

I. Aesthetics, Biographies, and Imaginaries of the Mask

Making/Unmaking, and Reusing. Cultural Creativity of the Masks

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ABSTRACT

Traditional craftsmanship, like other kinds of knowledge, know-how and technical skills, is one of the areas of cultural heritage whose importance and density of meaning has long been recognised. Heritage-making processes usually revolve around this domain and the creative and symbolic dimensions tend to be defined in relation to the divergent local and global dimensions. In Italy, mask making is not always recognized as a craft practice. Rather, the knowledge and techniques used in making masks tend to be counted among cultural practices and expressions, the result of individual craftsmanship and the cultural memory of the communities involved in masquerades. This paper aims to critically analyse some processes related to the artefacts produced or packaged during the winter masking rites investigated in the Italian region of Basilicata. These masks originate from technical skills learnt, embodied, and often informally transmitted, while also being enriched by artistic contributions, contaminations, and innovations. On the one hand, I will describe the masks with their "cultural biographies" and materiality, in addition to their symbolic meanings and their functions expressed in time and ritual space. On the other hand, the mask-makers will emerge, who draw heavily on local traditions, available techniques and materials, and the "knowledge of the hand" learned from scratch or handed down over generations. The "making," "unmaking," and "reusing" thus become a metaphor for the production of masks. Positioning themselves between continuity and change, mask makers, like "bricoleurs," draw on tradition in a creative way, confirming, transforming, and evoking it.

KEYWORDS

Masks; mask-makers; creativity; crafts; bricolage.

Introduction

In the 1990s, Italian artist Enrico Baj (1982), a great supporter of Alfred Jarry's 'Pataphysics[1] and an experimenter with new techniques and stylistic solutions that made extensive use of collage and assemblages using a wide variety of materials, focused his attention on a series of works called "Tribal Masks," which consisted of using discarded materials, assembled to create masks with mainly ironic, grotesque meanings and bright colours. Leaving to one side critical reservations of a semantic nature regarding the name adopted for the cycle of works, which reflects the methodical cultural appropriation that characterised part of 20th century Western contemporary art, Baj experimented with techniques, materials and models that we commonly find today in the creation of masks.

'Pataphysics[2] originated as a means of radical expression, inspired by François Rabelais' grotesque realism, which aimed to overturn the syntax of things, drawing attention to the exceptional, the particular, and the tangible. In the same way, in the creation and packaging of artifacts, the mask makers' attitude to recycling and reuse, the combinatory and unpredictable exercise of bricolage, intertwined with the traditional repertoire, contribute to determining a multifaceted and indefinable scenario of great individual and collective creativity.

Emblem of otherness, irony, the subversion of reality, the destruction of clichés, and the reversal of roles, as in the curious creations dear to 'Pataphysics, masks are capable of arousing wonder, disgust, and sometimes dissonance, producing reversals of direction and unexpected, non-linear symbolic meanings that lie outside the usual cultural models. In their conception and creation, as well as in the act of wearing them, and in the broader practice of disguise, which at a superficial glance might appear to be mere manual and performative operations, they have always expressed the human capacities for adaptation, change, and social and cultural (re)organization.

As a part of the research and documentation activities carried out within the European project MASKS,[3] I had the opportunity to investigate some masks worn during local winter rites that take place in small villages in the inner and rural areas of the Italian region of Basilicata. The fieldwork was carried out between 2024 and 2026 following a multisite ethnographic approach.[4] We should mention that the selection of mask-makers and techniques to be documented was made easier by previous studies conducted in the same areas by scholars and researchers, including anthropologists, based in some cases on ethnographic fieldwork, to which may be added the Unibas team's in-depth knowledge of these areas and the careful, long-term development of networks and relationships with local stakeholders, including event organisers and mask-makers.[5]

Many masking experiences, as Ferdinando Mirizzi (2016, 40), an authoritative expert on masking rituals in southern Italy, reminds us, are nothing more than "continuous reworking of widely disseminated models, which over time end up producing multiple variations within a complex narrative plot." These are always significant events for the definition of local cultures, which refer to "elements of a universal nature that respond to the same functions in the specificity of different contextual variations"; and they lend themselves to being incessantly "reshaped in their modes of execution and meanings to meet the contemporary needs of the protagonists of the ceremonies." Studies and research carried out in Basilicata over the past few decades demonstrate that local masks have come to be seen as a symbol of identity in the modern era; they also bear witness to the transformations and reinvention that these masked traditions have undergone over the course of history and in the face of changing economic and socio-cultural contexts (Mirizzi 2016).

Regarding this, Vincenzo Padiglione (2016) has clearly emphasized the value of masks in today's world, looking to the future, and to what manual and creative production represents in a changed local and global scenario, sometimes considered devoid of cultural horizons and meanings that are recognizable and shareable. As he writes:

> As ritual devices, masks guided, celebrated, and made the most difficult transitions in life conceivable. Today, they help us navigate complexity and see ourselves differently. They provide visual words to indicate suspended worlds, embodied deviations, announced revolts, possible deviations from the reality principle. A redundancy of hybrid beings which, we must not forget, are the basic elements of evolutionary mutations and therefore the most capable of allowing us to imagine the Future. (Padiglione 2016, 31)

The "ironic and tragic otherness" (Padiglione 2017) that inhabited traditional masquerades, such as those of Italy, has seemed, to some observers, to have abandoned contemporary rituals. However, according to Padiglione (2017, 124), it has "taken refuge elsewhere," in the interstices and marginal spaces of experimentation, such as those in which the mask-makers we met in Basilicata function, and in which they attempt to (re)activate that "social magic thanks to which not only does one become something else, but this different identity is imposed on the public" (2017, 124). In this sense, in most masquerades, and the rituals of Basilicata are no exception, masks contribute "to constructing the real world," while alluding to other possible worlds; since at the same time "the place of the mask is that of ambiguity, metamorphosis and transformation" (Bargna 2004, 144).

We know that masks should be observed above all through the practice of masking, understood as "a dynamic place marked by the ambiguity and reversibility of putting on and taking off (…) an action that can be performed in many ways and using different objects, often very far removed from the stereotype of the face mask" (Bargna 2004, 146). The identity of the mask cannot be established by limiting oneself, for example, to the analysis of the facial element or the costume worn, taken separately or isolated from the context of action, since "masks consist of masquerade" (Bargna 2004, 147). The protagonists of masquerades consequently recognise a certain ceremonial significance in their disguises, a ritual ethos, especially in relation to those actions that transform them into the desired otherness (Padiglione 2017).

