

Herd vs. Crowd

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I'm cold. My phone is about to die and it's now been 20 minutes since I last caught a glimpse of my friend's pigtails, sprayed green and pink. Everywhere around me, people are hurddled in groups. Groups of 4, groups of five, 16, couples.

If I look closely, I admit I can't tell who came here alone, I'm not sure if anyone did. But I know for certain that we all came here as individuals. I see a woman with black wings and claws for feet. By her hand, she holds a little princess in yellow. I see a middle-aged man spilling vodka all over his unicorn onesie.

I look down on myself and see a rudimentary witches' costume.

My freezing legs are wrapped in fishnet tights and I regret not having brought a warmer jacket. The rattling of a 1000 fool's ratchets rings in my ears. I lift my head and face the parade. A gloved hand reaches for my collar. Paper shreds obscure my vision. Within seconds I find myself in the midst of it, stumbling away from the crowd and into a stream of trampling feet. Feet that move forward, passing and colliding with the crowd in pig bladder-swinging attacks. Feet that would move right through me if I weren't keeping up. In my muddled state, they sound like the hooves of a herd hitting the ground. All around me are wooden faces, carved into screams and diabolical smiles. They tower over me like beasts in shaggy red fur. As they meet my eyes I am met by their wooden brooms, sweeping me like a child onto the other side of the street. I am, once again, lost in the crowd.

Introduction

Herd vs. Crowd

The term herd can be used literally or metaphorically, and its meaning may vary according to context. I will be using it to describe a group of beings, moving, acting and existing in union.¹

Crowds have a tendency to make you feel lost. As opposed to a herd, a crowd can seemingly drown you. It may leave you to fend for yourself, regarding you as a stranger, rather than acknowledging you as an individual contributing to the herd. Factors like color, shape, movement and rhythm have a significant effect on a group's perceived homo- or heterogeneity. A thousand people dressed in diverse everyday clothing, moving and talking among and over each other have little to no perceived homogeneity and may not appear to even have formed out of one uniting reason.

You may watch those same people wear only blue, move in union, sing or chant words and think they are performing a ritual.² Suddenly, they are no longer a crowd.

The introduction of such "ritualized behaviors"³ can transform the appearance of a crowd and provide it with an aspect of collectivity and intent. This can be effective in concert, protest, celebration or even battle.

How does costumed ritual turn crowds of people into herds?

¹ Herd, as defined by me, 2024

² Ritual: "*Ritual* describes a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order.", 2024, in Oxford Dictionary, retrieved from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com>

³ Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual, p.12, 1998

Driver describes certain subconscious behaviors that e.g. he and his cat show in their everyday lives as "ritualized", recognizing in them a pattern of repetition and solemnity akin to those found in ritual.

As described above in my memory of a parade in my hometown, the collision of herd-like processions and disorganized crowds of people during Fasnet⁴ in the Black Forest contrasts the experience of being densely surrounded by people as one of unity and as one of aloneness. Fasnet is an annual festival held during Winter in the Black Forest region of southern Germany, preceding the Christian fasting season and centering all things indulgent, unrestrained and commonly seen as sinful or vice. Variations of this tradition are celebrated across the world - as Carnival, Karneval, Carnevale, Fasnacht, Entrudo, or Mardi Gras.

The formation of herds in the wild, as well as that of human herds performing fight, entertainment or ceremony is beneficial to its members not only in strengthening their bond as a community, but also in ensuring their impression onto onlookers as powerful and capable of impact. A herd protects itself from attempted oppression, intervention and, in nature, attacking predators.

Through the example of Fasnet, I will discuss the act of dressing in ritual costume in order to obscure or entirely hide one's identity, shed visual aspects of heterogeneity and undergo a transformation from person to beast⁵ or wild being⁶, and from individual to herd-being.

Garment-Based Rituals As An Expression Of Identity And Belonging⁷

Apart from keeping one warm and protected, everyday clothing serves as an important agent in expressing the wearer's identity⁸, their beliefs and association with ideologies, individuals or existing groups. This symbolistic potential of clothing and adornments has become increasingly important and politically charged as a byproduct of the ever escalating, homogenizing force of globalization. In western capitalism, the handmade makes way for the mass produced and fast fashion creates an endless cycle of short-lived trends to buy into. It comes as no surprise that more and more people cling to clothing-items as meaningful, sacred tokens to carry fragments of their individual identity.

When moving apartments, I was recently confronted with my own hoarding problem. Aside from a ridiculous amount of clothes, I lugged all kinds of clutter across the city.

I find myself collecting an endless amount of sacred objects. Wearable or non-wearable, they serve me in expressing, exploring and further cementing my identity as a creature in my cave, as a creature possessing freedom, as a unique and eccentric individual.

⁴ Fasnet is the Alemannic word for „Fasnacht“, the Carnival of south-western Germany

⁵ Beast: A being as opposed to human, a creature or animal that is either partially or entirely non-human., definition by me

⁶ See page 19, „Wild Man“ and Wild Woman“

⁷ Belonging: „Belonging is the feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group. It is when an individual can bring their authentic self to work.“, Cornell University, 2024, retrieved from <https://diversity.cornell.edu>

⁸ Identity: „The fact of being, or feeling (knowing) that you are, a particular type of person, organization, etc.; the qualities that make a person, organization, etc. different from others“, in Cambridge Dictionary, 2024, retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org>



Figure 2



Figure 1



Figure 3



Figure 4

Whether consciously or not, every day I engage with these objects in ritual. I drink from my pretty handmade cups when I want to feel accomplished and close to my future self, I wash them and carefully place them on a special section of my shelf. I engage in physically exhausting rituals with my child-sized dirt bike, the treasure chest, a bamboo ladder I bought, having neither a use nor a space for it, the green lamp I found on the street 3 years and 3 moves ago. Instead of paying for their transportation, I move my sacred objects across the city by hand, one by one, carrying them through the rain, pissing off bus drivers and inevitably cutting my fingers. A week later I hire a man to drive a van with the rest of my belongings.

