshold' signifies the already in-train demise of bigger music festivals, for which the virus and lock-down simply provided an impetus to recalibrate and reimagine festivity.

[video/online]

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DAY 2

Chair: Sarah M. Pike

Sunday, September 19, 15:00–19:00

ALAIN GRIMM

Documentarist of the Basler Fasnacht, Basel – Switzerland

Vogel Gryff in Basel: documentation of an absence of ritual

The Vogel Gryff (Festival of the Griffin) is an annual festival in Kleinbasel (a district of Basel/Switzerland) in January, during which the three symbolic figures Vogel Gryff (the griffin), Wilder Mann (the savage) and Leu (the lion) perform over 40 dances all day, accompanied by the sound of drums. The event has its origins in the Middle Ages as an annual muster of arms by the three Kleinbasel societies, which were responsible for protecting and guarding the city walls in their district. The Vogel Gryff is listed as a living tradition by the Federal Office of Culture FOC. In 2021, the Vogel Gryff, which is attended by several thousand spectators each year, could not take place due to the Corona pandemic. This non-occurrence of the Vogel Gryff is unique and notable in its modern significance as a cultural and identity-forming festival. This special event of not taking place was recorded photographically and is to be published as a book. On the one hand, the publication is intended to systematically document the Vogel Gryff 2021 and, on the other hand, to confront a broad public with the topic of intangible cultural heritage in a low-threshold manner. Information such as date, time and picture description are added to the pictures and thereby evoke memories when viewed. The publication is not a scientific investigation, but an artistic play on and view of the Vogel Gryff. Supplemented by guest contributions from experts, the book aims to illustrate what happens when an orally handed down heritage cannot take place and depends only on memories. The result of this documentation will be presented at the symposium on the basis of the pictures and will take the expert audience on a journey through the Vogel Gryff 2021 itself.

COFFEE BREAK 16:30–17:00

JACK SANTINO

Bowling Green State University – USA

Challenged traditions: preliminary thoughts on adaptations, creation, and re-creation of public performances during the Covid pandemic

It has become clear during the pandemic how important traditional rituals and celebrations are to people, as Americans and Europeans refused to abandon annual and personal celebrations in the face of confinement. The enforced lack of social interaction led to the re-invention and adaptation of traditional activities during anomalous circumstances. The confinement has made it impossible to carry out direct field research concerning specific instances of adaptation and re-invention or of the creation of new performances. Therefore, in this paper I can only share preliminary observations.

Ironically, while ritual and festival events are routinely described as “times out of time,” as liminal, the period of the coronavirus is itself an anomalous period in which everyday structures and social rules have been suspended. Thus we are examining the enactments of regularly occurring periods of liminality during an unforeseen period of time out of ordinary time. In this paper, I will look at adaptations made to facilitate celebrations such as Halloween in the US; adaptations and accommodations made to celebrate rites of passage such as graduations; and the creation of new traditions such as daily bell-ringing, daily applauding, singing and dancing from balconies, and so on. I will suggest ways in which many of the new performance traditions draw on the particular cultures in which they are found, how they use the built environment, and the important role of electronic media.

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DAY 2

Chair: Sarah M. Pike

Sunday, September 19, 15:00-19:00

MICHAEL FUCHS, SANDY SCHMIDT

Fasnachtsmuseum Schloss Langenstein, Radolfzell - Germany

Museum 4.0 Presentation

Immersive museum experience.

DISCUSSION

Sarah M. Pike

5 min. opening, 30 min. discussion

OLGA CIESLAROVÁ, MARTIN PEHAL, ALESSANDRO TESTA

Charles University, Prague - Czechia

Closing