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Carnival in Strömstad as Temporary Autonomous Zone –

An Essay in Borderology

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ABSTRACT:

In this paper, Bakhtin's theory of carnival is applied in an analysis of young, subcultural Norwegians' accounts of their yearly celebrations in the Norwegian-Swedish border zone. We witness a scene open for grotesqueries, laughter and sexual freedom. In this context, the carnivalesque becomes a language to challenge the norms and roles of egalitarian, frugal and moralizing Norwegian society. Although this reflects the drinking culture of Norwegian youth to a certain extent, some features of the car-centered *råner* subculture's Easter celebrations make it an atypical case. Located in the border zone, the festivities are placed *betwixt and between*. Furthermore, Maundy Thursday is open to be redefined, because it is a public holiday with closed shops in Norway, and a normal working day in Sweden. This creates a spatiotemporal dimension particularly fertile for creating a free zone, or carnival – a place where the world is turned upside down, as day becomes night and traffic becomes a travesty. In this paper, we aim for a bottom-up understanding of freedom based on experiences related to borders. Could it be that rather than limiting people, the border acts as an engine in liberation and transgression?

Keywords: carnival, borders, transgressions, subcultures, Bakhtin, alcohol

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Introduction

The Norwegian car-based *råner* subculture have a habit of colonizing public space such as parking lots, gas stations and public squares. They park their styled cars close to each other, a practice they call to “share paint”, often in sufficient numbers to form *ad hoc* villages. This is a potential source of irritation among ground owners and citizens, who sometimes call police officers to disband the villages. The *råner*'s loud music and transgressions in traffic such as speeding, burnouts, donuts, skidding and revving are unpopular due to noise and hazard, and these driving patterns often bring them into conflicts with the authorities. A few studies of the subculture exist: Jørgensen¹ and Andersen² write from a sociological point of view, whereas Lundbye's³ study belongs to the field of criminology. These studies help us understand the *råner*'s transgressions as individual behavior, but what we are interested here is transgression as a social and collective affair limited to a particular time and space. Previous studies give valuable insight into the mechanisms of identity construction and social cohesion in the subculture, but they do not cover the Maundy Thursday celebrations in Strömstad and its potential for creating a free zone. This yearly event is an interesting starting point for investigating the subculture, because of its break with normality and the heated public debate it has spurred. Rather than meeting the *råner* in their everyday life, we focus on the day where they turn the world upside down. Qualitative studies of behavior patterns in the Norwegian – Swedish border zone, among others conducted by sociologist Gro Follo⁴ shows that the zone feels liberating to the people who visit. This helps explain why the *råner* cross the border for their highlight of the year. When we explore how the *råner* exploit the opportunities offered by the border zone, we turn to Bakhtin's concept of the carnival⁵. The discussion will also be

¹ Jørgensen, G. *To ungdomskulturer: om vedlikehold av sosiale og kulturelle ulikheter i Bygdeby*, Sogndal: Vestlandsforskning 1994

² *Råning - En meningsfull vei fra ung til voksen*. Tor Egil Andersen, Masteroppgave i sosiologi Institutt for sosiologi og samfunnsgeografi Universitetet i Oslo, Høsten 2009

³ Hege Iren Lundbye, *The Stars of the Cars: kulturell produksjon og identitetskonstruksjon i rånemiljøet*, Oslo 2005

⁴ *Grenselinje-landet— grensehandel mellom handel og tur*, Gro Follo, Norsk senter for bygdeforskning rapport 2/03

⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin *Latter og dialog – utvalgte skrifter*, J.W. Cappelens Forlag a.s, Oslo 2003

informed by studies of Norwegian youth drinking culture⁶, to which we will add a new class perspective based on Bourdieu's distinctions⁷. The *råner's* outsider position in Norwegian society might help account for the subversive and transgressive aspects of the celebrations.

The present study began in spring 2014. After interviewing two members of the *råner* subculture in Central Norway, I witnessed their take on the Maundy Thursday celebrations in the border town of Åre. Following an open invite at Facebook, I joined a trail of 300 *rånerbiler* at 11.00 17. April, on their 108 km pilgrimage to Åre. Heavy drunkenness, rowdy behavior, recklessness and nudity characterized the journey from start to stop. Surprisingly most of the *råner* seemed to vanish without a trace in the town center. There was certainly no sense of the *råner* taking over, as in Strömstad the following year (2.4.2015). I believe there are mainly four reasons why Strömstad dwarves Åre both in scale and level of transgression. The most obvious reason is that South-Eastern Norway is more populous and the number of *råner* is much larger. Secondly, Åre is a ski resort housing large numbers of Norwegian and Swedish tourists during Easter. Skiers have a tradition of partying after the slopes close – so called “after ski”. The *råner* in Åre assimilate into such parties, some of them are (like one of my informants) wearing ski-gear just to blend in. Thirdly, the tiny town center consists mainly of pedestrian streets, so there can be no traditional *rånerunde* – set routes where they can cruise. Fourthly, all parking lots are jammed with cars, effectively preventing the *råner* from founding their *ad hoc* villages.