It is not my intention to submit these masks observed during ethnography in Basilicata to a comparative or structuralist analysis, in order to highlight similarities and differences, or to emphasize the main cultural, ritual, and symbolic meanings and the semantic and aesthetic fields involved. However, the perspective I will adopt to observe the ways in which and tactics with which masks are created, worn, performed, and the contexts in which masquerades are produced, will be one drawn mainly from ethnography of material culture and critical and applied anthropology of heritage, with an approach to the study of masks and mask-makers which, in a broad sense, we might describe as "phenomenological." Given the consolidated symbolic structures of meaning and cultural horizons of sense, already extensively investigated for the masking practices of Basilicata, and continuing the reflections I have published elsewhere (Santoro 2025), in this article I will try to focus my attention specifically on a number of tangible aspects, so to speak, that pertain to the creative, productive, and artisanal moments of mask making. On the one hand, I will describe the masks with their respective biographies and in their materiality, without losing sight of certain underlying symbolic meanings and the functions that are expressed in ritual time and space. On the other hand, the figures of the mask-makers will emerge, who, like modern bricoleurs (Lévi-Strauss 2015; Favole 2009, 2010), draw heavily on local traditions, available techniques and materials, and the knowledge of the hand (Angioni, 1986; Sennett 2008; Ingold 2010) learned from scratch or handed down over generations. They operate retrospectively, combining, reorganizing, and intentionally adapting the pre-existing set of available and concrete elements, sometimes but not always finished. They are also capable of interweaving these traditional repertoires with innovative additions; they imagine original ones and invent new ones to create masks that will acquire a cultural biography (Kopytoff, 1986) over time, becoming a recognized fragment of local memory, of the traditions of masking that have been experienced and historicized.

In agreement with Adriano Favole, I would add that the forms of creativity highlighted in this paper do not seem to originate simply from the complex relationship between tradition and contemporaneity, nor are they limited to mere bricolage, as defined by Claude

Lévi-Strauss (1982). Rather, they will be analysed as dynamics of an articulated and dense process "arising from encounters, relationships, situations of coexistence or cohabitation, and even from the impact between different cultures and cultural styles." (Favole 2009, 23)

Furthermore, with regard to materiality, following Tim Ingold's reflections and endeavouring to apply them to the world of mask creation, we can regard making as

> a practice of weaving, in which practitioners bind their own pathways or lines of becoming into the texture of material flows comprising the lifeworld. Rather than reading creativity 'backwards', from a finished object to an initial intention in the mind of an agent, this entails reading it forwards, in an ongoing generative movement that is at once itinerant, improvisatory and rhythmic. (Ingold 2010, 91)

In other words, Ingold (2010, 92) argues that it is only by overturning the usual model, which assigns importance to objects and materiality, that we can focus our attention on the processes of formation rather than their final products, on the flows and transformations of materials rather than the states of matter. In any manual or craft practice, "preconceived forms are almost never imposed on inert matter," but rather "interventions are made in the force fields and currents of the material in which the forms are generated." So, my focus will therefore be on objects (the masks), considered as dense and polysemic devices, and starting from their conscious and creative makers within their respective contexts of production and use.

The knowledge of the hand

An anthropological perspective on the analysis of material culture could be based on a series of assumptions, such as those outlined by Mario Turci (2009, 27), according to which "the ethnographic substance of objects can be traced in their biography and, through the study of this, it is possible to probe the thoughts they contain". First of all, objects must be considered to be "prostheses of the body" and to "participate in the perception of reality and its consequent existence in the world," to quote the theories of Jean Paul Warnier (2005). Furthermore, it must be assumed that each object under consideration has a "prehistory (its production) and a history (its use)," and may experience "entry into a phase of obsolescence that will result in its exit from everyday life and possible entry into a new life (museum, heritage)" (Turci 2009, 27). Therefore, it can only be the "immaterial dimension of material culture that is the substantial point of interest of an ethnography which, although indebted to ergology and the history of technology, identifies the human nature of objects in the biographical content of things" (*Ibid.*, 27). All objects, including masks, can be traced back to specific socio-cultural contexts, which define their presence, but they are also capable of evocative functions and biographical density. Engraved in things and objects, Turci writes, we find "our individual presence and, as such, it cannot be assimilated to the processes of historical evidence but rather to those of testimonial evidence." (*Ibid*., 28)

Starting in the 1960s, in the field of material culture theories, Fabio Dei writes: "the combined influence of Marxism and cultural technology pushes anthropological attention to focus on work, matter, and 'things'" (Dei 2016, 446). Above all, objects resulting

from artisanal production processes seem to incorporate "technical knowledge, forms of hand-eye-mind coordination and collective cooperation, language, and memory—the very foundations of human evolution, which is entirely based on 'coming to terms with matter'" (*Ibid.*, 446). However, a different category of objects, serial objects, which are the "fruit of industrial production—and, consequently, the majority of those that populate modern living environments" (*Ibid*., 446)—are inexplicably excluded from anthropological interest. As Appadurai (1986) and Kopytoff (1986) argue, when studying objects and things, whether handmade or mass-produced, it is also essential to be open to ethnographic analysis of the market and consumption. This would be an ethnography of material culture that becomes an ethnography of consumption, but which is nevertheless capable of capturing the practices of object production "from the point of view of the agents involved and the changing contexts in which they are situated," Fabio Dei (2016, 446) writes, since

> if most of the objects that populate contemporary everyday worlds have been produced as commodities and have circulated at least once as commodities, their analysis can only be based on a rethinking of this concept; on the construction of a more complex relationship between the production system, forms of circulation and value regimes, processes of "singularization" (as Kopytoff calls them), "meanings" and subjectivity. (Dei 2016, 446)

Tim Ingold (2010) once again focuses on the importance of subjectivity and creative agency, arguing that we can consider artisans, like artists, as "itinerant travellers" who "make their way through the landscape of activities like walkers through the landscape, carrying on with their work as they go about their lives." It is in this sort of "forward movement" that we identify the "creativity of work." That is:

> Reading creativity "forward" means focusing not on abduction but on improvisation [...]. Improvising means following the paths of the world as they open up, rather than retrieving a chain of connections, from an end point to a starting point, on a path already travelled. (Ingod 2010, 97)

In the dual dimension of analysis proposed, on the one hand, we find material culture (Warnier 2005), such as handcrafted cultural objects, with their respective modes of transmission of know-how, which oscillates between acceptance and rejection of cultural innovations, in addition to any influences determined by the needs of local economic and tourist development. On the other hand, there are the subjects, in our case the mask-makers, other stakeholders, and the wider heritage communities.

Even in the specific field of masks, both materiality and the study of the body are important, since skills and manual dexterity are mainly embodied, and the notions and "skills acquired in doing" are skilfully "stored in the body's memory" (Angioni, Da Re 2003, 28), together with the tools that constitute its extension (Warnier 2005).

