

The Politics of Cultural Heritage

An Urban Approach

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The paper addresses the performance and display of cultural heritage in context of late modern urban culture. Contemporary metropolises constitute core settings for the political and symbolic representation of cultural diversity and multiculturalism. One of the most important forms of such representation is the “ethnic” or “multi-ethnic” festival. The Carnival of Cultures in Berlin is analysed as an example and compared to the much more prominent Notting Hill Carnival. The paper concludes that “ethnic” cultural heritage has strong social and political components which should be made central in ethnological analysis.

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In his introduction to the volume “Detraditionalization” the English sociologist Paul Heelas provides a condensed overview of current research in the uses of tradition, history, and cultural heritage (Heelas 1996). He distinguishes two dominant stances in the way cultural and social studies tend to think about the forms and functions of tradition and cultural heritage in the global world of late capitalism we experience today. The *radical thesis* accentuates the erosion and decline of tradition, “the radical turn from tradition” (Giddens 1991: 175–176). Here, modernity is construed as the opposite of traditional order. Modern societies are per definition and characteristically seen as “post-traditional”. The other perspective, the *coexistence thesis* does not talk about a ceasing of traditions so much but rather stresses the simultaneity of divergent movements: Detraditionalization in this view always takes place by way of a complex process which simultaneously involves the maintenance of traditions, re-traditionalization and the construction of new traditions.

From an ethnographic point of view this approach seems to come closer to what actually

happens in European societies today. The re-writing of history, reconstructions of the past and the revitalization of traditions all over Europe go hand in hand with economic globalization and post-industrial modernization. The celebration of newly invented folk traditions as authentic, the display of regional identities and heritages by means of symbolic practices somehow related to an allegedly “common past”, the production of legitimacy through languages and practices of conservation and essentialization and the notion that “old” or “original” is an equivalent for “good” – all these strategies have been problematized and more than once been described as practices specific to contemporary societies. In public discourses and everyday language, however, what Paul Heelas calls the *radical thesis* still looms large. Conceptions of cultural heritage as belonging to a certain group of people and as unproblematically referring to a distant past are widespread. Frequently, anthropologists and ethnologists working in contemporary societies are confronted with reflexive traces and implications of cultural heritage concepts that once were

developed by disciplines like *Volkskunde* but are by now considered historic by contemporary ethnological disciplines.

Classical ethnological concepts which represented culture as overlapping with notions of group and space and which focused on a spatial articulations of cultural differences, have been abandoned by and large by ethnology and cultural anthropology – but in a variety of contexts they are readopted and obviously considered plausible and convincing. And the “bounded concept of culture” is well and alive in what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has depicted as “the cultural heritage industry”: a commodified and commercially oriented “mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past” and that produces and promotes notions “of cultural distinctiveness” and “tradition” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 7). Such revivals indicate, that concepts of culture and cultural heritage are much more than just ethnological approaches or theoretical traditions. They might better be understood as politically and symbolically institutionalized inventions and fundamental fictions of modernity. In this sense, Eriksen (1993: 148) has demonstrated how the bounded concept of culture went along well with one of the most central and “mythical” principles of modernity, that “of the integrated and bounded individual, who is presumed to be a member of ‘a culture’ who lives his or her life as a continuous, directed person“ (ibid.: 148). And Liisa Malkki recently painted a portrait of ethnological and anthropological discourses about culture that showed them to be direct reflections of the mental and cultural basis of the nation-state (1997). She referred to different symbolic constructions and metaphors – like ‘roots’, ‘father-land’, ‘motherland’, and ‘soil’ – which reflect a “metaphysical sedentarism” in scholarly and in political contexts, and convincingly demonstrate how these constructions and metaphors create a culturally coded cognitive system by means of which people categorize the surrounding social world, and divide it into ‘home’ and ‘alien’, ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’.

To us it seems quite clear that dominant notions of “cultural heritage” today can and should be analyzed as a symbolic continuation

to these older concepts. Like them, the contemporary concepts of cultural heritage must be seen as symbolic constructions which territorialize cultural differences and which play an important role in the symbolic formation of regions, nations and supranational entities like the EU.¹ But we also have to rethink the links between cultural heritage and the present. European ethnology and cultural anthropology today are faced with contradictory challenges and transformations that are constitutive for our time. Migration and new forms of mobility have created a social and cognitive field, which exemplifies the political effects and symbolic consequences of “multiple rooting”, of simultaneity of distinct social and cultural times. What we can observe today, especially in urban settings, is not “one cultural heritage”, but a multitude of “possible” cultural heritages in constant exchange and flow. In the context of current globalization and transnationalism, urban – or for that matter any – culture can’t be simply defined or understood with reference to “heritage” or “tradition” (Hannerz 1992: 218).

We therefore suggest to think about cultural heritage as the social production of the here and now, the result of symbolic and political conflicts over the presentation or representation of minority and majority groups, the outcome of symbolic negotiations referring to self-definitions of different social groups, and a political process of exclusion and inclusion which turns cultural differences into social boundaries. Cultural heritage, in this perspective, is a social and political production emerging in particular social situations in order to be able to “respond to the changing material conditions, semiotic codes, power relations, and relations among groups shaping a specific time and place” (Smith 1992: 512–513). In this sense, we argue for an understanding of cultural heritage as a provisional, historically conditioned conceptual and symbolic space, in which divergent cultural pasts and cultural differences are negotiated.

