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COLOGNE CARNIVAL’S 'ALTERNATIVE' STUNKSITZUNG: CARNIVALIZATION? META-CARNIVAL? OR BAKHTINIAN RESTORATION?

by

ERIK ABBOTT

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

COLOGNE CARNIVAL’S 'ALTERNATIVE' STUNKSITZUNG: CARNIVALIZATION? META-CARNIVAL? OR BAKHTINIAN RESTORATION?

by

ERIK ABBOTT

Advisor: Professor Marvin Carlson

In the 1820s, Carnival in Cologne, Germany, underwent a series of reforms, ostensibly to bring the festival back to the people. Among the traditions that developed was the Sitzung, a theatrical variety-show event, with music, comic speeches and sketches, dance troupes, and various additional Carnival-related entertainments. The shows, and Carnival itself were, and largely have been since that time, mostly overseen by a Festival Committee and the official Carnival Societies it recognizes.

In 1984, a group of mostly students decided to create their own version of a Sitzung, an alternative version, the Stunksitzung. From three inaugural performances, it has grown to presenting over forty performances a year to sell-out crowds of one thousand people per night and to being a popular annual television event.

This dissertation considers the history of the Stunksitzung within a frame of Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on Carnival. I examine over two-dozen performance pieces of the Ensemble, and compare and situate the production and its history within Cologne Carnival, in particular the broader dichotomous status of the official versus the alternative, interrogating how alternative the production is, has been, and continues to be. Ultimately, I frame the Stunksitzung within the larger context of Carnival and the particular status it holds in Cologne.
Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to my Committee, particularly my advisor, Marvin Carlson, for the guidance and patience over this long journey.

Additionally, I owe a big debt of gratitude to all of the members of the Stunksitzung Ensemble, past and present, for the access I was granted, the insight and perspectives that were offered, for their extraordinary generosity, and of course for all the laughter. I extend a special thanks to Hans Kieseier for his friendship and support.
For Dena
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Chapter 1

“Introduction: Carnival Chaos/Bakhtinian Order”

In From Ritual to Theatre, Victor Turner writes: “By means of such genres as theatre, … performances are presented which probe a community’s weaknesses, call its leaders to account, desacralize its most cherished values and beliefs, portray its characteristic conflicts and suggest remedies for them, and generally take stock of its current situation in the known ‘world.’”¹ These processes of probing and calling, of desacralization, of portrayal, and of taking stock are also manifested in Carnival in Cologne, Germany, an event that is itself at once party and celebration, festival and performance. The latter is exemplified in the literal sense of theatrical performance in the Carnival Sitzung, a tradition that has developed in Germany in the last two centuries as a theatrical expression of Carnival. Carnival itself—a swirling performative mélange of parades, costumes, music, and traditions found in numerous cultures—has been described by Peter Burke as “the example par excellence of the festival as a context for images and texts.”² In examining the Sitzung, a discrete theatrical tradition within Carnival, I shall focus primarily on literal performances of and within the festival. For the purposes of illustration, however, I will secondarily consider carnivalistic/carnivalesque performances that fall outside of Carnival—in particular, film and television performances. These secondary foci will be present mostly in the fourth chapter. Critical to understanding all of the theatrical and performative events will be the interrogation of Carnival itself, including Burke’s framing of it “as a context for images and

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¹ Victor Turner, From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play (New York: PAJ
texts.” In particular, the specific object of study here will be Cologne Carnival’s “alternative” Sitzung, the Stunksitzung.

To situate the Stunksitzung within Cologne Carnival and to understand that positioning—in other words, to determine where and how it fits into Peter Burke’s vision—it is crucial to undertake a critical interrogation of Carnival in Cologne within the context of Carnival as a phenomenon on a broader scale. This study shall rely upon the application of the work of a number of critics, theorists, and historians to posit a theoretical lens through which the Stunksitzung individually, the Sitzungen as a theatrical form generally, and indeed Carnival as an event can be examined. Although Carnival, the Sitzungen, and the Stunksitzung are, as phenomena, too complex to be explicated by any single theorist, these efforts shall nevertheless be framed around the work of the primary figure in the development of this genre of critical analysis and thought, Mikhail Bakhtin.

Arguably, any study of any aspect of Carnival should engage in interpretation and application of the work on Carnival of Bakhtin; however, it must be acknowledged that such engagement treads, perhaps appropriately, upon contested ground. As Caryl Emerson notes in *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin*, the original Carnivalist’s “legacy has been claimed on all sides.” Furthermore, Carnival occupies, in academic terms, the crossroads of anthropology (including folklore), cultural studies, literary theory, and, to make the stew truly liminal, performance and theatre studies. A vital task then will be to disseminate Bakhtin’s initial published thinking on Carnival, as well as the interpretations of them from those who followed—

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and to sort out how it fits into this study of a particular slice of a slice of a particular Carnival that is far removed from the Rabelaisian Medieval “carnivalesque” of Bakhtin.

Elsewhere I have written that Bakhtin’s “theories on Carnival serve as the ‘fulcrum’ of contemporary Carnival studies.” Indeed, Bakhtin stands as the Colossus of Carnival studies, due primarily to his book, *Rabelais and His World*, published in English in 1968 (and only in Russian in 1965, although it was originally written in the 1930s). It is Bakhtin therefore whose work must frame the central arguments of this study. Those arguments will be rooted in *Rabelais and His World*—as should any contemporary discussion of Carnival. I shall, however, also seek to broaden and deepen that argument beyond *Rabelais* and to contextualize Carnival, and by extension the Sitzungen in general and the Stunksitzung in particular, within Bakhtin’s wider work, especially that which focuses on “speech genres,” and on literary analysis—especially the novel.

Although at first glance Bakhtin’s work may seem to focus only on linguistics and literary criticism, I submit that there is no more appropriate lens for this particular theatrical production, the artists associated with it, the theatrical form in which they are working, and the broader festival/event in which the work has developed and in which it appears. This study will include examples of how Bakhtin’s work has been applied routinely and broadly well beyond


literary and linguistic concerns. I shall in particular consider how his work on the novel has been interpreted as something far more than the ostensible clarification and classification of a genre of fiction, and how those interpretations have opened up avenues of investigation that will be applied in this study.

To begin laying the theoretical foundations upon which this dissertation shall be constructed, I return to Peter Burke, this time in his 2004 book *What is Cultural History?*, where he writes that

the equally interesting ideas put forward by Bakhtin about speech genres and about different voices that can be heard in a single text—what he calls “polyphony,” “polyglossia,” or “heteroglossia”—have attracted relatively little attention outside the literary world. This is a pity, since it is surely illuminating to approach Carnival, for example, as the expression of a number of different voices—playful and aggressive, high and low, male and female—rather than reducing it to a simple expression of popular subversion.  

Certainly no study of any aspect of Carnival would be complete (or even possible) without considering to what extent it is “a simple expression of popular subversion.” Still, Burke’s larger point that Carnival might be more thoroughly “illuminated” through a consideration of its “many [Bakhtinian] voices” is a solid one and underscores what will be a central element of the

analytical approach in this study. The aim shall be one of determining the complexity rather than
the simplicity of any assumed or performed subversion, as well as an attempt to contextualize
Carnival within Bakhtin’s theories of speech genres, both written and oral. (I submit that stage
speech is an amalgam of both.) This, to demonstrate that Carnival, like speech genres, is
comprised, in Bakhtin’s terminology, of “utterances.”

Furthermore, I shall seek to understand and engage with Carnival in Cologne—including
the overtly theatrical Sitzungen and the alternative Stunksitzung—as both individual
“utterances,” as well as collections of utterances. These collections operate in conjunction with
and in response/opposition to one another, and in conjunction with and in response/opposition to
the utterances and collections of utterances of previous Carnivals in Cologne. This elaborate
ongoing connection between utterances and collections of utterances form what Bakhtin termed a
“chain of communication.” Each utterance—any “concrete utterance,” Bakhtin submits—“is a
link in the chain of speech communication of a particular sphere.” I will argue that Sitzung
performances—all Sitzung performances—are utterances within the “sphere” of Carnival, which
is itself a collection of utterances, and I will seek to define how these various utterances interact
and inter-react. For utterances, Bakhtin insists,

are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they
are aware of and mutually reflect one another… Each utterance is

7. Mikhail Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” in Speech Genres and Other Late Essays,
Vern W. McGee, trans., Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, eds. (Austin: University of Texas
of Bakhtin’s ideas on the utterance, see Emerson and Holquist, introduction to Bakhtin, Speech
Genres, xv-xvii.
9. Ibid., 91.
filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it 
is related by the communality of the sphere… Every utterance 
must be regarded as a response to preceding utterances of the 
given sphere… Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and 
relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow 
takes them into account.\textsuperscript{10}

This “response” mode is key to unpacking and interrogating the dynamics of the relationship 
between the so-called official of Cologne Carnival and the so-called alternative, the latter most 
noticeably exemplified by the Stunksitzung.

Bakhtin’s notion of, in essence, one generation of utterances responding to and being 
shaped by others, is an ideal analytical tool for a theatrical form, theatre being, as many have 
noted, a complex, memory-infused art form. Marvin Carlson, in his book \textit{The Haunted Stage}, 
writes of theatre as “the repository of cultural memory,” noting however that, “like the memory 
of each individual, it is also subject to continual adjustment and modification as the memory is 
recalled in new circumstances and contexts.”\textsuperscript{11} This “continual adjustment and modification” 
mirrors and comprises in no small part Bakhtin’s ongoing responsiveness of utterances—in this 
case in the general sphere of Carnival and within the specific sphere of a theatrical event. As 
Carnival is played out year after year, the memories and traditions are contested and revised—
only, ironically, in the guise of preservation. The tension and interaction and response between 
the utterances of the memory of what will be referred to in this study as the “official” and the

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
memory of what will be referred to as “alternative” shape and inform the “the present experience.” Carlson writes that this “present experience” is “always ghosted by previous experiences and associations while these ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the processes of recycling and recollection.”

Understanding the “present experience” of Carnival in Cologne will necessitate attempting to understand these “always ghosted… previous experiences and associations.” This effort to forge a historical and critical analysis of Carnival carries with it the attendant weight of crafting a narrative—of starting at some point in history. The narrative must begin somewhere—or rather a narrative must be chosen and that narrative must begin somewhere. Part of the task here then is to provide a narrative of Carnival, with particular emphasis on Carnival in Cologne and to interrogate assumptions of that narrative. Or perhaps more accurately, part of the task here is to construct a narrative which considers and interrogates the existing competing narratives of Carnival. I submit that grappling with Carnival’s many contested narratives—while recognizing they too are constructions—is critical to understanding it. My purpose therefore in constructing what may be read as this study’s own grand narrative of Carnival is to confront those existing contested narratives in order to frame a single theoretical narrative. Within this study’s narrative, the specific manifestations of Carnival in Cologne, particularly as they relate to the Sitzungen and the Stunksitzung, may then be situated. Finally, the theatrical manifestation of Carnival, the Sitzung, and specifically the Stunksitzung can be employed as models back through which Carnival may be filtered and examined. As examples in constructing this grand Carnival narrative, I shall consider two primary contrasting narratives, the folkloric, and the Roman

12. Ibid.
origins, and will frame both within a broader context of the ongoing idealized visions that weave throughout Carnival’s contested histories.

However, before turning to that task, it is important to consider further the implications of the relationships between Carnival participants, including that between “performers” and “audience.” For in re-shaping Carnival memory, Sitzung audience members almost become performers themselves, approaching Bakhtin’s description of (wider) Carnival as “not know[ing] footlights… not acknowledge[ing] any distinction between actors and spectators.”¹³ Julia Kristeva’s essay “Word, Dialogue, and Novel,” in which she analyzes Bakhtin’s work, states that “a Carnival participant is both actor and spectator; he loses his sense of individuality, passes through a zero point of carnivalesque activity and splits into a subject of the spectacle and an object of the game.”¹⁴ Kristeva continues: “The scene of the Carnival, where there is no stage, no ‘theatre,’ is thus both stage and life, game and dream, discourse and spectacle.”¹⁵ The audience becomes an integral part of the “context for the images and texts” of the performance and of Carnival. The Sitzung audience, like, I submit, any theatre audience, receives and responds in a Bakhtinian exchange of utterances, “filled with dialogic overtones,” which “must be taken into account.”¹⁶ The “object,” what might be termed the content of the performance, “has already been articulated, disputed, elucidated, and evaluated in various ways”—before the performance, before the performers “speak” their utterance(s). Therefore, the audience engages in an

¹³. Bakhtin, Rabelais, 7.
¹⁵. Ibid., 79.
exchange, the content of which is contingent upon its prior engagement with the exchange, and, as Bakhtin would have it (because of the “anticipation” of response and of a particular response), even upon future engagements and future utterances.\(^\text{17}\)

The audience comes to the performance with culturally specific—that is, culturally historic, culturally ghosted—expectations about those utterances and images and texts and about the event it is to witness and in which it is to participate. These culturally historic, culturally ghosted expectations carry the weight of Carnival’s various contested narratives and therefore shape the audience’s participation. This participation may also be considered in part an act of ghosting as generations of audiences have similarly participated at Sitzung performances in the past. (Indeed, I will, in chapter two, consider briefly how the Stunksitzung audiences in effect ghost themselves from year to year even as the Ensemble in turn utilizes an internal intertextuality, which may be read as its own act of ghosting.) Susan Bennett’s clarification of the differences between theorizing “literary, as well as… filmic text” is applicable when she writes, “In much contemporary theatre the audience becomes a self-conscious co-creator of performance.”\(^\text{18}\) Kristeva and Bakhtin would argue that this is true in Carnival generally and it is certainly true to a significant degree in a Sitzung. The audience at a Sitzung and how its utterances respond to those before and what utterances it expects in response demonstrate that “theatre as a cultural commodity is probably best understood as the result of its conditions of production and reception.”\(^\text{19}\) The collected experiences, knowledge, references, and memories of

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 93-94.


\(^{19}\) Ibid., 114.
those in attendance—in this case the collected experiences, knowledge, references, and memories of Carnival in Cologne—shape the production and reception and expectations of the audience in what Pierre Bourdieu terms “cultural capital.”

As many of the larger official Sitzungen are broadcast, the experiences, knowledge, references, and memories of the physically present audiences—some thousands—are multiplied many times over when the tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of television viewers are factored in.

Of course any theatrical audience participates in a similar give-and-take with the performers and performance. All live performance is easily and appropriately categorized as using Bakhtin’s notions of utterances and responses to utterances within a chain of communication. Each is fraught with the same sense of participation in a dialogic encounter. (Indeed, a similar dynamic is discernible in the various role reversals and merriments of Carnival throughout its histories.) What then, distinguishes the Carnival Sitzungen from other theatrical performances or from theatrical forms associated with Carnival that pre-date the Sitzungen (e.g., the Carnival Plays of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Germany)? What about performance forms in Carnival celebrations of other cultures? The form, according to Christina Frohn, dates to the early years of the Carnival Reforms in Cologne:

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In those first three years [1823-1825] the basic foundational structures of the organized Cologne Carnival that we still know today had already been formed: the Carnival Sitzungen, the costumed parade on Carnival Monday, as well as the great masked ball in the Gürzenich hall.  

A Sitzung audience would most likely have seen and will still most likely see—or would have experienced or will experience or would have engaged in or will engage in—the performance in a large hall rather than a more traditional fixed seating theatre space. The atmosphere is festive, resembling a party—even a street party, deliberately reflecting Carnival’s street party character—more than a theatrical event, with the audiences usually at least partially costumed (erasing in Bakhtinian/Kristevan fashion even further the boundary between performance and observer). These legions are Carnival fans, celebrants, and participants from throughout much of what might, at least culturally, be termed “Catholic Germany.”

It is not the intention here to dissect the degrees of difference between Carnival traditions region to region—some areas, for


23. Historically, Catholicism has dominated the west and south of Germany, Protestantism the east and north. I use the phrase “Catholic Germany” as my own loose geographic term referring to the states North Rhine-Westphalia, Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, the Rhineland Palatinate, and the Saarland. In 2008, the Goethe Institut reported Catholic vs. Protestant membership in Germany as roughly thirty percent each. Thirty percent is non-denominational, with the rest divided between Islam, Judaism, etc. See Steffen Rink, “Religions in Germany,” trans. Ani Jinpa Lhamo, The Goethe Institut website (updated October 2013, accessed 28 April 2014), http://www.goethe.de/ges/phi/ein/en23778.htm.
example, follow much more the Swiss tradition. My specific focus instead shall be traditions of
Cologne within a broader context of the Rhineland. These traditions include the Sitzungen.24

In 1997, Frank and Jörg Fleischer compiled the first edition of *Dat wor et... Die Kölsche
Sessions-Chronik*, an annual chronicle of Cologne Carnival. (From 2001 to 2011, Tewes worked
with Heribert Rösgen on the publication. The 2012 and 2013 editions were produced by Tewes
and Heike Reinarz.) A cursory read through any annual edition of the *Dat wor et...* reveals
dozens of visual examples and written descriptions of Sitzungen from the given year’s “Carnival
Session.”25 For example, by my count the 2013 edition reveals that over 350 Sitzungen and
Carnival Balls were presented during the 2012-2013 Session by more than 180 “Carnival
Societies” (Karnesvalsgesellschaften) and fifty Church Parish Societies between New Year’s
Day and “Carnival Tuesday” (Karnevalsdienstag), 12 February.26 Several school Sitzungen
(Schulsitzungen) are also described, including one citywide school Sitzung (Gesamtstädtische
Schulsitzung). These numbers represent only a very small fraction of actual school Sitzungen, as
sixty schools are listed in the index with the Carnival Societies and Church Parishes.27 Likewise
the reported number of parish Sitzungen is almost certainly not comprehensive. Indeed, in the

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24. The Sitzung has spread throughout German regions that celebrate Carnival, with the
exception of places (such as the Black Forest area) where the practices mirror Swiss traditions.
25. Called the “Carnival Session” (“Karnevalssession”), the full Carnival season runs from 11
November (“Elften Elften”—the “eleventh [day] of the eleventh [month]”) through Shrove
Tuesday.
26. Frank Tewes and Heika Reinarz, *Dat wor et... 2013: Die Kölsche Sessions-Chronik*, Band 17
206-207. Editions of *Dat wor et...* will hereafter be cited in text as Tewes and
Fleischer/Rösgen/Reinarz [as applicable], *Dat wor et...*[applicable year]. Karnevalsdienstag is
called “Faschingsdienstag” or “Fastnachtsdienstag” in other German-speaking Carnival regions.
Carnival Tuesday or Shrove Tuesday (or in, for example, the Gulf Coast of the United States,
Mardi Gras), is the last day of Carnival, the day before Ash Wednesday and the start of Lent.
27. Ibid., 175-79, 208.
inaugural edition of Dat wor et... in 1997, Tewes and Fleischer put the number of productions well above my count, reporting in their introduction that “over 600 Sitzungen set the mood in the Carnival halls of Cologne.” These numbers represent only Sitzungen in Cologne and only Sitzungen presented as a part of what will in this study be referred to as official Carnival—those events and performances sponsored by registered Karnevalsgesellschaften, or by parishes, schools, neighborhoods (“Veedels”), and villages. Dat wor et... does not tally the numerous independently produced Carnival Sitzungen—both non-commercial and commercial, including those that have been labeled alternative, whether by their producers and performers and/or their audiences and/or the media and/or a combination of all of the above. This last group, those collectively assigned membership in the “alternative Carnival,” particularly includes the main focus here, the Stunksitzung. Of necessity the competing notions of official and alternative, as well as an attempt to clarify the terms, will be central to this discussion.

The thousands of Sitzung performances that are presented every Carnival season frame German Carnival’s theatre and cement it and its many utterances as an integral part of the celebration. It is in Cologne, both the historical and proudly self-proclaimed epicenter of the German Carnival celebrations, where their impact and omnipresence have most been felt.

This designation of Cologne as the center of Carnival is crucial to understanding the theatrical phenomenon of the Sitzung on a historical level and the cultural shockwave that resulted from the Stunksitzung’s co-option, parody, and satirization of the form. It is in Cologne

29. “Veedel” is Kölsch for the Hochdeutsch word “Viertel,” and means “quarter” or “neighborhood.”
that the Sitzung first developed, and it is in Cologne that Carnival—*as it is celebrated in much of contemporary Germany*—really began. Its traditions today are largely the present-day descendents of traditions that began in the 1820s in Cologne.

Cologne, with its innumerable Karnevalsgesellschaften, culturally wraps itself in Carnival, boasting that no other place quite understands how to celebrate the festival—*as it ought to be celebrated.* Former Cologne Mayor Fritz Schramma played, as Mayor, a traditional honored role in the festivities of “official” Carnival, and through the years has been a frequent target of Stunksitzung ridicule. Observe how Schramma, writing in his prior capacity as city officer and honored officiate, elevates Cologne’s historical importance regarding Carnival to an almost divine calling:

> Who else has it as good as we Cologners? In addition to the other usual four, the year *bestows upon us* a fifth season: the Carnival. I certainly do not exaggerate when I say that Cologne is the stronghold of Carnival in Germany, because *nowhere else does anyone* celebrate so merry and boisterous a Carnival as here with us in Colonia.

Note Schramma’s invocation of the common Rhineland designation of Carnival as “the fifth season.” Cologne, Schramma urges us to believe, and *only* Cologne somehow merits this extra magical time. The implication is that this special magical time in and for Cologne is liminal, that

is, in Victor Turner’s words, that it “elicits loyalty and is bound up in one’s membership or desired membership in some highly corporate group.”

The “membership or desired membership” in question is, in effect, that of being “Kölscher”—that is, being a “Kölner” (citizen of Cologne, “Kölle” in the local dialect), or at the very least a true “Jeck” (Carnival celebrant, or more literally, “jester” or “fool”). Turner himself would likely have considered it “liminoid,” which he associated more with play: “One works at the liminal, one plays with the liminoid.” He acknowledges that, “in complex modern societies both types coexist in a sort of cultural pluralism.” Indeed he lists Mardi Gras (Carnival’s name along the United States Gulf Coast and other areas with strong Francophone roots) as one of “all kinds of ‘free’ liminoid entertainments and performances,” while noting that they “already have something of the stamp of the liminal upon them,” as “quite often they are the cultural debris of some forgotten liminal ritual.”

Certainly the Kölner and Schramma would argue that Carnival is valued heritage rather than “cultural debris.” However, the special regard in which Carnival time is held—or in which it is portrayed—suggests both the liminoid and the liminal at work in Cologne’s “fifth season.”

(In chapters two, three, and four, I will explore further various ways time is carnivalized in Carnival and in other carnivalistic or carnivalesque performative forms.)

Consider another quote, from Schramma’s preface to the 2009 edition of Dat wor et…:

“To the beautiful customs of our city belongs the Carnival.”

(He wrote the preface to every

31. V. Turner, Ritual to Theatre, 55.
32. Ibid.
33. Fritz Schramma, “Grußwort,” in Tewes and Rösgen, Dat wor et…2009, 5. “Zu den Brauchtümern unserer Stadt gehört der Karneval.” Emphasis added. At my proposal defence at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York in April 2007, Dr. Frank Hentschker (Executive Director, Martin E. Segal Theatre Center), a German native, observed that Cologne
edition of *Dat wor et...* during his tenure as mayor—fall 2000 to fall 2009. His successor, Jürgen Roters, wrote the 2010-2013 versions.) A couple of sentences further along in his 2009 preface, in reference to the Session’s motto, “Our Carnival—heavenly revels,” he adds: “After all, *our* Carnival is like a gift of heaven; it still stands for pure *joie de vivre*.” These utterances speak volumes not only about Schramma, but about Cologne itself. For the city’s cultural attachment to its history, its deep devotion to Carnival, and the inextricable way these strands are woven together form the city’s collective and carefully constructed identity. This identity is layered in and crafted from tradition, which, to use Eric Hobsbawm’s term, is itself “invented.”

Mirroring Hobsbawm, John Storey observes, “The roots and routes of identity are staged and performed in...”

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culture and with culture.” Schramma, standing in for all of Cologne, and writing as its personification, is a stalwart defender of the city’s culture. Note his scolding tone when arguing for the preservation and recognition of the traditions of the past:

Tradition and custom are not exactly highly valued today. One could almost even think we had no past. The message seems to be quite obvious: only the future matters, because in the past there was not much that was worth preserving. I see it differently. I deem it as very important to care for traditions and customs. The past is the foundation of our culture and our identity.

Yet the glorious past that Schramma invokes, in terms of the specific practices of Cologne Carnival, is not so very old—most of the traditions date no further back than the 1820s. As Hobsbawm writes: “‘Traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented.” This study shall consider the extent to which even the presumed historical narratives of Carnival are likewise “invented,” even as the study itself is arguably dependent upon its own constructed—“invented”—narrative. This study shall examine how the contemporary Carnival in Cologne, in both its “official” and “alternative” iterations, clings to the invented historical narratives, and will interrogate the importance of their grasp.

Schramma is of course far from the first Kölner to romanticize Carnival time as something that is somehow outside of and superior to normal time. In 1854, Carnivalist and Carnival chronicler Anton Fahne wrote that Caesarius of Heisterbach, in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, had taken note of a “time of delirium” just before Lent for the “men of Cologne.”\footnote{Anton Fahne, Der Carneval, mit Rücksicht aus verwandte Erscheinungen: Ein Beitrag zur Kirchen- und Sitten-Geschichte (Cologne and Bonn: J.M. Heberle/H. Lempers, 1854. Reprinted Vaduz, Liechtenstein: Sändig Reprint Verlag/Hans R. Wohlend, 1994), 155. Hereafter cited as Fahne, Carneval.} Though Caesarius was possibly referring to an alcohol-induced delirium, Fahne’s tone nevertheless suggests that by the time he celebrated Carnival in the nineteenth century, the festival had already been regarded as a special, magical time for more than half a millennium. This sense of the magic and specialness of Carnival is evident throughout the narratives of Carnival’s histories and influences its present-day manifestations, including those which subvert the utopian, nostalgic vision (or are accused of/credited with subverting it) such as the Stunksitzung.

One hundred and fifty years after Fahne’s account, in 1984, a tradition that Fahne had seen inaugurated\footnote{Ibid., 169, 172-7.}—the theatrical form of the Sitzung—was confronted and its boundaries challenged. A new tradition emerged, an alternative tradition, invented from the previously invented one. On the twenty-sixth of February, four days before official Carnival opened (Thursday, the first of March), on the Studio Bühne stage on the campus of the University of Cologne, the Stunksitzung, the so-called alternative\footnote{Kölner Stadt Anzeiger, February 28, 1984. Quoted in Reiner Rübhausen and the Stunksitzung Ensemble, eds., Stunksitzung (Cologne: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch [Kiwi], 2004), 13. Hereafter cited as Rübhausen, et al., Stunksitzung. See also Michael Euler-Schmidt,} Sitzung, premiered. Approximately 300
people were in attendance. A second performance followed, and a third—added because of audience demand—closed the run on the twenty-eighth. A movement was spawned—the “so-called alternative Carnival in the hall.” The assumed dichotomies of Carnival and, with them, Cologne’s identity, forged in and with Carnival, would be subtly changed with a new oppositional alternative. The Sitzung would never again be the same, nor would the utterances of Carnival in Cologne. I submit, however, that this new invention—this new alternative—represented a restoration to its true parodic, impudent, mocking origins. Consider Hobsbawn’s explanation of how traditions are invented—how they develop:

“Invented tradition” is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.

I shall argue how the traditional Sitzungen as a theatrical form within Carnival and how Carnival itself follow Hobsbawn’s pattern and how the Stunksitzung, in co-opting and subverting the form, has also followed the pattern. Further, I will consider how traditional Carnival and the

44. Rübhausen, et al., Stunksitzung, 13.
Stunksitzung have both flowed from and within specific ideologies, which Hobsbawm indicates is crucial to the invention of a tradition as opposed to a “custom.”

But what was it, precisely, that was altered and challenged? What is a Sitzung? Wolfgang Schmitz’s description of the first Stunksitzung also provides a useful overview of the “well-worn forms” of a traditional Sitzung: “‘Elferrat’ with President, a stage program with sketches and music, a seating arrangement conducive to ‘schunkeln’ in the hall.” Schmitz, writing in 1991, was examining what was still a rather brief Stunksitzung history. The appellation alternative was assumed and unquestioned, the intention of the Ensemble members—or “Stunkers”—in their co-option and re-invention of tradition equally clear: “to make snotty impudent fun” of the Sitzungen and, by extension, Carnival.

Schmitz offers a short description of what any audience might expect in viewing any Sitzung: the audience sits at long tables set perpendicular to the stage apron and on benches (that can be straddled when it is time to schunkeln). The performance is emceed by the “President” of the sponsoring Karnevalsgesellschaft (or Verein). The President (historically a man, though more recently, sometimes—as in the case of the Stunksitzung—a woman) is surrounded by the Elferrat, or Council of Eleven. The Elferrat sit onstage, watching, serving as audience and non-audience, spectator and performer, their “performance” representing a pinnacle to which a true Carnival celebrant might aspire. (Being the Prince of Carnival is the highest honor—at least to

48. Ibid., 2-4.
49. Schmitz, Stunk, 8. “Festgefahrenen Formen.”
50. Ibid. “…Elferrat mit Präsident, Nummernprogramm mit Musik auf der Bühne, schunkelfreundliche Sitzanordnung im Saal…” “Schunkeln” means to sway rhythmically, e.g. in time to music, with linked arms or with hands on shoulders of the person in front.
51. Ibid. “Um daraus einen rotzig-frechen Spaß zu machen.”
which a *male* Carnival celebrant can aspire.)*52

Central to understanding Carnival in Cologne is navigating the almost heroic mythos which infuses it and interrogating the historical and historiographic claims that have generated and shaped that mythos. For example, in 1997, Peter Fuchs, Max-Leo Schwering, Klaus Zöller, and Wolfgang Oelsner published *Kölner Karneval: Seine Bräuche, seine Akteure, seine Geschichte* to celebrate 175 years of the Festival Committee of Cologne Carnival.53 This reverential—official—tome is part of an ongoing effort to “inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past”—that is, Hobsbawm’s “suitably historic past.”54 The symbolic distance between the alternative and the official Carnival(s) in Cologne is appropriately viewed as a struggle over which has the more legitimate claim to that “suitably historic past.” This study will consider the extent to which partisans of both *have portrayed themselves or have been portrayed* as the true guardians or destructors of the legacy—and the extent to which each cooperates with or contests the other’s portrayal(s). Both have peddled their interpretation of the legacy—the mythos. Both clearly profit from its continuance and both are deeply vested in that continuance: the official and the alternative very much need one another.

These attempts to shape, define, and own the perception and reception of Carnival’s presumed legacies demonstrate the utopian visions which are woven throughout Carnival

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52. There is much to explore regarding gender roles within Cologne Carnival, both on historical and theoretical levels. The scope of this study will permit only a cursory analysis—to the extent that these issues are directly relevant to the main themes.
narratives. The terms utopian and mythos are not chosen lightly; I submit that such rhetoric is appropriate for the idealism that surrounds Carnival. Michael Gardiner contends that “whilst utopia can be co-opted or utilized by officialdom, many radical theoreticians continue to insist that particular forms of utopian discourse can function in a more oppositional and subversive manner.”55 This consideration of the tension between official Carnival and alternative Carnival will therefore be partially framed around these competing utopian visions of Carnival and the extent to which both sides have or have not “co-opted or utilized” them to their own purposes. In consideration and interrogation of how Carnival throughout its history has been wrapped in a utopian cloak—how it has been received and celebrated as “utopian discourse”—I shall consider prevalent Carnival-origins narratives. The Roman origins narrative and the narrative Samuel Kinser calls the “folkloric explanation”56 may in particular both be termed “utopian discourse”—that is, discourse conducted and considered through lenses of utopian interpretations. I contend that such a consideration of the inherent utopian discourse within Carnival and its narratives is fundamentally Bakhtinian. In addition to an examination of Bakhtin’s utopian ideas about Carnival, this study will call attention to the intriguing utopian views of Carnival in discussions by contemporary scholars and authors such as Gardiner, as well as Tom Moylan, Robert Stam, Graham Pechey, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, and even Peter Fuchs, Max-Leo Schwering, Klaus Zöller, and Wolfgang Oelsner.57 These similarly utopian Carnival-origins narratives are

57. See Gardiner, “Bakhtin’s Carnival,” in Emerson, ed., Critical Essays, 252-77; Tom Moylan,
critical to the understanding of Carnival’s mythic cultural status today and are therefore critical to understanding phenomena such as the Sitzungen and the Stunksitzung.

While historical narratives are important for understanding Carnival, such narratives present a challenge, for we cannot know when Carnival “began.” The surviving evidence is unclear at best, for, as Pieter Spierenburg notes in *The Broken Spell: A Cultural and Anthropological History of Preindustrial Europe*, “The oral tradition of preindustrial Europe remains unknown to us. We only know about texts which have been written down later…”58 Despite this uncertainty, however, one widely accepted utopian vision narrative of Carnival represents it as Christian Europe’s adoption and alteration of existing Roman and pagan festivals into its pre-Lenten celebrations. Bakhtin did not write historic documentation per se, but he embraced this idea and linked Rome’s Saturnalia festival with Carnival, usually explicitly.59 Samuel Kinser, among others, strongly disagrees.60 Kinser argues that the last surviving mention

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60. Kinser, *Carnival*, 3. See also Frohn, *Narr*, 28-29. Frohn argues that claims of direct linkages between celebrations of antiquity and contemporary Carnival in Cologne, Aachen, and Dusseldorf are not supported by the evidence.
of a Roman celebration occurs in 494 CE, a date 471 years before the first surviving mention of the word “Carnelevare.”  

61. He notes that the “ambiguous” use of various words with the meaning “to leave off meat” occurs a few times “between 965 and 1130” CE. It is not, however, until 1140 that “festive customs associated with the approach of meatless Lent” are documented.  

62. Kinser insists, “It is important to disentangle Carnival’s origins from its pre-Christian analogues.”  

63. The point here is not so much to dispute his argument, but rather to complicate it. For Kinser’s blanket dismissal is too simplistic. Rather than adopting Kinser’s approach and simply dismissing these imagined and competing histories, this study shall instead interrogate their complexities, thereby contributing to an understanding of why they have persisted. Rather than attempting to “disentangle Carnival’s origins from its pre-Christian analogues,” I will attempt to explicate and understand competing histories’ importance as and contributions to utopian visions of Carnival and as discourse. In a sense, I seek to entangle Carnival even more in its own confused and contradicting narratives. For as Bakhtin writes, “Even in its narrow sense Carnival is far from being a simple phenomenon with only one meaning.”  

64. Framing the consideration only in terms of specifically documentable reference points nails down to some limited extent a chronology—or more accurately strengthens the receptions and perceptions of the various narratives. But it also hinders broader theoretical inquiry; in the attempt to “simplify”

61. Ibid. Kinser argues that “Carnival” comes from the Latin “Carnelevare,” and that it first appears in surviving European documents in 965 CE. It means “to lift up” or “rid” or “free from” a “cow” or “steer.” Kinser is interpreting this as ceasing to eat meat. See also Latdict, Latin Dictionary online, http://www.latin-dictionary.net/definition/25568/levo-levare-levavi-levatus, and http://www.latin-dictionary.net/definition/8259/carnero-carneronis, accessed 28 April 2014.  

62. Ibid.  


64. Bakhtin, Rabelais, 218.
the “phenomenon,” the risk of narrowing its perception to “only one meaning” is increased. Bakhtin’s “Carnival sense of the world,” with its “mighty life creating force,” its “indestructible vitality,” therefore transcends the specifics of any one time period or individual historical artifact. Accordingly, this examination and interrogation shall proceed in the interest of situating Carnival-origins narratives within the considered theoretical constructs—including Bakhtin’s. I seek to follow Bakhtin’s lead, applying a “broadened meaning to the word ‘carnivalesque’… interpret[ing] it not only as Carnival per se in the limited form but also as the varied popular-festive life of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance—and in the ages both before and since. In this vein, I submit that the Stunksitzung exemplifies in theatrical form the confusion, contradiction, multiple valences, innumerable utterances, and “indestructible vitality” of Carnival.

One example of the persistence of the Roman origins narrative is suggested in Hildegard Brog’s study of Rhineland Carnival. (The Roman origins myth is strong within Cologne Carnival lore and popular understanding.) Brog pointedly does not take a definite side. Indeed, she rather skirts around the topic and somewhat apologetically begins her Carnival history in the sixteenth century: “However the mythological origins of Carnival in grey antiquity are not themes of this book. Here the relationship of the Carnival revelers to their respective rulers takes center stage. Therefore the account begins in the sixteenth century.” Nevertheless, perhaps finding the

subject difficult to resist (if not impossible to ignore), she muses, “Is the Carnival therefore of Roman origins or was it a Germanic rite with which the winter was driven out?” 68. The mythos surrounding Carnival and its origins influence its perception and the ongoing invention of its traditions today; its utterances are shaped and received by societies that cling to legends of its past. Cologne was a city in the Roman Empire, making it perhaps rather too easy to connect Roman celebrations with Cologne Carnival. For her part, Brog seems to want to enjoy the conversation, allowing with amusement that it “is a question which does not keep the historians so occupied as it rather does the historiographers.” 69. This study shall consider the history of Carnival and Carnival in Cologne while attempting to situate those histories within a context of Bakhtin’s work (and related cultural and literary theorists). The utterances of the narratives—that is, their reception and the invented traditions associated with them—shall provide the foundation for theoretical consideration of the Stunksitzung, adding carnivalistic utterances to the dialogue.

I propose that the demonstrably ahistoric narrative of Carnival descending from Rome is another example of Carnival’s tradition of performed disruption: not only is the world “turned upside down,” time is as well. The provable is irrelevant; the myths are what survive. Even Kinser acknowledges, “There is no reliable general study of Carnival.” 70. However, a broad tracing of the general outlines of the history of Carnival is possible. I will here include some

68. Ibid., 8. “Ist der Karneval daher römischen Ursprungs oder war er ein germanischer Brauch, mit dem der Winter ausgetrieben wurde?”
69. Ibid. “Das ist eine Frage, die weniger die Historiker als vielmehr die Historiografen beschäftigt.
70. Kinser, Carnival, 326n2.
limited discussion of both the Roman origins narrative and Kinser’s “folkloric explanation,”\textsuperscript{71} to be enlarged upon in subsequent chapters as it relates to the core theoretical analyses. I will posit Carnival’s mythical origins as important components of its current-era narratives and utterances and consider the relationship of Cologne Carnival, the Sitzungen, and the Stunksitzung to these collective narratives. I will explore how the theatrical utterances are situated within the collective narratives—how the utterances of the one group are invented, received, translated, and understood in the context of the other. Within this process, I will interrogate how Carnival was and is similar and dissimilar to Roman festivals and celebrations.

Kinser rejects not only the Christian co-option/Roman origins hypothesis but the “folkloric explanation” as well. In his account, this latter train of thought came through the founding of folklore “as a discipline in the early nineteenth century by enthusiastic amateurs and some academicians.”\textsuperscript{72} Kinser is not alone in his understanding of the historical underpinnings of folklore. In a well-known article published in 1973, William A. Wilson similarly wrote that “English-American folklore studies began as the leisure-time activity of scholar-gentlemen intrigued by that quaint body of customs, manners, and oral traditions called \textit{popular antiquities},” which was “re-baptized \textit{folklore} in 1846.”\textsuperscript{73} Wilson describes the development of Continental “serious folklore studies” as starting “earlier” and as being “from the beginning intimately associated with emergent romantic nationalistic movements.” Within these emergent movements, Wilson writes, “Zealous scholar-patriots searched the folklore record of the past not

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
just to see how people had lived in by-gone days… but primarily to discover ‘historical’ models on which to re-shape the present and build the future.”

Wilson does not employ the term utopian, but his argument logically leads to a consideration of folklore as its own utopian sub-discipline within a broader romantic frame for interrogating history. The implied motives of his “zealous scholar-patriots” may thus be read as paralleling the utopian visions ascribed to Carnival and/or Bakhtin’s Carnival ideas, thereby reinforcing the folkloric Carnival-origins narrative. Bakhtin’s Carnival project, and by extension the theoretical ground I am attempting to explicate, is less a project of history than a project of the reception and perception of history, with all the attendant utopian visions, contestation, and turf defense. Some brief consideration therefore of the development of folklore as a discipline is here appropriate.

Robert Ackerman, in his book The Myth and Ritual School: J. G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists, describes “the study of the past” as having taken “two main forms” in the nineteenth century. “The work of the earlier part of the century,” he writes, “was mainly historical-archeological-philosophical” and was “inspired by romantic historicism.” The “second half of the century,” Ackerman explains, “saw the development of the comparative anthropological approach,” influenced by “evolutionary biology.” What Ackerman calls “romantic historicism” he claims “completely transformed the idea of the past, and its relation to the present.” This new vision of history, as Ackerman describes it, provides a logical backdrop for Wilson’s earlier idea of “romantic nationalism,” and, I shall argue, for the competing

74. Ibid.
receptions and theories of Carnival I am interrogating in this study. Ackerman, who was writing about the study of “the primitive and primitive religion,” asserts that a new attitude embracing mythology and “organicism,” combined with German nationalism and the philosophical fallout from the French Revolution, brought about a shift away from Enlightenment thinking on history.  

Consider Ackerman’s description of this new approach to historical studies and how it gels with the utopian vision of and the search for “‘historical’ models” of the “zealous scholar-patriots” in Wilson’s above-cited article:

> History [was] now conceived as sending its taproot deep into the irrational depths from which spring many of the richest sources of human life… History now had a whole new subject matter—now the organic connections between classes, languages, institutions, and the like would be emphasized rather than the record of battles and dynasties that had characterized the older history.

This study will show how Bakhtin envisioned Carnival as just such a “rich source of human life” and how that vision permeates Carnival’s presentation and reception today.

Kinser writes that folklore involved, among other things, the observation of disappearing “agricultural habits and superstitions,” in particular “customs associated with springtime plowing and planting which were carried out at Carnival-time.” The “pre-Lenten period” was often given over to public events that mocked “local social scandals.” Although “the form of these customs apparently had little to do with Lent or anything else Christian,” the folklorists “conjured a

76. Ibid., 17-19.
77. Ibid., 19.
pre-Christian rural origin for Carnival,” claiming, Kinser derisively notes, “that rural pagan rites had been conserved for thousands of years in miraculously pure form in the countryside.” He argues that Carnival began rather “as an urban and courtly reaction to Lenten rules” and that it “gradually” became additionally associated with “a variety of agricultural and social practices which were originally celebrated at different points in late winter and early springtime.” Although “many” of these “practices were very old… pre-Christian Celtic, Germanic, Slavic, and Roman,” Kinser contends, “All of them had gone through an unknown number of transformations in the course of one thousand years of Christian and feudal-manorial history.”

Kinser’s arguments are convincing, although he recognizes that it “is almost by definition impossible” to “be able to point to a specific document” or “associated documents and comparative materials” to prove a precise course of evolution of “customs developed through oral, gestural practice.” Of course, enormous difficulties also arise in attempting to disprove the possibility of a “plausible line of evolution” for such customs. The focus here then shall be rather more interrogating how these mythic narratives have colored Carnival’s critical reception and theoretical groundings.

Kinser both blames “the Germans” (in particular Jacob Grimm) for being “especially adept and especially careless in developing the notion” and credits them (in particular Hans Moser) for leading “the assault on the folkloric explanation of Carnival.” Though not specifically a folklorist himself, Bakhtin held highly idealized/romanticized/utopian views of Carnival. Those views rely upon some of the assumptions found in the work of the folklorists.

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78. Kinser, Carnival, 4-5.
79. Ibid, 5.
80. Ibid., 326n3.
Bakhtin had a great interest in folk culture. (I have previously described Bakhtin’s concept of Carnival as both “folkloric” and “sentimental.”)\footnote{Abbott, “Transgressing,” 99, and above.} Krystyna Pomorska, in her foreword to \textit{Rabelais and His World}, writes that folk culture was “the source of [Bakhtin’s] methodology.”\footnote{Krystyna Pomorska, foreword to Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais}, ix.} She credits this interest to an emphasis in the opposition of the “‘lower’ start of culture” and the “uniform, official ‘high culture’” in the Russian tradition.\footnote{Ibid.} His work, his “ideas concerning folk culture, with Carnival as its indispensable component” were “integral to his theory of art.”\footnote{Ibid., x.}

Bakhtin’s interest in folk culture and how this interest shaped his theories about Carnival provide important shadings of the perceived histories of Carnival—and the idealized visions of Carnival that dominate the popular view. Nostalgia, sentimentality, and emotionalism surround and permeate Carnival, and have for centuries.

Pointing to Johann Gottfried von Herder as having “basically completed” the “narrow concept of popular character and of folklore” that was “born in the pre-Romantic period,”\footnote{Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais}, 4.} Bakhtin does not have specific folklorist grievances, although he does note that the folklore “concept” did not have “room… for the peculiar culture of the marketplace and of folk laughter with all its wealth of manifestations.” He continues, “Nor did the generations that succeeded each other in that marketplace become the object of historic, literary, or folkloristic scrutiny as the study of early cultures continued.”\footnote{Ibid.} Bakhtin was seeking to posit his own work and theories about folk laughter and the marketplace for his Rabelais project. This positioning, as Michael

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Abbott, “Transgressing,” 99, and above.
\item Krystyna Pomorska, foreword to Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais}, ix.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid., x.
\item Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais}, 4.
\item Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
Holquist argues, placed his idealized “image of the folk” in stark contrast to that of the official Soviet folkloric vision of the 1930s. Bakhtin’s “folk,” Holquist notes, were “blasphemous rather than adoring, cunning rather than intelligent; they [were] coarse, dirty, and rampantly physical, reveling in oceans of strong drink, poods of sausages, and endless coupling of bodies.”

Bakhtin’s idealizations presented vastly different notions about the utterances of the “folk” than the official Soviet view. Holquist describes two contradictory visions—an “opposition… not merely between two different concepts of the common man, but between two fundamentally opposed worldviews with nothing in common except that each finds its most comprehensive metaphor in ‘the folk.’” One goal in this study is to explore the oppositional worldviews manifested in and through Carnival and to consider how binaries like high versus low and official (or traditional) versus alternative have been used by competing sides to claim the greatest and most legitimate hold on their mutual “most comprehensive metaphor”: Carnival itself.

Holquist writes that Bakhtin’s work was “widely appropriated in the West by folklorists, literary critics, and intellectual historians,” but that his “vision of Carnival has an importance greater than any of these disciplines.” Bakhtin, Holquist contends, rejects the idea that Carnival is a counter-revolutionary social “safety valve”; rather, it stems from a “popular, chthonian impulse.” He writes that Bakhtin argues “the sanction for Carnival derives ultimately not from a calendar prescribed by a church or state, but from a force that preexists priests and kings and to

89. Ibid., xxi.
whose superior power they are actually deferring when they appear to be licensing” it.\textsuperscript{90} While Kinser is deeply invested in rebutting the folkloric and Roman Carnival-origins narratives, Holquist is more interested in complicating seemingly simplistic connections between Bakhtin and folklore. (Kinser writes specifically about manifestations of Carnival—Mardi Gras—in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast of the United States.) Given the prevalence of arguably false history, Kinser’s goals are understandable and even laudable. But in his rejection of widely held (albeit incorrect) beliefs, he creates a false simplicity, for Bakhtin’s theory of Carnival owes much to a folkloric sensibility. In my framing of the history of Carnival generally and my examination of Cologne Carnival specifically, I shall seek to explicate and understand the significant influence on the reception of Carnival utterances of the Roman origins narrative and the folkloric narrative(s), and their importance in Bakhtin’s theorizing of Carnival. I will also demonstrate how pervasive these narratives are within the collective mythos of Carnival in Cologne and how its utterances reflect and reinforce those narratives.

I shall also consider to what extent the concept of “romantic nationalism,” which Wilson credits mostly to Herder,\textsuperscript{91} played—and plays—a role. Theatre and literature scholars know Herder for his influence on the German “Sturm und Drang” movement. In an October 2010 BBC 4 Radio broadcast of the program \textit{In Our Time}, Maike Oergel, Associate Professor of German at the University of Nottingham, stated, “Herder is perhaps best characterized in his early years as

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., xvii.
\textsuperscript{91} Wilson, “Herder,” 820.
the theoretician of ‘Sturm und Drang.’ He is the mastermind. He’s the one who provides the theory, if it is a theory.” More relevant to this study, she continued:

Herder wanted to change literature and art, but also the appreciation of literature and art by re-focusing on emotional language, emotional expression, and also emotional understanding, because he thought that aspect of human understanding had been neglected by the Enlightenment.93

Herder was engaged in an ongoing philosophical project to reject the rigidity of aesthetic rules, of any formalism, believing that the Enlightenment “was wrong in its one-sidedness, its focus on reason and rationality.” He wanted to “re-balance the scales by re-introducing emotional understanding,” and to “focus on the emotion.”94 It is intriguing to consider the degree to which the goal to create an alternative Carnival experience—i.e., the Stunksitzung—may be read with similar intent. In its mocking of the traditional and the official, the Stunksitzung is presented as a challenge to what is in turn presented as the preferred acceptable way to celebrate Carnival. I am hesitant to lump Bakhtin and Herder too closely together or to describe the Stunksitzung as explicitly Herderian (never mind as a latter-day neo-“Sturm und Drang” exercise). However, it does not require mental gymnastics to consider the Stunksitzung Ensemble’s work as an attempt to re-connect Carnival to its “popular, chthonian impulse.”95 Does Herder’s view of the Enlightenment as having “neglected” the “emotional language, emotional expression, and…

93. Ibid.
94. Ibid.
emotional understanding,” and his desire to “re-focus” on them not imply a yearning to re-connect to an earlier, ingrained, instinctual “aspect of human understanding” —even a “popular” one?96 His project was bigger than Carnival, but within his objection to aesthetic rigidity, is there not perhaps an inherent sense of Bakhtin’s later Carnival spirit? Do attempts to re-connect Carnival to its original perceived emotional origins—such as, I submit, the Stunksitzung—not then reflect at least in part Herder?

