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Passing the Mask On. Research in Dialogue from Carnevale to Carnevale at Satriano di Lucania, Italy

La transmisión de la máscara. Investigación sobre el diálogo del carnaval al carnaval en Satriano di Lucania, Italia

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Resumen
Este trabajo analiza los diálogos intergeneracionales y glocales en torno a las representaciones del Carnaval en el pequeño pueblo del sur de Italia, Satriano di Lucania, a partir de 2014, cuando una "comunidad patrimonial" local revitalizó una máscara histórica tras haberse inspirado en la obra de un artista de video contemporáneo. Con un enfoque particular en las tensiones y dilemas derivados de la persistencia de un sistema artístico/cultural bastante sectario y jerárquico, se analizan, por un lado, las relaciones entre la "comunidad patrimonial" que en 2014 reinventó las representaciones del Carnaval del pueblo, sus "mayores" y sus posibles "descendientes". Por otro lado, se examina cómo las relaciones etnográficas y las narraciones antropológicas sobre los Carnavales de los pueblos en Italia han cambiado debido a los diferentes "saberes situados" incorporados por las distintas generaciones, tanto entre los intérpretes de la tradición como entre los investigadores.

Abstract
This contribution discusses inter-generational and glocal dialogues revolving around Carnival performances in the southern Italian village of Satriano di Lucania starting in 2014, when a local “heritage community” revitalized a historical mask after having been inspired by the work of a contemporary video artist. With a special focus on the frictions and dilemmas deriving from the lingering of a quite sectarian and hierarchical art/culture system, it addresses, on the one hand, the relationships among the local “heritage community” that in 2014 reinvented the village Carnival performances, its “elders” and its possible “descendants”. On the other hand, it discusses how ethnographic relationships and anthropological narratives of village Carnivals in Italy have been changing due to the varying “situated knowledges” that are incorporated by different generations both among the interpreters of tradition and among researchers.

Palabras clave
sistema artístico cultural ? diálogo intergeneracional ? carnaval ? poéticas y políticas del patrimonio

Keywords
art culture system ? intergenerational dialogue ? carnival ? heritage poetics and politics

Introduction

With a view to highlight the role that they play in the processes of transformation of expressive

cultures such as those taking the stage during the performance of “traditional” masks within non-urban localities, this paper is focused on the multi-sited inter-generational, inter-disciplinary, and inter-class encounters and exchanges that occur alongside such performances, whether they may be explicitly integrated in the performances’ narratives or not. It aims to do so by focusing on the relationships among and within “heritage communities”, researchers in different disciplines, and other more or less temporary “travel companions” that have taken interest and part in the path that the historical Carnival mask of the “Rumita” has been taking in the village of Satriano di Lucania (Potenza, Italy) (1) (https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn1) since the early 2010s (2) (https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn2). The year 2014, in particular, marks the first public appearance of a new Carnival performance that engages in unprecedented ways the Rumita mask, which covers the person head-to-knee in ivy branches, with the effect of making them acquire the semblance of a “walking tree” (see image 1).



Image 1. The Rumita, Satriano di Lucania, 2020,
Ph. Francesca Zito published on Satriano’s Carnival’s official online portal:
https://www.carnevaledisatriano.it/visite-guidate/ (last visited on May 10 2025).

With particular attention to the frictions and dilemmas deriving from the persistence of a rather sectarian and hierarchical “art-culture system” (Clifford 1988: 224), this paper addresses the relationships among the local “heritage community” that “reinvented” the village Carnival performance in the early 2010’s, its “elders” and current “descendants”, and some of the “travel companions” that have since then been taking part in the processes interesting the movements of the Rumita, in Satriano and beyond. It also refers to how not only the Carnivals themselves, but also the nature of ethnographic relationships and anthropological narratives of village Carnivals have been changing (see Ballacchino and Broccolini 2017). This is due, at least in part, to changing disciplinary paradigms and the “situated knowledges” (Haraway 1988) that are embodied not only by the more or less stable “performance partners” to Satriano’s Rumita but also by different generations of anthropologists.