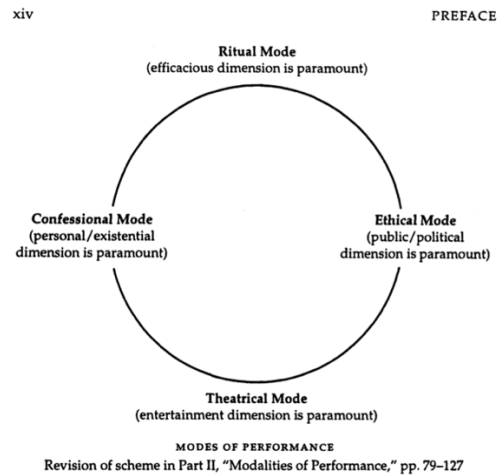


Figure 5

Rituals engaging with garment and objects of adornment occur in the day to day as well as in organized, theatrical performances and ceremonies.

In "Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power Of Ritual", Tom Driver (1998) describes the act of performing ritual or "ritualizing"⁹ as possessing four modes.

Illustrated in a four-part diagram, he juxtaposes a ritual and a theatrical mode, as well as a confessional and an ethical mode.

He describes *Ritual Mode* as centering the efficacious dimension, so the bringing about of the ritual in its essence. According to Driver, in *Theatrical Mode* the performed actions become accessible to the viewer and are carried out with the intention of entertaining. *Confessional Mode* is that in which the performer prioritizes their personal relationship with the ritual and uses it as a vessel of self-expression or relief, as opposed to *Ethical Mode*, which centers the public or political dimension of the performed, providing a regulating counterpart to what is being expressed. I will touch on how each mode influences the ritual of "Narrentreiben"¹⁰ within Black Forest carnival parades and how their balance or imbalance can instigate states of catharsis and empowerment and lead to the abuse of power.

Figure 1: my treasure chest

Figure 2: my candle holder

Figure 3: my bamboo ladder

Figure 4: my lamp

Figure 5: diagram of ritual modes from *Liberating Rites: Understanding the transformative Power of Ritual*, p.

⁹ Tom Driver, *Liberating Rites*, p.12, *Ritualizing: The Animals Do It And So Do We*

¹⁰ General term for the mischievous activities of guild-members during Fasnet



Figure 8



Figure 7

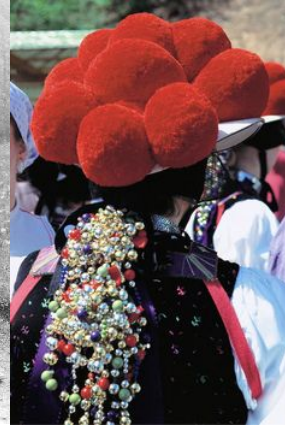


Figure 6



Figure 9

4. Costumed Customs Of The Black Forest

I have spent the last months in my hometown Freiburg im Breisgau, researching and reconnecting with the culture and history that surrounds the area. The fir-covered, mountainous Schwarzwald (Black Forest) stretches over the majority of Baden-Württemberg¹¹, neighboring the French and Swiss border.

In the late middle- and early modern ages, the region developed an intricate set of costumes, worn by the rural population of its over 300 villages. The costumes allowed one to display their local origin and affiliation with certain settlements, as well as one's profession, gender, age and social or marital status. Most of these very particular garments and accessories were worn to perform everyday activities, like attending church or other social events. During weddings and rites of passage, like a first communion or a girl's entry into *marriable* womanhood, the women of the black forest wore local variations of colorful dresses and extravagant hats, each providing the familiar onlooker with an in-depth profile of the wearer.

"(...)in the fashion system of contemporary western capitalism, women's dress is elaborated to a uniquely high degree."¹²

While still applicable today, this particularly apparent in the traditional costumes of the Black Forest. Where men wore a top hat and suit, adorned by the occasional red vest or handkerchief, women went through all stages of their lives sporting intricate prints and headpieces made from fur, glass, wood or woolen pom-poms, telling from the minute they were born whether they were too young or ready to be married, desperate to be married, finally married or widowed. These beautiful accessories had the effect of portraying the wearer less as an individual, as a woman with opinions and desires, and more so as a commodity, a thing to be obtained, or a thing that was occupied, already obtained by another man.

¹¹ The majority of the Black Forest belongs to the German Federal State of Baden Württemberg.

Figure 6: Markgräfler Flügelhaube, Hermann Jacob, „Leute Kleider Trachten“, 2003

Figure 7: Wedding procession in Schöppel, Bollenhut and top hat, Badische Heimat, Hans Retzlaff, 1935

Figure 8: Bollenhut, www.freiburg-schwarzwald.de

Figure 9: Silk bonnet from Kirnbachtal, Gutach, Badisches Trachtenfest, 1999

¹² Jane Schneider, Annette B. Weiner, „Cloth And Human Experience“, p.4, 1989



Figure 10



Figure 11

In contrast to this strict and utterly exposing way of dressing, the costumes worn by both men and women during Fasnet bore a refreshing ability to disguise their wearer and strip them of the assumptions and expectations that came with wearing their traditional clothes.

The origins of today's Fasnet and the many rituals, holidays and costumes that come with it are somewhat controversial. In Baden-Württemberg, first celebrations of the tradition are estimated to have emerged in the 13th century¹³. In a society dictated by the values and traditions of Christianity, it became common for people to indulge in a ritualized consumption of all perishable foods and alcohol, right before the beginning of lent. In Catholicism, lent lasts 40 days. From Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday, it marks the time leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection and is supposed to be a time of fasting, prayer and humility. In the 14th century, this feast preceding lent evolved into a more elaborate celebration with dances, parades and plays performed in public. Soon, a wide array of costumes was born. Common figures surrounding Fasnet are expressive and grotesque depictions of devils and demons, wild animals like bears and foxes, as well as witches and fools, the latter often being used to describe all those who dress up in costume and participate in so called "Narrenspielen" - fool's/jester's games. The German word "Narr" translates to both "fool" and "jester", the former being used in the English language to describe someone as naïve or irresponsible. I will be referring to the costumed guild-members as jesters, but I want to point out that the German word does not grace them with the same neutrality.