Kinser has little use for such deliberate emotionalism. Nor, predictably, does he care for the romantic nationalism thread in folklore, in particular when it is linked to hypotheses of Carnival’s origins. Kinser adheres instead to what can be directly proven, rejecting any emotional shadings of Carnival origins. I suggest that therein lies the problem of the competing claims of Carnival’s origins, as well as, in Cologne, of competing claims of authenticity and tradition: both the official and the alternative align (directly or through implication) with the invented origins narratives. Both, in Kinser’s eyes, would therefore be committing the same sin of attempting to link Carnival to pre-Christian rites and thus create false impressions “that city Carnivals were pale and adulterated versions of rural originals.”97 He writes: “Such a theory nicely supported the nationalist ideologies of authentic ‘folk spirit’ and anti-aristocratic populism sweeping Europe in the Romantic era when these ideas were elaborated.”98

Wilson’s analysis supports Kinser’s claim of “nationalist ideologies of authentic ‘folk spirit’ and anti-aristocratic populism.” However, Wilson views at least “romantic” nationalism as a positive historic force. He argues that “both as an inspiration for the idea of nationalism and as

96. Oergel, Bragg interview, BBC.
97. Kinser, Carnival, 5.
98. Ibid.
a means of winning the minds of men to that idea, folklore has served well.” He describes romantic nationalism as “a different kind of movement”—different than the more political nationalism that emerged in Western Europe in the wake of the French and American Revolutions. Romantic nationalism, he writes, developed in “Central and East Europe,” areas “where the people were generally and politically less developed than in the West” and where “national boundaries seldom coincided with those of existing states.” Nationalism in these areas, then, “became a movement not so much to protect the individual against the injustices of an authoritarian state, but rather an attempt to re-draw political boundaries to fit the contours of ethnic bodies.”

Romantic nationalism, Wilson contends, “emphasized passion and instinct instead of reason, national differences instead of common aspirations, and, above all, the building of nations on the traditions and myths of the past—that is, on folklore—instead of on the political realities of the present.”

Consider how Wilson’s description of romantic nationalism invites comparison with both the dominant idealized visions of Carnival in Cologne described above and with Bakhtin’s own, as Gardiner (after Moylan) labels it, “critical utopia[n]”

Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While Carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During Carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its

100. Ibid. Emphasis added.
own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of
the entire world, of the world’s revival and renewal, in which all
take part. Such is the essence of Carnival, vividly felt by all its
participants.\textsuperscript{102}

Carnival, based in its own “Carnival time” (Bakhtin) and existing as a “critical utopian”
(Gardiner/Moylan) “fifth season” (Cologne), evolved and evolves in a context of “passion and
instinct.” Its utterances are built on the (“invented”) “traditions and myths of the past.”

Before leaving Wilson’s “romantic nationalism” and folklore behind, its darker, uglier,
later manifestation should be acknowledged: the Nazis’ propaganda exercise of relating German
Carnival to pagan and Roman origins. Brog mentions it in her opening chapter: “Because of
ideological conditions, the pagan origin of Carnival was particularly stressed in the time of
National Socialism.”\textsuperscript{103} In chapter four, I shall consider Cologne Carnival in the Nazi era in
greater detail. I will compare and contrast the known history versus the perceived history and
will use the differences to postulate further about disruptions of time and narrative as
carnivalistic practice. This will include an exploration of the extent to which permission is
perceived to be necessary to carnivalize—and make fun of—Adolph Hitler and Nazism. This
consideration will venture beyond Carnival itself (and beyond the Nazis) into other performative
utterances, forms, and artists that I hold to be carnivalistic.

Returning to the particular idealized/utopian visions of Cologne Carnival, the example of
the previously mentioned Prince of Carnival is illustrative, as is the supremacy of the image and

\textsuperscript{102} Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais}, 7.
\textsuperscript{103} Brog, \textit{Zoch}, 8. “Denn der heidnische Ursprung des Karnevals wurde, ideologiebedingt, vor
allem in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus betont.”
role of the Prince and its place within Peter Burke’s “context for images and texts.”  

As with many Cologne Carnival traditions—including those co-opted, parodied, mocked, and satirized by the Stunksitzung—the Prince as a symbol is imbued with an aura that locates his position within the liminal/liminoid time/space of the fifth season, thereby reinforcing that tradition. Note in the quote below, for example, how the rhetorical swoon of Zöller and Oelsner elevates the role and powers of the Prince to a mythical, almost magical level. Observe also how in the process of that elevation Hobsbawm’s “overtly or tacitly accepted rules” of a “ritual and symbolic nature” are strongly implied and proclaimed without question: “What ruler would surrender to another his throne—voluntarily, without a coup? In the beautiful inverted world of the fools is this Utopia an annual peaceful reality. The princes of joy are rulers of time.”

Traditionally, every boy in Cologne dreams or is supposed to dream of someday becoming the Prince, of reaching the summit of the Carnival experience—a dream that represents genuine, theoretically obtainable prestige and even, in Zöller and Oelsner’s vision, actual power. The Prince, during Carnival, “reigns.” The fifth season is his time on the throne. To illustrate further the utopian Prince fantasy, however, consider the lyrics to the 1993 Carnival song (now a Carnival standard—and like most Cologne Carnival songs, written in the Kölsch dialect), “Eimol Prinz zo sin” (“Einmal Prinz zu sein” in standard German), by Wicky Junggeburth and Dieter Steudter when Junggeburth was serving as Prince:

106. “Biographie,” and “Prinz 93,” on Wicky Junggeburth’s official website, accessed 06 April
Just once to be Prince,
In Cologne on the Rhine,
In the Dreigestirn
In the full sunshine!

Even as a little scamp,
I dreamed of this.

Just once to be Prince,
That I’d not want to miss!107

A traditional Sitzung will always include the singing of Carnival songs, known by all present and accompanied by the raucous choreography of schunkeln. (Images of other regional German beer hall festivities like Oktoberfest are easily conjured.) The songs will almost certainly include “Eimol Prinz zo sin”—if there is an appearance by the Prince, the Farmer (der Bauer), and the Virgin (die Jungfrau). These three comprise the Dreigestirn, or three stars, the ersatz Royal Family of Carnival, and their grand entrance at any Carnival event is viewed as a high point. A man in full regal drag traditionally portrays the Virgin, although some villages and Karnevalsgesellschaften take the role-reversal/role-playing to a lesser extreme and feature

instead a Princess portrayed by an actual woman. Drag is likely a very old part of Carnival as well as other festivals. In writing about the Roman Saturnalia H. S. Versnel writes, “Among the many ways of visualizing a reversal, none is so obvious, unequivocal, and popular as the reversal in attire. The most easy and effective way to turn reality upside down is to change your clothes for the garment of the opposite sex… By thus inverting normality the new situation is marked as exceptional and abnormal.”

Or, perhaps it is simply a magical fifth season.

Peter Burke notes appearance of drag in European Carnival by at least the seventeenth century. However, this particular Cologne Carnival drag portrayal custom dates to 1824. That year, in order to mock widespread complaints from women in Cologne at being banned from participating in or even watching the event, Simon Oppenheim, a prominent local businessman and Carnival reformer, dressed as “Princess Venetia.” Sitting on a throne in a wagon bedecked at the front by a giant swan, he rode in what is now known as the Cologne Rose Monday Parade (Rosenmontagszug).

Numerous other men joined Oppenheim in his jest: “Because they had banished their women to the hearth, the Gentlemen of Creation could do nothing more than to slip into women’s clothes themselves.”

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110. Until approximately 1830 the Monday of Carnival was called simply “Carnival Monday”—“Fastnachts-Montag” or, in 1827, the “strange word ‘Faschings-Montag.’” See Joseph Klersch, *Die kölnische Fastnacht: Von ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, (Cologne: Verlag J.P. Bachem), 1961, 91-92). Hereafter cited in text as Klersch, * kölnische Fastnacht*. “Das fremde Wort Faschings-Montag.” Zug means either parade or train, depending on the specific context. Her, it will overwhelmingly mean parade.
Within the mixture of the performative elements of Carnival, the Sitzungen stand out as deliberate and overt theatrical performances. They are variety shows, vaudevillian or proto-vaudevillian spectacles of music and humor. Comic sketches are interspersed with mocking speeches that comment on the issues and events of the time. Local, national, and even international politicians and celebrities are ridiculed—another display of the symbolic overturning of the social order that happens during Carnival: those with power and prestige are temporarily deprived (if only theatrically) of both and are reduced to targets of jest.

The Sitzungen then are the theatrical representation—the literal theatricalization—of German Carnival, an amalgamation of performances costumed and celebrated as festival as well as a performances in the sense of what Richard Schechner has termed “restored behavior.” Carnival is also a cultural commodity—brimming with Bourdieu’s “cultural capital.” These intersections of performance, theatre, and festival—that is, the Stunksitzung, its role within Cologne Carnival, its relationship to the larger genre of the Sitzungen—and their mutual dependency upon each often remain deliberately adversarial. These intersections and relationships and dependencies inform the shifting perceptions of the traditional and the alternative as framed by the various constituents of Cologne Carnival.

The Sitzung emerged—or was invented—as a discrete theatrical form in the nineteenth century. Michael Euler-Schmidt has observed, however, that in particular, “proselytism from the

washtub” was recognized in seventeenth-century Jesuit Carnival plays. He notes that the masked balls of upper class Redouten festivities pre-date the Sitzungen by nearly a century. Their form relatively unchanged to this day, Sitzungen originated in Cologne and spread through most of the Carnival regions of Germany, eventually, as Heike Bungert has shown, even reaching the United States in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century German immigrant communities. In her study on Carnival in Cologne and Mainz between 1871 and 1914, Elaine Glovka Spencer refers to both “elaborately staged weekly assemblies” and “theatrical performances.” The early Sitzungen can legitimately be termed as both—for indeed the Sitzungen began as meetings (the word Sitzung means meeting or sitting or session), or perhaps more precisely, meetings with entertainment. The form quickly evolved to the primarily theatrical event still seen today, although it retained some of the predominantly ceremonial trappings of its original quasi-meeting form.

Fahne’s 1854 description of early Sitzungen—originally called “Generalversammlungen”—denotes (albeit in more lofty words) a strikingly similar atmosphere in the Sitzung hall to Wolfgang Schmitz’s 1984 description of the Stunksitzung.

115. Ibid.
116. Ibid. See also, for example, Brog, Zoch, 61-86; Fuchs, et al., Karneval, 176-94; Klersch, kölnische Fastnacht, 85; and, Frohn, Narr, 48.
119. Brog, Zoch, 63-65; Fuchs, et al., Karneval, 176-81; Frohn, Narr, 44-48; Klersch, kölnische Fastnacht, 85; Fahne, Carneval, 172-77.
120. Ibid. “General assemblies.”
Fahne writes:

The President, surrounded by his Small Council and in the highest seat, presides. Before him sit the fools, often a thousand in number, every one behind his glass of beer... The speeches alternate with exhilarating songs, which are sung by all present and accompanied by the orchestra... So lively is the conversation, so loudly clink the glasses, whenever the music plays or a crowd enters. There is a wave, a clinking of the glasses, a toast; none are strangers to the others, even if they have never seen one another before.121

Fahne depicts how the early Sitzungen were physically set up to resemble visually the meetings or sessions from which they derived. James M. Brophy notes how Fahne describes the Sitzungen in “crypto-political terms,” and that this “added to the atmosphere of a mock public chamber.”122 Fahne writes of the President’s Small Council (the forerunner of the Elferrat) as the “State Ministry” and compares the gathering itself to a “Reichstag.”123 I contend that the physical trappings of this atmosphere have been carefully maintained in the traditional Sitzungen more as

121. Fahne, Carneval, 175-76. “Der Präsident, umgeben von seinen Rätchen auf erhöhtem Sitz, führt den Vorsitz. Ihm Angesichts sitzen die Narren, oft tausend an der Zahl, jeder hinter seinem Schoppen... Die Reden wechseln mit erheiternden Gesängen ab, welche von allen Anwesenden gesungen und vom Orchester begleitet werden... So lebendig geht die Unterhaltung, so laut klingen die Gläser, wenn die Musik spielt, oder eine Haufe eintritt. Da giebt es ein Winken, ein Anstoßen, ein Zutrinken, keener ist dem Andern fremd, und wenn er ihn auch sonst noch nie sah.” Here, “fools” means the Carnival celebrants—what today would be called “die Jecke”—in their foolscaps.
an act of preservation or re-enactment than one of challenging or mocking the existing order; the traditional Sitzung of today is little more than the theatrical representation of that order—its utterance, its response, is a plea to preserve what has been or has been imagined or assumed to have been. It is an entreaty against change. Only within the utterances of the alternative Carnival sphere of the Stunksitzung have mockery and transgression been advanced.

Following Peter Burke’s suggestion of utilizing Bakhtin’s theoretical concepts well beyond his framing of Carnival in *Rabelais and His World*, I will contextualize Carnival through the examination of how the many utterances within Carnival link together in “chains of communication.” These chains form in response to previous utterances and in expectation of responses in the forms of future utterances.124

Burke considers Bakhtin in a chapter in which he “focuses on four theorists [Bakhtin, Pierre Bourdieu, Norbert Elias, and Michel Foucault] whose work has been particularly important for practitioners of the NCH [‘New Cultural History’].”125 This “New Cultural History”—which he claims is “the dominant form of cultural history… practiced today”—is a response to “the expansion of the domain of ‘culture’” and the “rise of what has become known as ‘cultural theory.’”126 New Cultural History “follows a new ‘paradigm’ in the sense that the term is used in the work of Thomas Kuhn on the structure of scientific ‘revolutions’”127—in Kuhn’s words, “provid[ing] models from which spring particular coherent traditions of…

126. Ibid., 49-50. Burke outlines what he views as the challenges “New Cultural History” is answering in an earlier chapter titled “The Moment of Historical Anthropology.” See also Ibid., 30-48.
Burke argues that cultural history has been “rediscovered,” and he is seeking “precisely to explain not only the rediscovery but also what cultural history is, or better, what cultural historians do.”\(^{129}\) The implication is that these four theorists are in part responsible for that rediscovery; in Burke’s consideration of Bakhtin, Bourdieu, Elias, and Foucault, he aims “to encourage [readers] to test the theories and in so doing to investigate new historical topics or to reconceptualize old ones.”\(^{130}\) Taking Burke’s positioning of Bakhtin in cultural history and/or cultural studies into account, this study may be read in part as an attempt to answer Burke’s challenge. The Stunksitzung has not previously been the subject of a lengthy analytical or scholarly study\(^ {131} \)—nor has the Sitzung form been examined except in the most cursory of historical descriptions. Furthermore, Cologne Carnival itself has rarely been studied in English and has not been considered within an explicitly Bakhtinian theoretical frame that moves beyond “Carnival theory” in any language. Burke’s description of Bakhtin as “a theorist of language and literature whose insights are also relevant to visual culture”\(^ {132} \) presents an opportunity to apply Bakhtin’s work to broader fields. Theatre is both a visual and a verbal medium, and drama is


\(^{130}\) P. Burke, *Cultural History*, 51.


This work, published as a partner piece to the exhibition, will be discussed in a later chapter. “Instandbesetzt” is a play on words, suggesting “instandsetzen,” (“to restore” or “to repair”, past tense “instandgesetzt”—“restored” or “repaired.”) “Besetzt” means “occupied” (like a lavatory) or “busy” (as in a telephone line). The suggestion is that Carnival has now been “occupied,” but also “restored.” The exhibition ran from 27 February to 11 April 2010.

\(^{132}\) Ibid.
traditionally a genre of literature. The Stunksitzung does not create literary texts, per se. But it is theatre, and its pre-eminence in Cologne Carnival—its participation in the exchange of Carnival utterances—situates it firmly within Bakhtinian concerns.

While Peter Burke bolsters the case for a Bakhtinian analysis of a non-literary form and event, the argument is stronger still within the wider sphere of Bakhtin studies. Consider, for example, Wayne C. Booth’s introduction to the English translation of Bakhtin’s *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, in which he writes, “The challenge presented in full force by Bakhtin requires an entirely different level of encounter.” Booth is writing about fiction, introducing a book that is about fiction, and discussing his own historic position within an ongoing dialogue in literary criticism about the “author’s voice.” Nevertheless, when he argues, “For Bakhtin the notion of diverse tasks is quite different from a collection of literary effects, like tragedy or comedy, satire or eulogy,” Booth too opens the door for a consideration of a Bakhtinian vision beyond the novel. For, he continues, Bakhtin held that “the artist’s essential task is not simply to make the most effective work possible, as viewed in its kind,” but “rather to achieve a view of the world superior to all others.” Bakhtin himself insists that his most beloved form be considered alongside all categories of literary art. In so doing he creates opportunities to apply his theoretical insight well beyond fiction. In other words, an analysis of the Stunksitzung phenomenon within the wider context of Carnival in Cologne demands its own “entirely different level of encounter.” Bakhtin’s works, even those devoted to literary studies, provide the

134. Ibid., xx.
135. Ibid.
best framework for it.

Booth believes that what he calls Bakhtin’s “unsystematic system” rests “on a vision of the world as essentially a collectivity of subjects who are themselves social in essence, not individuals in any usual sense of the word.”\textsuperscript{136} Bakhtin, Booth argues, believed:

We come into consciousness speaking a language already permeated with many voices—a social, not a private language. From the beginning, we are “polyglot,” already in process of mastering a variety of social dialects derived from parents, clan, class, religion, country. We grow in consciousness by taking in more voices as “authoritatively persuasive,” and then by learning which to accept as “internally persuasive.”... Polyphony, the miracle of our dialogical lives together, is thus both a fact of life and, in its higher reaches, a value to be pursued endlessly.\textsuperscript{137}

This process of “taking in” and “learning” which voices “to accept as internally persuasive” is a process of reception and perception—a sorting of utterances, a determination of responses, and a sifting of expectations regarding future responses, as detailed in Bakhtin’s “The Problem of Speech Genres.” This process reflects and depicts the actions not only of the audiences of a Sitzung, but also of the performers—and of the additional participants and celebrants of Carnival who may or may not directly view and directly participate in the performance/exchange of utterances of a given Sitzung.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., xxi.  
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
Bakhtin insists, “Any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive.”\textsuperscript{138} I submit that, with regards to theatrical settings, this is particularly in a Sitzung. Bakhtin’s analysis of speech utterances is indeed uncannily similar to how an audience perceives and responds to a performance—particularly a performance that is as interactive as a Sitzung:

When the listener perceives and understands the meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it. He either agrees or disagrees with it (completely or partially), augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution, and so on. And the listener adopts this responsive attitude for the entire duration of the process of listening and understanding.\textsuperscript{139}

The audience—as listener—perceive and respond and participate in an exchange of utterances, the audience’s utterances being its response in terms of laughter and applause. This exchange happens of course with any performance, but the nature of the Sitzung heightens the process. The cultural contexts of the utterances/responses within and around the performance are infused with and influenced/shaped by Carnival laughter—utterances Bakhtin also called “folk laughter” and laughter of “the culture of folk humor.”\textsuperscript{140} This study considers how these exchanges fit the pattern described in Susan Bennett’s analysis of theatrical performance. She writes:

Whatever the nature of the performance, it is clear that the established cultural markers are important in pre-activating a

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{140} Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais}, 4 and passim.
certain anticipation, a horizon of expectations, in the audience drawn to any particular event. Multiple horizons of expectations are bound to exist within any culture and these are, always, open to renegotiation before, during, and after the theatrical performance. The relationship then between culture and the idea of the theatrical event is one that is flexible and inevitably rewritten on a daily basis. 141

The history of Carnival has been a history of ongoing negotiations between the culture(s) of Cologne as they have struggled continually to invent their traditions. This history of negotiations in Cologne echoes the histories of ongoing negotiations between cultures in other locations as well. The history of the Sitzungen, therefore, has been a history of negotiations between those (Cologne) culture(s) in theatrical form, transforming those negotiations into negotiations about Bennett’s proposition of the “relationship… between culture and the idea of the theatrical event.”142 These contested relationships challenge the meanings of words like alternative and transgressive, and how they are used to describe the utterances of Carnival and its performance(s).

Booth argues that it is “obvious to any literary historian that literary works have tended not to do justice to our dialogical natures in this sense.”143 Booth refers here to Bakhtin’s vision “of the world as essentially a collectivity of subjects who are themselves social in essence.” Note again that Booth seems to acknowledge Bakhtin’s ideas hold promise for far broader application.

141. Bennett, Audiences, 114.
142. Ibid.
143. Booth, introduction to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky, xxi.
Consider, for example, when Booth writes, “If we think of ‘the novel’ not as some formalists would do, not as the actual works that we ordinarily call novels but rather as a tendency or possibility in literature… we can begin to study with some precision the conditions for achieving the elusive quality we have in mind.”\textsuperscript{144} It is this “elusive quality” this study seeks to locate within Cologne Carnival and the Stunksitzung and their collective utterances. Booth is hardly regarded as radical in his scholarship—he is most decidedly not at the fringe.\textsuperscript{145} I submit that what Booth seeks in his analysis of Bakhtin is very much what this study locates through application of Bakhtin’s theories to a non-literary form: “a representation, at whatever time or place and \textit{in whatever genre}, of human ‘languages’ or ‘voices’ that are not reduced into, or suppressed by, a single authoritative voice: a representation of the inescapably dialogical quality of human life at its best.”\textsuperscript{146} For, again, Carnival, as Peter Burke suggests above, would “surely” be “illuminat[ed]” if “approach[ed]… as the expression of a number of different voices.”\textsuperscript{147} Bakhtin’s theories shall here provide entry to a pathway for understanding Carnival—and therefore the Stunksitzung—as Burke’s “context for images and texts.”\textsuperscript{148}

Caryl Emerson suggests that in his writings Bakhtin engaged in a sort of dialogue with the readers, or rather, with the audience. Emerson’s work is important in any attempt to unravel Bakhtin and/or apply his theories. Emerson states her suspicion “that the audience Bakhtin had in mind was more a \textit{listening} than a reading public,” for “his works seem designed less to be read

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., xxii.
\textsuperscript{145} Caryl Emerson, \textit{First Hundred Years}, 134. Emerson refers to Booth’s work (along with that of Northrop Frye and René Wellek—who are also cited in this study—and Austin Warren) as “magisterial, grandfatherly, and uncontroversial.”
\textsuperscript{146} Booth, introduction to Bakhtin, \textit{Dostoevsky}, xxii. Emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{147} P. Burke, \textit{Cultural History}, 52.
\textsuperscript{148} P. Burke, \textit{Popular Culture}, 259.
than to be overheard, in a sort of transcribed speech.”\textsuperscript{149} It is as if he has expressed his ideas and is but waiting for a response, an utterance—or even an interruption—from across a gap that neither can nor ever \textit{should} be completely bridged.\textsuperscript{150} Crucial to the effort here is the attempt to reach insofar as is possible across the chasm, to interrupt, and to engage in a dialogue with Bakhtin’s ideas—locating that dialogue in and around an aspect of Carnival that was likely unknown to Bakhtin and parsing his utterances in search of clarity and meaning in the utterances of Carnival, the Sitzungen, and the Stunksitzung.

In both a Bakhtinian sense as well as in a more literal one, this dialogue, with its unbridgeable gap, constitutes communication across languages—or, in other words, translation. Bakhtin, Emerson notes, never offered “a theory of translation.”\textsuperscript{151} For Bakhtin, “translation, broadly conceived,” was “the essence of all human communication,” and “crossing language boundaries was perhaps the most fundamental of all human acts.”\textsuperscript{152} His definition of “languages,” however, is quite expansive. Emerson writes:

\begin{quote}
Bakhtin’s writing is permeated by awe at the multiplicity of languages he hears. These are not just the bluntly distinct national languages—Russian, English, French—that exist as the normative material of dictionaries and grammars, but also the scores of different “languages” that exist simultaneously within a single
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., xxxii.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., xxxi.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
culture and a single speaking community. In fact, Bakhtin viewed the boundaries between national languages as only one extreme on a continuum; at the other extreme, translation processes were required for one social group to understand another in the same city, for children to understand parents in the same family, for one day to understand the next.\textsuperscript{153}

Carnival in Cologne is comprised of many competing voices; it is a collection of utterances, and historically has been, as numerous scholars have shown,\textsuperscript{154} a site of ongoing contestation between different groups or social classes. These groups and classes have opposed one another and have engaged in the positing of competing and oppositional utterances over, among other things, to whom Carnival really belongs and which group or class “owns” it. The struggle over which group can legitimately claim the right to invent or re-invent Carnival and Carnival traditions and which group can offer the correct official Carnival utterances has long been central to these contestations. The intra-cultural oppositional claims and utterances manifest through separate “languages,” in the Bakhtinian sense, each requiring “translation,” which ultimately result in what may almost be understood as inter-cultural clashes.\textsuperscript{155} These conflicts between


\textsuperscript{155} A better term for these conflicts might be “inter-co-cultural” clashes, in the sense of Mark P. Orbe and Regina E. Spellers’ work. They describe how the members of one particular group may perceive themselves when that group is part of a larger encompassing culture (or larger encompassing co-culture). See Mark P. Orbe and Regina E. Spellers, “From the Margins to the
official Carnival and alternative Carnival supporters play out as, among other things, symbolic
generational disputes—as Emerson notes Bakhtin would understand it, “one ‘day’” fails “to
understand the next.” 156 Eric Hobsbawm has shown that such conflicts bring about the
development of new traditions and/or the transformation of old ones. He writes that in the
nineteenth century, the period which saw the invention of most Cologne Carnival traditions,
quite new, or old but dramatically transformed, social groups,
environments, and social contexts called for new devices to ensure
or express social cohesion and identity and to structure social
relations. At the same time a changing society made the traditional
forms of ruling by states and social or political hierarchies more
difficult or even impracticable. 157

In this study I will examine “new devices” of Carnival in Cologne (the Sitzungen in the
nineteenth century and the Stunksitzung in the late twentieth) and attempt to deepen the
“translation” between the groups represented by each.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White wrote, in 1986, “There is… a large and increasing
body of writing which sees Carnival not only as a ritual feature of European culture but as a

Center: Utilizing Co-Cultural Theory in Diverse Contexts,” in William B. Gudykunst, ed.,
173-92. Quoted in Ronald B. Adler, Lawrence B. Rosenfeld, and Russell F. Proctor II, *Interplay:
157. Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914,” in Hobsbawm and
Ranger, 263.
mode of understanding, a positivity, a cultural analytic.”¹⁵⁸ They posit Bakhtin’s Carnival ideas as the foundation of this burgeoning dialogue. Here I attempt to enter that dialogue and extend it to include Bakhtin’s wider analyses.

Yet essentializing Bakhtin’s work is not without danger. Michael Holquist, in a chapter in his book, Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World, titled “This Heteroglossia Called Bakhtin,” writes of the difficulty of “any attempt to grasp a unified version of Bakhtin,” noting, “it is more difficult than ever to argue for a single definition of Bakhtin.”¹⁵⁹ Bakhtin was a thinker of many voices, his work a collection of utterances that can at times seem contradictory. Holquist remarks on several of the widespread applications of Bakhtin’s thought:

Bakhtin has become less (or more) than a proper name. Rather, “Bakhtin” is currently a short hand for identifying many different meanings. It names a body of work that can be read as philosophy… Or, “Bakhtin” refers to a body of reading techniques for grappling with texts of various kinds, not only the novels of which the historical Bakhtin made so much, but such other texts as paintings and film. In addition, there is the Bakhtin who is read as a philosopher, by some as a religious or ethical thinker, by others as a source for a doctrine of social activism. …Others have read Bakhtin as a philosopher of language, and still others as a cultural critic par excellence. Bakhtin is increasingly taken up by a

¹⁵⁸. Stallybrass and White, Transgression, 6.
constantly widening range of specialists in other disciplines, as musicologists, anthropologists, classicists, historians, political scientists, theologians, and a congeries of professions seek to assimilate “Carnival,” “heteroglossia,” and “novelness” to their previously un-dialogized occupations.¹⁶₀

Theatre scholars can be added to the “un-dialogized occupations” list. Despite Holquist’s reservations, he does not ultimately object to the practice of Bakhtin’s ideas being applied so widely. He concludes the chapter, however, in a contradiction: his own cataloguing of Bakhtin as a philologist.¹⁶¹

Holquist and Katerina Clark offer a suitable starting point for considering Bakhtin’s greater view of the literary studies field in their seminal biography, Mikhail Bakhtin, although the work is somewhat controversial, owing to a still unresolved dispute. Since V. V. Ivanov’s claims in 1973, the question of whether Bakhtin was the true principal author of texts that were published under the names of associates has been argued—often fiercely. I will make no attempt here to determine whether the particular questioned works of Pavel Medvedev, Valentin N. Vološinov, and (according to Holquist and Clark) I. I. Kanaev were indeed Mikhail Bakhtin’s. Such an effort lies well outside the study’s purview and to every extent possible I shall remain neutral—while acknowledging that in Bakhtinian terms, this work constitutes an utterance (in the form of written speech) or a collection of utterances; Bakhtin held that “there can be no such

¹⁶⁰. Ibid., 190-91.
¹⁶¹. Ibid., 191-95.
thing as an absolutely neutral utterance.”¹⁶²

Clark and Holquist describe Bakhtin’s conception of “poetics” as “a very broad framework.”¹⁶³ They write:

He looks at genres not just in their narrow literary context but as icons that fix the world view of the ages from which they spring.

Genre is to him an X-ray of a specific world view, a crystallization of the concepts particular to a given time and to a given social stratum in a specific society. A genre, therefore, embodies a historically specific idea of what it means to be human.¹⁶⁴

For Bakhtin, then, a novel is not just a book; it is an idea that embodies a particular time, place,


¹⁶⁴. Ibid.
society, or culture. It is as broad and as encompassing as Carnival; it is as complex and as complete an utterance or collection of utterances as Carnival. In Bakhtin’s conception of genre, Carnival as a phenomenon, as an event—and therefore the specific components, events, utterances, and performances within Carnival—may be viewed and understood through a wider lens than Bakhtin’s Carnival theory. This approach provokes fresh perceptions and insights into what Clark and Holquist claim was “the task which occupied [Bakhtin] throughout his life, that of turning his dialogism into a full-fledged world view.”

Furthermore, expanding analysis of Carnival outward—“centrifugally,” to borrow from Bakhtin—guards against becoming too enmeshed in Gardiner’s “total utopia.” Recognition may be encouraged in both Bakhtin’s Rabelaisian Carnival and Cologne’s actual Carnival of “the centrality and desirability of certain utopian motifs.” However, these motifs are less about a world turned upside down to the point of anarchy than a “politics of culture that can be described as the desire to understand and encourage the ‘popular deconstruction’ of official discourses and ideologies.” Note that Gardiner writes “deconstruction” rather than “destruction.” I submit that the project of the Stunksitzung may be interpreted and understood as just such a project of deconstruction. Through mockery, satire, dialogism, and polyphony the Stunksitzung is a parodic exercise that, in its parody, seeks not just to entertain, but also to offer a critique of Carnival as it has been manifested in Cologne. In purist terms this is not a Derridean deconstruction. Rather it is an application of a philosophical and literary analysis process as a three-dimensional

performative process. In much the same manner I am following Graham Pechey’s lead in the application of a three-dimensionality to Bakhtin’s literary theory in order to consider it in a performance context. Gardiner describes Bakhtin’s “politics of culture” as “largely unarticulated.” I submit that the term “deconstruction” offers potential articulation, albeit in a “dialogic” sense—one that is rife with heteroglossic/polyphonic meaning(s).

Tom Moylan, in *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, writes of a “concept of the ‘critical utopia.’” Building on this idea, Gardiner asserts that Bakhtin’s work on Carnival “involves a radical negation of the traditional view of utopia but without abandoning the utopian ideal itself.” Bakhtin, Gardiner, writes, “incorporates” Moylan’s “critical utopia” and offers a “cultural criticism” that is “viable,” because it does not “restrict itself to the deconstruction or de-mystification of hegemonic ideologies and discourses.” Although suggesting that the process goes beyond them, Gardiner assumes deconstruction and de-mystification. He argues that “critique must be able to censure existing relations of domination by recourse to an alternative vision of social organization which is held to better satisfy the legitimate needs, desires, and capacities of human beings.” Gardiner’s notion that “the Bakhtinian concept of Carnival incorporates… major elements” of his and Moylan’s “critical utopia” and especially that “a crucial aspect of Carnival is its critical

171. Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, 213.
173. Ibid., 257.
174. Ibid.
function” are important considerations for understanding Gardiner’s use of “deconstruction.” I shall enlarge somewhat upon Gardiner’s and Moylan’s ideas to explicate how the Stunksitzung may be viewed as a deconstructive project within the proposed Bakhtinian framework. It is important to note that Gardiner urges caution against too simply describing Bakhtin’s work as a forerunner of deconstruction, as he claims Julia Kristeva in particular does.

Ultimately Gardiner argues that Bakhtin’s “desire to understand and encourage the ‘popular deconstruction’ of official discourses and ideologies” was rooted in “his staunch belief that the establishment of linguistic and cultural freedom is a necessary prerequisite of the emergence of a truly egalitarian and radically democratic community.” For such a project, Gardiner writes, “Bakhtin felt that we required a dialogical interaction with others before we could develop a unified image of self and engage in morally and aesthetically productive tasks.” Therefore, “It was necessary to combat the monologic desire to suppress social differences and to grasp how this diversity and heterogeneity was sustained in the linguistic, cultural, and social practices of everyday life.” Or, as Kristeva describes it, “Carnivalesque discourse breaks through the laws of language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest. There is no equivalence, but rather, identity between challenging official linguistic codes and challenging official law.” I contend that challenging the official of an entrenched cultural and social phenomenon such as Carnival is analogous in Bakhtinian terms to challenging “official law.” “Disputing the laws of language,” Kristeva writes, “Carnival

175. Ibid., 260.
178. Ibid.
challenges God, authority, and social law; insofar as it is dialogical, it is rebellious.”

It is by definition, alternative.

One possible and appropriate reading of the Stunksitzung, therefore, is to consider it “carnivalesque discourse”—that is, just such a “dialogical interaction” seeking to “combat the monologic desire to suppress social differences.” The Stunksitzung is a theatrical celebration—proffered as brazen and fresh and “rebellious”—of the social differences between the official and the alternative of Carnival in Cologne. Bakhtin’s “pronounced faith in the liberating potential of popular cultural forms,” once borne out in the traditional historical Sitzungen, has been renewed—or has been posited as renewed—in the revitalized, reinvented, desacralized, deconstructed form of the alternative. Thus do the many Bakhtinean utterances of Carnival past, present, and future come together in ongoing dialogue between competing ideologies. For, as Robert Stam writes, “All Carnivals must be seen as complex crisscrossings of ideological manipulation and utopian desire.”

Catherine Belsey, in her book, Critical Practice, offers a primer on post-Saussurean critical methodologies. Her work provides interesting fodder for consideration of the discursive ramifications of Gardiner’s “deconstruction” and my effort to tie it to a Bakhtinian analysis of a theatrical event within Carnival. In her chapter on Roland Barthes and Pierre Macherey, titled “Deconstructing the Text,” Belsey writes:

It was apparent that it was no longer possible to regard the classic

180. Ibid., 79.
183. V. Turner, Ritual to Theatre, 11.
realist text as a reflection of the world. As an alternative, it was possible to recognize it as a construct and so to treat it as available for deconstruction (as it was later termed), that is, the analysis and process and conditions of its construction out of the available discourses.  

She is, of course, discussing written literary texts—specifically realism. However, if, as I am suggesting, Carnival is posited as a “text”—or rather as a collection of texts (or utterances)—and the Sitzungen as the theatrical expressions of those texts/utterances, and therefore collections of texts/utterances, basing the analysis in myriad literary methodologies logically follows.

The Stunksitzung functions in no small part as criticism of the traditional form. In practice it is in part theatricalized analysis. Belsey contends that “the object of deconstructing the text is to examine the process of its production… the mode of production, the materials and their arrangement in the work.” The Stunksitzung, through its mockery and criticism is indeed examining the “process” of “traditional” Carnival and its traditional Sitzungen’s “production.” Belsey continues: “The aim is to locate the point of contradiction within the text, the point at which it transgresses the limits in which it is constructed, breaks free of the constraints imposed by its own realist form.” Although Sitzungen are of course not “realist,” the form of the traditional Sitzung is one that had previously, in the words of René Wellek (describing New

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186. Ibid., 104. 
187. Ibid.
Criticisms), “not been able to avoid the dangers of ossification and mechanical reproduction.”

The Stunksitzung’s parody and critique of the Sitzung form, rooted in the recognition that it is “composed of contradictions,” therefore examines, exploits, and deconstructs the form.

The Bakhtinean characterization of Carnival as a collection of utterances combined with Gardiner and Kristeva’s view that Carnival and Bakhtin’s view of it constitute forms of criticism serve to clarify Gardiner’s use of “deconstruction”—provided we also accept the conflation of utterance and text. Christopher Norris offers additional intriguing opportunities for consideration. In Deconstruction: Theory and Practice, he argues that Jacques Derrida had “no desire to establish a rigid demarcation of zones between literary language and critical discourse.”

By embracing Bakhtin’s broad idealizations of the novel and of Carnival, and by seeking to articulate a yet broader application of his ideas to the three-dimensional and theatrical utterances/texts of the Sitzungen and the Stunksitzung, I attempt an analogous lifting of “rigid demarcation[s].” The Stunksitzung is both theatrical performance and critical discourse, or rather is critical discourse (about Carnival) as theatrical performance and representation. (Carnival itself may also be viewed as a form of critical discourse.) The Stunksitzung illuminates the notion that, to use Norris’ words about Derrida’s work, “there is no longer a primordial authority attaching,” in my argument, “attaching” to the utterances/texts of official Carnival. Criticism

189. Belsey, 104.
191. Ibid., 24.
(via the Stunksitzung) is no longer “require[d]” to “keep its respectful distance.”  The alternative Stunksitzung is a form of criticism that has consistently refused and continues to refuse to “keep its respectful distance” from the self-appointed (invented) “primordial authority” that has “attach[ed]” itself to the official text of Cologne Carnival. With its criticism of the event of which it is a part and its own invented position as an alternative tradition, the Stunksitzung neatly fits Norris’ description: “Deconstruction is therefore an activity performed by texts which in the end have to acknowledge their own partial complicity with what they denounce.”

The Stunksitzung does not, then, function in a destructive fashion in regards to traditional Carnival. Its criticism of the official celebrations, though biting, acts, rather, to expand and support Cologne’s evolving tradition. For, even as the alternative encourages its audience to laugh at the absurdities of Carnival and its traditions, crucially, it also preserves them, despite its mockery. Indeed, the history of the Stunksitzung’s popularity and frankly now very commercial success makes it abundantly clear that the Ensemble could have no legitimate interest in tearing Carnival down. Rather, they are content, as I have written elsewhere, to remain “both a part of and apart from—and thus ever reliant on—the institution, the ‘official,’ and the ‘traditional…’ offer[ing] subversion and provocation, and occasionally offense, ironically cementing their own status as an ‘alternative’ institution.” One aim here is to consider this ironic attachment to and struggle against the traditional—to answer whether an event can simultaneously transgress and reinforce tradition. Bakhtin’s many-voiced view would certainly be that it could. The question then is how.

192. Ibid.
193. Ibid., 48.
Caryl Emerson observes, “Carnival was the first of Bakhtin’s notions to catch fire in English.”\textsuperscript{195} It was the beginning of the western Bakhtin “industry.”\textsuperscript{196} “Flanked by the provocative notions of ambivalent laughter and the grotesque body, the concept remains a staple,” and “passions for and against it run deep.”\textsuperscript{197} These same passions can be observed in Cologne—for and against particular views of Carnival, as well as who gets to decide which views are privileged. Such passions reflect the contradictions in Carnival and in Bakhtin’s understanding of it, as described by Emerson:

The “Carnival complex of values” appears both to enable life and crassly to destroy it, to encourage free speech and to disdain it, to liberate us from fear and to confirm us in our miserable subjection—either to an official institution after Carnival time is over or to the next cheerful thug during the festival itself.\textsuperscript{198}

The Stunksitzung heightens, valorizes, critiques, and mocks Carnival, celebrating the magical fifth season while sometimes crassly appearing to destroy it. The production and its contradictory utterances flow from and reflect Carnival, displaying many of the same characteristics. Carnival’s paradoxes play out in the utterances of parodic theatrical performances—overturning tradition to preserve it, staging the alternative, while using an

\textsuperscript{196} It is perhaps interesting to note that the bulk of the critical sources about Bakhtin cited in this study span the approximate chronological range of the Stunksitzung—which of course I contend is a Bakhtinian exercise.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid.
“ossified”\textsuperscript{199} form. Bakhtin’s “Carnival complex of values” finds energy in the competing utterances and interlocking responses.

Stallybrass and White argue that Bakhtin’s fascination with Carnival and his theory of it were intended to go beyond consideration of a specific festival and a specific novel. Bakhtin saw Carnival as “both a populist utopian vision of the world seen from below and a festive critique, through the inversion of hierarchy, of the ‘high’ culture.”\textsuperscript{200} The binary of high and low is problematic in Cologne Carnival, where the official Carnival is easily (and I submit intentionally) portrayed as high and the alternative as low. Yet, this elementary binary is too simplistic when considering the utterances of the traditional Sitzungen against those of the alternative Stunksitzung. The parodic methodologies of each mirror the other—the forms are largely identical, the two seemingly dependent on one another. Again, Stallybrass and White can shed some light:

A recurrent pattern emerges: the “top” attempts to eliminate the “bottom” for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover, not only that it is in some way frequently dependent upon that low-Other… but also that the top includes that low symbolically… The result is a mobile, conflictual fusion of power, fear, and desire in the construction of subjectivity: a psychological dependence upon precisely those Others which are being rigorously opposed and excluded… what is socially peripheral is so frequently

\textsuperscript{200} Stallybrass and White, \textit{Transgression}, 7.
symbolically central…The low-Other is despised and denied…

whilst it is instrumentally constitutive of the shared imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture. 201

Within the collection of utterances and social hierarchy of Carnival in Cologne, the invented traditions of the alternative have been categorized as “low-Other,” subsidiary to the high and official. Following the pattern described by Stallybrass and White, this relationship between the two seemingly oppositional voices is fueled and maintained by mutual need: the one might survive without the other, but both would undoubtedly be diminished.

Carnival is an integral part of the popular culture of Cologne. Therefore its consideration requires an understanding of the rudiments of culture studies and theory. The term “popular culture” has been widely considered and is one about which much discourse has been written. I use the term here in the sense of John Fiske’s analysis of it as “always” being “part of power relations.” Fiske writes that popular culture “always bears traces of the constant struggle between domination and subordination, between power and various forms of resistance to it or evasions of it.” 202 He argues that popular culture should continue to be seen “as a site of struggle,” and that the study of popular culture should accept that “power of the forces of dominance,” but that it should also focus “rather on the popular tactics by which these forces are coped with, evaded, or are resisted.” 203 A consideration of the power relations between the official Carnivalists and their alternative (sometimes pseudo-) adversaries and the utterances of each is inherent to this

201. Ibid., 5-6.
203. Ibid., 20.
study. Accordingly, I will, within the course of my examination of the Stunksitzung, reflect where appropriate on how its utterances are performed as strategies of coping, evasion, and/or resistance. Further, the extent to which these strategies are performances calculated as response to a dominance and a subordination that are also performed seems implicit in the work—for I submit that Carnival in Cologne is popular culture performed as festival. The meanings of Carnival and its many utterances are hammered out in an ongoing struggle (performed, in part, as celebration) over those meanings and how and by whom they are defined. The result is what Agnes C. Mueller might call a “polyvalently coded icon,” a cacophony of utterances, each proclaiming (and performing) in its own way its own presumed (and performed) privilege, leaving questions of meaning at once both unanswered and answered too often and too loudly.

The Stunksitzung’s history of challenging the status quo has resulted in its becoming part of the great Cologne Carnival myth of a fifth season, a magic time, during which the Kölner play out (professed to be) ancient festive rites. Within this myth, the alternative has become integral—questioning to what extent Carnival in Cologne as it is now constituted (i.e., with the primary forms of celebration and activities from the 1820s still dominant) has always depended upon an integral alternative. The rebels have altered Carnival by challenging it, by contributing to its excess of meaning, for, as Marjorie Garber writes, “Cultural meanings… are not so much determined as overdetermined, produced by multiple associative paths fortuitously converging on the same points.”

John Storey, whom I cited in the early pages of this chapter, echoes Garber in advocating a “Gramscian” approach to cultural studies. He writes that “meaning is

always a social production, a human practice; and because different meanings can always be
ascribed to the same thing, meaning is always the site and the result of struggle.”206 This struggle
for the control of meaning is a fundamental part of Peter Burke’s vision of Carnival as “the
example par excellence of the festival as a context for images and texts.”207 The interrogation of
that struggle is central here, as I seek to articulate the conflicting images, utterances, and
mythologies of Carnival, the Sitzung form, and the Stunksitzung—and the culture(s) and co-
culture(s) in which they have developed. Storey defines culture as “an active process” and “how
we live nature,” and elaborates by explaining that “it is the practice of making and
communicating meanings.”208 Understanding that process and that practice is important, for, as
Storey would have it, “Culture is not in the object but in the experience of the object: how we
make it meaningful, what we do with it, how we value it, etc.”209 The cultural identity of
Cologne is fundamentally associated with its Carnival—how Cologne “makes it meaningful” and
the performed dichotomy of the high official and the “low-Other” alternative is fundamentally
associated with Carnival.

In her introduction to The Reversible World, Barbara Babcock offers the term “symbolic
inversion” as an “organizing concept for… diverse perspectives on cultural negations.” She
writes:

“Symbolic Inversion” may be broadly defined as any act of
expressive behavior which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in

206. Storey, preface to Storey, Inventing Popular Culture, xi.
207. P. Burke, Popular Culture, 259.
208. Storey, preface to Storey, Inventing Popular Culture, ix-x.
209. Ibid., x.
some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural
codes, values, and norms, be they linguistic, literary or artistic,
religious, or social and political.  

A foundational assumption of this study is that Carnival in Cologne is a “commonly held cultural
code.” Babcock’s definition of “symbolic inversion,” I have suggested before, is a fitting
description of the Stunksitzung. However, although accurate, this assertion is also too
simplistic, for I contend that the Stunksitzung and its alternative offspring better represent the
spirit of the nineteenth-century invention of the Sitzung as a theatrical form. “Symbolic
inversion” is therefore also a historically accurate description of the earlier tradition of the
Sitzung form—i.e., that the “inversion” that is brought to life each year by the Stunksitzung
Ensemble is a truer restoration than the contemporary traditional/official Sitzung, which, though
typically following the form in the most literal ways, has, in the attempt to remain traditional,
lost much of the renegade spirit the original Sitzungen supposedly demonstrated. Yet, in a
Bakhtinian sense, this too is of course not that simple.

In the following chapters, in order to consider the Stunksitzung as an integral part of
Carnival in Cologne, I will undertake limited histories not only of the production but of Carnival
as well. The history of the latter is by no means meant to be comprehensive. Nor could it be, as
the history of Carnival in Cologne (and in Europe) before what Peter Burke (and others) would

210. Barbara Babcock, introduction to Barbara Babcock, ed., The Reversible World (Ithaca and
Derrida and Clifford Geertz. The remarks are from the abstract for an unpublished abstract for
the 1972 American Anthropological Association’s Forms of Symbolic Inversion Symposium.
call the “early modern period,” roughly between 1500 and 1800, is murky at best. There are of
course many chronicles of Carnival in Cologne, and I shall rely upon a number of them,
especially Fahne’s in 1854 (also something of a memoir), as well as Emil Kuhnen’s in 1925,
Joseph Klersch’s in 1961, Hildegard Brog’s in 2000, Christina Frohn’s in 2000, and of course,
the Festival Committee’s celebratory account by Fuchs, Schwering, Zöller, and Oelsner in 1997.
My aim in relying upon these and other secondary sources shall be one that is more
historiographical and/or analytical than strictly historical, as the particulars of specific events are
not in dispute. This work is not intended to be a chronicle of the Stunksitzung, per se. However,
examinations of the Ensemble and its production histories and historiographies will have similar
aims as those applied to Carnival, and will build upon the consideration of the Sitzung form in
regards to how the Stunksitzung is a parody of that form. The Stunksitzung Ensemble has written
and published its own chronicle, and I shall make no attempt to supplant that publication.
Although the Ensemble’s own history often (as might be expected and like the annual production
itself) takes the forms of parody and satire, it remained until quite recently the only definitive
published version of their history. Now, alongside it (and Schmitz’s 1991 book), an attempt at
a critical analysis and overview of the Stunksitzung has been published. Released in the autumn
of 2009, and titled Karneval instandbesetzt? Eine kritische Hommage: 25 Jahre Stunksitzung, the
book, edited and published by Georg Bungarten, Nadja Fernandes, Manfred Linke, and Petra
Metzer, and compiled by Bungarten and Metzger, was offered in conjunction with an exhibition
at the Kölnisches Stadtmuseum bearing the nearly identical title Karneval instandbesetzt?

Politik, Protest, Provokation und Persiflage—25 Jahre Stunksitzung,\(^{214}\) and was intended “both as a supplement to and background for the exhibition.”\(^{215}\) (“Karneval instandbesetzt?” was the motto for the first Stunksitzung in 1984.)\(^{216}\) I shall make use of these volumes in sketching the history of the production—in addition to attempting to examine the histories of Carnival and the Stunksitzung through the lens of the theoretical concepts I have been discussing.

The second chapter will focus on the origins theories mentioned above, with primary emphasis on the Romans origins narrative and how it is a fundamental part of the official narrative of Cologne Carnival. In chapter three, I will interrogate to what extent the Stunksitzung may be considered a “radical” performance and will look to historical examples of radicalism within Carnival, specifically in sixteenth-century France, in the city of Romans, and in the Rhineland in the nineteenth century. In chapter four, I will turn my attention to the Nazi era and its effects on Carnival both at the time and since.

Throughout this study I shall seek to articulate a wider theoretical formulation of Carnival and use it as a means to compare and contrast directly the binaries of traditional/official and alternative/transgressive, building on the foundation compiled from theoretical readings. The short concluding chapter will be framed around my findings and postulated theories and shall include input from select interviews of members of the Ensemble, including ones I conducted.