Prior to the 2015 event, I conducted 9 in-depth interviews with the Råner of town X, in South-Eastern Norway, 11 days before Maundy Thursday, as the *råner* were preparing for the highlight of the year. Participant observation was also used as a method on Maundy Thursday 2015.

⁶ Den norske russefeiringen – Om meningen med rusmiddelbruk sett gjennom russefeiring som et ritual, Allan Sande: NORDISK ALKOHOL- & NARKOTIKATIDSKRIFT VOL. 17, 2000

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Harvard University Press, 1984

Background Information

“Are we who live in the present doomed never to experience autonomy, never to stand for one moment on a bit of land ruled only by freedom?”

Hakim Bey – *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*⁸

As shops close on Maundy Thursday, throngs of Norwegians drive across the Swedish border to buy cheap consumer goods. This practice was documented as early as 1955, where “8000 Norwegians invaded Strömstad” for “the usual purchases of fruit, glassware and lighters”. We can also read in the subtext that some of the visitors were there for recreation: “things were calm and orderly (...) there were no signs of rowdy behavior among the many Norwegian guests”⁹. Fast-forward some sixty years, and the yearly invasion has grown in force and intensity – the goods border shoppers now seek are mainly tobacco, alcohol, groceries and petrol¹⁰. On Maundy Thursday 2015, Strömstad expected 15 000 – 20 000 Norwegians, and large police forces from other parts of Sweden were summoned to control the unruly masses. The biggest problem is, according to the local Head of Police Niclas Hallgren “drunkenness and bad conduct”. He also points out that the problem diminished when they decided to close the government alcohol shop Systembolaget on Maundy Thursdays as of Easter 2008¹¹. In the period 1955 to 2000, fourteen newspaper articles covered the phenomenon whereas from 2000 to the present, an average of fourteen were printed yearly. In addition, we find a great number of articles published online as well as TV coverage.

What Maundy Thursday in Strömstad has become seems to the uninitiated like a truly exotic spectacle. A long line of styled and modified *gatebiler*, *rånerbiler* and normal cars drive on parade through town. Shouting and laughing people move in and out of windows and doors of the moving vehicles, others lie, sit, stand or dance on hoods, roofs and trunks. Traffic turns into a travesty through a combination of binge drinking, nudity, flaunting of sex toys, masking and reckless driving. Oversized loudspeakers blast country music spiced with sexually explicit lyrics. Some of the cars fly the flag of The Kingdom of Norway or the Confederate Southern US states, others the Jolly Roger. Some cars are their normal “pimped” selves, others are for

⁸ Hakim Bey – *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, Autonomedia 2003, page 96

⁹ (VG 9.4 1955).

¹⁰ *Grenselinje-landet— grensehandel mellom handel og tur*, Gro Follo, Norsk senter for bygdeforskning rapport 2/03

¹¹ NTB 17.4.2014

the occasion “unpimped” with spruce, hay, cuckoo clocks, walkers and car parts on the roof. The obscene slogans and puns written on the side door are perhaps self ironically mocking or inverting the aesthetic of their car loving *råner* subculture from the outside defined as *harry* (colloquial Norwegian for vulgar or bad taste). The street becomes a stage¹² where a *Carnival of Cars* unfolds. It is hard for a Norwegian to recognize his fellow countrymen on this day, a nation according to Thomas Hylland Eriksen characterized by “frugality, desire for equality, lack of affect, romanticizing of the countryside, moralism, idealization of simplicity and a deeply engrained horror of differences, even those pertaining to gender.”¹³ To this list, we may add, with Witoszek: “rationality”¹⁴. Normally the quest for equality, or *likhet* in Gullestad’s terms, leads to an interaction style where sameness is emphasized while differences are played down¹⁵. In the spectacle we witness how this “myth of one language”¹⁶ is shattered as a plethora of voices fill the marketplace when the “world is turned upside down”¹⁷. The carnival is the prime arena for the world turned upside down (WOD), which can be a liberating experience¹⁸, and a rare one in a cultural climate like the Norwegian. In this, article I seek to confirm Marianne Gullestad’s claim that “Norwegian life is marked (...) by a passion for boundaries, expressed in tensions between boundary-setting and boundary breaking”¹⁹. This is our starting point when aiming for a bottom-up understanding of freedom based on experiences related to borders and transgression as an alternative to the top-down definitions advocated by economists and politicians.