Throughout history, the use of grotesque and *heathen*¹⁴ imagery within the costumes of Fasnet has compelled Christians and non-Christians alike to assume the tradition's origins within the pre-Christian pagan traditions surrounding winter solstice, a celebration of the shortest day of the year, welcoming a new cycle and dressing in costume to scare away evil spirits of the winter.

Though controversial and discussed to this day, anthropologist Werner Metzger¹⁵ has come to the conclusion that the celebration of Fasnet, like other traditions of carnival, is one that emerged as a result of the many restrictions of medieval Christianity and originated as a way for people of all social ranks to celebrate uninhibitedly and purge themselves of

Figure 10: Young girls from Glottertal, wearing the bridal crown, 1935, Hans Retzlaff, retrieved from <https://www.zum.de>

Figure 11: People dressed as "Strohär", Black Forest, source unknown

¹³ Wikipedia, Schwäbisch-Alemannische Fasnacht, 2005

¹⁴ „Heathen“: non-religious, blasphemous, uncultured, pagan, Merriam Webster Dictionary, retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com>

¹⁵ Werner Metzger: „Fasnacht ist eine christliche Tradition“, Südkurier, 17.01.2019

"sinful" urges, like the desire to indulge in gluttony, blasphemy or lust before submitting to 40 days of lent. Since the two traditions center around similar topics, they have inevitably influenced each other, whether through hearsay and common misconception or simply through the fact that they both deal with death and rebirth and the harshness and intensity of winter. While costumes surrounding winter solstice and their anthropomorphic qualities served a transformative, shamanistic purpose, costumes of carnival and Fasnet acquired their "demonic", deranged look as a response to fearmongering and disapproval of the church, attempting to insult the participants as fools.



Figure 12



Figure 13

Figure 12: Devil-masks of the Freiburger Hexen, one of the many carnival guilds in Freiburg, source unknown
Figure13: Early mask of the Narrenzunft (carnival guild) Elzach, depicting a bear, source unknown

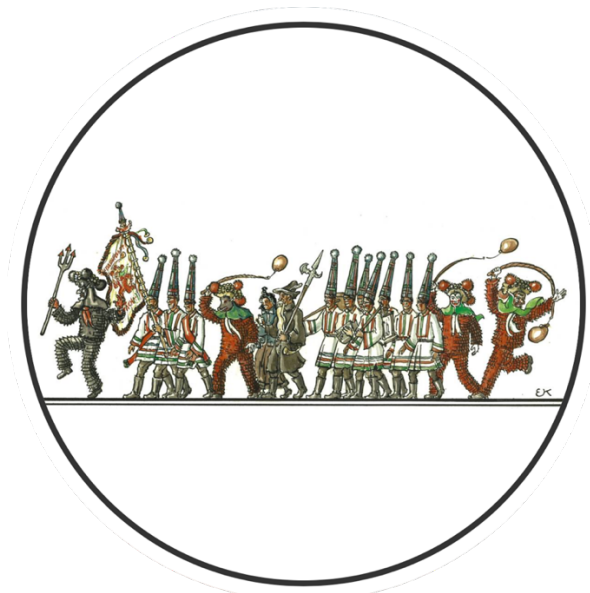


Figure 14

Ritual Catharsis: The Fifth Season and The Use and Abuse of Ritual

"I may be doing wrong, but I'm doing it in the proper and customary manner."¹⁷,

Religious historian Jonathan Z. Smith applies this rationalization of one's wrongdoing to rituals common in hunting-reliant societies. Though necessary for survival, the killing of an animal for its meat and hides is a remorseful act. As an everyday life-source, the hunt is carried out in an opportunistic way, leaving little room before the animal's gruesome death for it to be honored, prepared or sent off into the afterlife in an adequate and satisfactory way. To avoid feelings of guilt and moral repercussions of their violent act, both the Yakut and the Bambenga declare a detailed order of steps in which the ritual of hunting, killing and eating has to be carried out. Regardless of how the hunt actually transpires, this provides the hunter with a sense of comfort and encouragement that what they are doing is right, or rather inevitable, as if orchestrated by some greater force.

Similarly, a dissonance between the moral weight of what is being done and the desire to do it can be found in the celebrations of Fasnet and the idea of carnival itself. By calling out a "Fifth Season", devotees declare for the events of carnival an alternate mode of existence, a frame in which common rules don't apply and actions defy their natural consequences.

In order to gain a deeper insight into these specific traditions, I spoke to Michael Biehler, a long-standing member of the "Narrenzunft Elzach"¹⁸. In our first interview in January 2024, I inquire about his relationship with his secluded hometown and its strong emphasis on Fasnet.

Figure 14: Procession of Jesters and musicians, Narrenzunft Elzach, <https://www.narrentag-elzach.de>

¹⁷ George Bernard Shaw, from: Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown; The Bare Facts of Ritual*, p.53

¹⁸ German for „Jester's Guild Elzach“, rural town in the Black Forest

He describes this alternate mode that encompasses the rituals of Fasnet, "(...) all of the ideas you normally have of civilization, this kind of moral code that we operate under temporarily doesn't apply. The world around you completely shifts for a while."

Our conversations gave me a glimpse into the goings-on of Fasnet in Elzach and the beautiful and terrible dimension you enter upon witnessing this aforementioned 5th season.

