

Grotesque! Monstrous Arts and their Return

Presentation Summaries

Arlecchino: Creature without depth?

Markus Wörgötter

In the exhibition “Grotesque Comedy. Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini” a series of delicately executed, colorful drawings are on display, in which the versatility of Arlecchino is portrayed in the most diverse parts. He appears as an officer, dude, butcher or page. These disguises are permeable and repeatedly show the characteristic triangular four-color pattern of Harlequin’s costume on his arms and legs, peaking through coats or armor. To appear in many different guises, to slip into ever-changing roles and species and to switch between them corresponds to the nature of Arlecchino. On a playbill from 1741, Arlequin is announced in no less than eight duplications, including an abdicated soldier, an astrologer, a three-year-old child, a parrot and finally a one-legged table. This multiplicity of appearances and, to paraphrase Werner Hofmann, its *transgressive transformative power* provokes the question of Arlecchino’s identity. Is there a substrate that remains undamaged despite of all these transformations? Does a stable identity exist under the mask of Arlecchino, or are we dealing with a different kind of mask that cannot be grasped by the concept of subjectivity?

The philosopher Gilles Deleuze describes two methods of creating a monster. One is to assemble it from the set pieces of different creatures and create Arcimboldo-like hybrid creatures. However, this would be “a poor recipe for creating a monster, accumulating different determinations or overdetermining the animal. It is better to let the underground rise and to make the form fade away”. Letting the form fade and the underground rise means practicing anarchy and destroying the concept of a stable, permanent identity in favour of “becoming immoderate”.

There are numerous parallels to this transformative power of Arlecchino, which Burnacini demonstrates in his drawings, in contemporary art and popular culture. In the 2019 film *Joker*, the failed clown Arthur Fleck balances at the edge of extinction, psychologically destroyed. His “coming out” as a psychopathic, chaos-creating monster, turns the inside out — with the effect that the mask no longer hides anything. The merging of his ego-identity with the Joker, which he accomplishes in the end, means salvation from doom for Arthur and opens up all possibilities of transformation for him. Of the 22 Major Arcana of the tarot, the Fool’s card has the number 0 and is the symbol of self-realization. In the French-suited tarot deck, the joker is the wild card. Precisely because it has no value per se, the joker can take the value of any other card. It is, in fact, its mutability that gives it the highest value.

Burnacini’s outstandingly executed drawings seem tempered by our historical distance and their courtly formalism. De facto, his Arlecchino depictions and grotesques are rooted in early modern history and point back to archaic formal languages. From the 16th century onwards, European Mannerism dissolved the ideal balance of Renaissance art

into a labyrinthine and grotesque variety of forms, in which Burnacini's costumes and scenographies find their origins.

Gerda Baumbach refers to the proximity of Arlecchino to the archaic *trickster*. Constantly striving to create chaos, he is the master of metamorphosis. Eerie and iridescent, he possesses an elastic nature that is split in itself, but does not remain in the polar opposites. The trickster rather functions as a link between opposites and fulfills a bridging function. In Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he risks going under as he balances the tightrope, which is stretched over the market square above the raging crowd.

According to Dario Fo, almost all masks, including those of the Commedia dell'arte, are zoomorphic. Burnacini's grotesques and physiognomies play with animalistic references and correspond to the concept of overdetermination. They bring into play the inferior formula for the creation of a monster as mentioned at the beginning. The principle of the grotesque, however, also emerges from the primacy of becoming over being. Burnacini's grotesque figures are overdetermined mixed creatures. Thus, they are intermediate beings who, not clearly classifiable, elude a stable form and identity. Mikhail Bakhtin writes in *Rabelais and his World*: "The grotesque unites the decaying, already deformed body with the newly created life that has not been developed yet. Here, life is shown in its ambivalent, internally contradictory processuality, nothing is finished, the unfinishedness itself facing us. This is exactly what is the grotesque conception of the body."

The grotesque is never just funny; it is merciless and has a tendency towards the abysmal.

