

19. Displaying the Other: The Masking of Identity

Convenors:

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As visually impressive objects and "exotic" collector's items masks have always held special attraction – a fascination matched by anthropology's interest in these artifacts. As objectified demarcations of the boundaries between the self and the "Other" – Gods, supernatural beings, ancestors – masks and their associated rituals play a vital role in the cultural management of identity and alterity. On the one hand highly visible and intended for display, masks at the same time conceal privileged knowledge and thus establish social control: The crossing of boundaries only takes place in ritually defined circumstances.

Intensified culture contact added further dimensions to the function of masks: Portrayals of the colonizers in staged performances emphasize ethnic boundaries and serve to reinterpret colonial history; increasing commodification of cultural icons has turned masks into tourist art and saleable markers of ethnicity, while today the related processes of resacralization reflect the attempt on the part of indigenous communities to reformulate cultural distance. Moreover, emancipated indigenous audiences have begun to question their representation in anthropological publications and museum contexts, and the display of masks in the latter has especially become a matter of contention. This conflict is not only indicative of political strategies to regain control of their cultural heritage, but also of power struggles within societies that have become increasingly pluralistic.

The workshop presents case studies and theoretically informed analyses of the management of identity and alterity through the ritual use of masks and/or the cultural politics surrounding their production, ownership, and display in a globalized world.

Iroquois "False Faces" and the Politics of Identity

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"False Face" masks of carved and painted wood, usually with horse-tail hair and tin eye plates, form an integral part of the ceremonial and medical practices of the Iroquois "Longhouse Religion." Worn by men during Longhouse ceremonies and curing rites, they represent a class of supernatural forest dwellers who taught human beings how to cure diseases and who require special treatment, in particular sacrificial offerings of tobacco.

Even though the ethnographic record clearly indicates that not all masks were considered powerful and sacred, and False Faces have also been made explicitly for sale to outsiders for more than a hundred years, the presence of these artifacts in museums and private collections has today become a contentious issue in cultural politics. The debate over repatriation and the right to ownership and representation not only reflects power struggles within and between Iroquois communities in the United States and Canada and varying claims to "authenticity" of Iroquois culture, but is also illustrative of Iroquois attempts to (re)define Native identity in the face of mainstream America.

Sacred Goes Secular: Tourist Art among the Piaroa of Venezuela

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The *warime* is the most important ritual of the Piaroa of Venezuela. It epitomizes the central aspects of their culture and focuses on the relationship between humans and animals. The spirits of those animals which are their most important prey – tapir, monkey, peccari, and the wild bee – are invited to the village. They are represented in the form of masks, created by adult males under the guidance of a shaman. The process of mask making is surrounded by secrecy, and the women are not allowed to acquire any knowledge of these secrets under penalty of death. For the same reason, only a few anthropologists have received permission to see the ritual.

Today some Piaroas produce these masks for sale to tourists in the art-shops of Puerto Ayacucho, the capital of the Amazon State. The different opinions among the Piaroa about this new kind of business, which is touching on different aspects of Piaroa culture, particularly the role of shamanism, are expressed in the varying definitions of "authenticity" of their masks. This paper will discuss the transformation of a sacred ritual object into a secular commodity as an expression of an indigenous culture caught between two worlds.

From Bearded Monsters to Beaded Masks: Indians, *mestizos*, and Indian *mestizo*-Gods

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Huichol and Cora masks reflect the complexities of face-to-face interaction between Indians and non-Indians in contemporary Mexico. In traditional ritual Huichol and Cora masked dancers are opposed to unmasked wearers of yellow face-paint. The former represent savage beings of the coastal plains, associated with primordial growth, the uninitiated dead and, above all, non-Indians (*mestizos*); the designs painted on unmasked faces represent the reflection of the rising sun and visions obtained during pilgrimage to the eastern deserts. Since the ritual masks with their "ugly" and bearded faces are treated as extremely sacred, their development into a booming commercial craft is highly surprising.

Instead of the tangled hair and beards of the ritual masks, those made for the folk-art market display colorful beadwork with easily recognizable Huichol "symbols," such as deer, eagle, and peyote, satisfying urban tourists' demand for Indian spirituality. The decorative arrangement of these religious emblems is meaningless in ritual terms and therefore safe for the market. The danger associated with traditional masks is neutralized by the replacement of chaotic hairiness by decontextualized "traditional" designs. Mistaking them for artwork inspired by shaman's face paintings, tourists eagerly acquire those powerless versions of what in Huichol religion are the *mestizos'* deities.

When the Other is Chinese: The Case of Barong Landung-Giant Puppets in Bali

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Barong Landung figures are by far the most important anthropomorphic characters within the category of Barong. Apart from their songs and dialogues, these giant puppets make symbolic statements on the levels of masks, rituals, and myths.

However, encompassing semantic commonalities only emerge when one reduces the complexity of the field of narratives to the two most important strands: While the black man represents a Hindu from India or Bali, the white woman stands for a Chinese Buddhist, and as a married couple, these two *together* reflect the cultural and religious roots from which Hindu Balinese culture emerged. In this manner, the alien is incorporated into the historico-cultural past of the Balinese and is shown as being related to the latter – thus giving rise to a certain ambivalence: Since many Balinese regard the ethnic Chinese in Bali as elder siblings, not only deference toward this ethnic minority is demanded by Barong Landung, but avoidance of intermarriage is also justified on the basis of this assumed kinship. Against this background, it will be argued that ritual actors define their social relationship with the Chinese minority in Bali through the medium of Barong Landung.

Becoming the Other: Gender Reversals in Croatian Carnival and Wedding Customs
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The ritual adoption of the "face" of the opposite sex is an act of crossing everyday boundaries, the construction of an upside-down world. The mask encompasses the multiplicity of gender identities, one of which is hidden and temporarily suppressed, while the other is symbolically constructed and overemphasized. The aim of this presentation is to discuss, on the basis of data gathered through fieldwork and archival records, the means by which the image of the opposite sex is created in customs: masks, dress, mimicry, manner of walking, behavior, performing of activities traditionally attributed to the opposite sex, etc. The moments within clearly defined frames of wedding and carnival rituals which allow for the appearance of such masks, as well as the criteria for deciding which members of a community can assume the role of the other sex will also be discussed. Finally, the meanings and functions of ritual gender reversal change along with shifts in the context in which they occur: The folk-customs stage presentation at the International Folklore Festival in Zagreb, in which cross-dressed performers took part, will serve as an example of the way in which masks themselves, as well as their roles, change.

