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Second-Order Liminality: Dynamics of Ritual Change in the Basel Fasnacht

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Abstract: Taking the example of the Basel carnival Fasnacht, the paper shows in what way ritual can maintain the impression of being traditional and unchanging, and yet be open to changes and innovations. As the basic conceptual framework we use the notion of liminality, which Victor Turner identified as the creative moment of ritual. In Fasnacht, this liminal dimension appears in two degrees. The carnival as such represents a reflexive liminal counterpart to the standard social structure, yet it is itself also highly structured and bound by conservative traditional rules. As a reaction to this, there arises within Fasnacht a second-order liminality in the form of the so-called wild Fasnacht, which turns the official antistructural Fasnacht rules upside down once again, testing their validity. While the carnival structure offers a regulated opportunity for questioning everyday social behaviour, wild Fasnacht questions even this regulated manner of questioning as such, opening space for its reflection and modification. We use detailed examples to demonstrate how the subtle dialectics of structure and antistructure keeps the tradition of Basel’s Fasnacht alive and allows it to evolve without destroying its aura of traditionality.

Keywords: ritual change, ritual creativity, liminality, antistructure, carnival

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**Schlüsselwörter:** rituelle Veränderungen, rituelle Kreativität, Liminalität, Anti-struktur, Karneval, Basler Fasnacht

Rituals typically create the impression in their actors that they are unchangeable and traditional customs of a given community which cannot easily be created or altered. According to Ronald Grimes, we may usually trace two major strategies in the rhetoric of the ritual actors for denying the inventability of ritual. The first consists in referring to a tradition: “it has always been done this way” or “our grandparents did it this way”¹. The second, more radical strategy “is to claim for a rite the status of a sacrament instituted by some divine figure, often in the beginning or in the time before this time. [...] Both strategies put ritual considerably beyond the range of mere human creativity and thus beyond the reach of criticism.”² This aspect is reflected in scholarly definitions of ritual. Roy Rappaport, for instance, the author of possibly the most elaborate theory of ritual, defines ritual as “the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers”³. In similar vein, Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw claim that “[t]he person performing ritual ‘aims’ at the realization of a preexisting ritual act. Celebrants’ acts appear, even to them-

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² Ibid.
selves, as ‘external’, as not of their own making”⁴. Despite this, it may easily be demonstrated that rituals keep on changing and that new ones emerge.⁵ It is true that “ritual activities generally tend to resist change and often do so more effectively than other forms of social custom”⁶, but they change nevertheless. Strong as ritual conservatism is, there are apparently ways of bypassing it without spoiling the basic impression of traditionality and unchangeability of ritual action. How exactly tradition and innovation are reconciled is one of the central questions of ritual studies.

A fundamental contribution to the academic reflection on ritual change has been that of Victor Turner and his theory of liminality.⁷ While previous anthropological theories followed Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown in regarding ritual as an institution that allows the regular symbolic articulation of traditional social structures, in this way slowing down social changes, Turner identified in ritual an additional dimension of liminal antistructure, which allows the actors to step back from the social structure, serving as a source of creativity. Ritual thus does not have to be “a bastion of social conservatism whose symbols merely condense cherished cultural values. Rather, ritual holds the generating source of culture and structure. Hence, it is by definition associated with social transitions”⁸. In his late essays, Turner insists that the liminal moment is in fact present in every ritual.⁹ He does admit that ritual actions are strongly formalized and stereotypical, but in his view these forms and rules only “frame’ the ritual process, but the ritual process transcends its frame. A river needs banks or it will be a dangerous

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⁴ Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 89. It is in this sense that Humphrey and Laidlaw label ritual actions as “archetypal”, inasmuch as they refer to “previous ritual enactments” (12) which “are thought of as both ontologically and historically prior to the actor’s own performance of them” (158).
⁶ Ibid., 211.
⁸ R. Grimes, Beginnings in Ritual Studies, 152.
⁹ See esp. V. Turner, From Ritual to Theatre, 80.
flood, but banks without a river epitomize aridity”\textsuperscript{10}. Regrettably, what exactly the relation between the “river” and the “banks”, between formalization and creativity, consists in is not demonstrated by Turner by means of any concrete examples. The present paper would like to supplement this lack by historically analysing one particular ritual – the Basel Fasnacht festival.

Despite being a secular festival,\textsuperscript{11} Fasnacht may serve as a prototypical example of ritual liminality. The Fasnacht festival takes place annually in the Swiss city of Basel. More than 300 cliques take part in it, i.e. groups that are meeting regularly all through the year to look for social, political or other topics to which they wish to bring public attention. Each group selects one topic and gives it a satirical form, cooperating with artists to create masks, costumes, large movable constructions and pamphlets. Thousands of masks then parade these topics for three days and nights through the city centre, accompanied by marching music. For a short while, the festival disrupts the usual social order and opens up a liminal space for criticism, satire and creativity. Fasnacht is a ritual of rebellion where the citizens of Basel can openly express their disagreement with the current state of affairs, embody conflicts, and point at what is wrong with society. Dissolving the usual hierarchy creates the experience of Turnerian \textit{communitas}, which regenerates the participants and by extension the entire society. Despite its antistructural nature, though, the Basel Fasnacht is bound by many rules that have gradually evolved into a firm structure. The carnival antistructure is the counterpart of the everyday social structure, yet in the context of the festival it has developed into quite a strict arrangement that is itself paradoxically very formalized and conservative. In this regard, and despite its jollity, Fasnacht creates in its participants the typical ritual impression of tradition and unchangeability.

This rule-bound conservativism of the Fasnacht has the interesting effect of provoking some groups of participants to react by creating a sort of “second-order liminality”, a rebellion inside a rebellion. Baslers call these groups and actions \textit{Wilde Fasnacht}, or wild anarchic Fasnacht, which exists alongside the official, organized one (\textit{Organisierte Fasnacht}). Since the groups that operate in the wild Fasnacht observe the principal Fasnacht rules (wearing masks and costumes, playing piccolos and drums), the difference between the wild and the organized


\textsuperscript{11} While Basel Fasnacht does grow out of medieval carnival roots, its present form originated at the end of the 19th century and it has no direct connection with religion. Indeed, up to the 1920s the Christians were repeatedly being discouraged to take part in the Fasnacht (even just to watch it). See Peter Weidkuhn, „Ideologiekritisches zum Streit zwischen Fasnacht und Protestantismus in Basel,“ \textit{Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde} 65 (1969): 36–74.
Fasnacht is not easily noticeable to an outside observer, and it takes some time before the field researcher even realizes there is one. The wild Fasnacht rebels in very fine and nuanced ways. We will try to show nevertheless that it has an important and formative influence on the functioning and development of Fasnacht. It is a source from which the organized Fasnacht draws, and so keeps its vitality. By analysing the wild Fasnacht we will be able to demonstrate how ritual liminality works as well as elaborate on Turner’s conception and express the relation between structure and liminality with more precision. All this should help us better understand how rituals change without losing their conservatively traditional character.

1 Sources and Methodology of Research

There are numerous proceedings about Fasnacht and its history. They are usually published during anniversaries of the different cliques (as the individual carnival groups are called) or the body of the official Fasnacht-organizer, the Fasnachts-Comité. Newspaper essays are also a rich source of information, as well as memoirs, internal bulletins and magazines published by cliques, and a large

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14 Fasnacht is the topic of newspaper articles continuously and the intensity thereof always grows on all Basel media channels as the festival approaches. Basler Zeitung for example publishes a new supplement every day of the festival that covers the Fasnacht happenings and also contains essays and interviews.

15 Most of the cliques have their own periodicals, e.g. the Basler Bebbi Basel clique publishes the newspaper Böbberli twice a year; the clique Opti-Mischte their newspaper Opti-Mischt up to four times a year, et cetera.
number of texts in prose and verse. These studies and records come with few exceptions from Baslers who participate actively in Fasnacht. Academic papers written by non-Baslers are very rare, and surprisingly Fasnacht is not a subject of study even for the local students of ethnology.

Sources for the wild Fasnacht are even fewer. Peter Tokofsky in his study of Fasnacht does mention the role of the wild groups (wilde Fasnacht) too, but the only detailed article is by Karin Bienz. According to the ethnologist and historian of Fasnacht Dominik Wunderlin, “there are no serious publications on the wild Fasnacht. [...] These groups have no fixed organization structure, nor wish to help with writing memoirs. Often, they do not operate for long stretches of time, so they cannot publish a book at their 25th or 50th anniversary.” The only exception was the Kuttlebutzer clique which operated between the years 1956 and 1999 and which to this day is a legendary example of revolt within Fasnacht, and we will examine it more closely. After the voluntary dissolution of this clique in 1999 the members published the book Kuttlebutzer Basel 1957–1999 (a random selection of photographs, articles and commentaries). Also of importance are the materials from the exhibition Sodeli, d’Kuttlebutzer, organized in 2013 by the Basel Museum Tinguely. The innovative character of the Kuttlebutzer is partially thematised also by Rolf M. Vogt in his book Fasnacht, Masken, Rollenspiele.

The main source of information for this paper is a field research that Olga Cieslarová conducted in the years 2011–2019. She spent a total of 30 weeks over

17 This is confirmed in the interviews with Professor Walter Leimgruber (chair of the department Seminar für Kulturwissenschaft und Europäische Ethnologie, Universität Basel) and with Basel expert in Fasnacht and ethnologist Dominik Wunderlin (Museum der Kulturen Basel, now retired).
20 Dominik Wunderlin, 60+, historian and ethnologist in Museum der Kulturen Basel (retired since 2017), OF – Rumpelclique clique, e-mail correspondence, 12. 12. 2016. Unless otherwise stated, all the translations from German into English are ours.
23 Rolf M. Vogt, Fasnacht, Masken, Rollenspiele (Basel: Aha Fliegeverlag, 2003), 137.
20 visits in Basel and celebrated Fasnacht eight times. Interviews were conducted in Basel, in Prague during the numerous visits of the Baslers there, but also through e-mail, on Skype and WhatsApp. Cieslarová conducted semi-structured interviews with 42 men and women, and informal talks with dozens more. In the years 2011, 2012, and 2013 the research focused on the organized Fasnacht, particularly on the members of cliques (Duschuurli, Basler Bebbi, Opti-Mischte and others) and on the members of the Fasnachts-Comité. The research also focused on Baslers who do not participate in Fasnacht. Cieslarová focused on informants aged 40+, 50+ and 60+, who participated in Fasnacht at least 20 to 30 times and are thus able to reflect their participation in it on a larger time horizon. The cliques were selected to contain members from all social classes, which is typical for Fasnacht, but also to represent different types of these groups. Other interviewees were members of the Basel intelligentsia, who reflect Fasnacht in the historical context (dialectologist, director of the ethnology collection in the local museum, director of the Department of Culturology, journalists, musicians, etc.).