1. Research in Action

As it is clearly expressed in the series of exchanges and interviews conducted by Pilar Panero García between 2020 and 2023 (Panero 2023), the pre-2014 developments of Satriano di Lucania's masks have been thoroughly researched and lucidly analyzed from an ethnohistorical perspective since the 1970's by the Italian anthropologist Vincenzo Spera, who also explored other festive events in Basilicata and other Italian regions. He was the first, in 1982, to give account of the context and the aspect of Satriano's Rumita in a published anthropological work (Spera 1982: 118-124). The word Rumita (or, better, "Rumit'", as its name is most often pronounced locally) is a local vernacular contraction of the Italian word for hermit ("eremita"). Spera refers the origin of the name of this mask back to the Middle Ages, when various Catholic hermitages linked to the cult of Saint Onuphrius were attested in this region: both popular and official iconography depict these hermits living in caves and wearing only ivy branches (Spera 2017: 168).

However, no explicit memory of this origin has been documented in Satriano since the late 1970's, when Spera himself began researching on the contemporary developments of and narratives on this mask. He describes the Rumita in the early 1980's, walking silently the streets of Satriano, alone or accompanied by a "helper", on the early morning of the last Sunday of the Carnival calendar. It "resemb[les] a wandering bush", a "symbolic materialization of the spirit of nature" (idem: 123) that quietly approaches the village doors demanding an offer ("a compensation", usually given in the form of food) to homeowners by softly grasping their doors with the "frùsce", a slim and long wooden stick on which upper end some butcher's-broom (ruscus aculeatus) branches are tied together in a tuft (ibidem).

Spera's publications have clearly been representing a crucial reference on the "ethno-history" (Panero 2023) of Carnivals in Basilicata for the researchers that follow his footsteps. It has to be noted, however, that they also were one of the first sources of inspiration and information for the organizers of later Carnivals themselves –i.e., what many of us today, borrowing from a juridical concept introduced in 2005 by the Council of Europe, refer to as "heritage communities" (COE 2005)–, both in Satriano and elsewhere. Vincenzo Spera himself testimonies of the way that one of his early 1980s publications (Spera 1981/1982), which focused on Carnival performances in Tricarico (Matera, Italy) was locally "used as a kind of plot for the reactivation of the opening ceremonial of the carnival cycle" (Spera 2017: 175).
The same author may well be one of the first among the most relevant "travel companions" in the path that the Rumita has been taking since his 1982, when his work started being available, among others, to Satriano's readers. Ferdinando Mirizzi, who often, especially in their early careers, crossed Spera's scholarly and research path in Basilicata, writes of how those who reinvented the role of the Rumita in Satriano's Carnival were familiar with his publication on the village masks and of how in Satriano his scholarly work accounted for an authoritative source on the symbolic and historical depth of their expressive culture tradition (Mirizzi 2017: 237).

In 2014, when the once scarce, lone and silent figure of the Rumita, started being engaged in a progressively tumultuous collective «march» through the small southern Italian village during the last Sunday afternoon of the Carnival calendar, Spera did not cease to accompany the process. His words were in fact crucial in counteracting a "conservative" reaction from part of the local administration, whose majority was intending to emanate a regulation on how the "typical" masks of the village's Carnival should look and behave. Rocco Perrone (b. 1983), the main spokesperson for Satriano's heritage community that has since then been in charge of organizing the Carnival (one may refer to him as one of its "charismatic leaders"), was then also the leader of the political opposition in the village council.
He called on Spera's own words during a speech at a council meeting as a way to argue for their right to cultural creativity. Not only did Perrone cite Spera's publications in his speech, but he also quoted a private email exchange with the scholar where Spera sided with him on this political battle, arguing as follows:

"Popular culture has always maintained wide margins of creative freedom, alongside ample margins of conservatism. From the (historical and contextual) compromise of these two tendencies comes what we

loosely refer to as ‘tradition’. If the local council, or anyone else, really wants to help keep Satriano’s Carnival alive, it must simply encourage its free expression and support it with prudent measures and, in any case, refrain from interfering” (Spera, cit. in Mirizzi 2017: 237).

2. The Rumita’s Fame and Fortune

However, what did happen in 2014 to spark such a debate? What happened was the result of a process that had started a couple of years earlier, when Michelangelo Frammartino (b. 1968), a video artist based in Milan, decided to produce the sound and video installation titled Alberi(Trees), where the Rumita was the main protagonist (3) (https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn3). In 2011, with a general vision of the project already in mind, Frammartino travelled to the South of Italy (his parents were both born in Calabria) looking to become acquainted with historical cultural performances that were inspired by life in the woods. In Basilicata, he heard about the Rumita, and visited Satriano so as to see it in action. That is when he met Rocco Perrone who, worried that no one might “spontaneously” wear that mask on that year’s Carnival, called on his friends and family to see that the mask –which had until then (and at least since the 1980s earthquake, which had a catastrophic impact on the region, as Spera documented in his publications) been taken into minor consideration in the village –did appear during the artist’s visit. The small group of people called to action by Perrone –which included his own sister, Antonella, and his childhood friends Mara Camera and Massimo Cavallo– was the first seed of what would come to be, from 2014 onwards, the main “heritage community” taking charge of organizing the Carnival in Satriano, composed of a handful of Satriano’s 1980s class.