Mr Biehler walks me through the tradition's many customs and the particular order in which they are practiced. The events of Fasnet are supposed to transpire not chaotically, as a mindless purging of impure thoughts and fervor, but as a ritual act, carried out carefully from start to finish. Even in its revolt against the reign of Christianity and its intent for catharsis, it relies on a strict set of rules.

In a religious context, these rules would be considered sacred, as anything entering the site of ritual has the potential to be holy and infused with symbolic meaning. As Smith says about the occurrence of accidents and unexpected factors at the site of Jewish temples, "(...) either it must be understood as a miracle, a sign that must be routinized through repetition, or it will be interpreted as impurity, as blasphemy."¹⁹

It is unclear whether the events of Fasnet can be considered sacred or merely routinized, but, as can be said about all ritual, they move participants to abandon the rules they follow beyond the site of ritual and adopt the ones established as right and true for the ritual instead. This provides the participant with the same kind of moral crutch or divine reason for one's actions, that Smith found in ancient hunting rituals.



Figure 15

The most important figure in the Fasnet of Elzach is the Schuttig²⁰. Its costume can be worn with a variety of masks, depicting devils, foxes, bears and crying or smiling men. The three-pointed hat is embellished with red pompons and covered in snail shells, which ring like bells when the wearer moves their head.

¹⁹ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown; The Bare Facts Of Ritual*, p.54

²⁰ According to Michael Biehler, the name Schuttig is derivative of "Schurtag", meaning shrove day.

Figure 15: Schuttig Costumes of the Narrenzunft Elzach, exhibited in the Fasnetmuseum Freiburg, 2004

One of the early steps of the celebration is the children's carnival, during which children dress as bears²¹ and Schuttig. In a playful dance, Schuttig and bear compare strengths and try to "get" each other with their pig's bladders. Once the bear makes an advance, multiple Schuttig run after him, invited by the bear's provocation to "show no mercy".

While this is a harmless game of catch and is supposed to happen consensually, the definition of consent can become somewhat blurry within the ritual boundaries of Fasnet - according to some, the time frame of the 5th season.

Entering into Fasnet as a ritual space, a "fifth season" brings with it a common understanding of consent not for specific actions or situations, but for the events of Fasnet as a whole. By agreeing to partake in the ritual of Fasnet, be it as a performer or bystander, you accept the fact that to a higher degree than usual, everything that happens is ritual and therefore apart from common conceptions of right or wrong.

As can unfortunately be expected when consent makes way for ritual, this poses a major moral issue. Fasnet becomes a hothouse for sexual and physical assault.

In 2018, a masked and costumed member of the guild Bohbrigga Hexenbroda holds a young woman over a large pot of boiling water, threatening to drop her in and "add her to his witches' potion". The 18 year-old slips out of his hands and into the pot, receiving 3rd degree burns to her legs.²²

2013, in Elzach, around midnight, a 20 year old woman is followed by a man disguised in Schuttig mask and costume. He sexually assaults her and flees the scene when a passing pedestrian intervenes. As Michael Biehler told me in our interview, Schuttig fools are required to wear a numbered badge, which the woman searched for to no avail.²³

Incidents like these are not uncommon. In the past, harassment of women and sexism was even more normalized at the parades than it is today. Women have been victim to ridicule through jesters in sexist costumes, songs and performances since the earliest celebrations of this tradition. Sexual assault, as well as blatant racism and violence against people of all genders have been largely overlooked and even integrated into some of the customs of Fasnet.



Figure 16

Holding a young woman teasingly over a boiling pot of water, throwing her onto a ladder or locking her into a medieval pillory are things that don't happen haphazardly. For many guilds, the mocking and teasing of young women

²¹ Bear's mask pictured above

²² Robin Eichelsheimer, Daniel Hagen, Das Urteil Im Hexenkessel-Prozess ist gefallen! Heidelberg 24, 21.12.2018

²³ Redaktion RegioRebellen, Elzach: Schuttig greift junge Frau an und nötigt sie sexuell

Figure 16: Horb am Neckar, Jesters in „Turmschurken“ costume with mobile pillory, <https://www.swr.de>

is part of the ritual process just as much as are chanting "Narri - Narro!"²⁴ or throwing confetti. To this day, many guilds don't allow female members and if they do, then often only to walk the parades with their offspring, as babysitters for the young aspiring fools. Almost every woman I know back home has experienced some form of sexual harassment at one of these parades. I remember it was almost seen as insulting if a group of jesters passed by you without smearing your face or chest with permanent marker. It shocks me how engrained this way of thinking was into all of our heads, how accepted it was that as a young woman during Fasnet, you are prey.

Is Fasnet a safe space for abusers? Is this procession of masked men a pack of predators, rather than a herd?



Figure 17

Michael Biehler reminds me that above all, Fasnet is supposed to be fun. The rituals performed during Fasnet all serve the overarching purpose of indulgence - on a personal, and originally, a religious level. Whether religious or not, an indulgence or let-off provides the individual with an opportunity to cleanse themselves - to confess. Returning to the chart that Tom Driver proposed, it is clear to me that rituals centering indulgence are at risk of disrupting the balance of all four ritual modes. An individual indulging in the ritual of Narrentreiben, wearing the Schuttig or Rägamolli²⁵ costume for example, and teasing, tickling and wreaking general havoc on the audience is typically acting primarily out of *Confessional Mode*. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. It is incredibly important and healthy for human beings to confess and indulge from time to time. And what better way to do so than during Fasnet, when given a space to, playfully and collectively?

It is easy to forget that rites and traditions exist not only for the benefit of the individual, but also as a way to organize, and therefore strengthen community. In a large- or small-scale society without

²⁴ „Narri-Narro!“, common jester's phrase meaning: "I'm a fool, you're a fool!"