Since 2014, the research turned more to the wild Fasnacht groups, to the topic of internal revolt. This was partly due to the filming of material for the movie A pod maskou tma (There’s Darkness under the Mask) directed by Viola Ježková. Cieslarová interviewed members of the former Kuttlebutzer clique (five people), as well as active members of today’s groups (four of them are former Kuttlebutzer members who continue in different groups).

2 Historical Context

There is evidence of various carnival festivities in Basel since the early Middle Ages. Bans and attempts to limit Fasnacht on the part of the Church authorities

24 Here we would like to thank them for their cooperation; we also thank the journalist Jürg Bürgi, who has helped us with background research and with editing of the Basel terms.
25 Between the years 2012 and 2014 Olga Cieslarová was an active member of the Duschuurli clique (all members 60+), including the participation in their leisure time activities throughout the year, music practice and search for the satirical topic (activities typical for active participation).
26 The key respondents throughout the research were Werner Kern, former tambourmajor and painter of lanterns for Basler Bebbi Basel (OF) and diplomat Marc Wey, drummer, former member of Kuttlebutzer, now member of the group Frauenhilfswerk 1833 (WF). We always indicate if the respondent belongs to the “organized” Fasnacht (OF) or the “wild” Fasnacht (WF).
27 About the pre-history of Fasnacht e.g. Katja Zimmer, In Bökenwise und in tüfels hüten – Fasnacht im mittelalterlichen Basel (Basel: Schwabe, 2005); Ulrich Barth, Dorothee Huber and Martin Alioth, Basler Stadtgeschichte II – vom Brückenschlag 1225 bis zur Gegenwart (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag, 1981); Eugen A. Meier, “Die Fasnacht im alten Basel,” in Die Basler Fasnacht... ed. by id., 23–
and the nobility are the main source of specific information about what went on during these carnivals. Similarly to other Swabian-Alemannic carnivals, the modern Fasnacht does grow from these celebrations. Yet in the 19th century it takes a form so specific that it is unnecessary, for the purpose of this paper, to concern ourselves with the pre-history of Fasnacht or the context of neighbouring carnivals. The 19th century sees the merging of two formerly parallel elements – the carnival street satire and the military march music and marches – creating a synthesis that is unique to this day.

The military music comes from the tradition of ceremonial parades that used to be organized in the pre-Lent period by the guilds (Zünfte) from the centre of Basel, or Greater Basel (Grossbasel), companies from other parts of town (Vorstädtegesellschaften), and the honorary associations (Ehrengesellschaften) from Lesser Basel (Kleinbasel). These civic institutions held all the power in the city until the end of the 18th century. The most important of them were the guilds, whose members constituted the city council. One of the obligations of these civic organizations was to keep order in the streets and “they were assigned a part of the walls which they had to protect.” The role of the parades (Musterungen) was to display those able to protect the city from enemies. Young men accepted this obligation upon entering adulthood and by marching in these parades (Rekrutierungen, recruiting parades). For these occasions, the associations hired military drummers and flautists and especially “the retired soldiers would leave the barracks and look for jobs as musicians in the town associations. ... This is how the military music got in the sphere of the bourgeoisie” and is even today the musi-

80; Peter Koelner, “Basler Fasnacht,” in D’Basler Fasnacht, by Fasnachts-Comité (Basel: Fasnachts-Comité, 1946), 19–43.
31 Basler Stadtgeschichte 2, 93.
cal core of Fasnacht. A significant role was also played by immigrants from Germany and Italy, who brought their own carnival traditions, and by the increasingly important middle class (often consisting of settled immigrants) who dared to parody the established order. Many parades and clique topics from this period are already well documented by newspaper reports, which helped to increase the social importance of Fasnacht.

It is in the second half of the 19th century that the first cliques appear, at first only *ad hoc* for each year, and “Fasnacht parades begin to be organized by different cultural, sports and other leisure-time societies.” It is only at the end of the century that we see the establishment of the first cliques that would function all year round. This is also the time when the first organization units were instituted for the coordination of Fasnacht. The Quodlibet society (established as a leisure-time activities society in 1856) in the Greater Basel, and the Wurzengraber-Kämmerli organization in Lesser Basel. These originally rival societies merged in 1903 to create the new Fastnachts-Komitee, and the city council endowed them with “the monopoly to collect money for the parade of Fasnacht.” Thus the board got financial and formative power and started to transform Fasnacht into a spectacular event. The Fastnachts-Komitee planned the route for the parade and organized other activities on the side. In 1910 it changed its name to Fasnachts-Comité, and its role has not changed since then to this day (see below). When Basel recovered from the First World War, it made more space for the Fasnacht happenings. That is why in the twenties new cliques started emerging with unprecedented force and energy, and even the already established cliques started focusing their all-year activity on the preparations for Fasnacht.

In the thirties, first ateliers appeared (Adolf Tschudin, Roger Magne) that prepared papier-mâché masks for Fasnacht, and at the same time more and more

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34 Thomas Bürgi, “Geburt der Basler Fasnacht...,” 22–23.
36 Paul Koelner, “Basler Fasnacht”, 41.
37 Alex Fischer, “Die Aktivitäten der Cliquen während des Jahres,” in Meier (Hrsg.), *Die Basler Fasnacht...*, 130.
38 E.g. the oldest clique still in operation VKB (Vereinigte Kleinbasler) 1884, i.e. the Association from Lesser Basel.
artists began to participate. Fasnacht saw a great boom after the Second World War; in the fifties the number of cliques and of participants grew steadily, cliques were joined by wind orchestras and their number grew rapidly. After such an expansion of Fasnacht, there also came a reaction from the inside. At the end of the fifties, as a counterbalance to the whole Fasnacht institution, the “wild groups” emerged. They are diverse smaller groups that are inspired by the happenings just before the establishment of the coordinated parade at the beginning of the 20th century. In the fifties these groups stood in direct opposition to the official structure (see Kultebutzer below), whereas today they are a natural part of Fasnacht. We will nevertheless see that they still keep a bit of rebelliousness, even today.

The time of the duration of Fasnacht also gradually grew to a full three days (even though the official permission to play piccolos and drums all 72 hours without limit only came in 1997). Most of the rules remain unchanged since the establishment of the Fasnachts-Comité, yet it is still possible to observe small changes and subtle nuances that we will discuss further on.

3 Basic Structure, Process and Organization of Basel Fasnacht

After the historical outline we will now sketch the form of contemporary Fasnacht. In Basel, everything starts on the Monday following Ash Wednes-

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42 The number of parade participants has been registered since the establishment of Fasnachts Comité in 1911. Until 1971, only the number of participating cliques is known (e.g. 108 in 1939, 119 in 1946, 220 in 1956, 224 in 1966), not the number of all participants; this has been recorded only since 1972, when there were 282 cliques and 6657 participants. The number has slowly been growing, and in 1976 there were already 8,391 participants, and in 1985, 10,942. Data from Meier, ed., Die Basler Fasnacht..., 405–423. A Detailed overview of active participants between the years 1986 and 2011 can be found in Basler Fasnacht: Vorwärts..., 172–182. During this period, the smallest number of people participated in 1986 (479 registered groups, 10,270 participants); the largest in 1993 (524 registered groups, 12,198 participants).
44 Between the years 1946 and 1985, the number of Guggenuusig groups had grown from 7 to 68, see Meier, ed., Die Basler Fasnacht..., 413–421.
45 Given the short format of this article, we cite only the main Fasnacht events. A good introduction to the structure of Fasnacht can be found in Peter Habicht and Fredy Prack, Pfyffe Ruesse
day exactly at 4:00 a.m. The beginning is called the *Moorgestraich* (morning strike). When the church bells ring the fourth strike, all street lights in the city centre go out and thousands of piccolos and drums start playing the same melody, a march that is only ever played on this occasion. Then all the groups begin marching to the sound of this music. This is also the moment when all the satirical lanterns (*Ladäärne*) are lit for the first time and the cliques thus present their topics (*Sujet*). After several hours of marching through the city, the participants have a little sleep. At 2:00 p.m. starts the first parade, or *Cortège*, that goes on throughout the afternoon. The groups present their satirical topics (masks, costumes, pamphlets, and constructions), walk one behind the other in a long parade and hand out pamphlets. They are watched from the sides by tens of thousands of on-lookers from Basel and the rest of Switzerland, as well as from abroad. Tuesday is a little freer; it belongs to children and families (*Kinderfasnacht*), and to the parade and concert of the wind orchestras (*Guggenkonzert*). On Wednesday afternoon, the *Cortège* is repeated and again the groups parade all afternoon following the set route across town, this time in the opposite direction. The end of Fasnacht is called the *Ändstraich* (last strike) and happens at 4:00 a.m. on Thursday, exactly 72 hours after the *Moorgestraich*.