In 2012, Frammartino did indeed choose to base his project on the Rumita and the audiovisual installation that he created in 2013 was destined to a vast success within the contemporary art system: in 2013, it was even screened at Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The evident appreciation that such a recognized and prestigious arena for the “high arts” gave to the expressive potential of the mask then became a lingering inspiration to Rocco and fellows, who started considering and discussing their options towards a creative and re-engaging “reuse” of the mask back in Satriano. In those years, the “Al Parco” association, of which Rocco Perrone was then the president, first took on the responsibility to organize the local Carnival festivities, which it still holds, today under the direction of Massimo Cavallo. In 2012, the group started organizing a series of activities especially focused on the Rumita, and this has been resulting, first of all, in the mask acquiring a heightened and renewed value as a component of the expressive cultural history of Satriano among the villagers. This process of revitalization will also be based on the explicit addition of a new symbolic layer to the mask, corresponding to the recent “ecological turn”: the young heritage community will call first on the Rumita and, later, on Satriano’s Carnival as a whole to represent an “ecological” event, where, to this day, a special attention is given to its being an “environmentally sustainable” one.




Images 2 and 3. Reusable cups distributed during the 2025 edition of Satriano’s Carnival, Matera, 2025.

Taken by author.

The first activities organized around the Rumita in Satriano, such as the «incontro di avvicinamento" ("provisional meeting") that occasioned my very first visit to Satriano, in June, 2013, engaged partners (most of whom belonging to the same generation of Rocco and friends) that in different ways, localities and measures, promoted environmentally sustainable practices (see Ferracuti 2017). This aspect of Satriano's recent process of heritage-(re)making lasts to this day, when, during the 2025 edition of the Carnival, the organizers started distributing customized recyclable cups for wine drinking (see images 2 and 3) –another steady feature of Carnival in the village–, which replaced the "unlabeled" ones that had been circulating during the previous editions. This way, the organizers are actively distributing the ecological «brand» of Satriano's Carnival among the everyday lives of most of those who come to the village from outside so as to participate in the Carnival.

The image printed on the cup was created by Nicoletto D'Imperio, alias Nicozazo, a graphic artist of the same age group as Rocco and fellows who is based in Lauria (Potenza, Italy), a village located at ca. 90 km south-southeast from Satriano, who has long been another constant "travel companion" to the local group. A testimony of it is not only the constant presence of his stand at each edition of Satriano's Carnival, where he sells his original graphic arts products (based on Basilicata's and southern Italy's cultural and political history) (4) (https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn4). He participated in the very birth and distribution of the Rumita's "ecological fairytale" by creating the characters for the graphic novel for children titled Il Rumit. La favola ecologica nel Parco Nazionale dell' Appennino Lucano(D'Imperio – Perrone 2014), where, with the texts by Rocco Perrone, the Rumita itself gives environmental sustainability tips to children. In October, 2014, he also took part, together with the Rumita itself, in a segment of the long walk that Satriano's heritage community took towards Matera, when they covered the distance of ca. 140 km. on foot so as to reach the city on the occasion of the visit of the jury that would later award to it the title of European capital of culture for 2019 (see image 4), and claim the cultural presence of "rural Basilicata". In Perrone's own words to the jury at their arrival in Matera: "We have decided to go on a cultural pilgrimage, a collective sacrifice to testify that rural Basilicata is alive and wants to meet this challenge together with Matera and the people of Matera" (see the text of the entire speech in Ferracuti 2016: 103). The same graphic artist has also been producing original images that the organizers use to advertise and inform, both online and through flyers and posters, about Satriano's Carnival events (see image 5).





Image 4. The flyer advertising the initiative.
https://www.melandronews.it/2014/09/08/da-satriano-in-cammino-per-matera-dall1-al-7-ottobre-156-km-per-matera2019/.
Image 5. Nicozazo's original illustration for Satriano's Carnival 2025 edition.