Figure 17: "Abllass" - Letter of indulgence used by Catholics to buy the church's forgiveness for committed sins, <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

²⁵ Rägamolli (Feuersalamander) is German for the European fire salamander

established rituals, without specific *spiritually efficient* ways of doing, members are forced to look for outlets and ways to experience catharsis on their own. This counteracts the society's striving for connectedness and can leave individuals feeling more alienated and judged for their need to *let off*.

Fasnet, like most collective rituals, has the potential to be great. In order for this potential to come to light, however, it is crucial that the one performing it is aware of all four modes. A ritual should be carried out in its intended steps, move the audience, a higher power or the performing "herd" itself and provide the opportunity to let out what needs to be confessed, all the while practicing and honoring the ethics of what is being performed.

I ask Mr. Biehler about the danger that the festival setting poses. The masks and costumes, the alcohol, the common understanding of an alternate reality.

"In the best-case scenario, it is of course a mutual joke.", he says, "Everyone reacts to alcohol a little differently(...), for most of us it's just about having a fun and silly time, but there are also those who become aggressive, and of course I also know about instances of sexual assault. He tells me that both his mother and daughter experience it as a common part of Fasnet, "but whether you're used to it or not, it just doesn't belong there."

According to Michael Biehler, the members of his guild "see it as (their) responsibility as a community to keep these things at bay.(...) If members act out like this, they have to show accountability and have a personal conversation with the council."

This can cause a Schuttig to lose his membership.

"Fortunately", he says, "I don't know of any case of sexual harassment that has been too serious. Of course, every case is serious, there is no discussing that, but there's never been anything that had to be investigated juristically."

The man who, as I mentioned earlier, used the anonymity of his Schuttig costume to assault a young woman in 2013, was never caught. It remains unclear whether he was a member of the guild or simply a man using the costume as a criminal guise. The guild seems to be doing everything in their power to preserve their tradition while avoiding criminal behavior. Being among the oldest official carnival guilds in the area, Elzach's Schuttig have been known as particularly impetuous and were ordered by French occupants in the 1920s to wear a numbered plaque on their costumes, making them identifiable in the case of misconduct. "we can thank the gendarmerie.", Michael says.

While you have to be an Elzach-born man in order to officially join the guild, it is perfectly legal for anyone to buy a Schuttig costume. Without the small plaque carrying a number, anyone can unfortunately abuse this costume the way they could a car with no license plate.



Figure 18

Ritual and costume form a protective spell for everyone on the streets of Elzach. Both men and women attend the parades in costume, the men's appearance obscured to a much higher degree than the women's. Right before the beginning of this year's²⁶ Fasnet, I met up with Schuttig-seamstress Hildegard Eble, one of the few remaining artisans of her craft. Deep in the hills of the Black Forest, we sit around a table in an old farmhouse drinking home-brewed blueberry liquor. Mrs Eble has just walked me through the process of making a Schuttig costume, or, as the Elzacher's call it, "Anzug"²⁷.

Mrs. Eble's son and his wife tell me about a tradition that is lived in Elzach to this day. Husband and wife are supposed to celebrate separately. Since it's Fasnet, adultery isn't sin. Since the idea of sin is present in the first place, however, and no matter what season, husband and wife are reluctant to witness each other's adultery, they attend the events of Fasnet as strangers, the men in Schuttig costume, nearly unidentifiable, to some degree even to their own wives, and the women in self-made costumes, obscuring their identity only partially and occasionally. Disapproving of this concept, Mr. and Mrs. Eble attend Fasnet together.

I spoke to their young daughter too, who was excited to show me her beautiful demon's costume that her Mother had made and worn when she was younger.

Along with the disappearance of strict rules surrounding traditional costumes in the Black Forest and the implementation of contemporary dress into the everyday lives of people living in small towns like Elzach, the need for Fasnet as a costumed festival has changed - but not disappeared. To this day, the ritual of dressing up, becoming anonymous and playing pranks on each other remains a highly anticipated and necessary relief for most. As I mentioned earlier, women were affected by the rules of traditional dress more than anyone. This applied to their costumes during Fasnet too. While not being allowed to dress as Schuttig, they developed a rich variety of homemade costumes that were worn individually or in groups.

Figure 18: Mr. Eble and his daughter in costume, picture by me

²⁶ 2024

²⁷ German for suit

These costumes, existing and evolving to this day usually do not hide their wearer completely, which underlines the double standard that couples can commit adultery during Fasnet, but only the men are equipped with real anonymity.

In their uniqueness, these costumes may also not create the same feeling of unity as does wearing the Schuttig. They did, however, allow women and girls in the past to express themselves creatively and let go of certain societal expectations like the marriage-obsessed symbolism in their traditional everyday dress.

Besides the guild clinging to tradition and only allowing male Elzach-born members, it is completely normal for anyone today to wear a Schuttig costume, regardless of their gender or origin. When it comes to making Fasnet more diverse, older guilds like this one struggle to maintain their integrity, discussing whether tradition and inclusion can coexist, or whether one has to make way for the other.

Before speaking to Hildegard Eble and her granddaughter, I had expected to hear more about their struggles against the patriarchal structure of the guild, or their identity as women living closely with and even working for its members while not being able to join themselves. To my surprise, both of them seemed very content with their situation. Maybe if I had grown up there, I wouldn't have been interested in taking on the role of the jester, the parading Schuttig either.



Figure 19

In my hometown Freiburg, where the traditions of Fasnet are far less prominent than they are in many smaller towns of the Black Forest, the festival is celebrated in a modernized and slightly less gender-obsessed

way. The guild representing my home-district is named "Hölleleue"²⁸ and was founded in 1994.

The Hölleleue dress up in black suits, covered in feather-like scraps. Arranged like upside-down flames - blue core, red flame, yellow light, they symbolize hellfire.

Held in place by a hood of fur, their mask represents a horned lion. Some of the girls I grew up with became Hölleleue. People of all genders and origins are allowed to join the guild as long as they bring respect and enthusiasm.²⁹

However gruesome their appearance, I remember my encounters with these jesters as being entirely wholesome.