The body becomes the measure, the limit, the main tool of production and creativity. It is the device that gives meaning to the mask when it is worn, performed and acted.

This focus on the materiality of masks, which is part of a recognised and renewed interdisciplinary interest in the world of objects, is intended to be the starting point for a broader reflection on human creativity, without forgetting its numerous cultural implications and social relationships. I very much agree that masks make certain relationships visible, as Carlo Severi reminds us when he writes about the ritual dance that every young Iatmul[6] must perform for his mother's brother:

> We may conclude from all this that, in order for plastic representations—masks or other images—to become the props of a name, it is necessary not only that their form [...] be conventionalized, but also that the context in which they are used be ritually defined so that these representations are rendered clearly distinct from other, more familiar images that are less charged with meaning. (Severi 2015, 78)

Finally, there are other, so to speak, immaterial aspects that should not be overlooked, such as the relevant role of sociality inherent in craftsmanship, networks of relationships, contexts of production and use, and spaces for sharing that are built around it. Added to these are the complex dynamics determined by certain unprecedented and innovative scenarios in which we often find ourselves operating in the contemporary world. It is clear that the bricoleur-artisan, although accustomed to thinking with his hands (Sennet 2008), is capable of developing interest and agency in relation to the processes of orientation of local cultural, creative, and productive policies. In this regard, recent interesting experiences, documented around the masking practices in Basilicata, can be an emblematic example: strategic innovations in techniques and materials; social uses of tradition in an economic-tourism dimension; organization of promotion and communication initiatives using AI and new technologies; artification of masks; commodification of cultural memory through the invention of ephemeral objects or souvenirs inspired by masks. As Mirizzi (2021, 15) writes, from the beginning of the 21st century onwards, those same ritual forms that had appeared and been documented only two decades earlier as "in a state of inexorable decline" seem to have "re-emerged," within and as a result of processes of heritage-making, still ongoing, "aimed at actions and projects based on a sense of belonging and the enhancement of everything that was conceived as specific and exclusive to one's own context of life and relationships."

Masks of Basilicata

Since the 1950s, the availability of a good amount of literature and documentation, both locally produced and academic, has provided a fairly clear picture of the production of masks used in some Basilicata villages during different ritual and festive contexts. Moreover, thanks to several more recent anthropological research studies based on a well-established, long-term ethnographic relationship, over the years it has been possible to investigate in depth the masks of the region in the different contexts in which they are produced, packaged and used. In Italy in general, and in Basilicata specifically, these masking rituals are chiefly connected with the Carnival festivities and other so-called "winter rites." It is in the period between Epiphany and Shrove Tuesday that numerous zoo-, phyto- and anthropomorphic masks, accompanied by the sound of cowbells and the lighting of fires, all of which once had ritual significance, make their appearance in the streets, evoking a distant time and a world that no longer exists, "thus making relevant what is deeply irrelevant in the customs, gestures, and behaviours of the Lucanian people in the present." (Mirizzi 2021, 11)

The anthropologically interesting aspect here is the contemporaneity of these rituals, which are characterized by the production and the use or re-use of traditional masks. During present-day ritual practices these masks of Carnival ceremonials and traditional masquerades are re-actualized, re-signified, and re-functionalised in forms that are

almost always more organized and structured when contrasted with the improvisation that characterized them in the past (Mirizzi 2021). Sometimes they take on a different symbolic value for the heritage communities or for the new generations, such as for people who have decided not to emigrate or for those who have returned to live in their villages after experiences in other places and have been trying to discover a connection to their villages of origin. Furthermore, it is very important to look at the contextual dynamics and the processes of adaptation, transformation and patrimonialisation that characterize the individual Carnivals and masquerades, considered and investigated in their uniqueness and diversity, besides the hypothetical common traits that could be highlighted, as I have already stated.

Each ceremonial needs to be studied in its specificity, with a readiness to identify and reconstruct its history and to detect the differences, rather than the similarities, when it is compared to others that are apparently similar. Resemblances should not be automatically referred to presumed, but not proven and often invented, common origins. Each masquerade has its own specific characteristics, resulting from different traditions and "biographies," and contains recognisable symbolic elements of various origins, with elements that are similar to those found in other masquerades, but are always adapted to specific social and cultural situations in the contemporary dimension (Clemente 2016). Thus, each mask and masquerade ritual find its meaning within specific local histories, in which personal experiences and creative contributions converge. Contexts change, and so do masks, which perform their functions at a social level.

Contemporary Lucanian[7] Carnivals, which refer to a supposed local tradition, distant in time and more or less historically founded, are largely the result of processes of "re-traditionalization" based on multiple forms of relearning local masking traditions. These links between memory, present, and future also function as a prerequisite for such traditions, "as social practices in a not-too-distant past," to re-emerge and acquire meaning in the present as "cultural heritage" (Mirizzi 2016, 35). "Carnival is Carnival in the here and now," argues Sandra Ferracuti.

> It consists of an occasion that is at once creative and reflective, celebratory and critical of the status quo. On this level, the relevance of the mask (its "vitality") lies in its contemporary interpretations and uses and runs along the lines of activities that testify to the way in which cultural creativity, by reworking it, conveys tradition, symbolic support for the vitality and cohesion (dynamic and dialectical) of society itself. (Ferracuti 2016, 62)

The craft of mask-making is not recognized as an artisanal practice in Basilicata.[8] However, the knowledge and techniques used in making masks can undoubtedly be counted among cultural practices and expressions, the result of individual craftsmanship and the local memory of the communities involved in masquerades. Furthermore, masks are interesting as artifacts, both because they represent forms of artistic thought and because, unlike other objects, they are almost never destined for obsolescence and for leaving the horizon of everyday life; rather, as we shall see, they continue to have a practical function, or an affective and memorial meaning, in the context of contemporary masquerades.

The masks and techniques observed, given that there are currently no structured craft organisations that revolve around mask production, are significant because they involve different techniques and use materials that have the potential to represent the creativity of the kinds of local knowledge, expertise and know-how that are widely recognised in the context in which the masquerades take place. These masks are currently used for socio-

cultural performances and are an expression of gender balance and of communication between generations. Most are made of "sustainable" materials that do not compromise the human-environment or human-animal relationships, because they reflect the environmental sensitivity of the new generations of mask-makers. There are also masks that recall traditional shapes and characteristics, although these are artistically revisited. Other masks are the product of technical and craft skills for which the possibility of entrepreneurial development for commercial and tourism purposes is foreseen. This last category usually receives more attention from local stakeholders.

Lucanian mask-makers are often active members of local heritage communities and themselves wear the masks they make. At other times they create masks for others and do not wear them but sell them, reproducing them in original and imaginative forms that are more suited to being marketed than to being worn. This is the case, for example, with the mask-inspired souvenirs that have recently begun to appear at events devoted to masquerades in Basilicata. Let us not forget that the current practices and policies for promoting the masks of Basilicata, as is the case in other geographical contexts and for other masking rituals, are part of the so-called heritage-making processes.