3. The Warehouse

The Foresta che Cammina(“The Walking Forest”), which for most outsiders to the village has almost come to be a metonym of Satriano’s Carnival as a whole, gives the name to the most evident result of the process of revitalization of Satriano’s “walking tree” that was locally sparked by Frammartino’s project, and was born on the same year as the publication of the graphic novel. It consists of the inclusion, within the Carnival parade that flows through the village in the afternoon and the evening of the last Sunday of the Carnival season, of a numerically consistent group of persons (ideally 131, one for each of Basilicata’s municipalities) wearing the Rumita mask. Similarly to what happened in preparation for Frammartino’s production, then, the once solitary figure of the Rumita was “multiplied” and the group of organizers started to not only need to ensure that the village could count on a sufficient number of bodies to give it life on that day, but also to take the time for that number of masks to be ready to be worn at the same time. So as to achieve the first goal, the call to “become Rumita for one day” started being advertised through the social media (https://www.facebook.com/carnevaledisatriano/) and the web pages of the association, which later became a full-fledged internet portal (https://www.carnevaledisatriano.it/).

Since then, the second challenge entails a long period of preparation during the month preceding the last Sunday of the Carnival season. On the occasion of the preparations of the first Walking Forest, the hosts of my research in Satriano gave me the opportunity to join them in the work. At that time, I was working on the region’s heritage movements thanks to a research scholarship awarded to be me by the University of Basilicata (2012-2014) and this proved to be an outstanding opportunity to witness the process by which a group of friends became “a heritage community of practice”. This is how I also became part of their research process, even if, in Satriano, I am known to “traditionally” wear the Quaresima(Lent) “female” mask, which not only allows me to move more freely than the Rumita through the Carnival events, but it also better allows me to address the dynamically ambivalent positioning both assigned and incorporated by a single female anthropologist within the research field. The masks and events that populate Satriano during the Carnival season are not in fact at all restricted to the Rumita and its variants (see the above cited Carnival’s online portal together with Spera 1982, Ferracuti 2017 and Crovato – Ferracuti 2025, among others), and they too are significant sites for the expression of cultural creativity and the exercise of social reflexivity, but this is (maybe) another story.

Back to the Foresta che Cammina, the need to prepare in advance a large number of Rumita “costumes” so as to give the first “Walking Forest” required the setting up (in a garage made available by Michele Salvia, the manager of a gas station not far from the village, who was also born in the early 1980s) of a “cantiere” (warehouse) where the masks could be built and stored during the month preceding the event. In this space, the group’s work was characterized by shared rules (very often constructed on the fly) and objectives. The group was quite homogeneous in terms of age but heterogeneous in terms of gender, “poetics”, habits, religious, literary, musical, and political inclinations. This small community (composed, in 2014, of Rocco Perrone, Massimo Cavallo, Emanuele and Davide Sileo, Felice Lapertosa, Lella Roberto, Massimo Muro, and Mara and Rosangela Camera, all born in the early 1980s) organized itself in a manner reminiscent of that of a “band” (as defined by anthropological manuals): an organization characterized by open membership (meaning that members can leave at any time and for various reasons, while others can freely join) and a flexible leadership model (meaning that different individuals impose themselves as leaders on the basis of their demonstration of skills or qualities useful for a specific objective). In line with this organizational model, the “warehouse” group gradually and spontaneously identified three main working sub-groups among which each member could migrate but tended to choose one (based on skills, affinities, or practicality): “the hunters”; “the tailors”, and “the communicators”.

The first were responsible to search the woods for ivy, harvest it and transport it to the warehouse. The “tailors” were responsible for assembling the masks by tightening butcher’s-broom branches to the

wooden stick that would constitute the frùsceand by covering with ivy branches the iron wire skeleton that allowed the Rumita to maintain an upright position and thus be more easily transportable and less prone to damage. Finally, “the communicators” were in charge of distributing the news of the birth of the Foresta che Camminaand ensuring that a sufficient number of persons would come to Satriano so as to take part in it under the guise of the Rumita and give it life. Their ability has been fully proven by the amazingly wide distribution of its “ecological fairytale”, which through the years has been participated in, documented, interpreted, commented by a variety of “outsiders”, and especially by professional journalists and photographers. Rocco Perrone and fellows been treasuring, keeping track of, and contributing to distributing on their official internet portal those publications with an anthropological perspective that are focused on Satriano’s Carnival (5) (https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn5). Here they also publish a constantly updated press review where at the moment the latest entry reports of the appearance of a photographic series on the Rumita by Michela Balboni e Federico Borella in the Danish journal Politiken(6) (https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn6).