Much like those in smaller towns like Elzach, this guild and its costumes pose a great opportunity for individuals to celebrate and express themselves freely and transgress certain limits of their human condition. Whether Schuttig or Hölleleue, guilds are responsible for the organization and representation of many community-building events in their respective home-environments. Their presence is significant not only during the Fasnet season, but year-round, bringing people together and creating a colorful image of the place's identity.

Sexist and xenophobic undertones, offensive costumes, alcoholism and violence of both sexual and non-sexual nature have taken the fun out of Fasnet for many people and brought a number of guilds in Baden-Württemberg into disrepute.

Incidents like the ones I mentioned above have given the tradition the connotation of being a grand excuse for excessive drinking, distasteful jokes and immoral behavior.

While originally frowned upon by Christian conservatives, Fasnet itself is now commonly seen as a conservative affair.

Fittingly, Tom Driver thematizes the tendency of modern western society to attribute ritual to the ideas and practices of conservatives, "alienating liberal and progressive minds from positive appreciation of ritual."³⁰ This tendency is all too apparent in the celebration of Fasnet. Discussions about the importance of cultural preservation and its role in containing identity and belonging turn in circles of "We need inclusivity" and "Tradition is sacred".

Those who feel at home in a carnival guild exclaim that participation is optional and those who disagree with sexist and racist aspects of the tradition turn their back on it as a whole.

We all crave ritual. I would even argue that we need it. There is a great danger in turning your back on its liberating and transformative potential and dismissing it as conservative or problematic. By leaving ritual, its practice, its creation and perpetuation in the hands of conservatives, we allow for it to remain stagnant instead of transforming, to be used and abused, to divide instead of unifying.

"Rites can be liberating, provided their character is rightly understood and their practice creatively linked to the actual needs of living persons and groups. This requires, however, that rituals themselves need liberating. They need to be freed from misunderstanding and lack of

Figure 19: "Hölleleue" Jester Figure from the part of Freiburg I grew up in, picture from <https://www.hoelle-leue.de>

²⁸ German for "hell-people"

²⁹ <https://www.hoelle-leue.de/mitglied-werden/>

³⁰ Liberating Rites, p.12

creativity, from their presumed function as guardians and keepers of all that is ancient, stilted, incomprehensible, and conformist.”³¹

Guild-members and bystanders both suffer from people’s abuse of the ritual space. It is important that abusive and predatory behavior is persecuted uncompromisingly, for the sake of all those participating and for that of Fasnet and its guilds themselves.

In order for rites to fulfill their intended purpose as liberating and expressive, and for the traditions of Fasnet to be freed of bigotry, they need to be detached from complex conservative foundations and observed from their core as beautiful and necessary processes in human experience.

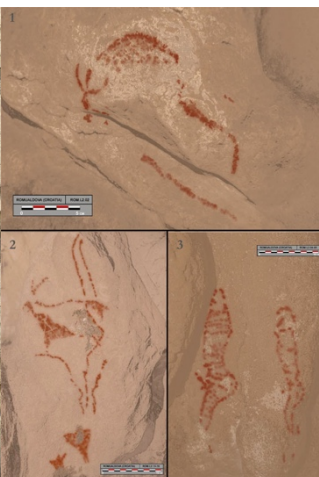


Figure 23

Figure 20

Figure 22

Figure 21

Figure 24

Anthropomorphic Costume: Escaping the Confines of Human Physicality

Cave paintings, hieroglyphs, gods with human limbs.

Humans have been anthropomorphizing in one way or another since the paleolithic.

“We take animals and we put our words into their mouths. To talk back to us, usually about us.”, says Eric Risher, introducing his documentary film: *The Fandom*. “It’s a very strange thing, but we’ve done it for centuries. We learned to read from anthropomorphic animals. We learned right from wrong from anthropomorphic animals.”

This innate tendency to take things that are not human and portray them in a form that resembles us, to put ourselves into their shoes or give them exclusively human qualities, Risher says, often goes unnoticed.

“Furry fans are the people who notice that we do this and think that there’s something really special about it.”³²

³¹ Liberating rites, p.12

Figure 20: Ganesha, Hindu God of New Beginnings and Luck, Basohli miniature, c. 1730. National Museum, New Delhi

Figure 21: Limestone Relief of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphs, picture from <https://www.historicaleve.com>

Figure 22: Anthropomorphic cave paintings in Romualdova Pecina, Croatia, picture from <https://www.sci.news.html>

The Fandom follows a unique subculture known as "Furry". Furrries celebrate and dress up as comic-style anthropomorphic characters and often create elaborate head to toe costumes known as Fursuits.

Though serving a wide array of purposes and carrying various meanings, costumes appearing in pagan and shamanistic rituals, carnival parades, fables, Halloween, mascots and fandom-based subcultures like the Furrries all have more than one thing in common. They hide or partially obscure the appearance of their wearer and render them to some extent unidentifiable. They also involve elements of anthropomorphism and sometimes animism, like the use of non-human masks and fur, or structural garments and prosthetics, creating a form for the human body to figuratively and literally change into.

While the figures and costumes of Fasnet range in appearance from human to caricature, to demon, to beast, there is one that sticks out to me.

The Wild Man³³ is one of the oldest figures portrayed in Fasnet and other Christian traditions surrounding winter in Europe.³⁴

Characterized by their hairy, human-like bodies and perceived wildness, wild men and particularly wild women like the greco-roman Lamia and Holzmoia appear in medieval German mythology as creatures that dwell on the fringes of society. Not quite familiar to the civilized, not quite at home in the wilderness, they appear in forests near cities, lurking just beyond the border of all things known, all things domesticated.