The grotesque body is in a state of permanent transformation, it *is not*, it *becomes*. This openness in the form connects the comic body with the horrible, the amusement with the horror. Grotesque bodies provoke laughter, but they also release fears and call to mind that what is clear and constant is threatened by a powerful, excessive and chaotically rampant force — life itself. This process of blurring borders underlies Burnacini's scenographies and festive sledges: we see intertwined reptilian creatures or fantastically arranged flocks of birds, which in several designs of allegorically decorated sledges produce a new, astonishing body. In the proliferation of form, the autonomy of the individual being dissolves. Burnacini's Mannerism anticipates the body experiments of modernism and allows for numerous cross-references. The drawings and dolls by Hans Bellmer are representative of this. They arise from fantastic body multiplicities and form conglomerations of affects and energy flows.

Based on the grotesque, the Harlequin body grows into an intermediate field. Here the costume of Harlequin functions as a second skin, as a "body mask", and becomes a kind of membrane. By anticipating its transformations, it creates a polymorphous body. Its colored diamond pattern, which established itself at the theatre during Burnacini's time, is the ennoblement of the patchwork dress to courtly form. According to the thesis of my lecture, Arlecchino's artificial figure becomes, by means of the dress, a matrix. As colorful and spectacular as the costume may be, at the same time it neutralizes the body and turns it into a tabula rasa. Arlecchino becomes the embodiment of the zero card of the Great Arcana of the tarot: he can transform himself into anything and everything. In

my perspective, the possibilities of transformation at the courtly theatre are no longer indicated by the finite number of patches applied, but by a structure capable of taking on all conceivable species and forms, from canaries to pieces of furniture. This geometric grid structure functions as a substrate for transformation. Through it, the underground rises because it makes the form shrink.

It can be argued that the grid, as the matrix of modern times, neutralizes the real and subjects the diversity of phenomena to a unifying principle. Therefore, at first glance it seems to contradict the anarchic nature of Arlecchino. A closer analysis reveals the opposite: regardless of its function as a metaphor of modern rationality, the grid also proves to be seductive, deceptive and ambivalent from the very beginning. What appears as a diamond pattern on the body of Arlecchino at courtly theatre is a reference to the anarchic power of the trickster. In a similar way, the quadratura of Baroque illusionism carries with it the radical experiments of Mannerism. Already in the early 16th century, the subversive possibilities of the grid were recognized and translated into anamorphic puzzle pictures, which used the quadrature through foolish and obscene allusions as a means of travesty and deception. The anamorphosis reveals the nature of the grid. Since the Renaissance, it has been a medium of knowledge and a symbol of the order of the Real, as well as an instrument of deception, seduction and transformation. Analogous to anamorphosis, the “rastered” body of Harlequin can pass through all imaginable forms to trickily escape from a stable identity.

„*ich habe nitt baldt was bössers gesehen*“. Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini and the diablery of the Dutch 16th century

Laura Ritter

With its depictions of fantastic scenarios of temptation and cruel visions of hell, the art of the Dutch 16th century was characterized by far-reaching iconographic innovations. With recourse to the medieval vocabulary of forms, the popular genre of the diablery reflected the fundamental social upheavals at the turn of the modern age. For centuries turned the corresponding prints and paintings into fascinating points of reference for later generations of artists. With reference to the works of Hieronymus Bosch (ca. 1450–1516) or Pieter Bruegel (1526/27–1569), the theatre engineer Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini (1636–1707), who was born in Northern Italy, also dealt with the concept of the grotesque in his drawn designs and “ricordi”. Working as an architect and costume designer in the immediate vicinity of the Viennese court, he had access to the rich Habsburg collections and was able to study the works of his famous predecessors in the original. Based on selected examples from Burnacini’s multifaceted oeuvre, the lecture is devoted to his formal and motivic references to the Dutch pictorial tradition. It also examines the changed contexts of meaning in the late 17th century, which necessitated a new relationship between representation and the real world, from a cultural studies perspective.