After every afternoon parade and dining together, the groups continue to walk through town playing their instruments, often until the early morning. This uncoordinated wandering of masked groups through town is called *Gässle* (compare *die Gasse* – small street). Whereas the afternoon *Cortège* is a civic parade of many kilometres showing topics to the audience, the night wandering in comparison is an intimate, almost meditative activity. The participants are enjoying the time spent together, the music, and the walks through the centre. Because of this, the streets and backstreets of the Basel city centre are filled all night with cliques, wind orchestras, and also with hundreds of small groups playing the traditional piccolos and drums that call themselves “wild” (*wilde*) and often do not even have a name. Both the official and the wild groups wander the streets and play, then refresh themselves in one of the many cellars or taverns, and then walk on again. The coordination board of the Fasnachts-Comité states that there are ten to twelve thousand masks during Cortège, and another six to eight thousand masks in the

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46 In Basel, the beginning of Lent is still established in the ancient way with Sundays included, which makes the fasting period shorter (40 days in total).
wild Fasnacht that do not participate in the parade. Since they do not register with the Fasnachts-Comité and do not march in the afternoon parades, there is no way to count them. It is often said, though, that during the nights in Basel, more than half of the masks really belong to the wild Fasnacht groups.

The organization of Fasnacht stands on two pillars. One is the already mentioned Fasnachts-Comité. It is a board of illustrious persons (formerly only men), whose task it is to coordinate the parade (Cortège), enforce the safety measures, arrange the times at which everyone starts marching or has a break, ensure the even distribution of the starting times of the cliques, etc. During the parade, which is several kilometres long, the Fasnachts-Comité members stand at an elevated platform and greet the passing cliques, evaluating their satirical topics, or Sujets, as well as their execution. They do not have masks or costumes, only black suits and black hats (which they raise to greet the passing cliques).

The other pillar of Fasnacht are the Cliques, who meet all year round to practise the marches on piccolos and drums and to plan and discuss their sujet. In cooperation with their chosen artist, they then give this sujet a satirical visual form (Sujet umsetzen). The artist then produces the lantern (Ladäärne, a construc-

47 See above, note.

48 For example Bernhard Batschelet, 60+, piccolo player WF – Gueti Fraue, formerly guest artist of the Kuttlebutzer, music composer and theatre director, interview 1. 10. 2015; Michael Luisier, 50+, piccolo player OF – diverse groups, journalist (SRF), interview 2. 10. 2015, and more.

49 All Fasnacht cliques were originally for men only. The first few women appeared only at the end of the 1930s. Today, most of the cliques are mixed, although there still exist several more traditional ones that accept only men, such as Basler Bebbi Basel, Olympia, or Alt Stainlemer. Dominik Heitz, "Wie die Frauen die Strassenfasnacht eroberten," Basler Zeitung, 9. 3. 2014 https://bazonline.ch/basel/die-basler-fasnacht/Wie-die-Frauen-die-Strassenfasnacht-eroberten/story/18558401?dossier_id=559?dossier_id=559 [20. 7. 2019]; Gabriela Imboden, "Geschichte der Fasnacht, Geschichte der Geschlechter,” in Zwischentöne..., 119–130. The first female member of the Fasnachts-Comité only appears in 1984, see Katja Muchenberg, “Abseits des Courant normal,” in Basler Fasnacht: Vorwärts..., 140. In 2018, Pia Inderbitzin has become the first woman ever to hold the position of the head (Obfrau) of the Fasnachts-Comité, see https://www.fasnachts-comite.ch/organisation.


51 Pia Inderbitzin, the first woman at the head the Fasnachts-Comité, uses a red hat to greet the groups. That might be understood as an innovation or even as a small revolt in the Comité itself.

52 They are always leisure-time societies with regulations and juridical personhood, whose highest authority is a general assembly, and who are represented by a president, often called Obmaa or Obfrau. More in Alex Fischer, “Aktivitäten der Cliquen während des Jahres,” in Meier, ed., Die Basler Fasnacht..., 127.
tion that is carried or pulled and is covered in paintings and verses in the Basel dialect, being lit from the inside). The lantern is accompanied by people mostly in huge papier-mâché masks that cover the whole head (Laarve) and costumes (Goschdüm). These are piccolo and drum players, and the vanguard (Voortraab), which does not play, but hands out pamphlets (Zeedel). A clique can have dozens or hundreds of members, so the larger ones are traditionally divided into Binggis (children), Jungi Garde (teenagers), Stammverein (adults) and Alti Garde (seniors). They offer free-time activities but also free piccolo and drum lessons for the younger members. Each part of the clique prepares its own sujet and they parade separately, with a few exceptions.

Besides the piccolo and drum playing cliques there are the brass bands (Guggemuusig) that have become part of the organized Fasnacht long ago. There is even an agreement from 1962 that the wind orchestras will not participate in the Morgenstraich (so as not to disrupt the intimate character for the playing cliques), but that they will have the city centre at their disposal on Tuesday afternoon when they organize their own parade (or Sternmarsch) and concerts on the main squares. Today, the Guggemuusig also participate in the Cortège, but they usually do not have a satirical sujet.

Cliques and wind orchestras register with the Fasnachts-Comité and march together in the Cortège parade. We can therefore call them the “organized Fasnacht” (or “official Fasnacht”). Among the Baslers, however, these terms are only used when they speak about the “wild groups” (wilde Gruppen) that are not registered with the Fasnachts-Comité. While the organized cliques and brass bands participate in the Cortège during the day, then have dinner, and then continue with the night wandering, or Gässe, the wild Fasnacht groups do not take part in the organized parade. At the time of the Cortège, they walk away from its route, or they start walking only after this afternoon activity ends.

However much the wild groups differ from the organized cliques, they also observe some of the Fasnacht’s most basic rules. These are, according to Felix Rudolf von Rohr, a long-term president of the Fasnachts-Comité, “not only accepted, but considered sacrosanct.” The first rule is the wearing of mask and costume. The person has to be completely hidden. It should be impossible to tell if the person in the mask is male or female. The second basic rule is the playing of

53 E.g. Karin Bienz, “Abgsprunge: Der Schritt aus der organisierten in die wilde Fasnacht,” in Zwischentöne..., 131, uses the collocation “offizielle Fasnacht” without capitalizing the O.
55 Until the 1930s, when mask studios and papier-mâché use spread, the Baslers used to make their masks themselves or buy them from Italy or Germany. On the pictures of Fasnacht parades
piccolos and drums. They are at the heart of the rhythmic walking and their sound fills the streets and squares where Fasnacht takes place. It has already been said that this music is originally historic military marching music, and all groups march strictly to its beat, like army troops. Another form of music, formerly only tolerated, now already integrated, is the Guggemuusig.\(^5\) And the third rule is the satire. The complicated and visually complex sujets of the cliques are basically performative enactments of the kind of political cartoons we might find in newspapers, making fun of politicians, as well as of various up-to-date social and political issues (immigration, political correctness, sale of Swiss weapons to politically unstable countries, etc.).

The last important aspect of the organization of Fasnacht that needs to be mentioned is the financing. No later than 1911 has the Fasnachts-Comité introduced the selling of badges (Blagette) that have a different emblem every year. The audience and the participants wear them on their coats. The principal sellers of the badges are the cliques themselves. They can keep part of the earnings directly and they hand two thirds of the money back to the Fasnachts-Comité.\(^5\) The huge amount of money that is collected every year (the exact amount is never officially stated and we have to add to it the proceeds from the accompanying activities) is divided in two different parts. Three quarters of the sum are distributed among the cliques according to their number of Cortège participants, and the fourth quarter is divided among those whose sujets the Comité considers to be best.\(^5\)

This essential role of distributing the money is the reason why the Fasnachts-Comité has such an influence on the formation and presentation of Fasnacht and can position itself as “the protector of Basel conventions”\(^5\) It is the same reason for which it is also often criticised, especially since the Comité is not elected and the members are chosen by their predecessors. As the journalist Jürg-Peter Lienhard puts it: “Those who rule over the money tap can decide. But they let no one see their cards. That is extraordinary when we consider the amount of money they

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\(^5\) Guggemuusig that participate in the Basel Fasnacht very much resemble the brass ensembles that play at other carnivals, for example in Lucerne or Solothurn.


\(^5\) http://www.fasnachts-comite.ch/subventionen [27. 2. 2018].

annually manage. It is clear that this position is honorary, isn’t it? Such criticism is understandably often heard on the part of the members of the wild Fasnacht, for whom the Comité incorporates the fossilized structure that holds back any development of Fasnacht. “They make sure Fasnacht moves as little as it can. That it stands still. Much like the decorative Gartenzwerge (Garden gnomes) in some Swiss or German gardens,” says Bernhard „Beery“ Batschelet. In case of the official cliques this criticism is soft and is balanced by the generally good reputation of the Comité: the cliques “do grumble but they do not really question the Fasnachts-Comité.” Even some “wild” fasnächtlers express their sympathy for the role the Comité plays: “I used to criticise this non-transparency. But now I understand it completely. It would be a terrible chaos if the cliques started arguing about why someone got this much money and someone else did not.” Making things public would also “complicate the whole bureaucratic process. And since all of us in the Fasnachts-Comité participate as volunteers, we wouldn’t have the capacity for that anyway“, says a former Comité member Nicole Salathé. And finally Marc Wey adds: “Our wildness is really possible only thanks to the given order. In fact we have to be grateful to the Comité as an anarchist is to the establishment.”