Figure 23: Halloween Costume, source unknown

Figure 24: Furry-tail, source unknown

³² The Fandom, Eric Risher

³³ also known as Wilder Mann in German, or woodwose in English

Figure 25: Lamia, Edward Topsell, *The History of Four-footed Beasts and Serpents*, 1658

Figure 26: Petrus Gonsalvus, the "Canarian Werewolf", Painting ca. 1580, Ambras Collection

Figure 27: Strohbär, Black Forest, source unknown

³⁴ E.g.: Pelzmärtle (Belsnickel), see: Wilder Mann, *The Image of the Savage*, Charles Freger, p.61, p.254

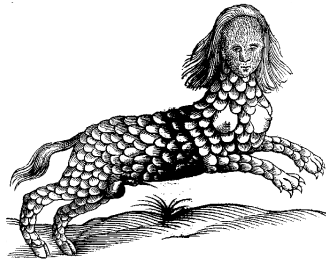


Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27

Local iterations of the Wild Man are portrayed in costumes like that of the Strohbar, the Reisigbar or the Pelzmärtle. Covered in straw or brushwood, they walk parades during Fasnet or appear as a scarecrow or punisher in the advent season.



Figure 29



Figure 28

Wild men are part of us, the way that our limbs are, and the garms and bangles and smart watches we dress them in. Early on in my research, I came across a book called *Wilder Mann, The Image Of The Savage* by French photographer Charles Fréger.

He travels around Europe to capture more than 200 breathtaking anthropomorphic costumes and meanwhile observes a resurgence - a rebirth of old ways of making, of dressing up, of ritual expression. Much like Tom Driver, he argues that ritual, and in particular costumed ritual is at the center of 21st century human yearning.

"It is in ritual and mimetism that we exorcise or celebrate our demons or angels. Our included and excluded, our permitted and forbidden. In becoming the monster or the other, we make it part of us again, a thing to be directed or followed, a negotiable, tolerable commodity. We clip its claws (...) by mimicking them."³⁵

There is an assumption that we make about the non-human animal - and consequently about ourselves.

As humans, we are inclined to think of the animal as a creature free from the burden of consciousness. Free from abstract societal concepts and expectations, but also incapable of forming a moral compass - a fair judgement of what is right and wrong.

The beast, the non-human is seen in the Christian religion as simultaneously wild, cruel and unpredictable and as a perfect gift of god or force of nature, a being with child-like innocence.

I should mention here, that my intention is not to juxtapose human and animal as fundamentally different from each other, but to recognize and further understand us humans as animals that have become alienated from our simple animal-existence.

Dressing in the skin of the beast, of what we fear or envy, of what we are not may not give us an accurate understanding of what it means to be the other, the wild animal. It may, however help remind us of how similar we are - and in remembering that, one may overcome a fear or judgement, of the other, or of being seen or heard, and in return - judged.

What is this urge that drives Carnival Jesters to dress themselves as horned lions, shamans to perform their work embraced by the skin and head of a wild animal, medieval artists to draw dogs with strangely human faces, adults to spend their life savings on customized smiling animal suits? One could argue that it is a simple and much needed response to the immense weight that comes with being human. The responsibility that comes with being known, recognized, employed.

When anthropomorphizing through costume, we disguise or modify our humanity and take on the appearance of something less defined, something more expressive, something with the freedom to be playful.

Michael Biehler brings up an important point about the transformative power of anthropomorphic costume.

"For many who may not be the most confident or extroverted in their regular lives, it's great to come out of their shell without being recognized. They're able (...) to step out of themselves and to go over that threshold that tends to hold you back in your day to day. (...)not with violence or ill

³⁵Wilder Mann, the Image of the Savage, 2012, Charles Freger, p.12

Figure 28: Pelzmärtle, Wilder Mann, the Image of the Savage, 2012, Charles Freger 2012, p.61, photo by Charles Freger

Figure 29: Reisingbär, Wilder Mann, the Image of the Savage, 2012, Charles Freger 2012, p.56, photo by Charles Freger

intent, but with quick wit and the ability to fight back, which you might not have the guts to in real life. If you struggle approaching women, this can help you get over your fear.”

The need to overcome social anxiety is also a driving factor for many Furrries to dress in costume. Taking on the identity of an anthropomorphic character allows individuals to express themselves playfully and loudly, no matter how confident or outgoing they may be in regular clothes. The ritual of Fursuiting is liberating in itself, and so is that of wearing a Schuttig or Hölleleue costume. It can create a sense of personal freedom, harmony and belonging, even apart from the additional steps of the ritual surrounding it. There is a real power in modifying your human appearance. With it, we tend to modify our very humanity. For better or worse, for as long as ritual is in place, we become the *other*.

It is no coincidence that during celebrations of Fasnet, it comes to instances of abuse. When given the power of anonymity and the expectation of embodying the wild, the depraved, unruly and unpredictable *other*, abusive individuals will use their liberating ritual-costume at the expense of others.

Anthropomorphic costume can provide a great outlet for some people. It can provide a safe space for them to undergo some much-needed catharsis in contrast to their everyday lives. Furrries are highly stigmatized and often portrayed by the mainstream as kinky or cringeworthy. The Jesters of Fasnet and carnival are infamous for crossing boundaries and perpetuating patriarchal and misogynist traditions.

It is in all of our hands, as people encountering them to hold them accountable and treat them with respect for the humans they are under their suits.



Figure 30



Figure 31

Herding: Crowds in Movement through Costumed Ritual

"The very real work that ritual can do (...) is work done playfully."³⁶ Tom Driver refers to ritual as work, implying that a successfully performed ritual requires intent, concentration and balanced coordination. Anthropomorphic and anonymizing costumes bring with them a level of responsibility - to honor both the role and the ritual, and to ensure that enjoying the freedom of expression and anonymity goes hand in hand with the freedom of the engaging group - ideally, the herd.

So, how does costumed ritual create human herds - and why do we need it to?

