Summary: Carnival ritual could be interpreted as a sign of an inverted world and as such can certainly signify crossing (rejecting) the boundaries between researching subject and researched object, between researcher and performer (informant), between WE and OTHER; at the same time as an event carnival ritual could display almost everybody’s body on stage for him/herself and for the other. In case we research this event is the ritual process a carnival, called Škoromatija in southwestern Slovenia. The most important issues are historical changes relating the question of tradition and self-presentation, as well as relationship between researcher and performer (informant).

**

In his article, Being there, Clifford Geertz {Geertz} discusses some very important issues that a researcher has to deal with, namely the troubles of getting and staying in the field and the ambivalences a researcher experiences in the communication process with people s/he meets, and needs to get information from. This issue is now, we can say, almost a standardized, usual part of a researcher’s self-reflection regarding the data gathering process.

On the other hand, of equal importance is the process of authoring and writing, when a researcher leaves the field and begins to write, to translate the “facts” s/he noted and cultural events in which s/he participated into the final, “non”-fictional text. In every case the ethnologist is always confronted with the Michel Leiris dilemma, how to make a particular night, its touch, and all its emotions visible to the public {Fikfak 1999}.

But if we now reconsider more than forty years of the ritual practice we know as masquerading, the so called Škoromatija of southern Slovenia, these issues are a part of only one, very particular, professional, researcher’s egocentric point of view; which excludes the other part of the research process itself, the informant, the other, who performs actions and seeks self-realization. If we define the research process as interplay between the researcher and the informant, even better performer, then the performer’s worldview should also be involved in this interplay and understood as
equally relevant to that of the researcher him/herself. The question of the We (researcher) and the Other (performer – informant) is even more complex if we consider and eventually apply George Herbert Mead’s statement about the Self,

is the self essentially an interplay between self as subject and self as object. That is, the self is a process, not a thing or substance« (1934: 186) after {Strauss 1993: 111} ...

The dynamic polarity of self as subject-object can be brought out also by considering the concept of “self-conception” often used by social psychologists. One can have attitudes toward oneself, it is said, or have images of oneself: that is, have conceptions of self. But it is impossible to imagine oneself (including one's body or aspects of it) or to take an attitude toward oneself without an agential self bringing under regard the self as object. {Strauss 1993: 112}

After we combine the interplay between researcher and performer (informant) and the interplay between subject and object, we can get the following picture:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher / Performer (Informant)</th>
<th>Researcher Self</th>
<th>Performer (Informant) Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>WE</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subject / Object</td>
<td>Object / Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performer (Informant)</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>WE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Object / Subject</td>
<td>Subject / Object</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand each interaction is connected with re-productive sign processing, where we should assume that:

A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. {Peirce CPW: 228}

Now we can also better understand the statement Anselm Strauss pointed out:

... the condition for the difficulty in interpreting representational interactions is this: They (representational interactions, JF) rest on the multiple basis of representation that each social unit (whether and individual or collectivity) will possess. {Strauss 1993: 170}
A deeper look into the structure of understanding and interpretation types makes the
different levels of representational interactions even more explicit – in our case we
use ritual practice as an example, where different agents (researcher and performer)
are looking for different realities and producing different results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agent</th>
<th>Fictional Reality - Desire</th>
<th>Produced Reality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher - Scientific U</td>
<td><em>Field - a System of not yet discovered rules</em></td>
<td>Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performer (Informant) - Commonsense U</td>
<td><em>Ritual as Realization of (traditional) Rules</em></td>
<td>Performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following to the stereotype carnival ritual should be a sign of an inverted world and
as such can certainly intensify G.H. Mead’s interplay between self as subject and self
as object, as well as signify crossing the boundaries between researching subject and
researched object, between researcher and performer (informant), between WE and
OTHER; at the same time carnival ritual is the event that displays almost everybody’s
body on stage for him/herself and for the other.

In our case this event is the ritual process a carnival, called Škoromatija in southern
Slovenia. Etymologically the name itself is a metathesis of liquids: this is *in habitu scaramata* instead of *in habitu mascarata*; in my opinion this change occurred to
avoid the ban or taboo before 1340, when the folk custom was mentioned for the first

I.

