

Fasnacht and the social life of the city

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The social life of the *Daig* was, and remains, bound up with the institutions of the city: the guilds, which continue to exist as social corporations; the societies and associations for culture, science and charity; the churches; and, above all, the Fasnacht, the carnival of Basel. The Basel Fasnacht, which begins at four o'clock in the morning on the Monday after Ash Wednesday with the *Morgestraich*, when the lights of the city are extinguished and the cliques march through the streets with lanterns, fifes and drums, is the most important popular festival of the city and was inscribed by UNESCO on the list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity in 2017.¹

The Fasnacht is organised by cliques, associations of fifers and drummers who prepare their costumes, their lanterns and their satirical themes for months. Some cliques are old and associated with particular social milieus. Because members of the old families have long participated in certain cliques, the Fasnacht is one of the occasions on which the social networks of the city are renewed. The Fasnacht also has a satirical dimension: the lanterns and the verses of the *Schnitzelbängg*, the satirical songs performed in the restaurants and cellars, mock the politicians, the bankers, the pharmaceutical companies and the notables of the city. For three days, the city laughs at itself and its elites.

The Fasnacht illustrates a feature of Basel's social life that is relevant to its economic culture: the combination of hierarchy and equality. The *Daig* is an elite, but it participates in the popular festivals of the city, masked and anonymous, alongside the rest of the population. The masks of the Fasnacht, which hide the identity of the wearer, allow a temporary suspension of social distinctions. The elite that accepts to be mocked once a year, and that participates in the mockery, maintains a legitimacy that a more distant elite would lose.

1 Notes

1. On the Basel Fasnacht (beginning with the Morgestraich on the Monday after Ash Wednesday) and its inscription on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2017, see the publications of the Fasnachts-Comité. To be verified. ↩

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