The Uffizi Grotesques

Valentina Conticelli

The grotesque cycle of the east corridor was painted at the behest of Grand Duke Francesco I de' Medici; it is one of the most extensive of the Tuscan sixteenth century and constitutes a fitting prelude to the formation of the Uffizi museum collection. In 1581, at the time when the vaults were frescoed, the Gallery did not yet exist: the "Corridor" was simply a loggia, located on the second floor of the Fabbrica that connected the Magistrature of the Guilds, and was part of the passageway that gave access to Palazzo Vecchio from Palazzo Pitti and vice versa. It was only in 1582 that the loggia was enclosed with fixtures and windows, perhaps to protect the frescoes, but also because, starting with the creation of these, the "Corridor" began to change its function radically and, from a simple place of passage, it became an area where works of art were preserved and produced.

The cycle is one of the rare instances of figurative evidence of the union between Francesco I and Bianca Cappello, celebrated officially with their marriage in 1579, after the death of his first wife Joanna of Austria in 1578. The emblem with Bianca's coat of arms – immediately removed throughout the city by the Grand Duke Ferdinando on the death of his brother and sister-in-law – is now clearly visible only in some details of the final cross-vault and in the adjacent pergola, where it was discovered under the repainting during the 1970s restoration works. In fact, traces of it remain under all the Habsburg coats of arms in the corridor, while explicit references to Bianca appear in the central bay of the loggia, number 22, where Francesco's emblems (the taxus bush, the weasel and the ram) are depicted together with those of his spouse (the swan and the pearl shell). The celebration of the Grand-Ducal couple and the wish for a fertile generation explains the preponderance of erotic themes, often expressed through ingenious iconographic inventions.

The documentation relating to the construction of the second floor of the Uffizi is paltry and, as far as the frescoes are concerned, the only known evidence so far is contained in the *Ricordi (Memories)* by Alessandro Allori (1535–1607) which specify the date of execution and the names of the team of painters who participated in the enterprise. His main collaborators were: Alessandro Pieroni (1550–1607), Giovanni Bizzelli (circa 1550–1612?), Ludovico Buti (1555–1611) and Giovanni Maria Butteri (circa 1540–1606). Among Allori's aides, the hand and workshop of Antonio Tempesta (1555–1630) were also recognised in the corridor; to him were attributed the first fourteen frescoes. The decoration extends over forty-six bays, marked by a long and narrow coffered ceiling along each pavilion vault. At the end, the work concludes with a large cross vault, flanked by a span with a fictive pergola, which precedes Bianca Cappello's room.

A complex image discourse that follows the Quaternary rhythm of the vaults corresponds to the long journey along the corridor. The subjects of the vast decorative enterprise present an exclusively secular character; myths and allegories are constantly juxtaposed to the fantastic element with great expressive freedom. The playful aspect, the

quest for the marvellous and the monstrous prevail over the antique-like detail and on the antiquarian elements, which seem to have little relevance, especially in the bays attributed to Antonio Tempesta. Here the artist pursued unusual iconographic solutions, original, licentious, allusive or explicit in their erotic content, according to the typical canon of the grotesque. The myriad of figurations that unfold in a journey of about 150 meters, cause disorientation in those who search for a direction, also because the main figures are not oriented towards the viewer in a uniform way and are surrounded by images that are deliberately enigmatic, seemingly dreamlike, in which, at first sight, it seems impossible to grasp a thematic path. The grotesques or “insogni” are a mixture of all the fabulous things about the Gentile gods, the nature of things, earthly and human accidents, and in part they depicted strange fantasies of herbs, temple vessels, altars, fish, birds, sphinxes, harpies, all connected by frail and thin tendrils, so as to give figurative form to certain and uncertain things, and to the ambiguities of what is taken for granted.