In the late forties of 20th century the ritual practice Škoromati was either marginalized
or banned. The first phase of research and narratives about the Škoromati in the fifties
is characterized by silence, connected with the political exclusion of some authors
(Metod Turnšek, *Od morja do Triglava*). The brief description, written by Milka
Stančič, a former clerk from the town of Podgrad, presents škoromati from the village
where she lived between the two World Wars. Her description and names still fit the
present ritual and basic characters. However, her description is unclear in places.
Fragments of stories about the škoromati are preserved in the fieldnotes of Radoslav
Hrovatin, the ethnomusicologist who researched the Matarsko-Podgrajsko podolje
(Matarsko-Podgrajsko valleys) with the field teams of the Slovenian Ethnographic
Museum in 1955. While recording songs, music and dances he also collected some information on the škoromati, especially regarding the musical aspect of the event.

II.
In the early sixties either non-visible, or even banned, ritual practice became visible. The key name in several simultaneous events was a student of the folklore studies researcher Hrovatin, namely Branko Mahne, living in the nearby village of Hrušica, who wrote a detailed report (1963) for Niko Kuret, a researcher at Institute of Ethnology at the Slovenian Academy of Sciences. This record is interesting because of two levels of information. In it, Mahne reports about the škoromatija of which he was a member from his childhood to his seventeenth year (1937), when he fled from the Slovenian Mediterranean territory occupied and governed by Italian fascism into Yugoslavia. Since his narratives are not burdened by later performances of the ritual practice, which he did not witness, they could also clarify the actual past, “authentic” state of the folk custom. However, this ideal starting point is already compromised by several facts: a brief analysis of my interview with Branko Mahne two years ago shows, that:

- The ritual practice he participated in was already affected by the first world war – many youngmen – bearers of tradition were dead: e. g. as a boy of just thirteen he played the accordion with an adult group of youngmen;

- The ritual practice also suffered under an Italian fascist administration that wanted to destroy every trace or witness of non-Italian language and culture and that also tried to ban the ritual itself;

- The compromising fact is that Mahne learnt folklore from Hrovatin. They discussed customs and traditions, especially the škoromatija and on the basis of these discussions his teacher Hrovatin also published a paper on the škoromati (1962). The question raises itself, to what extent have these discussions and a relatively intensive introduction to folklore studies affected Mahne’s report and made it closer to the image which researchers-folklorists wanted to see.

Very important issue here is the frame of reference – the researcher’s viewpoint that expected to get at that time a full description of the phenomenon from the informant, especially of the main figures of the whole event and through this description to find an Urtext. This position in many cases overrode recent manifoldness of the event itself and purified the informant’s memory in the desired direction.
On the other hand it is an important issue who in the “field” is either imposed through the community dynamics to tell “relevant data about the community,” or to define what should be observed, preserved, and continued as folklore, as tradition, or as part of the local identity.

And here we can find some traces in the letter from 1961, sent by the Tomo Šorli Cultural Society to the Ethnographic Institute in Ljubljana.

To your letter regarding the carnival performance we can respond with the following: we are prepared to cooperate with a carnival masquerade in the old-fashioned style. But with the remark, that our masquerade will be on 12. 2. 1961 from 10h to 13h. Please respond inasmuch you agree with this. We cannot perform on other days, as most of the participants are employed in the factory.

Regarding the fee: we would request if you could pay a fee as a kind of assistance to our cultural society. The sum would be approximately 20.000.-

Our procession would look like this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 poberin</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 škopit</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6 škoromati</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 gypsy family</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bride and groom</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Good seed” (Dobrega semena)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>photographer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soldier (žandar)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please reply to the address

Cultural society “Tomo Šorli”, Podgrad.

(Archive - Institute of Slovenian Ethnology)

Why the attribute old-fashioned style? First the statement shows that there should be more ritual practices, but from the side of researchers the old-fashioned version was expected and served, as Pierre Bourdieu {Bourdieu} stated in Afterword to Paul Rabinows Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco about the informant’s desire to fulfill the researcher’s expectation. Second, attitudes to this ritual practice were in that time still ambivalent. The ritual practice in this market was banned and sanctioned by the police at the end of forties and beginning of fifties; it seems that it was the outside institution that revived a practice that would otherwise have vanished. Expectations, local cultural society indicated, were in the Institute’s letter pointed out:
... We are satisfied to take into account your notice that you are preparing an old-fashioned masquerade procession on carnival Sunday, on the 12th of February of this year from 10h to 13h. We are willing to photograph your masks, however there is no way we can afford the sum of 20.000 din that you recommend. From your notice we can assume, that you are preparing the procession for Sunday, which is traditionally the day such processions take place, and not specially for us. We can pay participants only when people put on masks especially for us and thus lose part of their working time. /.../ every further agreement on this basis (is) impossible. The local administration is responsible for the support of local cultural societies, not us. 