4 Wild Fasnacht

The wild Fasnacht groups are mostly offspring from the traditional cliques. They consist of people with Fasnacht background who usually grew up in some official

61 We are referring to interviews with the wild Fasnacht participants (B. Batschelet, L. Handschin, M. Wey, W. Huber); a similar opinion was expressed by members of the Basler Bebbi clique W. Kern and S. Künzli.
64 Jürg Bürgi, 70+, WF – an unnamed Schyssdräggzigli, journalist, retired, interview in Basel, 6. 5. 2017. It is common that all unnamed wild groups call themselves Schyssdräggzigli – a buggy of faeces. Nowadays, this originally abusive appellation has just a funny, ironic connotation.
66 Marc Wey, 50+, WF, drummer, former member of the Kuttlebutzer clique, now member of Frauenhilfswerk 1833, lawyer and diplomat, e-mail correspondence, 20. 4. 2017.
clique, learned to play piccolo or drum there and were members for some time (often for many years) before they decided to form or join a wild group. A frequent motivation for this, according to Werner Kern, is that “they are frustrated and wish to participate in their own way.”\textsuperscript{67} The rupture in the clique “usually happens during Fasnacht”.\textsuperscript{68} The main reasons are dissatisfaction with the organized parades that have to follow a set route and, often stand in traffic jams for a long time, the obligation to eat and drink in the same places, and submission to the Fasnachts-Comité. Dissatisfaction with the Cortège and criticism of the Comité is heard often and from members of many cliques. But those who move over to the wild Fasnacht “decide to face the consequences of refusing to conform”.\textsuperscript{69} This means for example no money (\textit{Subventionen}) from the sold badges that would help to pay for the production of masks for the next Fasnacht. Another thing that is quite common is that people return to their (or another) organized clique after some years in the wild Fasnacht.\textsuperscript{70} The range of these groups is wide and their reasons for taking part in the wild Fasnacht are different. “The wild groups enjoy the fact that there is no structure and that they can decide on the spot where they want to go, which corner to turn, join another group for a bit or spend another twenty minutes in a wine bar.”\textsuperscript{71} The wild groups also differ quite a bit in the degree of their rebellion against the rules. A huge number of people merely wish to enjoy a free Fasnacht and Gässle in the streets and the only “rebellion” is that they skip the Cortège. They may have a satirical topic (for example Kerzedrepfli or Frauenhilfswerk 1833), but it is not necessary (also for example Gueti Fraue or diverse family groups), they may have a lantern (for example Kerzedrepfli), but often they do not (Frauenhilfswerk 1833, Gueti Fraue, Familie Tell). This is again because they prefer to move around freely. The pulling or carrying of a lantern is, truth be told, “tiring and demanding, as it needs to be looked after and cannot fit in pubs, so someone has to stand outside and look after it”\textsuperscript{72} etc.

We qualify these groups as “soft” wild Fasnacht. They usually do not even call themselves cliques, as their participation does not involve all the elements of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{67} Werner Kern, 60+, a former drummer and tambourmajor, now marching in the vanguard, OF – Basler Bebbi Basel, graphic designer and lantern painter, phone interview, 28. 12. 2016.
  \item \textsuperscript{68} Marc Wey, WF, interview in Prague, 16. 11. 2016.
  \item \textsuperscript{69} K. Bienz, “Abgsprunge,” 132.
  \item \textsuperscript{70} “We should note that fasnächtlers are not only leaving cliques because they no longer enjoy organized Fasnacht and participation in Cortège; there are also those – and their number is growing – who are returning back to the organized Fasnacht.” Dominik Wunderlin, OF – Rumpelclique, e-mail correspondence, 16. 12. 2016.
  \item \textsuperscript{71} Peter Tokofsky, “Fasnacht in Basel,” 107. The author refers to the wild groups as “wild marchers” or “wild masquerades”.
  \item \textsuperscript{72} Werner Kern, OF – Basler Bebbi Basel, phone interview, 28. 12. 2016.
\end{itemize}
a satirical sujet (including lantern and pamphlet), and often they do not even have a name. One of these groups may be “the family of Mr. Müller which one day decides to celebrate Fasnacht together,”73 or “a few friends that have spent evenings together for years.”74 Frauenhilfswerk 1833, from which comes one of our informants, Marc Wey, is a typical wild Fasnacht group. It consists of some ten drummers. They select a topic just before Fasnacht and everyone prepares his or her own costume to suit it. They even publish a short satirical pamphlet online. The most important thing for them is free movement in the streets, playfulness, and not participating in the Cortège.

There are also groups that have rebellion as their theme and we call them “radical” wild Fasnacht. Probably the most famous were the Kuttlebutzer, whom we will discuss in more detail further on. But even a rebellion can happen through soft nuances. In the years 2016 and 2017, Olga Cieslarová walked with the group Gueti Fraue, which consists of seven professional flautists, both male and female, under the direction of the composer Bernhard Beery Batschelet.75 Their playing is like a private concert in the streets. They perform complicated compositions of different genres on piccolos, and they also improvise (which would be unthinkable in a traditional clique). They do not march in a closed rank as is usual, but they dance, wander, hide in niches and walk across yards and courts, all the time closely held together by music. Not only do they not have a lantern or a topic, they also disregard the formation rule.

Some groups come from outside the cliques. This means that their members did not go through the piccolo or drum learning drill. Their wildness is thus seen mainly in the music they play, and they have emerged mostly in the recent years, as the influence of the wild groups grows (as we will see later) and Fasnacht is not as strict as it used to be. Today it is possible to meet a hundred-piece jazz band called Grand Wazoo consisting of professional and non-professional musicians who only meet during the nights. They usually dress in black. Often, they wear only suits and simple masks. They seldom wear the huge papier-mâché masks
typical for Basel Fasnacht.\textsuperscript{76} They draw attention everywhere they go because of their difference, both visual and musical. The beginning of the Grand Wazzoo goes back to the year 1986.\textsuperscript{77} The trumpet player Kilian Dellers says: “That year my brother Tassilo invited several jazz musicians to come to Fasnacht dressed in black and play jazz, as a performance, you know. Since then we used to do that now and then. In 2000 Tassilo arranged some twelve jazz and rock pieces for three voices. We had rehearsed them and played them for the three nights over and over, and on Tuesday afternoon, too.”\textsuperscript{78} They were joined by other musicians who until then did not have the possibility to play at Fasnacht. “The Grand Wazoo are very controversial even for the wild Fasnacht. A few years ago, it would not have been possible for them to participate. They do not even wear the traditional masks.”\textsuperscript{79} The reactions of Baslers are now quite welcoming. “We regularly see people tapping their foreheads when we walk by them. But mostly they are friendly.”\textsuperscript{80}

The Grand Wazoo body started from one-time performances. And these interactive and impromptu performances that are occasionally seen in the streets form an important part of the wild Fasnacht. They often take place on Tuesday afternoon, when the program is more relaxed in any case. Sometimes these performances have a clearly satirical tone to them, sometimes they are just a play in a public space. Michael Luisier describes two examples of these performances:

“I remember a year when Fasnacht was really soon after Christmas. I saw a man come to the town square with a chainsaw and a Christmas tree and start cutting it really slowly to pieces. The noise was terrible. Everyone fell silent. Everyone was watching him. Then he stopped. Just a crazy idea. In 1991 there was a huge scandal in Switzerland: it was discovered that the state had secretly surveilled more than two hundred thousand people. In reaction to this, a man appeared at Fasnacht wearing the grey suit of state civil servants and a mask of an arse on his head. He kept taking notes. He wrote in his notepad, then he went inside a telephone box and talked to someone. Then he went out and started writing again. A group of drummers walked by: three in the front, three in the middle and two at the rear. He stepped between the two and kept writing in his notebook. The drummers got so thrown off that they had to stop playing, take off their masks and see what he was writing. It was a proper street

\begin{itemize}
  \item At that time, they still called themselves “S Uffangbeggi fir gstrandeti Jäzzer” (Pit for stuck jazzmen).
  \item Kilian Dellers, 60+, trumpet player and one of the founders of Grand Wazoo (WF), professional musician, e-mail correspondence, 30. 5. 2017.
  \item Marc Wey, WF – Frauenhilfswerk 1833, Skype interview, 5. 12. 2016.
  \item Kilian Dellers, WF – Grand Wazoo, e-mail correspondence, 11. 5. 2017.
\end{itemize}
But the pivotal moment of the wild Fasnacht are the nights. As the journalist Jürg Bürgi puts it:

“During Gässle you are there for yourself even if you march in a band of drummers and flute-players. At Gässle, you are hidden in your larva, in your heart, hidden from the wind, the cold and the looks of others. [...] During Gässle, you suddenly understand the meaning of the wish ‘Enjoy it!’ (Vyl Vergniege!). At Gässle, you are in seventh heaven. This is true even when it’s raining cats and dogs.”

The freedom of movement, the ability to decide where to go and for how long, the possibility to navigate with music the narrow streets that are typical for the historical centre of Basel is what attracts the wild groups. None of these things are possible in an organized clique. “It is in the tiny streets that the music sounds the most beautiful. It flies up and echoes and vibrates between the walls of the houses. But the big cliques cannot fit in here.” Not only is a small clique able to walk freely in little streets, it can also easily experiment with new ideas. This is best seen in the creativity of costumes, and in the new musical motives and rhythms.

5 Kuttlebutzer

Wild Fasnacht consists of many groups and individuals. For the purpose of this article it will be sufficient to present the most notorious of the anarchic groups, the Kuttlebutzer clique (tripe cleaners). Its name is the first one you hear when you mention wild Fasnacht to Baslers. It was established by drummers and flautists from several cliques in 1956, and will thus allow us not only to demonstrate what wild Fasnacht may look like, but also to evaluate the long-term influence its rebellious interventions had on the organized Fasnacht.

“The Kuttlebutzer opted for anarchic Fasnacht. They wanted freedom, because freedom encourages imagination. The Kuttlebutzer would do Fasnacht for

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83 Bernhard Batschelet, WF – Gueti Fraue, interview in Basel, 1. 10. 2015.
themselves, not for the Comité. That was the main idea." The reasons were the same as in other groups: “We decided to leave our former cliques because we couldn’t stand all the stupid topics, the practicalities of running a clique, the felt costumes, the endless parades, and all the set and planned routes.” There were many artists in this group and they gave original and innovative character to everything they did. Besides Jean Tinguely, the internationally famous sculptor, other Basel painters, graphic designers, and artists were members of the Kuttelebutzer, such as Christoph Gloor, Ferdi Afflerbach, or Hanspeter Hort. They were also the first ones who confronted the Comité openly and who did not participate in the Cortège. In 1963, they put up a huge banner across one of the streets through which the Cortège marches. High in the air, there was the message “The Kuttelebutzer greet the jammed cliques”. And while all the cliques stood in the jam on the street, the Kuttelebutzer walked wherever they wanted. The liberty of walking freely at the time of Cortège was the first form of rebellion.