In what follows, we will show how “multi-ethnic” heritage events have acquired specific meanings in the context of contemporary transformations of urban culture, city marketing and the politics of urban space. We shall argue that contemporary European cities not only

The Carnival of Cultures as key symbol of a specific “multicultural milieu”. Float sponsored by the broadcasting station *Radio Multikulti*. Berlin May 2002. Photo: Michi Knecht.



give ample proof of the coexistence of de-, re- and neo-traditionalization, but also of the side-by-side existence of different cultures and “possible” cultural heritages, no longer exclusively or even predominantly defined as regional, local or national, but as ethnic, multi-ethnic and multicultural as well. Taking the Carnival of Cultures in Berlin as our ethnographic example, we proceed to explore how cultural heritage is construed as a marker for ethnic groups, and how, in the form of “multi-cultural abundance” it figures as an important resource in the city’s economy. The display of “multi-ethnic” cultural heritages in the streets of Berlin-Kreuzberg is shaped by strategies of commodification and politicization that both have implications for who gets involved and who gets excluded. Finally, we will try to sketch how the production and display of cultural heritage in “multi-ethnic” urban settings can be understood as a mode of social reproduction of groups as well as group relations and as a specific form of social capital.

Cultural Heritage Projects in Contemporary European Cities

Contemporary metropolises are privileged places for the study of social change. Having grown through industrialization and migration and today often serving as coordination points in increasingly globalized economic networks, they cannot possibly be symbolized as places of

unbroken continuity or authentic simplicity. Turning to the specific urban ways of displaying and promoting cultural heritage, we suggest to locate them theoretically in what Sharon Zukin has called the “new symbolic economy of cities” (see Zukin 1995), an unprecedented expansion and commodification of the “culture-generating capabilities of cities” (Scott 2000:14). The historical context for such a new cultural economy in urban centers is marked by the transformation from fordist to postfordist forms of production and consumption. Its main implications for the relationship between culture and economy include “changing consumer tastes and demands involving a general aestheticization and semioticization of marketable products” and, related to this, changing identity politics; an increase in services and goods that “trade on the basis of short- or medium-term fashion, information, and entertainment value, and on their merits as social markers” (ibid.:6) and “new possibilities for inter-city differentiation” as well as “vertical disintegration” (ibid.:7). While traditional neighbourhoods and social milieus dissolve, cities get simultaneously engaged in the deliberate creation of cultural-historical packages and marketable pastiches in which a more or less playful arrangement of historical and cultural elements is used to produce what are supposed to be attractive, pleasant and uplifting environments (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 155). This entails not only urban redevelopment projects and gentrification, but also spectacles and events



Sound system at Notting Hill Carnival, August 2002, getting prepared. Photo: Michi Knecht.

created with the intention to attract tourism, “one of the few growth industries in late capitalist countries” which relies more and more on the “marketing of distinctive cultures to bring in visitors” (Welford, 1998: 5).

The role of cultural heritage in the pervasive processes of symbolic and economic commodification is an important and substantive one and entails two dominant forms of urban heritage production: (a) local/national historical heritage; (b) ethnic heritages. The local/national heritage is represented as “history” and “past” inscribed in the architectural and spatial body of the city. It sustains and monumentalises the alleged permanence of the nation state or symbolizes the particular flair of the local. Ethnic heritages, in contrast, are always performed heritages. Staged as aesthetic phenomena and activities based on the expressive capacities of ethnic groups, this form of cultural heritage is often displayed to symbolize the coexistence of diverse cultures and the heterogeneity of the city, simultaneously emphasizing difference and constructing “otherness”. Both forms of urban cultural heritage practices work together in emphasizing the uniqueness and attractiveness of specific cities and in culturalizing social conflicts.

The last decades have seen a marked increase of public urban festivals or spectacles in which a diversity of cultural heritages or “multi-ethnic heritages” – specific musical genres and styles, dances, costumes, ethnic foods and arts, etc. – are displayed and celebrated. Multi-ethnic concoctions seem to have become a valuable asset of urban regions, promising fun, displaying the

exotic and strange, ensuring the picturesque and the colourful. These spectacles are the place, where the different and distinct populations of a city can meet and where the growing and distinct multiculturalism of a city finds an expression: “Global nomads” – businessmen, artists, intellectuals and tourists – who roam around the world, and represent the voice of infinite, pleasurable consumption, the “voice of exotic cuisine” (Hall 1994: 56) encounter migrants, their second and third generation offspring and refugees, all of whom looking for new geographical places and social localities free from exclusion and discrimination. At multiethnic festivals, migrants and “global nomads” celebrate with, or are watched by the “native” population of the cities, the people “at home” (Niedermüller 1998).

Often, “multi-ethnic” heritage festivals like the multicultural “Stadtteilkulturwochen” in the “Gallus”, a former working-class district of Frankfurt/Main (Welz 1992, 1994, 1996) start in economically depressed periods or city quarters, in which social problems are conceived by the dominant discourse as “ethnic problems” or as generated through the presence of certain ethnic groups. The display of cultural heritage then functions as an instrument in urban renewal and gentrification. As such, it is directed at harmonizing social antagonisms and at the same time at transforming those parts of the city, in which these festivals are staged, into “symbolic urban landscapes”, aestheticised for the consumer interests of old and new urban middle classes. Another important function of

urban ethnic festivals is the reproduction and presentation of differences between cultural heritages – between “our” national and “their” ethnic heritage. Recently, however, there is a second symbolic construction emerging, which is closely connected to the new economic position of culture as a primary resource for production and to a shift in the public discourse about migration and migrants. Here, “multiethnic-cultures” are fantasized as a much needed and potentially unlimited raw material, which must be put to use for the revitalization and the future of cities. In spite of local differences and regional or national peculiarities a number of general features that new “multi-ethnic” urban festivals commonly exhibit, can be detected. In her research on the representation of cultural diversity in German and American cities, Gisela Welz has shown that the genre “multi-ethnic” festival operates with a set of standardized rules or strategies, all aimed at displaying foreign cultural heritages in the mode of “staged authenticity” (Welz 1996) The genre and its organizers select forms of cultural heritage particularly well suited for display. Expressive, demonstrable and colourful forms are preferred: moreover, they need to be unambiguously assignable to particular ethnic groups. A certain style of dance such as flamenco, or a musical genre like salsa or classical Indian music is thus equated with a specific ethnic group. That is arts, musical styles and genres, handicrafts all get constructed as belonging to the timeless,