As stated, we would photograph this year’s masks and give you several series of photographs. However, we are in talks with the television, which would film your procession next year under our guidance. In this case it will be possible to arrange a suitable fee for the society and individuals! This year we would have to first see the procession, so that we could write a scenario and create an organisational basis.

Please respond, if you agree with our position, also please let us know the name of the comrade with whom we will be able to get in touch directly.

(Archive - Institute of Slovenian Ethnology)

Presentation of the cultural self could happen (and eventually did happen), when in negotiation process all elements are solved. Besides cultural (old-fashioned style issue), self-presentation, and research issue was financial one very important.¹

In this point different strategies and desires met and together negotiated a common event – a display of themselves as bearers of tradition. This display we could see in the form of a TV report from 1962. What is implicit in this report?

Let us take a look at some outsiders’ viewpoints. They were the main factor, initiating and also financially organizing the whole event:

_Outsiders_ were:

1. Institution – Slovenian Academy of Sciences – Institute of Slovenian Ethnography. Niko Kuret (probably with Radoslav Hrovatin, whose participation is not clear yet) as the organizer and re-constructor of similar events in other parts of country. The researcher - Outsider gave this ritual practice a meaning. It was for him a sign of old tradition, of folklore; it was a witness of the Slovenian, etc.
He sought in it authenticity, historical evidence, and he found evidence that proved his assumptions and desires. He oriented himself on figures, on magical elements, that connected pagan and Christian substrates. In etymology he found the historical evidence of longevity and European frame of this particular ritual practice.

2. Slovenian TV Station financed the participants and the cultural society, which prepared the event. Characteristic of the filmmaker’s point of view is that through repetition and rearrangement the desired visual image of tradition is created. There was some disagreement “on the stage” between the researcher, who wanted presentation “as it was” and the filmmaker, who wanted to present dramatic elements – like an arranged marking of the girl with ashes, or a non-existent procession of the škoromati group to lunch.

Insiders were:

3. Political Decision Makers and Factory: The main reason I am speaking about political decision makers is the fact, that the ritual was banned after WWII. Certain decision makers decided that was OK to be part of a reconstruction/revival process.

4. Local Bearers of Tradition: It is obvious that the local bearers respected the tradition, they were all only from the youngmen community; however, under the instruction from the cameraman or filmmaker they emphasized only some routines; there is no little theatrical event or sketch presented, which was usual for event itself. Most likely this has to do also with the nature of silent film.

5. The local police distanced itself from the event. In the late forties most engaged police officers were now absent under the presence of “outsider” institutions.

Later research indicated that at least two varieties were present in Podgrad, the countryside (old-fashioned style) and the “modern”, more urban variety. Two varieties could have made room for disagreement, as Anselm Strauss {pointed out when he wrote assumption Nr. 18 in Continual Permutations of Action}. Instead, for the purpose of filming the “old, authentic local” ritual practice both researchers Niko Kuret and Radoslav Hrovatin, as well as local representatives obscured or even erased the tradition of the non-countryside carnival.

Slika 01 1962

Fig. 1. Group Škoromati in front of the most prominent – old fashioned house.
However, it seems that the event itself was only a replica or re-construction of events taking place some decades ago and that did not find connections with “roots” and its newly appropriate space in the settlement. Next year there was no event in the market.

The height of the cooperation between the institute of ethnology and the performers was in the mid sixties not with the cultural society in Podgrad but with the group from the neighboring village Hrušica, where the main local researcher Branko Mahne came from. They performed their ritual at the main carnival event in Slovenia at the kurentovanje in Ptuj: it was the first real, external affirmation of the importance of their tradition. As per agreement with Kuret part of the masks was sold to the Museum of Masks in Binche (Belgium). Even today some villagers blame the sale of the costumes for the stagnation of the škoromatija and look upon this step as a sign of a lack of awareness that the local tradition is important.

The škoromatija that took place in Podgrad and Hrušica and both the film and photographs show that the number of participants and the characters themselves
mostly fit with the writings of Stančič in the 50s.