Parsing the authenticity of a spirit of a time is a formidable challenge, and parsing the reception of a performance within a festival, one utterance or collection of utterances within a

\(^{214}\) Bungarten, \textit{et al.}, \textit{Karneval instandbesetzt}.


collection of countless others, is at least doubly so. The historical surveys of Carnival chronicle
the development and evolution of a theatrical form, and the Stunksitzung’s own published
histories—and the 2009 volume—chronicle the development of a parody of that form (albeit in a
decidedly tongue-in-cheek way in the case of the Ensemble’s history of itself). Analysis to
determine or attempt to determine the ways in which a traditional, official, or, I would argue,
*preservationist* performance/utterance does or does not reflect the most authentic sense of a
nearly two-centuries old form any more or less accurately than an alternative version that first
appeared in 1984 will not yield pat answers. Nor perhaps should it. Bakhtin, we must assume,
would argue that it *could* not. The aim is to contribute to the discussion, interrogate the
assumptions, and attempt to create a workable theoretical framework as a tool to aid
understanding and comprehension, not to attempt to define the “essential” characteristics of that
which so strongly resists being essentialized.

Graham Pechey describes Bakhtin’s view of Carnival as “dialogism that has taken to the
streets,” which is “posed” (performed?) as “the popular utopia of laughter and Carnival,”
answering “against the monologism of ‘actually existing’ socialism in the Stalinist period.”[217]
Stretching the metaphor to the democratic Federal Republic of Germany in the 1980s and the
people’s festival of Carnival, the Stunksitzung can be similarly read as a reaction against an
ossified Carnival in Cologne (decidedly non-oppressed) as dictated monologically—that is
single-voiced—by the Festival Committee. Hence, the alternative (or in Babcock’s terminology,
the “symbolically inverted”) represents a dialogic or multi-voiced manifestation of
voices/utterances that had been previously shut out—or were *perceived* as having been

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previously shut out—in and through the dictates of a singular official keeper of Carnival tradition. This meta-dialogic response, Pechey’s “dialogism that has taken to the streets,” has now been taken to the *stage* in a meta-meta-dialogic utterance-as-performance response. This response process revives aspects of Bakhtin’s utopian and folkloric view of Carnival. The licensed transgression throws off (part of) its license and becomes a performance of a genuine transgression. The original Carnival spirit described by Bakhtin is simultaneously evoked.

Pechey’s linking of dialogism, which Clark and Holquist call Bakhtin’s “metaphysics of the loophole,”218 and Carnival—this situating the two ideas as part of a progression both of Bakhtinian thought and of phenomena to which the ideas can be applied in analysis—is important to my interrogation. Although he wrote about it at length, Bakhtin never concisely defined dialogism, his term for the process(es) through which heteroglossia operates in language. Emerson and Holquist describe it thus:

> Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole—there is constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. What will affect the other, how it will do so and in what degree is what is actually settled at the moment of utterance.219

As Peter Burke suggests, then, the consideration of Carnival “as the expression of a number of

different voices—playful and aggressive, high and low, male and female” offers with Pechey’s analysis of what he calls “Bakhtinism” an approach that is indeed “illuminating” (Burke) to the unpacking of the multiplicity of voices. Those voices—the simultaneously complementary and contradictory utterances and collections of utterances—comprise the layers of “languages” that are Cologne Carnival and the Stunksitzung. Bakhtin writes, “A language is revealed in all its distinctiveness only when it is brought into relationship with other languages, entering with them into one single heteroglot unity of societal becoming.”

This study shall analyze the “distinctiveness” of the individual “languages” of Carnival, the Sitzungen, and the Stunksitzung, and how they are “revealed” when they “are brought into relationship with” one another—when the “heteroglossia” (or polyglossia or polyphony) of Carnival is parsed. I will also interrogate how the revelation of the relationships above have shaped the “societal becoming” of the culture, the mythos, and the phenomenon of Carnival in Cologne—how these Bakhtinian elements contribute to the invention of its traditions. When Bakhtin writes of the “distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages” and thematic “dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization,” he is articulating the “basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel.” He could, however, also be articulating the elements and relationships within Cologne Carnival.

Carnival and its performances, its many performative utterances, are primarily centrifugal forces—forces that seek to expand, to open, to push outward. These forces work in

223. Ibid., 263.
opposition to centripetal forces, which seek to contain and unify. Bakhtin argues that “every utterance participates in the ‘unitary language’ (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces).”

The Stunksitzung has based its parody and satire upon the assumption of the centripetal force of official Carnival’s utterances, its alternative nature performed as utterances that are centrifugal. My goal is to question those assumptions and to complicate the resulting perceptions that flow from them. For, as Bakhtin would argue, all such utterances/collections of utterances/performances are both centripetal and centrifugal. The many layers of Carnival in Cologne and its unruly bastard child, the Stunksitzung, are, have been, and continue to be, in constant dialogue with one another, and it shall be my task to translate a few of the languages of which those dialogues are comprised.

224. Ibid., 272.
Carnival, as a collection of conflicting and competing utterances, is surely a form of discourse—or, rather, in the Bakhtinian sense, it is a collection (if not a cacophony) of discourses—discourses whose principal subjects are the binaries of high/low and official/alternative. Carnival utterances combine to create numerous modes of signification: at the most obvious level the binaries of high and low, official and traditional, signify for the Kölner the roots and histories of Carnival. I contend that it is rooted in myth, in terms of how Roland Barthes, in *Mythologies*, defines the term. Barthes writes of myth “at the outset” as “a type of speech,” then clarifies, “not any type: language needs special conditions in order to become myth.” Myth, he continues, “is a system of communication… a message,” which “allows one to perceive that [it] cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form.” Barthes argues, “Since myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by discourse.”¹

The history of Cologne Carnival is one conveyed by discourse and woven through with myth, often, I contend, self-perpetuating myths—though, critically, as explored below, not self-fulfilling. Carnival tells its own version of its own story over and over, but that telling is a projection, even a performance. It does not confirm an invented history that cannot be proved. One obvious example of these myths is the seeming bedrock belief in the narrative that

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Carnival’s origins derive from the city’s Roman history. Interrogating Cologne Carnival must include considering its mythical past and an attempt to balance the conflict between what can be proved and what is believed. This binary may be regarded as somewhat parallel to that between the official and the alternative. The sundry historical myths of Cologne Carnival shape the overall narratives—that is, what can be proved (relatively little) and what is believed. The “facts” of the historical myths are less important than the faith in those facts. How those stories are passed on and accepted (revered?) today are more important than the content of the stories.

Barthes again:

Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way it utters this message: there are no formal limits to myth, there are no “substantial” ones. Everything, then, can be a myth? Yes, I believe this, for the universe is infinitely fertile in its suggestions. Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society.²

Barthes emphasizes that the “speech” of myth goes beyond and transcends what may immediately be thought of as “speech.” He writes:

Speech of this kind is a message. It is therefore by no means confined to oral speech. It can consist of modes of writing or of representations; not only written discourse, but also of

². Ibid., 131-32.
photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity, all these

can serve as a support to mythical speech.³

The many utterances of Carnival include of course “oral speech,” as well as “representations” and “shows” (consisting primarily of performed written elements—performed “written discourse”). These components create, shape, preserve, and re-create—“invent,” as Hobsbawm would have it—the myth(s) of Carnival, which in turn carry the many overlapping and often conflicting messages.

The myths of Cologne Carnival extend to and encompass its origins, shaping for its celebrants and adherents, its very identity. That identity, particularly in relation to Carnival, is carefully honed—invented, in a sense, and deliberately projected. The image of what Cologne and its Carnival is or is supposed to be influences what it becomes—though not, crucially, in a self-determining way. Homi K. Bhabha, in his book, The Location of Culture, writes:

The question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy—it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that identity. The demand of identification—that is to be for an Other—entails the representation of the subject in the differentiating order of otherness. Identification... is always the return of an image of

³. Ibid., 132. Emphasis added.
identity that bears the mark of splitting in the Other place from which it comes.⁴

This study argues that Cologne—and its citizens—present Carnival as the central image of its/their identity and attempts to shape the city and its culture and history to fit that image. Cologne transforms to become the self-proclaimed Center of the Carnival Universe by projecting the image of itself as that Center. It is therefore different from other (presumably lesser) places—it is the higher “Other” in the ever-present and ever-necessary binary of high and low. The alternative Carnival, including the Stunksitzung, is regarded as low by the internal high half of the binary—the official Carnival and its guardians and promoters. This study will demonstrate how the identification of Cologne and its Carnival is transformed by assuming that identity and by the presence and actions of the alternative.

In its embrace of the alternative label, the Stunksitzung Ensemble has often mocked Cologne’s self-identification as the Superbowl of Carnival, including its fascination with its mythical past, and of course its civic self-absorption. For example, in the 2007 production, a sketch titled “Parfum,” a parody of the film adaptation of Patrick Süskind’s novel, Perfume, reset the story in Cologne. In the concluding scene of the sketch, “Schäng” Grenouille (Schäng is a Kölsch diminutive of Johannes) unleashes the perfect scent he has distilled not from the murder of literal virgins, but rather the murder of Cologne Carnival Funkenmariechen, the young dance corps women associated with Carnival Funken regiments.⁵ The Kölner, rather than tearing him to

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⁵ Earlier in the sketch, Grenouille begins to chase the Cologne Carnival Jungfrau (Virgin) to kill
pieces and consuming him as the crowd does in the novel and film, are instead overcome with
t heir love—of the city of Cologne. They rhapsodize about its beauty, declaring that every aspect
of Cologne is “the most beautiful one” ever seen. One character even makes the declaration
about a pile of dog feces on the Cologne street.⁶

This conviction that there is no place else like Cologne, that it is an unparalleled paradise,
and that it has a Carnival unrivaled anywhere, exemplifies the mythos of the city and its culture.
The persistent belief in the Roman origins of Carnival is a foundational component of that
mythos. This chapter will examine the Cologne Carnival mythos assumed from the Roman
origins and will attempt to extrapolate relevant conclusions. The task is less about considering
details of a particular history than how the invention of that history and its traditions helped
shape the contemporary official/alternative binary.

One integral part of the history of Cologne Carnival is its Carnival music. Carnival bands
will debut eagerly anticipated new “motto” songs every year for the celebration and true
Cologners can sing along with dozens of Carnival standards. The most successful and most
famous of the Carnival bands are major celebrities in Cologne. Bläck Fööss and De Höhner

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6. The Stunksitzung Ensemble, “Parfum,” Stunksitzung, 2007. See also Patrick Süskind,
Books, 1987). The phrase echoes a line used several times in Stunksitzung sketches: “It is the
most beautiful/nicest Sitzung I have ever seen.” (“Das ist die schönste Sitzung die ich je gesehen
habe.”) It also echoes a line from a 1990 sketch in which the President, Jürgen Becker,
interviews the new Dreigestirn, who appear in business suits. The Prince, “Karlheinz Schmitz,”
played by Martina Bajohr, is shy and must be coached to say “This is the most wonderful day of
my life” (Das ist der schönste Tag meines Lebens) with emotion, as he will have to say it
hundreds of times as Prince. This echoing of lines also represents an example of the
intertextuality the Ensemble sometimes employs, which I will discuss in more depth later in this
chapter.
arguably occupy the highest echelon of Carnival groups, both groups having been Cologne Carnival institutions for decades. This musical history of Cologne Carnival may be seen as forming the soundtrack of its mythos, and it reflects and reinforces the utopian visions on which that mythos is based. At turns jaunty and funny or steeped in wistful nostalgia—and always dripping with sentimentality—the city’s idealized self-image is infused with the music of Cologne Carnival. To offer one initial example, the lyrics of the Bläck Fööss song, “Unsere Stammbaum” (Our Family Tree) illustrates how Cologners feel about their city (in this instance, describing it as a great melting-pot). Further, its use of the presumed Roman connection as a springboard for that vision provides another example of how saturated Cologne’s self-myth is with Rome and the presumed Roman origins of Carnival. Bläck Fööss, as noted above, is an iconic Kölscher rock/Carnival band. It began as a cover band called the Stowaways, but in 1970, after the group began singing songs in the Kölsch dialect, the members re-christened themselves. As a group, they are particularly adept at establishing an aura of a gauzy time-gone-by; their songs are imbued with longing and project a sepia-toned civic pride. “Unsere Stammbaum” (Our Family Tree) is a composition that exemplifies this sentiment.

7. Bläck Fööss’ precise founding date is a little unclear, but the group began using the name in 1970. De Höhner was founded in 1972. See De Höhner, “Höhner—offizielle website,” accessed 05 April 2014, http://www.hoehner.com; and, Bläck Fööss, “die offizielle bläck fööss website,” both accessed 05 April 2014, www.blaeckfoeoess.de http://www.blaeckfoeoess.de. “Bläck” is Kölsch for bare or naked, and “Fööss” is the plural of “Föß,” the Kölsch word for foot. “Bläck Fööss” therefore translates as “Bare Feet,” with an obvious pun on “black feet” and the pun is visually repeated in the group’s logo. “Höhner” is Kölsch for “Hühner,” which is in turn a pun on “Hühner,” or “chickens.” The unumlauted version of the word, and in turn the Kölsch version, carries an additional meaning of “jokers” or perhaps more accurately, “scoffers,” or “jeerers,” as “höhnen” in Hochdeutsch is to scoff or jeer, with “hühnen” in Kölsch carrying the same meaning. The phrase “Da lachen ja die Hühner” can be literally translated as “The chickens are going to laugh at you,” and is colloquially understood as “You must be joking.”


9. In a total of four years living in Cologne, plus several holidays visits of a couple of weeks
Stammbaum,” written by the band with composer Hans Knipp, speaks to the universality of being a Kölner, beginning with the bald statement, “I was a proud Roman, who came with Caesar’s legions.” Although Carnival is never explicitly mentioned in the song (except for the Jecke—a plural of Jeck), Bläck Fööss has been so long and so thoroughly associated with Carnival the connection is inescapable. The song implies that Roman occupation was only the beginning of the great collegial blended culture that makes Cologne so special. Rome may have started it all, but as Bläck Fööss sings, the Empire contributed only part of the rich historical mixture of humanity that makes up Cologne: “And I am a Frenchman, who came with Napoleon. I am a farmer, a carpenter, a fisherman, a beggar and nobleman; a singer and a juggler; that’s how it all began.” Sung after each verse, the refrain speaks to how everyone who settles in Cologne becomes a Kölner:

So we all have arrived here;

Today we all speak the same language.

Through this we have won so much.

We are as we are, we “Jecks” on the Rhine.

That is something of which we are very proud.10

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Cologne then, in Bläck Fööss’ vision, is a Shangri-La on the Rhine. No higher earthly status can be reached than to be a Kölner who celebrates Carnival properly (a Jeck). “Speak[ing] the same language” (presumably Kölsch) signifies having reached that status, having become someone who has “won so much.” The song continues:

I am from Palermo, I brought along Spaghetti for you all.

And I was an East German; today I laugh with you.

I am Greek, Turkish, Jew, Muslim, and Buddhist,

a Hochdeustch translation may be found. “Jecken” is also sometimes seen as a plural for Jeck. The full Kölsch text of the lyrics:

“Ich wor ne stolze Römer, kom met Caesars Legion, un ich ben ne Franzus, kom mem Napoleon. Ich ben Buur, Schreiner, Fescher, Bettler un Edelmann, Sänger un Gaukler, su fing alles aan.


De janze Welt, su süht et us, es bei uns he zo Besök. Minsche us alle Länder triff m’r he aan jeder Eck. M’r gläuv, m’r es en Ankara, Tokio oder Madrid, doch se schwade all wie mir un söke he ihr Glöck.”

Refrain:
Su simmer all he hinjekumme, mir sprechen hück all dieseve Sproch. Mir han dodurch su vill jewonne. Mir sin wie mer sin, mir Jecke am Rhing. Dat es jet, wo mer stolz drop sin.

*“Pimock”: someone new to an area, an immigrant; often derogatory. With the cataloguing of nationalities, the sense here seems more “East German,” as suggested by the Akademie för uns Kölsche Sproch website. Standard German slang, “Ossie,” would also have worked.
We all, we are just people; before God we are all the same.\textsuperscript{11}

Living in Cologne, it seems, equalizes all who are privileged enough to do so.

The music of Bläck Fööss, De Höhner, and other popular Carnival bands features prominently not only in traditional/official Carnival but in the alternative as well. A musical component of Carnival has long been the performance of recognizable songs with lyrics rewritten for Carnival. In turn, the Stunksitzung has often featured popular Carnival songs with lyrics rewritten for the Ensemble’s own parodic and satirical purposes—and the Ensemble has not been above making the occasional swipe at traditional bands. (Mild jokes about the wealth of De Höhner’s members are common.) In 2011 and 2012, this (usually, mostly) affectionate nod to the traditional came full circle when the Stunksitzung featured a tribute sketch to Bläck Fööss (in 2011) and a traditional Sitzung featured a nearly identical tribute sketch the following year. The 2012 edition of Dat wor et... describes the sketch in the Sitzung at St. Cornelius in the Rath-Heumar neighborhood of Kalk (a area of Cologne on the eastern side of the Rhine) as featuring players who “each portrayed a band member, their feet draped and costumed, with a leg stretched up into the air.”\textsuperscript{12} The same description precisely fits the Stunksitzung version in 2011—which of course was not mentioned in Dat wor et... 2011.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Tewes and Reinarz, Dat wor et... 2012, 39, 144. “[Sie] hatten ihre Füße so drapiert und kostümiert, dass sie im Sitzen—jeweils ein Bein in die Luft gestreckt—ein Band mitglied darstellten.” In both cases the feet held aloft are bare, visually with the name “Bläck Fööss” (“bare feet”), and are also festooned with wigs, eyes, facial hair, etc. Compare the photos with those on the official Stunksitzung website: http://www.stunksitzung.de/stunksitzung-fotos2011---blaech_ooeoes----.html. Accessed 28 April 2014.
\textsuperscript{13} Tewes and Rösgen, Dat wor et... 2011.
The song “Unser Stammbaum” trades on another common facet of Cologne lore: the city’s tolerance—a claim frequently heard in particular with regards to sexuality. A brief search reveals numerous websites that describe Cologne as open-minded and LGBT-friendly, and Cologne does boast one of Germany’s largest Christopher Street Day celebrations.\(^\text{14}\)

Furthermore, Carnival in Cologne has in recent years boasted two popular LGBT Sitzungen, the *Röschen Sitzung* (annually since 2005) and the *Gloria Sitzung* (2002-2009). The *Röschen Sitzung* emerged from the ashes of the former *Rosa Sitzung*, which the former’s website describes as “the flagship of the alternative Carnival.”\(^\text{15}\) The *Rosa Sitzung* debuted in 1995 and was last presented in 2004. The *Gloria Sitzung* began after the *Rosa Sitzung* changed its performance venue from the Gloria Theater, an LGBT café/club and performance space, in 2002.\(^\text{16}\) In addition there are

\(^{14}\) For a start, see the Cologne Pride website, accessed 05 April 2014, http://www.csd-cologne.de, for an overview of the Parade and festival as well as a summary of Cologne’s history of LGBT rights in the last forty years. A search under the terms “lgbt Cologne” yielded many more results. A blog post on the “Star Online” website (“Australia’s leading gay and lesbian news source,” published online by *Sydney Star Observer* and *Southern Star*, weekly gay and lesbian community newspapers) was typical: “With an estimated one in 10 gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender residents it is no surprise that Cologne (in German, Köln) has been dubbed the gay capital of Germany. The huge number of bars, cafes, restaurants and clubs catering to a gay or lesbian clientele in the city attest to how important that community has become to Cologne’s identity.” Accessed 05 April 2014. See: http://www.starobserver.com.au/life-style/travel-life-style/2011/04/12/gay-pride-in-cologne/49223


numerous popular LGBT Carnival societies and groups, including the StattGarde Colonia Ahoj and the Rosa Funken, a gay male Funken group that has become something of a Cologne institution in its own right.\textsuperscript{17} The Rosa Funken (Pink Funken) carnivalize the pseudo-military Carnival regiments—the Funken, of which the Rote Funken (Red Funken) are the most famous. The Carnival Funken are in turn parodies of the early-nineteenth-century (French, then Prussian) regiments in the Rhineland in the years leading up to and following the Carnival reforms of the 1820s.\textsuperscript{18} In the case of today’s Rosa Funken, the parody is particularly sharp, in that the official Carnival Funken are known for a dance called the Stippe Föttche, a primary movement of which is when the presumably heterosexual “soldiers” bend over and rub their buttocks against one other.\textsuperscript{19} The Rosa Funken’s spoof of official Funken groups playfully challenges both the presumed heteronormativity of the official Funken’s soldiers and the heteronormativity of the dominant images of Cologne Carnival (the drag queen Jungfrau notwithstanding). Arguably, this carnivalization across boundaries of sexuality (remembering that Carnival as such is dominant in heavily Catholic cultures such as the Rhineland) has, however, been historically more accepted by the official guardians of invented traditions than the carnivalization practiced by the alternative Stunksitzung. Queering Carnival, it seems, is allowed and even embraced; making \textit{too much} fun of it is not.

\textbf{Bläck Fööss} does not mention sexuality in “Unsere Stammbaum.” The song focuses on

\textsuperscript{18} Klersch reports Funken regiments participating in Cologne’s Carnival Monday parade from 1823. See Klersch, \textit{kölische Fastnacht}, 86-7.
\textsuperscript{19} The etymological derivation of “Stippe Föttche” as separate words is somewhat vague, but together they translate roughly from the Kölsch as “bent over with one’s rear end sticking out” or possibly “proud behind.” Either is an apt description for this particular dance move.
an image of Cologne that is both less queer and less alternative, and which is seemingly based on the assumption that the melting pot Kölnisch masses have embraced and absorbed the Roman origins narrative as gospel, although it cannot of course be proved. For even in Cologne, we cannot know when Carnival “began.” The question then is whether a provable “start” to Carnival is essential information for an understanding of Cologne Carnival. Have the myth and how its utterances have been received and perceived become so important that the provable history has been carnivalized to the point of being irrelevant? If so—and I contend that this is very nearly the literal case and absolutely so if we are to understand the swirl of utterances and perceptions of Carnival—is its invented history then not an essential component of it?

I argue that it is this very invention of a Cologne Carnival history that forms the core of the alternative Carnival (and its most visible manifestation, the Stunksitzung). Further, I contend that it is this invented aspect of official Carnival which undergirds its strenuous defense by its guardians: “We” (the official Carnival societies and the cultural and social elite they de facto represent and who comprise their membership rolls) may invent the history of Carnival; those who would mock “us” (or the forms of “our” own mockery) most certainly may not. The legend of the Roman origins has been recorded by official scribes in official narratives and received and perceived not as invented but as indeed official—that is, correct, accepted, authentic, true.  

In its utopian self-image, Cologne fashions itself almost as a nation, in the sense of

20. However, a visit to the Cologne Carnival Museum in January 2014 revealed that the accompanying text labelling the museum’s small exhibition on Rome specifically states—after teasing with the possibility—that Carnival did not derive from Rome. This contradicts what is published in the Festkomitee’s 1997 chronicle of Carnival. The museum itself is not especially large and is part of the Festkomitee’s headquarters. See the Cologne Carnival Museum website, accessed 05 April 2014, http://www.koelnerkarneval.de/museum.
Benedict Anderson’s definition of nations as “imagined communities.” Anderson, writing about nationalism in his seminal book, accordingly titled, *Imagined Communities*, describes a nation as “an imagined political community.”\(^{21}\) In his use of “imagined,” Anderson notes how “members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members... yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”\(^{22}\) Cologners cling to their sense of identity as Cologners, with Carnival as their strongest bond. Anderson argues “all communities of larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.”\(^{23}\) Nations, in Anderson’s formulation, are imagined as “sovereign” and “limited,” and ultimately “as a community,” the latter “because... the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”\(^{24}\) The Kölner—during Carnival—self-consciously insist that Cologne exists as its own paradise, outside of the concerns of the rest of the world—in a sense, “sovereign,” as the concerns of politically recognized nations become mostly irrelevant while Carnival reigns. Carnival in Cologne, like Saturnalia in Rome (and in the deepest Bakhtinian sense), re-creates the city as its own imagined “nation” with its own set of invented traditions and historical narratives. The emotional link to Saturnalia is reflective of this pseudo-nationalist urge that is woven into Cologne consciousness. As Anderson writes, “Communities are to be distinguished... by the style in which they are imagined,”\(^{25}\) and Cologne imagines itself—*styles* itself—as the keeper of the true Carnival flame and as the direct indisputable Saturnalian descendant. In the

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\(^{22}\) Ibid.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 6.
next chapter, this study will consider the effects of genuine nationalism (i.e., “real world” as opposed to “imagined”) in the context of nineteenth-century Rhineland politics, and will touch on the invented traditions (including those invented for Carnival) that paralleled the political turmoil.

Through the unpacking of the legends of Cologne Carnival and situating those legends within the pseudo-nationalist utopian self-image of Cologne and its citizens, the centrality of the Roman origins Carnival myth in Cologne and how the official scribes understand/claim the supposed linkage may be understood. This methodology promises a deeper understanding of the binaries of Carnival inherent to this study. Moreover, these interrogations offer means of understanding the invented/re-invented nature of Cologne Carnival itself—in turn aiding the understanding of the phenomenon of the Stunksitzung.

What can be proved? What is known? The earliest evidence in Cologne offers primarily administrative details. Carnival’s presence as a celebration in Cologne has been definitively shown only as far back as the mid-fourteenth century, when an entry in a city “Book of Oaths” (a sort of municipal book of records, sworn to by city officials) dated 05 March 1341 declared: “Under no circumstances shall the Council grant any association support for Carnival from city funds.”

26 This, as Joseph Klersch notes, assumes that Carnival was an established occurrence: “The Books of Oaths of the fourteenth century indeed presuppose the celebration of Carnival as

customary,” even though “they do not reveal full particulars about the form of the celebration.”

Whatever Carnival was, it appears to have occurred regularly.

This reluctance of city officials seemingly lacked sufficient cultural authority, however, to quash Carnival. For, as Klersch observes, although it remains unclear whether city money could ever again be allotted from the Council itself (or from any group), or how the ban was administered (or if it was), the issue was “taken up” by the councilors three additional times, as noted in the Books of Oaths on 22 February 1372, 08 March 1395, and in March 1396.

In their official account, Peter Fuchs and Max-Leo Schwering relate the provable history of the Book of Oaths in almost the same breath as they unabashedly declare a link from Rome to Carnival: “The beginnings of Cologne’s Carnival pleasures lie in the distant times of the Roman colonization of the Rhine.” They acknowledge, however, that the word “vastavent” (Fastabend—Carnival) appears in Cologne only in the “second half of the twelfth century” in what they call “clear reference to Carnival time.” This “colonization,” they assert, and the “promotion” of Cologne (due to the Roman occupying legions) to the status of Roman city, “allowed the populace to celebrate the same festivals as the Romans themselves.”

additional populations “advancing over Gaul and Northern Italy” into the area “at the latest by the second century CE,” bringing with them “Hellenic and eastern mystery cults,” Fuchs and Schwering argue it “can be assumed that the Saturnalia and the Lupercalia, the famous Roman festivals of pleasure and purification, were adopted.”

They assert “the excavations of archeologists in Cologne endorse this conclusion.”

They further argue that “the memory of all this remained alive long ago when Christianity had firmly planted its foot in the Rhineland.”

Later they write that Saturnalias were “annual important joyful celebrations of the ancient world, a kind of Carnival.”

Saturnalia seems then the obvious entry point for a more detailed discussion of the Roman origins narratives and the similarities between the festival of Rome and Carnival.

In considering Saturnalia, it must be asked why, if we cannot know when Carnival, let alone Carnival in Cologne, genuinely “began,” the attachment to this particular narrative has remained so resilient and what does that resilience imply about the theoretical underpinnings of Carnival? Are there, in the Roman origins narrative, theoretical equivalents to the binaries of official/alternative? To what extent can the elements of the alternative Carnival, including the Stunksitzung, be seen as signifiers or even guardians of alternative ways of considering the

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war zur römischen Stadt aufgestiegen, und die Bevölkerung durfte gleichen Feste feiern wie die Römer selbst.”

32. Ibid. “Spätestens während des zweiten nachchristlichen Jahrhunderts drangen über Oberitalien und Gallien auch hellenistisch-orientalische Mysterienkulte zum Rhein vor. Zuerst… Es ist anzunehmen, daß man die Saturnalien und die Lupercalien, die berühmten römischen Freuden- und Reinigungsfeste, beging.”

33. Ibid. “Die Grabungen der Archäologen in Köln lassen diesen Schluß zu.”

34. Schwering and Fuchs, “Geschichte,” 159. “Die Errinnerung an all dies blieb lebendig, als im Rheinland schon lange das Christentum Fuß gefaßt hatte.”

35. Ibid., 159. “Die ‘Saturnalien-’ [sic] waren alljährlich bedeutende Freudenfeste der antiken Welt, eine Art Karneval…”

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Cologne Carnival narrative? I have argued that the alternative Carnival and the Stunksitzung represent a restoration of earlier more Bakhtinian elements of Carnival. How does that view intersect with the accepted narrative?

The partial chronology presented here provides the foundation for considering Carnival as a site of contestation and seeks to define Carnival narratives as opportunities for what Bhabha calls an “enunciation of cultural differences.”36 This “enunciation,” Bhabha argues, “problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address.”37 I submit that the history of Carnival is a history that has been fought over precisely at “the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address” and that Carnival itself has served to “problematize” the “binary division(s)” Bhabha suggests. Bhabha explains this process as

the problem of how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated, and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic.38

Samuel Kinser’s scorn towards the narratives of Roman and folkloric origins for Carnival echo Bhabha’s analysis (as do Hildegard Brog and Max-Leo Schwering’s skepticism about Cologne Carnival’s supposed anti-Nazi pedigree, which will be discussed in a later chapter). Bhabha’s complex iteration is therefore appropriate to the multi-voiced utterances of Carnival. Whether

36. Bhabha, Location, 51.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 51-52. Emphasis added.
direct linkages between antiquity’s and today’s celebrations can be proved or not (they can’t) and
whether there is indeed any solid evidence to support such linkage (there isn’t), it is clear that
Carnival’s history has involved numerous examples of repetition, relocation, and translation—in
particular translation in the Bakhtinian sense discussed in the first chapter. Carnival’s “guise of a
pastness” that has been translated from “one day” to “the next”\(^3\) is core to its understanding. The
inability of succeeding generations to translate the traditions and utterances handed down to
them from their forbears is likewise core to understanding Carnival’s many contestations.

In Cologne specifically, the Stunksitzung represents one of the most visible examples of
those mistranslations, for in its performed opposition to the official and its reception as
alternative, it has become emblematic of a generation. The extent to which the Stunksitzung’s
mistranslations are deliberate—or are perceived/received as being deliberate—must therefore be
considered. Further, the question of what faulty translations—deliberate or not—may follow
from the Stunksitzung as the Ensemble members themselves age into being forbears of newly
invented Carnival traditions must ultimately form part of the discussion. How might future
generations translate or mistranslate the invented traditions and utterances passed to them by the
guardians of both the official and alternative Carnivals?

Before such questions can be situated within the analyses of a specific manifestation such
as the Stunksitzung, however, it is necessary to consider its genuine and mythical forbears: to get
to the Stunksitzung, we must first look at Saturnalia. With its mythical status in relation to
Carnival generally, and Cologne’s particular attachment to the Roman origins legend, Saturnalia,
Rome’s carnivalistic/carnivalesque celebration, is key to the collection of utterances sold as

\(^3\) Emerson, “Editor’s Preface,” in Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky*, xxxi.
Cologne Carnival’s “true story.” The narrative could not have been invented without it and cannot be interrogated without considering it along side Cologne’s Carnival history.

In addition to the mythical supposition that it is Carnival’s direct ancestor, Saturnalia is almost certainly the most widely recognized Roman festival. In his monumental 1981 work, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic*, H. H. Scullard describes it as being “one of the best known of Roman festivals” and states that it “was perhaps the most popular.” Sir James George Frazer writes that the “famous festival” is the namesake “in modern languages” for other “periods of license.” Fuchs and Schwering establish the mood of the festival for their readers by quoting the Greek writer Lucian:

> It is not permitted for me to do anything serious or important
during the Saturnalia, but rather simply to drink, to make noise, to
joke, to play dice, to choose festival kings, to entertain the slaves,
to sing with full throat, and to be somewhat smeared with soot and
dulked in a cold fountain.  

Despite their obvious desire to connect the past to the present, Fuchs and Schwering do not, of course, offer evidence of any direct evolution from ancient Rome to the Rhineland of today. In a
pattern that is common, their efforts extend rather to connecting specific tangible elements of Saturnalia to Carnival. For example, after describing how slaves were allowed during Saturnalia to don togas rather than slave garments as part of the custom of servants and masters trading places (more on this below), they write, “Outside as well, [the slaves] wore hats, that pointed head covering, which much later was also to be found as the primary attribute of clowns and fools at the first General Meetings of the Cologne Carnival Friends [Carnival Society] in 1827!”

Pointed hats alone obviously do not prove Roman heritage in Cologne Carnival. They are clearly not, in Bhabha’s words, “faithful sign[s] of historical memory.” Bhabha’s “strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic” has instead become an obligatory article of Cologne Carnival faith. “Of course,” the Kölner seem to be saying—and Fuchs and Schwering literally say, “Carnival comes from Rome. Just look at the pointy hats!” To cast aspersions on this gospel, to question Bhabha’s “representing of authority,” or to call attention to the “artifice of the archaic” is to declare oneself heretical; it is to risk sanction. It is perhaps even to become alternative.

The Stunksitzung, by insisting on poking official Carnival in the eye, focuses attention on the “artifice.” It jumps up and down, waving its arms, symbolically shouting that it’s all a sham, pointing and jeering that the self-appointed emperors of Carnival are indeed naked. In its rejection of the official, and in its refusal to embrace the invented traditions except on its own

43. Ibid., 159-60. “Gleich den Freien trugen sie Hüte; jene spitze Kopfbedeckung, die viel später erst das Attribut der Clowns und Narren wird und sich auch bei den ersten Generalversammlungen der Kölner Fastnachtsfreunde im Jahre 1827 findet!”
44. Bhabha, Location, 52.
terms, the Stunksitzung implies a disbelief in Cologne Carnival gospel; it suggests questioning the very notion of an official history. Carnival, it submits, is now; the past is ossified, the traditional dull and lifeless. In so doing, the Stunksitzung’s implicit claim to what Carnival really is sticks out as the more legitimate rebellion—its overturning of the social order or, in this instance, an existing, albeit performed, act of supposed overturning, as, in a sense, more Saturnalian. The Stunksitzung overturns that which is presumed already overturned.

The point must be conceded that the various idealized descriptions of Saturnalia from Fuchs, Schwering, Lucian, Bakhtin, Fowler, Scullard, and Frazer demonstrate at least superficial similarities to contemporary Carnival in the German Rhineland. The comparisons are easily—and perhaps necessarily—drawn. The question, however, remains: “What was the Saturnalia?”

For analysis of the Roman Saturnalia narrative and the effect it has on Cologne’s narrative, this study will also, in addition to Scullard, draw upon the work of William Warde Fowler, and, to a lesser degree, H. S. Versnel. Scullard cites both Fowler’s richly detailed *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic: An Introduction to the Study of the Religion of the Romans* and *The Religious Experience of the Roman People—From the Earliest Times to the Age of Augustus* as inspirations.45 (The latter title is a published collection of Fowler’s Gifford

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Lectures.) Both Scullard and Fowler use Ovid’s poem, the *Fasti*, as a source. Although Ovid does not include the Saturnalia in his work, this study will consider a supposition put forward by Anthony J. Boyle and Roger D. Woodard, the translators and editors of the Penguin edition of the poem. Boyle and Woodard posit the *Fasti* as a work of political commentary using a specific poetic form. This idea offers interesting possibilities for analysis of a work like the *Stunksitzung*, which similarly mimics—even parodies—a particular form to comment upon social and political events.

Versnel’s chapters on the Saturnalia in his book, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion II: Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual*, offers similar descriptions of the festival as those of Fowler’s and Scullard’s. Versnel, however, as his book’s title suggests, is quite cautious in stating what can be known for certain. He meticulously reviews the evidence at hand, pointing out what remains unclear and what seems contradictory. For example, he notes the similarities between the Greek god Kronos and the Roman god Saturn and in the rituals surrounding the worship of both. He even offers that there is much about Saturn’s story that suggests the god was viewed as a foreigner, but avoids overt statements of proof except where evidence is clear. “We are,” he writes about the two gods, “well-informed about some common traits, especially the nature of their festivals, the Saturnalia and the Kronia. But the gods share

enigmatic aspects too: the mystery of their ‘original’ nature; their provenance; and the question
of alleged derivation of cult elements from foreign sources.”

Finally, this study considers the somewhat controversial contribution of The Golden
Bough, by Sir James George Frazer. Perhaps too easily described as folkloric, or as “an
imperialist and a romantic” (appellations strongly contested by Robert Fraser), J. G. Frazer
offers intriguing narratives about customs and practices across many cultures. His work has been
enormously influential; that influence, however, has faded in contemporary anthropology,
although Scullard, Fowler, and in particular for purposes here, Bakhtin, all acknowledge his
influence on their own work. Indeed, Frazer’s utterances appear to have had an enormous
influence on Bakhtin—or at the very least, on his own idealized utopian visions of Roman
festivals. Frazer’s unabashed linkage of Rome to Carnival neatly supports Bakhtin’s own
theories.

Dispute remains around Frazer’s legacy and much of the criticism is extremely negative.
Even Robert Ackerman’s biography, which generally praises Frazer, opens with the statement
“Frazer is an embarrassment.” In his book on the Cambridge Ritualists cited in the opening
chapter, Ackerman notes, “Neither the work nor the reputation of Frazer has weathered well.”
Frazer, he writes, “does not appear in any of the professional lineages that anthropologists

49. Ibid., 136.
51. Respectively, Scullard, Festivals, 12; Fowler, Religious Experience, passim; and Bakhtin,
Rabelais, 54. Fowler does often take exception to Frazer’s conclusions, however.
52. Robert Ackerman, J. G. Frazer: His Life and Work (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge
Ackerman, Frazer. Citations are to the Canto edition.
53. Ackerman, Myth and Ritual, 45.
acknowledge today.” Ackerman refers to *The Golden Bough* as “both the culmination and the swan song of the old-style evolutionary anthropology.” However, he notes that Frazer “was immensely important in his own time and the first half of [the twentieth] century,” and “even if he leads nowhere in anthropology as it is currently configured, anthropology is not the only field he touched.” He writes, “History, criticism, and theology are not positivist in their attitudes toward knowledge,” that is, “valuing a theory only for its factual correctness,” and argues that Frazer remains “of inestimable importance.” For if “considered in [the] perspective” of reflecting those disciplines, he is also “concerned with the spiritual effects and moral residues that all powerful images possess and express about the tenor of an age.” Considered in this light, Frazer’s work is useful both for his influence on Fowler, Scullard, and especially Bakhtin, and the qualified utopian vision(s) it represents. When Ackerman, following Northrop Frye’s lead, suggests that *The Golden Bough* is actually a work of literary criticism, he generates the possibility of considering a work ostensibly framed as anthropology in an entirely different light. Citing and agreeing with Stanley Edgar Hyman, Ackerman contends that Frazer (with Darwin, Marx, and Freud) has been part of the process of “provid[ing] basic metaphors and ways

54. Ackerman, *Frazer*, 1.
56. Ackerman, *Frazer*, 2.
57. Ackerman, *Myth and Ritual*, 47.
58. See Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity* (New York and San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963), 17. Hereafter cited in text as Frye, *Fables*. “But the fascination which *The Golden Bough* and Jung’s book on libido symbols have for literary critics is not based on dilettantism, but on the fact that these books are primarily studies in literary criticism, and very important ones.”
of understanding the world that have permeated the modern consciousness.”

This approach of “understanding the world” through metaphor shares much with Hobsbawn’s notion of considering tradition as “invented,” and offers another potential point of engagement with Carnival and its narrative—including the alternative elements of the Stunksitzung. Certainly consideration of Cologne Carnival based only on a “positivist attitude” towards that which is provably factual is problematic at the very least. The very nature of it carnivalizes its own history.

Ackerman’s perspective also recalls Peter Burke’s view that Bakhtin’s ideas “about speech genres and about different voices that can be heard in a single text” might be useful analytical tools for areas of study beyond literary criticism. Thus does Frazer’s work in *The Golden Bough* provide a basis for consideration beyond the immediate anthropological issues and his influence on Bakhtin argues for it. Frazer’s view of Carnival aligns obviously with Bakhtin’s—and ironically with both the traditional and alternative. Ackerman writes, “By its nature the comparative method [of anthropology], of which Frazer is the practitioner par excellence, tends to place greater emphasis on the lower rather than on the higher, to focus on the potential rather than the actual.”

This places Frazer’s utterances about Carnival and festival squarely in a Bakhtinian frame, suggesting the use of Frazer’s work in conjunction with Bakhtin. Such an effort serves the broader purpose of situating Cologne Carnival, its local invented historical narrative, and the Stunksitzung’s place in that narrative, within this Bakhtinian frame.

60. P. Burke, *Cultural History*, 52.
Peter Burke’s position on the expanded analytical possibilities of Bakhtin’s ideas also suggests that the invention of a Carnival narrative is a Bakhtinian exercise. In the opening chapter of *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, titled “Bakhtin in the Sober Light of Day,” Ken Hirschkop argues that Bakhtin himself, in the essay “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity,” both “shows us how to derive the forms of ‘author’ and ‘hero’ from the structures built into our experience” and “how they evolve through a long and complicated cultural history.” Bakhtin, Hirschkop writes, argues that, “The forms... come from ancient tragedy, from... confession, from biography, romanticism, classicism.” Bakhtin’s description of the evolution Hirschkop describes is arguably more “complicated” than the history itself. However, in tracing what he calls “biological values,” Bakhtin considers the literary forms and eras listed by Hirschkop. As his task is to categorize and analyze particular characteristics within the constructs of “author” and hero “forms,” it would be a mistake to make too much of any narrative suggested by Bakhtin in “Author and Hero,” but Hirschkop is not wrong in his argument that a narrative of the history of the forms is present. The crafting of a Carnival narrative, then, may be considered in a similar light.

Accordingly, and taking into account Frazer and Frye’s view that *The Golden Bough* is a work of literary criticism, how might the official invented histories of Carnival in Cologne be

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64. Bakhtin, “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity,” 4-256.
considered? The truth of those histories is no longer relevant—the story of them has become a ritualized gospel of myth. Frye defines “a ritual” as “being a temporal sequence of acts in which the conscious meaning or significance is latent.” That is, “It can be seen by an observer, but is largely concealed from the participators themselves.” The “latent” quality of Frye’s “conscience meaning or significance” is somewhat looser than Victor Turner’s definition in which he describes rituals as “having reference to beliefs in invisible beings or powers regarded as the first and final causes of all effects.” Carnival is of course a festival deriving from a Christian culture, although religion is arguably relegated to a background assumption in Cologne’s celebrations.

Turner views “ritual essentially as performance, enactment,” and “not primarily as rules or rubrics,” whereas Frye contends, “In ritual... we may find the origin of narrative.” The official version of Cologne Carnival origins, the invented histories, the narratives of its “performances” and “enactments,” have become so ingrained that the storytellers—the “performers” and “enactors”—can no longer challenge or reinvent them. They instead practice the traditions and concretize the story, ritualizing it and renewing and re-creating the unquestioned narrative—setting up, in contradiction to Turner, de facto “rules and rubrics.” Carnival’s narrative thereby becomes its own ritual and only the outliers, the ones who refuse to play along—the alternative practitioners, if you will—are able to invent anew within the tradition. They avoid Frye’s warning (also an apt description of how those histories have been

67. Ibid.
derived—invented): “It is only when we try to expound the derivation chronologically that we find ourselves writing pseudo-prehistorical fictions and theories of mythological contract.” Of course, these acts of denial of the official by the alternatives in time become their own rituals, but not before, ironically, re-inventing the faux-Saturnalian fest as an arguably more authentically Saturnalian one.

This process is analogous to Frye’s scheme of archetypes and myth. Frye, in seeking to explain how “the term” myth “[got] into literary criticism,” states, “In most works of fiction we are at once aware that the mythos or sequence of events which holds our attention is being shaped into a unity. We are continually, if often unconsciously, attempting to construct a larger pattern of simultaneous significance out of what we have so far read or seen.” The narrative of Cologne Carnival’s accepted history continues to be “constructed,” that is, “shaped into a [unified]” vision based on what has been “seen” by the Cologners, leading to the inevitable “Of course Carnival comes from Rome—just look at the pointy hats!” syndrome described above.

Frye discusses an “inductive movement towards the archetype” as a “process of backing up… from structural analysis.” This description offers a further clue for understanding the process of inventing the official histories of Cologne Carnival. In describing how such a “backing up” of Hamlet works, Frye writes, “The literary anthropologist who chases the source of the Hamlet legend from the pre-Shakespeare to Saxo, and from Saxo to nature myths, is not running away from Shakespeare: he is drawing closer to the archetypal form from which

69. Ibid., 17.
70. Ibid., 25.
71. Ibid., 13.
Shakespeare re-created.” Similarly, I contend, when the Cologne Carnival official scribes “chase” the source of Carnival to Saturnalia—when the Roman festival is pronounced and celebrated as the Ur-festival of the Rhineland—they are moving closer toward Carnival’s spiritual roots—indeed toward its “archetypal form”—rather than moving away from its “true” roots. They are re-creating, they believe, or choose to believe, the genesis. Carnival becomes its own archetype; Bhabha’s “artifice of the archaic” is made manifest, even as it parodies its own invented history.

Further questions are suggested. If the Carnival myth as here described is a parody of history, might it not also be considered as a parody of actual myth and mythology as described by Frye, and if so, in what way?

Returning briefly to Barthes, with whom this chapter began, we note that he counts mythology as “but one fragment of [the] vast science of signs”—that is, “semiology,” or as it is now more commonly known, semiotics. Describing Carnival and Carnival histories in terms of myth/mythos/mythology thus brings the discussion into the realm of semiotics, and Barthes would seemingly approve: “In a single day, how many really non-signifying fields do we cross? Very few, sometimes none.” He writes that mythology “is a part of both semiology inasmuch as it a formal science, and of ideology inasmuch as it is an historical science.” The accepted, received narrative of Carnival straddles both history and ideology, the histories are invented from the ideologies. In addition, the histories represent the ideologies so completely that the

72. Ibid.
73. Barthes, Mythologies, 133.
74. Ibid., 135, n2.
75. Ibid., 135.
semiological relationship between them is scarcely noticed by the primary—or rather, the official—participants. The alternatives too have a semiological/ideological relationship to Carnival’s histories. In their performed rebellion (against an ostensibly rebellious event which is itself a performed rebellion), the alternatives signify—or presume that they signify—an older deeper authenticity, their own notions of Carnival histories inextricably linked to their own ideologies.

In signifying their ideologies and inventing their histories, the alternative and official exist within overlapping frames of myth that both represent—or rather both claim to represent—as the real history, the authentic narrative. The work of social anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss considers how mythology can evolve within a culture to become understood as history. Lévi-Strauss discusses the phenomenon in his book, *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture*, in a chapter titled “When Myth Becomes History.” He explores two accounts of the tribal history of the native Tsimshian culture in Canada. Lévi-Strauss is writing about anthropological observations about two conflicting histories that are rooted in oral tradition, but his work nonetheless offers useful insight, posing the question, “Where does mythology end and where does history start?” Because of their basis in oral history rather than “written documents,” Lévi-Strauss writes, the books/histories he is analyzing, “illustrate characteristics of a kind of history widely different from our own.”

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77. Ibid., 38-39.
It [was] as if a diachronic succession of events was simultaneously projected on the screen of the present in order to reconstitute piece by piece a synchronic order which exists and which is illustrated by the roster of names and privileges of a given individual.\textsuperscript{78}

The official and the alternative of Cologne Carnival exist in a similar relationship. The official represents a “synchronic order,” existing in the present in the guise of the authentic historical—in Bhabha’s “guise of a pastness”—signifying “privileges,” in this case of a given group of individuals. The alternative represents Lévi-Strauss’ “diachronic succession of events,” signifying the changes of time and history, all the while “project[ing]” itself “on the screen of the present,” ironically in this instance “reconstitut[ing]” an arguably more “faithful sign of historical memory.” He argues, “The simple opposition between mythology and history which we are accustomed to make is not at all a clear-cut one… there is an intermediate level.”\textsuperscript{79} I submit that the different receptions of the official and alternative narratives of Cologne Carnival exist in Lévi-Strauss’ “intermediate level.”

Bakhtin’s expansive view of Carnival and its “universal spirit” allows the embrace of seemingly contradictory narratives. Lévi-Strauss writes:

\begin{center}
We would think that it is impossible that two accounts which are not the same can be true at the same time, but nevertheless, they seem to be accepted as true in some cases, the only difference is that one account is considered better or more accurate than the
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 38, 40.
other. In other cases, the two accounts can be considered equally
because the differences between them are not perceived as such.\textsuperscript{80}

The competing claims of authenticity by the official (voiced and assumed) and the alternative
(performed and implied) co-exist in Bakhtin’s universal Carnival spirit, approximating Lévi-
Strauss’ “intermediate level” between history and mythology. Both are perceived—“accepted”—
as “true in some cases,” depending on the camp in which the receiver perceives himself or
herself to reside, despite Bläck Fööss’ musical contention that the Jecke all “speak the same
language.”\textsuperscript{81} The outsider, the non-Kölner, however, may easily see little difference and may
thus consider both “equally.”

Saturnalia, then, in relationship to Carnival’s invented history, also occupies a space in
this intermediate level, \textit{between} the mythology of Carnival and the unknown, unknowable “true”
history. It is part of the mantel of the guise of Carnival’s pastness. It is the emotional antecedent
of the universal Carnival spirit.