The motto of their sujet at that time was “Kuttlebutzer von heute zeigen die Fasnacht von morgen“ (the Kuttelebutzer of today are showing the Fasnacht of tomorrow). This was their way of saying that a living festival needs evolution and changes responding to the needs and possibilities of its time. They participated in Fasnacht between the years 1957 and 1999, when they deliberately dissolved the clique. Not every topic was great but people still remember many things they did, even today. “The Kuttelebutzer were breaking every Fasnacht rule, trying new things”, says Bernhard Beery Batschelet, an occasional guest artist (Fifer and sujet-designer) of the Kuttelebutzer and the author of the artistic part of what they did for several years. After the war, and especially during the sixties and seventies, Fasnacht grew rapidly. More and more people participated in it and the festival was slowly losing its small-town character, where everyone knew each other. The Fasnacht structure was reliable and traditional and was abandoning somewhat the creative spirit it once had. For example, more and more cliques were having their costumes and masks made professionally. The Kuttelebutzer decided to prepare for Fasnacht the way it was originally done: everyone would make their own mask and costume from recycled material, not from expensive new fabrics. “Once Jean Tinguely bought old brushes from some carwash. He told us we were going to represent the Swiss mentality for that year’s Fasnacht. Each

of us then got a huge parcel in the post full of big chunks of the red brushes from the carwash. We used them to make the costumes. [...] Each of us made their own costume and larva. We would meet on Saturdays several weeks before Fasnacht and work together. We did this every year”, remembers the drummer Patrick Haenggi.88

Most cliques today select a topic that is important to them and then look for ways to give it an artistic form.

“In the Kuttelebutzer, we often did it the other way round. Jean Tinguely made sketches for us, proposals of what each mask should look like. And then it was up to us to make something of it. Our wives then sewed the costumes for us, which was the conventional part of it. The meeting on the Fasnacht Monday was always a surprise. What would the final thing look like?”89

The Kuttelebutzer stopped using felt. “Until the end of the sixties, the costumes were almost always made of felt. It was cheap and came in many colours. Today you have to look long before you find a felt costume.”90 One of the nuanced changes of rules in the Kuttelebutzer was refusing to use felt and working instead with other, often recycled, materials. “There was only one time when my job of shoe seller influenced our topic. We were all making masks from old shoe boxes.”91 Each costume of their sujet was an original piece whose author was the person who created it and was wearing it during Fasnacht. One of the characteristic traits of costumes in cliques was the collective character. This is still true for most cliques today. The flute-players have one costume, the drummers another, the vanguard still another. Or they all have the same costume. “The only thing that differentiates you from the others in this case is your size.”92 A large number of identical costumes reinforces the meaning of the topic, that is evident. On the other hand, it weakens the individual creativity and imagination, which were always key for the Kuttelebutzer.

Another innovative impulse came from the music. There were not only great painters and designers in the Kuttelebutzer, but also great musicians: flute players, drummers and composers. The notorious marches “Whisky Soda” or “Gin Tonic” were written by Lukas (Cheese) Burckhardt in 1958 for the Kuttelebutzer and today

89 Werner Huber, 70+, WF – Kuttelebutzer member since its foundation, owner of a shoe shop, interview in Basel, 7. 5. 2017.
92 K. Bienz, “Abgsprunge...,” 133.
they are played by most cliques in the organized Fasnacht as well. These marches first introduced jazz and swing rhythms and are far less militaristic than traditional Fasnacht marches. Musically much more challenging marches for the Kuttlebutzer were composed in the eighties and nineties by Bernhard (Beery) Batschelet. They are also performed by other cliques, but mostly by the smaller ones from the wild Fasnacht. “His music is demanding in technical and musical aspects, with new harmonic sequences, new rhythms and phrasing.”  

Batschelet also introduced the three-beat measure rhythm. “The pace changes, three-beat measures make you dance, you can’t march to this rhythm like in the traditional eight-measure verses. You change the phrasing and the movement changes. No need to explain anything.”

The Kuttlebutzer’s playing with the Fasnacht rules was also apparent in their sujets. “Through the satire we were trying to capture the Zeitgeist – the spirit of the age. Not only in the local topics but in society as a whole.” For example, in 1984 they made a topic of the intended construction of the nuclear power plant Kaisergaust. People were protesting massively against it and the manifestations led to an eleven-week-long occupation of the grounds. “The occupation was illegal. Nobody knew if the police would come and intervene by force. It was dangerous and people were wondering if the nuclear police will come.”

The Kuttlebutzer reacted with the sujet Atompolizei: clique members wore black and white masks that were breaking the tradition of colourful costumes and there were all sorts of weird horns on their larvae. Some wore gas masks. “With the sujet Atompolizei they were pointing at the danger of today’s (especially nuclear and chemical) large-scale industry.” They captured the spirit of the age precisely. It was only two years before the disaster at Chernobyl (1986). In the same year, there was fire in Schweizerhalle (chemical industry storage facility) not far from Basel, which caused the leak of huge amounts of chemicals into the Rhine that destroyed much of the life in the river and contaminated it for a long time. “The following Fasnacht was black. Most cliques had black costumes. It was a danse macabre at Fasnacht.”

But what the Kuttlebutzer mainly criticised was the Fasnachts-Comité. “Fasnacht, this source of energy and potential, should evolve continuously, not con-
form to the Comité. The Fasnachts-Comité should kindly conform to Fasnacht!"\textsuperscript{99} The most notorious participation of the Kuttlebutzer at Fasnacht was the one in 1974, and it came to be known as “Der grosse Bums” (The Great Explosion). The Kuttlebutzer decided that year to bury the Fasnachts-Comité. They started the whole performance by registering officially for the Cortège. That alone caused some agitation. “Why they decided to suddenly register we do not know. But it’s good. At least we can now guarantee that they will probably wear larvae on their heads, which is not always certain with the Kuttlebutzer. It is even possible that we will give them a subvention”\textsuperscript{100}, rejoiced Peter Lotz, one of the Comité members.

About twenty members of the Kuttlebutzer marched in the parade dressed in mourning. That was a provocation in itself – they were dressed as the members of the Comité. Also, one of the Fasnacht rules at that time was to wear coloured costumes. They wore only small white plastic masks that covered their faces, which also went against the tradition of large coloured papier-mâché larvae. When they got close to where the Fasnachts-Comité were standing on the Marktplatz square, Jean Tinguely (in a gas mask) made the lantern explode, and clouds of black smoke, petards, pieces of paper, and feathers came out of it. “It was a huge scandal. The smoke was everywhere. All the other cliques were sooted over, the smoke got under the larvae, everybody was coughing. It was an absolute blasphemy. Do something like that at Fasnacht! There was probably nothing worse they could have done. I was about twelve at the time but I remember the news spreading through Basel that there was an explosion at Marktplatz.”\textsuperscript{101} And the Kuttlebutzer members were giving out pamphlet-obituary notices: “We regret to inform you that in connection with today’s explosion the Fasnachts-Comité was standing on the Marktplatz for the very last time today.”\textsuperscript{102} On the other side of the pamphlet-obituary there was a manifesto informing all fasnächtlers that the square was now cleaned and there was no need to patiently obey the Comité anymore, and that everyone could walk freely through the city during Fasnacht from now on.

The Fasnacht event even had a follow-up at court for violation of safety regulations, though the charges were eventually withdrawn. Traditional fasnächtlers and members of the Fasnachts-Comité were very critical of the action. “They

\textsuperscript{99} Citation from their \textit{Zeedel} (satirical leaflet that every clique is distributing during the Cortège) from 1974, in Robert Hiltbrand (ed.), \textit{Kuttlebutzer Basel 1957–1999}, pages unspecified.


\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Kuttlebutzer Basel 1957–1999}, records from 1974, pages unspecified.

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Kuttlebutzer Basel 1957–1999}, records from 1974, pages unspecified.
should be ashamed. To drag Fasnacht in such dirt.” Yet, some of the traditional cliques reacted positively. “The clique that was passing by in the opposite direction got a full blast. Their tambourmajor (chief drummer) even vomited inside his mask from the smoke. We later sent him a crate of wine. He was great though, he had lunch with us and appreciated what we have done.” You can hear praise of that action even now. “Nobody else took their criticism this far before. Especially at a time when Fasnacht was so much stricter than it is today”, says Werner Kern from the Basler Bebbi clique.

The following year, the Kuttlebutzer even published a book of detailed criticism of the Fasnachts-Comité. “Last year, we blew you up but this year we give you one more chance.” Yet there is a warning in the foreword not to leave the book just lying around “where kids might find it. Otherwise we risk that in ten years’ time they will come asking why nothing has changed.” Among other things they encourage the Comité to abandon autocracy in favour of “Fasnacht democracy”.

The historian Dominik Wunderlin agrees that their motto from the 1963 Fasnacht, „the Kuttlebutzer of today are showing the Fasnacht of tomorrow”, is coming true. He says, “the Kuttlebutzer contributed to changing the direction that Fasnacht took.” The way they were crossing the lines and changing the rules inspired many others, and the Fasnacht of today is much less strict than it used to be. “Their bold anarchistic actions, their musical seriousness and the creative force of their performances has strongly influenced my generation. The dramaturges and artists of both smaller and larger cliques are largely inspired by them, though often unconsciously. I am sure that the Kuttlebutzer still have influence, even today”, says the journalist and active fasnächtler Jürg Bürgi. The important role of the Kuttlebutzer is described also by Benedikt Wyss, curator of one of the contemporary exhibitions on Fasnacht: “They contributed to the de-uniforming of Fasnacht. They inspired people to see that everyone can take part in the creation of satirical topics. It was their example that led many people to leave the main routes and take to the small streets (Gässeln). For me they represent the

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103 Rüesser (pseudonym, meaning “a drummer”, original name of the author not known), “Ihr Name ist Schall und Rauch,” National Zeitung, 10. 3. 1974.
106 Team of authors (ed.), Aufgabebüchlein für das Comité (private publication of Kuttlebutzer: Basel, 1975), 3.
107 Ibid., 13.
Fasnacht I would like. “Sometimes they are praised, sometimes not. According to Felix Rudolf von Rohr, a long-term president of the Fasnachts-Comité, the Kuttelbutzer were “only one group among others. They had much less influence than they imagined.”