static and somehow traditional cultural heritage a certain ethnic group “has” and “brings with it”.² A further strategy of display identified by Welz is the comparability of the diverse elements brought to stage. While, on the one hand, differences between single performances or performing groups are strongly emphasized – thereby maximizing the appearance of variety and diversity – the webs of meaning and cultural practices to which these forms normally belong are all made invisible and ignored. In this way, the display of “multi-ethnic” heritages as a colourful string or sequence of varied performances is achieved. It is dependent on a perspective “from above”, Welz concludes, a viewpoint located beyond, rather than entangled in the experience of difference (cf. Welz 1996).

While the forms of display, which can be found in multicultural urban festivals, follow certain standards and genres, the motives of participants and organizers are heterogeneous and diverse. They might encompass a professional interest in the promotion of certain “ethnic” ways of dancing, music making or costumes; a wish to humanise the city and to create new ritual forms of being together and belonging; fights for recognition and demonstrations against racism, very self-conscious attempts to define “a local identity in the face of globalisation” and europeanisation, mundane economic interests or a love of spectacles, entertainment and partying (Welford 1998). But it is important to see what sets the limits to such motives and

“Our Heritage”. Ironic ensemble of “Russian heritage” packed in sacks, on a float designed by the Cultural Centre *Club Dialog*. Karneval der Kulturen Berlin, May 2002. Photo: Michi Knecht.



goals: we argue that it is precisely the genre (which privileges the display of comparable entities and distinct ethnic heritages and selects only certain “traditions” and “cultural elements” as cultural heritage, repressing or making invisible others) and its rules of commodification that to a large extent confine the interests of social movements and specific groups in their struggle for visibility.

Karneval der Kulturen – or Urban Summer Carnival in Berlin

Walking along Gneisenaustrasse in Berlin-Kreuzberg on Whitsun Sunday, both sides of the street and the surrounding areas are densely packed with people watching the parade of the *Karneval der Kulturen*. The mood along the route is relaxed and orderly. The crowd on the street today – groups of young people, visiting and watching the carnival with friends, families with prams from nearby neighbourhoods, couples of apparently mixed ethnic background, tourists – appears to be even more diverse than on a normal weekday, with maybe one major exception: people from Turkish communities don’t seem to be particularly interested in the event.³ A few spectators have put on heavy make-up or face paintings, others display certain accessories – unusual hats, rhythm instruments, a feather – as signs of their carnevalesque solidarity, but they are clearly outnumbered by people with video or photo cameras and the most common visitor quite obviously wears no signs of fancy dress at all.

The parade – called “Karawane” by its organizers – is basically made up of groups of dancers and live musicians in costumes, elaborating on a chosen theme or “*playin’ mas*” as it is called in Caribbean carnival traditions, alternating with huge floats and decorated trucks on which sound systems with DJs or live musicians are installed. Roughly speaking, the parade presents three distinguishable categories of bands and projects: The first group performs or displays all sorts of “ethnic”, sometimes also religious or regional “heritages” – for example, Anatolian fertility dances, costumes from the Peruvian Andes, Mexican Mariachi music, a Kurdish wedding, Fandango, Cumbia, Merecum-



Queen of the group *Burrokeets UK*, performing their 2002 *mas* theme “*So Dey Say*”. Notting Hill Carnival 2002. Photo: Michi Knecht.

bès and Salsa from Columbia, Voodoo rituals from Benin, a Hindu puja ceremony, Brazilian Capoeira and traditional Croatian folk music. Their organizers and sponsors cover a wide spectrum, reaching from private or corporate businesses to political or social minority organizations to professional dance, martial arts or music schools. Side by side with these, a second group of participants represents sociopolitical projects, queer initiatives, artists, theatre people and pedagogic institutions in the youth sector that identify positively and explicitly with concepts of multiculturalism,⁴ many of them publicly funded or subsidized. The third group – normally lumped together at the end of the parade – is made up of sound systems with a youth- und subcultural music orientation (Techno, Drum’n Bass, Reggae, Hip Hop, House, Djungle, Garage, Trance), sponsored by clubs, record labels or music agencies. While the parade is on, performers and audience are rather clearly divided with spectators, who might dance, clap

their hands, wave or whistle to show their appreciation, being more static and the bands moving on. But that distinction tends to collide at the end of the parade, when the sound systems draw large followings into the parade and revellers might get ecstatic and wild.

The Parade on Whitsun Sunday is the major feature of the *Karneval der Kulturen*. It is accompanied by a children's carnival one week earlier, a costume and performance contest, a three-day street fair with four open-air stages (dedicated to "Euro-Asian", "Latin-American", "Oriental" and "African" music styles and traditions), pre and post-parade parties like the "Long Night of Sound Systems", and stalls where food (everything from *Döner* to *Bratwurst*), drinks (margaritas and beer) and handicrafts are sold and where different political groups, independent ethnic associations and social movement projects inform about their work. All in all, the carnival clearly is an occasion for entertainment and fun rather than politics or protest, it is musically dominated by samba groups and other "Latin" styles (also this might be debated), more popular with the young than with other generations and still slightly less commercial than comparable public events, like the street ravers' "Love Parade" or the gay and lesbian "Christopher Street Day".⁵ For American anthropologist John Borneman, who describes the Carnival of Cultures as part of "Berlin's summer trilogy of parades", the overall atmosphere is marked by "public nudity", a "transparent exhibition of desires and political aims" and "a mixed display of sexuality and 'primitiveness'". Even though it declares to present a maximum of cultural diversity, he sees the carnival therefore as distinctly "Berlinian" (Borneman 2001: 8).