As I have pointed out elsewhere (Santoro 2023), both handcrafted artifacts and technical skills learned, incorporated, and usually informally transmitted refer to specific territorial contexts. They are capable of placing themselves at the centre of dynamics that redefine local identities, in ways that can even be problematic, since they have become the subject of heritage processes and interact with economic and tourist dynamics, with popular culture, and with interesting and innovative museographic experiences. Heritage is cultural memory; it has to do with places, as well as with practices, knowledge, expressions, representations, traditions, and territorial identity. In other words: territory as a territory that remembers.

The mask is certainly a product of human creativity, requiring considerable manual, artisanal, and/or artistic skills. It is closely connected to a specific context and to the cultural memory of communities. But it is, above all, a technology for the construction of identity, "a device for the production of reality and, as such, falls within the realm of 'technique', understood on the one hand as a prosthesis and extroversion of the body and, on the other, as an agent of anthropopoietic introversion" (Bargna 2004, 143). Finally, when dealing with the craftsmanship of masks, it is entirely appropriate, as we shall see, to consider the informal modes of transfer of knowledge, practice, and technical know-how, since this is chiefly embodied and acted knowledge, bodily memory, connected both to the transmission of implicit and abstract notions and to the oral memory of mask-makers (Angioni, Da Re 2003, 28). We also include here the symbolic aspects linked to the different stages of work (Angioni 1986) and the tools and raw materials used in production.

It is well understood that the repertoire of Lucanian masks is not limited to the most ancient, time-honoured, and lived-in models, that is, to those thought of as traditional local masks. In the parades currently held in various villages in Basilicata, there will be people wearing other types of costumes. In addition to masks that are, so to speak, hybrid, i.e., freely inspired by historical forms, there are original ones, which are an expression of the creativity of individuals and groups. Finally, there are ones inspired by literary, cinematographic, and television productions (Ferracuti 2016).

In the following pages, I will discuss two case studies in which I have identified a particular creative ability on the part of mask-makers, as well as a more or less conscious desire to play in original ways with local masking traditions. The images and reflections I will present will move repeatedly from one mask to another, crossing the respective masking

rituals, the festive events in which they are currently included, and the practices, meanings, knowledge, and know-how embodied in them. The reasons for choosing these cases spring from an in-depth knowledge of masking rituals and from personal involvement over the years with the respective heritage communities. Finally, the description of the craftsmanship and the materiality of the artefacts will highlight the agency both of the material itself and of the mask-makers who act through them, while demonstrating how production practices are closely linked to the processes of heritage making taking place within their contexts of use.



Biographies of masks and mask-makers

In the polyphony of masks that characterize the winter rites of Basilicata, it is thanks to the mask-makers that knowledge, skills and know-how are able to oscillate creatively between tradition, innovation, invention and (re)use. I have already emphasized the striking feature that in this region there are no artisans working in special workshops to produce masks; rather, those who create them are members of the heritage communities, local people who participate in and give life to ceremonial rituals.[9] And yet these mask-makers, like recognised artisans, strike me as custodians of knowledge passed down orally, techniques of the body and hand learned within the family, or through other networks of relationships, as well as sometimes at work and during leisure time. The number of makers active in each village in which masks have been documented is highly variable.

Lucanian masks are made of a wide range of materials, including paper, ivy, wood, iron wire, metallic and textiles materials, straw, coloured fabric, plastic and metal string, recycled and natural elements. The techniques used by local makers range from papier-mâché to tailoring and sewing, but most masks are constructed using bricolage techniques employing different natural and recycled materials, as was the case in the combinatorial and unpredictable practice of 'Pataphysics. Several research studies have shown that each masquerade finds its meaning within its particular local story, in which personal experiences and specific creative contributions, individual or collective, act and converge in the constantly changing contexts in which people continue to live and perform their functions at a social level.

The techniques documented in Basilicata have chiefly concerned masks that are constructed and packaged ad hoc for use in local Carnivals. More rarely, they are produced to be sold. These masks are often assembled and made shortly before the festival concerned, using artefacts and materials already in the possession of the participants who need to wear them. In other cases, we observe an operation that we can once again define as the bricolage of fabrics, garments, hats, scarves, boots and other objects and sound-producing elements that are part of a family's heritage and are passed down from generation to generation with great care, because they are regarded as objects of affection freighted with memories.

As Mirizzi writes regarding the memory capacity of objects:

> the more Carnival is based on archaic and outdated elements, the more it is an expression of contemporary life and reflects the need for participation and dialogue, for the enhancement of local resources, experiences and knowledge, for the imagination of possible lives drawing on one's own history and cultural tradition, for encounters with other individuals and groups with whom one can share the same type of imagination. (Mirizzi 2016, 45)

For example, the masks of the Tricarico[10] Carnival are a good example of bricolage and the re-use of elements, often items that belong to the same people who wear them and who have inherited them from their families or via other life trajectories. During the fieldwork, we often found ourselves documenting the biographies of masks and of specific accessories, such as hats or scarves that had belonged to grandparents and parents or siblings. An example would be the mask hat worn by Francesco Santangelo, known as Ciccio, the president of the "Pro Loco" association that organizes the Tricarico Carnival, who recounted for us the significance of the coloured ribbons decorating the hat, which brought back memories of his childhood and of widespread material poverty.[11]

These are objects of affection which carry with them a wealth of feelings, emotions and sensations, contributing to the value of the mask and to the intimate meaning of masquerading. It is no coincidence that the ritual moment of dressing is significant. Masquerading for the parade in Tricarico thus functions as a kind of commemorative occasion: on the one hand it recalls an individual history with family memories, while on the other it involves participation in a shared collective tradition. More than this, the possession of biographical objects is certainly a tangible sign of belonging. (Figure 1)



Fig. 1. Dressing the *Vacca* mask for the Tricarico Carnival. Photo credits RVM.



Fig. 2. Holy card of Saint Anthony the Abbot on the *Vacca* mask in Tricarico. Photo credits RVM.

Similar points can be made about another important aspect: the links between masquerades and popular devotion. This is always the case for the Tricarico Carnival, but the connection is widespread in other Lucanian masquerades too. This Carnival consists of a parade of *Tori* (bulls) and *Vacche* (cows) through the streets of the village on 17 January, the day dedicated to St Anthony the Abbot, the protector of animals. It is characterised by a deep devotion to the saint—indeed the people who wear the *Vacca* mask have a holy card depicting St. Anthony the Abbot pinned to their waists. However, this is a devotional practice and religious ritual that "over the last decade, has seen the expansion of the limited, marginal human and territorial universe that produced it" (Di Paolo 2024).