What then is known about Saturnalia? And, as with Carnival, what are the important
differences between what is known and what is believed? Where is the intersection of the myth
and the history? In their discussions, neither Scullard nor Fowler nor Versnel are able to provide
great detail regarding the actual practices associated with Saturnalia. Technically, 17 December
was the official religious holiday, but the celebration varied at times from three to seven days,
and, Versnel asserts, sometimes longer.\textsuperscript{82} Saturnalia apparently dates to the early Republic and

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 41-42.
\textsuperscript{81} Knipp, Hans, and Bläck Fööss, “Unsere Stammbaum,” 2000.
\textsuperscript{82} Scullard, \textit{Festivals}, 205; Fowler, \textit{Roman Festivals}, 268; Fowler, \textit{Religious Experience}, 78,
80-81; and, Versnel, \textit{Inconsistencies}, 146, 186-88.
appears to have been celebrated “throughout the days of the Empire.” The festival was in honor of the god Saturn, whose own mythological origins are somewhat murky. Was he “a god of sowing or of seed-corn?” Fowler agrees that Saturn was an agricultural deity, but writes that Romans “knew very little about him, and cared only for his Graecized festival.” Versnel rejects the idea of a god whose celebration fell in December and who was often depicted with a sickle as being associated with sowing. He does agree that Saturn was an agricultural deity and first suggests that harvest may have been a more logical linkage, before theorizing that the opening of the silos of seed-corn seems most likely as the god’s provenance. He stresses, however, that he does “not claim to have detected the original nature of Saturn,” believing the “evidence is too lacunary ever to arrive at definitive and all-embracing conclusions.”

Frazer writes about Saturn and his “merry reign” in lofty terms. Saturn, “the god of sowing and of husbandry,” had mortal origins, having “lived on the earth long ago as a righteous and beneficent king…” Fowler writes that among the “plenty of legends” about Saturn is that of his status “as the first civilizer of his people, the representative of a Golden Age.”

Fowler is reluctant, however, to characterize the Saturnalia as anything “more than the license of the population of a great metropolitan city, an out-growth… from the rude winter

83. Scullard, Festivals, 206-7.
84. Ibid., 205-6.
85. Fowler, Roman Festivals, 269. See also Fowler, Religious Experience, 80.
86. Versnel, Inconsistencies, 164-90.
87. Ibid., 184.
89. Ibid.
90. Fowler, Roman Festivals, 269.
rejoicings of the farmer and his familia."\(^91\) Certainly the first half of this description fits present-day Cologne Carnival as well, and, similarly, Frazer’s writings on the Saturnalia also reflect much of what has been written to describe Carnival. He draws a broad picture of the general themes, noting how “many peoples” have “observe[d] an annual period of license… when the whole population give themselves up to extravagant mirth and jollity.”\(^92\) Comparisons to Bakhtin’s “universal” Carnival “spirit” are easy to the point of obvious: Frazer’s “population giv[ing] themselves up” readily calls to mind Bakhtin’s “life [coming] out of its usual, legalized, and consecrated furrows and enter[ing] the sphere of utopian freedom.”\(^93\)

Versnel summarizes how license as a cultural practice becomes imbedded through myth and ritual:

> Collective myths and rituals are often created and performed in order to expose in word or action anomalies and paradoxes of nature or society, thus reducing the threat of their inherent tensions. Both myth and ritual may go even further and devise a non-realistic, paradoxical, and internally contradictory imagery in order to show what happens if one ventures outside the borders of orderly society. These strategies prevail especially in two types of festivals: *festivals of licence*, such as the Saturnalia and Carnival,

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and rituals of initiation. Both carry the notion of “transition”; both are marked by signs of reversal.\textsuperscript{94}

Carnival in Cologne is “performed,” ostensibly, precisely “to expose in word or action” (or, I contend, both—indeed, in utterances of all sorts) the “anomalies and paradoxes” of, particularly, Cologne as a society. It is done so with deliberate mirth, through deliberate mockery. The Stunksitzung goes “even further” and devises it “non-realistic, paradoxical, and contradictory imagery” and intentionally “ventures outside the borders of orderly society” and its official, traditional Carnival.

Frazer’s Saturnalia is based on the “Golden Age” story. King Saturn, he writes, “Drew the rude and scattered dwellers on the mountains together, taught them to till the ground, gave them laws, and ruled in peace.”\textsuperscript{95} His presence on the thrown was wondrous:

- The earth brought forth abundantly; no sound of war or discord troubled the happy world; no baleful love of lucre worked like poison in the blood of the industrious and contented peasantry.
- Slavery and private property were alike unknown: all men had all things in common.\textsuperscript{96}

It is this idyllic time, this mythic utopian era that Saturnalia was presumed to honor and create anew, if only for a short time, and if only in festival form. Carnival too celebrates an idyllic vision in which social divisions are erased or overturned.

\textsuperscript{94} Versnel, \textit{Inconsistencies}, 3.
\textsuperscript{95} J. G. Frazer, \textit{The Golden Bough}, 630.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
Saturnalia opened with a sacrifice at the temple of Saturn followed by a public banquet, which was, “a time of general jollity: shops, law-courts, and schools were shut, while gambling in public was allowed.” Frazer writes, “Feasting and revelry and all the mad pursuit of pleasure... seemed to have especially marked” Saturnalia. Klersch argues that the festival was officially changed to three days with the Emperor’s calendar reforms in 257 CE, but that “in reality” people continued to celebrate the holiday for “an entire week.” Frazer and Klersch’s descriptions bear resemblance to Carnival, with food and drink and boisterous public celebrations attached to no obvious religious devotion (once the ritual sacrifice was finished).

Compare Frazer’s characterization of Saturnalia to one of Cologne Carnival from 1925: “The Cologners had their Carnival again. Everyone sang, laughed, and joked. Wherever anyone went, joy and merriment ruled, as before, everywhere.” This also accurately describes a Sitzung audience—including the Stunksitzung.

Frazer argues that Saturnalia was not only “popularly supposed to commemorate the merry reign of Saturn,” or “to be an imitation of the state of society in Saturn’s time,” but indeed

99. J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 631. As noted earlier, Both Scullard and Fowler maintain that Saturnalia celebrations did not always last seven days.
that “the Saturnalia passed for nothing more or less than a temporary revival or restoration of [his] reign.”\textsuperscript{103} This idea recalls again Bakhtin’s words that Carnival “is a special condition… of the world’s revival and renewal… most clearly expressed in the Roman Saturnalia, perhaps as a true and full, though temporary, return of Saturn’s Golden Age upon earth.”\textsuperscript{104} Later he repeats the point, writing how a Medieval feast “presented this happier future of a general material affluence, equality, and freedom, just as the Roman Saturnalia announced the return of the ‘Golden Age.’”\textsuperscript{105} Fuchs and Schwering, again citing material particulars, note the “clownish groups” of Roman revelers, “torches in their hands, raucously crossing the city.”\textsuperscript{106} They continue: “With wild exuberance [the revelers] paid homage to the God of Freedom, called back—even if only for a few days—the ‘Golden Age’ of Saturn.”\textsuperscript{107} The authors relate these events to an 1823 “distinct recourse to antiquity,” as “the Cologne Carnival Celebrants phrased it” when they wrote “Wisdom in fool’s clothing brings us to the ‘Golden Age.’”\textsuperscript{108} Ultimately, Fuchs and Schwering acknowledge the ease with which similarities between Carnival and Saturnalia are drawn, clinging to the suggestion of a literal link: “Indeed, abundant echoes of the

\textsuperscript{104} Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais}, 7-8.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid. “In wüster Ausgelassenheit huldigten sie dem Gott der Freiheit, riefen—wennd auch nur für wenige Tage—die ‘goldenen Zeiten’ des Saturn zurück.”
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid. “‘Weisheit im Narrenkleid bringt uns die goldene Zeit,’ so formulierten die Kölner Fastnachtsjocken um 1823 in einem deutlichen Rückgriff auf die Antike.” Fuchs, Schwering, Zöller, and Oelsner are unclear in what they mean by “die Kölner Fastnachtsjocken” and where or how the phrase was recorded. The motto for Carnival in 1823 was “Thronbesteigung des Helden Carneval” (“The Hero of Carnival’s Ascension to the Throne”). See Ibid., 258.
Saturnalia of the Roman days find themselves in the modern romantic Cologne Carnival.¹⁰⁹

Their utterance depends upon and contributes to the ongoing narrative, a Bakhtinian dialogue in the intermediate level of invented history and blurred mythology, a conversation that exists in “Carnival time,” standing outside the monologue of historical documentation.

Saturnalia, then, in the Frazerian/Bakhtinian view, and through the lens of Cologne’s self-reflecting mythos, is a parodic celebration and event. The similarities between Saturnalia and Carnival thus validate the positing of Carnival as a parody of Roman festivals such as Saturnalia, suggesting that Carnival did, in a sense (e.g., a symbolic, parodic sense), derive from Rome.

Working then from a premise of Carnival as a parody of Saturnalia, what is meant by the term parody itself? Simon Dentith in his book, Parody, offers a “preliminary definition”: “Parody includes any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice.”¹¹⁰ Although Dentith’s definition, which he acknowledges is “deliberately widely drawn,”¹¹¹ implies intentionality in the creation of parody as such, it nonetheless encourages the reading of Carnival, whatever its literal history, as a parody of (among other things) Saturnalia. Might the Roman origins narrative then in part be based on a similar unconscious supposition? Whatever its origins, Carnival clearly had and has parodic intent. Certainly the Frazerian/Bakhtinian universal spirit perception of Carnival’s invented history leads to a parodic reception—even one in which the parodied “cultural

¹⁰⁹. Ibid., 161. “In der Tat finden sich im neuzeitlichen, romantischen kölnischen Karneval reichlich Anklänge an die Saturnalien aus römischen Tagen.”
¹¹¹. Ibid., 37.
production or practice” is not known first hand by the parody creators. Bakhtin’s notion of one generation being unable to understand the utterances of the next can thus be considered within the possible frame of one generation’s utterances parodying those of previous generations through incomplete memories and invented histories. Dentith notes:

The functions which parody serves can vary widely, so that it is impossible to specify any single social or cultural direction for the mode. In fact, the social and cultural meanings of parody, like all utterances, can only be understood in the density of the interpersonal and intertextual relations in which it intervenes.112

Carnival then, considered in this light of a collection of parodic utterances of an incompletely remembered, thoroughly invented history—a contested history “intervening” in a “density” of “interpersonal and intertextual relations” that permeate the many cultural utterances swirling around and through it. Carnival thereby embraces again its place within Bhabha’s “guise of a pastness” and “artifice of the archaic.”

One element to consider is the degree to which Carnival, if a parody of Saturnalia, is “relatively polemical” with regards to the earlier festival. In the previous chapter this study addressed the notion that Carnival, in Michael Gardiner’s words, presents “politics of culture that can be described as the desire to understand and encourage the ‘popular deconstruction’ of official discourses and ideologies.”113 I argued that the Stunksitzung should be similarly read. Likewise, I contend that Carnival itself is appropriately read as deconstructive discourse, in the

112. Ibid.
sense(s) suggested by Gardiner, Tom Moylan, and Catherine Belsey using deconstruction as a term describing a critical exercise.\textsuperscript{114} Given the cultural and emotional importance of Cologne’s genuine and mythical connections to ancient Rome, the city’s Carnival—a festival which is in part comprises critical, deconstructive discourse—is by extension a criticism of Rome, whether an intentional one or not. Its parody, therefore, contains parody of its mythical predecessor.

Schwering and Fuchs observe Saturnalia’s (and by extension, Carnival’s) striking similarities to other celebrations of earlier eras, including those in Third Millennium BCE Babylonia, ancient Egypt (and the Cult of Isis), and the twelfth-century Brabant Province of Belgium.\textsuperscript{115} Was Saturnalia then a parody of these earlier celebrations? Might they in turn have been parodies of still other celebrations? Regardless, Schwering and Fuchs’ invented narratives of Carnival are propagated in Cologne legend and represent what Wolfgang Oelsner, one of Schwering and Fuchs’ collaborators on \textit{Kölner Karneval}, characterizes as “the desire for the second, the other life.”\textsuperscript{116} Oelsner, in his 2004 book, \textit{Fest der Sehnsüchte: Warum Menschen Karneval brauchen; Psychologie, Kultur und Unkultur des Narrenfests} (Festival of Desires: Why People Need Carnival; Culture and Un-Culture of the Fools’ Festival), writes that “people have only one life,” but that they ask themselves the

questions that arise again and again: How would it be if I were

another person or became another person? If I had made different

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\item \textsuperscript{114} Ibid. Also Moylan, \textit{Demand the Impossible}, 213; and, Belsey, \textit{Critical Practice}, 103-4.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Fuchs, et al., \textit{Karneval}, 158-59.
\end{itemize}
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decisions in the key moments of my life? If I had been born into a
different family, in a different class, a different religion, into a
different landscape? Even if I could have come into the world as a
different sex? It would be nice if we could try it just once, to
pretend. But the world around us does not allow it—not at any rate
without finding us strange or sick.\(^\text{117}\)

Oelsner’s belief in the universality of human questioning of or longing for alternative
possibilities in life undergirds his thesis of the necessity of Carnival: “Everything that we do has
consequences. Always. Unless we play.”\(^\text{118}\) Carnival, he maintains, is how we play—and, as
Bakhtin would also have it, Carnival is universal: “All cultures have fostered it and do foster it,
almost all celebrate the ‘Game of the Upside-Down World.’”\(^\text{119}\)

This innate desire to play, to assume other guises, to live a different life, to turn the world
upside-down—to have a fifth season, if only for a short time—leads to the creation and embrace
of invented traditions and invented narratives. It is an impulse that drives, even within those
invented traditions and narratives, the ongoing process to find and create the alternative. The
evolution of Carnival, as Bakhtin would have it, as Oelsner would deign necessary, and which

\(^{117}\) Ibid. “Menschen haben nur ein Leben… Die immer wieder hochkommenden Fragen: Wie
wäre das, wenn ich ein anderer wäre oder würde? Wenn ich mich an Wegmarken meines Lebens
anders entschieden hätte? Wenn ich in eine andere Familie, in einen anderen Stand, eine andere
Religion, in eine andere Landschaft hineingeboren worden wäre? Hätte ich gar als anderes
Geschlecht auf die Welt kommen können? Es wäre schön, wir könnten das mal ausprobieren, so
tun als ob. Doch die Mitwelt wird das nicht zulassen. Jedenfalls nicht, ohne uns befremdlich oder
krank zu finden.”

\(^{118}\) Ibid. “Alles was wir tun, hat Konsequenzen. Immer. Es sei denn, wir spielen.”

\(^{119}\) Ibid. “Alle Kulturen pflegten und pflegen es, und fast all feiern das ‘Spiel der verkehrten
Welt’.” Oelsner is literally referring to what he terms the “Game with the Mask” (“Spiel der verkehrten
Welt”) or the “Masked Game” (“Maskenspiel”).
the Stunkers have indeed staged is one of a continual, inevitable movement towards a broader expression of the Carnival spirit. It is a process through which one generation attempts to talk to another, using, as this study will show, a variety of methodologies, primarily that of imitation and parody.

Oelsner, in his article, “Liebe, Sünde, Leidenschaft: Ein närrisches Jahrtausandereignis” (Love, Sin, Passion: A Foolish Millenial Event), published in Dat wor et... 1999, describes Cologne Carnival as being “at the intersection of religion, philosophy, folklore, and psychology—on the crossover from the Middle Ages to the modern era.” Writing about Sebastian Brant’s 1458 novel The Ship of Fools, Oelsner offers entry into a possible means of examining a long disputed history, or rather long disputed histories. Thomas Hill Jamieson wrote in his introduction to the Alexander Barclay English translation of Brant’s novel: “Brant’s satire is a satire for all time… It can never grow old; in the mirror in which the men of his time saw themselves reflected, the men of all times can recognize themselves.” Similarly, and following Jamieson’s lead, might not a similar timelessness be extrapolated with regards to Carnival in Cologne? The area’s attachment to Carnival as a fifth season outside of standard time and the demonstrably ahistoric Romans origins narrative are yet further examples of Carnival’s tradition of performed disruption: not only is the world turned upside down, time is as well. The provable is irrelevant; the myth is what survives.


Carnival’s turning the world upside down is popularly also attributed to being a legacy of Rome. In one example, Fowler and Scullard both touch on “the part played... by slaves,” who participated in a role reversal during Saturnalia and were “waited on by their masters... treated as being in a state of equality.” Scullard writes, “Masters waited at mealtime on their servants who briefly were treated as equals.” Both offer similar brief suppositions as to the origins of the custom, with Fowler suggesting that the slaves “represent[ed] the farm servants of olden time... who at the end of their year’s work were allowed to enjoy themselves” as equals and Scullard that in “early times... master and man worked more closely together and the farmer relaxed among his hands.” Scullard also mentions the “mock king” that was crowned “within the family” to serve as a “Master of Revels”—a role similarly played on a much larger scale and stage by each year’s Prince of Cologne Carnival.

Klersch also discusses the change in the social order that was temporarily instituted at Saturnalia, noting that the festival represented “suspended the drudgery of the slaves.” Normally, writes Klersch, “a slave must either work or sleep, but on these days [of Saturnalia], these stepchildren of fate were free from work and took part in the general delights.”

Social reversals went further, as Klersch explains:

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124. Ibid., 206-7; and Fowler, *Roman Festivals*, 273.
127. Ibid. “Hieß es schon, ein Sklave muß entweder arbeiten oder schlafen, so waren diese Stiefkinder des Geschickes an diesen Tagen von der Arbeit frei und nahmen an der allgemeinen Lust teil.”
Instead of slave clothes [the slaves] wore tunics, togas, and the symbol of freedom, the hat. At least in the smaller houses, they dined together with their masters or held their festive meal before the family, at which sometimes even the master of the house served them. They allowed their tongues to run free and took small naughty liberties against their master. During these days the freepersons acquiesced to slovenly clothes or ran through the city engaged in all sorts of mummery.128

Frazer describes a similar scene:

But no feature of this festival is more remarkable; nothing in it seems to have struck the ancients themselves more than the license granted to slaves at this time. The distinction between the free and the servile classes was temporarily abolished. The slave might rail at his master, intoxicate himself like his betters, sit down at table with them, and not even a word of reproof would be administered to him for conduct which at any other season might have been punished with stripes, imprisonment, or death. Nay, more, masters

128. Ibid. “Statt Sklavenkleidung trugen sie Tunika, Toga und das Symbol der Freiheit, den Hut. Zumindest in den kleineren Häusern speisten sie mit der Herrschaft zusammen oder hielten sie ihr festliches Mahl vor der Familie, wobei zuweilen sogar die Herren sie bedienten. Sie durften der Zunge freieren Lauf lassen und sich selbst kleine Freiheiten gegen den Herrn herausnehmen. Die Freien gefielen sich in diesen Tagen in salopper Kleidung oder liefen in allerlei Vermummung durch die Stadt.” The hat, presumably, is the one referenced by Fuchs, Schwering, Zöller, and Oelsner.
actually *changed places* with their slaves and waited on them at table; and not till the serf had done eating and drinking was the board cleared and dinner set for his master.\(^{129}\)

For Frazer, this social reversal during Saturnalia took on a special quality; the season becomes a time outside of normal rules. “So far was this inversion of ranks carried, that each household became for a time a mimic republic at which the high offices of state were discharged by slaves…”\(^{130}\) This special time created a parody of social order, even one of history itself. Frazer’s descriptions of Saturnalia invite comparison to Carnival and Frazer does not hesitate to do so, wondering whether, “in the light of all the facts that have come before us... the resemblance does not amount to identity.”\(^{131}\)

Frazer does acknowledge that Carnival, occurring just before Lent in February or early March, “does not coincide with the date of the Saturnalia.” He posits that the festival may have been originally celebrated in rural areas in February or March, but shifted dates in the urban areas with the reforms of Julian calendar. His decidedly non-Kinserian hypothesis is that Catholic Church successfully “stamp[ed] out Saturnalia in the towns,” but “suffer[ed] the original festival... to linger unmolested in the country,” its identity apparently safe because it was “disguised by a difference of date.”\(^{132}\) Carnival, Frazer seems to suggest, carnivalized time to avoid official censure.

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\(^{130}\) Ibid.
\(^{131}\) Ibid., 634.
\(^{132}\) Ibid., 634-35.
Frazer’s re-imagining of Saturnalian dates does perhaps offer some explanation for the calendar placement of a major Christian festival, which falls at more-or-less the same time as the traditionally understood time for Saturnalia: Christmas. Both Scullard and Fowler suggest that elements of Saturnalia were adopted by the Christian Church for its celebration of Christmas. Bakhtin argues that, “the tradition of the Saturnalias remained unbroken and alive in the Medieval Carnival” and contends that there was a “genetic link” between Medieval Carnivals and “ancient pagan festivities, agrarian in nature.” Bakhtin further connects both Saturnalia and pagan celebrations to Christianity’s Carnival when he writes: “In the early Middle Ages folk laughter penetrated not only into the middle classes but even into the highest circles of the Church… The attraction of folk humor was strong at all levels of the young feudal hierarchy, both lay and ecclesiastical.” In his list of reasons, he includes that “the tradition of the Roman Saturnalia and other forms of Roman legalized folk humor was still alive,” and “the Church adapted the time of Christian feasts to local pagan celebrations…”

The narrative of Saturnalia being co-opted for Christmas fits neatly into a larger narrative of Christian co-option of Roman religious practices—a narrative which clearly parallels that of Carnival deriving from Saturnalia. Fowler argues this co-option of Roman practice by the early Church, devoting his final Gifford Lecture primarily to the idea. He credits a number of “points of contact, or of contrast, or both” that made Rome ultimately receptive to Christianity. The Church adopted “the calendar, the ritual, and the terminology or vocabulary” of Rome.

133. Scullard, Festivals, 207, and Fowler, Roman Festivals, 272.
134. Bakhtin, Rabelais, 8.
135. Ibid., 76.
“There were,” he contends, “certain direct legacies from the old Roman religion, of which Christianity could dispose with profit, in the shape of forms of ritual, and… words of real significance… which were destined to become of permanent and priceless value…”

I submit that this co-option of the practices and customs of one religious culture by another has significantly formed and forms still the underpinnings of the ongoing tangled origins narrative of Carnival. Notwithstanding the centuries of gaps in documented evidence, the existence of pre-Christian Roman traditions within post-Roman Christianity suggests a direct line between Carnival and Saturnalia, as well as other festivals of antiquity; thus does the narrative persist. I further submit that it is useful to consider the similarities between both the historic Carnival(s) and contemporary one(s) and the festivals and celebrations of antiquity—because of the resilience of the Roman ancestral narratives. Such a consideration of the similarities will aid contemporary understanding of why the Roman narrative and the folkloric narrative have persisted. Rather than simply dismissing imagined histories and Carnival narratives, this study shall instead interrogate their complexities.

Ackerman suggests that Frazer’s work—his utterances—be considered in a context of “understanding the world” through metaphor and “provid[ing] basic metaphors” for it. Similarly, a Frazerian reading of the Stunksitzung’s official (that is, by those persons and organizations self-designated as official) reception as lower/alternative offers an interesting perspective. The Stunksitzung Ensemble accepts the lower designation, which they then overturn by embracing and privileging it. Indeed, they revel in and flaunt it. Through its greater degree of historical authenticity (within a context of a deliberately invented narrative) the lower is actually higher

137. Ibid., 322, 324, 329.
and alternative therefore becomes its new metaphor; a new more carnivalesque narrative—or at least a new more carnivalesque chapter in the existing narrative—is invented. The process is not unlike Frazer’s invention of a Saturnalian narrative. Nor, I submit, is it far removed from Wilson’s folkloric one.

In light of Wilson’s embrace of and Bakhtin’s demonstrated interest in folklore, the implications of Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci’s writings suggest another avenue of potential interrogation. Suggesting that Bakhtin’s “work on Carnival textualizes the context,” Graham Pechey implies that perhaps Gramscian is a more telling description of Bakhtin’s view of Carnival than folkloric.

Pechey stops just short of linking Bakhtin’s Carnival directly to Gramsci, but he nonetheless finds much similarity to the Italian’s work in Bakhtin’s analysis of Dostoevsky. Consider for example, Pechey’s assertion that “Gramsci’s concept of the revolutionary party is not far removed from [the] catholic inclusiveness ascribed by Bakhtin to Dostoevskian polyphony.” It is in his book *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* that Bakhtin first expresses some of his ideas about Carnival and what he terms a “Carnival sense of the world.” As noted earlier, Bakhtin defines “this Carnival sense of the world” as “possess[ing] a mighty life creating and transforming power, an indestructible vitality.” Compare this with his later description in *Rabelais and His World* (cited above) of Carnival as having “a universal spirit,” or being “a

139. Ibid., 22-25, 27.
140. Ibid., 22.
142. Ibid.
special condition of the entire world, of the world’s revival and renewal.”

Pechey’s argument for a reading of Bakhtin’s reading of Dostoevsky that is explicitly political parallels Holquist’s argument for a historical-political reading of Bakhtin’s reading of Rabelais. Bakhtin’s “polyphony,” Pechey contends, “stands for the ideal condition of civil society,” by which he means the Gramscian concept of civil society. Gramsci describes “civil society” as one of “two major superstructural ‘levels’” (the other being “‘political society’ or ‘the State’”) that “correspond on the one hand to the function of ‘hegemony,’ which the dominant group exercises throughout society, and on the other hand to that of ‘direct domination’ or command exercised through the State and ‘juridical’ government.” When I argue in favor of Pechey’s implied endorsement of labeling Bakhtin “Gramscian,” it is in the sense of Bakhtin’s concern with the social strata of the folk and those whose rule over them and how the implicit differences are manifested in their respective Carnival utterances as well as how each perceives the Carnival utterances of the other.

Gramsci’s lengthy and complex ideas about hegemony therefore offer means of interrogating the perceived dynamics of power between official/traditional and alternative Carnival. His ideas are particularly apt when Carnival in Cologne has played such a visible role in periods of history such as the nineteenth-century revolutionary years and the Nazi era. They

143. Bakhtin, Rabelais, 7.
also offer entry into an understanding of the Stunksitzung’s ongoing poke in the eye to Cologne Carnival’s elite, even as its popularity has made it into a de facto power in Carnival.

Gramscian thought forces compelling questions about how his theories on hegemony may be read in relationship to Bakhtin’s formulations of Carnival. In order to decipher that thought somewhat, John Fiske’s concise explanations of Gramscian hegemony are a useful introduction. Fiske writes that Gramsci and the cultural theorists who followed him use the term hegemony “to describe the process by which a dominant class wins the willing consent of the subordinate classes to the system that ensures their subordination.”147 It is this process which I seek to consider as related to Bakhtin’s Carnival vision. For as Holquist argues, Bakhtin’s book on Carnival, Rabelais and His World, and I submit, Bakhtin’s vision of Carnival, are both “finally about freedom, the courage needed to establish it, the cunning required to maintain it, and—above all—the horrific ease with which it can be lost.”148 When Fiske argues that “consent [of the subordinate classes] must be constantly won and re-won,” because the “people’s material social experience constantly reminds them of the disadvantages of subordination and thus poses a constant threat to the dominant class,”149 his Gramscian description of a socio-political process may be easily understood in a Carnival context.

Bakhtin writes that “medieval laughter” was “most clearly and consistently brought out in the Carnival rituals and spectacles and in the parodies they presented” and describes this laughter

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as having an “indissoluble and essential relation to freedom.” Bakhtin describes the parallel structures that are constructed through laughter—through the Carnival process: “It builds its own world versus the official world, its own church versus the official church, its own state versus the official state.” This “state,” however, this “world,” is not permanent; it is “a temporary suspension of the entire official system with all its prohibitions and hierarchic barriers.” In exchange for periods of Carnival freedom, Bakhtin seems to suggest, Gramsci’s “subordinate classes” do indeed “consent” to “the system that ensures their subordination.” He writes, “For a short time life came out of its usual, legalized, and consecrated furrows and entered the sphere of utopian freedom.” Time, once again, is altered, a liminal/liminoid fifth season created. Gramscian hegemony also seems to insist, however—as Bakhtin also notes—that the “utopian freedom” be short-lived. Fiske’s suggestion that Gramsci’s hegemony “posits a constant contradiction between ideology and the social experience of the subordinate that makes this interface into an inevitable site of ideological struggle” seems to leave no doubt that the “utopian freedom” can only be manifested as “a temporary suspension”—that is, “for a short time.” Versnel too notes that such periods of license are, and historically were mandated to be, brief.

150. Bakhtin, Rabelais, 88-89.
151. Ibid., 89. See also Holquist, “Prologue,” in Bakhtin, Rabelais, xxi.
152. Ibid.
154. Bakhtin, Rabelais, 89.
Fiske’s interpretation of Gramscian hegemony recalls Bhabha when the latter writes, “Forms of popular rebellion and mobilization are often most subversive and transgressive when they are created through oppositional cultural practices.” In his utopian Carnival vision, Bakhtin is writing of just such a Gramscian struggle, opening a path for the interrogation of how Bhabha’s “popular rebellion and mobilization” have permeated Carnival. Further, how Carnival represents and has represented “oppositional cultural practices” and how the romantic, utopian utterances of Carnival became subsumed with very real struggles over political agency may be similarly probed. Such an interrogation would aid in determining whether Carnival in contemporary Cologne, including the alternative, invented tradition of the Stunksitzung, signify any such genuine struggle, and if so, to what degree.

Ultimately these interrogations must also consider whether the Stunksitzung is instead merely a satirical irreverent parody mocking the Sitzung form and the official Carnival it represents. Is the Ensemble, in other words, mocking the pretentiousness of the very idea that Carnival even can be the site of actual struggle? Is it just about slaying all romantic notions associated with Carnival, a theatricalized exercise in exposing the falsehood of the utopian ideal? (Or, conversely, an endorsement of some contrary utopian vision?) Is it a symbol of a Carnival in which political agency has become flaccid and irrelevant? Are the utterances of the Stunksitzung finally and only intended to be for fun—is it in actuality simply a big party with the whole point being to laugh at the folly of the fifth season?

Arguably, to many celebrants, Carnival is now primarily about the beer and the music and the costumes and the parades. But beneath the surface clamor and outward manifestations—

157. Bhabha, Location, 29.
beneath the very loud utterances of the celebration—are Carnival’s “own freedom” and “universal spirit” still “vividly felt by all its participants?” Does Bakhtin’s vision describe the Carnival of today and do the utterances of the Stunksitzung represent it accurately—or indeed at all? Rome, Cologne Carnival’s mythical ancestor, provides an obvious and intriguing parallel. Fowler offered in 1911 that certain Roman festivals might have lost over time some of their original meanings and “attached new meanings to themselves.” Fowler submits that Saturnalia became simply “a merry mid-winter festival for a town population,” and similarly writes of the Lupercalia, “Life in a city had obliterated the original meaning of the rite… but a new meaning becomes attached to it…”

Has Carnival in Cologne undergone a comparable transformation, and, if so, what has been the Stunksitzung’s role, if any, in that transformation? Alternatively, does the Stunksitzung and its utterances perform or still perform their original (stated? assumed?) intended function—that of subverting a no-longer subversive festival? Are its utterances read—perceived—in the same critical/mocking spirit in which they originated?

The Roman poet Ovid’s poem *Fasti* is an interesting literary model for briefly illustrating parallels between ancient Rome and contemporary Carnival, particularly with regards to the analogous methodologies and receptions of both Ovid’s poem and the Stunksitzung. The *Fasti* is cited by Scullard as “a major source of our knowledge of the [Roman] festivals,” although it

160. Ibid.
161. Ibid., 341-42.
does not include descriptions or commentary on the Saturnalia. In their introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of the *Fasti*, A. J. Boyle and R. D. Woodard, the translators and editors, posit the work as “a revolutionary act” of “self-conscious generic transgressions” that are themselves also “revolutionary.” The poem is ostensibly about the Roman calendar year—specifically the Augustan calendar—but Boyle and Woodard argue that its deeper purpose was to comment upon the political/power/social structure of the Rome of Ovid’s time. Similarly, the Sitzung form was originally an ostensible means of providing entertainment within the context of private club meetings. The façade, however, was thin, as the clear actual point was entertainment—fun—significantly through commentary on and criticism of the political/power/social structure of the post-French-occupied, current (at the time) Prussian-occupied early nineteenth-century Rhineland. Approximately one-hundred-and-sixty years later, the Stunksitzung Ensemble openly co-opted the form and re-invented the tradition, in an ostensibly simple performance of parody and satire. Behind the action/performance of mockery, however, a deeply traditionalist impulse lurked; the Stunksitzung’s seeming act of re-invention through the tearing down of a tradition actually signified an effort to re-invent through an act of restoration—that is, the restoration of a tradition to its original roots. Boyle and Woodard’s argument then, about the subversiveness of Ovid’s *Fasti* has resonance for consideration of the Stunksitzung and its role in the attempted transformation of Cologne Carnival. The Stunksitzung made official Carnival’s weaknesses—its tedium, its orthodoxy, its rigidity, its flagrantly ossified social (and arguably economic) strata—apparent. It shone a light on a specific tradition/utterance

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within a broad collection of traditions/utterances. The Stunksitzung gave prominent voice to the conflicting cloaked impulses of destroy/re-invent and restore/re-invent.

Ovid was exiled in CE 8 to the Black Sea port of Tomis (now Constanza, Romania) for reasons that are not entirely clear and, in his banishment, revised the *Fasti*, which was to be his final work. Theoretically the poem was etiological—that is, a work that explores “the origins or causes of things, in this case the origins or causes of Rome’s religious festivals.” If, as Boyle and Woodard posit, the *Fasti* was intended as political and social commentary, the poem arguably fits Dentith’s definition of parody cited above—that is, as a parody of an etiological poem— similar to the Stunksitzung’s role as a parody of the traditional Sitzung.

Boyle and Woodard relate that the Roman calendar was altered under Julius Caesar and again under Augustus—whose reign lasted most of Ovid’s life. They argue that “precisely because the Roman calendar lacked a continuous narrative thread linking the various festivals, it was always possible to incorporate new political *feriae* [festivals] and remove old ones…” This possibility of politically manipulating festivals and holidays, they assert, “continually mutat[ed] the image of what Rome was.” Therefore, according to Boyle and Woodard, “the Julio-Augustan organization of the Roman calendar transformed the calendar *ideologically*, re-structuring the life-patterns of Roman citizens and filtering those patterns through its own

164. Ibid., xxv, xxxix. Boyle and Woodard accept that Ovid’s banishment had something to do with “factional rivalries of the imperial family” is likely correct. See Ibid., xxv-xxvi.
165. Ovid, *Fasti*, i.
166. Boyle and Woodard, introduction to Ovid, *Fasti*, xxxv.
discourse of power.” Ovid, through his *Fasti*, “expos[ed] and judg[ed] this discourse of power.”169

It is the position of this study that the Stunksitzung has functioned as a parodic and ideological means of imposing a continuous narrative on Cologne Carnival, in the process “exposing” and “judging” the “discourse of power” inherent in it. The Stunksitzung is ideological, the processes and utterances of its ideology mockery, parody, and satire. Its Bakhtinian translations (or deliberate mistranslations) travel both forward and backwards in time, dialogically entering into conversation with both historical Carnival and with contemporary Carnival as it re-defines, re-invents, and restores the parodic, satirical, ideological commentary. Through the dialogue, the translations between generations, the Stunksitzung links and illuminates the conflicting utterances of official and alternative. The utterances of Carnival’s histories echo through the Stunksitzung and weave in and out of it. The traditional and the alternative have become arguably intertwined, the latter evolving to become emblematic of Carnival—with the Stunksitzung becoming the most successful of all the Sitzungen. This process, since the Stunksitzung’s inception, has been one of “continually mutating the image of what” Carnival is: the alternative encompasses the traditional, even as the Stunksitzung’s fierce and proud embrace of the alternative label simultaneously separates it from the official, itself wrapped in the self-proclaimed banner of traditional. The Stunksitzung, straddling both sides—or more accurately, embracing, interpreting, and “translating” between both generations—is, as I

169. Ibid. Emphasis added.
have previously written elsewhere, “both Carnival and anti-Carnival, both a celebration and a meta-celebration.”

Dentith maintains that parody “has flourished at particular historical moments “ and asks whether it is more likely in closed or open societies.” He asserts that there is such a breadth of material that might be considered parody that it “seems too wide to be accommodated in any single definition,” opening the door to consideration of both the Fasti and the Stunksitzung in a parodic light.

Dentith borrows heavily from both Bakhtin and Vološinov and frames parody within the context of chains of utterances—a concept also used in this study to consider how Carnival interacts and has interacted with its audiences and participants. His insistence that parody must include a “relatively polemical” element is key to the discussion. Within, for example, the Stunksitzung, quite sharp polemic may be inveighed against its target within one sketch while a second sketch in a different year or even in the same performance may offer a far gentler attack against the same target. To illustrate: in the 2003 production, in a sketch titled “The Bush Ponies,” a character remarked that then German Justice Minister Herta Däubler-Gmelin’s comparison of US President George W. Bush to Adolph Hitler was unfair because, after all, “Hitler wrote a book.” A year later, when President Bush was arguably no more popular in German opinion, the 2004 production featured a “Muppets” sketch that poked far more genial

171. Dentith, Parody, 22.
172. Ibid., 21.
fun, depicting an episode of television’s *The Muppet Show* on which the President and Saddam Hussein were both inadvertently booked as guest stars.\(^{173}\)

The Stunksitzung also engages in utterances that are self-referential, even intertextual, using parodic and satirical repetition of characters and ideas, the target often of course being official Carnival. In the context of the histories of Carnival in Cologne and the celebrations’ deep connections to status and perceived power, any such challenge to or mocking or questioning of official Carnival must be considered polemical or at the very least, quasi-polemical.

One recurring example is the group of sketches featuring the characters of the elderly Kalli (portrayed by Doro Egelhaaf) and the younger Peter (Tom Simon), who are Chairs (President and Vice-President) of a fictional Carnival Society named “Die Löstije Kalledrisser vun 1736” (The Merry Gutter-Shitters from 1736).\(^{174}\) Inevitably, Kalli and Peter are in dispute with one another over some aspect of the Verein’s Carnival festivities. Two years’ sketches in


\(^{174}\) The Stunksitzung Ensemble, “Kinderarbeit,” Stunksitzung, 2006, and the Stunksitzung Ensemble, “Putin,” Stunksitzung, 2013. “Kalli” is a pun on “Kalledrisser.” It is a diminutive form of “Calmund.” “Kalli” could also be a diminutive of various other names, including Karlheinz and Karl. In a 2004 sketch about a “Foreigners’ Sitzung” (Ausländer Sitzung), the Peter character was called “Tony.” In the *Contemporary Theatre Review* article, the fictitious Verein’s name, “Löstije Kalledrisser von 1736,” was translated as “The Jolly Gutter-Shitters from 1736.” I believe “merry” is a preferable translation. Part of the joke is that no Carnival Societies existed before 1823.
particular illustrate the point nicely. In the 2006 sketch, Peter is pressured into acknowledging that he has outsourced the group’s Carnival costume construction to China, where child labor will be used, which he maintains is only a source of “developmental aid,” although it is eventually revealed that funds have perhaps been diverted for his new S-Class Mercedes. (The dispute is resolved by Peter giving the keys to his car to Kalli.)  

I have written elsewhere in reference to this sketch:

The “traditional”... is presented as the Other—the “alternative” in contrast is assumed to be the (preferable) norm. The Stunksitzung satirizes “official” Carnival’s self-appointed royalty, exposing their (presumed) glaring flaws, subverting what is supposed to be correct, approved (dis)order of tradition.

This pattern is repeated, in the instances of these sketches, by a recycling of the characters and of their central conflict: they always argue about the Verein’s activities, and in the process always expose and mock the self-centered, closed, and inward-gazing tendency of the supposed guardians of traditional Carnival. (The characters remain ignorant of their polemical function.)

The unmistakable impression—the clear intent—is that the Carnival itself must be mocked because in its official incarnation it is a moribund institution, no longer capable of genuinely upending the world of its own approved, self-appointed practitioners. At the same time, the Stunksitzung Ensemble slyly recognizes the risk that their own work may ultimately follow a similar path; by calling attention to it within their parodic and satirical frame, they seek to diffuse

that possibility—by, in essence, making fun of themselves. The comparison between the fictional official Carnivalists and the real alternative Carnivalists is heightened by the theatrical portrayals of the former by the latter; the criticism is inherent and clear.

The 2013 production featured a Kalli and Peter sketch titled “Putin,” which was a lead-in for a musical number by a parodic all-women musical group, “Tussi Riot.” The sketch begins with a group of women, in brightly colored conservatively tailored suits and old-fashioned hairstyles being welcomed onto the stage to receive the Verein’s gratitude for providing the refreshments for the meeting. After their acknowledgement, the women leave the male domain of the dais. It is an important meeting, as the Löstije Kalledrissers are holding an election for President of the Verein. Peter, the incumbent, is running for another term and asks Kalli to read some remarks in support. Kalli has written no such remarks, but Peter of course provides them for him—and insists they be read. As Kalli reluctantly reads (and strenuously objects to) Peter’s lofty words of self-praise, Peter plays recorded majestic music and reveals two large photographs of himself in bare-chested poses meant to draw a visual comparison to Vladimir Putin—brandishing a Kalashnikov rifle in one and sitting heroically astride a horse in the other. The absurdity of the situation leads Kalli to muse aloud whether there might be a woman candidate available—an idea Peter finds outrageous. Indeed, such a suggestion would be absurd in any traditional Carnival Society, which were constituted as Vereins for men to celebrate Carnival.

The women, apparently finished in the kitchen, re-enter during Peter and Kalli’s heated

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177. “Tussi” is sexist German slang for “woman.”
disagreement and don ski masks (which match their suits) and break into a Pussy Riot-style protest song.\textsuperscript{179}

Here, the Ensemble is not only making fun of the pretentiousness and silly internecine squabbles they imagine to be a part of official Carnival life, but are also attacking its inherent sexism. On the immediate level, Peter’s self-aggrandizing comparison to Putin suggests traditional Carnival’s elevated view of itself—that is, traditional Carnival’s practitioners’ and guardians’ presumed views of their own importance. Carnival’s importance is portrayed as self-evident and therefore never openly questioned, even by Kalli. Indeed Kalli’s objections may be read as an expression of who can best claim the mantle of being Carnival’s representative. In this sense, Kalli functions almost as a parody of the Stunksitzung (a humorous, critical voice of dissent from the traditional) within a Stunksitzung sketch parodying Carnival—for even the Stunkers do not question the value of Carnival itself, only its official wrappings.

The women entering and donning masks to assume the role of Tussi Riot remind the audience (and Kalli and Peter) that Carnival in Cologne is a relentlessly patriarchal institution.\textsuperscript{180} The commentary is sharpened by the fact that it is the alternative Stunksitzung, which pioneered having a woman President (Präsidentin) of a major Sitzung. The Kalli and Peter sketches in the Stunksitzung re-enforce the criticism by featuring a woman (Egelhaaf) in the role of Kalli, the

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{180} One all-female Karnevalsgesellschaft is recognized: Colombina Colonia, eV, which began in 1999. Ironically, their website reveals that one event planned for Carnival 2013 is a “Herrensitzung”—a men’s Sitzung. Traditionally, Herrensitzungen feature female strippers. The Colombina Colonia website does not specify whether their Herrensitzung will follow this particular tradition. Another event, however, their “Houseparty” will be for “girls only.” See http://www.colombina-colonia-ev.de/index.php?id=2, accessed 28 April 2014.
senior, more experienced, presumably more official Carnivalist, thereby reversing the usual, accepted, traditional male-to-female drag of Carnival.

These messages were particularly poignant in 2013, as the previous year’s Carnival Session (the season from 11 November through Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday) featured a firm statement from Festkomitee President Markus Ritterbach that the Cologne Dreigestirn would not, so long as he was President, feature women.\footnote{Bastian Ebel, Bastian May, and René Kohlenberg, “FK-Präsident: ‘Nein und basta!’” \textit{Express.de}, 15 February 2012, http://www.express.de/koelner-karneval/frauen-im-dreigestirn--fk-praesident---nein-und-basta--,4398498,11643554.html#. “Solange ich Festkomitee-Präsident bin, wird es nicht geben,’ rumpelte er los. Näher begründen wollte Ritterbach seinen Entschluss nicht.” (“As long as I am Festival Committee President, that will not happen,’ he grumbled. Ritterbach did not want to give reasons for his stance.”) Website accessed 28 April 2014.} Ritterbach was responding to public discussion of the possibility of women members in the Dreigestirn spurred by a column, written by Bastian Ebel, in the tabloid \textit{Express}. Ebel’s column, titled “Women in the Dreigestirn? The Time is Ripe for it” (Frauen im Dreigestirn? Die Zeit ist reif dafür), also described Festival Committee Board Member (FK-Vorstandmitglied) Sigrid Kreps as being open to the idea and quoted Bernhard Conin, Chair of the Friends and Patrons of Cologne Traditions (Chef der Freunde und Förderer des kölnischen Brauchtums), as saying, “The time is ripe. In recent years several traditions have been broken. Why not this one as well?”.\footnote{Bastian Ebel, “Frauen im Dreigestirn? Die Zeit ist reif dafür,” \textit{Express.de}, 15 February 2012, http://www.express.de/koelner-karneval/revolution--frauen-im-dreigestirn---die-zeit-ist-reif-dafuer-,4398498,11635270.html. “Die Zeit ist Reif. In den letzten Jahren wurden einige Traditionen gebrochen. Warum nicht auch diese?” Website accessed 28 April 2014.} The \textit{Express} article with Ritterbach’s firm denouncing of the idea was published the very next day. That article, written by Ebel with Bastian May and René Kohlenberg, also noted the Festival Committee Vice President Joachim Wüst’s “Solomonic” suggestion for a solution: that “perhaps
there will soon” be a “women’s Dreigestirn.” After all, there is, he notes, a “great and a
children’s” one.\(^{183}\)

Intertextual and self-referential humor that is arguably not in and of itself polemical can
also be observed in the Ensemble’s portrayal of the television personality Alfred Biolek, a
lawyer turned TV celebrity, who is perhaps best known for cooking on the air with his guests.
(He has published at least one cookbook.) Biolek’s broad on-air persona is easily and frequently
lampooned. In 2001, the Ensemble presented a sketch called “Kochduell Biolek” (Cooking Duel
Biolek) as if it were a segment on Biolek’s highly successful WDR television show,
alfredissimo! In the sketch Biolek took his cooking skills to a famine area in India as a “UN
Ambassador of Good Taste” and miraculously turned a few grains of rice, one drumstick, and a
single peanut into a full gourmet meal.\(^{184}\) In his portrayal, Günter (Gügi) Ottomeier precisely
captured Biolek’s distinctive vocal tics and flamboyant mannerisms, which were immediately
recognized by the audience and which drew enthusiastic applause—in addition to a loud outburst
of audience approval at President Biggi Wanninger’s mention of Biolek’s name in her
introduction remarks (Anmod or Anmoderation) to the sketch.\(^{185}\)

In 2007, in the “Parfum” sketch mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Ottomeier’s
Biolek again made an appearance, as “Alfredissimo,” punning the television show, an
aristocratic customer seeking a new scent from the perfumer (based on the novel and film’s

\(^{183}\) Ebel, May, and Kohlenberg, “FK-Präsident: ‘Nein und basta!’ ” “Wir haben ein großes- und
ein Kinderdreigestirn. Vielleicht gibt es bald auch mal ein Damen-Trifolium.”
juten jeschmacks.”
\(^{185}\) Ibid. A YouTube recording of Wanninger’s introduction to the sketch and the sketch itself
can be viewed at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6xFmH4-Wko. Accessed 28 April 2014.
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character, Baldini). In the sketch Ottomeier was not costumed or made up as Biolek; rather, he wore a period (eighteenth Century France) costume and a long extravagant wig. However, upon his entrance and before he said anything, the audience immediately recognized Ottomeier’s gestures as those he had previously employed in portraying Biolek six years earlier and broke into laughter and applause. When Ottomeier then spoke in Biolek’s “voice,” with Biolek’s inflections, the laughter and applause grew. The central plot element of scent (in the book, film, and sketch) provided an opportunity to spoof the real Biolek’s excited gestures and inflections that were well known to the audience from watching him cook (and enthusiastically respond to the smells of dishes) on television. The actual link between Biolek and Perfume is tenuous at best, but the parodic and satirical link is sufficient to provide an intertextual, self-referential thread—perhaps even one which, in the words of the Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger review, exudes the “scent of narcissism” (Duft der Selbstverliebtheit).

Intertextuality is of course a term of literary criticism—as is, it bears repeating, carnivalesque (and even, to some extent, Carnival)—although it has been extensively integrated into discourse well beyond the realm of theorizing literature. As posited earlier in this study with deconstruction, this study seeks to engage with intertextuality with a similarly broad consideration. Kristeva suggests that to Bakhtin “any text is constructed as a mosaic of

quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.” In “Revolution of Poetic Language,” Kristeva describes intertextuality as the “transposition of one (or several) sign-system(s) into another,” adding: “We prefer the term transposition.” She posits:

If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality), one then understands that its “place” of enunciation and its denoted “object” are never single, complete, and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated.

The Stunksitzung, in the sketches discussed here, as well as further sketches that will be discussed in following chapters, engages in this transposition, this intertextual shattering of tradition—the “object” of Carnival’s history—and of the “‘place’ of enunciation,” the site of contestation in which Carnival is experienced and performed.

Within this consideration of the Stunksitzung and how it engages in Kristeva’s “transposition,” the next chapter will parallel the political environment and principal developments in the Rhineland of the nineteenth century—the backdrop against which the traditions of Cologne Carnival were invented—and the Stunksitzung. This effort will focus on

189. Ibid.
190. Three sketches in particular that will be considered contain film pieces, “Weiße Massai” (The White Maasai), from the 2006 production; “Willis Wahlkampf” (Willi’s Campaign), from 2009; and, “Triumph des Funkenwillens,” from the 2003 production. The first two feature the character of “Willi,” a fictional member of the very real blackface Carnival Society called the “Poller Negerköpp” (literally The Nigger Corps of Poll). Poll is a traditionally working-class neighborhood in Cologne on the eastern side of the Rhine. The third is about Leni Riefenstahl.
interrogating further the extent to which the contemporary alternative is correctly read as the
more historically reflective of Carnival in the region—and of course whether it is therefore also
more Bakhtinian. Further, I will attempt to complicate the issue by considering the political label
of “radical” as applied to the nineteenth-century political activists in Jonathan Sperber’s work
and compare and contrast it to Baz Kershaw’s use of the term in theatrical contexts.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹. See, for starters, Jonathan Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals: The Democratic Movement and the
Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (London and New York: Routledge,
1999); and Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*
Chapter 3

“Cologne Carnival + The Stunksitzung = ‘Alternative’ = ‘Bakhtinian’ = ‘Carnivalesque’ = ‘Radical’?”