III.

At the beginning of the eighties several participants from the televized škoromatiija of 1962 and younger enthusiasts gather in Podgrad at the initiative of Tone Ančkin and with the help of the Plama factory. In a very organized way they set about preparing the first performance, which is no longer led by a boys’ or male community but by the local organization (administration?), which is closely linked to the company financing their activities. The most important members: commercialists, syndicate members and representatives of the socialist union, were from the factory. In reconstructing the tradition they also have the active assistance of art teacher Romeo Volk, an amateur researcher of folk traditions. This is the first time that the school (Podgrad) also has an important role in restoring the tradition as various teachers place it in their programme. Among the most important aspects of the škoromatiija are guest appearances in other locations, Ilirska Bistrica in the eighties, Postojna, and several times abroad as well (Croatia, Poland…).

**Slika 05 1983**

*Fig. 5. Group Škoromati in front of the most prominent – old fashioned house. Podgrad 1983. Archive – Institute of Slovenian Ethnology – Foto: Roman Gašperin.*

**Slika 05 1983**

*Fig. 6. Group Škoromati is waiting for the Bride. Podgrad 1983. Archive – Institute of Slovenian Ethnology – Foto: Roman Gašperin.*

Researcher – the author himself, who documented ritual practice in two settlements Podgrad and Javorje with a student in 1983 and with the Croatian folklore institute in 1984 – soughted in that time binary opositions, this is village vs. market (Javorje vs. Podgrad), rural vs. urban, authentic vs. i.e. reconstructed ritual practice, tradition vs. innovation, ritual time vs. time gaps, ritual either as performance or as a device of
presentation of the self to strangers.

**Slika 07 1983**

*Fig. 7. Group Škoromati. Javorje 1983. Archive – Institute of Slovenian Ethnology – Foto: Roman Gašperin.*

**Slika 08 1983**

*Fig. 8. Group Škoromati. Javorje 1983. Archive – Institute of Slovenian Ethnology – Foto: Roman Gašperin.*

**IV.**

In Hrušica, where only around seven to ten boys performed the škoromatija and collected gifts at the end of the eighties, the local škoromati organize themselves again in the early nineties, nearly thirty years after visiting the kurentovanje in Ptuj in sixties. They present themselves to the wider public in a new way, even as an “authentic, original” opposition (alternative?) to the group from neighboring Podgrad. Leading roles are taken by the teacher Ester Juriševič (female!), then researching the folk traditions of Hrušica (1995), and the youth, who learnt about the tradition in elementary school. In 1992–1993 over fifty škoromati appeared almost overnight. They performed outside Hrušica the same year, and a year later in Portorož at the summer meeting of carnival groups.

**Slika 09 2002**

*Fig. 9. Group Škoromati with the eldest man in Hrušica. 2002. Archive – Institute of Slovenian Ethnology – Foto: Jurij Fikfak.*

**Slika 10 2002**

*Fig. 10. Group Škoromati from Hrušica in Ilirska Bistrica. 2005. Archive – Institute of Slovenian Ethnology – Foto: Jurij Fikfak.*

The last act is the founding of a masquerading society in Javorje (2002), where the youth want to follow in the steps of Podgrad and Hrušica and present their village in this way. Besides these groups which want to perform outside their villages and towns, there are three groups that have stayed (in the past) at home: Hrušica till 1992,
Javorje till 2001, Obrov till today. I point out these landmarks because the carnival in these settlements functioned in a different way.

**Slika 11**

*Fig. 11. Group Škoromati in Obrov. 2002. Archive – Institute of Slovenian Ethnology – Foto: Jurij Fikfak.*

**Slika 12**


The boundary I found in the early eighties in writing down the image of the škoromatija in the market/square of Podgrad and the villages Javorje, Obrov, and later Hrušica, was the question of the authenticity of the experience, of the “happening”. On the basis of film and photographic material it has been possible to identify the problems organizers in Podgrad have had with forming temporal transitions, with defining the content of the carnival and the desire to have a demonstrative – manifestive procession through the village. In Javorje and Obrov, on the other hand, the question of forming time was unimportant as every participant and observer found his post in whichever house and partook of the excesses (brandy, coffee…).