The first versions of the metal wire skeleton that were used to support the Rumita masks were assembled by the two “elders” that kept the closest dialogue with the young heritage community, both born at the turn of the 1950s: Donato Perrone, “The Professor”, and Carmine Pascale, “The Miller”. Donato, Rocco Perrone’s uncle, had been one of the high school teachers of many locals, has been and still is one of the most engaged “keepers of tradition” in Satriano, and has been leading for decades the animated group of the “Urs” (that of “the Bear” is another historical mask in Satriano; see Spera 1982 and image 5, published here) during the Carnival. Carmine, of whom we are mourning the early, unexpected passing, in May, 2024, was, till the very end, a tireless and passionate local historian and collector who also accompanied with generosity my own research in Satriano. Both of them had also been engaged in the realization of Frammartino’s project, which also required the construction of several Rumita masks in advance.

Their role, however, was in no way merely that of providing «technical support» or passing down practical know-how: they were the main discussion partners during the process of creation of the new variant of the Rumita, both supporting the youth in their symbolic reappropriation of the mask and making sure that its historical value was not “lost in translation” and its dealing was interpreted as it should be: a “serious game”, one around which fellow villagers pay a special attention due to a shared sense of ownership. Any innovations in the form and behavior of these masks meet the “scrutiny” and agency of each villager: on their approval, whether explicit or silent, expressed in practices or murmured, direct or mediated, depends not necessarily their “success”, but the durability of the transformations and their very access to tradition. Internally, the historical masks are shared, participated emblems and witnesses to the temporal depth of the village itself, at the same time vehicle and confirmation of its cohesion and survival; with visitors, they are its ambassadors and the means of their engagement in the challenge to maintain its social and cultural life dynamic in the face of its worrying depopulation rates.

For about a month (February 2014), working mainly as one of the tailors – with the occasional role of communicator (“the anthropologist”) in the presence of the media (7) (https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn7), I was testimony to ‘the hunters’ mixed fortunes in harvesting ivy shoots around the village, the long days spent at the warehouse evaluating and experimenting with materials and techniques in constant negotiation with the two experienced “elders” on the margins of innovation. This process led to the emergence of a community born on the basis of a new, daily shared practice that stimulated the unprogrammed exchange of narratives. A kind of quiet, extended, and patient relationship among persons and with materiality that Massimo Muro, as he was coming to the warehouse as a “hunter” one afternoon to deliver butcher’s-broom branches to the “tailors”, compared to that that could be experienced by those tending together in the farmhouse courtyard to the cobbing

of the corn brought to them from the family field. These unprecedented activities, which bestowed an unprecedented quality upon time and the relationships that it contained, also required the community, ecological fairytale aside, to devise a “collaborative” relationship with nature, in view of the desired “return” and availability, the following year, of the ivy necessary to replicate the event.

Today, when a younger generation accompanies the activities of the first heritage community in the organization of the Waking Forest, the same experiences and preoccupations are condensed in the space of “the lair” (“il covo”). This is the way that Michelangelo Potenza (class 2000) and Antonio Pascale (class 2002), who are currently among the most active younger “mask makers” refer to the space that has replaced the garage hosting “the warehouse”. Closer to the village center, the lair is established a couple of months before the Carnival performances in the empty locals of a dismissed indoor marketplace that be reached on foot from there. Here, the younger generation has been developing new techniques for the preparation of the skeleton for the Rumita and exchanging ideas concerning the development of the performance with those who come to visit, whether from Satriano or elsewhere, often accompanied by a glass of local red wine and the music of spontaneous live “concerts” for accordion, voice, and tambourine.

4. Rumita for a Day

The conversations that one may be present to in “the cove”, or during the meetings that the organizers periodically host elsewhere in Satriano after Carnival so as to share ideas with fellow villagers on the ways of cultural creativity as it manifests itself during each edition, testimony as to how the “game” remains a serious one. As a way of example, I refer to a conversation I had a few days ago in Potenza (May, 2025) with one of the members of Satriano’s generation of those born at the turn of the 2000’s. He expressed his worries that Satriano’s Foresta che camminamay be losing the character that it had in its first years, when its members tended to try and preserve at least in part some of the silent and “hieratic” character of the Rumita documented by Spera.