In the 2010 edition of Dat wor et…, Markus Ritterbach, President of the Cologne Carnival Festival Committee since 2005, writes:

It is known far beyond the borders of Cologne that anyone who comes to our city will be quickly and heartily accepted into the community. The feeling of being part of the whole binds us together. This characterizes the Cologne mentality. But not until one receives an easy little kiss from the heart is the feeling of Cologne Carnival really experienced.¹

In the previous chapter, I considered a handful of Stunksitzung sketches that demonstrated the Ensemble’s use of a theatrical intertextuality and its parodic and satirical sensibility—its own “kiss,” if you will, not only from its “heart,” but also from its critical eye, delivering a “Bützje” that is at once more forceful, more playful, and more deconstructive. This consideration began the process of interrogating how those performative choices, both in and out of the Sitzung hall,

¹. Markus Ritterbach, “Grußwort,” in Tewes and Rösgen, Dat wor et... 2010, 9. “Es ist weit über die Grenzen Kölns bekannt, dass jeder, die in unsere Stadt kommt, schnell und herzlich in die Gemeinschaft aufgenommen wird. Das Gefühl, ein Teil des Ganzen zu sein, verbindet. Dies zeichnet die kölsche Mentalität aus. Ein leichtes Bützje von Herzen macht das Gefühl Kölner Karneval dann erst richtig spürbar.” A more literal, but perhaps less evocative, translation of the last line would read “Then not until an easy little kiss from the heart is the feeling of Cologne really made noticeable.” “Bützje” is Kölsch for “little kiss.”
serve to define the Stunksitzung’s role as the bastard cousin made good in the world of Cologne Carnival.

I also argued for consideration of Carnival in its official form in Cologne and for Cologne generally to be regarded together as an ersatz nation, enlarging upon Benedict Anderson’s definition of nation in *Imagined Communities*. Through this lens, Carnival—official Carnival—in Cologne may be read as something that needs to be changed, even rescued or restored to its original Bakhtinian vision. This urgent need to change conjures the possibility of the Stunksitzung as “radical performance.” This study implicitly considers the degree of urgency, how much it still exists, whether the Stunksitzung has changed it, and whether it still does.

Baz Kershaw writes in his 1999 book, *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard*, of “radical performance” as “always” being “a creative opportunity to change the world for better or worse, a performative process in need of direction.”2 Building on his earlier work in *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, Kershaw posits that “radical performance is made problematic by cultural praxis, in that it invites an ideological investment it cannot of itself determine.”3 I argue in this chapter that the Stunksitzung is a carnivalesque theatrical attempt acting to prompt change in the form of an actual restoration of Carnival. Given the ideological and cultural importance of Cologne Carnival, it is clear that official Carnival “determines” the Stunksitzung’s role as a potential agent for change within Carnival. The Stunksitzung Ensemble’s goal may simply be to mock, to parody, to satirize. But those intentions carry implicit (and sometimes explicit) criticisms—allegations and accusations,

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3. Ibid. Emphasis added.
both theatrical and parodic, that official Carnival fails at its own ostensible goal of turning the world upside-down. Official Carnival in Cologne, the Stunksitzung implies, works to preserve itself—and by extension the social order it represents and ultimately valorizes. Indeed, I submit that the Stunksitzung’s very existence (and its continued success) bolsters this view of official Carnival. Bakhtin’s Carnival spirit is perhaps therefore portrayed and—again, perhaps—obliquely mentioned, but not genuinely released or celebrated. The Stunksitzung, a critical voice clinging to outsider (alternative) status, a deconstructive, performative parody of a parody, even a meta-Carnival, is at the same time a Carnival voice within Carnival. As such, it does not solely determine its ideological investment, its reception by the Kölner, or the effectiveness of its restorative agenda. This chapter attempts to gauge those efforts and that agenda by considering its (genuinely?) radical predecessors.

Positing Carnival as a collection of performative utterances, the task here then is to define, in Kershavian terms, Carnival’s “efficacy,” that is, its “potential... to make the immediate effects of performance influence, however minutely, the general historical evolution of wider social and political realities.” Kershaw continues, “Historians and critics have habitually fought shy of committing themselves to unambiguous claims about the possibility of a more extensive socio-political efficacy of performance.” However, he wonders, “Surely such efficacy is the fundamental purpose of performance?” Kershaw argues:

6. Ibid., 2.
There is a sense in which even shows that aim solely to promote ephemeral entertainment have long-term designs on their audiences. By encouraging a taste for escapism they may push social and political questions to the background of experience. Performances with a more overtly “serious” purpose—shows which engage with current moral issues, for instance—are hoping more obviously to alter, or confirm, their audiences’ ideas and attitudes, and through that to affect their future actions.  

I posit that the Stunksitzung straddles both the worlds of “entertainment” and Kershaw’s “more overtly serious” concerns. By addressing political and cultural issues, its own “taste for escapism” both provokes boisterous laughter and challenges the audience to consider the criticism layered within. I submit further that this characteristic distinguishes it from official Carnival, which fights to preserve the status quo—through the exclusivity of its decision-making bodies (e.g., the Festival Committee). Official Carnival is presented for the public, but not by them. The access to the control of the ostensible people’s festival is locked and gated. The official Carnival Societies have—and always have had—an exclusive membership, limited not least by the considerable expense of membership. The Festival Committee is therefore its own self-selected, closed, governing body. (Allusions to nationhood are again easily conjured, although the vision here is arguably less idealistic for those not in the governing circle.)

Kershaw acknowledges the difficulty in assessing “accurately the relationship between theatrical effect and subsequent audience behavior” and suggests that to do so requires

7. Ibid.
“refram[ing] the question,” asking, “What if we pay more attention to the conditions of performance that are most likely to produce an efficacious result?” Further, he questions, “What if we broaden the canvas for analysis beyond the individual show or production… in order to consider theatrical movements in relation to local and national culture change?”8 In a limited way, that is an objective of this chapter—to consider Carnival not specifically as a “theatrical movement,” per se, but as a collection of performative utterances. Those utterances then will be contrasted against the contexts of two historical eras (sixteenth-century Romans, France, and the Rhineland of the nineteenth-century) in which Carnival correlated with and contributed to dramatic social and political upheaval and change. These historic instances will be contrasted against examples of the Stunksitzung’s radicalism or potential radicalism, seeking, as Kershaw writes, to “consider the potential of performance… to achieve efficacy in a particular historical context.”9 Structurally, I will alternate sections that discuss the two historical eras, and intersperse descriptions of and commentary on Stunksitzung sketches that I believe provide intriguing counterpoints. The overall structural objective is to create a broad perspective which both contrasts and links the Stunksitzung and its radical forbears. Section headings will assist the reader in navigating this structure.

Kershaw argues that, in a post-modernist era, “the collapse of history into fiction... challenges the radical potential of collective cultural memory.” However, history “can be rescued from the reign of nostalgia by the performance of the past as a reclamation of its radical

8. Ibid., 3.
9. Ibid.
instability in the present.” In an interview he gave in May 2007 to Performance Paradigm, titled “Pathologies of Hope,” he poses further questions about nostalgia, asking, “What might rescue nostalgia for the future from being just a golden glow of comforting illusion yet to come?” I contend that the Stunksitzung represents an effort to restore, to reclaim, as Kershaw would have it, a more historical, more Bakhtinian, more carnivalesque Carnival in Cologne—and therefore a more historical, Bakhtinian, and carnivalesque reception of it. If so, then the Stunksitzung is a “rescuer” of Carnival from its mythological, folkloric past. If applied to the Stunksitzung, Kershaw’s question above suggests the possibility that it might also “rescue its own nostalgia for the future.” For both Carnival at large and the Stunksitzung specifically are deeply nostalgic. Both hearken to a Carnival that was, or might have been—or, in the case of the Stunksitzung, might be or might be again. The Stunksitzung reclaims Carnival from Cologne’s version of Carnival nostalgia, its assumed Roman origins, and replaces that nostalgia with one that is, I submit, more Bakhtinian. (Bakhtin’s vision of Carnival is also deeply nostalgic.)

Considerations of the contexts of the origins of the historical traditions of Cologne Carnival are therefore necessary.

Kershaw cautions, however, that examining any such history is itself problematic. “History,” he insists, “is not what it was. Telling a true tale about the past, whether at the micro-level of performance practice or the macro-level of global culture, has never been more difficult.” In particular, when dealing with theatre or performance history, he notes that there is a

“key problem” of “how to create histories of a cultural form that is, in its most crucial aspects, wholly ephemeral.” In addition, theatre and performance historians must “privilege the multiplicity of the past and its traces,” making “‘history’ profoundly volatile and a matter of acute contestation.”

Kershaw’s question above reflects a shift in focus since 1999’s The Radical in Performance. He admits as much and argues, “Politically and ethically the signs of the post-modern disease are everywhere.” Seeking an antidote, he says, “for radicals wanting a change for the ‘better’… all this chronically ups the anti [sic] on how to act and what to perform.” The final chapter of The Radical in Performance is titled, “The Sight of the Blind: Performance, Community, and Ecology.” In it Kershaw writes that he is interested “in the dynamics of an aesthetics of total immersion in performance, through which spectators become wholly engaged in an event which they, as it were, inherit as a complete environment.” He submits, “This type of participatory performance,” is one that “mirrors the relationship of humans to the potential for global ecological crisis.” This, “because the post-industrial societies of the world have ensured that it [global ecological crisis] is already being ready-made for everyone and that humankind is by definition fully immersed in its future progress.” In his 2007 book, Theatre Ecology: Environments and Performance Events, Kershaw builds upon the ideas of performance and environment in a time of grave ecological threat.

12. Kershaw, The Radical in Performance, 160-61. See also previous chapter about the mythologies of Cologne Carnival’s origins.
Diane Conrad, in a 2010 chapter titled “In Search of the Radical in Performance: Theatre of the Oppressed With Incarcerated Youth,” published in the book, *Youth and Theatre of the Oppressed*, writes about a series of performance projects she undertook with youth in a “provincial youth jail” in Alberta, Canada, between 2005 and 2008. Using Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed techniques, she wanted to see whether “participatory drama” could “contribute to the education of incarcerated youth to avoid future negative outcomes of their ‘at risk’ behaviors.” Conrad utilized several of Boal’s exercises and methods for developing projects with “more than fifty” incarcerated youth over the three years, “mostly boys,” aged fourteen to nineteen. She reports that anywhere from three to fifteen took part in the projects on a week-to-week basis, and that “the majority of youth who participated were First Nations youth.” Her chapter details the specifics of each project, stating that the “TO-inspired [Theatre of the Oppressed] projects engendered moments of radical performance—performance that occurred both inside the theatre work (during games, devising activities or formal performances) as well as outside it.” In her discussion of the projects, she identifies “moments that were distinctly performative, with radical potential, which occurred during our TO work, in discussions about our work, and during casual conversations and activities surrounding the work.” She clarifies moments that “hint[ed] at the potential for a kind of freedom that Kershaw describes—moments that transgressed and transcended the system of formalized power in which

we were caught.” Conrad is referencing a quote The Radical in Performance, which she cites early in her article:

The freedom that “radical performance” invokes is not just freedom from oppression, repression, exploitation—the resistant sense of the radical—but also a freedom to reach beyond existing systems of formalized power, freedom to create currently unimaginable forms of association and action—the transgressive or transcendent sense of the radical.

It is Conrad’s application of Kershaw’s ideas that is of interest here. When she writes of the “potential for the kind of freedom Kershaw describes,” and “moments that were performative with radical potential,” a useful rubric for the consideration of Carnival and the Stunksitzung is suggested. For while a Carnival performance—even one as popular as the Stunksitzung—may no longer engender or threaten revolution the way the historical events related in this chapter did, the potential for the radical is—and, I contend, must be—present.

The conflicting and competing official and alternative claims of Carnival authenticity, both explicit and implicit, through Kershaw’s “wholly ephemeral” overtly performative cultural practices (parades, costumes, Sitzungen, and so forth), propagate an environment of volatility—or at the very least a performance of volatility. This volatility/performance serves to bolster the competing claims and fosters the mutual dependence between the two camps. Despite their interdependence, the performers on both sides disparage the other: the low, performed as

18. Ibid., 129.
alternative, relies absolutely on the performance of the official as the high as much as the high, performed as official, relies absolutely on the performance of the low as alternative.

Kershaw seeks to “explore the tension between... a history that is at best rendered unstable, at worst made unavailable by post-modernism, and... the possibility that the past may be drawn on by performance as a source for a resistant critique of the present, or even for a trenchant radicalism.”

The Stunksitzung’s efforts to prompt change—its own “trenchant radicalism” (or perhaps its performance of “a trenchant radicalism”), its self-determined alternative-ness—are primarily centered on challenging and changing Cologne Carnival. Its performances are performances of Kershaw’s “resistant critique of the present”—in this case the present, stagnant, fossilized official Carnival. Their challenges present moments of potential radicalism, with regards to the official Carnival universe. The Kalli and Peter sketches discussed in the previous chapter comprise but one example of the Ensemble’s work that is easily—and, I submit, correctly—read as an attempt to encourage such change. The pettiness and limited visions of the official Carnival’s functionaries and the resulting ossification of the festival are lampooned. The clear message is that Carnival needs to evolve, to be reclaimed, to be restored to a less rigid, less centrally controlled, less sexist, less boring event—different, in other words, than the Carnival being portrayed in the sketches. In 2001, the Ensemble’s criticism included a satirical declaration of official Carnival as actually evil, through a sketch which featured a Kölsch Harry Potter fighting the Voldemort-like Festkomitee at a school for Jecken. Given the popularity of the books (the first Harry Potter film was not released until some months after the

2001 Stunksitzung), both the setting and the comparison were arguably easy and obvious, but the point was clear: official Carnival’s utterances are tired and irrelevant to the point of being destructive to Carnival itself. New utterances—or, more precisely, a restoration of carnivalesque utterances of the true Carnival spirit—are required.

Although a comprehensive list would be prohibitively long, Kalli, Peter, and Harry Potter by no means represent the gamut of direct Stunksitzung attacks on Cologne official Carnival and its ostensible overseers, the Festkomitee. Recalling that the first Stunksitzung in 1984 was performed under the motto “Karneval instandbesetzt,” emphasizes that the entire exercise was intended as an attack on the traditional. Instandbesetzt is a pun on word Instandsetzen, which means a repair, maintenance, or, in perhaps a more carnivalesque sense, an overhauling. The verb form, instandsetzen, means to repair or overhaul; the past tense is instandgesetzt—repaired. One meaning of besetzt is occupied, so a Carnival that is instandbesetzt is at once both occupied and being repaired or overhauled—one, it may be suggested, that is being restored or overturned.

One reading of the reforms of the 1820s whence most contemporary traditions derive is one of a similar attempt to change Carnival—and by implication the society in which it existed. This linked history and the Stunksitzung’s restorative agenda within that context are important to consider with regards to where the productions fall on the radical scale. Similarly important are the Rhineland’s nineteenth-century radical politics and how those politics shaped Carnival’s utterances. Crucial too is consideration of the Carnival riots in the French city of Romans in 1580, a famous historical example of Carnival fueling genuine social—and in this instance, quite violent—uprising.
Philip Auslander, in writing about “post-modernist performance of the 1980s,” states that it offered “positions from which to critique post-modern culture.” It is perhaps worth interrogating whether the Stunksitzung offered and still offers a similar position “from which to critique.” This chapter’s framing of the Stunksitzung through Kershaw’s radical lens argues in the affirmative. The consideration here though is not Auslander’s “post-modern culture,” but Carnival culture—specifically, Carnival culture in Cologne from the 1980s forward, a post-modern (or post-post-modern) age. Can any such critique be offered “not by claiming to stand aside from it, to present an alternative to it, or to place the spectator in a privileged position with respect to it, but, rather, deconstructively, resistantly, from within.” It is my position that it has and does. The Stunksitzung relies heavily on the co-option and parodying of an existing performance/theatrical form. In the preceding chapter, I argued that this parody of a Carnival practice/tradition is, by extension, a parody of Carnival itself, and that Carnival, with its mythical ties—perpetuated by popular opinion as well as the writings of scholars and critics like Bakhtin—is in turn a parody of earlier celebrations such as Saturnalia (despite how little we actually know about Saturnalia). This chain of interlocking, intertextual, deconstructive, and resistant utterances are imbedded in and woven through the popular culture of Cologne. Carnival is, as Markus Ritterbach’s quote illustrates, a fundamental component, a defining component, of

23. Ibid. The intention here is not to affix the Stunksitzung with the label of being specifically “post-modern.” However, it seems important to recall that the Ensemble began its Carnival project in the 1980s. While it would be heavy-handed to impose too much influence on the Stunksitzung from the post-modern performances Auslander is examining (especially as he is not considering German performance), it is nevertheless intriguing to consider the era.
Cologne. Cologne’s broader culture then, with specific regard to how Carnival shapes it, might be termed as having a Carnival “flow of culture.”

I borrow here again from Auslander, who builds on Dana Polan’s work, who in turn builds on Raymond Williams’ notion of “flow.” Williams uses the term in the context of considering television and Polan argues for extending it in such a way that, as Auslander writes, “any given cultural work be understood in relation to an overall cultural context created by the operation of mass media.”

Auslander argues further that, “ideally, the meaning of a given work must somehow be constructed through both an intrinsic reading and a consideration of how the cultural flow constructs that particular work.” The Carnival “flow of culture” or perhaps more accurately “flow of Carnival culture” shapes—“constructs” (invents?)—the Stunksitzung by providing the representation of the dominant power dynamic in Cologne, the very establishment that the performance seeks to change. That flow also serves to confine the Stunksitzung’s overarching project to being one of changing Carnival and, ostensibly, only Carnival—for even the most ossified of traditional Sitzungen will contain jokes about national and local politics and/or the Catholic Church. (The broader implication is of course that a change in Carnival will result in change to the culture in which it plays such a major role.)

The difference in perception of official Carnival and alternative Carnival in Cologne is what Polan might call a “seeming paradox of two so evidently exclusive readings of the same

Although Polan is describing the arguments about Hong Kong kung fu movies in two books, Stuart Kaminsky’s *American Film Genres* and Claudine Eizykman’s *La Jouissance-cinéma*, his description is nonetheless apt. The difference in the two seemingly exclusive perceptions of Carnival, however, is less one of genuine exclusivity than one rooted in the claims of authenticity of both groups—one explicit, one implicit. Both wave the banner of the true Carnival and both engage in their own versions of re-enactment; the differences and similarities in the utterances of the two are evident to any audience.

Polan, describing the differing perceptions of kung fu films, continues, “What is most striking is the way in which these seemingly divergent interpretations can finally seem to rely on a single, insistent mythology, taking on the form of a duality in which each term supposes and necessitates the other.” The official/alternative dichotomy of Cologne Carnival likely relies on numerous intertwined mythologies, including that of Roman origins, but the dominant underlying all of them is the one of authenticity—who is celebrating the real Carnival and who is not. The utterances of the official celebrations parody or pastiche—reverently, it must be said, in either case—earlier celebrations, painstakingly copying (some of) the trappings of the original (1823 and after) Carnival. The claim staked to authenticity is clearly not without merit. Those earlier celebrations in turn may, as noted above and in the preceding chapter, be read as parodying the imagined celebrations of Rome. The alternative Carnival—and its exemplar, the Stunksitzung—parodies the official, its tone less studied in the intricacies of re-enactment, but, I
contend, far more reflective of Carnival’s spirit, its claim to authenticity more implied than trumpeted.

Both the official and the alternative, however, share the myth of authenticity, even as the relationship between the two is arguably more symbiotic—or perhaps, co-dependent (to use a phrase that implies dysfunction). Each depends on the other in order to cling to its respective claim. As both have increased in presence, size, and economic impact, both rely on the mutually oppositional status—although arguably, the outsider, alternative Stunksitzung more so. The Ensemble’s independence and freedom relies on the outsider status. While the Ensemble’s performed criticisms of official Carnival draw less blood than they once did, still, should an official Sitzung, sponsored or produced by a recognized Carnival Society, take such regular direct aim at official Carnival, the response from the Festival Committee would likely be less than an open embrace.29 The alternative depends on the presumed position of the official as the true Carnival. The official in turn feeds on the duality of high versus low, while both, in their roles as claimants to the authentic, true Carnival, also stake an inherent claim on being the more authentic exercise of popular or mass culture. In the case of the Stunksitzung, this inherent claim is deeply ironic, given its origins as a reaction to and rejection of the enormously popular—and officially sanctioned—mass celebration of Carnival in Cologne. This duality within the

29. Official Carnival’s relationship towards the Stunksitzung has warmed in recent years. Marcus Ritterbach has spoken publicly about how the official and the alternative are both part of Carnival. And, as I mention in chapter four, the Cologne Carnival Museum does feature a small exhibit about the alternative Carnival, including the Stunksitzung. Brog relates the story of how, in 2000, the Stunkers were invited by the Festkomitee to share a float with other alternative Carnivalists—the Rosa Funken and members of the “Ghost Parade” (Geisterzug) in the Rosenmontagszug, under the motto of “We all sit in the same boat.” The Ensemble declined. The Geisterzugs are neighborhood (Veedel) parades at night, in which ghost and similar costumes are popular. See Brog, Zoch, 268-69.
alternative Stunksitzung makes the members of Ensemble’s performed roles as outsiders, alternatives, even protesters, problematic. Yet the definition fits: Polan defines Kaminsky and Eizykman’s mass culture as “essentially a regime of content, theme, the formulaic regularity of simple explanatory myths, an art tied to the givens of an everyday world.”  

This study is rooted in part in the argument that Carnival in Cologne is an integral “given” of the city and its inhabitants’ “everyday world.” Therefore, when Polan writes that Kaminsky and Eizykman’s interpretations of the films they are considering “share in the ideological binary opposition of mass culture and avant-garde culture,” the leap to a similar comparison in the context of Cologne Carnival between the official and the alternative is tempting. That temptation is however complicated by the puzzle of which, if either, fulfills Polan’s role of the “avant-garde.”

Posing such a puzzle should not be read simply as an exercise, for Cologne Carnival’s traditions—since the early nineteenth century—have evolved and often been initiated under a performed radicalism. I submit that both the official and alternative manifestations of Carnival, in their proclaimed and implied mantles of authenticity, deliberately link themselves to the performed radicalism of the nineteenth-century Carnival reforms. Both present to differing degrees what Polan calls a “recurrent aspect” of the “self-reflexive dimension” of “popular culture,” their “pointed commentary on, and even pastiche or parody of, [their] own status as cultural item[s].” To understand that status and the resulting contemporary parodies, official and alternative, the radical roots must be considered. Thus I turn now to the two historical examples of political radicalism related to Carnival to illustrate when the potential became the

31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 175.

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actual. As the Carnival reforms of the nineteenth century form the basis of Carnival in the Rhineland today, I begin there.

Radical and Carnivalized Stirrings in Nineteenth-Century Rhineland

The German Rhineland of the nineteenth century was a focal point for activism for a German Democracy, culminating in 1848 in what Jonathan Sperber has labeled an “ignominious” failure, one which he writes “has often been portrayed in a series of comic vignettes.”\(^3\) He contends, however, that dismissing it “ignores the extent to which the mid-nineteenth-century revolution was a remarkable mass movement.”\(^3\)

The Rhineland in the early to mid-nineteenth century, Sperber argues, was “an area rich in radical political activity of both a violent and peaceful nature.” Its varied geography led to its being “extraordinarily diverse,” with, however, “a common historical experience” and “a revolutionary heritage.” The region, he contends, “of all the regions of central Europe,” had been “most deeply affected by the Ur-revolution, the great French Revolution of 1789.”\(^3\)

The great diversity of the Rhineland—Catholics, Protestants, urbanites, rural dwellers, vintners, subsistence farmers, textile manufacturers, coal miners, steel workers, tanners, dock laborers, riverboat operators, weavers, artisans, peasants, and the bourgeoisie—mingled in the exchange of commerce and labor, although not necessarily within the social sphere.\(^3\) “It was,” Sperber writes, “a thoroughly bourgeois social order, with ownership of property in a free market

\(^{33}\) Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals*, 3.
\(^{34}\) Ibid.
\(^{35}\) Ibid, 5-6, 13-14.
\(^{36}\) Ibid., 13-37.
the main criterion of social stratification.”

This social stratification, amplified by the terms of the Treaty of Vienna, which prevented German unification, led to unrest in the period known as the “Vormärz,” the period of roughly twenty years leading up to the uprisings in March 1848.

Sperling writes that Carnival celebrations in the Rhineland in the early nineteenth century could sometimes erupt into activities “beyond harmless fun”—beyond, that is, “costume balls, comic skits, public masquerades,” and “a most un-German atmosphere of chaos and fun.” He describes how, in Cologne, “crowds would mock and insult Prussian soldiers,” and argues that the first Carnival Societies, “founded... by notables of the larger cities, organized elaborate parades to direct popular street celebrations into more orderly channels.” (Official contemporary Carnival and its Societies arguably offer their seemingly endless parades, balls, concerts, and Sitzungen for precisely the same reasons.) During the final decades of the eighteenth century, Cologne authorities increasingly sought to exert greater control over Carnival festivities. The tension then between the desire to codify Carnival—to make it official—and to maintain or restore its more festive, more folkish, more Bakhtinian spirit predates the Stunksitzung by at least two centuries.

In response to grassroots street celebrations in 1782, the City Council issued the “Order for Night Balls” (Ordnung für Nachtsbälle), which, among other rules, forbade “stick and rapier” at Carnival events. The Council essentially declared that Carnival festivities were to be officially

37. Ibid., 33.
38. Ibid. “Vormärz” literally means “before March.” The time period of the Vormärz is generally recognized as beginning around the time of the French July 1830 revolution, but this is somewhat fluid.
39. Ibid., 98.
40. Ibid.
sanctioned events, festivities which “came to be felt” by many as something “foreign,” with the “Carnival element” widely regarded as being “barely adequate.”\textsuperscript{41} Schwering and Fuchs opine, “If in this process these esteemed notables had particularly apostrophized their highly sage counsel, the Cologne Carnival Jecken’s desire to join in would have decayed to an even greater degree.”\textsuperscript{42} The Jecke— the real Carnivalists— “preferred” a Carnival that was “more of the people” and more “ribald”\textsuperscript{43} (i.e., less official, more alternative). However, the influence of the Council’s efforts to reign in Carnival remained: “Nevertheless, in the organized renewal of Cologne Carnival in 1823— long after the French Revolution abolished the old feudalism— reminiscences of the erstwhile co-operation of ‘exalted Society’ also definitively played a part.”\textsuperscript{44}

The French Revolution brought French Troops to Cologne, an event Hildegard Brog describes starkly: “The peaceful surrender of the Key to the City to the French Revolution troops on 06 October 1794 ripped the City of Cologne from its Sleeping Beauty Slumber. The invasion

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{42. Ibid. “Wenn der hochweise Rat die hohen Standespersonen dabei besonders apostrophierte, wird den kölischen Fastelovendsjecken erst recht die Lust vergangen sein, mitzumachen.” The writers here are using “apostrophize” in the sense of its use as a rhetorical device, that is, “the addressing of a usually absent person or a usually absent personified thing rhetorically.” See Merriam Webster online “apostrophe,” http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apostrophe?show=0&tt=1380206117 (accessed 26 September 2013).}
\footnote{43. Ibid. “Sie liebten es volkhafter, deftiger.”}
\footnote{44. Ibid. “Trotzdem: bei der organisierten Erneuerung des Kölner Karnevals 1823—längst hatte die Französische Revolution den alten Feudalismus—spielten doch auch Reminiszenzen an die einstige Mitwirkung der ‘gehobenen Gesellschaft’ mit.”}
\end{footnotesize}
of the French soldiers marked the beginning of an enormous cataclysm which would drastically change the Rhineland.”

Klersch is similarly bleak in his description:

On the sixth of October 1794, the advance troops of the French Revolutionary armies appeared before the city. The Council and the citizenry had neither the moral nor the military power to oppose them… Just a couple of days later it was clear to everyone that the new masters would feel like conquerors and the citizens knew that all the ideological rhetoric of freedom and brotherhood would not arise again.

The troops, Nico Ehlscheid writes, “incorporated the free imperial city into the French State,” while “the Electorate of Cologne was dissolved, the Archbishop had to flee,” and Carnival was soon affected, as “the courtly Carnival found itself abruptly at an end.” Klersch describes how the new French regime set about dismantling Carnival: “On the twelfth of February 1795, the City Commander, General Daurier, forbade the festival on the grounds that “the evil-minded

46. Klersch, kölnische Fastnacht, 66. “Am 6. Oktober 1794 erschien die Spitze des französischen Revolutionsheeres vor der Stadt. Rat und Bürgerschaft hatten weder die moralische noch die militärische Kraft, sich ihm entgegenzustellen… Schon ein paar Tage später wurde es jedem klar, daß die neuen Herren sich als Eroberer fühlten, und darüber konnten auch alle ideologischen Phrasen von Freiheit und Brüderlichkeit die Bürger nicht hinwegtösten.” See also Ehlscheid, Geschichte, 10-11.
would certainly not fail to effect disorder through what is called your Carnival, from which the aristocratic horde will know how to take advantage.” Under the ban, it was forbidden to “demonstrate” in the streets, either singly or in groups, and the conducting of Carnival balls required obtaining a special license from the City Commander—which was only granted if the Magistrate provided a certificate of “good conduct” to the effect that any such proposed amusement had in place a guarantor. The “radical reconfiguration of the social order” coupled with the dissolving of the City Council, the guilds, the convents, etc., also proved to be the “means of pulling the rug out from under Carnival.” Ehlscheid writes, “The old feudal order was replaced by the new citizen society of the French Republic.” This new society, Anton Fahne notes, added new bans in 1796, 1797, and 1798 “to avert conflicts between the military and civilians.” In 1799, Carnival was again forbidden “because it did not conform with the

48. Klersch, Kölnische Fastnacht, 66. “Am 12. Februar 1795 verbot der Stadtkommandant, General Daurier, das Fest, mit der Begründung, daß die Übelgesinnten ‘ne manqueraient sûrement pas de profiter de ce que vous appellés (!) ici le Carneval, pour amener quelques désordres, dont la horde aristocratique saurait tirer un avantage quelconque.’ ” See also Fahne, Carneval, 156-57. My translation is of Klersch’s German from the French. See Ibid., 222, n1. “Die Übelgesinnten werden sicherlich nicht verfehlen, durch das, was ihr Karneval nennt, einige Unordnungen herbeizuführen, woraus die Aristokratienhorde ihren Vorteil zu ziehen wissen wird.”
49. Ibid.
50. Ehlscheid, Geschichte, 10. “Mit der radikalen Umgestaltung der Gesellschaftsordnung und der Auflösung des Stadtrates, der Zünfte, der Klöster etc. wurde den Trägern der Fastnacht der Boden entzogen.” The German literally translates as “pulling the ground.”
51. Ibid. “Die alte feudale Ordnung wurde durch die neue bürgerliche Gesellschaft der französischen Republik ersetzt.”
52. Fahne, Carneval, 157. “Spätere Verbote von 1796, 1797, 1798 sollten Streitigkeiten zwischen Militär und Civil verhüten.”
Republican calendar of the new system.\textsuperscript{53} Carnival could then only be celebrated publicly as an official festival or not at all.

\textbf{Carnival Violence in Romans, 1579-1580}

It is not possible to know for certain whether General Daurier was cognizant of the history of Carnival in 1580 in the city of Romans in the French Province of Dauphiné, but his fears of Cologne Carnival celebrants acting to “effect disorder” suggest the possibility. Indeed, considerations of the actual political agency of Carnival (as opposed to its function as a steam valve to allow oppressed peoples to exercise their misrule inclinations through controllable means) invariably feature discussion of Romans. I refer to it here not to attempt to draw exact parallels between a sixteenth-century violent uprising and a present-day parodic send-up of ossified traditions masquerading as an upending of social norms. Rather, I seek to provide historical context. Carnival today may not threaten violence. But I contend that any discussion of radical performance, or potentially radical performance, must be grounded in a consideration of whatever genuinely radical antecedents there may be. Furthermore, in associating Carnival with a period of historical violence almost half a millennium ago, it perhaps offers, if somewhat obliquely, one subliminal kernel of explanation as to why Carnival was so easily appropriated by a violent regime—the Nazis—four centuries later. Obviously a too literal comparison between sixteenth-century France and now or even eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Cologne is fraught with difficulties, and over-reach is a danger, but some consideration is appropriate. Given the

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. “1799 untersagte man das Fest, weil es mit dem neuen System des republikanischen Kalenders nicht in Einklang stehe.”
political agency sometimes popularly accorded Carnival and, in the case of Cologne, given the very real political overtones of Carnival and its integral position in the city’s history and culture, such attention is, I believe, important. Finally, interrogating whether and to what degree the Stunksitzung may be considered radical within a Cologne Carnival context argues for at least some examination of Carnival’s most famous violent radicalization.

In his seminal study of the events, *Carnival in Romans: Mayhem and Massacre in a French City*, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie relates a compelling story of the oppressed classes using the context of Carnival to push—in this case, violently—for change. The city of Romans was known for its Carnival.54 He encapsulates the 1580 events starkly:

Romans is a former textile center located to the southeast of Lyons in what was once the province of Dauphiné... Each February, it was the scene of a colorful and animated Mardi Gras Carnival. In 1580 the winter festivities… denigrated into a bloody ambush where the notables killed or imprisoned the leaders of the craftsman party. This blend of public celebration and violence burst like a skyrocket over France, which was in the throes of a prolonged religious conflict.55

The Carnival violence occurred “at the juncture of two essential phases of the Wars of Religion, a bitter struggle between Protestants and Catholics… during the second half of the sixteenth


55. Ibid., xi.
century.” 56 The Carnival revolt was “the climax of a vast regional revolt,” 57 the “urban showcase of a vast peasant war.” He explains, “In the towns, revolts pitted upper class against craftsman class; the standard rural struggle was peasant against noble.” 58 In addition to its religious “cleansing” character, “Carnival also dealt with social sins or ills, on which the community… could reach no consensus.” Ladurie argues, “The elimination of social ills implied class struggle, with greedy notables on one side and rebellious peasants on the other.” Both groups “entered violently into Carnival, confronting the other with theatrical and ritual gestures leading up to the final massacre.” 59 He notes in understatement, “The incident was and is highly charged in terms of social and cultural history.” 60 In contemporary Carnival, the high and low engage as official and alternative and exchange carnivalesque barbs. In Romans, the high and low, characterized by economic class and differences in status, abandoned the radical potentiality of Carnival for genuine violence.

Ladurie lists four categories of “ranks” or “estats.” The first were the nobles, “well-to-do landowners,” and “members of the patrician bourgeoisie who lived as nobles.” The second rank “was essentially mercantile.” The third consisted of “every branch of the crafts.” (From this rank came “nearly all the leaders of the 1579-1580 rebellion.”) There was a clear line between the second and third ranks, and movement between ranks was difficult and rare. The fourth and lowest rank was that of the agricultural workers. 61 “The protest,” Ladurie explains, “reflected the

56. Ibid.
57. Ibid., xii.
58. Ibid., 28.
59. Ladurie, foreword to Ibid., xiii.
60. Ibid., xi.
61. Ladurie, Carnival, 5-10. Although the worst violence was concentrated in 1580, the course of
fundamental differences separating these four categories,” with “the upper two ranks…almost entirely on the side of law and order, “ and “the lower two furnish[ing] members and support to the league of rebels.”

From his analysis of the economic status of members of each rank Ladurie concludes that “the division of wealth does not appear to be too undemocratic,” stating that Romans in 1578 was “far more egalitarian than underdeveloped societies of its day or even of today.” He notes, “The majority of the agitators came from” a group who were “craftsmen” and “plowmen,” who “provid[ed] leaders and popular support for the protests.” The remaining “fat cats” comprised “side of law and order.” Ladurie writes, “The lines dividing the classes were at once clearly drawn and intersecting” during the “upheavals.” In the country, “peasants attacked noble landlords… In town, “the craftsmen and plowmen clashed with the bourgeois patricians.” The uprising was “a conflict between the upper crust of the merchant-landowner society and the bourgeois patricians, on the one hand, and on the other, the small property owner sector in the middle ranges of common craftsmen.”

What then, were the underlying causes of the revolt? Ladurie writes, “The whole philosophy of the revolution of 1579-1580 was basically to undo the consequence of the 1542 takeover” of the local government council by “a coterie of merchants and noble landlords.” It was part of a pattern “gradually” taking shape, marked by “the re-awakening of urban centers and increasingly centralized power of the monarchy,” which “encouraged the predominance of

the armed rebellion began in 1579.
62. Ibid., 10-12, 19.
local oligarchies.” The “rapidly growing lower-class population was becoming a threat.” The crux of a situation” was “revolutionary.” He writes:

Large groups of the peasantry had taken up arms... The urban bourgeoisie was... in conflict with the two privileged ranks. The craftsmen and the common folk were locked in a struggle with the bourgeois patricians... The nobility itself was no longer unified. The rift between Protestant nobles and their Catholic brothers was destructive... Upper class battled with lower; the elite was divided.

These divisions—of the sort still mocked, parodied, and symbolically overturned in Carnival tradition and practice—became the catalyst for bloodshed. Carnival’s playful inversion became radicalized and that radicalization was performed as actual violence. Carnival was re-invented, this time as a platform for violent confrontation.

Religion played its role, but taxation was also critical—the commoners objected to benefits and exemptions of the privileged. In 1578, “the first, halting steps of a union of communities formed,” based on “anti-noble and anti-tax privilege” sentiments. Called a “league,” it was “more the manifestation of a state of mind than a bureaucratic method of organization.” These leagues were not limited to Romans. “Fears of outlaw soldiers” and “devastating taxes” prompted further leagues in the Dauphiné region. That spirit of revolt to

63. Ibid., 22-24.
64. Ibid., 33.
65. Ibid., 35-59, 79, 81.
challenge injustice, to change the cultural or economic circumstances, was the overriding spirit of the uprising.

Ladurie describes “the peasant insurrection” as having “from the start… certain characteristics of a folk festival,” as “the first seditious gathering… coincided with the winter games held by young male athletes.” These games “culminated in the annual high-comic election of an Epiphany or Carnival king.”66 The progression to violence was predictable. Ladurie writes:

> Once the rebel movement was incorporated into the burlesque, yet serious and sacred, institution of the festival, the next step was logical and simple. Light weapons appeared… A peasant war… was in the offing… The first battle took place in Marsas… Royal troops were attacked…67

A second attack was made against the troops of Henri, the Grand Prior of France and King Henri II’s illegitimate son. In Romans proper, the “master craftsmen” raised “the banners of revolt.” In addition, “outsiders who had immigrated from the surrounding countryside or even farther away… unskilled laborers,” who filled “the least desirable jobs in town,” formed “an eager audience for the agitators.” The stage set for the third of February 1579, the Feast of St. Blaise (patron saint of drapers). The drapers elected a captain, a comic king (possibly), and, critically, a political leader.68 On 10 February 1579, “the first and decisive confrontation… took place… at the town hall.” A “thousand people” gathered to protest tax and finance policies. The clash heated up: “All the participants in a revolution knew each other. They hated each other

66. Ibid., 95-96.
67. Ibid., 96-97.
68. Ibid., 97-101.
passionately, cordially, and personally. It was... far more concrete than a simple abstract ‘class consciousness.’”

On 15 February, “a detachment of horse guards garrisoned” nearby was run out of town, but without actual violence. As the horsemen—the “royal army”—rode past the gate and walls, “the mutineers brandished their halberds” and called out “insults.” From “atop the ramparts,” the rebels “jeered at them.” This “mockery and role reversal” were “typical Carnival phenomena,” and “a year later the Carnival in Romans was to reveal how great an extent these themes had been developed.”

Mocking the Military, Mocking Authority (and its Faux Military)

Making fun of the military—in perhaps a similar fashion as the jeering rebels atop the barricades—has a long tradition in Cologne Carnival. The area’s resistance to the presence first of French troops (1794-1814) and later Prussian troops (from 1815) was less of course overt than the earlier events in Romans, possibly because, despite prohibitions, the French did sanction some aspects of Carnival. There was even a “Bürger Bellegeck” (Citizen Bellegeck) jester character who danced and performed in the streets. Eventually the strictures imposed by French rule—in particular the money charged for balls, originally for charity purposes—led to the festival becoming an opportunity for money to be made, a tradition that continued and expanded under Prussian rule. The commercialization of Carnival during the French occupation and its

69. Ibid., 104-5, 107-9. Rhineland Carnival’s “Funken” regiments were parodies dating to 70. See Schwering and Fuchs, “Jecke Bürger unter der Trikolore: Fastnacht zur Franzosenzeit,” in Fuchs, et al., Karneval, 172-75; Schwering and Fuchs, “Romantische Reform des Kölner Karnevals: das ‘Festordnende Comitee,’” in Fuchs, et al., Karneval, 176-99; and Brog, Zoch, 59-169
growth during the early Prussian years ultimately generated a discernible public yearning for Carnival of old, thereby stirring the reforms.\textsuperscript{71} It does not seem too much of a leap to suggest that the reforms then can be read as an early proto-alternative movement, one with perhaps some measure of a similar restorative agenda. Too, the desire to use Carnival as a device to challenge authority, at least symbolically, suggests carnivalized moments—performative utterances—with radical potential. In the face of military occupation, a desire to see a festival restored to its formerly populist roots—and the carnivalistic performative gestures and utterances derived from that desire—may be read as potentially radical. Mocking the military was likely present before, but definitively became ingrained in Carnival with the advent of reforms from 1823.\textsuperscript{72} The Funken regiments that remain as a central part of official Carnival in the Rhineland (and in many parts of Germany where Carnival is celebrated) date to the era of the reforms and were originally conceived as parody and mockery. Now representatives of official Carnival, their own original mocking role has been subsumed, as they have become targets of the alternative’s parodic criticism.

The Stunksitzung frequently targets the Funken, albeit in rather gentle attacks (with heavy drinking usually central to the humor—a jibe that is not culturally regarded as harsh in a Cologne Carnival context). Nevertheless, even this tame mocking of the Funken is in stark contrast to the reverential esteem in which they—as representatives of official Carnival—are usually held and the almost adulatory reception they customarily receive at official Carnival

\textsuperscript{86}.

\textsuperscript{71} Schwering and Fuchs, “Jecke Bürger unter der Trikolore: Fastnacht zur Franzosenzeit,” in Fuchs, et al., \textit{Karneval}, 174-75.

The Stunksitzung’s jibes, although relatively benign, nevertheless represent a direct attack on the perceived power structure of Cologne Carnival. The jeers are no longer hurled from atop a barricade, but the intention to challenge the self-appointed authority of Carnival’s ruling class is no less genuine. Four examples of the Stunkers’ jests will suffice to illustrate.

In 2005, in the sketch “Funken Meet Blaumann-Gruppe,” the Roten Funken danced the Stippe Föttche to the accompaniment of the Blue Man Group. Or rather the Funken danced the Stippe Föttche to the accompaniment of the Ensemble’s version of the Blue Man Group, a group of the band members dressed in workers’ “Farben” (colors), the working clothes that tradespeople, construction workers, etc., wear in Germany, in this instance, of course, blue ones. In the sketch, the Funken, or at least their posteriors, are employed as percussion instruments. The following year, the sketch “Pinguine” (Penguins) re-envisioned the Funken as the subjects of a staged documentary, parodying the film March of the Penguins, with beer kegs rather than eggs being the primary objects of protection. In 2007, in “Pränatale Funken” (Prenatal Funken), the mocked soldiers are portrayed as babies, with the performers’ hands used as feet, recalling the “Triplets” song from the 1953 Vicente Minnelli film The Band Wagon, in which Fred Astaire, Nanette Fabray, and Jack Buchanan sing and dance as babies. This infantilizing of a beloved Carnival institution by the Stunkers suggests a view that the guardians of official Carnival lack both maturity and judgement, that the Festkomitee and its symbolic militia are

73. Brog notes that members of the various Funken are often heard to say that they do not wear a costume, but a uniform. See Brog, Zoch, 263.
childish and petty. Carnival in Cologne merits a more mature, responsible, more authentic—and therefore, alternative—leadership.\textsuperscript{74}

Finally, in 2003, in a sketch titled “Triumph des Funkenwilles” (Triumph of the Funken Will), the at-that-time one-hundred-year-old Leni Riefenstahl is portrayed (by Martina Bayor) as a guest on a German television talk show discussing her latest documentary film. The Funken are shown in the sepia film oiled and nearly naked, cradling beer kegs and the distinctive Kölsch (beer) serving trays, posing before images of flames and smoke. The masculinity of the Funken—and in particular their marching—repeatedly causes Riefenstahl to slip into reverie. The sketch and film subliminally remind the audience of the militarism of much of official Carnival’s symbolism. It also links Carnival—official Carnival—to Nazism and the Nazi era.\textsuperscript{75} I will explore this connection—Nazism and Carnival—in greater detail in the next chapter. Here I simply wish to suggest again how Carnival—alternative Carnival—performs moments of potential radicalism in its continuing attacks and criticisms of official Carnival’s power and the performative symbolism rooted in that power.

Infantilized imagery of official Carnival has even been presented by actual children in their own alternative, potentially radical, performative practice of Carnival. The now-defunct children’s version of the Stunksitzung, the Kinderstunksitzung, also mined the Funken for comic and satirical effect. (Kölner children, it seems, are also able to recognize the deficiencies in official Carnival and are accordingly able to critique it.) The Kinderstunksitzung, billed as “die


erste Karnevals-Sitzung von Pänz für Pänz” (the first Carnival Sitzung by kids for kids), was
started by a founding member of the Stunksitzung Ensemble, Dorothee Schmitz. It featured
children and youth performers with adult professionals handling production responsibilities. It
began in 1994 and ran for seventeen Carnival Sessions, finally ending in 2010.76 One sketch a
few years before the production’s demise featured two onstage villages separated by a mountain.
Neither village knew of the other’s existence. In one, the villagers wore the uniforms of the Red
Funken and Mariechen, in the other, the blue. A tunnel through the mountain eventually revealed
the villages to one another and the resulting fear led to a war between them. The battle scene
culminated in a loud explosion and blackout. When the lights came back up, the mountain was
gone and the now disheveled villagers from both villages were wearing Funken and Mariechen
uniform pieces of both red and blue. The aftermath prodded them to the decision that they could
live together in harmony after all. One former red proclaimed, “We are one people”—to which a
former blue (physically the smallest performer onstage) sarcastically replied, “So are we.” The
line received a huge laugh, as the sketch borrowed its immediately recognized climactic punch
lines from a well-worn joke from the era of “der Fall der Mauer” (the Fall of the Wall). In the
joke a “Wessie” (West German) and an “Ossie” (East German) meet. The Ossie says, “We are

http://www.ksta.de/koeln-uebersicht/kinderstunksitzung-ende-des-alternativen-
kinderkarnevals,16341264,12770294.html. The article also reports that a second “alternative”
children’s Sitzung, the Ziegenbartsitzung, which debuted in 2001, and was started by original
“Stunkers” Jürgen Becker and Basti Körber, will also cease after the 2010 Session. See also
http://www.koeln-allgemein.de/letzte-session-fuer-die-kinderstunksitzung and the
one people.” The Wessie replies, “So are we!” The children’s sketch, like its adult progenitor, simultaneously suggests the need for a change in official Carnival (by mocking it) and highlights the resistance to change by the self-appointed guardians of official Carnival. The children draw their parallel to the presumed and actual resistance to German unification through the use of a near-universally-recognized joke about the Unification.

Romans, Round Two

Discontent simmered, but Carnival in Romans in 1579 was “not one of out-and-out insurrection.” Ladurie reports that “negotiations persisted” and the “consuls kept the promise they had made to the thousand demonstrating malcontents.” The “troubled weeks… were a period of power based in the streets as much as in the town hall.” The carnivalesque atmosphere continued, as the rebels did not let up on their demands and exhibited behavior in meetings with the consuls reminiscent of a “Carnival charivari.” Carnival had become not just “dialogism taken to the streets,” but political advocacy, direct action, and, I submit, a performative radicalism taken to the streets.

Ladurie calls 1579 “The Shadow Carnival.” Although the “craftsmen’s protest against the nobles” in Romans “remained non-violent,” such was not the case “in the surrounding countryside” where the “fight against seigneurs” produced both “killing” and “torture.” Nobles

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78. Ladurie, Carnival, 110-14.
80. Ladurie, Carnival, 93-152.
were “attacked” and “tracked down in their manor houses… the peasants’ intention to destroy or at least damage the entire seigneurial system was explicit.”

This literal overturning (or attempted overturning) of the social order extends the carnivalesque well beyond the playful and the mocking and indeed beyond the performative into a radicalism of actual violence.

Following a short respite due to a visit from Catherine de’Medici, the Queen Mother, in July of 1579, “an atmosphere of violent peasant insurgence” rapidly returned and “spread through the… countryside.” The peasants “rejected” the “tax and a part of the tithes” for “the harvest of 1579” and “city process-servers were pelted with country stones.” In Romans itself, “Bands of… hoodlums roamed the city,” where they “intimidated the gentlefolk.” Various factions and groups “persisted in picking fights” with each other. Opposition and frustration with the situation changed the politics sufficiently that the town council was enlarged with “extraordinary members” from the craftsmen and “popular faction.” Ladurie writes, “Over an entire year—until the bloody quelling of the revolt in mid-February 1580—the leaders of the popular faction were able to take part in the council, providing them with all sorts of information and means of applying pressure on problems…” The “extraordinary council members,” Ladurie explains, “were meant to deal a heavy blow to the town treasury and property. They were supposed to collect from the rich, the ex-consuls, the powerful…” This attempt at a radical overturning of the entrenched wealth and power of the elite was reflected in the 1580 “poor people’s Carnival,” reportedly with the theme “rich men, give the town back your dishonest gains.” This display fed the “threatening feelers” that were “sent into the furthest reaches of the

81. Ibid., 131-32.
82. Ibid., 154-58.
collective unconscious of the poor, *of course*, but also… into the disturbing fantasies that haunted the rich…”\textsuperscript{83}

Carnival, then, in Romans in 1579 and 1580, was a collection of radical performative utterances that exploded into radical violent action. Ladurie’s account of sixteenth-century Romans lends credence to the idea that Carnival itself is a performative proto-revolutionary utterance, the radical played out in ever larger and *sometimes* bloodier actions. But the gradual nature of the Romans conflict, the evolution of the degree of radicalization tempers the argument, and certainly in a Cologne context, although the alternative Stunksitzung has elicited objections, criticism, and lawsuits, no literal storming of City Hall has happened. Indeed, in Cologne, even the opening of Carnival on “Weibersfastnacht” (Women’s Carnival), the Thursday before Ash Wednesday, has long since abandoned the symbolic tradition of women “storming” City Hall three times until the Keys of the City are turned over from the city’s rulers (men), thereby overturning the social order for Carnival. Cologne, the self-proclaimed true heart of Carnival opens with a simple fanfare and the releasing of balloons. The more gradual evolution of behavior—even within a festival that is centered on the overturning of the social order—merits consideration in any discussion of the radical nature of Carnival, whether official or alternative.