Despite the multitude of “vacillating”, “vague”, “masked” images, “correspondences of desires”, the bays display obvious iconographic indicators, placed within a circle at the focal point of each ceiling, that is, in the centre. These are allegorical figures, myths or symbols and their singular attributes, placed on the head, on the limbs or on the clothes, make them extravagant and similar to the oneiric creatures that surround them.

The theme proposed by the central figures is related to other allegories and/or myths located in the other main points of the ceiling, in the centre of the four sides or along the diagonals, so as to form networks of symmetrical and/or opposite conceptual links in each bay. The remaining space is occupied by dragons, monsters, chimeras, sphinxes, harpies, satyrs, tritons, scyllas, mermaids, actual and fantastic animals, satirical and obscene hints that suggest, allude, reproduce or oppose the main theme. The eleven narrow bays, on the other hand, alternate heraldic motifs with allegories and mythological figures, always in relation to or in contrast with the adjacent themes.

Each group of four bays develops a segment of the symbolic discourse, whose “sentences” are formed by combining the elusive figurative “words”, placed at the centre of each ceiling, with the other “talking” images of each bay, and then, by placing the ceilings side by side, the “periods” are organised to form the celebratory, cosmological, erotic and moral path of the decorative programme. The images’ enigmatic play reveals itself to the understanding as soon as the viewer can guess the common thread that unravels the darkness: pulling one corner aside, the figures are revealed one after the other as if by removing a veil, invoking a feeling of wonder. However, their ambiguous, elusive and polysemic nature is never completely exhausted and in their interpretation there always remains a feeling of vagueness.

In the first eight ceilings, following the gallery in the current direction of the museum’s visit (from north to south), the themes of dynastic celebration prevail, with the presence of the heraldic symbols of the Medici family, such as the lily, the ball, the crown and the sceptre. Starting from the ninth, on the other hand, the prevailing subjects are of a cosmological nature; these extend to the fifteenth bay with the depiction of the goddess Nature, the harmony of the cosmos, the main stars, the deities responsible for health, and

the four temperaments. Following these we find concepts related to love and marriage, including Eros, the allegories of the individual and the couple, the coat of arms of the Grand Dukes, the genealogy of the gods, the victory of lovers, Francesco and Bianca's emblems, Fame and the goddess of Virginité who presides over unions and births.

Finally, starting from the twenty-fifth bay, triads of virtues and vices dominate the second part of the corridor. Here we observe a peculiar conceptual dynamic: the central ceiling of each group of three bays depicts an allegorical concept that mediates between the two opposite extremes presented in the adjacent bays, thus undertaking a "tempering" function towards the allegorical images that surround it. The triadic course of these bays employs the conceptual exaltation of a third "cautious" element (in the central one), as a mediator between the two extremes (in the lateral ones); this follows in line with the Medici *festina tarde* (hasten slowly), a figure of speech among Cosimo I's main emblems. This concept is depicted in countless iconographic variations, from the tortoise with the sail to the classic personification of Temperance, both in Palazzo Vecchio and in the Medici residences; the notion is rich in philosophical and moral meaning; it expresses the model of virtuous behaviour to which the prince must adhere, the temperate reconciliation of opposites, or the golden political middle way, the *aurea mediétas*.

I Balli di Sfessania. Choreographic transgression between grotesque vision and reality

Alessandro Pontremoli

Callot's engravings, studied from the point of view of dance, appear as a deposit of memories with different functions: testimonial, moral, social representation; and of various pieces of information, useful for understanding both that type of dance, which we define popular in heuristic terms, and the process of transforming dance as a social practice. Studying the relationship between these pictures and their users, within the Ancient Regime society, helps to understand them, revealing, among others, their role of surveillance and moral control of behaviour through the visual effectiveness of the text. Like other contemporary collections, Callot's one is composed of both images and words (in the specific case: of names, some of which are fictional, and of onomatopoeias taken from poetic verses of popular songs) and is aimed at producing effects that are simultaneously memorial, emotional and cognitive. From this point of view, the formal juxtaposition of these images of Neapolitan professionals of the Sfessania with the depictions of demons is illuminating, this kind of images responds to the need to represent the diversity and the deformity, also typical of other works by Callot, such as the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*.