Image 6. A “Rumita spontaneo” is awarded a prize in 2014, in the company of some of the members of the first heritage community for the Foresta che cammina (from left to right): Felice Lapertosa, Massimo

Cavallo, Antonio Langone, Rocco Perrone, Emanuele Sileo. Satriano di Lucania (taken by Francesca Zito).

During the 2025 edition of Satriano's Carnival, which was the first in which I took part not under the guise of a Quaresima, but under that of one of the "walking trees" marching through the village, I shared with Francesca Zito a similar feeling, to which she was the first to give voice to. The quiet and solemn atmosphere that we had experienced under similar circumstances in the past was distant memory compared to what we were living. Francesca Zito is a professional photographer (author of the images 1, 6, 7, and 8 that are published here), who also works in the tourism industry with an ethical, socially and environmentally sustainable approach. She is another of the most long-lasting "travel companions" of the event. I met her for the first time in 2014, in the immediate vigil of the first edition of the Walking Forest, when I was helping Rocco Perrone and fellows "dressing up" the first group of "Rumita for a day" ever to give body to the performance in Satriano. We were in "Bosco Spera", at the village outskirts, where the march of the walking trees still begins to this day. She was taking pictures while waiting to participate in it and we shared an experience that at that time led me to write of how spontaneously solemn the moment was for all participants. One of them even referred to the moment when they were "turned" into the Rumita by those who helped them to put on its ivy-covered skeleton as a "rite of passage" (see Ferracuti 2017: 57). The "visitors" to the event who were about to give body to the performance spontaneously waited for the moment in silence and it was only when the march had reached about a half of its path through the village that they joined in the Carnival parade collective chaos sparkled with music and wine.

During the 2025's edition, when Francesca and I re-encountered each other on the same spot eleven years later, the "Rumita for a day" waiting to descend into the village were everything but quiet and solemn, so much that Rocco Perrone needed to group them and deliver a message so as to recall them to the depth and seriousness of the "role" that they were about to play. Using a carefully constructed vocabulary that conjoined the language of a guide to yoga meditation with that of anthropological literature, he first invited those present to close their eyes, breath slowly, and focus on their "third eye", and then framed the performance in terms of an homage to our ancestors and a gift to our descendants, thus calming the group, acquiring their silence, and "rooting" them back to the context of a "serious game".



Image 7. A group of “Rumita for a day” waiting to participate in the Foresta che cammina. Bosco Spera, Satriano di Lucania, March 2, 2025 (taken by Francesca Zito).



Image 8. A shot of the Foresta che cammina marching through the village. Since 2014, the Carnival parade is headed by a chariot guided by a member of Compagnia la Varroccia (Pignola, Potenza, Italy), which

organizes tours of the region on horseback as well as concerts and other events focused on the regional expressive cultures.
On the left, Mimmo Albano, one of the members La Varroccia.
Satriano di Lucania, March 2, 2025 (taken by Francesca Zito).

Apparently, Satriano's performance eleven years later is not only attracting the kind of persons that I had written of in terms of "orphans of rituality" (Ferracuti 2017: 55), who consciously and explicitly shared similar poetics and politics to those of the local heritage community (Ibidem), but also ones looking for leisure activities via a kind of tourism akin to that lucidly addressed by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in his volume Destination Culture(1998). Within this framework, Rocco Perrone's speech to the 2025 participants is a trace of the difference that can be made, locally, by the planting (however so discreet as to risk to remain undetected) of similar seeds of "culturally informed" behaviors with a view to cultural performances as a tool for and social reflexivity and regeneration.

As noted above, since the beginning, and now traditionally (for the past ten years, which means that most of the 2000's generation of villagers "grew up" with the Foresta che cammina), the most recent variant of Satriano's "walking tree" has been given body not only by fellow villagers but by anyone who wants to answer the call: to "become Rumita for a day" which is published online every year by its organizers. Unlike what has since 2014 come to be termed the "spontaneous" Rumita", which in appearance and behavior more closely follows in the footsteps of its ancestor described by Spera, this Rumita does not move solitary or accompanied by a helper but as an element of a much larger and compact group. This variant of the Rumita (see image 7) is integrated –together with the Quaresima and the Bear– in the Sunday carnival "parade" (see image 8) that moves in the early afternoon from the Bosco Spera, a small wooded area on the southern edge of the village.