¹² Richard Schechner, *The Future of Ritual – Writings on Culture and Performance* Routledge, London and New York 1993

¹³ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Typisk norsk*, Oslo: Huitfeldt 1993

¹⁴ Nina Witoszek «Fugitives from utopia». In Ø. Sørensen and B Stråth (eds) *The Cultural Construction of Norden*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press 1997

¹⁵ Marianne Gullestad, *Plausible Prejudice. Everyday experiences and social images of nation, culture and race*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget AS, 2006.

¹⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, 1984), p. 123

¹⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin *Latter og dialog – utvalgte skrifter*, J.W. Cappelens Forlag a.s, Oslo 2003

¹⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin *Latter og dialog – utvalgte skrifter*, J.W. Cappelens Forlag a.s, Oslo 2003

¹⁹ Marianne Gullestad, *A Passion For Boundaries – Reflections on Connections between Children’s Everyday Lives and Discourses on the Nation in Norway*, *Childhood*, 4 (1) 1997: 19-42 ed. Sharon Stephens.

The Act

"...this time however I come as the victorious Dionysus, who will turn the world into a holiday...Not that I have much time..."

--Nietzsche (from his last "insane" letter to Cosima Wagner, cited in Bey 2003)²⁰

We will start by interpreting this event as situated modes of action, in the terms of social critic Kenneth Burke. Burke believes the pentad scene, act, agent, agency and purpose are the elements we need to examine in order to understand performance as behavior. Thus "any complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when and where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how (agency) and why he did it (purpose)"²¹. This seems like a good starting point for a hermeneutic circle that could help us understand the spectacle. In the meantime, let us embark on some preliminary speculations in order to construct a theoretical framework for the first three elements in Burke's pentad.

To answer the first question, (what), we turn to Bakhtin's theories on carnival²². Briefly summarized, the carnival is an arena where "the folk", "people" or "second world" carve out "time out of time" in which they subvert normal cultural ideals and social hierarchies to turn the world "upside down". The symbolic power of the WUD comes from masking and the grotesque centered on the "lower body stratum" with its "open orifices" and "protuberances" and the functions of the animal body: eating, drinking, copulation, urinating and defecation. During the carnival, the marketplace becomes an arena for "free and familiar contact among people" dominated by ribald laughter, marketplace speech, excess and "conspicuous consumption". Bakhtin's descriptions fit accurately as the sleepy border town of Strömstad is turned topsy-turvy: when work (shopping) becomes play (partying) and day is turned into night. In a class perspective, we might argue that the condemning reactions from the journalists in the above-mentioned articles reflect a middle class fear of lower class power. As Stallybrass and White point out, "the grotesque tends to operate as a critique of a dominant ideology which has already set the terms, designating what is high and low"²³. In the newspaper articles, we witness "the ruse of the dominant culture that critique can only exist in the language of reason, pure knowledge and seriousness"²⁴. When journalists measure what they see against Norwegian

²⁰ Hakim Bey – *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, Autonomedia 2003

²¹ D. Soyini Madison (Author, Editor), Judith Hamera, *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*, SAGE Publications, 2005

²² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, 1984),

²³ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Poetics & Politics of Transgression*: Cornell University Press, New York 1986, page 46

²⁴ *ibid*

egalitarianism, horror of differences, moralism and idealization of simplicity, it is hardly surprising that they find this spectacle “wild and vulgar”²⁵, “stupid and sad”²⁶, “embarrassing”²⁷ and that they become “ashamed of being Norwegian”²⁸. The need to identify these actors as the other, as *harry* or *råner*, becomes all the stronger when the *råner* wave Norwegian flags at their renegade carnival in Sweden. Norwegians are in general very concerned with national identity and particularly how it is perceived abroad.²⁹ The center – periphery axis, identified by Marianne Gullestad as crucial to Norwegian understanding of identity, constitutes another dimension where the *råner* can be identified as other.³⁰ From the vantage point of the centrally located national newspapers, the *råner* are rural and unsophisticated actors who roam the countryside. According to the Norwegian cultural ideal, the quiet week of Easter is centered on the hearth of the home or cabin with quiet family enjoyment and nature worship – “productive recreation” in economic rationale. As Barbara Ehrenreich shows in her *Dancing in the Streets*, the demands of productivity played a significant part when carnivals were eradicated from Western Civilization during the Reformation and Enlightenment periods³¹. To the extent that Western rational man accepts that carnival has survived, it is understood as belonging exclusively to the *other* – the lower classes or the “noble savage” in distant countries. Today, carnival is an exotic spectacle you may only observe in places such as Rio, where you can admire its *joie de vivre*, openness, freedom and sensuality. Even the idea of recreating such festivities in the cold and frigid north seems utopic. (Yet, it has happened).