The gesture of the dance is endowed with the characteristic of memorability: it contains within itself elements that make it able to install itself in the spectator's memory. A rhetoric of memory acts on stage, aimed at creating, among audience of the event, a community of thought as a community of memory. Dance, even if it does not appear to leave traces, demonstrates a much greater power than stable writing: by escaping the mechanisms of censorship, it acquires a formidable power of penetration into the consciousness and collective memory. The *Balli di Sfessania* try to fix this element of memorability of the comic-grotesque gesture through an articulated process of condensation, within which there are not only the protagonists of the action (the *morescanti*, bearers of a twisted, grotesque and alienating corporeality), but also their observers (nobles, bourgeois and common people) each with the characteristics of their belonging.

The *Balli di Sfessania* are a series of twenty-four rather small engravings (the impressed surface measures 90 x 55 mm), which can be placed, according to documentary sources, between 1620 and 1622, after Callot's return to Lorraine, but presumably designed by the artist around the mid-10s, during his stay in Florence, where he had also drawn inspiration for the *Capricci* and the *Gobbi*. These works, undoubtedly the result of nostalgia for Italy, must also be considered as editorial strategies dependent on market demand, as can be easily deduced from the use of the Italic idiom in the title pages or within the series, aimed at pleasing the audience of buyers from Northern Europe, where the fashion for Italian things reigned.

We can speak of a relevance of the *Commedia dell'Arte* only in terms of a *posteriori* memorial construct – certainly corroborated and indirectly authorized by Callot himself, who associates with his images the names of some of the *maschere* in vogue in the

theatrical circles of his time –, without however obscuring how much a more precise observation of the visual document and a more careful examination of the sources can contribute to operate a historically more appropriate and effective contextualization of these engravings.

Linking *I Balli di Sfessania* with the *Commedia dell'Arte* is a sign of the contemporary reception of those images, perceived in direct relationship with the world of comic theatre, especially in 17th century France, where Callot offers his Italian subjects to possible buyers of the wealthy society of the time.

The vision that those engravings aroused in contemporaries was correctly explained by Fernando Taviani: «After all, it is precisely those so irrelevant images that ensured the survival of the *Commedia dell'arte*, its secret fascination for posterity. *Balli di Sfessania* [...] are the best representation not of the *Comici dell'Arte*, but of the memory that could remain of them in the eyes of spectators, in the stories of travellers who had seen them and they talked about them as if they were chasing their own invention.

A contemporary of Callot, Filippo Baldinucci, speaks more generically of «*Histriones* who [...] walked around Europe, practicing mostly buffoonish art», highlighting the popular trait of these street artists. If it is a company, it is rather one of those itinerant teams expert in acrobatics, contortions and seduction dances, who performed at village festivals and entertained a heterogeneous audience, commercial target of charlatans and sellers of thaumaturgical potions and talismans who, in turn, crowded the squares of Italian cities since the Middle Ages. The presence of Neapolitan names, in addition to some typical of carnival *maschere*, suggests a group of artists skilled in grotesque body dances, characterized by modular comic elements, identifiable also in the various and metamorphic forms assumed by the coeval farce.

If the interpretation of this collection is moved from the world of the actors to that of the dancers of a Neapolitan *moresca*, the *Sfessania* series acquires a new light, also as a memorial archive of postures and attitudes of the *morescantì*, experts in acting a grotesque body trained to arouse the fat and immoderate laughter of the square carnival. However, it is not a real catalogue, but a figurative condensation of many experiential elements, among which, in addition to the memory of Neapolitan dancers of *Sfessania* and *Lucia*, there are also memories of less cheap and less acrobatic performers, court dances, tamed *moresche* for the courtly spectacle.