6 The Influence of the Wild Fasnacht on the Organized One

The wild fasnächtlers often stress the importance of the creative aspect of wild Fasnacht and its influence on the organized Fasnacht. “All the important new elements come to the structure from the outside, either from the wild Fasnacht, or from other countries” says for example Bernhard Batschelet. This statement might be a little exaggerated, but in many cases, it actually is true, as we will now attempt to demonstrate.

The participation of Guggemuusig, or wind orchestras, is a good example. These music groups initially represented a creative rebellious element that was in contrast with the traditional cliques’ playing on piccolos and drums, and it used to be a part of their tradition to play a little out of tune. During the second half of the 20th century, their numbers increased greatly and they themselves became more professional, and today they often play high quality music and have become a part of the organized Fasnacht. Their rebellion is now only in the fact that they play loudly (so they disrupt the cliques’ music), there are many of them (so they block the calm passage through the streets) and they have huge gaping masks that rarely serve any satirical purpose. The cliques and the piccolo and drum groups often dislike their music and consider wind orchestras primitive, vulgar and a lower form of art.

We have already said that the wild Fasnacht groups do not participate in the afternoon parade called Cortège, organized by the Fasnachts-Comité. Since the

113 For example, interview with Bernhard Batschelet in Basel, 9. 9. 2015, who speaks about ”the mentality of brass bands”, who are “loud, coarse, and do no intelligent satire”.
Guggemuusig groups do participate at Cortège and duly register for it, they can be considered an initially antistructural stream that has over the years become institutionalized and fully integrated in the organized Fasnacht. The wind orchestras have even instituted one more organized parade on Tuesday afternoon (with two big concerts) that has also become part of the organized Fasnacht. With their integration in the organized Fasnacht, the formerly rebellious character has disappeared, and from the point of view of an outsider, the wind orchestra music is now one of the most noticeable and catchy parts of the festival, since they often play well known hits and dance music in highly simplified versions. In 2011, Beat von Wartburg wrote an essay about changes in Fasnacht where he reminds us that as recently as in the fifties, the Guggemuusig groups made out of tune music with painted stove-pipes and garden hoses, and especially that “they made fun of the traditional brass bands that take themselves too seriously. The Guggemuusig of today [...] only care about the musical energy.” The new rebellion that stands against them now are the night jazz improvisation groups like the above mentioned Grand Wazoo or the elegant music of Gueti Fraue.

Beery Batschelet cites another example of the influence of the wild Fasnacht in the area of music. “An important new impulse came from the wild groups in the seventies and eighties. At that time, some piccolo players started improvising directly in the streets, solo or even in their groups, spontaneously adding the upper or lower parts to the traditional pieces.” At first, they were laughed at, but soon “especially the lower pitched melodies became part of the repertoire” and started being successfully published.

Besides innovative impulses in music, the most important influence the wild Fasnacht has had has been the expansion of Gässle, the marching of masked groups through the streets during night and day. Formerly Gässle meant walking in masks after the Cortège ended. Today, it is happening even during the day, parallel to the Cortège, and it continues until the early morning hours. Strolling at anyone’s will in masks at other times than during the organized parade has always been a part of Fasnacht, since the parade originated from masked groups wandering around the city, and continued even after the Cortège was established. “Gässle always existed. This intimate part of the festival was taking place a hundred years ago as well as today.” The difference is that today it is happening on

116 Ibid.
a much larger scale. This is confirmed by the fact that the time when the piccolos and drums had to stop playing in the streets was gradually being pushed to a later and later hour.\textsuperscript{118} In 1938, the police hour was moved from ten to midnight,\textsuperscript{119} then in 1965 it was moved to one in the morning, since 1975 it was allowed to walk and play until four in the morning on Monday (i.e., the night from Monday to Tuesday), and two in the morning on Tuesday. This order was in place until 1997, when the police issued a permission for the entire 72 hours, which means from 4:00 a.m. on Monday to 4:00 a.m. on Thursday. The shifting of the police hour clearly reflects the wishes and needs of the citizens. First, there had to be pressure on the part of the Baslers, so the police would change and then completely eliminate the time limits. It is significant that the main changes were taking place in the sixties and seventies, when the number of wild groups was growing and the masked night walks were gaining popularity.\textsuperscript{120}

The set police hours also created opportunity for revolt. The traditional cliques mostly stopped at the set time, which “left the wild groups in the streets on their own”\textsuperscript{121}. Very often, they would really enrage the police. “We would play the hunters game (\textit{Jääglis}). When it was no longer allowed to play, we would continue. And when the police cars came after us, we would disappear into the narrow streets. In this sense, it is a bit boring today”, adds Beery Batschelet. Today, Gässle fills up all nights, many groups walk until morning. The fact that Gässle is now such an important part of Fasnacht does come, in our opinion, from the influence of the wild Fasnacht that favours the intimate, non-presentational art of experience before all else.

But the influence of the wild Fasnacht is not seen in the introduction of new elements alone. On the basic level, it consists mainly of small innovations that enable the traditional format to be met with more creativity. The Basler Bebbi Basel are a good example. Every year, they put great emphasis on an original and mordant sujet that is artistically and intellectually elaborate and well executed. That is why they are sometimes called (or are calling themselves in their period-

\textsuperscript{118} The following information comes from individual annual volumes of \textit{Kantonsblatt}, a newspaper that has been published twice a week since 1798 by the Basel Stadt canton. Announced here are all upcoming events, legal decrees, town hall meetings summaries, etc.

\textsuperscript{119} The shift always concerned only Monday and Tuesday nights. The beginning of Fasnacht at four in the morning on the night from Sunday to Monday has always been tolerated, as has the close at four in the morning on Thursday. Wednesday night has always been tolerated.

\textsuperscript{120} It needs to be said though that in part, the reasons were also practical. As the wealth of the Baslers grew, more and more people were able to take leave of absence from work during Fasnacht (initially people still went to work during the festival, although for shorter hours, and thus needed to get some sleep at night).

\textsuperscript{121} Bernhard Batschelet, WF – Gueti Fraue, interview in Basel, 9. 9. 2015.
ical Böbberli) Kuttlebutzer successors. “Similarly to the Kuttlebutzer, we are trying to grasp the Zeitgeist, the spirit of the age, and show the conflicts in society, and not only in the local, Basel one. We try to be provocative. But we are a large clique. They were a clique of artists, that is a fundamental difference.” Unlike the Kuttlebutzer, they stay in the organized Fasnacht. They walk the designated route and do not dare, as we have seen, to give up the subvention.

Werner Kern, a Basler Bebbi Basel tambourmajor and lantern designer for many years, says the Kuttlebutzer inspired him greatly. “I think that their participation in Fasnacht is wonderful. I wouldn’t say I have copied anything from them, but their innovations did motivate me to go about the sujets differently. They inspired me to try and incorporate some of their principles into our huge clique.” Werner Kern has been the artistic author of the 1992 sujet El Carton. All (hundred) BBB members made their costumes themselves, out of cardboard. Everyone made their own original and tall cardboard tower, which was a reaction to the building of a huge cardboard tower at the entrance to the Swiss pavilion of Expo ’92 in Sevilla that was meant to represent the Swiss ability to recycle. The whole spectacle was very impressive and is to this day considered visually one of their best. “One Kuttlebutzer member took pictures of us and sent them to us with a commentary. I was delighted by his appreciation,” Werner Kern adds. Making masks yourselves, using recycled material and individualised masks instead of a collective uniformity, are elements of inspiration by the Kuttlebutzer.

The wild Fasnacht groups generally go against the tendencies to “conventionalize” Fasnacht in the sense of the individual participants losing touch with it. The paradoxical problem of rich Baslers can sometimes be “the over-professionalisation of the preparations: the larvae, costumes and lanterns that people don’t make themselves, but have made by others.” Costumes are often made in art shops and the clique members get everything delivered a week before Fasnacht: the so-called “Fasnacht im Sack“ or “Fasnacht in dr Gugge“ (a plastic bag in which you get the ready-made costume). This approach can have a negative effect

123 The only exception was 2010, when they intentionally paraded the topic Illuminati – De liberate non est disputandum outside the set route and did not get a subvention. The next year, they returned to the set route.
127 Marc Wey, WF – Frauenhilfswerk 1833, phone interview, 15. 5. 2018.
on the whole sujet. In comparison, the wild Fasnacht groups resign at getting a
subvention, their costumes are therefore usually simpler and cheaper. They im-
provise more, recycle costumes and use all sorts of different materials. “I had a
colleague who did not even play any instrument, he just made a costume out of
old newspapers and walked in it. It was marvellous.” 128 “When you have less, you
need to be more creative, you have to experiment more and work harder” 129, says
Gabi Streifuss. 130 In this regard, the wild Fasnacht works against the stagnation of
the ritual form, inspiring the participants to always look for ways of refreshing it.