²⁵ Telemarksavisa 07.04.2012

²⁶ Halden Arbeideblad 03.04.2013

²⁷ Aftenposten Morgen 09.04

²⁸ Vårt Land 27.03.2013

²⁹ Marianne Gullestad, A Passion For Boundaries – Reflections on Connections between Children’s Everyday Lives and Discourses on the Nation in Norway, *Childhood*, 4 (1) 1997: 19-42 ed. Sharon Stephens.

³⁰ Marianne Gullestad, A Passion For Boundaries – Reflections on Connections between Children’s Everyday Lives and Discourses on the Nation in Norway, *Childhood*, 4 (1) 1997: 19-42 ed. Sharon Stephens.

³¹ Marianne Gullestad, A Passion For Boundaries – Reflections on Connections between Children’s Everyday Lives and Discourses on the Nation in Norway, *Childhood*, 4 (1) 1997: 19-42 ed. Sharon Stephens.

The Scene

As for the next questions, the *where* and *when*, Thomas Lundén offers an overview of activity along the Swedish Norwegian border through recent decades. According to Lundén, alcohol, tobacco, groceries, gasoline, auto repair, porn and striptease were the main goods and services that lured Norwegians to visit their more liberal neighbor as private cars granted mobility to the masses³², effectively “liberating them from the daily bondage of space”.³³ Lundén claims, tongue in cheek that the business of Swedish strippers waxed and waned with the amount of voters for the Norwegian Christian Democratic Party (KrF). Swedish car culture, modeled on US counterparts, was a major source of inspiration for Norwegian youngsters. The Swedish youth subculture *raggare* drove American cars, whereas the Norwegian *råner* preferred Swedish Volvos. Norway lacked a car industry and pursued a restrictive policy on automobile use and purchases. Also in this sense, Sweden was a country of (relative) freedom. Border landers voted with their wheels to protest against regulation and state control, thus contributing to the *panic of mobility*³⁴ that reigned in the population at large. The negative stamp on border shopping turned official in 2002 when the Norwegian minister of Agriculture labeled it *harry*. In her sociological study of shopping along the Swedish border, Gro Follo shows that the border zone feels liberating to the people who frequent it. She coins the term *Grenselinje-landet* to designate an area in the border zone, which manifests itself as “a result of people’s exploitation and elaboration of the conditional possibilities that the borders of the Norwegian national state offers”.³⁵ She suggests a model that separates the activity in *Grenselinje-landet* in two ideal categories; *tur* (outing) and *handel* (shopping). The object of our study seems intuitively to belong to the first category. The break with the *handel* activity on Maundy Thursday seems definite and irreversible as Systembolaget closes yearly. The border landers answered by bringing alcohol from Norway for consumption in Sweden, thus in a toll perspective incurring a net *loss* – in other words the antithesis of Tax Free shopping.

Marc Augé’s Anthropology of Supemodernity³⁶ also informs Follo’s discussion. Augé describes a reality where we spend an increasing proportion of our time on motorways and in shopping centers, or in front of TVs, computers and cash machines – in his definition *non-*

³² Thomas Lundén, *Över gränsen – Om människan vid territoriets slut*, Lund 2002

³³ James Howard Kunstler *The Geography of Nowhere – The Rise and Decline of America’s Man-Made Landscape*, Touchstone, New York 1993, page 86

³⁴ Tom O’Dell, *Raggare and the Panic of Mobility: Modernity and Hybridity in Sweden* published in *Car Cultures (Materializing Culture)*, Oxford: Berg, 2001; New York University Press

³⁵ *Grenselinje-landet— grensehandel mellom handel og tur*, Gro Follo, Norsk senter for bygdeforskning rapport 2/03, page 23

³⁶ Marc Augé, *Non-Places – Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Verso Books; New York 2009