The very short history of the carnival in Berlin spans only seven years but it is already an object of contest and conflict. Several cultural and social projects associated with the alternative milieu of "old" West Berlin are lining up for the role of "inventor" or "founder". In 1996, the "Ufa-Fabrik", one of Berlin's largest and oldest collective resident communities and social-cultural experiments played an important role, but right from the start the festival was organized by "Werkstatt der Kulturen", a public-

ly funded multicultural project that describes itself as a "centre for Berlins various ethnic, religious and cultural communities" and a "culturally and politically undiscriminating platform for artists, intellectuals and independent associations".⁶

Since 1996, when the Carnival of Cultures in Berlin started as a rather small, Kreuzberg and Neukölln based community celebration, it has developed into a large urban festival, watched each year by several hundred thousand visitors, respectfully and in great detail attended to by the media, sponsored by the city as well as by local and global businesses and engulfed by broad public sympathy. But this "success story" is not specific or unique to Berlin. Rather, it is part and consequence of a remarkable expansion of carnival festivities since the 1960s (cf. Knecht 2002) that introduced a new form of summer carnival into cities in Europe, North America and Australia, cities that previously did not have any carnival tradition of their own. The new carnivals were inspired by Caribbean carnival genres and traditions that feature a number of distinct cultural performances, such as "*mas*" and "*playin' mas*".⁷ They owe a great deal to two historical processes: "First the movement of populations, both European and African, across the Atlantic";⁸ and second, the Caribbean migration to Europe, Canada and the United States since the 1950s. In the course of these movements not only populations, but also ideas, knowledge and customs "shifted across the world, mingled and hybridized".⁹ The historic trajectory of the new Caribbean inspired carnivals demonstrates this intermingling and traveling of ideas and practices. Carnival elements, that were brought to the new World by French and Spanish settlers, got picked up and reinvented by black slaves during the 19th century, made into a symbol of black liberation and then moved back to European cities with the West Indian migrants after World War II (cf. Nurse 1999). The most well known and largest of the new Caribbean inspired summer events is the Notting Hill Carnival in Kensington/West London, which shows a very strong impact of Trinidadian carnival traditions and which is celebrated annually during August bank holiday since the early 1960s (Cohen 1993, Manning



Folk Dances performed on stage at the Children's Carnival of Culture, Berlin 2002. Photo: Levent Soysal.

1990, Welford 1998, Melville 2002). Comparable carnivals were approximately at the same time founded in New York, Toronto and Miami and they have since then spread to many regions of Great Britain,¹⁰ and to other European cities.

In these context of these developments, the Berlin Carnival of Cultures is one of the most recent. It could be called a newly invented tradition after an invented tradition, because it is modelled after, or at least inspired by, the example of the Notting Hill Carnival in London. It is organized by two professional experts for the representation of cultural difference, one of them an ethnologist. Both came to the "Werkstatt der Kulturen" as trainees in a course of further education that prepared academics for jobs in the field of public relations and event management. "At the 'Werkstatt'", they state in an interview, "the idea for a carnival was already in the air. (...) We wanted to have a carnival in Berlin like the one in Notting Hill or Rio". The new carnival according to their concept was right from the beginning supposed to represent "the diversity of cultures" in Berlin. "All migrant groups should unite in a big festival". (*Der Tagesspiegel*, 2. 6. 2001: 11)

While the Carnival of Cultures is advertised and marketed primarily as a "multi-ethnic" carnival, "a unique opportunity for ethnic communities to make their respective cultures – both traditional and modern – visible to Berliners and visitors alike"¹¹ – it simultaneously declares and practices an explicit openness towards new trends and styles in youth and

minority cultures and subcultures. The potential to draw together different and often conflicting groups or positions seems to be a historical legacy of carnival as a cultural form. In cultural anthropology and folklore studies, there has been a long and rich theoretical debate on how to interpret carnival and other rituals in which authority is mocked or reversed (see, for example, Schindler 1984, Moser 1986, Hauschild 1994, Gluckman 1963, Turner 1988, da Matta 1991, Nunley 1988, van Koningsbruggen 1997, 2000, Miller 1994, Handelman 1990), as a privileged space for rebellion and change or as a – "safety valve" which ultimately always affirms and supports the power of those in power. For Cohen, "every major carnival is precariously poised between the affirmation of the established order and its rejection" (Cohen 1993:3). Herzfeld emphasizes the symbolic space that is provided by this contradictory structure: "It is here that people can explore the tension, inherent in the fact that they belong to a community, yet may not share equally in its benefits." (Herzfeld 2001: 211). Arnaud (2001: 2) is more sceptical: For him, carnival is "a place of negotiation where the positions of resistance are strategic and themselves enabled by the structures of power." Murray's advice, to refrain from positions that analyse carnival as structurally and universally determined, is plausible here (Murray 2000: 103). He agrees, that carnival generally is a site in which symbolic tensions are expressed, but sees its social impact as neither "inherently revolutionary nor repres-

sive". What the carnival means and does for different people will in significantly different ways ultimately depend on specific cultural, political and economic contexts (Murray 2000: 104) and may remain symbolically open. However, as a site of symbolic tension and problematic politics, the new carnivals seem especially well equipped to evoke concepts of multiculturalism. Notions of multiculturalism should not only be understood as harmonizing strategies but also as attempts to redefine the social question after the end of the industrial form of capitalism (see Wieviorka 1998: 112). This double function may help to explain their success. Summer carnivals may themselves be understood as events that simultaneously evoke concepts of multiculturalism, regulate and manage the complexities of urban heterogeneity (cf. Arnaud 2001), and culturalize social differences.