Pieter Spierenburg, whose book *The Broken Spell: A Cultural and Anthropological History of Preindustrial Europe* was cited in the first chapter, suggests a relationship in societies between hierarchy and emotions. Grounding his ideas in Johan Huizinga’s “mentalities” and the subsequent work based on Huizinga from Norbert Elias and Max Weber, Spierenburg argues that

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 158-63.
“in the early modern period… larger groups adopted refined models of behavior.” These “more refined codes of behavior” first emerged “among elite groups,” creating “differences in conduct between various social strata.”

He writes:

The vast majority in, say, the sixteenth century were… required to control their behavior. Lower class people had to be reticent especially when confronted by persons from the elite. The latter could expect submissiveness and deference. Among themselves, peasants and artisans behaved differently. To a large extent the regulation of conduct was attuned to social distinctions… The adjustment of behavioral regulation to social distinctions may have become even stronger during the early modern period because the elites withdrew from popular culture.

It is intriguing then to consider Ladurie’s narrative of the Carnival protests in Romans in at least partial breakdown in social behavioral codes between the classes. The artisans and craftsmen and peasants revolted against the privilege of the elites and the taxation and political policies that favored the elites by confronting and shattering the behavioral codes under which they were


85. Ibid., 4.
supposed to act. The deference to the elites turned to protest and confrontation, sometimes violent, which was then met in 1580 with an escalation of violence from the elites to end the protests.

In the autumn of 1579, the situation in Romans accelerated towards the greater violence of 1580. A summer butchers’ strike elevated tensions when the bakers joined it in November and the joint strike continued into the New Year. Ladurie writes of the gathering storm: “It is established that the butchers and bakers would be among the principal leaders and participants in the Carnival tragedy in a matter of days.” He continues, “They would also make a heavy contribution to the hangings in the final act of the 1580 Carnival,” as several of the leaders were among the condemned. Ladurie emphasizes, however, “The butchers and bakers’ strikes were far from being the sole cause or motive behind the events of February 1580; protest was widespread, varied, and intense throughout the entire region during the fall of 1579 and the ensuing winter.” Religious skirmishes broke out around Christmas in the area and throughout much of southern France, adding to the pressure, as did resentment over the occupation by military forces.86

Although most Carnival events initially went without incident, the traditional threshers’ street-dancing processions with brooms and rakes—marking the end of the wheat season and thereby symbolizing death—were seen as ominous. One group wore shrouds and dances and celebrations continued beyond St. Blaise’s Day—with the theme of the rich exploiting the poor.87 Several processions and events by the gentry and, eventually, the nobility of Romans, unfolded over the Carnival period, culminating with the feast of the “Partridge Kingdom,” a

86. Ladurie, Carnival, 169-74.
87. Ibid., 175-81.
Carnival “reign” of the nobility featuring a footrace with a partridge as the prize. (The race was fixed.)

This Kingdom and its ostensibly carnivalesque trappings, was in fact, a plot, a “rich men’s suppressive retort,” portraying itself as a court surrounded with military figures and issuing decrees. These activities were not in and of themselves so unusual in Carnival. But a supposedly mock edict was enforced and the mock military guard was eventually replaced with a real one. 

“Popular protest” re-appeared “on or around” 14 February. The “people’s kingdoms either started up again or merely continued.” Tense encounters between people’s kingdoms’ leaders and participants and those of the Partridge Kingdom’s, coupled with mockingly stated but genuinely intended Partridge Kingdom intentions “to mete out justice to the opposing Carnival,” preceded an opulent feast. Carnival charades cloaked violent designs. Reports of the events differ, but it is clear that violence erupted between better-armed detachments of the Partridge Kingdom and members of one of the people’s kingdoms on 15 February, during a procession to a Carnival ball. Revenge-driven street fighting erupted throughout the town. The fighting lasted well into the early hours of Tuesday, 16 February—Mardi Gras. The forces of the nobles—those claiming the side of law and order—had better weapons and numbers and peasant re-enforcements from outside the town were unable to come to their urban brethren’s aid. The craftsmen’s force dispersed and fled. Uprisings outside Romans, in the countryside, dwindled in the aftermath. Ladurie writes, “On Mardi Gras… Carnival died an early death. Over the next

88. Ibid., 181-96.
89. Ibid., 201-14.
90. Ibid., 220-48.
few months, unrest in the villages came to a bloody halt… Yet much would be done before the town returned to normal. It was necessary to upbraid, punish, examine, hang, whip, draw and quarter, force confessions, and confiscate property.”91 Repression was restored.

Spierenburg warns “against a too idyllic notion of preindustrial popular culture,” noting that Carnival was “a time when latent conflicts surfaced or new ones were even created.”92 The incidents in Romans clearly fit this counter-Bakhtinian paradigm. The violent reprisals against the rebels and the resulting shutdown of their protests contradict any freeing sense of a Carnival spirit theorized by Bakhtin. The ruling classes were threatened by a Carnival that promised to invert society in all too real a fashion, by a Carnival that was too radical. The threat of substantive change was perceived as creating a society the privileged did not want. They reacted with violent utterances, forcing a restoration of that which they wanted to preserve—violently enforcing strictures on Carnival to ensure its function as a steam valve, suggesting, but never daring to bring about, genuine change. Carnival exposed its radical potential and was brutally stopped.

Spierenburg’s formulation leads easily to a reading of Carnival as performance (or collection of performances) mocking the extremes of social behavioral codes, a deliberate expression (or utterance or collection or utterances) of “the official culture, which is just serious,” being “confronted by an unofficial one which combines seriousness and the trivial.” He writes, “Carnival… is deadly serious to some participants, just a game to others, and a little bit of

91. Ibid., 249.
both to most people.” Spierenburg is specifically describing Carnival in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (and is referencing a far broader area geographically), but it seems probable that similar attitudes would be evident today, even in Cologne.

**Rhineland Carnival, Reformed and Re-Born**

The nineteenth-century Rhineland Carnival reforms and the customs they initiated arguably fit Spierenburg’s model of the “official culture” being “confronted by an unofficial one.” Those customs, from a man in drag performing the role of the Princess (and later Virgin) to the Funken to, of course, the Sitzungen, “confronted” the official culture of the era—which was imposed by non-local governments. Carnival targeted the “foreign” military occupiers, making first French then Prussian leaders uneasy. Sperber notes, however, that most Prussian leaders came to regard Carnival in the hands of the Carnival societies as being useful in “preserving public order.” The overlords had found a steam valve for the populace.

The Congress of Vienna left Cologne under Prussian control in 1815 as part of the Rhineland Province. “This incorporation of Catholic Cologne into Protestant Prussia, as one might surmise, did not always proceed without stress. Prussia was also not exactly thrilled with the civic broad-minded democratic ideas of the Cologners.” (Although it would perhaps be too

93. Ibid., 49.  
94. Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals*, 98. This is in line with ideas that Carnival performs a “release valve” function.  
easy to draw a parallel with Cologne Carnival history since 1984 by stating that the self-professed guardians of official Carnival have not been “exactly thrilled” with the “broad-minded,” alternative—and, I would argue, Bakhtinian—ideas of the Stunkers, it would, at least to some extent, also be accurate.)

The Prussian authorities did significantly diminish Carnival activities—echoing the efforts of prior French authorities. Then, “in the fall of 1822, in order to revive and reform Cologne Carnival anew, several engaged citizens, all emanating from the educated and property owning classes, gathered together… They established a programmatic Gesamtkunstwerk… In 1823 the first ever ‘Festival Regulatory Committee’ was planned…”96 Klersch writes:

Because of the rich urban tradition at that time, the good parts of which coincided in large part with economic collapse, the goal of the Reformers in the year 1823 was therefore to place the leadership of Carnival into the hands of the spiritual elite of the city, to give the festival as a central focus the symbolic figure of the hero and to gather all the power around this central focus.97

This first Festkomitee set its sights on engineering “the return of the old Cologne scene”—to set


“the Cologne Carnival on the quest for the lost ‘Golden Time.’” With this launch of their
“magical Renaissance,” the Committee, “a quite distinguished, academic, cultured gentlemen’s
c club,” gave “Cologne Carnival a new direction, a new purpose,” guided by the motto “Harmony
enlarges small things—Discord destroys completely.”

Following its 1822 meeting, the Festkomitee officially formed in 1823. Among the
Carnival activities they presented was a “tightly organized” Rose Monday Parade
Cologne Carnival to a new level and made its organization a forward-looking model.”
Forty-year-old Matthias Josef DeNoël was arguably the new organization and movement’s driving
force—its “motor,” as Schwering and Fuchs describe him. They write: “Probably the most
brilliant and active member of this [Carnival] Society was named DeNoël, a sort of dreamy

98. Schwering and Fuchs, “Romantische Reform des Kölner Karnevals: Das ‘Festordnende
“Die kölnische Fastnacht auf der Suche nach der verlorengegangenen ‘Goldenen Zeit...’”
Herrenclub...” “Wurde... der kölnischen Fastnacht eine neue Richtung, neuen Inhalt geben.”
“Concordia res parvae crescent—Discordia magnae dilabuntur.” The Latin was translated into
rhyming German by founding member Matthias Josef DeNoël as: “Durch Einigkeit die
Kleinigkeit / Zum Großen sich erweitert; / Durch Zank und Streit zu jeder Zeit / Das Große ist
gescheitert.”
Karneval auf ein neues Niveau gehoben und seine Organisation zu einem zukunftsweisenden
Modell gemacht.” See also Joseph Klersch, *Volkstum und Volksleben in Köln: Ein Beitrag zur
Soziologie der Stadt* (Cologne: J.P. Bachem Verlag, 1965) 111-25. Hereafter cited in text as
Klersch, *Volkstum*. See also Klersch, *kölnische Fastnacht*, 84-114; and, Frank Tewes, 150 Jahre
Rosenmontags-Divertissementchen von 1861, e.V.: Das Jubiläum (Cologne: Rosenmontags-
*Jubiläum*. See also Schwering and Fuchs, “Romantische Reform des Kölner Karnevals: Das
‘Festordnende Comitee,’” in Fuchs, et al., *Karneval*, 176-87; Frohn, *Narr*, 44-48; and Fahne,
*Carneval*, 171-77.
scholar, driven by artistic ambitions.” Although Frohn points out that it is not entirely certain, DeNoël was likely the one who initially assembled the future members of that first Festkomitee. Schwering and Fuschs write: “After all, one can assume that it was he who brought together at the pub ‘Im Häuschen’ that circle of friends which there in the winter of 1822 made a momentous decision for the Cologne Carnival.”

DeNoël himself described the meeting: “Here the festival was to be reviewed, restored to its old honor, and its direction corrected, through which its old fame as a people’s festival in Germany would again be reached.” Schwering and Fuchs delineate why reform was needed: Prussian Kaiser Wilhelm Friedrich III had demonstrated hostility towards the Rhineland and in particular against Carnival; the local Prussian authorities arranged Carnival “completely differently” than Cologners; and, Cologners did not celebrate their festival in any ill-mannered way. Therefore, “in opposition to what blew in from Berlin,” the Festkomitee would now be the “organ of order” for Carnival.

Klersch notes that the Committee grew out of a “roundtable” or “Romantic circle,” which greeted with concern a new set of rules for the celebration of Carnival that the Prussian government published on 22 February 1821. Among other restrictions, the new rules forbade the


104. Frohn, Narr, 44; and, Schwering and Fuchs, “Romantische Reform des Kölner Karnevals: Das ‘Festordnende Comitee,’ ” in Fuchs, et al., Karneval, 177. “Nach allem was man vermuten kann, war er es, der jenen Freundsckries in der Gaststätte ‘Im Häuschen’ zusammenbrachte, welcher dort im Winter 1822 eine für den Kölner Karneval bedeutsame Entscheidung traf.” “Im Häuschen” literally translates as “in the little house.”

105. Ibid. “Hier wurde das Fest besprochen, in seine alten Ehren wiedereingesetzt und erhielt die Richtung, durch die es als Volksfest in Deutschland wieder zu seinem alten Ruhm gelangt ist.”

106. Ibid., 176-77. “Entgegen dem, was aus Berlin herüber wehte….” “Organ der Ordnung…” See also Sperber, Rhineland Radicals, 98.
popular Carnival masked balls.\textsuperscript{107} These new regulations, Klersch writes, “had to mean the end for Carnival as a people’s festival.”\textsuperscript{108} Therefore, the “circle of friends sought to find an escape from this emergency, and they found it in the re-creation of the festival in the spirit which enlivened them, the spirit of the Romantic.”\textsuperscript{109} Klersch continues:

The re-formation of the old people’s festival in the sense of the Romantic aspired to a twofold, though closed purpose: to endow Carnival with new symbolic substance and to give it a societal upper class, which at that time more or less corresponded with the intellectual class, and which more and more had turned away from the coarser aspects [of Carnival]— to win the festival back.\textsuperscript{110}

The Committee’s 1823 Carnival reforms then were genuinely radical in the sense of Kershaw’s definition with which this chapter opened. The Committee sought to transform the performative utterances of Carnival, to take, as Kershaw writes, the “creative opportunity to change the world for better or worse,” to re-invent “a performative process in need of direction.”\textsuperscript{111}

Diane Conrad, in describing her project with the incarcerated youth in Alberta, acknowledges that although the work “did not always directly address the politics in which our work was set,” it nevertheless, “whether subtly destabilizing the structures of authority, opening up new ways of thinking or acting, or through performative playfulness,” was, in Kershaw’s

\begin{thebibliography}{111}
\bibitem{107} Klersch, \textit{Volkstum}, 113-15.
\bibitem{108} Ibid., 115. “Das mußte für die Fastnacht als Volksfest das Ende bedeuten.”
\bibitem{109} Ibid. “Wallraf, DeNoël und ihr Freundeskreis suchten, aus dieser Not einen Ausweg zu finden, und sie fanden ihn in der Neugestaltung der Feier aus dem Geist, der sie selbst beseelte, aus dem Geist der Romantik.”
\bibitem{110} Ibid., 115-16.
\bibitem{111} Kershaw, \textit{The Radical in Performance}, 20.
\end{thebibliography}
words, “actively engaged in widening the bounds of political process.” I submit that the first Festival Committee was pursuing a similar result. They did not force a direct political confrontation with the Prussian authorities, which—like the incarcerated youth forcing a confrontation against the authorities of the facility in which they were held or against the justice system—they would have lost. Instead, they engaged less directly by seeking to reform a festival around which revolved so much of Cologne’s culture. The Committee changed Carnival from what it saw as a festival that no longer belonged to the people into one that better fit their vision, a vision steeped in the Romantic, the folkloric, the (yet-to-be-articulated) Bakhtinian.

The early years of the Festkomitee saw the creation of the “Hero of Carnival,” which later became the Prince of Carnival, and “Princess Venezia,” who later became the Virgin (Jungfrau). It is unclear exactly when the Farmer (Bauer), the third member of the Dreigestirn, was added. Fuchs, Schwering, Zöller, and Oelsner suggest it may have been as early as 1825, a date Klersch confirms, although the name of no Bauer before 1868 is known. Brog claims 1883 as the first year for the Dreigestirn to appear under the titles Prince, Farmer, and Virgin. Within a few years, as Frohn notes and as cited in this study’s opening chapter, “the basic foundational structures of the organized Cologne Carnival” as it is still practiced were in place. Carnival was reformed.

These structures, newly invented traditions—including the Fastelovendsmötz, the distinctive Carnival hats worn by Carnival society members—ratified by repetition, cemented in

place the utterances of official Cologne Carnival’s Festival Committee. In 1842, however, the Committee faced its own proto-alternative movement, when “a group of dissidents seceded,” becoming “known as the ‘democrats,’” and standing in opposition to “their rivals, ‘the aristocrats.’”\(^{116}\) The two competing groups re-united in 1844, but the reconciliation was short lived. Franz Raveaux, the “new leader of the democrats,” decided to run “for a seat on the Carnival Society’s executive committee.” His platform, Sperber reports, “called for more explicit political satire in the festivities and lower entrance fees for the private ‘sessions’” of the group. Upon his defeat, “the democrats formed their own society,” with Raveaux as their leader. Named the “Allgemeine Carnevals-Gesellschaft” (General Carnival Society) his new Society “soon counted over a thousand members.” Several other new Carnival Societies followed over the next few years.\(^{117}\) Raveaux’s Society was indeed more political in its satire and humor—more radical in its approach to Carnival—which led to more political humor being introduced into the original Festkomitee’s programs and celebrations.\(^{118}\)

Raveaux’s “nominal business” was as a “cigar dealer,” but having “made a fortune in the mid-1840s real estate boom,” he was able to devote himself to the political causes in which he believed. The Carnival Society was but one of his efforts. In addition, he worked with the trades association and a Prussian-permitted association to fight poverty. Furthermore, he was a leader in

\(^{115}\) See Schwering and Fuchs, “Romantische Reform des Kölner Karnevals: Das ‘Festordnende Comitee,’ ” in Fuchs, et al., \textit{Kerneval}, 180, for discussion of the “Mötzte.” One will also hear it referred to as a “Karnevalsmötzte.”


\(^{117}\) Ibid., 99; and, Schwering and Fuchs, “Romantische Reform des Kölner Karnevals: Das ‘Festordnende Comitee,’ ” in Fuchs, et al., \textit{Kerneval}, 190, 192-94. Allgemein can also be translated as public.

\(^{118}\) Sperber, \textit{Rhineland Radicals}, 99.

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the unarmed civic guard that was formed in the aftermath of the 1846 St. Martin’s Parish Fair
riots in Cologne. As a part of “a left-wing coalition of democrats and communists,” Raveaux
was elected in the first municipal elections the Prussian government allowed in the Rhineland
Province. “These elections,” Sperber writes, “were far from democratic, since a stiff property
franchise meant that only a fraction of adult males were eligible” to stand. Cologne was
unusual in that the elections broke down more along lines of “self-proclaimed representatives of
the people against the ‘moneybags’” instead of more religious—Catholic against Protestant—
lines. Sperber notes, however, that “religion and social structure did coincide to an extent.”
The Rhineland today remains predominantly Catholic—Carnival is of course a Catholic cultural
institution. My observation is that this Catholicism may be considered more cultural than deeply
religious.

Raveaux’s documented political activism—James M. Brophy notes how Raveaux was
“characterized” as a “known radical howler” by Prussian officials—argues for a consideration of
his participation and interest in Carnival as political action. And as a radical one. First was his
rebellion against what he seemed to view as the practice of a deliberate exclusivity by the
Festival Committee. Then came his moves first to reform the Committee from within (by

119. Ibid., 105, 118-19, 129-30. See also Brophy, Rhineland, 248-52. St. Martin’s Church (Groß
Sankt Martin) is a Romanesque church in the old part of the city, not far from the Cathedral. The
yearly Parish Fair, in August, featured fireworks and sometimes guns fired into the air. As it was
also a holiday celebrating Wilhelm Friedrich III’s birthday, the laws against such activities were
usually overlooked—until 1840, when Wilhelm Friedrich IV took the throne. His birthday was
not in August. A few years of tension resulted in an over-reaction by Prussian soldiers and the
deaths of several people. Riots ensued and the civic guard was re-established as a compromise
solution to end the violence.
120. Ibid., 131.
121. Ibid., 131-32.
standing for a position as a democrat on the aristocrat-dominated executive committee), then to help form a new General Carnival Society that was less a club for the self-proclaimed spiritual elite. The rapid growth of Raveaux’s new democratic Carnival Society and the rise of other Carnival Societies challenging the exclusivity of the Festkomitee may be viewed as a restorative move towards an older, more Romantic, more authentic Carnival. I have described this Carnival as more Bakhtinian and I submit that it is also one which may be read as having more radical potential. It is noteworthy that the original Festival Committee was formed with the same idea.

Cologne Carnival, then, may be read as creating and re-creating itself through a cycle of utterances which may at times function as radical utterances for direct societal change and which often functions as radical (within a Carnival context) utterances for Carnival change. The repeated efforts to restore Carnival, to perform the festival as an Ur-Carnival of sorts, are based in an assumed judgement that the existing Carnival has strayed from its purpose and that it must be restored. As Carnival is so entrenched as a cornerstone of Cologne culture and life, these efforts must be considered as attempts to perform Carnival as radical. The alternative Stunksitzung is the foremost example over the last thirty years of an attempt at radicalization within Cologne Carnival that is aimed directly at Cologne Carnival.

Klersch terms the Carnival of Raveaux’s era, of the Vormärz, “The Civic Carnival” (Der Bürgerliche Fastelovend). He writes, “The Romantic Carnival was represented in two senses as a closed entity.” He continues, “Consistently, at any one time the idea was fixed on the festival, but also consistently on its organization.” He writes: “The Committee, the Small, and the

Large Councils were united in an organization in which probably no one disputed the leadership, because it simultaneously represented the foremost intellectual and social layer of Cologne’s population.”\textsuperscript{124} The relatively new customs of Carnival that had been put in place in the 1820s by the Committee remained essentially unchanged: “The tradition, which the Romantic Carnival had created, was already so strong that the form of the festival was in no way questioned.”\textsuperscript{125} The radical action to establish a Carnival in which creative control was not under the regulatory control of the Prussian occupiers had become the new official.

This element of the moneyed classes being in charge of Carnival paralleled growing political frustration in the Rhineland. Sperber writes, “As political tensions increased in the 1840s, the Carnival world began to seem closer to the everyday one.”\textsuperscript{126} He relates the story of a Carnival Society’s activities in Düsseldorf that pushed its political satire far enough that Prussian authorities “ordered the Society dissolved.” This, in spite of the belief that “Carnival societies helped preserve public order.” Raveaux’s “democratic” society even “boasted of its activities in this respect.”\textsuperscript{127} Generally, both the authorities and the public understood that some things could be said during Carnival that could not be said the rest of the year. It was also understood, however, that even during Carnival, the line could be crossed.

One incident in 1844 Sperber describes as “a precursor to the events of 1848-1849,”

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{124} Ibid. “Das Komitee, der Kleine und der Große Rat waren in einer Gesellschaft vereinigt, der wohl niemand die Führung streitig machte, weil sie zugleich die geistig und gesellschaftlich führende Schicht der Kölner Bevölkerung darstellte.”
\item \textsuperscript{125} Ibid. “Die Tradition, die der romantische Karneval geschaffen hatte, war bereits so stark, daß die Form des Festes von keener Seite in Frage gestellt wurde.”
\item \textsuperscript{126} Sperber, \textit{Rhineland Radicals}, 101.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 100.
\end{itemize}
when a performer in a sketch in Düsseldorf, responding to official efforts “to censor… politically oppositional comic skits” removed his fool’s cap—his action an utterance signifying deliberate self-removal from the Carnival world—and announced to the audience that he was speaking “not as a fool, but as a solemn man who [would] not tolerate such treatment.” He exhorted the audience to “do the same,” a plea which was greeted with “applause and tumultuous cries of approval.”\(^\text{128}\)

The Vormärz Carnival expressions of political displeasure were reflected beyond Carnival. Brophy writes of efforts by the regime’s opponents to express their rebellion and how those efforts played out in public spaces. The planting of “liberty trees” (often “refashioned May Trees,” adorned with placards and/or symbolic colors and other symbols of rebellion) was one form of popular protest throughout the Rhineland. Also popular were charivaris (“cat musics”—Katzenmusik) and the writing and singing of political songs, including the mocking of national anthems. Festivals, too, including the Cologne Cathedral festivals, offered—though not by design—a platform and outlet for the expression of political views. (The Cathedral festivals began in 1842 to mark the start of work to complete the building.)\(^\text{129}\)

Throughout the 1830s and 1840s the Prussian officials and the political activists who opposed them engaged in what Brophy calls a “cat-and-mouse game of political publicity.”\(^\text{130}\)

Public spaces and their permissible usages were regulated by the government. Pubs often

\(^{128}\) Ibid., 101.

\(^{129}\) See Brophy, \textit{Rhineland}, 54-104, 105-14, 129-38, 139-45. See also Sperber, \textit{Rhineland Radicals}, 203. The planting of liberty trees deliberately referenced the era of the French Revolution and were particularly popular in the Bavarian controlled Rhineland-Palatinate (“Rheinland-Pfaltz”).

\(^{130}\) Brophy, \textit{Rhineland}, 167.
functioned as “principal meeting place[s]” for the “exchange of gossip, news, information, and viewpoints,” which allowed for people “to deliberate, reflect, form, and reconstruct viewpoints.” The addition of alcohol sometimes fueled behaviors that were seen as “posing a problem for social order.” Consequently, the authorities passed “increasingly tighter restrictions “ on bars “over the course of the Vormärz.” 131 The government also practiced secrecy and “minimized publicity over [governmental] Diets, parliaments, and their deputies.” Furthermore, Brody writes, “The state rigorously censored news articles pertaining to the Diet’s debates, denied permission to hold parades honoring deputies, and even warned the Catholic Church about changing its service or using sermons to mention the opening of the Provincial Diet’s sessions.” 132 The “premise” was “that common Prussian subjects had no right to participate in the affairs of state.” The reality, Brophy argues, was that “Rhenish society as a whole expressed widespread interest in its formal political institutions.” 133 Banquets for the deputies—and even processions—were common. The banquets helped build “a social base for middle-class liberalism,” with the Provincial Diet viewed “as the best forum for advocating its desire for a constitution and a united legislature for Prussia.” 134

The government, however, regarded these banquets and processions with suspicion, worrying “about the popular dimensions”—potential radicalism?—of such activities. Restrictions were issued. Government unease was also exacerbated with the popularity of petitions. These public, written utterances “addressed… critical issues” including the “reform of

131. Ibid., 155-56.
132. Ibid., 162.
133. Ibid.
134. Ibid., 162-3. See also Sperber, Rhineland Radicals, 107-10.
municipal government, freedom of the press, and the royal promise of a constitution.” In several Rhineland cities the government acted against any meetings called to discuss petitions. However, the official censor in Cologne “tried to play down” a June 1843 “public demonstration,” a “torchlight parade” on “two steamships” to Düsseldorf, with the intention of presenting “a writ of formal thanks to the [Provincial] Diet for its unanimous rejection of the government’s attempt to change the penal code.” The censor argued that Cologne, as “a Carnival city,” was a place where “processions were common affairs” which did “not mean much.” Nevertheless, “a publicly advertised banquet for the entire Rhenish deputation to the United Diet” in Cologne was banned by the government “as a public assembly” in July 1847, in part because two of the organizers were targets of government disfavor—one was Franz Raveaux.135 Official responses then could be inconsistent, but Carnival’s radical utterances—and the corresponding repressive reactive utterances—could not ultimately be contained within Carnival.

At the end of June 1844, Raveaux’s Allgemeine Carnevals-Gesellschaft organized another steamboat event—an excursion south on the Rhine to an island near Bonn. “The day-long outing,” Brophy reports, “included eating, singing, and speech-making, some of which bristled with political satire.” Although the event was not a political “milestone,” Brophy argues it was important, for, among other reasons, demonstrating “the ability of Carnival clubs to host a regional gathering.” That ability confirmed “a level of communication and organization that Prussian officials” found “threatening.” The episode, he writes, “marks the self-evident fusion of Carnival and political publics.”136 Carnival’s Bakhtinian utterances, now radicalized, led

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136. Ibid., 170-71.
Carnival to shed its calendar boundaries. Its spirit, its utterances, and its radicalism stretched beyond its folkloric festival roots and staked a position as a political force.

**The Stunksitzung and Risking the Radical Moment**

The Stunksitzung’s utterances arguably function more often as cultural than political critique. Too, even those social and cultural critiques are often to a demonstrable degree (particularly with its phenomenal growth in popularity and its ever expanding commercial appeal) not significantly more barbed than the predictably tame humor of traditional Sitzungen. I submit, however, that the level of sophistication and wit in the Stunksitzung’s criticism almost always exceeds the official; the rapier may not always be sharper per se, but the tactics employed to wield it are far more complex. I argue further that such complexity and texture also allows for and creates a greater potentiality for radical moments.

In recent years, when the Ensemble comments on politics or political figures, they generally do not directly advocate for a specific political ideology. The point rather more seems to be to mock the very existence of politics, to marvel at the futility of the exercise. The performed radicalism of humor is intended to question whether human politics can ever be a genuine force for change. Instead, the context of their performance of a restored Bakhtinian Carnival, the undeniable inference for the audience is a perception that Carnival itself is the only true possibility for change; the Stunksitzung’s assumed and performed radicalism is the anarchy of Carnival laughter. Politics are ephemeral and therefore incapable of prompting change; Carnival—when freed from its official chains—is the truly radical option.

137. This is a definite change from the early years. I will touch on this in the conclusion.
A character called Peter Holzmeier (portrayed by Bruno Schmitz), who appears in two sketches, both titled “Wählerhasser” (Electorate-Hater), in 2005 and 2006, illustrates the ridiculousness of politics seen through the Stunksitzung lens. In 2005, Holzmeier is portrayed as an incumbent SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei—Social Democratic Party) member of the Bundestag, the directly elected legislative body of the German government. In 2005 the SPD was attempting to weather a severe decline in popularity, which eventually led Chancellor Gerhard Schröder of the SPD to call an election. That election resulted in a so-called Grand Coalition (Große Koalition) government between the SPD and the CDU/CSU (Christlich Demokratische Union/Christlich-Sozial Union—Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union) with Angela Merkel of the CDU as Chancellor.

The Holzmeier character is seen canvassing voters on the street, who respond to him with hostility and venom—one even spits at him. Holzmeier, his bitterness growing, is finally left alone to bemoan his and his party’s likely coming fortunes. In 2006, a defeated Holzmeier is seen working to remove his campaign posters, again while being jeered by passers-by. He once more addresses the audience, this time lamenting the lack of appreciation he has received for his service to his constituents, who have tossed him out of office. He explains how hard he has worked and how difficult the job is. His constituents, he complains, don’t understand how hard life can be in Berlin. Among the examples of sacrifices required, he explains how Berlin is such a different world—Berlin’s mayor, for example, is gay, but everyone else there is heterosexual.

whereas in Cologne the situation is reversed. The joke received a huge laugh. In this instance, the audience’s Carnival laughter served to re-enforce two elements of Cologne’s self-image. First, the audience was laughing at itself, indicating its Carnival spirit in appreciating the self-reflective humor. Second, the joke underlined Cologne’s self-image as a city more tolerant than others, a city where perhaps only those who cannot laugh—particularly at themselves—during Carnival are not welcome.

Holzmeier, who ends one of the sketches by defiantly telling the audience (i.e., his constituents) to kiss his ass (“Leck mich!”), signifies all politicians—insincere, dishonest, preening fools whose service is but an exercise of ego. In a sense, the world of politics, the Stunkers seem to be saying, is a perverse sort of Carnival world, in that it functions outside normal time and place, and within it the people who ostensibly rule are real fools. The political world is therefore an elaborate practice of genuine misrule. Carnival—at least alternative Carnival, with its more authentic utterances—is the one mechanism through which the truth can be understood. While politics and politicians can be and of course often are also mocked in official Carnival, the humor is far less strongly based upon the assumption that the political world is an actual upside-down world. Political figures are mocked more for their celebrity than their inherent (real or perceived) foolishness. In the more Bakhtinian utterances of the alternative, political fools—the implication is that all politicians fit this description—are revealed as true fools; Carnival Jecke, who understand the alternative as the true Carnival and celebrate

140. The Stunksitzung Ensemble, “Wählerhasser,” Stunksitzung, 2006. In German, the full phrase is “Leck mich am Arsch!” It is often shortened to “Leck mich!” The verb “lecken” literally translates “to lick.”
it accordingly are the wise fools who also understand the political process and its practitioners.

The premise turns again on my deliberate use, again, of the word authentic. In the context of Carnival generally, and here in the specific context of the alternative Stunksitzung, I am once more suggesting that the alternative is closer to Bakhtin than the official. The official replicates the outward ceremonial performative elements of Cologne Carnival, whereas the alternative Stunkers, through their parody and satire, restore Bakhtin’s Carnival spirit and laughter, insofar as we might at such a distance be able to imagine. Indeed, this restoration instead of replication, I contend, even conjures moments of Kershaw’s radical potential. The genuinely authentic is probably not possible; we cannot literally travel back in time to take notes. But the effort here by the Stunksitzung Ensemble, I maintain, comes closer than any precisely-rendered, historically-accurately-uniformed, official replication ever can.

Other Stunksitzung sketches boost the argument. A 2008 sketch called “CSI/SPD” parodied the various versions of the popular television series and featured a Crime Scene Investigation unit trying to discover what caused the mysterious death of the SPD. In 2004, “Gerd und Joschka” portrayed SPD Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (Ozan Akhan) and Green Party Foreign Minister and Vice Chancellor Joschka Fischer (Günter Ottomeier) as stand-ins for Max and Moritz, the two wicked boys who were the title subjects of Wilhelm Busch’s 1865 illustrated collection of rhyming stories, Max und Moritz: Eine Lausbubengeschichte in sieben Streichen. In the stories, Max and Moritz play cruel and mischievous tricks on a widow, a tailor, a teacher, their own uncle, a baker, and a farmer. In the sketch, Gerd and Joschka play similarly cruel tricks on characters based on Busch’s—characters who signify ordinary Germans suffering under the government’s policies. The sketch utilized the same sing-song rhyming couplet style as the
original.  

Another sketch in 2005, titled “Grüne VIPs” (Green Party VIPs), demonstrated that, whatever the Ensemble’s collective politics may be, politicians across the political spectrum are obvious targets for criticism. (The original Ensemble was unabashedly leftist; it seems reasonable to infer at least some remaining leftward tilt.) In “Grüne VIPs,” members of the Party are portrayed as wealthy liberals enjoying fine wine in a lovely home (decorated, it is mentioned, with Tuscan marble), while a Green Party protest rages below. The members watch the protest from the terrace; the protesters themselves have been hired by the members to do the actual protesting work.  

The Stunksitzung’s political commentary can also be poignant. In 2006 a sketch titled “Ein Euro Job” featured a classical violist (Bruno Schmitz) and his wife, a music teacher (Anne Rixmann). Left unemployed by the bad economy and forced to accept a one-Euro job under new government regulations for welfare and unemployment benefits, they have become Carnival Sitzung performers. The wife tries to raise her husband’s flagging spirits by feigning cheerful acceptance and encouraging him in their new endeavor. As part of their schtick, they tell viola jokes, which of course he finds humiliating. Finally, in despair, he begins to play a haunting...

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142. See Rübbenhausen, et al., Stunksitzung; Schmitz, Stunk; and, Bungarten, et al., Karneval instandbesetzt. Also previous note 144 in this chapter.  
144. For example: Question: “What is the difference between sawing a viola in half and cutting
rendition of Billy Joel’s “The Piano Man.” She tries to convince him to stop before giving in and proudly singing along—with the lyrics changed to “Der Bratschenmann.”  

In 1987, the Ensemble engaged in an apparent jest at the expense of the corporate class—a group that has arguably been extremely well represented in official Carnival. After a performance, they traveled by bus to the Leverkusen headquarters of Bayer, the international pharmaceutical giant. The “goal,” an exercise they termed “the Ostermann Torture,” was to give a “recital” of Carnival songs for a “few members of the Managing Board” in the firm’s “front gardens,” an effort that was not appreciated: the Stunkers were fined for their efforts. This charming, if somewhat baffling, act was not the only instance in which the Ensemble metaphorically “took to the streets” (or the garden), to invoke again Graham Pechey’s phrase. I submit that the Ensemble was engaging in a dialogic utterance of political humor. It was perhaps not potentially radical—one could hardly expect Bayer to change its behavior, if indeed that was the ostensible point. But if the incident may be labeled political—and I contend that it should—it may at least be read perhaps as a performance of a potentially radical moment. No

an onion in half?” Answer: “With the viola, no one cries.” Question: “Why is a viola called (in German) a ‘Bratsche’?” Answer: “Because that is the sound it makes when someone stomps on it.” The Stunksitzung Ensemble, “Ein Euro Job,” Stunksitzung, 2006.

145. The Stunksitzung Ensemble, “Ein Euro Job,” Stunksitzung, 2006. “One Euro Jobs,” which were intended as supplements to benefits and were not to take the place of full-time work, paid one to two Euros an hour. For one brief overview, see the Deutsche Welle website: http://www.dw.de/one-euro-one-way-out-of-unemployment/a-1416143. Accessed 28 April 2014.


change was likely possible, but the overt silliness (despite the fines for trespassing) was cheeky, reasonably startling, and clearly carnivalistic. The image conjures an idealistic, carnivalized vision—on which I will touch in more depth in the next chapter—vision of a world; it was an “if only” moment, implicitly posing the question of why can’t serenading a corporate office building change the world. It is a vision, and was an utterance, of hope, that—through Carnival—perhaps someday it could.

In 1991, in a carnivalesque, or perhaps meta-carnivalesque, reversal, the Ensemble took, again, to the stage in defiance of official Carnival being taken from the streets of Cologne. Because of the US invasion of Iraq and the outbreak of the Gulf War on 17 January 1991, most official Carnival events throughout the Rhineland were cancelled—including Cologne’s Rose Monday Parade, scheduled for 11 February.¹⁴⁸ The Stunksitzung performance on 18 January was cancelled, but not the entire run. Rainer Rübhausen writes about the cancellation:

For us the Stunksitzung is not just critique, cabaret, and wicked satire, but always as well an expression of fundamental joie de vivre, music, power, and communal celebration with the audience. But we do not consider it appropriate to continue to act as if this conflict does not concern us. No little bouquets for Georgie Bushhead, no bonbons for Saddams—burn all the arms dealers on the “Nubbelverbrennung” pyre. Rhenish joyfulness against worldwide insanity.¹⁴⁹

The cancelled performance was re-scheduled and the run of the show resumed. The “people of the alternative Stunksitzung” were, Brog writes, “the only ones” who “did not yield the concept [of Carnival] to the sudden outbreak of war.” She argues, “Because they regard Carnival as a means of political expression, they were in a position to tie the Gulf War in with their Sitzungen.”

The Ensemble did not ignore the war when they returned to the stage, but took instead the opportunity to comment upon it, to perform a moment of potential radicalism—with a sketch featuring the performers as puppets like those of Cologne’s famous Hänneschen-Theater, presenting an exaggerated stiff and jerky physicality. Sticks were attached to their arms as if they were being manipulated by puppeteers below the stage, in the style of the puppets used at the Hänneschen-Theater. Titled “Hänneschen Welttheater” (Hänneschen World Theatre) and employing various characters including “Sadames” and “Schorschi-Bush-Kopp,” the sketch, Rübhausen writes, “explained the war.” According to Brog, it “re-enacted the historical...
origins of the war”—with puppets. Or rather with actors portraying puppets portraying caricatures of world leaders. Brog writes, “At the conclusion, ‘Sadames’ and ‘Schorschi-Bush-Kopp’s’ bombs cracked the ears,” leading to the wish that “it was in reality as it was in the theatre, where Presidents could push buttons [to set off bombs] only against each other.” Siding with Raveaux’s view of Carnival as a political voice, she continues, “There was not, unfortunately, such shaping of the coverage of political reality in the established Carnival Sitzungen.”152 The alternatives were willing to challenge the status quo and to risk the potentiality of a radical moment. They did this first by continuing with their performances (after a short break), and, second, by treating the situation not with reverence, but with full-throated mockery. Their insistence on satirizing a tragedy as it unfolded dared to suggest that things could be different, that change was possible and that change could be (should be?) provoked by Carnival. In other words, “If only.” Portraying war-mongering leaders as puppets implied the stupidity and futility of those leaders and of the wars they start. In the midst of a largely cancelled celebration, the refusal to not have Carnival was a radical act, a seizing of Kershaw’s “creative opportunity to change the world for better or worse, a performative process in need of

Kölsch. The Stunksitzung has repeatedly used Hänneschen as a framing device for sketches. The name “Hänneschen” (a Kölsch diminutive of “Hans”) comes from the traditional Cologne folk character, who is paired with the character “Bärbelchen” (Kölsch diminutive of “Barbara”). For more on the Hänneschen theatre, see their official website: http://www.haenneschen.de/index.php?kat=Startseite. Accessed 28 April 2014.

152. Brog, Zoch, 260. “Am Schluss knallten sich ‘Sadames’ und ‘Schorschi-Bush-Kopp’ die Bomben um die Ohren und ‘Speimanes’ wünschte, dass es doch so wäre wie im Theater, wo sich nur die Präsidenten gegenseitig die Knöpfe einschlugen.” “Speimanes” is a character name, but the derivation is not clear. “Spei” is Kölsch for “spit,” a so a literal translation would seem to be “Spitman.” “Solche Formen der Bewältigung von politischer Realität gab es im etablierten Sitzungskarneval leider nicht…”
direction.” In this case the direction was squarely focused on drawing attention to the tragedy of war, and through laughter, to encourage the audience at least to consider the possibility of a world in which political leaders are not puppets to an acceptance of endless war, or in which they are at least not as seemingly wooden-headed as puppets.

**In Raveaux’s Footsteps**

In the book, *Karneval instandbesetzt? Eine kritische Hommage 25 Jahre Stunksitzung*, Michael Euler-Schmidt’s article, “Politsch, Subversiv—Kreative und Manchmal Wild” (Political, Subversive—Creative and Sometimes Wild), considers the influence of Franz Raveaux on Carnival as a political force. (Given the subject of the book, Euler-Schmidt is arguably suggesting Raveaux’s influence, recognized or not, on the Stunksitzung.) Described as the “Spokesperson of this ‘Opposition in Fool’s Clothing’” (Wortführer dieser “Opposition im Narrengewand”), Euler-Schmidt reports, “Raveaux used the Cologne Carnival in those years for his political goals.” Affiliated with the Carnival group, “Eisenritter,” Raveaux and his fellow members “vehemently criticized the ‘Festival [Committee] Parliament’ for its undemocratic scheming and denounced the inequality not only in Carnival but in society.” Raveaux, as noted above, eventually formed the Allgemeine Karnevals-Gesellschaft as a more democratic Carnival Society, leading to, Euler-Schmidt writes, “two separate and competing” Rose Monday Parades in 1845. “Raveaux’s political Carnival,” Euler-Schmidt writes, “gained more and more

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popularity as well as admirers from the outside,” as “Cologne Carnival in those years was turbulent and for many people both a carnivalistic and a political home.” Raveaux and others ensured that Carnival featured “political satire” that was “biting and direct,” also ensuring that it was also “all too often the victim of the authority’s official censorship.” Undaunted by the negative reaction, “Raveaux himself struck ever-sharper tones,” leading to more official vilification: “The Prussian authority characterized him as stupid and corrupt, casting aspersions and disparaging him to the king.”

Euler-Schmidt argues that, “without question,” Raveaux “orchestrated Cologne Carnival for his political goals of a democratic upheaval in Germany.” Raveaux “did nothing in essence in his actions, however, that was un-carnivalistic. Carnival had always functioned as a release-valve for the people; it was after all the season of small and large satirical ‘revolutions’ in carnivalistic costumes. Authority was held up before the mirror—in most instances with cautious criticism.” Raveaux put Carnival on a new course, but one that arguably restored it to its

Kölner Karneval für seiner politischen Ziele.” “Um 1842 wurde er karnevalistisch aktiv und schloss sich den Karnevalisten mit dem Namen ‘Eisenritter an…’ (“Eisenritter” literally means “Iron Knight,” but Euler-Schmidt notes that the name came from where the group traditionally met, the “Eiser’schen Saal.”) “Dies führte 1845 dazu, dass die Domstadt auch zwei getrennte und konkurrierende Rosenmontagszüge sah.”


156. Ibid. “Franz Raveaux instrumentalisierte in jener Zeit ohne Frage für seine politischen Ziele des demokratischen Aufbruchs in Deutschland.”

157. Ibid. “Im Grunde genommen tat er damit jedoch nichts Unkarnevalistisches. Immer schon hatte der Karneval eine Ventilfunktion für das Volk gehabt, war er doch die Jahreszeit der kleinen und großen satirischen ‘Revolutionen’ im karnevalistischen Kostüm. Der Obrigkeit
Bakhtinian origins. The Stunksitzung picked up the same gauntlet a hundred and forty years later.

Raveaux’s disputes with the Prussian authority reflected those of the broader populace in increasingly politicized Cologne. Brophy writes, “Clashes between civilians and state authorities in the Vormärz arose with consistent frequency in the Rhineland.” Poor crop harvests and resulting famines throughout much of Europe beginning in 1845 ratcheted up tensions. The “economic effects of two successive bad harvests” forced “municipal and village governments… to raise substantial sums.” Debt became “the most palpable result of the near-famine.” The resulting “second phase of the economic crisis” and “severe business contraction, beginning in 1847, aggravat[ed] the final and most critical phase of the food shortages.” Unemployment and business failures soared.

The widespread economic woes spurred political crises. The Swiss Civil War of 1847 and the Paris uprising of 1848 signaled the advent of mass protests and clashes in the Rhineland. A gathering of five thousand in Cologne in March of 1848 demanding a litany of liberal, even radical, reforms was refused by the city council. The councilors were forced to flee and soldiers had to break up the angry crowd. The Prussian authority in Berlin answered the demands and growing unrest with further press restrictions and sending soldiers to the French border. Sperber writes, “Only after barricades were built and street fighting between the army and the inhabitants” of Berlin “took place… did Prussia’s leaders… concede to some of the revolutionary demands.” Despite a new sense of “freedom,” however, clashes continued, leading

wurde der Spiegel—zumeist verhalten kritisch—vorgehalten.”
Brophy argues that during “the Vormärz, the violence between civilians and state officials… was a politicizing element that provided the social base for a constitutional tenet that mobilized both bourgeois and popular classes in the ‘institutional revolution’ of 1848-49.”

He writes:

Social disciplining… arose repeatedly across a number of cultural fronts. Although the French initiated the process of integrating the Rhenish countryside into centralized administration and governance, Prussia’s role as a disciplinary state was longer, more efficient, more penetrating… Violence was not uncommon. And when the state also strove to discipline other domains of social life—parish festivals, market regulations, wedding rites, tavern hours, Carnival, pilgrimages, processions—elements of Rhenish society… responded with… violence… The social and legal fallout… politicized the population. They reinforced the bias among Rhinelanders that Prussia was an “occupying army and administration” which cared little for civilians and civic rule.

Eventually, what Sperber calls “the pendant to reform of the individual [German] states” was “the movement toward national unity.” A “provisional assembly” met in March 1848 in Frankfurt and “issued an appeal for elections to an all-German National Assembly, which would

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160. Ibid., 143-51. See also Brophy, Rhineland, 248-52.
161. Brophy, Rhineland, 252.
write a constitution for a united German state, to replace the German Confederation.” In May, the delegates, including the radical Carnivalist Franz Raveaux, were elected. This first German Parliament lasted approximately a year, eventually failing in 1849 due to a complex web of issues including revolts in the Rhineland Palatinate and Baden.

Although he is but one example of many whose Carnival and political lives were inextricably joined, the intersection and combination of Carnival and politics in Raveaux’s public life argue strongly for the view that Carnival can be a potent, radical force. So, too, do the events in Romans in 1579-1580.

The Stunksitzung has of course not spawned violent revolution, but the Ensemble’s political (and sometimes non-political) humor has on occasion prompted more contemporary responses. Two lawsuits again illustrate.