Observing devotional aspects of cultural elements, practices and expressions helps us to better understand the multiple dynamics of religions as immersed in the materiality of things. Devotional objects exert power over individuals in the context of religious experience; in the case of masquerades, they are tools for demonstrating one's devotion to others.

We know that the presence and ritual use of representations, objects, images, bodies, substances, artefacts, and things with material

consistency is fundamental to the existence of a religion. At the same time, in liminal practices situated between the sacred and the profane, as in the masquerades I have documented, the use of such devotional objects also becomes a device that enables the ritual or festival to function within the context of contemporary heritage practices. (Figure 2)

Mask making techniques, while adhering to tradition in a strict and "philological" manner, are quite flexible and responsive to the taste and creativity of each mask-maker. This makes it possible, for example, for people to make changes to decorations at will or introduce original elements into masks or masquerades. The younger generation in particular tend to be innovative with their masks, sometimes replacing traditional materials with others that are easier to find and use, or making changes to meet contemporary demands.

This is the case with the Satriano di Lucania[12] Carnival, where traditional masquerade coexists with contemporary masking practices, which have acquired new meanings and values while still drawing on tradition, but also with the invention of new masks. One example is the *Folletto* mask (Elf or Pixie), which I will discuss below.

The Satriano Carnival is the result of rediscovered and renewed traditions and practices that have become community heritage. Its masks, including the *Rumita* (hermit), the *Urs* (bear) and the *Quaremma* (Lent), are the result of a process of reinterpretation and adaptation to the heterogeneous historical and social circumstances that have shaped the life of the village. In particular, the phenomenon of post-war emigration has influenced the perception of certain masks, such as the Rumita, associated with the image of the local man who decides to remain in his homeland in poverty. (Figure 3)

As Sandra Ferracuti (2016) has written, thanks to long-term and still ongoing ethnographic research, the introduction of cultural models from the past into the contemporary world has led to the creation of new styles and practices. The Satriano Carnival has thus been imbued with symbolic values and transformed into a kind of catalysing event (see "The Walking Forest") that also conveys a universal ecological message. Here, people from different generations have the opportunity to participate in the masquerade, an event that provides an opportunity, especially for younger people, to learn informally from the village elders' techniques and knowledge related to the creation not only of the *Rumita* but also of other masks, such as the *Folletto*. Informal learning takes place during times of conviviality and dialogue.

With regard to intergenerational transmission, we should mention Donato Perrone, one of the main promoters of the Satriano di Lucania Carnival. He is known as *u' professor* (the teacher), because he taught technical education to many Satriano people who today play an active part in the creation of the *Rumita*.[13] Donato Perrone and Carmine Pascale, both belonging to the generation born in the 1950s, have facilitated and continue to facilitate (both technically and by providing moral support, cultural-historical information and knowledge to the younger generations) the transformation of Satriano di Lucania's Carnival. In addition to this, Donato has concretely supported the birth of a new heritage community, made up of younger people from the village who are involved in organizing the various events of the Carnival and in preserving local traditions. These younger generations, born in the 1980s, have been trained by Donato in the construction of this mask, both in its spontaneous version and the version used during "The Walking Forest," which requires a functional variation. This generation has also been passing on information on the construction of the mask to those younger than them. (Figure 4)



Fig. 3. Mask of *Rumita* emerging from the woods of Satriano di Lucania. Photo credits RVM.



Fig. 4. Donato Perrone makes the mask of *Rumita* in Satriano di Lucania. Photo credits RVM.



Fig. 5. Masks performance during the Tricarico Carnival. Photo credits RVM.

The social life of the mask between tradition and innovation

Returning to the Tricarico Historical Carnival, this is closely connected to the research conducted by many anthropologists, notably Enzo Spera, whose written memorial has become authoritative testimony for a reconstruction of the sequences and masks that make up the parade that passes through the streets of the village on January 17th every year. The detailed description of the masquerade given by Spera in the 1980s became, in the following years, a canvas of behaviours, performances and instructions to be followed in the representation of the transhumance herd staged at every Carnival (Mirizzi 2016).

Recent ethnographic research in Tricarico shows that over time, in addition to the shape of the masks, the methods and motivations behind the ritual of masking have also changed. As Di Paolo (2024) points out, participation in ritual events has changed significantly, as have the specific social actors involved, "citizens engaged on multiple fronts in collective, spontaneous activities that underlie complex relational mechanisms of revitalization and enrichment, not only economic." However, at least one basic principle remains unchanged: participation in the parade is always open to anyone who has a cow or bull costume, regardless of whether it is faithful to historical tradition or deviates slightly from the original.

The anthropologist Marina Bernardi believes that the Tricarico masks

> crosses a town that is disappearing because it is undergoing demographic contraction like many towns in Basilicata, but at the same time it enters into unprecedented strategies of appeasement, it enters into new urban fabrics, so that the carnival experiments with new forms of community, it stages new forms of living and new ways of practicing the ritual. (Bernardi 2022, 5)

As mentioned above, the Tricarico masquerade is characterised by two main masks, the *Vacca* and the *Toro*, the wearers of which parade ringing loud bells and perform a ritual dance that evokes the traditional practice of the transhumance, now no longer followed. As in other villages, local makers produce these masks, often the same people who wear them during the ritual. They are made from fabric, recycled elements, and coloured strips of various materials. In this specific case the makers are both men and women, part of the heritage community, who have learnt to make masks through oral tradition and preserve this knowledge to be passed on and shared with future generations. The craft techniques employed in these masks consist mainly but not exclusively of tailoring, sewing, and weaving textile and polychromatic materials. The mask wearers then use bells during the parade to produce the sound of a herd in movement. The wearers of both kinds of masks wave cowbells of different sizes to accentuate the choreotic actions that take place during the parade. (Figure 5)

The Tricarico Carnival has been shaped by the re-proposing, in a contemporary key, of certain traditional symbols of the Lucanian carnival, including zoomorphic masks.

The role played by the (male) body in performances highlights the central importance of the masks and their characteristics, including colours and symbols. In the colourful performative dance of the *Toro* and *Vacca* masks, the transhumance of animals is re-enacted and the mating of the two animals is simulated. During the parade there are riding scenes, in which the personification of the *Toro* courts the *Vacca* by "mounting" her: although the transgression is only simulated during the performance, nevertheless this moment appears to be, in participants' stories, a propitiatory ritual denoting fertility and procreation.[14] The procession, which evokes the transhumance of the herds moving from the mountains to the sea, characteristically has numerous *Vacche* compared to the far fewer *Tori* (about two bulls

to twenty cows). Thus, most of the masks are *Vacche*, while there are fewer *Tori*, as this is the proportion during transhumance.