Multi-ethnic Heritage, the Politics of Place, and the Construction of "the Other"

To understand the meanings and functions of the Carnival of Cultures in Berlin in its political and commodified dimensions, it is necessary to re-conceptualize it in the context of what Sharon Zukin called the two main related "production systems" of the urban symbolic economy in late capitalist societies. "The production of space, with its synergy of capital investment and cultural meanings, and the production of symbols, which constructs both a currency of commercial exchange and a language of social identity." (Zukin 1995: 24). *Karneval der Kulturen* participates in the production and redefinition of urban space as well as in that of social identities. It infuses public space with new images of "multiculturalism", incorporating them into the visual representation of the city. And it partakes – together with other practices and displays of order – in the construction of a public taxonomy, that defines membership in "ethnic" or "cultural" groups in terms of characteristics that can be performed or/and commodified in order to belong. In the Carnival of Cultures, both production systems intersect.

Like many other summer carnivals, *Karneval der Kulturen* ranks high among the public per-

formances "that have injected new energy and interest into urban life" (Manning 1990: 20). The making of a place for it was framed by public discourses that remodelled not only the public image of Kreuzberg, but also that of Berlin as the new capital city. Kreuzberg, a "mythical" district (cf. Lang 1995, Lang 1998) in the shadow of the wall was until unification known as West-Berlin's laboratory for alternative and multicultural lifestyles, for a unique mix of sub-cultural opportunities and migrant cultures, but in no way as a place of interest for capital investment or politics. When the wall came down, the district suddenly found itself in the position of being very close to the new centre of the unified city. This reconfiguration of space led for a short time during the early nineties to a discourse of "symbolic gentrification" (Lang), forecasting an aesthetic uplifting and fast rising land prices. But this did not occur in any large scale until today. While intense waves of gentrification and property speculation have swept through the inner city districts of former East Berlin,¹² Kreuzberg is pretty much left to itself. With some of its former attractiveness gone, especially for the current generation of young and hip people who tend to flock to "neue Mitte", today the district is still unique in its mixture, but publicly talked about more for its social problems, high rates of unemployment and difficult school situation. In this context, the *Karneval der Kulturen* has had some significance for reconnecting Kreuzberg with images of youthfulness, dynamism and change. The broad media coverage of the carnival infused the district with pictures of a vital and abundant multiculturalism, which is applauded by politicians and admired by local and multinational business investors alike and which eclipses the district's long standing reputation as a stronghold of radical anti-capitalist politics.

But the carnival was not only used to renovate the image of Kreuzberg. From the very beginning it was also advertised – side by side with the Love Parade and the Brandenburg Gate – as one of the central brand names of the "New Berlin": For this newly developed and internationally marketable image of post-unification Berlin as "open city", "dynamic metropolis" and "fun loving capital", the Carnival of Cultures

was a real asset. When it was first performed in 1996, Berlin was struggling hard to come to terms with a shrinking budget, the de-industrialization of the East, growing social polarization and a new but as yet undefined economic role. Additional pressure emerged as reports about xenophobia, racism and people attacked or even killed in rightwing attacks especially in the outskirts of Berlin and the new *Bundesländer* reached the international public. In this situation, "Partner for Berlin", a public-private-partnership between the city council and about a hundred major business firms, could sell the Carnival of Cultures on high gloss paper and in multi-coloured print as "a four-day long spectacle (...) which contributes to diminishing ignorance and arrogance so often directed towards foreign worlds of thought and feeling" and which will "attract tourists and increase the turnover of Berlin's retail shops".¹³ The press coverage, too, has been exceedingly positive and it is almost impossible to find any critical edge. In accordance with the much hoped for image of Berlin as a tolerant and dynamic metropolis, the Carnival is described as heady mix and site of fun. While the yellow press focuses on the exotic, the picturesque and the erotic,¹⁴ daily newspapers from liberal to conservative praise the carnival as "platform for minorities", "colourful, varied, surprising",¹⁵ "a stroke of luck for the City", allowing "the new capital" to "show its friendly face",¹⁶ a proof that "living together multiculturally can be fun"¹⁷ and that the – "integration of foreign co-citizens has been successful".¹⁸

As Germany rewrites its history, representing itself no longer as a mono-ethnic national state but as an open, "multi-ethnic" organisation, all prepared and ready for Europe, the Carnival of Cultures is portrayed as something profoundly "good", potent enough to counter reports about racist attacks. The cultural heritage of "ethnic" groups is symbolized as a fountain of youth, a resource that will not run dry, but relentlessly fuel the economy. "That is what the new dynamic Berlin looks like" says the caption under a huge newspaper photograph of a black man, whose face is painted with big white strokes and who wears shell necklaces and feathers, while dancing at the Carnival of Cultures. It is ironic, but also disturbing, that comparable pictures were used

a century ago to advertise colonial exhibitions in Berlin (see Van der Heyden/Zeller 2002).

The official reading of the *Karneval der Kulturen* – promoted by the organizers and repeated in press reporting on the event – is not that it "constructs the other" but that it "reflects Berlin's migrant population".¹⁹ The mirror metaphor, often used in the public representation of foreign cultures,²⁰ goes hand in hand with a rhetoric of "excavating" hidden treasures and of "bringing to light" cultural assets that would otherwise remain forgotten in some marginal space "deep" inside the city.²¹ The organisers picture their work as a mere act of "making available" and "putting on stage" heritages, arts and traditions that always already seem to exist as bounded entities prior to their display (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, Welz 1996). This at least is the version given in the published statements. It veils the power of the genre "multicultural carnival" to define and elicit specific forms and contents of cultural heritage performances that are only produced and created in response to this call. It relegates the contemporary instruments of display, the criteria and devices employed in the process of ultimately commodifying and reifying "heritage", backstage or even makes them completely invisible. The same can be said of the dominant discourse the Carnival team utilizes in equating ethnicity, community and cultural heritage, thereby culturalising the social position of "ethnic" minorities (Baumann 1996).