Under the German penal code (Strafgesetzbuch), Article (§) 166, covering the “Abuse of faiths, religious societies and ideological associations” (Beschimpfung von Bekenntnissen, Religionsgesellschaften und Weltanschauungsvereinigungen), it is illegal to “insult,” either “publicly or through dissemination of writings,” the “content of religious or ideological beliefs” in such a way as to “disturb the public peace.” Violations are punishable by a fine or up to three years’ in prison. The law also provides for the same penalties against anyone who likewise “insults” any “existing domestic church, other religious community, or ideological association, or their institutions or customs.” In 1993, a sketch titled “Spiel’s noch einmal, Sam!” (Play It Again, Sam!), featured a crucifix with a sign above Jesus’ head which, instead of “INRI,” the

163. Sperber, Rhineland Radicals, 146.
164. Ibid., 173-84, 192, 408, 467-93.
Latin abbreviation for “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,” was lettered with the name “Tünnes,” a traditional Kölsch folk comic character from the puppet theatre. (The name itself is a Kölsch version of Anthony.) A lawyer, Dr. Peters (identified only as “Dr. P.” in the press—a journalistic custom in Germany), filed suit under § 166. The State Attorney had the police confiscate the sign in a dawn raid. The Ensemble fired back, reserving an empty table for the State Attorney’s office at the next performance and replacing the Tünnes sign with another reading “Welche Tünnes hätt dat Schild?” (Which Tünnes has the sign?). Lines were also added to the sketch, including, in reference to the State Attorney, “Forgive them, for they know not what they do.” The legal proceedings carried forward, with the Ensemble winning an acquittal a few months later.\footnote{165}

In 2006, the Ensemble portrayed Pope Benedict XVI and the Archbishop of Cologne, Joachim Cardinal Meisner, as gay lovers in a sketch titled “Ratze und Meise.” Known for his conservatism, Cardinal Meisner has been a frequent target of Stunksitzung barbs. An audience

165. Rübhausen, et al, \textit{Stunksitzung}, 77-78; See also Abbott, “Transgressing,” 104-5. “Vergib ihnen, denn sie wissen nicht, was sie tun.” Rübhausen also refers to the sketch as “The \textit{Casablanca} Number” (Die \textit{Casablanca} Nummer). The full German text of § 166 (following) may also be read at: http://dejure.org/gesetze/StGB/166.html. In German: “1. Wer öffentlich oder durch Verbreiten von Schriften (§ 11 Abs. 3) den Inhalt des religiösen oder weltanschaulichen Bekenntnisses anderer in einer Weise beschimpft, die geeignet ist, den öffentlichen Frieden zu stören, wird mit Freiheitsstrafe bis zu drei Jahren oder mit Geldstrafe bestraft. 2. Ebenso wird bestraft, wer öffentlich oder durch Verbreiten von Schriften (§ 11 Abs. 3) eine im Inland bestehende Kirche oder andere Religionsgesellschaft oder Weltanschauungsvereinigung, ihre Einrichtungen oder Gebräuche in einer Weise beschimpft, die geeignet ist, den öffentlichen Frieden zu stören.” The translated full text of § 166 is: “1. Whoever publicly or through the dissemination of writings (§ 11, Paragraph 3) insults the content of the religious or ideological beliefs of others in a way that is likely to disturb the public peace, shall be punished with imprisonment up to three years or a fine. 2. The same penalties apply to whomever publicly or through the dissemination of writings (§ 11, Paragraph 3) insults an existing domestic church or other religious community or ideological association, or their institutions or customs in a way that is likely to disturb the public peace.”
member identified only as a “private person from the Münsterland” (the region around Münster, in the northern part of North Rhine-Westphalia) filed charges under § 166, which were dismissed after the senior public prosecutor responsible for the case, Rainer Wolf, attended a performance and determined that there was insufficient evidence to proceed. The Archdiocese of Cologne had supported the suit. The broadcast network WDR (Westdeutscher Rundfunk—West German Broadcasting), which shows the Stunksitzung every year, deleted the sketch from its broadcast. 166

In the 1993 incident, the Stunkers responded with clearly defiant utterances in the face of challenges to their satire. In 2006, the public utterances were more muted. Their attorney, Alfred Bongard, issued a statement, and no doubt a spirited legal defense would have been mounted had it proved necessary (Bongard represented the Ensemble in the 1993 incident), but little else was presented publicly—that is, not until closing night, 28 February 2006. On that night, the Ensemble, as is its custom, celebrated its own Nubbelverbrennung after the performance. Officiated by Rainer Rübhausen, the ceremony was filled with scathing satirical commentary

against the show’s detractors and WDR. ¹⁶⁷

The Stunksitzung, then, cloaked in its alternativeness, has often ventured into moments of radicalism, and perhaps more often presented moments that were potentially radical. Carnival, too, in its history, and as I have shown with two primary examples, has often ventured into the radical and advocated forcefully for change. In the cases of sixteenth-century Romans and the nineteenth-century Rhineland, Carnival’s call for change was direct—the societies and cultures in which it was celebrated had to change. That the calls arguably were ultimately unsuccessful—i.e., Carnival’s final efficacy as an agent of change—is an issue for another discussion. The Stunksitzung’s alternative call for change is often subtle or silly or both. It is a call for a change of Carnival, of course, but it is also implicitly and, on occasion, explicitly, a call for change of the society in which Carnival’s utterances form so much of the discourse, commentary, and criticism. While no riots have (yet) erupted because of the utterances of the Stunkers, they have riled private citizens, religious leaders, and certainly the self-appointed guardians of official Carnival. Their link then to Franz Raveaux and his fellow failed revolutionaries—some of whom like himself and like the Stunkers were radical Carnivalists as well—and to the political and violent uprisings in Romans, is a spiritual kindred. It is a connection to the innate Bakhtinian spirit of Carnival, in which the inverted world challenges and pushes society to consider and reconsider the possibility of a different, better, more carnivalesque world. I submit that those

¹⁶⁷ Katzmarzik, “Ermittlungen”; and, Rübhausen, et al., *Stunksitzung*, 77-78; and, Abbott, “Transgressing,” 105. The script—to the extent that the Nubbelverbrennung was scripted—does not apparently survive. I was present that night and Rübhausen appeared to be both working from notes and ad-libbing. The most biting comment I recall was a sort of “What is the world coming to?” litany which included a lament that a Pope could no longer “fuck” an Archbishop on television. The phrase may even have been “his Archbishop.”
who travel and perform and offer their utterances in this spirit are far more the true spiritual elite of Carnival than any Festkomitee members can be. For, as Conrad writes about her work in Alberta with the incarcerated young people, “If the moments I have described in this chapter are moments of radical performance, they are so because they have offered possibilities to radically imagine and re-imagine current realities.” The Stunksitzung challenges the Jecken and Carnival itself, to “imagine and re-imagine current”—and I contend, past—Carnival “realities.” The festival, and by extension and implication, the world in which it takes place, can be, if not better, then at least more fun.

In the next chapter, I will consider when the utterances of Carnival in Cologne decidedly did not radicalize against the existing regime in the Nazi era and how that failure runs contrary to the popular mythos of Carnival as a bastion of anti-Nazi propaganda. I will explore some of the Stunksitzung’s various considerations of National Socialism and the cultural fascination it still invokes. From this discussion, the study will turn to a broader theoretical elaboration of the Stunksitzung and Carnival.

Chapter 4
“Laughing at Hitler, Lying about Nazism: Carnival’s Essential Contrariness”

In the previous chapter this study considered how Carnival, broadly, and the Stunksitzung, in particular, may be read as potential exercises in Kershaw’s radical performance paradigm. Two specific places and time periods were considered as examples: Romans, France, in 1579-1580, and the Rhineland of Germany, including Cologne, in the nineteenth century. This chapter addresses the theme of Cologne Carnival’s historic radical qualities—or, more pointedly here, its lack of them—in a historical era during which they were decidedly absent. This absence of Carnival as an oppositional, protesting voice against the National Socialist regime is in direct contradiction to longstanding cultural belief in the Rhineland, a belief that has only begun to be countered in recent decades or years. That time span correlates loosely—very loosely—to the rise of the Stunksitzung and the alternative Carnival and, more pointedly, to the Stunksitzung’s growth in popularity to being a Cologne Carnival institution in its own right.¹

There is, however, no intent here to credit the more honest perception of Carnival’s role in the Nazi era to the Stunksitzung directly—correlation is not, of course, causation, and, it must be stressed again, the correlation is a loose one. Rather, the goal is to posit how the roughly concurrent emergence of both may be read as discrete elements of an evolutionary restoration of

¹ The Stunksitzung’s status as a Cologne Carnival institution is recognized even by the Festival Committee—at least tacitly. A January 2014 visit to the Cologne Carnival Museum (Kölner Karnevalsmuseum), which is operated by the Festival Committee (Festkomitee Kölner Karneval von 1823, e.V.), revealed that the museum includes in its permanent collection an exhibit on the “alternative Carnival.” That exhibit in turn includes a piece from the Stunksitzung set, which was re-designed and re-built for the 2004 production. For additional information on the museum, see its website: http://www.koelnerkarneval.de/museum. Accessed 28 April 2014.
Cologne Carnival to its Bakhtinian roots. That aim will be paralleled with the consideration of whether such a restoration, the alternative as typified and defined by the Stunksitzung, and the re-evaluation of Carnival’s anti-Nazi pedigree, function, or may function, as symptoms of each other’s effect. In so doing, I will explore German popular cultural depictions of Nazism and conflicting receptions thereof, including associated controversies, and will interrogate the Stunksitzung’s own satirical Nazi portrayals and the Ensemble’s mockery of wider cultural concerns about how the era and its legacy are represented and understood. I will consider the region’s historic mythology of Carnival in the Nazi era in relation to the more accurate historical narrative as a carnivalization in its own right. I will juxtapose the carnivalized history not only against the Stunksitzung’s mockery of Nazism, but also against other popular cultural carnivalizations of history, finally postulating how such disrupted narratives, whether for parodic-satirical purposes or not, serve to bolster the Bakhtinian view of Carnival.

A central tenet of this study is that Carnival in Cologne has demonstrably moved closer to the chthonian spirit articulated by Bakhtin and that the Stunksitzung is arguably the most visible component of that movement. Indeed, the production’s place in Cologne Carnival now strongly suggests it has functioned as the biggest catalyst in the movement over the last three decades. Furthermore, as I will outline at the end of this chapter and develop further in this study’s conclusion, the Stunksitzung’s emergence and continued growth and popularity indicates that Carnival not only is evolving to its spiritual, if you will, core, but indeed that it must. Finally, I will consider how the appellation alternative and how the Stunksitzung Ensemble continues to embrace it contributes to that evolution, interrogating their status as outsiders (that
is, outside of the official) and the freedoms and obligations that accompany it.  

No myth of Cologne Carnival may be more resilient than the narrative of Carnival as a sort of exercise in coded resistance to the Nazi regime, rivaling even the Roman origins myth in status. The tabloid Express, in an article about a 2011 installation at the Cologne National Socialist Documentation Center, offered its view: “For decades after 1945 Cologne Carnival celebrated itself as a stronghold of anti-fascist resistance.” The article relates, however, how the truth that the “relationship between Carnivalists and the Nazis” was “definitely complicated.”

An earlier article in the Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger about the televised documentary program Heil Hitler und Alaaf! Karneval in der NS-Zeit notes that historian and Cologne Literature Prize winner Carl Dietmar (who is also a Stadt-Anzeiger editor) and journalist Thomas Förster disputed the Carnival-as-Nazi-resistance story. In Dietmar’s words, “The official Carnival in

2. The Carnival Museum exhibit notes that the alternative Sitzungen are not part of official Carnival because they are not produced or sponsored by recognized Carnival Associations or by schools or neighborhoods (“Veedels”).
4. Ibid. “Die Ausstellung zeigt, dass das Verhältnis zwischen Karnevalisten und Nazis durchaus kompliziert war.”
Cologne long attempted to keep its own brown past under wraps.” He adds: “Only in the last five or six years has the reconstructing of a no-holds-barred past begun.” The article reports: “According to Dietmar, a generational change at the top of many Carnival Associations and Markus Ritterbach’s two-year reign as the Festival Committee President triggered the development.”

Dietmar expounded further on the subject in a 2010 book, *Alaaf und Heil Hitler: Karneval in Dritten Reich*, co-written with historian Marcus Leifeld. In the book, Dietmar and Leifeld clearly outline the Nazi agenda as it related specifically to Carnival:

The consolidation of society was an indispensable step to the implementation of all the ideological goals Hitler had enunciated long before in his 1933 book, *Mein Kampf*. In accordance with the totalitarian claim of the National Socialist worldview, all thought and action had to be steeped in and defined by Nazi ideology, in order to control every area of life, including leisure time. In this regard, Rhineland Carnival, known in the Kölsch dialect as “Fastelovend,” as well as “Fasching” in Munich and “Fastnacht” in the Alemannic [dialect], offered the National Socialists, if nothing
else, numerous clues for the implementation of the “People’s Society.” This primordial Christian festival became the collective experience, the communal singing and swaying to the music were brought to the fore as traditional unifying rituals. What previously had served as a force for strengthening regional identity, the Nazi association *Kraft durch Freude* and various Nazi authorities exploited as a kind of “national” tradition and—at least in the Rhineland and southern German Carnival strongholds—used relatively quickly as a platform for promulgating a political agenda and ideal. 9

Dietmar and Leifeld maintain that the Nazis viewed Carnival as an opportunity to co-opt yet another beloved institution and twist it to their own purposes. Carnival, in Nazi hands, was forced into functioning as a propaganda tool of a radical and violent political movement, rather than zuletzt von der rheinische Karneval, im Kölner Dialekt “Fastelovend” genannt, der Fasching in München und auch die alemannische Fastnacht den Nationalsozialisten zahlreiche Anhaltspunkte zur Verwirklichung der “Volksgemeinschaft”—standen doch bei diesem ursprünglich christlichen Fest des kollektive Erleben, das gemeinsame Schunkeln und Singen als einheitsstiftende Rituale traditionell im Vordergrund. Was zuvor zur Stärkung regionaler Identität gedient hatte, instrumentalisierten die NS-Gemeinschaft *Kraft durch Freude* und andere NS-Behörden in ihrem Sinne als “nationales” Brauchtum, nutzen—zumindest in den rheinischen und süddeutschen Karnevalshochburgen—sie relativ schnell als Plattform, um politische Ansichten und Wertvorstellungen des Regimes zu verbreiten.” *Mein Kampf* is usually translated as “My Struggle” and *Kraft durch Freude* as “Strength through Joy.”

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than as a radical force itself. This history belies the invented Cologne version of Carnival as pure
resistance, although as noted previously it does of course have historical antecedents as a
political protest and revolt. Indeed, as shall be seen, there were elements within Cologne
Carnival that were genuine attempts to resist the Nazi regime—or at least its domination of
Carnival.

In order to understand Cologne Carnival’s overstated reputation as an utterance of
resistance to National Socialism, it is important to consider German attitudes of how the era is
and has been portrayed in media and cultural offerings. One clear benchmark is represented by
the complicated receptions of and reactions to the 2004 film, Der Untergang (Downfall), which
portrayed the final days of Adolph Hitler in his Berlin bunker as the city was under imminent
collapse from the siege of Russian troops. The German news magazine, Der Spiegel, in a cover
story article by Klaus Wiegrefe titled “Im Bunker des Bösen” (In the Bunker of Evil), describes
the film, directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel and produced and written by Bernd Eichinger (based on
Joachim Fest’s book Der Untergang: Hitler and das Ende des Dritten Reiches), as “now giving
the absurd drama a real face.”\(^\text{10}\) In a further Spiegel Online article, “Die unerzählbare
Geschichte” (The Un-tell-able Story), Andreas Borcholte summarizes the controversy of the
film’s reception while somewhat dismissively reviewing it as a work. He writes: “In the Führer’s
bunker it remains cold: Bernd Eichinger’s film, Downfall, seeks to show the human side of the

\(^\text{10}\) Klaus Wiegrefe, “Im Bunker des Bösen,” Der Spiegel, 23 August 2004, 52-68,
http://wissen.spiegel.de/wissen/image/show.html?did=31900129&aref=image035/E0434/ROSP2
00403500520068.PDF&thumb=false. “Bernd Eichingers film gibt dem absurden Drama nun ein
reales Gesicht.” See also Joachim Fest, Der Untergang: Hitler and das Ende des Dritten Reiches
German nightmare figure Hitler.” However, “The inevitable withdrawal of any warmth ultimately renders Downfall a needless film.”11

Borcholte decries both Der Untergang and the controversy around it, citing scenes like Hitler’s “fussy” eating of spaghetti, for “having provoked fierce media hype weeks before opening.” The film, Borcholte claims, is controversial because it “presents Hitler not as a monster, but rather as a human for whom one develops an impermissibly friendly feeling.” That, Borcholte submits, “poses a reflexive question of outrage which has not faded sixty years after the end of the war: can one really do that?” Borcholte makes his opinion clear: “Of course one can.” He continues, “One can do even much more, if one moves in the circles of cinema’s fictional artworks. One can interpret, caricature, simplify, and of course, provoke. Even in Germany one can ‘do that,’ as long as one calls it satire…”12 To support his view, Borcholte cites two other films about Hitler’s last days: Christoph Schlingensief’s 100 Jahre Adolf Hitler—Die letzte Stunde im Führerbunker (One Hundred Years of Adolph Hitler—The Last Hours in the Führer’s Bunker) from 1988, and Jörg Buttgereit’s short 1982 film, Blutige Exzesse im

Führerbunker (Bloody Excesses in the Führer’s Bunker). He implies the films were successful because they were successful as satire. However, he also argues, “Juicy over-hyping is always an excuse to betray the work of artists of tastelessness and with it, ridiculousness.”

Shot in one day, Schlingensief’s hour-long film was the first of his “German Trilogy,” followed by Das Deutsche Kettensägenmassaker (The German Chainsaw Massacre) in 1990, and Terror 2000—Intensivstation Deutschland (Terror 2000—Intensive Care Unit Germany) in 1992. Jörg van der Horst, a collaborator of Schlingensief’s, describes 100 Jahre as “a wild take on the demise of Hitler… a story of incest and intrigue, drugs, suicide, and blasphemy.”

Buttressing Borcholte’s view, van der Horst argues that in 100 Jahre, “The only remaining insight, i.e., that Hitler is but one man among the rest of us, whose possession of power sees him mutate from a human catastrophe to a catastrophe for humanity, leaves critics and audiences baffled.” One can, in other words, “do that”—portray Hitler in a human light, but only within certain, preferably satiric or wildly satiric, boundaries—and even then not everyone is going to accept it or understand. Till Briegleb of the Goethe Institut describes Schlingensief, who died in 2010, and his body of work as “employ[ing] outrageous means to shock his audiences into greater self-awareness.” Displaying “an amazing lack of trepidation,” Briegleb writes, Schlingensief—who was also a theatre and opera director—“consistently overstepped the boundaries of decency, good taste, and the safe terrain of the comprehensible.”

13. Ibid.
of 100 Jahre Adolph Hitler, Schlingensief overstepped those boundaries specifically to depict a genuine history which itself shattered all such boundaries. The implication is that by overstepping them, Schlingensief made the incomprehensible more comprehensible.

Blutige Exzesse, filmed in Super-8 and made by a then eighteen-year-old Buttgereit, is a gory Frankenstein spoof. (Hitler brings Eva Braun back to life as an undead monster—zombie Nazis threaten to take over the world.) On Buttgereit’s website, Johannes Schönherr praises the film for its “much fun and gory effects.” Also shot in one day, the film, according to author and critic Dietrich Kuhlbrodt, is now “more widely accessible” and “experiencing a comeback.” Kuhlbrodt describes the six-minute-long, pre-YouTube-and-smartphone-era Blutige Exzesse as “a self-staged massacre and splatter film that made Buttgereit a pioneer of the Super-8 scene, in which punk rockers and the autonomous saw themselves reflected.” He adds that because “it is considered chic to be fond of Hitler again (see Der Untergang),” it therefore “feels good to know that Blutige Exzesse im Führerbunker is also a significant presence again.”

Both films have achieved certain levels of cult status. Schlingensief’s work is available in the undeniable mark of acceptability, a DVD boxed set and even Buttgereit’s are available in a limited run of DVDs.

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The Stunksitzung’s take on Kuhlbrodt’s “chic fondness” of Hitler was an ostensible mocking of the film at the center of the controversy. Punningly titled “Der Entgang” (Duck Walk), the sketch briefly tells the story of the last days in the bunker, with Donald Duck (Ozan Akhan) playing Hitler. Instead of the end of the “Dritten Reich” (Third Reich), we see the end of the “Dritten Teich” (Third Pond), which has as its symbol a swastika with webbed feet. The question of whether Hitler should be portrayed as human was irrelevant; rather, the Stunks asked, could he be portrayed as an irritable unintelligible giant duck? The sketch parallels the grim realities portrayed in the film with cartoonish silliness. At the opening Hitler’s generals are found looking at a tabletop map of Berlin, the Russian army’s positions indicated by plastic toy bath ducks festooned with Soviet flags. Hitler’s entrance is met with an elaborate series of salutes that evolve from a Nazi (or Nazi-esque) salute into an arm flapping and waddling approximation of a duck walk dance. Exaggerated sound effects are used throughout, often to spoof historically (and, in the film, cinematically) tragic and shocking moments. For example, in reality, Magda Goebbels murdered her children by giving them cyanide, a moment starkly portrayed in Der Untergang. In “Der Entgang” Frau Goebbels enters cradling six baby dolls, the heads of which the Führer squeezes, producing a series of clownish honking sounds. The sketch ends with the Führer, in a fit of exasperated sputtering (contrasted with the raging outbursts of the film), accidentally shooting everyone in the room, the gun sounding requisite comic cartoonish reports.

17. The Stunksitzung Ensemble, “Entengang,” Stunksitzung, 2005. In a conversation after I’d seen the production, Hans Kieseier, the director that year and a member of the Ensemble since 1994, told me that originally Frau Goebbels dropped the dolls on the floor and Hitler repeatedly trod on them, but it seemed to be too much and was changed during rehearsals.
The sketch, however, also mines subtler humor within the over-the-top antics. Hitler of course was Austrian and spoke German with a strong accent, which Swiss actor Bruno Ganz, as Hitler in the film, replicated. The sketch invites comparison between, in the words of author and screenwriter William Boyd, Ganz’s Hitlerian “growly vocal cadences” and Akhan’s saliva shower of quacking plosives, suggesting that Ganz’s “impeccably accurate” accent (Boyd again) most closely resembles what German would sound like if spoken by a fascist Donald Duck. Further, the sketch, while appearing on the surface to mock Hitler and Nazism, is perhaps more accurately read as mocking German sensitivity to any treatment of the National Socialist era that does not portray the era with solemn condemnation, deep cultural regret, and insistence of Hitler’s monsterhood. The Ensemble’s mockery of Hitler serves to humanize him. Der Führer is made approachable as a subject for mockery—for carnivalization—by the portrayal of him in such a ridiculous light. The historical utterances and actions of the real Hitler are not softened or made any less monstrous, but the outrageous parody reveals him not as a monster, but rather as a human who did monstrous things.

Boyd, who likely knows little if anything of the Stunksitzung, argues that a more human Hitler is in fact a more horrifying one and that Der Untergang succeeds in its portrayal of evil in large part because it “humanizes” Der Führer. He writes:

Ganz plays Hitler as a crazed, semi-senile fantasist. The film has attracted controversy and drawn some criticism on the grounds that somehow Ganz's portrayal “humanizes” Hitler. That this canard


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needs to be addressed—and nailed—at all is some indication of the ubiquitous power of political correctness. Hitler was not beamed down to Earth from an alien spaceship: it is the fact that he was a human being capable of benign human qualities such as affection, gross sentimentality, and charming eccentricity (obsessive cleanliness, for example) that disturbs and chills. That he possessed a sweet tooth, idolized Wagner’s operas, became a teetotal vegetarian, loved dogs, American movies, etcetera, etcetera, make his implacable mania, his cruelty and ruthlessness all the more terrifying and minatory.¹⁹

By making fun of the controversy and spoofing the film, “Der Entengang” insists that not only may a human Hitler be mocked but also strongly suggests that he should be. Like Borcholte, the Stunkers are proclaiming, “Of course one can do that.”²⁰ Hitler is a legitimate target for satire and so is cultural sensitivity to portrayals of Hitler. In the invented, alternative, Bakhtinian, authentic Carnival, utterances of parody and satire are reserved not only for the folly of preening politicians of a post-fascist, re-invented democratic, economic powerhouse Germany; the ugly brutal past and contemporary attempts to contextualize it are fair game as well. Guilt, current or inherited, are as rife for Carnival’s withering sting as anything else.

¹⁹. Ibid.  
²⁰. On its 2009 DVD, _Stunksitzung: Extra Scharf—Bissiges aus 25 Jahren_ (Stunksitzung: Extra Strong—The Most Biting Sketches from 25 Years), the Ensemble lists “Der Entengang” among its “scandals.” Journalistic accounts of the 2005 production do not seem to indicate significant controversy regarding the sketch.
The Stunksitzung Ensemble’s “Der Entengang” sketch is of course far from the only example of *Downfall* and/or the controversy generated by the film serving as fodder for mockery. A cursory search of YouTube with the words “Untergang parody” draws over 67,000 hits and the phrase “Downfall parody” draws over 200,000. Both phrases retrieve hundreds, if not thousands, of individual videos that utilize clips from the film with either false sub-titles or false soundtracks superimposed.

Charlie Chaplin wrote about the issues he encountered in making fun of Hitler for his 1940 film, *The Great Dictator*, in his 1964 autobiography, in which he too insists that “Hitler must be laughed at.” However, this view was not necessarily shared: United Artists warned him about having been “advised by the Hays Office” that he “would run into censorship trouble.” Furthermore, “The English office was very concerned about an anti-Hitler picture and doubted whether it could be shown in Britain.” Chaplin was nevertheless “determined to go ahead,” even, he writes, “if I had to hire halls myself to show it.”

The film proved to be a success, grossing more than any previous Chaplin film. Chaplin acknowledges, however, that the film was made in an environment of ignorance of the true extent of Hitler’s reign: “Had I known of the actual horrors of the German concentration camps, I could not have made *The Great Dictator*; I could not have made fun of the homicidal insanity of the Nazis.” However, National Socialist racial philosophies and ideas were fair game: “I was determined to ridicule their mystic bilge about a pure-blooded race…”

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22. Ibid., 443. See also Ibid., 445-66, about the plagiarism suit around the film.
23. Ibid., 386-87.
A controversy similar to the ones around Der Untergang and, more pointedly, The Great Dictator, emerged in Germany in 2007, when the film Mein Führer—Die wirklich wahrste Wahrheit über Adolph Hitler (My Führer—The Truly Truest Truth about Adolph Hitler), directed by Dani Levy, was released.24

Johanna Adorján interviewed Levy for the Frankfurter Allgemeine in December 2006, ahead of the film’s January 2007 release. Echoing the “Can-one-really-do-that?” question, the interview was, unsurprisingly, titled “Can We Laugh about Hitler?” (Dürfen wir über Hitler lachen?) Levy freely acknowledges that he wanted to make what Adorján terms a “humorous anti-film,” in his own words, “a kind of subversive answer” to Downfall. The director states that he’d had “itchy fingers” to make such an “anti-film” in response when he first heard about the project, “even before [Downfall] was a film.” He continues, “It appealed to me to take the German monument that the combination of Eichinger, Fest, and Hirschbiegel wanted to erect—single-handedly and with a lot of money—and contrast it with something small, quick, brash, and politically incorrect.”25 Levy describes a desire that had “built up” in him “over decades” to “rough up the so-called rehabilitation of the Germans in the realm of film,” adding that he’d felt that way, “at least since I started to feel artistically aware as a Jew in Germany. For a long time I

wanted,” he says, “to contrast this authoritarian historiography with something anti-authoritarian.”

When questioned whether he “sees any danger” that Hitler would be “minimalized” through his “portrait,” Levy is clear: “One cannot minimalize him: everyone knows what he did.” He adds, “I am pursuing no new historiography, nor would I argue that nothing was known of Adolph Hitler’s gassing or elimination of the Jews.” In defending his carnivalization of Hitler, Levy argues, “Obviously, I show Adolph Hitler as a fool; true, in my film he is a pathetic creature, and of course he was in reality much less pitiable than I portray him. But one can, I believe, make assumptions—in the spirit of a comedy, in the sense of certain recognition—without leading to any belief in his harmlessness.” Levy believes that “films like Der Untergang always look at history from a great distance,” whereas his work, in a film like Mein Führer, allows a view from the “opposite side.” It is, he says, in the former type of film “completely clear who the bad guys are,” and “the offenders will usually be demonized.”

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Conversely, “The beauty of a comedy is that it is allowed to pose moral questions. It is allowed to provoke.”

Levy makes no overt claim to following in Chaplin’s footsteps of carnivalizing Hitler—nor, for that matter, do the Stunkers—but the parallels seem clear, for he ultimately echoes Chaplin’s claim that “Hitler must be laughed at,” and the Stunksitzung is rooted in the carnivalistic ideal that nothing is ever above or below being mocked. That, Levy maintains, is why “the unexpected nearness to Adolph Hitler that [his] film fabricates” was so “important” to him. It had, he says, “to do with empathy, with sympathy, or let us call it quiet compassion.” For Levy, it is “a process, through which the audience sometimes must quietly go… That it is provocative and unsettling is perhaps a very dialectical and interesting process. That can lead to something of substance. It will not change how the conventional history is viewed, but it creates an opening for this question.”

The Stunksitzung, I submit, through its co-option and carnivalization of a theatrical form that is steeped in convention, engages in a similar dialectical process through its use of and reliance upon mocking exchanges and the blurring of boundaries between Carnival performer and Carnival participants—the audience. This process of course is one that also occurs with a non-alternative Sitzung. In both, the audiences’ utterances, in sing-alongs, Schunkeln, clapping in time, standing for ceremonial entrances of the Dreigestirn, repeated call-and-response salutes,

29. Ibid. “Das Schöne an einer Komödie ist, daß sie moralische Fragen aufwerfen darf. Daß sie provozieren darf.”
and even the individual members’ costumes, signify the audience as Susan Bennett’s “self-conscious co-creator[s] of performance.” Levy’s “dialectical process,” the director seems to suggest, takes it yet further. Viewing his carnivalized/carnivalesque *Mein Führer* prods its audience to ask the very same questions—or types of questions—that heighten the process, that make the dialogue more urgent, more critical. The Stunksitzung Carnival audience implicitly, and perhaps co-conspiratorially, poses similarly heightened dialectical questions in their roles as “co-creators” when they view—and participate in—the Ensemble’s mockery (of a form, it must be remembered, that is itself based in parody and mockery). The film carnivalizes its subject through a dialectical process; the Stunksitzung, while certainly carnivalizing its myriad subjects, also carnivalizes the process through its mocking of the form it parodies to engage in that process. The audience, ever in on the joke, participates, mocking with the performers, engaging in the multi-valenced, Bakhtinian dialectic/dialogic collection of utterances. That the process can occur around forbidden subjects underlines the carefully cultivated alternative mystique of the Stunksitzung, even as the Ensemble winks and nudges to signal their own deep awareness of their performance of their alternative-ness.

Levy’s carnivalization of Hitler, like Chaplin’s, generated some regret, if not from Levy himself. Helge Schneider, who portrayed Hitler in the film, spoke out about his own complicated relationship with the subject matter and the film’s approach as it was about to be released. In a *Spiegel Online* article “one week before” the premier of *Mein Führer*, Schneider “suddenly” announced he “wanted to know nothing more about the satire.” Quoted as saying, “I no longer like this film, because it doesn’t reveal anything more,” Schneider, a musician and comic—and

film director—also claimed, “The message of the story was retroactively changed in editing.” He charges, “The focus, which had originally been placed on Hitler, has now been put ‘with great force’ on Jewish history.” Schneider says, “Had I known that, then perhaps I would not have performed [in the film],” adding that, on the basis of the screenplay, the story had already felt “a little weak” to him.  

In an interview with Johannes Bonke on the website filmreporter.de, Schneider, who says that as a musician, he did not think of Charlie Chaplin or Bruno Ganz or any other actors as examples, states however that the film should “stimulate reflection for the viewers, whether they like it or not.” When pressed as to why a comedy was appropriate for such, Schneider explained:

I am a protester. I absolutely do not accept that one supposedly cannot laugh about such a figure [as Hitler]. Not being allowed to play around with something creates a certain double standard, and I want to fight against that. However, to me the word “comedy” is really too loaded. If Dani Levy defines his film as such, that is of course okay, but I would not necessarily describe the film as

comedy. That would almost require that one laugh constantly. But we are just people: art means something different to everyone.33

The film, Schneider seems to suggest, may be a carnivalization of history, but as such is not simply and only about laughing at or about past horrors. Nevertheless, he believes that such laughter is permissible, and—given German attitudes about the Nazi era—even desirable:

We Germans have in recent decades grown up with a feeling of guilt. As a cosmopolitan, I view it less narrowly and am of the firm opinion that one can indeed laugh about such a serious issue. I do, however, definitely understand both sides: I can comprehend if people have a feeling of guilt; but I can also understand if some claim to have nothing to do with it and would like to shed the guilt. What I understand even more is freedom. And that, for me, means a film in which the subject matter is treated with a wink may be

filmed. Of course we can laugh about Hitler! *We’ve been laughing about him for decades already.*

The Bakhtinian view would of course be that “we”—that is, those who celebrate and hold true to the carnivalistic ideal—have been laughing at, if not specifically Hitler, then certainly other serious, even tragic or horrific subjects for *centuries*.

Schneider rejects the idea that parody for humorous effect is comparable to trivializing. “No, it is the opposite,” he says. “At the moment of making fun of something, one finds it amusing, tasty; perhaps one even identifies with the target.” He adds, “The way we treated him, one almost has sympathy for Hitler.” Levy and Schneider’s carnivalized Hitler, like the Stunksitzung and Chaplin and Buttgereit and Schlingensief’s carnivalized versions, and like Ganz and Hirschbiegel and Eichinger and Fest’s avuncular parody, humanize der Führer, collectively making him both ridiculous and pitiable. This, as Boyd reminds us, is “all the more terrifying.” The parody, carnivalized or not, leads audiences to a different understanding that transcends the historic “truth” about the real Hitler. Parody and carnivalization offer audiences—participants—opportunities to distance themselves from the terrible realities, permitting reflection and judgment that is both nuanced and more informed.


35. Ibid. “Nein, im Gegenteil… In dem Moment, wo man sich über etwas lustig macht, wird es amüsant, schmackhaft, man identifiziert sich vielleicht sogar damit… Man hat mit Hitler bei uns fast schon Mitleid.”
Boyd argues that the more we understand the humanness of someone who committed monstrous acts, rather than simply dismissing him or her as a monster, the more we understand the human capacity for those and other monstrous acts. The implication is that we may then be better able to address our inner monstrousness as a species. Carnivalization, then, is a deeply humanizing process. The dialogue, the conversation—the dialectics—that are brought into play, as it were, through carnivalization, force a broader consideration of the subject, institution, or person being parodied and/or mocked. Carnival itself is arguably performed, experienced, and participated in through a deliberate distancing: the Lappenclown linking arms with the pirate to schunkle and sing “Viva Colonia!” at a Sitzung—even the Stunksitzung—is in no way attempting to realistically “portray” a clown any more than the pirate will seek to attack and loot a real ship.\(^{36}\) The costumed participation is part of the carnivalization. The Lappenclown and the pirate are “co-creators,” engaging in the dialectical, dialogic parodying process; there is always a distance between the carnivalistic act/dialogue—utterance—and the objects of parody and ridicule. Those objects are thereby scrutinized, considered, and, in the examples noted here, humanized.\(^{37}\)

When the same dynamic—Levy’s same “dialectic process,” if you will—is broadened and cast more widely in order to consider additional examples, those examples bolster the

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36. A “Lappenclown” is a traditional Cologne Carnival costume made from scraps of fabric (“Lappen”).
37. I am loathe to suggest that Carnival, even in performance of a Sitzung, is some sort of sprawling Brechtian “Verfremdungseffekt” utterance (or collection of them). However, in the broadest sense, some parallels may be inferred. Carnival itself, of course—if personified like Breughel the Elder’s figure in “The Battle Between Carnival and Lent” and able to argue its own case—would never overtly do so along such seriously philosophical or theatrical theoretical lines (rather than, say, mock such arguments if for no other reason than the fun of mockery).
argument. For naturally examples well beyond Levy, Schneider, Chaplin, Buttgereit, Schlingensief, and the Stunksitzung’s carnivalization of a brutal history are not uncommon—even, as noted above, satirical parodies on Ganz, Hirschbiegel, Eichinger and Fest’s humanizing parody abound online. And the targets are not limited to Hitler, of course, although he seems to be a favorite. One intriguing parallel can be found in the work of the African-American comedian Dave Chappelle, whose humor often confronts historical and current legacies of racism in the United States. In March, 2004, in episode eleven of the second season of his Comedy Central television program, *Chappelle’s Show*, Chappelle aired a sketch titled “Haters in Time.” The episode, “Greatest Misses,” consisted of a collection of sketches described by Chappelle as “too crazy” or which otherwise did not work, and which therefore had not been previously broadcast. In the “Haters” sketch, co-written by Chappelle and Neal Brennan (Chappelle’s principal co-writer for the series), a group of characters, led by “Silky Johnson” (Chappelle) use a time machine to travel back in time to “hate on people.” The characters—all “Haters”—are, in addition to Silky, “Buck Nasty” (Charles Q. “Charlie” Murphy), “Beautiful,” (Donnell Rawlings), and “Phyuck Yiu” (Yoshio Mita), the inventor of the time machine. All are black, with the exception of Phyuck Yiu, who is Asian. After beating up—who else?—Adolph Hitler, the Time Haters visit the antebellum South, where Silky tells a slave master that they’ve travelled back to “call you a ‘cracker.’” After also calling him a “honky” (and offering a circuitous etymological explanation of the derivation of the word involving the 1975-1985 CBS television show, *The Jeffersons*), Silky finally shoots and kills him. In his comments to the studio audience watching the recorded film of the sketch, Chappelle comments that this event (the shooting) is what “stopped the whole thing” and caused the “whole episode” to come “to a
screeching halt.” When the camera cuts back to the studio, Chappelle is bent over laughing and

tells the audience, “Apparently, shooting a slave master isn’t funny to anybody but me and
Neal.” He assures the audience, “If I could, I’d do it every episode.”

Chappelle, then, highlights and confronts the horrors of slavery not by the solemnity of a

Roots- or 12 Years a Slave-style realistic brutality or even through the stylized violence of

Quentin Tarantino’s quasi-Western revenge-fantasy parody/carnivalization, Django Unchained,

but rather with an over-the-top satirical carnivalization played for laughs. Although the Haters,
cartoonish stereotypes, are not as characters admirable or heroic or necessarily even likable, they
are funny. The audience, their utterances again immersed in Levy’s dialectic process and
Bakhtinian dialogue, are permitted and encouraged, in carnivalistic spirit, to laugh at an act of
violence that confronts institutional violence. In the same way, Django’s audiences are invited to
cheer the acts of violence confronting the same institutional violence. In both, justice of a sort—a
crudely drawn comic interpretation of it in the one, a vividly drawn dramatic interpretation in the

38. Dave Chappelle and Neal Brennan, “Haters of Time,” a sketch on Chappelle’s Show,  
Episode 2.11 (Season Two, Number Eleven, 2004). View the full sketch and Chappelle’s  
commentary on YouTube, at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VsneAxBlk4. See also tv.com website for summaries of Chappelle’s Show episodes: http://www.tv.com/shows/chappelles-show/episodes; and, Chappelle’s Show IMDb website page:  
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0353049. “Haters in Time” grows out of “The Playa Haters Science Fair” sketch, in which the time machine is revealed. The characters were originally introduced in a Season One, Episode Nine, sketch titled “The Playa Haters’ Ball,” in which awards were presented to various characters for most hateful actions. See Dave Chappelle and Neal Brennan,  
“The Playa Haters Ball,” a sketch on Chappelle’s Show, Episode 1.9 (Season One, Number Nine). See also IMDb pages for Charles Q. Murphy (http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0614151/?ref_=nv_sr_1), Donnell Rawlings (http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0712603/?ref_=nv_sr_1), and Yoshio Mita, (http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0593046/). Websites accessed 28 April 2014.
other—is served. In “Haters of Time,” tongue is planted firmly in cheek. In both, viewers are implicitly invited to think, “If only.”

In Django, Tarantino offers a variation on a theme. In his war adventure thriller parody, Inglourious Basterds, he similarly carnivalized (basterdized?) World War II history with an en masse assassination of prominent Nazis—including Hitler—in a Paris cinema, again inviting an “if only” moment. Tarantino, not particularly noted for subtlety, does not explicitly seek a response of laughter in either Django or Basterds, but I contend he is carnivalizing history nonetheless. His lack of subtlety in both films arguably supports the notion of a carnivalized approach to the past. Chappelle’s efforts with the Time Haters, however—like the Stunkers with Donald Duck playing Hitler and Schneider’s Führer—is more effective. For the overtly comic efforts engage Carnival laughter, both literally and in the larger Bakhtinian sense. The transendence of humor in Carnival, transplanted from the official to the more biting alternative, heightens and frames altered histories in such a way as to emphasize the humanity of real historical victims and perpetrators. The Carnival humor and its resulting laughter are transplanted from a millennium or more of Carnival proper to arenas of pop culture, dialectical dialogic utterances transcending both media and eras. The process makes the horror of some of history’s most brutal moments more human by disrupting—carnivalizing—the narrative in the

service of poking fun and/or evoking the innate desire that ugly histories might have transpired differently.

It is in this disruption/carnivalization of narrative that I maintain the Stunkers, Chaplin, Schlingensief, Buttgereit, Levy, Chappelle, and Tarantino, among arguably countless others, engage in the carnivalistic and, at times (e.g., the more scatological and/or violent moments), the carnivalesque. Carnival in Cologne, in particular, official Carnival in Cologne, has, as I noted in my earlier discussion of the Roman origins myth—the “Look at the pointy hats!” syndrome—employed a similar disruption of historical narrative to serve its larger purpose. Time, history, narrative—all are subjected to being symbolically and literally overturned to serve the parodic, the carnivalistic, the carnivalesque.

In his essay, “Epic and Novel,” Bakhtin writes, “Alongside direct representation—laughing at living reality—there flourish parody and travesty of all high genres and of all lofty models embodied in national myth.” I contend that the Stunkers, now an integral part of the “national myth” of Cologne Carnival (in the sense of Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities definition of nation noted in chapter two), employ such “direct representation,”

40. See, for example, The Stunksitzung Ensemble, “McCLean,” Stunksitzung, 2004. In the sketch the Ensemble performs a musical sketch mocking the “McCLean” chain of pay toilet facilities found in many German train stations. The sketch included the song “There’s No Business Like Klo Business.” “Klo” is German slang for “toilet.” See also the works of Schlingensief, Buttgereit, and Tarantino discussed here.

41. There does appear to be some change with regards to the Roman origins myth, however. The Cologne Carnival Museum, in its very small exhibit about Rome, casually dismisses the idea that Carnival has Roman origins—despite the various and sundry official publications that have long maintained the opposite view. It is difficult not to read this as yet another carnivalization of historical narrative.

frequently—and deliberately—“laughing at living reality.” They do so, in part, by also employing “parody,” satire, and even “travesty”—all “alongside” the “living reality” they portray and mock. Their critical and comic methodologies are thus embedded and “embodied in the [Cologne Carnival] national myth.” In the same essay Bakhtin also writes, “The world has already opened up; one’s own monolithic and closed world… has been replaced by the great world of one’s own plus ‘the others.’” This oft-quoted statement relates specifically, again, to the development of the novel. (One could easily argue that Bakhtin’s primary scholarly obsession was the development of the novel—as noted earlier, even his interest in Carnival grew out of it.) However, the passage is also an apt description of the role of Carnival, and, in specific reference to this study, of the roles played by such carnivalized/alternative cultural events as the Stunksitzung, Chaplin and Levy and Schlingensief and Buttgereit and Tarantino’s films, and Chappelle’s work. All engage in polyglot utterances that disrupt and critique. All renounce “monolithic” utterances. All set themselves apart as “others” (alternatives), and all “open up” the world with which they engage. All replace a narrow, closed world with their own open, disrupted, othered, alternative, carnivalistic one.

This disruption sets up an intriguing frame for consideration of Cologne Carnival’s historical attachment to a second (with the Roman origins) false history. One point of entry might be the parallels between Carnival and Nazism symbolism, as expressed by Dietmar and Leifeld, who echo banned and exiled Nazi-era author Irmgard Keun when they expressly compare Hitler’s public appearances to the ceremonial entrance of the Carnival Prince. They

write: “After 1933, wherever Adolph Hitler appeared, the people stood like an honor guard, waving flags, rapturously cheering the ‘Führer.’ Hitler’s entrances somehow resembled the processions of the Prince of Carnival, the symbolic figure of joy and playfulness…”44 Certainly the Nazis recognized the importance of symbolism as a propaganda tool and in Carnival they saw a ripe opportunity. But, in a statement of the obvious, Dietmar and Leifeld add, “With Hitler there was nothing to joke or jest about and he could not and did not want to fulfill his many promises. He could only raise his empty hand.”45

However, Dietmar and Leifeld argue, “Most people did not recognize these connections” between the symbolism of Carnival and that of the Nazis. “They were largely completely absorbed in the Nazis’ propagandized ‘People’s Association’; they were persuaded by the achievements of the National Socialist regime, from which every individual would obviously profit.”46 This disconnect (or willful ignorance) is perhaps emblematic of the mindset that was necessary to allow for the continued celebration of Carnival during the Nazi era. It is my contention here that this disconnect, this failure to see the connections between Nazi and Carnival symbolism, may be retroactively viewed as another carnivalization of history. In order,

45. Dietmar and Leifeld, Alaaf, 9. “…Mit Hitler war nicht zu spaßen und zu scherzen und er konnte und wollte seine vielen Versprechungen nicht erfüllen. Er konnte nur die leere Hand heben.”

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therefore, to understand the variances in perception of the events, it is critical to consider differing accounts of Cologne Carnival during the era. I rely here primarily on four: Fuchs and Schwering’s account in their lengthy chapter on Carnival History in *Kölner Karneval: Seine Bräuche, seine Akteure, seine Geschichte; 175 Jahre Festkomitee des Kölner Karnevals von 1823 e.V.*; Hildegard Brog’s *D’r Zoch kütt! Die Geschichte des rheinischen Karnevals*, Dietmar and Leifeld, and, for the first time in this study, Thomas Liessem’s memoir, *Kamelle und Mimosen*.47

Fuchs and Schwering write, “The ‘synchronization’ of the Festival Committee and many other free organizations with the political regime threatened” Carnival “after the takeover of power by the National Socialists.”48 Liessem describes that takeover: “A few days after the Rose Monday [in 1933] Hitler came to power. Then, a few days after that, the new rulers moved into the Rathaus (‘City Hall’).”49 Cologne’s Mayor, Konrad Adenauer, had been warned “by good

47. Joseph Klersch’s summary is also informative. See Klersch, *kölnische Fastnacht*, 175-85.
49. Thomas Liessem, *Kamelle und Mimosen*, ed. Helmut Eickelmann (Cologne: Verlag M. DuMont Schauberg, 1963), 24. Hereafter cited in text as Liessem, *Kamelle*. “Wenige Tage nach dem Rosenmontag kam Hitler an die Macht. Wieder wenige Tage danach zogen die neuen Machthaber ins Rathaus ein.” Kamelle is a Kölsch word for chocolates and, with “Strüßje” (Kölsch for “Sträußchen,” or a small bouquet of flowers) are thrown to the shouting crowds along the Rose Monday Parade route. “Mimosen” are violets, which have traditionally at times comprised the bouquets. In recent times, the crowds yell “Kamellen” and “Strüßje.” In Liessem’s era, “Mimosen” was more common. The Carnival week in 1933 was from 23 February – 28 February. Ash Wednesday was 01 March. The Nazis took over City Hall on 13 March. For definition of Kamelle and Strüßje, see Brog, *Zoch*, 315. She reports that 300,000 bouquets and
friends” and “had been brought into safety.”\textsuperscript{50} Liessem writes how Adenauer exhorted the Carnival crowds from the balcony of the Rathaus to “have a beautiful, a really good parade.” Still, Liessem wonders in hindsight, which of those present, as he was, might have sensed that the Mayor’s “Alaaf”—his Carnival greeting—“lacked the usual cheer presumed in the [traditional] fool’s cry.”\textsuperscript{51} Describing the Nazis’ aim with regards to Carnival, Fuchs and Schwering write: “It was the intention of the political rulers to anchor the people’s festival completely and finally in the great National Socialist political show.”\textsuperscript{52}

The Nazi takeover of Carnival did not occur in a vacuum and it is important to look briefly at the cultural and political landscape of the region, with particular regards to Carnival, given its historic significance. Dietmar and Leifeld carefully outline the contemporary relationship between the political class and Carnivalists at the time of the National Socialists’ rise to power and the changes which were forced upon the festival:

Scholars of cultural traditions, who regard Carnival rather critically, like to point out in this context that the “official,” the organized Carnival, developed, in the second half of the 19th Century at the latest and particularly in the Rhineland, into an

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Liessem, \textit{Kamelle}, 25. “Dr. Adenauer war von guten Freunden gewarnt worden. Er hatte sich in Sicherheit gebracht.”
\item Ibid., 24. “Und in unseren Ohren klang Adenauers Mahnung: ‘Meine Herren, jez machen Se aber ne schöne, ne wirklich jute Zug!’… Vom Balkon des Rathauses am Altermarkt nahm Konrad Adenauer diesen, man könnte sagen: seinen Rosenmontagszug ab… Wer genau hinhörte, der spürte jetzt aber, dass dem ‘Allaaf’ von Oberbürgermeister Dr. Adenauer der Frohsinn abging, den dieser Narrenruf voraussetzt.”
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
event in which the primary members of the middle class—freelancers of all sorts, from artisans to opticians, from businessmen to lawyers—were involved. Thus were they presented into civic society. On the one hand, the middle class especially was regarded as holding a rather conservative political attitude, [and maintaining] a certain proximity to conservative parties. Since the 19th Century, the middle class had formed the so-called “civic center,” which principally found its political home in the National Liberal Party after 1870-71. However, at the same time, members of this civic, middle-class center sought, during the era of Kaiser Wilhelm’s Germany to be close to the ruling classes, the nobility, and the military. From that time, scarcely anything changed in that respect—to state it plainly, the middle classes liked to see themselves in the vicinity of the authorities—to cloak themselves in the robes of power.

Conversely, Cologne’s traditional politicians and especially the Mayor, for example—in the days of the Weimar Republic when Konrad Adenauer was Mayor—sought close solidarity with Carnival. But such interaction between politicians and Carnival, though frequently observed, does not really reflect one of the Carnival’s most important traditions—that is, to criticize the
authorities, to expose representatives of power to ridicule, to hold them before the fools’ mirror.

What actually should be part of the self-evident truths of Carnival culture is criticism of the powerful, but this was strictly and criminally thwarted in the Nazi era—not only in the Büttenreden, [the comic Carnival speeches], but also in Rose Monday Parade.

That was based on the specifications of the regime—and was therefore wrapped in the mockery of and malice towards the League of Nations, the Soviet dictator Stalin, the Jewish Mayor of New York, Fiorello LaGuardia, and increasingly the already disenfranchised German Jews.53

Carnival, then, developed a symbiotic relationship with the political powers (if arguably somewhat artificially so), from the time of the reforms of the 1820s through the Wilhelmine period. The middle classes in essence took much of the celebration from its working class street festival roots and organized and codified it into the official form which still exists. Indeed, I submit that the relationship between the political and moneyed classes is as strong or stronger than ever, with the enormous resources required for presenting and maintaining official—and, often, commercial—Carnival. The Stunksitzung has from the beginning presented itself as a literal alternative to that symbiotic, politically cozy Carnival—even as its own power and presence as a brand and an enormous commercial success has grown. Although there is no intention within this study to parse the details of the historical economic impact of Carnival in Cologne (and elsewhere), it has clearly played a significant role. The Nazis understood both the propaganda value of cultural institutions like Carnival and the close association that had developed between it and local governance. That the National Socialist machine would seek to envelope it, in hindsight, is obvious.