As the procession passes, wine, cold meats and cheese are offered to the participants.

For Marina Berardi, this is a "procession of men/cows and men/bulls, with bells hanging around their necks, plow[ing] through the suspended time of the carnival to celebrate the alternation of life-death-rebirth and the return of a new era." (2022, 1)

Paola Langone, a young woman from Tricarico, is an expert in the creative manipulation, modelling, and transformation of materials used to make masks for the Carnival.

She is not a tailor by profession but a self-taught practitioner who has specialised, among other things, in making local traditional Carnival masks. Paola has been involved in tailoring and has devoted herself to making local masks, both the *Tori* and the *Vacche*, for about ten years. She participates in the procession by dressing as a *Vacca* and ringing her cowbell. For the inhabitants of the village, she is eminently capable of creating both masks. The two masks are similar in design but different in colour.

In particular, the preparation of the *Vacca* mask allows her to personally choose the decorations with great creativity.[15] The techniques she used to make this mask include tailoring, sewing, and weaving. The creation of masks and costumes, "which feature extremely refined and complex decorative elements, is entrusted to expert hands, usually women of the family, who embellish those traditionally worn by men with various feminine touches such as lace" (Berardi 2022, 2). The textile materials comprise a hat with a wide brim, lining, nylon ribbons (light and resistant), satin and double satin, a scarf, lace, decorations to embellish the headdress (beads, fabric flowers), and boots. Those who decide to dress as a *Vacca* wear beige or flesh-coloured clothing (a tracksuit, old woollen pyjamas, long johns); the neck, knees, elbows and waist are wrapped in many-coloured scarves, absolutely excluding black, because that is the colour used for the *Toro* mask. (Figure 6)

During interviews with mask-makers while they were producing masks, the differences between masks of the past and contemporary ones were repeatedly emphasized. As Paola recalls regarding the availability of materials for the masks: "In the past, recycled materials were used, such as old tablecloths, cut into rags or strips, anything that could be cut and made into ribbons. Today, however, with materials more readily available, we have much more choice."[16]

Even today when creating masks the trend is generally to reuse fabrics that are already owned and have also possibly been used for masquerading in previous years or have been inherited from masks of the past. Sometimes some elements of the masks remain the same (e.g., hats), while others need to be repaired or replaced because they have worn out or been damaged during the previous year's parade. Although there is a list of items of clothing required for the masquerade, and mandatory colours, which would seem to indicate that many participants respect tradition, there is a certain freedom of creative expression, at least in the choice of decorations and some accessories.

The dressing ritual takes place at home with the help of a second person, especially to tie the scarves to the arms. During dressing, as mentioned above, the holy picture depicting Saint Anthony the Abbot is attached at the waist.

The most eye-catching element of the *Vacca* mask is the rigid polychromatic headdress from which hangs a white lace veil, used to cover the face and neck, and to which numerous long coloured ribbons are attached which go down to the ankles, as if to simulate a long cloak, and various decorations. "Everyone does what they think is best. It's a subjective thing," Paola points out, and showing the finished hat, she adds: "This is the complete hat, sewn step by step and embellished in every detail."[17]

Fig. 6. Materials used to make the *Vacca* mask for the Tricarico Carnival. Photo credits RVM.



Fig. 7. Paola Langone creates the hat for the *Vacca* mask in Tricarico. Photo credits RVM.



Paola says that in the past the hat was sometimes adorned with objects belonging to one's ancestors. For her the spring colours used to adorn the headgear represent the cows during transhumance, but also rebirth and the ending of the winter period. (Figure 7)

According to the organisers, Ciccio Santangelo included, the Tricarico Carnival is characterised today by a new phase of creativity, evident in terms of participation, transformation and innovation: this marks an important difference from the past, when there was more improvisation and a more spontaneous and exclusively male participation. Specifically regarding the participation of women in the procession, Ciccio Santangelo says: "This creates some difficulties for those of male gender who dress up as a *Toro* in the riding simulation, especially if there is a friendship or family relationship between the participants. This inclusive innovation was nevertheless welcomed, at least by the majority."[18] We will return to this topic below.

Bricolage, invention and (re)use

"As an expression of freedom, the *Folletto* mask incorporates the creativity of those who make it." These are the words of a mask-maker describing the creative and original possibilities of making masks for the Satriano di Lucania Carnival.

This festival, held in a small town in the Potenza area, has also been the subject of anthropological attention since the 1980s. According to Sandra Ferracuti (2016), this recent tradition builds on the local historical mask of the *Rumita*, the purpose being to add a layer of meaning connected to the contemporary concerns of the generations of those born from the 1980s onwards. It especially focuses on the symbolic use of the mask to express the urge to re-establish a sustainable relationship with the natural environment. Ferracuti (2016, 55) writes that "with the invention—albeit in the wake of tradition, as is the case with phenomena that occur under the banner of 'cultural creativity'—of the Walking Forest," the group of young people from the village brought to Satriano "the forces of a second community: that composed of the people who gave it substance." Furthermore, these young people, all approximately the same age and sharing the same environmentalist metaphor attributed to *Rumita*, "built partnerships with individuals from different areas based on a shared desire to belong, generational unease, and a passion for the environment, bringing together a generation of probable orphans of rituality."

2014 saw the first edition of the "Walking Forest" as a "clear outcome of a process of revitalisation and reinterpretation of this figure, which is still ongoing" and "an event that has now also become a Satrianese tradition" (Crovato, Ferracuti 2025, 85), during which the organizers of Satriano di Lucania's Carnival parade have been developing innovative techniques for the construction of the *Rumita* mask. Starting that year, a new mask appeared in the parade: the *Folletto*. This is a mainly but not exclusively female character who represents another bridge between humans and the natural world. From then until now, local girls and women have been preparing creative interpretations of this mask every year and then wearing them during the parade on the last Sunday of Carnival, before Shrove Tuesday.

Ferracuti tell us about the appearance of this *Folletto* mask when describing the noisy and festive atmosphere of the "Walking Forest":

> Most *Rumiti*, as they make their way through the streets of the town centre, show a progressive tendency towards rowdiness and drinking. This tendency is also "fuelled" by the *Folletti* (elves)—or, more often, *Follette* (female elves)—who also appeared for the first time in 2014 and are responsible for "watering" the *Rumiti* with red wine transported in barrels on the "non-motorised carts" participating in the parade. The first accessories for making the masks of the *Folletti*, also "woodland" figures created to creatively "inhabit" the walking forest, were made during one of the "preparatory meetings" arranged by the organisers for the first edition (Crovato, Ferracuti 2025, 86).