But there is yet another way in which the Carnival of Cultures actively "others": Through its alliance with a broad, pedagogically oriented form of multiculturalism, that takes it for granted that social conflicts today primarily arise out of cultural difference that could simply be solved were people more tolerant – and implies, that tolerance can be taught - it helps to create a symbolic structure, in which non-compliance with the goals and activities of the carnival is marked as a problematic, uneducated or otherwise inferior position. We have already shown how on the one hand the official discourse about the *Karneval der Kulturen* highlights purportedly "authentic traditions" and heritages, but on the other hand also actively emphasizes and encourages hybrid performan-

ces and projects that actively fuse different influences to explore new styles.²² And while the carnival organisers on the one hand use an essentialising language to describe the participating groups, they on the other hand openly reject a similar essentialism when journalists criticize the “multiethnic carnival” as fake, since many or maybe even most of its sambadrummers, voodoo-dancers and kung-fu-fighters are in fact not members of “real ethnic minorities” but “real Germans”. The contradictory, but inclusive rhetoric of the organizers contributes to the public image of the carnival as very open and inviting towards all migrant groups and generally to-wards the interested public. Against this background, individuals or groups rejecting this image or refusing to participate find it hard to take up and formulate for themselves a legitimate space in the cities symbolic landscape.

The conspicuous absence of Turks in the ranks of carnival participants as well as spectators is a case in point which has itself been an issue of public debate in Berlin. Often, the staying away of Turks from the parade was explained with Turkish “values and norms” regarding shame and public appearance which supposedly had been “brought” to Germany via migration like a timeless cultural baggage. Carnival creators Anett Szabó und Brigitte Walz suggested in a published talk (*Der Tagespiegel*, 2.6.2001) that many Turks stayed at home during the carnival because they found the festivity to be “obscene” and because “they are afraid of too much naked skin” (ibid.). This discourse left little space for the social, economic and political situation of migrants or for the possibility, that to participate in the carnival might at all be experienced as an unreasonable demand. It was also totally unsuspecting of the fact, that the carnival itself occupies a specific social place, closer to the young, to lifestyle-oriented groups, and a broad multicultural milieu than to many migrant communities. But something else is apparent here: Discourses about multiculturalism are increasingly moral discourses. As such they can itself be used as a resource in social conflicts. In this perspective, the Carnival of Cultures is one of the main symbols of a morally “right” multicultural attitude that has the power to mark any un-

willingness to participate as a deficiency. It is a symbolic practice wrought with power and as such part of negotiations referring to the self-definition of different social groups and to a process of exclusion and inclusion, which turns social inequalities into moral positions and cultural differences into social boundaries.

Cultural Heritage between Commodification and Social Exclusion

“Multi-cultural” or “multi-ethnic” urban festivals such as *Karneval der Kulturen* in Berlin always create a public space that is contested and contestable, a field constituted by political, social and economic forces, subject to the play of different interest groups, institutions and actors. But how exactly political, economic and social contexts play together in the creation of such events is always historically specific. Some of the shifts which have taken place in the urban contexts of European summer carnivals in recent decades become apparent when comparing the beginnings of London’s Notting Hill Carnival in the early sixties with the start of the Berliner carnival 30 years later. Both carnivals share some common features. But there are also major differences with important implications for the meanings and usages of cultural heritage performance. The historical and political context in London during the 1960s was very different from the situation in which the Carnival started in Berlin. Today, however, the two festivals seem to be subject to comparable influences and as a consequence are becoming more similar in a number of respects.

The Carnival in Notting Hill started in a decade, which has been described as “settling down period” for Caribbean migrants in Great Britain, a period characterized by latent as well as open racism, full employment and the ferment of the “Swinging Sixties” (cf. Cohen 1993, Manning 1990). Notting Hill then was a poor, rather run down working class district with a growing West-Indian population. Abner Cohen has depicted the early Carnival years in Notting Hill as “successes of poly-ethnic diversity” in a working class neighbourhood, with solidarity and festivity reaching across colour lines, drawing people from Ukrainia, Cyprus, India,



Paraphernalia of Rastafarianism on sale at Notting Hill Carnival, 2002. Street vendor at Portobello Road. Photo: Michi Knecht.

the West Indies and other national and ethnic backgrounds together (Cohen 1982). Other sources emphasize the almost therapeutic role the import of Caribbean carnival arts to London – of the *mas* and steel bands of calypso and soca – played for the West Indian diaspora in the early years, building up a common identity and reconnecting people with the culture of their homelands (Melville 2002). Gradually during the seventies and early eighties the event not only grew larger, but also changed its nature. As black consciousness movements and Rastafarianism,²³ riots and anti-racist demonstrations found their way into the carnival, it became a more exclusive expression of black identity which attracted not only people from Notting Hill itself, but from greater London as well and later from all over Britain. The Carnival got political, sometimes violent, unpredictable, and a continuous source of conflict: not only over the meanings of being black in Britain, but also over police strategies, public safety and racist media reporting. “The Carnival broke all the rules” writes novelist Mike Phillips in retrospect about this period “(...) and just as we, the migrants, had been obliged, through the preceding decades, to come to terms with the industrialized patterns of urban life, so London had to begin coming to terms with a model which demanded a symbolic explosion of democracy in its public life. It was, perhaps, the first time I had a clear understanding that we actually possessed the potential to reshape the city (...)”