This more recent tradition still coexists with what has come to be called, by distinction, the "spontaneous" Rumita. The spontaneous Rumita still vists the village (early in the morning of the last Sunday of Carnival) asking for an offer in silence, alone or accompanied by a helper. In 2014, however, this figure, more "aligned" in appearance, context and behavior with the one documented by Spera, started a parallel life, distinct from that of its "multiplied" variant, and with a view to mark this distinction, the Carnival organizers have "patrimonialized" it by establishing a yearly award be assigned each year to the "spontaneous" mask most voted by a "popular jury" (see image 6).

In the meantime, as noted above, the Foresta che cammina's fame became so widespread that most outsiders seem to have eyes just for it. Moreover, its growing exuberance and its role in the Carnival festivities acquired a central space among the preoccupations of both the organizers and their "travel companions". After the 2024 edition, Emanuele Sileo, one of the members of the 2014's heritage community, gave voice to a protest that has been shared by other villagers, who petition (both online and during in-persons formal and meetings) for the Foresta che camminanot to "invade" Satriano's Carnival as a whole, and that each of the villagers' freedom to interpret it be safeguarded. A similar "reminder", this time strictly concerning the Foresta che cammina, was given in February this year, in the vigil of its 2025 edition, by Massimo Cavallo, echoing the half-mouthed complaints of some of the villagers. In welcoming the representatives of one of the most recent "travel companions" to the performance, a theater Company based in northern Italy (Campsirago, Colle Brianza, Lecco), he reminded them: "Ai satrianesi non piace essere comandati!" ("Satriano's people don't like to be commanded"). The company had participated in the performance for the first time in 2024, causing a bit of a stir due to the difficulty to articulate a "double direction" of the event, which tempted me to reflect back (Crovato and Ferracuti 2025) on the ever-ambiguous, frictions-ridden, and mostly left implicit cohabitation between the domain of the so-called "high art" (and of art historians) and that of the so-called "popular arts" (and of anthropologists).

The Foresta che cammina, in sum, is by now "historically" a multi-sited, heterogeneous magma in movement especially characterized 1) by a special "attraction" of and attention given by its participants to the

performative aspects of the event itself and 2) by the animated, long-lasting, and passionate dialogue among the interpreters of various forms of expressive cultures (from photography, to graphic arts, to music, and most recently to theater…) that traverse it and contribute to give form to each of its editions. And even though such interpreters, who walk alongside Satriano's Carnival, are often based elsewhere (if not also geographically, at least in the sense of their social class, cultural references, aesthetics…), no matter how "distant" from Satriano and each other, they are almost universally united by a "rebel" streak towards the current art/culture system. A context, in sum, that does not cease to represent a fruitful challenge to anthropological interpretation, both as one tries to "describe" it and as one tries to recalibrate the discipline's own traditions in its very light.

Notes

1. As of today, Satriano di Lucania counts 2,317 residents. Source: amministrazionicomunali.it: https://www.amministrazionicomunali.it/basilicata/satriano-di-lucania (last visited on April 9, 2025).

2. This paper is based on a research process that started in 2012 and involved periods of fieldwork in Satriano – during the organization and realization of a number of editions of the Carnival performances, on other festive occasions (such as the high summer celebrations in honor of Saint Rocco, the patron Saint of Satriano), and during "non-festive" periods. The research also entailed following its protagonists elsewhere, especially on the occasion of the participation of Rocco Perrone and fellows to the September pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of the Madonna di Viggiano(Potenza, Italy). The research process has also been characterized by a continued dialogue online with its protagonists, and it may now count on the occasions for new encounters and dialogues that the Università della Basilicata's partnership with the MASKSproject provides (see https://unveilingthemasks.uva.es/it/home-it/).

3. See an extract of the film here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3mHktvCMPg.

4. See his work here: https://www.facebook.com/Kaluraartepopolare/.

5. The texts are published here: https://www.carnevaledisatriano.it/testi-di-antropologia-sul-carnevale-di-satriano/.

6. You may read the press review here:https://www.carnevaledisatriano.it/category/rassegna-stampa/.

7. The local media visited the village during the preparation of the 2014 of Satriano's Carnival and the television broadcast TRM covered live its developments during the last Saturday and Sunday, see here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDKmMDfCg24.

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