7 Second-Order Liminality

The starting point of our paper has been the question of how rituals are capable of
innovation without losing the aura of traditionality and unchangeability so typi-
cal of ritual activities. As a theoretical framework for conceptualizing ritual
change we have offered the theory of Victor Turner, who finds in ritual the para-
doxical interplay of formalized conservative structure and creative liminal anti-
structure, liking it to a river flowing in-between its firm banks. 131 To what would
the “banks” and the “river” correspond in the Fasnacht? The basic answer is
clear. The “banks” amount to the firm rules described above, adherence to which
is a precondition for registering with the Fasnachts-Comité: the prescribed route
of the Cortège, a clearly defined type of music, marching strictly to its rhythm,
wearing masks covering the entire face, the requirement of having a satirical sub-
ject. The “river” amounts to the creative fulfilment of these rules, which is differ-
et every year: the clique chooses a different subject every year, creating a unique
lantern and masks for it. In this regard, Fasnacht differs from a traditional carni-
val (out of which it originated), in which most masks and motifs are always the
same and it is solely their enactment that is different every year (though even this
level exists in Fasnacht in the form of character masks worn mainly on Tuesday).
The difference is of course even bigger in comparison with rituals on which Roy
Rappaport bases his theory of ritual and which he designates as “liturgical or-

128 Lars Handschin, WF – Grand Wazoo, interview in Prague, 15. 11. 2015.
130 On the economic side of Fasnacht, see in detail the study commissioned by the Fasnachts-
Comité in 2005: Yuko Brodbeck et al., D’Frau Fasnacht in Frangge und Räppli: Untersuchung über
die wirtschaftliche Bedeutung der Basler Fasnacht, https://www.fasnachts-comite.ch/customer/fil-
es/409/fhbb_zahlen-tabellen.pdf [30. 10. 2018].
131 V. Turner, From Ritual to Theatre, 79.
ders”, i.e. “more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances of some duration repeated in specified contexts”\(^{132}\) (the Mass being a classic example).

It would seem that in comparison with the rituals of the “liturgical” type, the space for creativity and ritual change in Fasnacht is huge. Still, we have seen that in itself this is not sufficient to keep Fasnacht flexible and alive. Even such a seemingly creative and unique ritual activity as satirically and symbolically representing current political subjects may easily slip into conventionality: the cliques have their masks designed in professional studios and their members get the ready-made costume a week before (the “Fasnacht Package” mentioned above). Since they have not participated in its creation, it functions for them in the same way as a traditional ritual role that the performers enact but whose parameters—to use Rappaport’s formula\(^ {133}\)—they have not “encoded” themselves. On the one hand, such a situation is perfectly natural for ritual (and may even be seen as constitutive for it, if we follow Rappaport’s definition), on the other, it may easily lead to the “banks without a river” aridity effect pointed out by Turner.\(^ {134}\) Wild Fasnacht is a reaction to this situation and an illustration of the type of instruments that the ritual actors have at their disposal for keeping their rites alive.

In Turnerian terms, wild Fasnacht represents the antistructural dimension of ritual. It is remarkable, though, that while Turner normally sees antistructure as opposed to the established social structure, in the case of Fasnacht, the situation is more complex and calls for a more subtle conceptualization. The antistructure reacting to the social structure is realized by the organized Fasnacht as such, which as a whole offers a liminal space for articulating social conflicts and holding up a satirical mirror to ordinary Basel society. We may designate it as first-order antistructure. The wild Fasnacht plays exactly the same part vis-à-vis the organized Fasnacht, and thus stands for a kind of second-order antistructure: it functions as a carnival within a carnival, turning the antistructural rules of Fasnacht one more time on their head, in this way testing their validity. Whereas carnival satire questions in a regulated manner the common norms of social behaviour, the wild Fasnacht questions even this regulated manner of questioning as such, opening up a space for its reflection and modification.\(^ {135}\)


\(^{133}\) Ibid., 24.

\(^{134}\) V. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 79.

\(^{135}\) As one of the peer reviewers suggested, “second-order liminality” bears some similarity to the concept of “second-order observation” from Luhmann’s system theory, i.e. the reflexive “observation of observation” by which a system observes its own actions and blind spots. Luhmann himself actually sees ritual as a protection against this kind of second-order reflexivity – see his *Soziale Systeme: Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), 613. Yet, as
Victor Turner does not identify such a complex dynamic within liminality, but he does deal with a related problem in case of communitas. In its pure form, he sees it as the existential experience of the immediate communion of human beings which dissolves common social boundaries, allowing otherwise segmentalized individuals to meet in the “total confrontation of human identities”\textsuperscript{136}. However, a communion of this kind cannot be experienced on a long-term basis, and wherever people try to do so (such as in monastic orders), sooner or later they end up instituting firm rules, which are antistructural in contrast to the ordinary social structure, but are nevertheless fully structured themselves. Turner thus distinguishes between “existential or spontaneous communitas”, which is fleeting and unstable in principle, and “normative communitas”, which is institutionalized and in which “existential communitas is organized into a perduring social system”.\textsuperscript{137} Turner does not make this distinction in connection with ritual, but rather with various long-term religious movements that have communitas as their goal. As the case of Fasnacht shows, however, we can see a similar polarity in ritual as well.

Rather than through the elusive concept of communitas, it seems more suitable to conceive this polarity by means of the concept of liminality, which is easier to delimit as the measure in which ritual performance deviates from the standard rules and structures of social behaviour. The deviation is always relative: every ritual performance is structured to some extent, and it is only antistructural in relation to some everyday activity that is regarded as more normal. In this contrast of the normal and the non-normal there flash what Turner would have called “the subjunctive depths of liminality”\textsuperscript{138}, a flickering awareness of the relativity of all structures and of the existence of other possibilities of being. It is here that lies a source of creativity, whether social or ritual. Just as spontaneous communitas, however, these flashes are not easy to maintain for long. The contrast of structure and antistucture as such is insufficient for their recurrent evocation, for after a while it easily turns routine: spontaneous liminality changes into normative liminality, which on account of its stability and predictability loses its provoking strength. If ritual is to retain this strength, its performers need to search for ways to renew spontaneous liminality. Wild Fasnacht is an example of a possible

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} V. Turner, \textit{From Ritual to Theatre}, 83.
way to achieve this: in opposition to the normative liminality of organized Fasnacht, the wild cliques search for ever new structural oppositions by means of which they attempt to reinvigorate the festival.

8 Does This Work for Other Rituals as Well?

One might rightly ask to what extent the model just presented is applicable to rituals in general. After all, the Fasnacht is a very special type of ritual: modern, secular, carnivalesque. We cannot of course deal with other types of ritual in depth here, but even so we will offer at least some basic observations.

First of all, our approach is in line with those scholars of ritual who presuppose that “ritual should be studied in its own right and not be presumed immediately to be constituted through representations of the sociocultural surround that give it life”\(^{139}\). This is not to say “that ritual phenomena exist independently of cultural and social orders”\(^{140}\). But though ritual is inseparably intertwined with socio-cultural orders – religion being one of them –, it is not solely their reflection or instrument but an autonomous phenomenon with interior dynamics of its own. The tension between first-order and second-order liminality may be seen as precisely an illustration of such autonomous ritual dynamics, which we may therefore expect to find in both religious and secular contexts.

Despite this presupposition, it still makes a difference whether ritual is embedded in a traditional religious or a modern secular context. One possible way of characterizing this difference was offered by Turner himself, who made a distinction between \textit{liminal} and \textit{liminoid} phenomena.\(^{141}\) Liminal phenomena tend to predominate in traditional societies in which religion, economy, law, politics, and other cultural domains are essentially interwoven. In effect, they are obligatory for individuals, and are regarded as \textit{work}. Liminoid phenomena, on the other hand, are typical of modern societies with a high degree of individual autonomy and division of labour between different institutions. They thus have to compete with one another for general recognition, and are associated with \textit{leisure}. In this regard, Fasnacht, like most other secular rituals, would be classified as “liminoid”, for participation in it is solely optional. Nevertheless, while this has important consequences for the part Fasnacht plays in the Basel socio-cultural system,

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
    \item \textit{140} Ibid., 3.
    \item \textit{141} See e.g. V. Turner, \textit{From Ritual to Theatre}, 52–55.
\end{itemize}
it does not seem to affect its ritual dynamics, which is still based on a clear ten-
sion between structure and antistructure. One might perhaps suspect that a limi-
noid ritual on account of its recreational nature would be more open to innova-
tion than a liminal rite that is seen as seriously affecting the fate of the entire
community. In fact, however, Fasnacht does not corroborate such a suspicion: it
is much more conservative than e.g. the tribal rituals Turner studied among the
Ndembu, which had no firm rules and allowed for lots of improvisation.

Another possible difference between traditional and modern rituals might be
the greater degree of reflexivity attached to the latter. As one of the peer reviewers
of this text asked: “isn’t it precisely a structural feature of modernity that all in-
vventories of tradition can be questioned, criticised, rejected, or changed always
and by everyone. In this case, the explanandum would not be the ritual, but the
modern age, and how modernity changes our notion of ritual. From this perspec-
tive, one could then ask whether traditional rituals, as Turner had in mind, are
still possible in a modern, obsessively self-reflexive society.” In particular, we
should ask to what extent contemporary Fasnacht displays the characteristics of
what Beck, Bonß and Lau call “reflexive modernization”, namely a second stage
of modernity, which “disenchant and then dissolves its own taken-for-granted
premises”142, questioning, criticizing and changing all inventories of tradition. Is
the wild Fasnacht not a product of this late modern propensity for self-reflexivity
rather than a feature of ritual in general?

There is no doubt that reflexive modernization produces a different attitude
towards ritualizing. As Arfman shows, this “liquid ritualizing” is characterized by
constant innovations, by instability and room for experiments, by adapting elements from other traditions, as well as by giving rise to newly established net-
works of individuals instead of working with pre-existent traditional commu-
nities.143 When e.g. a present-day Dutch Protestant parish organizes an All Souls’
Day celebration, it can no longer rely on a clearly delimited congregation of be-
lievers who have been raised into the traditional practices associated with it. In-
stead, it needs to make the ritual interesting in order to attract the audience, many
of whom are no longer churchgoers themselves. This is achieved, among other
things, by reducing difficult Bible readings and experimenting with more open-

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ended material symbolism that is normally typical of the Roman Catholics. The exact form of the ritual varies from year to year.  