(Philipps 2001: 62). What – in the terminology of Cohen – had been started as a “local, poly-ethnic and working class event” got transformed into a “national, exclusively West-Indian and highly politicized occasion” (cf. Cohen 1982, 1993, Manning 1990). During the 80s and increasingly during the 90s the carnival got “contained” (cf. Cohen 1993: 62 ff.). Parts of its anarchic potential were eroded by increased policing, bureaucratic regulation and growing commercialization. As in Berlin, the economic aspects got ever more important. The increasing commercialisation of the Notting Hill Carnival puts questions of profit and ownership centre stage. As notions of “legitimate possession” are closely aligned with ideas about “heritage” and always need to be historically legitimated, it is not surprising, that the history of the origins of the Carnival in Notting Hill is a sensitive issue and an unresolved dispute, centring on the question whether its original roots in London are “black”, “white” or “multi-ethnic”.²⁴ As some of the political activities of the past were being replaced through acts of consume, the changed relationship of culture, economy and politics and its impact on the way people thought about and explained their inner selves, became evident. “The vendor’s stalls replace confrontation with political power as a place of important activity in the social life, while the carnival is presented as an indomitable explosion of symbols which individuals endow either with or without signification.” (Arnaud 2001: 13). The transfor-

mations of the Notting Hill Carnival in the 1980s and increasingly in the 1990s also entailed a shift in what the carnival predominantly signifies: From a representation of black identity in Britain, it was converted – albeit not uncontested – into a symbol for the presentation of multiculturalism (cf. Arnaud 2001). In this commutation, the carnival also “marks out Britain’s multicultural evolution: an unplanned process Stuart Hall has called “multicultural drift.” (Melville 2002). This reading highlights a genuine reconstruction of “the other” as a less bounded and more hybridised identity and is attributed most often to the styles and orientations that have emerged over the years around the music of the sound systems (ibid.). But this shift also points to developments in consumer styles and to questions of what can and will be sponsored and sold. Shortly after the 2002 carnival, Chris Mullard, the most recent chairman of the official Notting Hill Carnival Trust, declared: “I hope people will now see the carnival for what it is, a wonderful opportunity to project the multiculturalism that is metropolitan London, and I hope they will sign up to sponsor it and fund it fully” (*The Guardian* 27.8.2002). However, there is also a certain unbroken vitality, best exemplified by the fact that the carnival is still heavily and publicly contested. While some feel, it got “handed over to the authorities” who “are now defining how the culture is to evolve”,²⁵ others are proud of

and applaud the fact, that the carnival arts – the masquerades, costumes and music – have at last started to find official recognition in Britain’s higher arts institutions. Criticism of the selling out of the carnival is voiced by independent music groups and new styles of music are developed that put forward images of combination and mixtures of heritage that symbolize innovation and originality. At the same time, it is especially active musicians, dancers and people from the *mas* bands and sound systems who underline the existential need for a carnival compatible with business interest and a wide sponsorship in order to keep the carnival going. From the perspective of social actors in the carnival, the ways in which the event can be used have been narrowed down – and pluralized.

These developments point to a central and fundamentally contradictory situation of late capitalist societies: on the one hand, the politically motivated demand for cultural assimilation and social integration; on the other hand, the “consumer-need” for cultural diversity and ethnic cultures. This discrepancy makes the strong political and social component of “ethnic” cultural heritage apparent. Clearly, the term “ethnic” serves primarily as a means of *social* categorization. Ethnic categorization in contemporary European political and social discourse refers to culturally determined social subordination and marginality. Belonging to an ethnic group, or being classified as a member of an

Shademakers, an international active, Germany based, Carnival *Mas* Group founded by Paul McLaren, performing their 2002 theme Games Legacy at Notting Hill Carnival. Photo: Michi Knecht.



ethnic group inevitably indicates a place at the social periphery. As Edwin Wilmsen put it: „dominant groups are never ethnicities, they are in control“ (Wilmsen 1996: 4). Socially dominant groups define what cultural heritage is and how cultural heritage should be represented. As a matter of principle subordinated ethnic groups have two options in this situation. On the one hand they are not forced to participate in the cultural heritage industry, they can refuse to join urban festivals, as many Turks in Berlin do. On the other hand, the cultural heritage industry offers possibilities for self-representation and for making money. But if ethnically defined people are “using” the cultural heritage industry, they have to accept its criteria and definitions as it reflects the structuring provided by the dominant groups. This intertwining is, we argue, constitutive for the social and cultural logic of the field of cultural heritage. However, it would be a mistake to think that urban ethnic groups are helpless victims of this strategy of representation. Indeed, one of the most important changes the last decades have seen is precisely that groups defined as “ethnic minorities” have learned how to manage this situation. They get engaged in the search for and the (re)-construction of their “traditional”, “original” cultural heritage, their “roots”, because they understand the political and social potential inherent in this practice. They recognize that their “cultural heritage” can be turned into symbolic capital – maybe the most valuable capital they can command in the social arena of late capitalist societies. This is a crucial turn in the field of cultural heritage. Cultural heritage has the ability to function as a creative arena for social and political conflicts, where ethnically defined people try to turn their cultural heritage into social practice, and – by means of this practice – try to adapt to or to resist the forces of political and social discrimination.

Notes

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1 For an analysis of cultural heritage as part of official EU strategies aimed at fostering “Europeanisation through mass education and the rewriting of history” see Shore 2000: 56. The

“construction of a common cultural heritage” focuses on three dominant symbols: “cultural continuity, moral ascendancy, and ‘unity in diversity’” (Shore 2000: 28).