It is clear that Callot blends elements from distinct, albeit dialoguing, universes of the entertainment world of the early seventeenth century, nevertheless presenting common traits that were undoubtedly present in the collective imagination of noble and less noble spectators. Alongside the specific references to dance and its movements – more courtly the female ones, more acrobatic and overwhelming the *morescantì*'s ones – there are the traits of the comicality of «the material lower bodily stratum» (Bakhtin), such as the joke of the enema and the phallic use of sword that threatens buttocks easily exposed through the movements of the dance. Examples of the carnival inversion include the harlequin walking on the hands in the background of one of the engravings or the female jester who performs the figure of the bridge, according to a medieval tradition that was per-

formative and figural at the same time; and farcical action, like the mistress who chases the servant to beat him.

This imaginary, which perhaps should be thought of as a common matrix in the construction of Renaissance acting techniques, undoubtedly comes from afar. The postural affinity of Callot's characters with the *morescanti* of Munich of 1480, wood-carved figures attributed to Erasmus Grasser, and with those of Nikolaus Tübing in Innsbruck for the Goldenes Dachl has already been widely highlighted. The contortions of the body and the gestural vehemence are the common trait of these representations, different in origin and historical location, and represent what I like to call the memory constants of the *moresca* between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries:

- twisted and curved body vs. an erect courtier body with a noble posture;
- deformed body, read with the mediation of medieval demonic imagery;
- grotesque body of the carnival invention.

At the time of Callot a *moresca* called *Sfessania* is attested in Naples, a term that according to Giovan Battista Del Tufo (1588) would be the Neapolitan variant of a Maltese dance. Similarly, Brantôme refers to a dance performed by maids and black slaves in Malta, which he calls *fiscaigne*, a probable French word for *Sfessania*.

Ferrari Barassi and Posner relate *Sfessania* to *Lucia Canazza*, another Neapolitan dance accompanied by the song of the same name. Curt Sachs also refers to the tradition of a Lucia, a dance of death and rebirth that he associates with the *mattaccino*, in which a woman is brought back to life by the lively rhythm of the dance, according to the anthropological meaning of the *moresca*, in which the vegetative elements are often represented by the birth, death and rebirth cycle of original fertility rites. The erotic forms of *Lucia* are instead described by Brantôme, especially when the female dancer joins the *Sfessania* in its Maltese version, in which a brunette or Turkish slave performs on Moorish music. Sometimes *Lucia* is called *Bernagualà*, an exotic term that comes from the comic process of mangling a pretended Turkish language.

Lucia and *Sfessania*, so often associated altogether in the sources, when cited by Del Tufo in 1588 were considered a single dance, characterized by sensual movements of the pelvis and by the excessive and farcical gestures typical of the carnival performances of comedians of fair, portrayed by Callot certainly with a good dose of realism.

The performative context of this dance is that of local fairs and carnival parties, crowded with companies of *morescanti* or single performers: those «buffoons, jugglers, cantambanchi, histriones and pantomime actors», about which Ludovico Zorzi speaks when commenting on one of the most famous Venetian engravings by Giacomo Franco; independent artists or artists sponsored by charlatans who sold products of various usefulness on improvised stages, with whom Callot had become familiar during his stay in Florence (see *La Fiera dell'Impruneta*, Florence 1620).

According to Posner, the current sequence of the plates is not the original one but was arbitrarily modified in the eighteenth century for commercial reasons. In an attempt to

rearrange the engravings, the art historian follows a formal intuition, using the scale of the figures as a basic criterion: the tables with the smaller characters in the foreground and with a less detailed background would come before those with the figures larger and with an increasingly saturated background, where you can glimpse in addition to generic spectators, recognizable as belonging to different social classes, also other street artists in action.

In my opinion, in an attempt to make sense of the sequence of the engravings, an equally effective criterion could be the dramaturgical/choreic one. Let us not forget that by explicit indication of Callot we are faced with a dance, which the sources define as a *moresca*, a dance which, while certainly staging ritual elements and symbols that are difficult to interpret, is however attested, in most cases, as an event with highly spectacular features and often verbalized, both in the chronicles and in the literary references, in terms of a small drama.