Liessem was President of the “Prinzengarde” (Prince’s Guard), one of the premiere Vereins of official Cologne Carnival. It was established in 1906 and ceremoniously, as the name suggests, escorts the Carnival Prince. Members don a variation of period military uniforms and

Vertreter der Obrigkeit auch einmal dem Spott preiszugeben, ihnen den Narrenspiegel vorzuhalten. Was eigentlich zu den Selbstverständlichkeiten der Karnevalskultur gehören sollte, Kritik an der Mächtigen, wurde in der NS-Zeit geradezu sträflich konterkariert—nicht nur in den Büttenreden, auch im Rosenmontagszug. Man orientierte sich an den Vorgaben der Machthaber—und überzog daher etwa den Völkerbund, den sowjetischen Diktator Stalin, den jüdischen Bürgermeister von New York, Fiorello LaGuardia, aber zunehmend auch die schon entrechteten deutschen Juden mit Spott und Häme.” Although LaGuardia’s mother was Jewish, he was not raised in and never practiced the faith. See also Dietmar and Leifeld, Alaaf, 51-54.
the “regiment” is now headquartered in a rebuilt and restored tower that was once part of the city wall. Fuchs and Schwering argue that Liessem’s book both “addressed and illuminated” the “political upheaval” of the era; it may perhaps be read as slightly disagreeing with Dietmar and Leifeld’s account of the relationship between the political class and Carnival prior to the Nazis. Liessem writes, “Up to that point, political parties and public authorities had allowed Carnival its free run.” He then, however, contradicts himself and relays the story of how once, “before 1914,” the Mayor of Cologne, Max Wallraf, and the President of the Festival Committee, Peter Prior, “intervened” when “the festival threatened to slide into vulgarity.” Wallraf and Prior “gave the foolish proceedings new incentives.” He concludes, “The sympathetic awareness of the city and a relatively small donation from the its treasury supported the festival from that point.” In conclusion he wonders, “But what should happen now?”

Klaus Zöller writes that Liessem, who was elected President of the Prinzengarde in 1929, had previously earned a reputation as a “rebel.” In 1925, he had founded the “Small Cologne Carnival Society” (Kleine Kölner Karnevalsgesellschaft—with the unfortunate abbreviation of KKK), as a “counterpart” (alternative?) to the larger Vereins, which to Liessem “seemed too inflexible.”

Liessem writes that the events of the smaller group—which name was eventually changed to “Cologne Carnival Society Cap and Bells” (Kölner KG Schellenkappe)—were “from time to time cozier and funnier.”

His description of the period immediately following the Nazis’ takeover suggests a fear among the Carnivalists of perhaps the end of their beloved Carnival: “The days were so turbulent that only every now and then could we think about the continuing development of our fools’ festival after that plainly dying Session.” The Nazi-appointed Mayor, Günter Riesen, and Deputy Mayor Willi Ebel, instituted the new Nazi-fied Carnival, although Ebel was the main actor. This led to events that Liessem describes as “belong[ing] to one of the most exciting chapters of Cologne Carnival” in May of 1935. It was “the Revolt of the Fools.”

57. Liessem, Kamelle, 16. “In der ‘Kleine Kölner’ wurde es von mal zu mal gemütlicher und lustiger.” “Gemütlich” implies far more than the English “cozy,” meaning all at once, cozy, comfortable, homey, welcoming, etc.
Ebel, “with a certain satisfaction,” made a “series of advances” to “set the assumed and leading ‘Friends of Carnival’ against one another.” To that end, he “extended an invitation, in early 1933, to the Board of the Festival Committee” for a discussion of “a single program point: continuance of Cologne Carnival.” Stating first that he was “acquainted with their concerns” and that he wanted to address them, Ebel, Liessem writes, continued—“thundered” on—with: “The Cologne Carnival must become a genuine Festival of the People! Therefore it must have a guiding hand in the City of Cologne! If it is already giving money for the Carnival Parade, then the city also has a right to have a voice in the matter!” Ebel declared that, instead of the Festival Committee, the city and the Tourist Office, or Tourist Association as it was also known (and which he controlled), would present the next Rose Monday Parade, in 1934. Parade floats were to be constructed only through the city “Building Authority” and the various Corps and Carnival Societies would be approved and overseen by the “Parade Designer”—a Party appointee. Finally, “the cloven hoof” dropped: the Festival Committee would be disbanded and Carnival would be under the authority of the Tourist Association. “That was,” Liessem writes, “for Cologne Carnival a break with every tradition… The civic-led Festival Committee would lose all its rights.”

In Liessem’s account, the Carnivalists, remarkably, and with what must now be regarded as an act of considerable nerve, refused: “The assembly failed because with one voice the invitees said no.” The ensuing “tug-of-war” and “one-on-one meetings” resulted in a few compromises: the Festkomitee was replaced by a “Great Council of Cologne Carnival,” the members of which came from all of the Carnival Societies. This Council was governed by a Board, which was an artery of the Tourist Office (chaired by Willi Ebel). Liessem, who was in attendance at the original meeting with Ebel, writes of the compromise: “We tried to make the best of this solution, to rescue, at least, the independence of the Societies.”

That rescue may perhaps be viewed as successful in the sense that many, if not most of the Carnival Societies that were in existence in Cologne in 1933 still are, but the degree to which any level of genuine autonomy was preserved at the time is, at best, debatable.

Liessem describes how the Nazis’ Tourist Association then took control anyway, focusing on the actions of Ebel. First in line for the Parade was the “so-called Workers Society,”

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Gesellschaften würden durch den Zuggestalter… eingewiesen.” “Aber dann kam der Pferdefuß: Auflösung des seit 1823 bestehenden ‘Festkomites des Kölner Karneval’ und Überführung in den Kölner Verkehrsverein.” “Das war für den Kölner Karneval ein Bruch mit aller Tradition… Das bürgerliche geführte Festkomitee sollte alle Rechte verlieren.” “Pferdefuß” literally translates as “horse’s foot,” but is colloquially meant as “club foot” or “cloven hoof.” The sense here is of “the penny has dropped” or “the other shoe has dropped,” in both cases in a very negative way. The image of being stepped on (or stomped on) by a cloven hoof—i.e., the Devil, is intentionally suggested. See also Dietmar and Leifeld, Alaaf, 55-58.


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with its the quintessentially National Socialist appellation, Strength Through Joy. The Society “demanded its part in the foolish events.” Liessem writes, “Parade by parade, the festival was estranged from the citizenry.” Ebel placed himself in a position of prominence for the Rose Monday Parade and, in what Liessem seems to think was perhaps the ultimate insult, invited “a genuine Münchner Kindl” (Munich Child) to be Guest of Honor at the Parade—twice! Liessem writes, “I still believe today [1965] that his supposed love for Carnival at that time morphed into hate. The men whom he believed he had tamed, laughed about him… His supposed aura was assaulted, if not made entirely to disappear.”61

Ebel, however, “sought revenge.” Further new restrictions were put in place. “Ebel wanted the autonomy of the Cologne Carnival Societies and Corps, some of which had been in existence for a hundred years, completely destroyed.” A new organization, the “Association of Cologne Carnival,” which he led, “appropriated all of the halls in the city during Carnival time.” All Carnival events had to be “operated through the patronage of the new association,” and “all Carnivalists, in particular the Büttenredner, with their speeches, had to be subjected to censorship. Without the clearance of Ebel’s association, there would be no more approval to hold

61. Ibid., 27-28. “…sogenannte Arbeitsgemeinschaft ‘Kraft durch Freude’…” “Sie forderte ihren Anteil am närrischen Geschehen. Zug um Zug wurde das Fest den Bürgern entfremdet.” “Ich glaube heute noch, daß sich damals seine vermeintliche Liebe zum Karneval in Haß verwandelte. Die Männer, die er gebändigt glaubte, lachten über ihn… Sein vermeintlicher Nimbus war angeschlagen, wenn nicht ganz geschwunden.” A “Münchner Kindl” or “Munich Child” is a symbol of Munich, appears on the city’s coat-of-arms, and is portrayed every year by a young woman during Oktoberfest. See, for example, the “Münchner Kindl” page of the Oktoberfest.de website: http://www.oktoberfest.de/de/article/Aktuell/Meldungen/Neues+Münchner+Kindl/1690. For a brief list of the various Nazi units that were to replace Cologne Carnival Funken and other groups in the Parade, see “Der Kölner Karneval in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus,” Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger, 07 January 2006, http://www.ksta.de/koeln-uebersicht/der-koelner-karneval-in-der-zeit-des-nationalsozialismus,16341264,13740318.html. Websites accessed 28 April 2014.
performances.” Similar restrictions were enforced for the Rose Monday Parade. Liessem refers to it as “Humor by command, joy upon order.” To justify these actions and to establish a basis for the new association, Ebel hurled accusations at Carnival Society Presidents, perhaps intending to posit himself as the savior of Carnival.62

Liessem retreated from Carnival appearances. Protests grew; some of the protesters approached him, urging action. “Something,” he writes, “had to be undertaken immediately, or else our whole beautiful Carnival would be flushed down the drain—the only festival, which one could celebrate from the heart—and without control of the Party!” A meeting was held—“one of the most united meetings that such men had ever held.” They, eight Carnival Society Presidents, including Liessem, met in secret, knowing that, “The words openly spoken here could cost every one of us his freedom.”63

A resolution was composed for the “Festausschuss Kölner Karneval” (Festival Committee of Cologne Carnival), which the group was eventually named. That resolution read, in part: “All Carnival Societies and Associations that are willing to participate as comrades in

steadfast allegiance to the structure and overall welfare of the Cologne Carnival may be admitted onto the Committee.” The solemn and elevated tone—ironically common in discourse about Cologne Carnival—was deliberate. “One likes to joke,” Liessem writes, “that for the people of Cologne, Carnival is a deadly serious thing.” However, he continues, “This time it was for real. Because it was important to speak our opinion and declare openly, not only to Deputy Mayor Ebel, but also to the NSDAP associated city administrators, that we were not willing to submit to this Carnival swindle.” Although wary of the potential consequences and, as Liessem puts it, “No one is born a hero,” they proceeded. A newspaper was published, *Der Neue Tag (The New Day)*, with a front page headline, “Cologne’s Fools Revolt.”

The authorities were not pleased, but could not publicly stop the paper’s publication. A rally at the Cologne Stadium demonstrated the breadth of dissent. Cologne’s mainstream newspapers published edited versions of the group’s resolution. An invitation was issued to all the Carnival Societies for a gathering in the Great Hall of the Cologne Reading Society (Lesegesellschaft). The event was packed. The Police Chief warned the Carnival Societies that

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the proceedings would be stopped if “even one word were spoken against the Party.” A message from Cologne-Aachen Gauleiter (Area Party Leader) Josef Grohé was shared. In effect, Grohé declared that the Party did not approve of the actions against Carnival and, further, that Willi Ebel had been ordered to dismantle the Verein Kölner Karneval.66

Fuchs and Schwering describe the founding of Liessem’s Festausschuss Kölner Karneval (Lieseem was President) thusly: “In hindsight this action has been interpreted as early and decisive resistance.” (And certainly Liessem himself did not attempt to squelch his image as a principled rebel.) Fuchs and Schwering concede, however, that ultimately the Nazis had a strong influence on the content of Carnival, which was rife with anti-Semitic jokes and imagery—several Sitzungen, for example, were known to open with “Heil Hitler!”67 In 1998, the same year that the Festkomitee’s lengthy homage to Cologne Carnival was published, the news magazine Der Spiegel published an article questioning the rosy glossed over view of Carnival under the Nazis, titled “Heil Hitler und Alaaf” (strikingly similar to Dietmar and Leifeld’s 2010 book.) Directly challenging Liessem’s narrative, the article notes, among other uncomfortable points, that he commentated for the filmed Rose Monday Parade in 1936 and suggests that Liessem’s claims that “anti-Semitic SA marchers and floats had been smuggled into the parade—‘against our wills’” were false.68

The jubilation that followed the gathering at the Reading Society hall, Liessem declares, reflected a great victory. “Certainly, it was ‘only’ about Carnival,” he writes. “But in this domain we had defeated the Party big shots on the field [of battle] and we were proud of that.” This “Revolt of the Fools” had “not only been reported in our newspapers, but also abroad” as “substantially” damaging “the prestige of the all-powerful Party in the eyes of the People.” However, he acknowledges that he “knew” that “the Party would not allow such damage to its reputation to go unavenged.” Sure enough, “Mayor Riesen disclosed to us that the Rose Monday Parade could no longer count on a subsidy from the city.” Riesen’s “cynical” message was also unambiguous: “You wanted autonomy. Now you can show how ready you will be for it… There will not be one cent more from us.”

Liessem claims that the next Rose Monday Parade—“the first for which we were again responsible”—“sparked great enthusiasm,” but concedes that confrontations with the Nazis did continue to occur at various events, and that the Carnivalists “saw the future” in these “episodes.” He notes, “How terribly incompatible staunch Nazism is with Carnival spirit.”

70. Ibid. “Der erste wieder von uns veranstaltete Rosenmontagszug löste Riesenbegeisterung
(One is perhaps prompted to wonder whether some kinder, gentler Nazism would have been more Carnival-friendly.) *Der Spiegel* and Dietmar and Leifeld argue that National Socialism and Carnival did not necessarily prove to be incompatible at all. Indeed, the Nazis found it to be a useful tool—as they did other traditional and community focused activities. “The conscious advancement of Carnival—like with both leisure and holidays—had ultimately one important function for the legitimization of the National Socialist regime.”

Following Carnival, in 1937, Liessem was visited by Bodo Lafferentz, a leader in Strength Through Joy. Lafferentz informed Liessem that, although the Carnival Societies could remain, “organization, financing, speeches in the Sitzungen, as well as the Rose Monday Parade, all had to be handed over to the control of the National Socialist government.” Orders would come from Berlin. Although Liessem insists it was against the Carnivalists’ wishes, Nazi influence on Cologne Carnival of course grew until the war began in 1939. Liessem was soon drafted and “as a soldier led… the last General Assembly of the ‘Festausschuss’ in November 1939.” The war ended Carnival in Cologne as any sort of official celebration—indeed, most activities had been banned before November 1939. Liessem writes, “A curtain of fire ended the Carnival scene, the spirit their home city, [the spirit] for which the Cologners had campaigned over long difficult years.”

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Liessem’s sentimental descriptions of a spunky band of brave Carnivalists holding the line against the evil Nazis are perhaps understandable within the wider contexts of Carnival and carnivalization, even, or perhaps especially, with regards to history. (When the history is inconvenient, why not reframe it in a friendlier light?) In the broadest context, possibly even Liessem’s Festausschuss may be viewed as alternative—when considered against the takeover of the official Carnival. His earlier Kleine Kölner appears to have been founded in some spirit of genial rebellion, if not in that of being decidedly alternative. Liessem even admits to (brags about?) visiting the Sitzungen of the larger official Vereins in his Kleine Kölner days with the express purpose of seeing what material he might be able to steal for their own Sitzungen. (Since he believed the Kleine Kölner to be at least occasionally “cozier and funnier,” may it be surmised that the stolen material was perhaps altered a bit—made more alternative?)

Certainly, in the beginning the Festausschuss seemed to be—and was arguably intended to be—an alternative to complete Nazi takeover of Carnival, but must not whatever resistance it genuinely mustered now be read as little more than a delaying tactic? Furthermore, it seems clear that any victories seemingly wrought from the Nazis were little more than tactical maneuvers by the Party to ensure ultimate and complete co-option. Still, as both Der Spiegel and Dietmar and

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Feuervorhang beendete die Karnevalszene, für die sich die Bürger im Sinne ihrer Heimatstadt eingesetzt hatten, auf lange, schwere Jahre.” Fuchs and Schwering note that the Festausschuss officially existed until 1942 and was re-constituted in January 1947. Although some celebrations resumed after the war, with an estimated nine-tenths of Cologne’s buildings destroyed, less than two-thirds of its pre-war population still there, and lean rations, such celebrations were minimal. There was no Dreigestirn and the Rosenmontagszug did not resume until 1949—when the city was still largely rubble. Liessem became President again in 1954 and the old name, “Festkomitee,” was restored in 1957. See Fuchs and Schwering, “Die Geschichte des Kölner Karnevals,” in Fuchs, Schwering, Zöller, and Oelsner, Karneval, 198, 260-61. See also Dietmar and Leifeld, Alaaf, 86, 203-4.
Leifeld report, even Adenauer stoked the Cologne—and by extension, the Cologne Carnival—resistance narrative. In a speech on the campus of the University of Cologne in March of 1946, the former Mayor and future Chancellor said to an audience of four thousand: “No other city has been hit so hard by the war—although none deserved it less, because nowhere did National Socialism encounter until 1933 such open and since 1933 so much spiritual resistance.”\(^{73}\) The *Der Spiegel* article states that Adenauer explained to the audience “what absolution means.”\(^{74}\) Referencing his words above, and although he “spoke… what most Cologners thought,” Dietmar and Leifeld describe Adenauer as “someone who should simply have known better.” They write that no efforts towards genuine civic self-examination had yet begun: “After 1945 only a few Cologners had developed the insight and summoned the strength to ask themselves self-critically the question of guilt or shared responsibility—a great majority saw themselves as victims and suppressed anything that called that role into question.” Adenauer, they contend, offered a “whitewashing,” which the locals “eagerly seized.”\(^{75}\) Originating at least from the time the city still lay in ruins, *Der Spiegel* notes, “The fairytale that the world-famous Cologne Carnival had been a kind of hotbed of the resistance during the dictatorship had long been keep alive.” The article does allow that the Carnivalists’ refusal to be under the authority of the Strength Through

\(^{73}\) Dietmar and Leifeld, *Alaaf*, 203-4. “Keine andere Stadt ist vom Krieg so schwer getroffen worden—und dabei hatte sie es am wenigsten verdient, denn nirgendwo ist dem Nationalsozialismus bis 1933 so offener und seit 1933 so viel geistiger Widerstand geleistet worden.” See also *Der Spiegel*, “Heil Hitler.”

\(^{74}\) *Der Spiegel*, “Heil Hitler.” “…die… die Absolution bedeuten.”

\(^{75}\) Dietmar and Leifeld, *Alaaf*, 203-4. “Adenauer… sprach… was die meisten Kölner dachten.” “Zum Sprecher der Mehrheit machte sich indessen einer, der es eigentlich hätte besser wissen sollen.” “Nur wenige Kölner hatten nach 1945 die Einsicht entwickelt und die Kraft aufgebracht, die Frage nach Schuld und Mitverantwortung selbstkritisch zu stellen—eine große Mehrheit sah sich als Opfer und verdrängte alles, was diese Rolle infrage stellte.” “Persilschein… der von den Kölbern…begierig aufgegriffen wurde.”
Joy association was the “one time” that “resistance sprouted,” but argues that Ebel’s plans for punishment failed because he had not obtained “rear cover” from Gauleiter Grohé. Chillingly, however, it also relates how the opening of the 1938-1939 Session was merrily celebrated on 11 November 1938—two days after “Kristallnacht.” They write, “Cologne’s Jecken also did not allow the brutal assaults and pogroms of so-called ‘Kristallnacht’ in November 1938 to spoil their fun.” Finally, the article sums up Liessem’s view of the National Socialist era and Carnival with biting derision: “It was just such a foolish time.”

Hildegard Brog, in describing the 1936 Rose Monday Parades, calls them “an awkward chapter.” Among the “floats and marchers,” some of both “put anti-Semitic motifs or National Socialist propaganda on show.” She acknowledges, “Because only a few of the floats or group images and descriptions still exist, a complete picture of these parades cannot be drawn.”

Liessem of course provided commentary for the filmed version of the Cologne Parade and Der Spiegel reports his broadcast silence about a float depicting the Jews as “hideous sub-humans.” That silence is contrasted with the praise he offered about how “agreeable” the “strict bearing” of


the marchers was when the next group of “Funken” and “Gardisten” appeared. Brog concludes, “From the Carnival Societies responsible for presentation of the Parade came no protest whatsoever against such anti-Semitic floats, which were in the Rose Monday Parade year after year.” Witnesses from the time, she notes, describe the level of enthusiasm about the floats among the crowd differently—some say there was little response; others claim the crowds cheered raucously. Brog also notes that the Allies’ post-war Denazification Committee (by whom Liessem and other Carnival officials were interviewed) determined that the Carnivalists had permitted the floats because the local Nazi authorities gave them no other choice. Echoing the Der Spiegel article, Brog calls Liessem’s insistence (and, implicitly, the Denazification Committee’s acceptance) that the Carnivalists were not at all complicit in the content of the floats “obviously false.” She points out that one of the Festauschuss’ Presidents rode on one of the floats and threw flowers to the crowds. “The public certainly had to be of the impression,” she writes, “that the respective Carnival Societies and the Festauschuss in particular were responsible for the inclusion of these floats.” Dietmar and Leifeld further document the fiercely negative political content—against France, England, Russia, etc.—and more pointedly the viciously anti-Semitic content in Carnival events and on floats in Rose Monday Parades in Cologne and other German cities in the Nazi years. They write: “In the Cologne Rose Monday

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Parades from 1934 to 1939 the Jecken from year to year presented many floats and marching
groups through the streets which incorporated extremely offensive anti-Semitic defamations and
which proclaimed anti-Semitic slogans.” The conclusion seems clear: how could it all have
been done without co-operation of the Carnival Societies?

Following a January 1937 meeting, which Liessem attended, in Munich, of members of
fifty Carnival Societies from throughout Germany, the “Federation of German Carnival” (Bund
Deutscher Karneval) was founded. The purpose was to unify Carnival nation-wide as an
instrument for propaganda. Presidents of the Carnival Societies had no voice in the Federation,
which was run by representatives of the regime—including Willi Ebel. The Federation insisted
that the Virgin and the Funkenmariechen be portrayed by women, instead of the hundred-plus
years’ tradition of being men in drag. The Festauschuss did not protest against the edict.

Brog, however, does report that Carnival was not completely lacking in resistance, or at
least objection to, the regime: “Not all Carnival Jecken could be ideologically convinced.” She
mentions the Kölner Rosenmontags-Zeitung (Cologne Rose Monday Newspaper), a satirical
publication which featured a picture of Joseph Goebbels on the front in costume as “Prince
Jüppche I.” The publication’s origins are not definitively known, although Brog notes it was
certainly a product of the underground and surmises it may have come from the Netherlands or

führten die Jecken Jahr für Jahr mehrere Wagen und Fußgruppen durch die Straßen, die äußerst
offensiv antisemitische Diffamierungen enthielten und antisemitische Parolen verkündeten.”
“Vereinnahmen” literally translates as “collect” or “take.”
Belgium. Dietmar and Leifeld, however, in their more recent book, credit the paper to Otto Niebergall, a writer and satiricist who spent time and was tortured in a Nazi prison. According to Dietmar and Leifeld, the Düsseldorf artist Karl Schwesig financed the illegal publication and provided much or all of its artwork.

Even the Nazis could not police every Sitzung. Some Büttenredner risked mocking and criticizing them. One in particular, Karl Küpper, was quite direct in his speeches. Küpper, who far more comfortably fits the mold of alternative than Thomas Liessem—let alone resistant—was warned, arrested, and banned from performing his speeches. He avoided prison by joining the army where he was assigned to work in a theatre unit. His biographer, Fritz Bilz, reports that even after the war, Küpper’s mocking, politically tinged humor continued to provoke and bite. Portions of a Büttenrede (speech) he gave at a Sitzung in 1952 so angered various Cologne city officials, including Mayor Ernst Schwering, that the federal government (Adenauer was Chancellor) had to verify whether Küpper could be prosecuted. Because of his popularity, charges were not sought. The Stunksitzing paid tribute to Küpper in 1992, when then-President Jürgen Becker re-created one of Küpper’s original Carnival speeches (Büttenrede) from 1938.

83. Ibid., 249-51.
84. Dietmar and Leifeld, Alaaf, 188-92.
There were others who publicly did not tow the Nazi line. Dietmar and Leifeld, in addition to Küpper, whom they call “the Non-Conformist, the Un-Bending,” also mention others, most notably, the “Martyr of Tradition,” Leo Statz, President of the Düsseldorfer Festkomitee, who was sentenced to death and guillotined for his criticism of the regime. They also include artists Max Beckmann and Karl Hofer, both of whom survived the war and the Nazis.\(^{87}\)

After considering then, the authentic historical narrative of Carnival resistance to National Socialism and contrasting it to the received disrupted carnivalized one, some questions remain. In their joint mockery of Nazism, are the Stunksitzung and its carnivalistic cohorts discussed in this chapter, guilty of a similar “whitewashing” of which Dietmar and Leifeld accuse Konrad Adenauer? Is “Der Entengang” some sort of merry pretense that it all wasn’t so bad, or that the Nazis did not infect Carnival? Does laughing at Hitler and portraying him as a bumbling dolt, whether directly, as Levy does in Mein Führer, or in a slight fictionalization, as Chaplin did in The Great Dictator, suggest a willful erasure of historic memory—as prominent Carnivalists clearly tried to do after the war? Is carnivalizing historical memory for humorous or dramatic effect (in the case of Tarantino) the same thing as sanitizing history of its ugliest moments? Has the Stunksitzung induced or indeed celebrated the same deliberate amnesia?

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The answer, I submit, is no. While I would concede that parody, satire, and unrestrained mockery can function as devices to ignore or repress or forget cultural guilt, it can also remind the descendants of those who lived through the awful years of the horror they lived—and sometimes helped create. In this, I submit that the Stunksitzung has maintained its alternative edge in its approach to Carnival—by laughing at things the official Carnival will not. The carnivalization of historical narrative by the official Carnival has, until relatively recently, served as a means of absolving and denying its own complicity. Thomas Liessem held himself up to be another Karl Küpper. The implication is that, but for some luck and, perhaps, exceptional Carnival skills, he might have been another Leo Statz, beheaded for his courageous defense of his beloved fest. The Stunksitzung defies those kinds of distorted carnivalized narratives. When it pokes its critical finger in the eye of official Carnival it reminds the audience that, for all the fun, the parades, the beer, the music, etc., Carnival itself can be—and has been—carnivalized in ways that are not funny. A brutal regime can co-opt tradition to its own purposes. The self-appointed guardians of those traditions can, if not collaborate, per se, then at least co-operate. (Thomas Liessem would seem to fall well short of, say, the Vichy authorities.)

It is important as well to recognize that the Stunksitzung was created and has been maintained by post-war (alternative) Carnivalists. The past, after all, can only be carnivalized once it is past. Any sanitizing or carnivalization or disruption of historical narrative must come later. Yet it is critical to recognize that the carnivalization and disruptions that the Stunksitzung engender and perform do not seek to sanitize. Like Dave Chappelle, who reminds his audience of the horror of slavery when his time travelling Time Haters assassinate a slave master, when the Stunkers Donald-Duck Hitler, there is no attempt to sanitize what the Führer really did. In this,
the Stunksitzung, and I submit, Chappelle, Chaplin, Levy, and even Tarantino, and their
carnivalized historical narratives stand apart from those of the Liessems and official Carnival
carnivalized narratives. The Stunksitzung and its kin, comical and otherwise, find truth in their
antics. The Stunkers illuminate the authentic by carnivalizing and disrupting its story.

Bakhtin of course regards Carnival in a thoroughly positive light. Clearly, however, the
utterances of a carnivalized narrative can be equally negative. Brog, in addition to her discussion
of the Nazi era, writes at some length about the role of women in Cologne Carnival and I noted
briefly in an earlier chapter how rampant it can be and often has been (and is still) with sexism.88
The Stunksitzung, in the years I have seen and studied it, has not taken the subject on as a
primary or significant topic of ridicule. It has confronted racism in Carnival—in particular with a
series of sketches lampooning the blackface Carnival Society “Poller Negerkopp.”89 The
Stunksitzung, however, in carnivalizing Carnival, in its attacks on official Carnival and the
institutions that support it—the Carnival Societies, of course, the city government, the Catholic
Church, etc.—in implicitly showing how carnivalization can be positive or negative, is speaking
its truth not only to power but also to myth. Mocking Hitler and the Nazis reminds the audience
of the complicity of the era—including, if subtly, the complicity of official Carnival. In what I
have described as an ongoing, increasingly more carnivalistic—Bakhtinian—trajectory, the myth

88. See Brog, Zoch, 139-64.
89. See The Stunksitzung Ensemble, “Weisse Massai” (Film), Stunksitzung, 2006; and, The
Stunksitzung Ensemble, “Willis Wahlkampfspot und Wahlkampfparty” (Film, sketch, and
musical number), Stunksitzung, 2009.
of Carnival resistance is rejected, the carnivalized historical narrative is employed with a wink before the truth is confronted. And mocked.

This alternative reading, this carnivalization of historical narrative becomes its own parody. The alternative, preferred story tracks the actual history and parallels what happened—in the case of the Nazi resistance narrative (and possibly the Roman origins narrative), closely enough to heighten the “if only” factor to a level of plausible believability. This is perhaps especially so within the context of a war-vanquished country and society eager to move beyond their very recent brutal past.

Given what has been known about the Nazi era since at least the end of the Second World War, and given the choices made in the Allies’ Denazification process, it may yet be unfair to criticize too severely the choices made by the official Carnivalists of the era. Even things like becoming a Party member—as Liessem did, in 1932—we may now understand, to some extent, as a survival mechanism.90 Perspectives like James Shapiro’s in his book on Oberammergau offer an interesting look at Denazification in contexts of treasured people’s cultural/performative/theatrical traditions and can provide broader insight into the actions of people at the time.91 It is my contention, however, that the Stunksitzung efforts to portray Nazism and other forms of radical extremism offers an illumination and a potential for understanding which in and of itself is alternative. For it attempts to offer no solutions, it does not realistically carry the expectation of “if only” (even as the humor is partially rooted in it), and its primary objective is the freeing, chthonian, Bakhtinian Carnival laughter. The Stunksitzung

90. Dietmar and Leifeld, Alaaf, 80.
assumes the role of traditional theatrical fools in speaking truth to power (i.e., traditional
Carnival), while also speaking truth to the mythos of that of the powerful of Carnival (and,
arguably, Carnival’s audience and participants), with regards to Carnival’s history. Again.92

In the next, short, concluding chapter, within a review of the key points of this study and
its theoretical framework, I will introduce a couple of last supporting sources, including
comments from recorded interviews from various members of the Ensemble, as well as from
interviews I conducted with two, Jürgen Becker and Hans Kieseier.

92. For example, see The Stunksitzung Ensemble, “NPD,” Stunksitzung, 2007, where a school
classroom is portrayed as it might be in a Germany controlled by the Nationaldemokratische
Parle Deutschlands—the National Democratic Party of Germany—which is the most succesful
far right party in Germany today. The sketch is essentially a group of sacharine-sweet school
students and their teacher singing various essentially neo-Nazi songs and regurgitating similar
propaganda. For examples of how the Ensemble has mocked non-Western extremism, see The
Stunksitzung Ensemble, “Bekennervideo,” Stunksitzung, 2006, where an Islamic terrorrist is
frustrated in his efforts to make a video claiming credits for his group’s acts by the professional
(Western, infidel, female) director hired for the project; and The Stunksitzung Ensemble,
“Attentäter,” Stunksitzung, 2007, where two suicide bombers attend the opera (and one keeps
insisting that he got the better deal because he bought a subscription series).
In his introduction to the 2009 book, *Karneval instandbesetzt? Eine kritische Hommage: 25 Jahre Stunksitzung*, titled “Einem Phänomen auf der Spur” (On the Trail of a Phenomenon), Georg Bungarten writes that the Stunksitzung’s “goal” is to “revive the critical-political character of Carnival.” That it has “achieved” that goal, “is no longer a question.”¹ Bungarten cites the book and the 2010 Cologne City Museum exhibition of the same name about the Stunksitzung as proof of his point. The book and exhibition “should demonstrate that since coming into existence, the Stunksitzung has not only attained both artistic and economic power, but, in addition, by establishing itself and developing alongside the Festival Committee-Carnival, has made definitive contributions with innovative and self-organized forms of carnivalistic traditions.”² He notes (as have I) that, “not only has the traditional Carnival been satirized, but Mayors and politicians, elements of culture and counter-culture, the Catholic Church, and, above all, Cardinal Meisner, have been as well.”³ No one and no institution have been safe from

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² Ibid. “Beides soll aufzeigen, dass die Stunksitzung seit Bestehen nicht nur an künstlerischer und wirtschaftlicher Kraft gewonnen, sondern maßgeblich dazu beigetragen hat, dass sich neben dem Festkomitee-Karneval innovative, selbstorganisierte Formen karnevalistischen Brauchtums entwickelt und etabliert haben.
³ Ibid., “Nicht nur der tradierte Karneval, auch Oberbürgermeister und Politiker, Elemente aus Kultur und Gegenkultur, die katholische Kirche und vor allem Kardinal Meisner werden persifliert.”

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criticism or mockery. This willingness to spare no potential target, Bungarten implies, is the backbone of Carnival’s revival by the Stunksitzung.

Bungarten’s choice of words here is telling. The German verb, “beleben,” can have several meanings—to enliven, to freshen, to activate, to revitalize, etc.—all of which would be arguably suitable for describing the Stunksitzung’s effect on Cologne Carnival. It can also be translated, as I have done here, to revive. My choice is deliberate. It is my contention, and a central tenet of this study that, with regards to the Stunksitzung and Cologne Carnival, the former has indeed been a force of revival within the latter. I also submit that, at least now, at the beginning of the Stunksitzung’s fourth decade, it is more and more an ingrained part of Carnival, rather than an oppositional force to it—thus, within, not against. Although its mockery of official Carnival remains unabated and while its even stirs up controversy from time to time, the alternative has become accepted, popular, possibly even mainstream. Such is one of the ironies.

Or is it? Bungarten argues, “At first glance, the [Sitzung] tradition seems to be a rather conservative affair.” The Stunkers, it seems, would not necessarily disagree. Also in 2009, the year of the book, Ecki Pieper, lead singer of Köbes Underground, the house band of the Stunksitzung, said, “We sing it very often—we are just a Carnival Society.” He was speaking in

4. Ibid. “Das Brauchtum scheint auf den ersten Blick eine eher konservative Angelegenheit zu sein.”
5. Ecki Pieper, Commentary, Stunksitzung XXL: Dat Beste aus 25 Jahren, Film by Thomas Pfaff, aired 20 February 2009, Phoenix Network (Cologne: WDR Fernsehen, 2009), DVD. Hereafter cited in text as Stunksitzung XXL, DVD. “Wir singen es sehr oft—wir sind nur ein Karnevals Verein.” “Verein” usually translates as club or association. Karnevalsgesellschaften—Carnival Societies—are often referred to as Karnevals Vereine, although their formal names almost always use Karnevalsgesellschaft, or KG. The “e.V” designation for a non-profit association stands for “ein Verein.” Until 1993, the band used a different name every year. “Köbes” is the Kölsch word for the servers who work in the traditional Cologne brew-houses. They wear long
an interview, as part of the commentary for the film *Stunksitzung XXL*, a collection of sketches and commentary that was broadcast on television and released on DVD for the production’s twenty-fifth anniversary. There is of course no official Carnival Society attached to the Stunksitzung—Pieper was speaking about the community that has grown and remained together around and within the production. However, even with no “KG” or “e.V.” designation after the name, no event of its size and impact could continue without an organizational structure. Furthermore, the Stunksitzung Ensemble has always demonstrated a keen understanding and deep comprehension of the traditional framework in which they were performing; they know what it is they are parodying and mocking. Their methodology is rooted in co-option, which again, they do not deny. Included in *Stunksitzung XXL* is a clip from a 1994 debate on the television show *Parlazzo*, in which one of two unidentified representatives of official Carnival levels an accusation at two Stunkers saying, “You do a lot from the head that we do from the heart.” Original Ensemble member Martina Klinke interrupts him and retorts, “Stop! Off! We schunkeln, we sing, we laugh—we do a lot from the heart!” “We,” in other words—the Stunkers—do the same thing “you” do. Left unspoken in the exchange is the claim—demonstrably true to the Stunksitzung’s fans—that the Ensemble does it better. They bring to life an alternative that is new and improved. The experience of Carnival they present, the alternative stance they take is one which inherently acknowledges the similarities while reveling in a new and improved experience.

6. Martina Klinke and unidentified Carnivalist, Debate excerpt from *Parlazzo*, television show, 1994, on *Stunksitzung XXL*, DVD. “Sie machen viel mit dem Kopf, wat wir mit dem Herzen machen.” “Stop! Aus! Wir schunkeln, wir singen, wir lachen—aber wir machen viel mit dem Herzen!” The second Stunker with Klinke is also not identified but is apparently Gaby Köster, who was a member of the Ensemble from 1993 to 1996. See Rübhausen et al., *Stunksitzung*, 95.
in the differences. When Bungarten writes, “Celebrating Carnival is above all emotion,” he implicitly recognizes that the outward practical forms of the celebration have remained essentially the same since the 1820s. The Stunksitzung was Jürgen Becker’s brain-child and even he stated, in an interview in March of 2009, that it is “old-fashioned.” What it then has revived is the cheeky end of the emotional spectrum, the Bakhtinian Carnival spirit of earthy laughter, of taking nothing too seriously, of insisting that nothing is sacred in Carnival, except perhaps freedom.

It is in that spirit that I quote the phrase “Blootwoosch, Kölsch, un lecker Mädche” in this conclusion’s title. It is an often-heard Kölsch phrase, especially in regards to Carnival. Literally, it means “sausage, beer, and tasty girls.” The overt sexism notwithstanding, the words capture much of what Kölners believe is the essence of Carnival: having fun—that is, a particularly earthy, hedonistic kind of fun, a Bakhtinian carnivalesque kind of fun, or at least their communal interpretation of it. In this Bakhtinian, chthonian sense, the Stunksitzung is indeed conservative and traditional. The dullest and deadest Herrensitzung is presented within the same general performance frame. The difference is that the Stunksitzung, I submit, has recaptured and revived that spirit where official Carnival—often—may only claim it. Official Carnival is largely about tradition, whereas the Stunksitzung is based in tradition, but has built on it, expanded it, and in the process, re-defined it. Thus do I ask the questions in the title of this study about the

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9. These are for male-only audiences—there are “Frauensitzungen” or “Mädchensitzungen” as well. In the men’s version, it is traditional for the cards announcing each act to be changed by a stripper, who wears one less article of clothing for each appearance. I’ve often heard the term used derogatorily as an example for the worst of official Carnival.
Stunksitzung, “Carnivalization? Meta-Carnival? Or Bakhtinian Restoration?” And thus do I conclude that the answer is all three. In 2007, following the FIFA World Cup (football—soccer) that was played in Germany in the summer of 2006, including in Cologne, the Ensemble used “Blootwoosch, Kölsch, un lecker Mädche” as the opening lyrics for their version of the German National anthem. They used projections of each member to introduce the cast in football-match style. The audience was then asked to stand for the anthem and the carnivalized lyrics—of which some lines were quite similar to the actual anthem’s—were projected on a screen. In addition to referencing sausage and beer and demeaning women (or, with tongues in cheeks, pretending to), they also used another popular, cruder, Cologne Carnival saying (also in Kölsch): “Suffa, poppe, Kaate klopp” (drink, have sex, play cards). Although overt patriotism in Germany does not carry the same cultural weight and significance as it does in, say, US culture, in distorting national anthem lyrics for their Carnival antics, the Stunkers, through mockery, re-emphasized the Cologne-as-nation ideal I wrote about earlier with regards to Benedict Anderson’s work. (They were also following a tradition from Franz Raveaux’s era, mentioned in chapter three.) The Ensemble, however, took

the idea further, demonstrating fealty to a Carnival nation—something the official Carnival arguably does as well. But the Stunkers in particular were implicitly being patriotic to their own rebellious, breakaway, alternative Carnival nation. Finally, the Blootwoosch lyrics were a reference to a song of the same title by De Höhner, the Kölsch group mentioned in chapter two, which has long been a Cologne Carnival institution (and an occasional subject of Stunksitzung parody). One tradition was carnivalized to serve another, and that to serve another, itself a carnivalization of an earlier tradition. And so on—a mockery of a mockery. It was, as I have suggested, meta-Carnivalization.

In the late seventies and early eighties, many of the original Stunkers became acquainted at the Fachhochschule (more or less the German equivalent of a technical college or community college) in the Zollstock section of Cologne. They were, for the most part, studying Social Work or Social Pedagogy. In the summer of 1982, a group of them took part in an occupation at the school in protest against announced cutbacks in the social system, including reductions at the Fachhochschule. The occupation culminated in a naked group march along the inner ring road in Cologne to Neumarkt, a major commercial and shopping area. (Perhaps unsurprisingly, the large open square at Neumarkt has long featured significantly in Carnival, with varying events being held there. At one time, it was the staging-ground for the Rosenmontagszug.) Following the occupation, and inspired by Berlin’s Ufa-Zircus, an alternative vaguely circus-themed cabaret the group had seen, they decided to form their own version and the Kölner Spielecircus was formed. Wolfgang Schmitz writes that the group took their working model from the Ufa-Zirkus: “We had seen with the Ufa-people how it could function: living together, working together.” He
stresses, however, “We did not want to copy them, but this model of a collective society with communal living and a work collective inspired us.”

Although much bigger and commercially more successful than ever, the Stunksitzung Ensemble still works collectively, with the actors, director, assistant directors, writers, and musicians contributing and giving feedback. A group of writers helps hone the material over the course of the weeks before opening. In at least some years, the Ensemble has invited an audience to view the works-in-progress and used their reactions to assist in the decisions about which pieces made the final cut. According to Doro Egelhaaf, who has been a Stunker from the beginning, the performers originally wrote the material together, but the writers now both contribute ideas and write away from rehearsals based on ideas from the Ensemble. (The song


12. In addition to the fourteen actors, ten musicians, and one director, the Stunksitzung website lists nine writers and thirty-four additional personnel in the Ensemble for the 2014 production. See The Stunksitzung website: http://www.stunksitzung.de/stunksitzung-ensemble2014.html.

13. Egelhaaf, Commentary, Stunksitzung XXL, DVD. For the perspective of two of the writers, see also Dietmar Jacobs and Moritz Netenjakob, “Das letzte Basisdemokratische Projekt
lyrics are mostly written by the band members.)\textsuperscript{14} Hans Kieseier, who has been a Stunker since 1994, adds that the Stunksitzung today is a “very professional affair.” In an interview I conducted with him in September 2008, Kieseier said, “That means that we have a pool of writers who collectively write pieces with us and who guide us.” He notes that the “physical numbers”—sketches and pieces which involve little or no dialogue and play out through the physicalization of the actors—are “of course hard to write.” In those instances, a greater use of improvisation is employed.\textsuperscript{15}

According to Schmitz, Becker, who remained a member of the Ensemble from its founding until 1995, came up with the idea of an alternative Sitzung in answer to the Spielecircus performers wondering aloud what they might do in the winter—when an outdoors-and-tent circus wouldn’t be appropriate. Wolfgang Nitschke, another original member of the Ensemble, in describing his recollections of the early years, recalls how Becker described the traditional Sitzungen as “quite terrible.” But, Becker allowed, “The structure is not bad.”\textsuperscript{16} He seems in retrospect to have been uncertain of the idea’s potential, saying of the success of the


\textsuperscript{15} Nitschke, Commentary (quoting Jürgen Becker), \textit{Stunksitzung XXL} DVD. “Ganz furchtbar… aber die Struktur ist nicht schlecht.”

first Stunksitzung, “The alternative, the leftist-radical Cologners want[ed] to schunkeln,” adding, “I would never have thought it.”

Nitschke confirms the political focus of the Stunksitzung in the early years: “At the first session [February 1984] there were fellow leftist-radical fellow student types sitting on the benches and also on the stage, and it was flesh on flesh, and today it is the same, only most of the people now who stand on the stage and who sit in the hall understand this society perfectly.”

Becker, however, seems skeptical about its impact. In answer to his own question, “Has the Stunksitzung changed Carnival?” Becker replies, “I believe one can say, ‘No.’”

Therein perhaps lies the conundrum. In one sense, their impact and presence cannot be denied. Tens of thousands pay to see the Stunksitzung live every year and tens of thousands more watch it on television. It is likely that at least one million people have seen the show live since its premiere. The band sells CDs of the music. There have been books and DVDs and

20. Bungarten estimates nearly fifty-thousand see the show live each year, which is a reasonable assumption. The venue, the E-Werk, seats about a thousand and the Ensemble performs forty-five to fifty shows each year. Metzer notes that every single performance in the first twenty-five years sold out. See Bungarten, “Einem Phänomen auf der Spur,” in Bungarten, et al., Karneval instandbesetzt, 8; and, Metzger, Karneval instandbesetzt? Politik, Protest…” in Bungarten, et al., Karneval instandbesetzt, 23. WDR began broadcasting the Stunksitzung in 1992. See Brog, Zoch, 261.
museum exhibitions, not to mention t-shirts and even seat cushions emblazoned with the red-and-black, anarchy star-and-fool’s cap, Jürgen Becker-designed logo. Other so-called alternative Sitzungen abound: the previously mentioned Röschen Sitzung and Pink Punk Pantheon and many smaller ones. Other than that of the Festkomitee, no other Cologne Carnival brand may be more recognizable. Yet despite Bungarten’s claim that the Stunksitzung “has established itself and won back many people for Carnival who for decades exhibited hostility against it,” Becker does not believe it has created change. And, indeed, Carnival does not seem to have re-written its own rules, and Cologne’s self-obsessed year-round love affair with it does not seem to have cooled. The biggest official Sitzungen will also without doubt continue to sell to overflow crowds. Tens of thousands still line the streets to shout “Strüßje!” and “Kamelle!” for the Rosenmontagszug and thousands more take parts directly in it—Dat wor et...2013 reports that the 2013 parade involved approximately thirteen-thousand participants.

But is official Carnival, in the late-Stunksitzung era, as dull and, in the words of Petra Metzer, describing the feelings of “many young Cologners” in the early eighties, as “bourgeois” as ever—as the Stunksitzung sometimes portrays it? One of the production’s writers, Dietmar

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22. See Becker, Commentary, Stunksitzung XXL, DVD.
25. Tewes and Reinarz, Dat wor et... 2013, 194.
Jacobs, when asked “What role does Carnival play in and for the Stunksitzung?”, answered, “Carnival plays a role on two levels: The Stunksitzung wants to be a fulfillment of Carnival but it also wants to resist it.” He continues, “That is, so to speak, the dichotomy, which [the Stunksitzung] straddles. That means that the official Carnival traditionally has been antagonized, although in recent years the boundaries have weakened and it is no longer so very suitable as a concept of the enemy.” Finally, he notes, “However: the Stunksitzung audiences want to have Carnival, want to sing songs, schunkeln, drink beer…” And it is in that dichotomy that Jacobs describes, where perhaps lies the answer to whether official Carnival still needs to be challenged, revived, or occupied. The boundaries have weakened. The attitudes have softened. The Stunksitzung, by thriving—by becoming arguably the most popular Sitzung amongst the multitudes of them—may not, as Becker asserts, have changed Carnival, per se. However appalling the thought may have once been to the most faithful in both camps, the official and the alternative have become de facto colleagues in the massive enterprise that is Cologne Carnival. The Stunksitzung does not damage the overall brand or the economic machine that brand represents, so why get too upset when they make fun? The relationship, now more a performance of occasional antagonism than actual hostility, is beneficial to both, making it perhaps culturally

symbiotic. The *assumption*, then, of opposition, the *performance* of antagonism, becomes fuel to both.

Pieter Spierenburg, whom I cited in the first and third chapters, has an interesting take on the secularization of Medieval cultures. His ideas, derived from Weber, are intriguing to consider within the broad context of Cologne Carnival. Spierenburg describes secularization as “a dual process” that can be observed at both “the mental level as well as at other levels of society.” He notes “a balance of tension between secularizing tendencies and their opposites,” which “increases in the influence of the clergy, or clericalization.” Carnival, then, at least in the era Spierenburg discusses, may be seen as a secular event to celebrate an element of the ecclesiastical calendar. Extending the analogy—carnivalizing it, if you will—the alternative of Cologne Carnival may be similarly read as an even more secularized event both within and without the official Carnival. Within this carnivalized framework, within the culturally Catholic milieu of Cologne, and within the Cologne and/or Cologne Carnival nation idea I have proposed, I submit that official Carnival has been so mythologized as to stand as its own simulacrum of the ecclesiastical. The Stunkers, then, in their Carnivalization of Carnival, become more than just rebels, more than just alternatives. They are apostates to the mythologized High Church equivalent of Carnival, the official. Their co-option of an official Carnival sacrament, the Sitzung, is their primary heretical action in the balance of tension between their secularizing (alternative) tendencies and the ersatz, self-appointed guardians/clergy of official Carnival. The official versus alternative dichotomy, as hinted at by some of the Stunkers quoted above, remains important to the validity of both. Taking the secularization/ecclesiastical metaphor one

carnivalized step further, the Church needs its apostates, its heretics, and (perhaps most of all) its
run-of-the-mill sinners. The Stunksitzung merrily provides sanctuary for all of them. In so doing,
it must be conceded then, that, at least in terms of the celebratory options for the Jecken, the
Stunksitzung has changed Carnival. The official fest may look and sound the same, but the
Kölner have somewhere else—an unofficial, alternative space—in which to revel. Spierenburg,
in writing about Carnival’s emergence in Europe, describes an “accommodation between
Christian doctrine and popular ritual.”29 A similar, mutual accommodation can be observed now
between the alternative and the official Carnivals of Cologne.

Becker calls Carnival a “melting pot for crazy ideas.”30 One perhaps crazy idea, proposed
and argued in this study, is that Carnival must continually move towards the more carnivalesque,
towards, if you will, the more alternative. Its utterances must ever seek the more heretical
ground, to use the ecclesiastical metaphor above. It must move towards a more Bakhtinian spirit
and must celebrate ever more its innate chthonian nature. Yet, the alternative is, as Keiseier
states, “relative.”31 The reforms of 1823 were alternative and perhaps even radical in an
ostensible attempt to return Carnival to the people (to revive it?). The forms that grew out of
those reforms are today traditions the Stunksitzung mocks and parodies—even as the Ensemble
arguably utilizes those traditions with deliberate precision and professionalism.

The Stunksitzung then, finally, in its play, its parody, its satire, and its occasional overt
sentimentality, carnivalizes the Carnival upon which it depends and in which it is now so
imbedded. It mocks the mockery and stirs a festive blend of parody and meta-parody, creating

29. Ibid., 65.
31. Kieseier, Abbott interview.
that carnivalization, that meta-Carnival, and, perhaps above all, that Bakhtinian restoration of Carnival spirit. To quote the *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* review of the 1986 production, “Occasionally even ‘real’ Carnival spirit emerge[d].” Indeed.

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