Yet, this is a rather different situation from what we see in the Fasnacht, where a clear, organized structure is confronted by a wild antistructure. In “liquid rituals”, on the other hand, the structure is itself weakened, its “[b]oundaries cease to be given and instead become choices”\(^\text{145}\). The dialectic of structure and antistructure is still there, but these two tendencies now seem to coalesce and cooperate. In this regard, Basel Fasnacht seems still very much embedded in a traditional, non-liquid setting of First Modernity. Its ritualizing is enacted by distinctly delimited cliques, and is bound by well-defined ritual rules. The wild fasnächtlers go against these rules, and the result is a creative tension in which the conservative and the innovative pole are clearly distinguished. In the “liquid” rituals analysed by Afrman, on the other hand, they are fused in mutual cooperation. The same kind of difference can be seen in the kind of groups which perform the rituals: whereas in “liquid” rituals the groups as such drop their firm boundaries and are transformed into loosely formed networks, in Fasnacht the traditional cliques are still clearly delimited, and what we see is rather a flux of individuals switching back and forth between these cliques and the liquid wild groups.

Where the wild Fasnacht is indeed very much modern is in its striving for individual authenticity, creativity and self-expression. As Bernhard Batschelet puts it, the aim of him and other wild fasnächtlers is “to make a different, more interesting and varied Fasnacht. Mainly because we are bored doing the same things over and over and over! ‘Wild’ means mainly more creative, more free”\(^\text{146}\). Against the passive “Fasnacht im Sack” approach, the wild groups endorse the active involvement of each individual in creating his or her mask and costume. Instead of having the masks and costumes collectively uniform, they prefer individualized diversity. In this regard, the wild Fasnacht exemplifies what Massimo Rosati calls “mystical postmodern social practice”, namely the kind of social performance in which “the performer is not respecting a canonical script, not encoded by him or herself, but is trying to invent a script in his or her own voice”\(^\text{147}\). This is the very opposite of the above-mentioned “liturgical” rituals, which are usually taken as a prototype of what ritualizing means, namely performing “more


\(^{146}\) Bernard Batschelet, WF – Gueti Fraue, an e-mail comment on the first draft of this paper, 25. 7. 2019.

or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by
the performers"148.

Yet, this does not mean that the dynamics we have traced in modern Fasnacht
does not apply to traditional liturgical rituals at all. We might rather regard it as
an extreme version of something that in liturgical rituals takes place in more
subtle and less conspicuous ways. As a number of scholars agree, even liturgical
rituals offer space for reflexivity and ritual criticism. In the words of Michael
Stausberg, “reflexivity is part of the very logic of performance of each and every
ritual that is based on some sort of script or prototype”149. For even when the ritual
follows a script, there are many ways of doing so, and the actors may debate
which of them are more effective or appropriate. Frequently, the current way of
performing the ritual is criticised as having degenerated from the ideal way in
which it was conducted in the idealized past.150 In this way, ritual innovations
may be introduced in the name of returning to the “authentic” form of the rite.
Here again, we may see a version of second-order liminality: by confronting the
current ritual structure with its alleged original prototype, the participants at-
tempt to reinvigorate the rite and renew its spontaneous liminality.

As Ronald Grimes stresses, „ritualizing is not incompatible with criticism, nor
is a sense of mystery incompatible with iconoclasm, provided self-critical actions
are embedded in rites themselves, and provided the timing of criticism is carefully
chosen.“151 In most cases, the reflexive criticism is not cognitive but performative.
“Criticism itself can take the form of an action, a gesture. It need not take the form
of an intellectual operation separate from ritual performance.”152 Even in the Fas-
nacht, the primary motivation of the wild fasnächtlers lies not in their critical
thinking about the festival (though many of them do this as well), but in their desire
to act differently, to experience the festival performance in a more authentic way.

To appreciate the similarity between the wild Fasnacht and the more tradi-
tional types of internal ritual criticism, it is important to realize that what we see
in the wild Fasnacht is a graded spectrum of critical practices. At its more radical
end, there are the radical iconoclastic performances of the 1974 Great Explosion
type. These will generally be rare in most ritual traditions, though they may occur

149 Michael Stausberg, “Reflexivity,” 636. For “liturgical reflectivity” see also M. Rosati, “Ritual
Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual, vol. IV: Reflectivity, Media, and Visuality (Wiesbaden:
Hassarowitz Verlag, 2011), 147–162.
152 Ibid.
at crucial points of reform. A good example is the Reformation. As Scribner has shown, while we may see the Reformation primarily as a theological reform, it was in fact largely achieved through a ritual process. “People of the sixteenth century were probably not very theologically educated, but they were certainly well schooled in ritual behaviour. Through various rites and rituals, they learned how the symbolic world was constructed. [...] Through ritual activity, people were constantly building, rebuilding and reshaping their world.”

Accordingly, when Martin Luther started to seriously question this world, ordinary believers appropriated the new world structures by performing them through iconoclastic “acts of reformation”: they were disrupting Catholic rites or parodying them in a carnivalesque counter-liturgy, they were damaging religious symbols such as crucifixes or images of the saints. In this case, the radical iconoclasm was transient only, but in other cases, it could be integrated in the ritual tradition as its permanent part – such as in medieval carnivals, of which modern Fasnacht is a transformation.

Yet, such radical iconoclasm is rare even in the wild Fasnacht. As we have seen, in its most common form it consists of various small innovations, such as subtle changes in music accompaniment or in walking rhythm that the external observer is likely not to notice at all. It is these that may serve as a good example of how ritual criticism works in most ritual traditions. It is important in this regard to see the Fasnacht as a continuum offering a space for both the radical and the subtle types of criticism, both for the creative Kuttlebutzer artists and for “the family of Mr. Müller, which one day decides to celebrate Fasnacht together”.

While the Kuttlebutzer show the basic principle of ritual innovation in its naked form, Mr. Müller illustrates its more common version, in which the deviation from the rules is barely visible, though in effect no less important.

One might wonder whether it is correct to speak of “second-order liminality” in the case of liturgical rituals, which – unlike the carnivalesque Fasnacht – are not based on an inversion and critique of everyday social order, but rather on

154 Another example is the ritual disenchantment built in some initiation traditions, such as the Chihamba healing rite of the Ndembu, in which the secret initiation into the cult of the Kavula spirit culminates when the initiands are ordered to kill Kavula (represented by a blanket-shrouded mortar) by hitting him on his head, only to find out after the blanket has been taken off that there is no Kavula underneath it. Through this iconoclastic act they have been confronted precisely with a “second-order liminality”, i.e. with the realization that even the ritual categories as such are but another type of structure transcended by the true “depths of liminality”. See Victor Turner, Chihamba, the White Spirit: A Ritual Drama of the Ndembu (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962).
creating a stronger, unchangeable version of order. Where do we find “first-order liminality” in these? Here, it is good to remember that while in the Ritual Process Turner only applied the concept of liminality to those rites that involve a direct inversion or dissolution of structure (such as rites of passage), in his later work he extended it to all rituals worthy of the term. What he meant, presumably, is that even when rituals create order, the order is of a special, sacred kind that transcends the ordinary orders of human social world. To put it in Rappaport’s terms, liturgical rituals create “an apparently eternal meta-order within which social orders themselves may be transformed”, one that can “not only sanctify any institution while being bound to none but can also sanctify changes in institutions”. It is this “transcendent” quality of liturgical rituals that gives them a liminal, reflexive quality, “that subjective as if that allows us to look at the world around us as a conjunctural, namely not necessary, matter of fact, as an is criticisable in the light of a subjunctive might be”. The liturgical order even transcends all the particular ritual acts through which it is expressed, and it is this that allows for the emergence of second-order liminality, i.e., of internal ritual criticism.

9 Conclusion

At the beginning of our paper, we have observed that rituals create in their actors the impression of being unchangeable and traditional, though they evidently do change and develop. As Grimes comments, if we wish to take seriously both of these poles, we need to reconsider the concept of tradition. “Tradition must be understood not merely as cultural inertia but also as a mode of active construction.”

Basel Fasnacht illustrates what such a flexibly conceived tradition consists in. We have shown that the carnival as such represents a reflexive liminal counterpart to the standard social structure, yet it is itself also highly structured and bound by conservative traditional rules. As a reaction to this, there arises within

156 See e.g. V. Turner, From Ritual to Theatre, 79–85.
158 Ibid., 233.
159 M. Rosati, “Ritual and Reflectivity in the Sociological Discourse on Modernity,” 170. The same conclusion may be reached if we read liminality as “virtuality”, i.e. as “self-contained imaginal space [...] that enables participants to break free from the constraints or determinations of everyday life, and even from the determinations of the constructed ritual virtual space itself”; see Bruce Kapferer, “Virtuality,” in J. Kreinath, J. Snoek and M. Stausberg, eds., Theorizing Rituals, 671–684, 673.
Fasnacht a „second-order” liminality in the form of the wild Fasnacht, which challenges even the official antistructural Fasnacht rules, opening space for its reflection and modification. It is the dialectics of structure and antistucture on both of its levels that keeps its ritual tradition alive and allows it to subtly shift without either suffering a radical revolution or becoming an external empty shell, maintained solely as a tourist show or due to cultural inertia. Jürg Bürgi summarizes this fittingly in his commentary to the 2013 Kuttlebutzer exhibition in Museum Tinguely: „Without a certain measure of arrogance with which the Kuttlebutzer attacked seemingly old traditions, today’s Fasnacht would be no more than ossified folklore.”

It is not yet clear how the recent inscription of Fasnacht onto Unesco’s list of intangible heritage in December 2017 will affect the situation – whether it will reinforce the conservative and museumish sides of Fasnacht, or whether it will provoke an even bigger revolt wave.


162 A crucial part in the inscription has been played by the ethnologist Dominik Wunderlin (OF – Rumpelclique) and the former head of the Fasnachts-Comité Felix Rudolf von Rohr (OF – Opti-Mischte, Alti Garde), who have both been quoted several times in our paper.