places devoid of meaning. The non-places are interchangeable and without sociability or affect as they fabricate the anonymous “average man” and leaves him in “solitude and similitude”. Missing from Follo’s analysis is Augé’s opposite – *anthropological place*, which are places of identity, relations and history-³⁷ Do we witness a shift from non-place to anthropological place when the borderland activity changes so dramatically? As the car loving *råner* park their cars next to each other and create *ad hoc* villages, we may, with Richard Sennett define them as borderless “open cities” as opposed to the proliferating “closed cities” of modernity built to exclude.³⁸ The anti-social feature of the car also changes dramatically in this setting. In his sociology of the car, John Urry describes how cars constitute closed and confined spaces that exclude the outside world.³⁹ However, as the car doors, windows and trunks are left open – the car becomes a social space that stimulates “free and familiar contact” among the festive youth. This also resonates with Bakhtin’s ideas of the “open orifices” of the grotesque carnival bodies who are ready to interact with the outside world. In this setting, you may fit seventeen party people in a classic Volvo 245 (one of my informants being a passenger). Norwegian traffic authorities have limited the influx of illegally modified and sub-standard *råner* cars to Sweden by establishing control posts at border crossings on Maundy Thursday. “It used to be much more fun when we could bring our traditional modified Volvos”, said my informant. At the *Carnival of Cars*, the costumed mechanical body finds grotesque forms of expression parallel to the human body. Such as burning: the car remains at a standstill while the wheels turn at a frantic speed; burning rubber, screeching and spreading a toxic white fog as bystanders scream in joy and admiration. While carnival people dance, cars are capable of shaking *their behinds* through skidding and drifting. We even find cars that spin into ecstasy, like dervish Sufi mystics. Other cars backfire, or rev to make the engines roar with estrous masculinity – echoing the mating calls of the young men. The agora becomes the *råner*’s playground, which should come as no surprise because as Kalvø points out: they are the only people who use public space in Norway.⁴⁰

Norwegian authorities define Maundy Thursday as a holiday (a red day on the calendar), whereas the Swedish do not (black). This makes *Grenselinje-landet* particularly ripe with possibilities on this day. The limbo between Norway and Sweden, between holiday and workday is a spatio-temporal dimension open to be redefined. For this process, we may turn to

³⁷ Marc Augé, *Non-Places – Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Verso Books; New York 2009, page 46

³⁸ Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization*, W. W. Norton & Company; (1996)

³⁹ John Urry, *Inhabiting the Car*, published in the *Sociological Review*, Wiley Blackwell 2006, page 9

⁴⁰ Are Kalvø, *Harry: Samlaget* 1999

Lyman and Scott's *Sociology of the Absurd*.⁴¹ They speak of streets as "public territories" where certain freedoms and restrictions on behavior apply. The streets do however have the potential to become "home territories" where people have a relative degree of freedom of behavior and a sense of intimacy and control over the area. As for the temporal dimension and the activities that unfold, they use the term "time tracks" to designate the "products of cultural definitions; (as) they conceive of life divided into temporally specific, qualitatively different event activities". The time tracks are categorized according to the degree of human autonomy and free will on an axis between *humanistic* and *fatalistic time*, whereas duration is measured in terms of *episodic* and *continuous time*. Compulsive shopping ironically stimulated by the ubiquitous rhetoric of freedom (in this case the paradox of shopping to *save* money) seem to be a prime example of fatalistic time. Our McDonaldized society and especially the market place, is designed to stimulate efficiency, calculability, predictability, standardization and control.⁴² This seems to account for the ambivalence voiced by Swedish merchants through the Norwegian and Swedish press. It is clear that they welcome the surge in business, but they would prefer not to deal with the dirt and mess of the people. Well-behaved customers are trained to come, buy and leave. Thus, when people abandon shopping and start playing, this constitutes a dramatic shift towards humanistic time, because as Alessandro Falassi argues, "the human social animal still does not have a more significant way to feel in tune with his world than to partake in the special reality of the Festival, and celebrate life in its "time out of time".⁴³ The merchants may comfort themselves that these "episodic" time tracks are one-off happenings, little islands in the "continuous" normality. Alternatively, from a radically different perspective, as Hakim Bey poetically laments: HOW IS IT THAT "the world turned upside down" always manages to Right itself? Why does reaction always follow revolution, like seasons in Hell?"⁴⁴

⁴¹ Stanford M. Lyman and Marvin B. Scott, *A Sociology of the Absurd*, General Hall, New York 1989

⁴² George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, SAGE Publications, 2007

⁴³ Alessandro Falassi, *Time out of time: essays on the festival* University of New Mexico Press, 1987, page 7

⁴⁴ Hakim Bey – *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, Autonomedia 2003, page 97

The Agents

Who are these people behind the yearly “invasion” of Strömstad? Journalists are unison in labeling them *råner*, (hogs) thereby referring to a subcultural group predominantly aged 16-30. The group is set apart from the rest of youth culture and society mainly by their cars, but also their “distinct symbols, forms of expression and cultural codes”. Their characteristic activity, *råning*, is defined as “driving back and forth along a set *rånerunde*” (route).⁴⁵ It is quite revealing in our perspective that the pig became a symbol for this group. As Stallybrass and White point out, the pig is an ambivalent creature, a source of delight and disgust, an animal of the grotesque and low, of transgressions and the threshold. This symbolic versatility and ambivalence might be the reason why the police are also called pigs, or *purken* (sows) in Norwegian colloquial speech. Frequently the two groups of “pigs” interact in “games of cat and mouse”, i.e. minor offences followed by pursuits.⁴⁶ My informants told me that they were to some extent able to escape from surveillance in the Maundy Thursday celebrations, because they knew the locations of the Swedish police posts. In other words, they were able to identify pockets in public territory suitable for carving out home territories. One of them hinted that the home territories were not always safe; sometimes the “cat” wins, when he added that the Swedish police have a heavier hand than their Norwegian colleagues do.