One of the organizers of the contemporary Carnival in Satriano di Lucania is Raffaella Roberto. She has been the "*Folletta* capo" (head *Folletta*) since 2016 and is the main maker of outfits, ideas, and equipment for the *Folletto* masks that are distributed to be worn during the parade. Raffaella, known as Lella, born in 1985, is a native of Satriano di Lucania, where for the past ten years, as part of the Carnival event "The Walking Forest," she has been responsible for the preparation of the *Folletto* masks. She plays an active role in the Carnival, dressing as a *Folletta* and making herself a new mask every year. In addition, she regularly prepares further materials for these masks so that she can offer them to visitors and to other villagers who wish to wear such a mask.

The *Folletto* is an iridescent mask that does not respect any precise dress code. The results of subjective creativity can be seen in the crafting of the accessories that adorn the figures. Each mask is customized with original decorative elements, the underlying costume being a brown, green or purple shirt and leggings. Since this mask is innovative and versatile, there is no specific construction technique, and the aesthetic aspect of the mask itself depends





Fig. 9. Lella Roberto makes a *Folletto* mask in her workshop. Photo credits Lella Roberto.

Fig. 8. Lella Roberto shows the materials used to make *Folletto* masks in Satriano di Lucania. Photo credits RVM.

on the creativity of those who produce it. Its polychromy gives liveliness to the parade of masks that advances from Parco Spera, one of the natural parks among which the village is located, along the central streets of the village. As Lella states, the *Folletto* mask represents "the liveliness of the forest, since it is close to *Rumita*, which is a silent mask. The *Folletto* surrounds him precisely to contrast with this silence and make a noise, with music, songs, screams, and running. The *Folletto* is a very free mask."[19] (Figure 8)

Lella is a very interesting case because her know-how is truly embodied; dressing up as a fairy is not just for masquerades but is for her almost a lifestyle. She says, "I like it, I feel very much like a fairy. Even in the way I dress, always colourful, I change often, I'm never the same. And so I do the same for the costumes I create." [20]

The materials she uses with such creativity are varied, fabric mainly, but her work always includes ivy leaves and fibres, with which she decorates face masks, shoe covers, skirts, trousers, and camisoles. These are almost all recycled materials that Lella strives to reuse in her creations. Thus, the main craft techniques are reuse and bricolage.[21]

Lella's creativity—we might regard her as a contemporary "follower" of Alfred Jerry's 'Pataphysics—knows no bounds: "I use recycled materials. Basically, anything I come across that inspires me at that moment. Since I'm not an expert seamstress, I use a needle and thread or glue as I go along." She does not buy many materials but uses what she has or can find. "I study them a little and then let my imagination run wild."[22] (Figure 9)

The act of masking is not exclusive to men in the Carnival practice of Basilicata, even though there is often a predominance of the masculine gender over the feminine. Dances, music, the jingling of the bells on the costumes, the deliberately created noise and confusion and a kind of uproar that is felt as the masked procession passes by are particularly associated with masked men. Children and women may not be permitted to wear certain masks. This is not the place for an in-depth reflection, but it is clear that in addition to generational access, the issue of gender access too deserves greater attention when it comes to masquerade rituals. Almost always, the role of women in masquerades is relegated to a secondary one of little or no importance. In recent years, however, there has been a notably greater openness on the part of some event organisers, as we have seen happening in Tricarico, and as is also happening in Satriano. The new *Folletto* and *Folletta* masks allow both women and children to participate in the Rumiti parade. (Figure 10)



Fig. 10. Group of female *Follette* masks in the Satriano Carnival parade. Photo credits Lella Roberto.

The final interesting issue to highlight is the focus on the transmission of practices linked to the Satriano Carnival, which is also fostered through the holding of workshops, seminars, and public meetings. With the emergence of the "Walking Forest" event, this Carnival has taken on a collective value, offering the inhabitants of Satriano, and all who want to actively participate in the event, the opportunity not only to "become a *Rumita* for a day," but also to "become a *Folletto* for a day," through workshop activities.[23] The *Rumiti* and *Folletti* parade represents a fundamental moment for exploiting and communicating local cultural heritage, while also offering an opportunity for local and regional development through the implementation of new forms of participatory and experiential tourism, open to an interested public of visitors. For example, those who wish to make a mask and learn the creative technique can contact Lella directly through the website dedicated to the Satriano Carnival. Her availability clearly contributes added value to the practices of transmission and the exploitation and promotion not only of the Carnival event and its unique mask and masking practice, but of knowledge, know-how, creativity and ecological consciousness linked to local and youth culture.

Final considerations

Cultural creativity is a constitutive aspect of every culture, a skill and an area of human experience present in all societies and one which finds room for itself in very different fields (Santoro 2025). Considered in its historical, intersubjective, and intercultural dimensions (Favole 2010), it is open, dynamic, (re)generative, vital, transformative, and reflective. As a product of relationships and connections, it is articulated in the nexus that exists between memory and future. In other words, it can operate in an innovative way and in continuity with established traditions and rules.

The concept of creativity "puts agency at the forefront," Adriano Favole (2009, 22) reminds us, "agency" being understood as "the ability of social actors and cultures to relate to the dynamics of the contemporary world."

Although it is well known that the followers of 'Pataphysics were primarily devoted to producing works that defied the conventions and linearity of mainstream art through their use of bricolage and collage, we have seen that the mask makers of Basilicata give free rein

to their creativity, while yet remaining true to local traditions. This is a situation that might seem contradictory, but, as case studies have shown, the adoption of such a "combinatorial" approach and technique, capable of blending tradition and modernity, is fully in line with the processes of "re-traditionalisation" of masks, as well as the current trends towards heritage making and touristification practices. Judging by the original work of the mask-makers we met, in the way in which they create masks, it could be said that they go far beyond the art of 'Pataphysics. Whilst drawing creative inspiration from the bricolage technique, our mask-makers reinvent and transform, without in any way destroying them, their own local traditions. This is also related to the concept of agency highlighted in the article, which pertains to the agency of mask makers but also to that of the objects themselves in their material and embodied form, which I have defined as "knowledge of the hand."

Numerous references to tradition persist, and in a widespread manner. However, innovations, (re)inventions, and creative solutions adopted in the context of mask creation, and implemented above all through the practice of reuse, recycling, and bricolage, allow much more than in the past for practices, knowledge, know-how, and cultural expressions, and for artisans, artists, and mask-makers involved in their specific production, preservation, and revitalization, to adapt to the passage of time. This entails reshaping festivals and rituals and thus responding to the currently changing needs of increasingly complex global heritage arenas. The language of masks is both creative and original; indeed Pietro Clemente (2016, 17) argues that "even the world of masks [...] and their forms continue to vary between the ancient world and contemporary geographical varieties, caught up in the vortex of reborn creativity." This vitality, inventiveness, and relevance of the universe of masks observed in Basilicata, and the coexistence of past and present, is confirmed by Ferdinando Mirizzi (2016, 38), who writes: "Cultures use and re-use the symbols made available by tradition and passed down from generation to generation, re-contextualizing and re-functionalizing them according to the needs of individuals in their present lives." This is where references to the cultural heritage of the past become strategic, serving to construct unique ways of experiencing contemporary life, "through the use of a particular form of cultural creativity and, therefore, the introjection of cultural models derived from tradition to give rise to new and, at times, completely unexpected productions and styles within the codification of local culture" (Mirizzi 2016, 44).