The variety of names and depicted characters should not be misleading. The protagonists of the *Sfessania* are actually few and can be assimilated to each other: what changes are the relationships and contrasts that these few characters, put in the figure, maintain each other, producing in any case an increase in meaning in the direction of grotesque comedy.

We can identify overall two classes of actors: the *zanni* and the captains who face each other in homogeneous or mixed pairs and who instead sometimes take on the role of musicians who accompany the dance with the *colascione*. To these must be added the female figure, portrayed now as a noblewoman, now as a servant and as a player/dancer respectively. Various characters appear in the background, both in the role of spectators and in that of street performers (waders, harlequins, musicians, various dancing ladies and knights, captains, generic *zanni*, charlatans and/or *Commedianti dell'Arte* on stage).

The aesthetic and cultural category within which to place the *Balli di Sfessania* is that of the grotesque, explicitly suggested for these engravings by Paul C. Castagno. Callot's grotesque images multiply points of view and combine opposing orders of values into ambivalent connection. It is a mode of representation which, not placing itself in terms of idealized imitation of reality, detaches itself from the Aristotelian conception of Renaissance art, not aligning itself with its rhetorical dictates. Callot's proximity to the model of carnival culture theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin is evident: using the visual tools of engraving, which Callot masters with wisdom and great skill, Callot draws a dancing body which performs unrestrained movements, thanks to the effects produced by the posture very twisted, typical form of the characters of *Sfessania*.

This grotesque style contrasts with the forms of court dance that from the fifteenth century onwards aspired to build a behavioural regime which is in close relationship with the problems of the nascent society of good manners. Within the same representation, the grotesque body therefore appears in all its power, confronting itself dialectically with this world of taste and refinement.

However, elements of decadence are already present in *Sfessania*: in this period the concept of the grotesque is progressively perceived as a feature of satire, which can take on the characteristics of a moral judgment and a social criticism. It is important to ask

whether that of *Sfessania* is a positive and universalizing hyperbole or whether some form of laughter deformation already acts in it. The distinction between the exaltation of the grotesque body – as a revolutionary, transgressive and therefore the bearer of instances of change – and its condemnation in the satirical parody is substantially undecidable in the traces left by the representation of Callot.

Through the rhetorical tool of contrast, Callot allows us to understand factors of the performer's material culture otherwise not easily traceable, such as in particular the range of possibilities for setting the quality of physical presence, which ranges from a maximum of adherence to the noble dance technique up to an acting that draws tools from the dance of the lower classes.

The *Balli di Sfessania* are configured more and more clearly as a memorial reminiscence (a sort of figurative re-enactment) of a street performance, with professionals of the late Renaissance comic body at work, able to exploit all the body knowledge of generations of *histriones* who from the Middle Ages onwards had been building effective stage presence techniques.

From the “grotesche” designs to the “habits grotesques” inventions: Jean Berain (1640-1711)

Jerôme de la Gorce

Today, Berain is most well-known for his decorative art and his famous “grotesque” compositions (“grotesche”), inventions of vegetal, animal and human elements combined with a great sense of fantasy. Born in 1640, in Saint-Mihiel, Berain was already prepared to publish his designs for arabesques and ornamentations for rifles by 1659, which included Jacques Callot’s figures. In 1671, he was paid to make copies after Charles Lebrun’s grotesques, designed for the famous Apollo’s Gallery in the Louvre, and to print them for the *Bâtiments du roi*. Berain was inspired by Lebrun’s well-known style, which he emulated in his own grotesques. Because of their similarity in style with the Lorraine figures of Jacques Callot, we must also consider the official French style compositions developed by Le Brun. Berain continued in some of his decorative compositions to borrow important figures from Le Brun’s work, as we can observe in *Winter* from his *Saisons* series, which depicts the god Saturn between two opera dancers. As early as 1683, the designs he created for tapestries, furniture and other decorative objects inspired him to create other works called “grotesques”: costumes for masquerades both funny and strange and close in their qualities to the “ridiculous masques” of his contemporary, Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini.