No matter to what extent we apply the subculture term, we must see the phenomenon in connection with Norwegian youth culture at large, and what seems most relevant in this context – their drinking habits. Our drinking culture belong to the temperate, ambivalent drinking cultures that are by default dry, with occasional wet spells.⁴⁷ This ebb and flow of alcohol is determined by weekly cycles (Weekends) and yearly cycles that lead to literal spring tides. To get to know the peculiarities of Norwegian drinking culture further, it seems natural to choose the same point of departure as teenage initiates. At the age of 17-19, they are socialized into our society of drinkers through their *russefeiring*, a 17-day graduation celebration in May, identified by Allan Sande as a liminal *rite de passage* that constitutes a “competition in uniformed public drunkenness”.⁴⁸ Subverting the norms and rules of society is encouraged and honored. The *russe* establish a set of transgressive goals measured against the society’s rules of public decorum,

⁴⁵ Råning - En meningsfull vei fra ung til voksen. Tor Egil Andersen, Masteroppgave i sosiologi Institutt for sosiologi og samfunnsgeografi UNIVERSITETET I OSLO, Høsten 2009

⁴⁶ Ibid, page 44

⁴⁷ The Social Issues Research Centre, Social and Cultural Aspects of Drinking - A report to the European Commission, March 1998

⁴⁸ Den norske russefeiringen – Om meningen med rusmiddelbruk sett gjennom russefeiring som et ritual, Allan Sande: NORDISK ALKOHOL- & NARKOTIKATIDSKRIFT VOL. 17, 2000

alcohol intake, hierarchy, sexuality, and nudity. Players who achieve these goals win knots and tokens to decorate their hats. The one with the most knots is the elite *russ* of the year. This liminal period ends as the youth return to society in public flag parades on Constitution Day, 17th of May. Sande focuses on the uniformed, egalitarian nature of the ritual and the feeling of *communitas*⁴⁹ that results. Sande also concludes that the *russefeiring* fills a vacuum created by the banning of public rituals during the Reformation. This eradication of public ceremonies and the carnival culture meant a “farewell to the street” which transformed the protestant north into “indoor cultures”.⁵⁰ Surprisingly Sande fails to mention the fact that the *russ* are separated in two distinct groups according to their fields of study. The graduates from study preparation wear red uniforms and those from vocational studies wear black. The black *russefeiring* is a later invention, never fully accepted as legitimate, and many of the graduates are below the legal drinking age as the ritual unfolds. The two groups celebrate in separate camps and the black *russ* are labeled as troublemakers and black sheep who become the scapegoats when things grow out of hand. Largely, the working class *råner* belong to this group – our future carpenters, mechanics, nurses, cooks and hairdressers. If we apply Bourdieu’s terms, we may speak of low economic capital.⁵¹ The *råner* are also associated with low *cultural* capital. Haugen and Villa⁵² have shown in their research among Norwegian youth, how urban teenagers believe the *råner* culture and “harry” esthetics to be dominant in rural Norway. The urban youth describe these aspects of rural culture as very negative. Their understanding of the word “harry” implies failure to follow trends, bad taste and mainstream culture. Hjelseth and Storstad⁵³ show how negotiations between hip and “harry” popular culture is manifested when festivals are debated online. Being hip means to have the right competence in the field of popular culture. Harry forms of expression are of low status and often imply dismissal of established hierarchies.

Pauline Garvey⁵⁴ shows through her studies of drinking habits among Norwegian working class youth that the appetite for transgressions and excess remains throughout adolescence. She identifies alcohol as “their prime vehicle for transgressions”, alongside

⁴⁹Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* Transaction Publishers, 2011

⁵⁰ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Poetics & Politics of Transgression*: Cornell University Press, New York 1986, page 106

⁵¹ Pierre Bourdieu *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Harvard University Press, 1984

⁵² Haugen, Marit S. and Mariann Villa (2008) Idyllisk eller kjedeleg? Slik ungdom ser bygda. In Almås, R., M. S. Haugen, J. F. Rye and M. Villa, (ed) *Den nye bygda*. Tapir Akademisk Forlag, Trondheim, pages.137-156.