Artist Nick Cave has answered this question in a mesmerizing way. In his performance work *Heard*, he creates a beautiful example of such a herd moving in harmony.

Horse-like, hairy and colorful, 30 large creatures dance around an urban landscape, creating a rhythm through movement. Rhythm to the ear and eye.

Figure 30: Film still from Frauke Finsterwalders 2013 Film "Finsterworld"

Figure 31: "Heard", Nick Cave, source unknown

Figure 32: "Heard", Nick Cave, 2013, The Queensland Gallery of Art

³⁶ Liberating Rites, p.12

The incredibly intricate costumes give the performers the impression of being wild, shaggy and joyful beasts.



Figure 32

Starting off as two-person costumes with both performers blending into one large being, they eventually separate into pairs of more human-looking, individual costumes. Through this, the artist seems to playfully explore the fluidity of humanity and otherness, as well as that of the individual and the collective, cooperative herd-being.

I used to love Fasnet. When I was a child, it filled me with the same euphoria and sense of freedom that this wonderful work by Nick Cave does. I started to experience the fear and misplacement I described in my introduction of this text when I was six years old and a Jester of the Freiburger witches' guild lured me into the parade by waving with a piece of candy and placing it on a pillow he was dragging behind him. Not expecting anything other than candy, I fell for his trick and ran after the pillow, only to find myself trapped in the strange man's arms, hauling me along the parade until the houses around me had changed. I ran back through the crowd, not knowing where my parents were.

When looking into the ritual use of costume within my homeland, I inevitably had to face my own aversion to the tradition of Fasnet and relived a lot of the grief and frustration it had caused me in my youth. The human ability to dress up, to change shape and experience life differently through the fabric of a costume is one of the main factors that make my life worth living.

As a queer person, as a neurodivergent person, as a person that experienced years of bullying, I have found a lot of comfort and liberation in costume. My research of ritual- and anthropomorphic costume has made me realize just how powerful of a tool it can be in transforming, liberating and connecting people from all walks of life, struggling to express or explore themselves fully in their day to day.

I am happy to have grown up and found people I relate to in that sense, people I can dress up and “unmask” with, figuratively and literally - by putting on a mask. I see how important it is for me and people like us to express what we are often expected to hide. To have the freedom to go *feral* and act more like the *other* that I described when talking about the mythical figure of the Wild Man.



Figure 33



Figure 34

Paintings of Wild Women make me feel seen. As a woman with a beard, their hairy bodies seem to embrace me with a warm familiarity. I started researching costumes from my homeland because I was looking for a sense of familiarity - a sense of belonging. I guess you could say now, that I was looking for a herd. I found herds of people in the form of carnival guilds. I let them pass by me and tug at my ears, flirt with me and take me into their midst, as a visitor, but I couldn't find my herd.

To conclude this grappling with my estranged culture and its failure to liberate those in need of liberation, I have come to realize that instead of looking for a herd, I simply need to create one.

Tom Driver's notion of ritual work has inspired me to do so by creating, costuming and performing a ritual.

The work I am doing for my Graduation Project can best be described as *herding*. I have been busy building a fictional framework for this liberating ritual to take place in, a society or crowd in the process of becoming a herd. The ritual work of herding begins in the creation of textiles, costumes and objects. Together with a group of close friends, loved ones and strangers in need of liberation, I am working on a collaborative quilt, which will later be implemented into the same individual's costumed performance of the herding-ritual.

Through the use of hairy, masking and revealing costumes, I aim to process both the excitement and grief I encountered while growing up with and researching a conservative and patriarchal tradition in the Black Forest.

We know now that a crowd of people can be figuratively transformed into a herd by precisely the factors that make shared ritual effective. Rhythmic

movement, sound and visual composition. Amazingly, all those can be achieved through costume. Further than color, texture and shape, costumes worn by jesters and wild men are often adorned with bells or other percussive accessories. The long hair on the costumes used in *Heard* jump and fall in response to the performers' movements, ebbing and flowing like a body of water, sometimes chaotically, sometimes in synchronicity. Why is it important that we use ritual and costume in this uniting, homogenizing way? Why do we need to form herds, when individuality is a beautiful thing and the diversity of our planet's individuals is what makes the very world we live in possible today?

When discussing the danger that comes with ritual and its power to move and encourage people in their actions and beliefs, I briefly brought up Jonathan Z. Smith's pondering the formation of ritual. He observes that symbolism and processes in religious rituals often form through the use of accidental "miracle" factors present at the ritual site. As apparent under the ritual umbrella of the 5th Season, the emphasis on honoring the site of a ritual, rather than its supposed transformative effect can make the ritual subject to corruption. This is unfortunately the case with many Christian sermons and religious ceremonies performed in the present day. They continue to uphold what is considered holy and may once have been accidental. For a ritual to truly liberate, it is important that the thing being honored is not primarily the ritual site, but rather the purpose of the ritual itself and the need it originated from.

In 1998, Tom Driver speaks "of a world that grows more interconnected every day and is in urgent need of liberative justice as a condition of its survival"³⁷. Now, 25 years later I don't need a degree in Theology to see that this need is growing stronger every day. In the age of capitalism, everything that makes the individual, that makes them unique can make or break the happiness, success, and safety they will encounter throughout their life. Being born into a certain gender, ethnicity, social rank or sexuality inevitably decides how the world will view and treat you. Nick Cave battles this injustice by giving his performers the opportunity to anonymize and homogenize. Under their so-called "Soundsuits", they are all one, one herd fighting prejudice.

I want to get to know this power of costume. I am no longer a creature in my cave, I am a herd being, yearning for ritual.

Figure 33: Foemina Cinnaminiae Gentis, source unknown

Figure 34: Tapestry "Two Scenes From "Der Busant" (The Buzzard), Upper Rhine region, 1480-90

³⁷ Liberating Rites, p.11

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