Is the carnival the most important event in the settlement? Based on the studied state we must differentiate between two levels of self-representation: in Podgrad, Hrušica and now Javorje they represent themselves to the outside with the škoromati, they perform with them, they carry the flag at the head of the procession, and they have gained general recognition for the origin of the škoromati in Slovenia.

For the participants the number of reports in newspapers, on television or the radio is an ever more important measure. The production of local identity is becoming an ever more important and as yet little researched phenomenon. An ethnologist can become one of the means of presenting the local production of knowledge. Thus an ethnologist needs an informer – a participant, to write his professional, scientific story, while the participant uses the ethnologist to promote his settlement. With the škoromati, however, the following occurred: Ethnologist who wrote descriptively about the various characters either mostly repeated (Kuret 1972; 1976; 1984) or
summarized local knowledge (Bažato and Bogataj 1994) so that the local production of knowledge, by individual villagers who actively partook in the škoromatija, was much more important. Kuret’s descriptions in Maske slovenskih pokrajin ( Masks of the Slovene Regions) and Fikfak’s (1999b) in Enciklopedija Slovenije (Encyclopaedia of Slovenia) guarantee the škoromati an important position among Slovene masks, Bogataj’s description by the stamps (1999) assures their social importance.

Slika 13

Fig. 13. Group Škoromati in front of the most prominent – old fashioned house. Podgrad 2002. Archive – Institute of Slovenian Ethnology – Foto: Jurij Fikfak.

Important local researchers of the tradition were mostly the teachers Ester Juriševič (1995) Romeo Volk and the reporter Danijel Cek (Volk and Cek 1996). We can also include Branko Mahne, whose report (1963) was published in Kuret’s work. These researchers in great part defined as well as redirected many phenomena. Let me draw attention to just two examples: In Mahne’s report and later interview – which covers the period between the two world wars – the colours of the ribbons on the cap of the škoromat with bells were described merely as being different, without any suggestion that the colours were those of the Slovene national flag (red, blue, white). The interpretation that has gained ground in Hrušica emphasises precisely this element, thus the ribbons that fall from the caps of the Hrušica škoromati are now in the national colours. Another example are the red neckerchiefs of the škoromati in Podgrad, which were an invention of a local researcher and are now also on the škoromati stamp. In this way local researchers explored the tradition but at the same time also recreated and redefined it.

In the last twenty years the importance of the mass media for the success of Carnival events has become clear. Regardless of some of the differences between the škoromati custom in Podgrad, which was reconstructed at the beginning of the 1980s, and the one in Hrušica (restored a decade later), both have in common the search for self-presentation (newspaper articles, fliers, websites, etc.). Among the more important modern forms of self-representation is also the posting of contents regarding the local village and škoromati on the internet. The chronology of the formation of the village websites is interesting in this case. In all the villages, first
in Podgrad (http://www.sigov.si/ueilbi/skoromat/), then in Hrušica (http://users.volja.net/skoromati/) and last in Javorje (http://www.javorje.com/skoromati.html) the first web pages to be formed were about the škoromati; only later did the web designers add other information about the village, e.g. about important events, historical sites, connections etc. However, in Podgrad and Hrušica the web pages are still designed so that the škoromati are in the centre of attention, while in the last available version of Javorje the škoromati have become part of the presentation of the village.

One organizer said to me, that when they saw their name written near the Brazilian samba dancers in the main Slovenian casino in Gorica they felt to be a part of world’s stage, estrade. They are crossing the boundaries of local establishing of the self with guest appearances; to be recognizable as the Other, worth watching, they implicitly use the device, i.e. self-exoticization, with special choreography and arrangement outside of the village. For them is very important and characteristic skilful communication with folklore researchers and representatives of the media (one of the škoromati groups has even chosen a journalist for their public relations representative).

This relation is almost paradoxical; it is namely difficult to say who stands to gain more from such a relationship: the researchers who obtain material for their research and the journalists who are able to create an attractive article for their readers, or the locals who in this manner are able to represent themselves, acquire certain funds, and reproduce local identity on the state level. In view of the demographic changes of their settlements, which are becoming smaller, the last aspect may well be the most important one.

_Slika 14_

_Fig. 14. Children group Škoromati in Javorje 2002. Archive – Institute of Slovenian Ethnology – Foto: Jurij Fikfak._

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Financial expectations have changed. Within the village they are presenting themselves for the outsiders without pay; when they are presenting themselves outside of the village/market they usually get transport and some lunch for free.