⁵³Hjelseth, Arve and Oddveig Storstad 2008: ”Hippe eller harry musikkfestivaler på bygda? Forhandlinger om populærkulturelle hierarkier”, in Almås, Reidar, Marit S. Haugen, Johan Fredrik. Rye and Mariann Villa (ed): *Den nye bygda*, Trondheim: Tapir akademisk forlag.

⁵⁴ Pauline Garvey, *Drinking, Driving and Daring in Norway* published in *Car Cultures (Materializing Culture)*, Oxford: Berg, 2001; New York University Press

driving. Andersen concludes that the *råner* period constitutes a “meaningful transition from adolescent to youth”⁵⁵. This youth period is prolonged and intensified in modernity.⁵⁶ The sense of uncertainty, or *liminality*, continues through young adulthood as people from this group often find temporary jobs. Guy Standing has identified an emerging class called the *Precariat* whose working and living conditions become increasingly uncertain and vulnerable through the proliferation of market liberalism and New Public Management.⁵⁷ Ivor Southwood emphatically describes the miseries of this condition as non-stop inertia.⁵⁸

Although the *russefeiring* has not officially commenced on Maundy Thursday, some of the participants are clad in the uniforms of the *russ*. My informants described the spectacle in Åre and Strömstad as a form of *russefeiring*, or carnival. Whereas the traditional carnival was a feast balanced against the absence during lent, (*carni vale* means farewell to meat), this does not reflect modern secularized Norway. For consumption during the Strömstad carnival to be excessive, it must transgress the boundaries of weekly overconsumption. Norwegian authorities are alarmed by the observation that traditional distinctions between dry every day and soaked holiday are disintegrating as Norwegians adopt continental habits of enjoying wine or beer with food *in addition* to the weekend binge.⁵⁹ The dry culture is becoming increasingly wet with a slow trickle of alcohol throughout the week, possibly also putting increasing demands on the binges to top this. (One informant told me that he drank 1 liter of pure vodka before meeting up for the group departure at 11.00).

The carnivalesque is by no means limited to the *russefeiring*, the *råner* subculture or their carnival – it forms an integrated aspect of binge drinking. A point that was argued in the 1998 SIRC report on Social Drinking where the findings of Honigmann⁶⁰, and Gusfield⁶¹ are drawn upon to conclude that “the contingent, twilight realm of the carnival, in which familiar, trusted boundaries become blurred, barriers dissolve and cherished values are challenged can seem a dangerous and frightening place. Yet this state of fearful excitement, and even embarrassment, is often actively sought and encouraged, and seems to be intimately connected

⁵⁵ Råning - En meningsfull vei fra ung til voksen. Tor Egil Andersen, Masteroppgave i sosiologi Institutt for sosiologi og samfunnsgeografi UNIVERSITETET I OSLO Høsten 2009

⁵⁶ Chris Jenks, *Trangsgression*: Routledge 2003

⁵⁷ Guy Standing, *The Precariat – The New Dangerous Class*: Bloomsbury Academic 2011

⁵⁸ Ivor Southwood, *Non-stop Inertia*: Zero Books 2011

⁵⁹ Varden 30.6.2014

⁶⁰ Honigmann, J.J. Dynamics of drinking in an Austrian village. *Ethnology*, 2: 157-196. 1963

⁶¹ Gusfield, J.R. Passage to Play: Rituals of drinking time in American Society. In M. Douglas (ed.), *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1987.

with the consumption of alcohol”.⁶² For similar findings in a contemporary study of British young adults, see Hackley et. al.⁶³ In Norway, the link between excessive drinking and the carnivalesque “lower body stratum” is encoded in the language itself. In “marketplace speech” the heavily intoxicated are referred to as being *dritings*, *skitings*, *møkkings*, *drita*, *skitfull*, - all terms taken from scatology. The low pig is also a guiding metaphor to drunkenness as people embark on *grisefylla* or *svinfylla* (pig binges). A politically incorrect synonym is *mongofylla*, “å drikke seg mongo” to “drink yourself mongo”, which bluntly points towards topsy-turvydom and irrationality. This is also indication that the politically correct limitations on speech ease with alcohol. Another abundant source of metaphors to describe intoxication is (maritime) traveling, which indicates cultural concepts of a link between mobility and intoxication. Drunk people are characterized as *påseilt* (out sailing), *på en snurr* (on a spin), *på galeien* (on the galley) when they engage in their *sjøslag* (sea battles).

However, as anyone who has experienced alcohol intoxication knows, the return to normality must come, sometimes in brutal forms. This is particularly true in cultures who engage in binge drinking. “Gusfield refers to the morning-after “I was not myself” plea of drinkers in ‘ambivalent’ cultures, and it could be said that during festive remissions and inversions, we experience an entire culture that, for the duration of the event, is ‘not itself’” (cited in SIRC 98)⁶⁴.