My observation of experiences of cultural creativity focused on the material and production aspects of these masks, starting from ethnographic research, leads me to believe that the creation of masks and participation in masking rituals is an additional way in which the inhabitants of the villages of Basilicata are consolidating their belonging to fragile communities in mainly marginal territories. They are doing so creatively, both by engaging with and working within the materials available to them and with current social, cultural, technological, and aesthetic landscapes, and by regarding themselves as following in the footsteps of tradition. However, as mentioned above, creativity is not limited to the relationship between tradition and contemporaneity; in fact, it has become clear that mask-makers today are able to create "masks, sets, and performances that belong to different horizons (geographical, historical, and imaginative)." (Ferracuti 2016, 48)

At the same time, as conscious actors, subjects who are never passive but active and present in history, they are striving to ensure that cultural practices and expressions are recognized and appreciated and remain alive and vital. After all, "when the mask becomes a face, the season of change appears to be upon us: hybrids emerge, anthropological mutations become imaginable" (Padiglione 2016, 30). Since we know that it is above all "the work of the imagination" that influences the social practices of human beings, as a defining and

constitutive feature of modern subjectivities (Appadurai 1996), they are trying to reinvent themselves daily in original ways, generating new forms of locality, social contiguity, empowerment, and participation in diversity. In other words, they are endeavouring to navigate and better govern complexity in their own way.



NOTES

1. Sometimes referred to as the "science of imaginary solutions," Pataphysics was invented by French writer and playwright Alfred Jarry, who took François Rabelais' literary and intellectual tradition as his model and continued in its footsteps.

2. This "science," described using an atypical, irreverent, distorted linguistic code, as well as mixture of references, quotations, philosophical, artistic and mathematical allusions, blending nonsense, irony and absurdity into a single whole, is considered a sort of "parody" of metaphysical thought. It is based on the principle of universal equivalence and the conversion of opposites.

3. "Unveiling the Arts and Works behind the MASKS" is a project funded by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) in 2023 under the ERASMUS-EDU-2023-PI-ALL-INNO. As part of the research and documentation activities carried out for the Italian partner University of Basilicata, we had the opportunity to investigate some masks worn during winter masking rites, which take place in small villages in the inner areas of Basilicata region.

4. The Iatmul are a large ethnic group of about 10,000 people settled along the middle reaches of the Sepik River in New Guinea. The Iatmul people practice horticulture, fishing and hunting.

5. The ancient name of Basilicata is Lucania. Even today, many inhabitants of the region prefer to use nouns and adjectives referring to the old name.

6. The area selected for MASKS is the Basilicata, also called by the old name of Lucania. It is a little region located in the south of Italy and is subject to a strong and progressive demographic contraction, with an underdeveloped and fragile economy and a lack of infrastructures. The key sectors identified for a sustainable development are mainly: agriculture, tourism, and traditional or artistic crafts. Specifically, the economic sector of crafts is considered important, because it allows the inhabitants of smaller villages not to emigrate to other, more industrialised, areas and to engage in some work activities linked to the territory and local craft traditions.

7. As part of the MASKS project, a survey of masks from Basilicata was carried out, including interviews, inventory sheets (for the catalogue of masks in preparation), and audiovisual documentation on a selection of them. The video interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner by the team from the University of Basilicata and edited by RVM Broadcast Matera. All the interviews are available at the following link: https://unveilingthemasks.uva.es/.

8. Such rituals relate in all the cases we have documented to the festivities associated with the Carnival period. These events are highly attended not only by the local village communities, but also by visitors from neighboring countries and tourists. These Carnivals, which are considered "historic," are also part of a newly established "Network of Lucanian Carnivals."

9. The village of 4,634 inhabitants is located in the province of Matera on hill 698 metres above sea level; it has been a bishopric since 968. It has one of the most important and best-preserved historic centres in Basilicata and is characterised by several traditions such as the historic Carnival. Since 2012, Tricarico has hosted the International Gathering of Anthropological Masks every year.

10. Informal conversation with Francesco Santangelo held in Tricarico on 28 September 2024.

11. Satriano di Lucania is a village with a population of 4,634 inhabitants located in the province of Potenza at an altitude of approximately 653 metres above sea level. It is classified as a mountain municipality and is part of the Lucanian Apennines National Park. It is mainly renowned for its Carnival, consisting of a historical parade and a contemporary event ("The Walking Forest").

12. The materials used for making the mask are: natural materials, ivy, string, stick, butcher's broom branch. The technique is the creative bricolage of those materials, through practices of collection, composition and tying of ivy shoots and butcher's broom sprigs.

13. See the following website: https://www.prolocotricarico.it/il-carnevale-di-tricarico/

14. The *Vacca* mask fits perfectly into the context of the Tricarico Carnival, with the use of coloured ribbons derived from decorations, in particular multi-coloured ribbons similar to those placed on cows' heads during transhumance. The most striking feature of the mask is the rigid polychromatic headdress from which hangs a white lace veil, used to cover the face and neck, and to which are attached numerous long coloured ribbons that fall to the ankles, simulating a long cloak, and various decorations.

15. Interview to Paola Langone conducted in Tricarico on 21st October 2024 during the documentation activities for the MASKS project.

16. Interview to Paola Langone on 21st October 2024.

17. Informal conversation with Francesco Santangelo held in Tricarico on 01 June 2025 during the annual festival "International Gathering of Anthropological Masks."

18. Interview to Raffaella Roberto conducted in Satriano di

Lucania on the 31st January2025 during the documentation activities for the MASKS project.

19. Interview to Raffaella Roberto on the 31st January2025.

20. About the materials used there are: ivy, textile materials, hot glue, recycled materials (shirts, plaids, breakfast placemats, crepe paper, fake flowers, a sheet, diapers, cards). Through a creative and experimental approach, the various materials chosen for the creation of the mask are joined together using hot glue or needle and thread, thus creating a unique mask. The headdress is made with iron wires, weaving ivy around them, or with felt, on which fake flowers can be added.

21. Interview to Raffaella Roberto on the 31st January2025.

22. See the website: https://www.carnevaledisatriano.it/

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