- 2 This practice of representation very much resembles what Gerd Baumann has described as the rules of the dominant discourse about urban ethnicity in London during the 90s: This discourse entails a reification of culture and cultural heritage, the construction of community on the basis of ethnicity and ultimately a very effective circular argument that equates “culture” and “cultural heritage” with “ethnicity” and “community” (Baumann 1996), thereby reducing anybody’s behaviour to a symptom of this equation” (ibid.: 6).
- 3 With 31% so-called foreigners in its district population (according to the official census of 2000) Kreuzberg is ethnically more diverse than Berlin as a whole. But many German cities have a more mixed population than Berlin (Frankfurt being Germany’s most international city with more than 30% of the urban population counted as non-German). In the year 2000, Berlins largest group of “legal” foreigners (128.700) is coming from Turkey; 66.400 from countries within the European Union; 61.200 from former Yugoslavia, 57.700 inhabitants from Asia, mostly Vietnam, 28.600 from Poland, 24.800 from Russia, 15.300 from Africa, 8.100 from Latin-America and 10.400 from the USA. (see *Der Tagesspiegel*, 17th of January 2001: 11).
- 4 The dominant multicultural discourse is sometimes treated with mild irony, for example by a group called the “Theatre for the Protection of the Species” performing an endangered “Swabian identity”, or in the 2001 parade, when boozing punks posed as indigenous “traditional sub-culture”, but it is never explicitly critiqued.
- 5 The Love Parade is a free for all street rave to techno music, which started in 1988. Today, it has grown into one of Europe’s largest mass events (cf. Borneman/Senders 2000). Christopher Street Day is a parade in commemoration of the Stonewall riots in Greenwich Village/New York that evolved into the gay and lesbian liberation movements. Like the Carnival of Cultures, these parades take place annually during the summer months.
- 6 See their homepage under <http://www.werkstatt-der-kulturen.de>
- 7 Mas refers to “unscripted dramatic costume”, “manifested and enacted” during the carnival times, most commonly in bands of up to several hundred participants. For an ethnographic case study of “playin’ mas” at the Notting Hill carnival, see Alleyne-Dettmars 1998.
- 8 See Carnival homepage under http://www.shu.ac.uk/schools/cs/teaching/jb2/ch_sem10.htm
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 The “UK Carnival Diary 2000” under www.ukcarnival.org.uk/

carnivalnet.org.uk/events/events-main.html lists more than 80 entries for carnivals celebrated during April and September – from the Luton International Carnival (“a traditional English-style parade” which has grown “spectacularly into what the Arts Council calls “the most multi-cultural event in this country”” (ibid.) to Charivari Day in Folkestone, from Croydon Mela to the “Manchester International Caribbean Carnival”.

- 11 See official Carnival-homepage <http://karneval-berlin.de/html/english.html>
- 12 Especially the districts Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg and Friedrichshain, which possessed many run down buildings from the years of rapid industrial expansion in Berlin (1890 to 1920) as well as a reputation as centers for alternative lifestyles and artistic experiments, have been the targets of inner city development (aesthetization, historization, gentrification) in the last years.
- 13 See: Third issue of the Journal “99/01 – Der Jahrhundertsschritt”, Berlin, March 2000. Ed. by “Beauftragte des Senats von Berlin für Ausstellungen und Veranstaltungen um das Jahr 2000”; supported by “Partners for Berlin”.
- 14 “Swaying Hips, Sunburn, Sweat”, BZ, 20.5.1997.
- 15 “Bunt, abwechslungsreich und überraschend“, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 5.6.2001.
- 16 *Berliner Kurier*, 5.6.2001.
- 17 Barbara John, patroness of the event and Berlin’s Commissioner for Foreigner’s Affairs. (Ausländerbeauftragte), quoted by the German press agency DPA, May 5th, 1998.
- 18 Former speaker of the Green Party and Minister of Justice in Berlin, Wolfgang Wiegand, quoted in *Jungle World*, 17.6.1998.
- 19 “Berlins international summer Carnival (...) is a reflection of the city’s cultural diversity (...) [and] also a unique opportunity for ethnic communities to make their respective cultures – both traditional and modern – visible to Berliners and visitors alike.” See homepage of the Carnival of Cultures, available at <http://www.karneval-berlin.de/html/english.html>
- 20 For a thorough analysis of the functions of this metaphor in the work of public folklorists in Germany and the United States of America see Welz (1996).
- 21 A self portrayal published as a leaflet by “Werkstatt der Kulturen”, states: “Die Werkstatt der Kulturen will die verborgenen Schätze der internationalen Künstlerszene heben und den kulturellen Reichtum Berlins erlebbar machen. (...) Berlin bietet dafür ein unerschöpfliches Reservoir.“
- 22 An example of the latter performances are the sound systems on large trucks, which often are accompanied by crowds of followers raving, jumping and dancing for hours. Sound systems are originally West-Indian discos, operated with huge amplifiers and record players by a number of DJs and “toasters”, poetry artists that improvise

- lyrics and social critique (cf. Cohen 1993, 36–37; 99). They developed predominantly around Afro-Caribbean and other black music styles and create sounds in which improvisation, remix, dialog with the audience and social or political critique are essential. For a number of cultural analysts, sound systems are therefore important social spaces for the creation of a “genuine multicultural” (Melville 2002) and for the propagation of an identity politics that undermines dominant notions of totality and authenticity (cf. Arnaud 2001). At the Berliner carnival, sound systems are usually placed at the end of the parade, but the organizers hold them to be “very important for the credibility of the carnival” (Annett Szabó, personal communication).
- 23 A black political and religious movement, that got momentum during the 1930s enthronement of Ras Tafari as Haile Selassie in Ethiopia and was greatly popularised, especially in the West Indian diaspora, during the 1970s by Bob Marley.
 - 24 The conflicts about history are documented in Sherwood 1999, esp. p. 204–215, Cohen 1993: 77 ff., Melville 2002, Nunley 1988 and in city magazines and dailies.
 - 25 Interview with Claire Holder, former chairperson of the Notting Hill Carnival Trust, 29.08.2002.

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