Even in an age of individualism, such rituals may have a collective function. As Slavoj Žižek confirms in his readings of Bakhtin: “What most deeply holds together a community is not so much identification with the Law that regulates the community’s normal everyday rhythms, but rather identification with a specific form of transgression of the Law, of the Law’s suspension...”⁶⁵ According to Mezzadra and Neilson, we have recently experienced “a proliferation of borders”, despite the promises of liberalism and globalism.⁶⁶ In this respect the concerns voiced by Lyman and Scott seem even more accurate now than they did four decades ago; “in contemporary society, it appears that men acknowledge increasingly fewer free territories for themselves. Free territory is carved out of space and affords opportunities for

⁶² The Social Issues Research Centre, Social and Cultural Aspects of Drinking - A report to the European Commission, March 1998

⁶³ Young adults and ‘binge’ drinking: A Bakhtinian analysis: Chris Hackley, Andrew Bengry-Howellb, Christine Griffinc, Willm Mistralc, Isabelle Szmigind & Rungpaka Amy Hackley née Tiwsakule; Journal of Marketing Management Volume 29, Issue 7-8, 2013

⁶⁴ The Social Issues Research Centre, Social and Cultural Aspects of Drinking - A report to the European Commission, March 1998

⁶⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Universal Exception*. New York: Continuum Press, 2006

⁶⁶ Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson *Border as Method, Or, the Multiplication of Labor*, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2013

idiosyncrasy and identity”⁶⁷. We may, as Hakim Bey does, label such free territory Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ). Although refusing to define the TAZ, Bey recommends that we start looking for "spaces (geographic, social, cultural, imagined) with potential to flower as autonomous zones--and we are looking for times in which these spaces are relatively open, either through neglect on the part of the State or because they have somehow escaped notice by the mapmakers, or for whatever reason”. According to Bey, the search for TAZ requires a new kind of mapmaking, because “whereas the map is closed, the autonomous zone is open” as it “metaphorically unfolds within the fractal dimensions invisible to the cartography of Control”. And further: “These dimensions must be mapped on the level of 1:1, the level of personal experiences”.⁶⁸

Conclusion

A secular, modern, rationalized and individualistic society like Norway is perhaps the last place one might expect a yearly carnival to appear spontaneously. Certain idiosyncrasies of Norwegian culture, such as frugality, sameness and lack of affect, makes this event even more unlikely. In this essay, we have explored some of the reasons why the celebrations in the border zone have evolved in this direction against the odds. We have seen how *Grenselinje-landet* between Sweden and Norway during the liminal hybrid of holiday and workday offered the potential for creating a TAZ. This is where the liberal minded *råner* clandestinely carves out a “home territory” for his carnival to celebrate “time out of time”. Considering the *råner*'s precarious position in Norwegian society, it should come as no surprise that he chose the language of the carnivalesque and body grotesque for its subversive power to invert social hierarchies and challenge the “myth of one language”. We have also seen how alcohol is the ointment that lubricates the vehicles of transgression.

Borders and border crossings are the common theme that links this essay together. Paradoxically, the border is what set man free in this case. The strong symbolic dimension of thresholds was illustrated when one of my informants and nine other *råner* Maundy Thursday some years ago ran stark naked across the Swedish-Norwegian border in - 20 degrees. As mythmakers have always known, the intoxicating and liberating aspects of transgressions are embedded in the substrata of the human psyche. This feature of the human condition has been universally celebrated throughout human history in the trickster archetype⁶⁹; the Norse Loki,

⁶⁷ Stanford M. Lyman and Marvin B. Scott, *A Sociology of the Absurd*, General Hall, New York 1989

⁶⁸ Hakim Bey – *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, Autonomedia 2003

⁶⁹ Jung, C. G. *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious* Princeton, NJ: Bollingen, 1991

Greek Hermes and Dionysus, Winnebago's Wadkijanga, Native American Coyote, West African Anansi, to name but a few. The trickster personifies man's need to construct and identify borders to order his existence – and the desire and power to subvert and destroy the same borders. As Jenks points out, the borders are completed through their transgression.⁷⁰ We have witnessed that there are certain *loci* and *tempi* where the borders are more likely to be guarded, experienced, negotiated and transgressed. This is the reason why Hermes is the god of the border, marketplace, roads, crossroads and thresholds. The activities that sort under his domain include travel, translation, commerce, thievery and messaging – in a sense *transcending* activities. Against this backdrop, (and in honor of its etymological roots), Hermeneutics cannot afford to disregard the centrality of borders and transgressions, because they are the very glue that holds society together.

⁷⁰ Chris Jenks, *Transgression*: Routledge 2003

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