The expression “habit grotesque” appeared for the first time in the *Mercure galant* to describe divertissements organized in Versailles for the Grand Dauphin in 1683. According to the accounts, it was impossible to identify individual performers inside the costumes because the costumes were so extravagant. Sometimes, a “human form” would disappear to imitate the appearance of a work of porcelain. The *Mercure galant*, does not provide us with exact titles for each costume because they were simply meant to be an “effect of one’s imagination.” Amongst examples mentioned, some of the costumes referred to the past with “old fashioned models,” chosen amongst the “most ridiculous.” Others were completely invented and could create a surprise effect by including four performers in one costume. Some of Berain’s unpublished drawings could be studies for the Dauphin’s masquerades. One of them represents, under a large swiss hat, four faces evoking various ages and with hair of different colours. It was difficult to know which face was the true face of the performer. Another project reveals a “grotesque costume” which includes a huge “fontange,” a fashionable ornament used as early as 1678 in female hairstyles but used here as type of protection for a monstrous man. The comic effect is given by the lack of several body parts. The fontange choice itself could also surprise viewers. It was later chosen by Claude Gillot in his famous painting, *Les deux carrosses*, also known from two drawings by the painter preserved in the Louvre. In this work, two women of the Parisian bourgeoisie wear the extremely high ornaments on their head to prove their importance as they quarrel.

Berain, who died in 1711, five years before Gillot’s painting, was the first one to practice this comic effect, but unfortunately, we do not know exactly for which occasion

he made it. For the costumes he imagined around 1695 for the *Italian Comedy*, we lack information, however, some other drawings have been found, in particular, an interesting project relating the travels of Arlequin. For the figure of “Zibaldone” as drawn by Berain, the comedian was entirely dressed in a great “haut de chausse” (which was supposed to be discovered by Arlequin himself). On his back, the comedian wears a sail which can be compared, due to its size, to a parachute. He could move quicker on the ground thanks to shoes which appear very much like roller skates. To sleep he had an inflatable mattress.

This costume was very successful. A different version of the original drawing by Berain’s son, Jean II Berain, has been found in the Kupferstich-Kabinett in Dresden, where it is mentioned as a “habit de fantaisie.” His hairstyle, however, is more common. The curious helmet has changed into a more traditional hat embellished with feathers. In the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, there is another version described as an “Arlequin en culotte.” This caption could be justified by the very short arms and legs and confirm the observations of Daniel Cronstöm in a letter sent to Nicodème Tessin the Younger in 1700 (from Paris to Stockholm), about the missing hands and feet, considered as “marks” which generally allow one to detect the presence of masqued costumes. As late as 1700, the “grotesques masques” were still fashionable. We know this fact by Cronström and by the rich collections of drawings found in Paris, Dresden and Stockholm.

Within the circle of the Grand Dauphin in Versailles and Marly, the Duke and Duchess of Burgundy were also dressed by Berain during masquerades and balls. One such testimony is an original project drawn by the artist, described as a “Masque grotesque.” The body is “deformed as a Polichinelle (Pulcinella) one...in front and behind.” This monster playing a wind instrument could evoke a devil painted by Hieronymus Bosch in the Flemish tradition. In the 18th century, when Chinese figures were in competition with grotesque ones, according to Cronström, references to the Callot prints and the Comédie Italienne were very strong. We can easily see this in a *Polichinelle* found in the Tessin collection in Stockholm, whose body looks like a globe, while his toothless face, his nose and his large round glasses are those of Callot’s *Gobbi*.

During this period, one main inspiration can be observed in Berain’s costumes: the Italian tradition of Commedia dell’arte characters found in the spectacles of the Paris Opera. Berain also found inspiration for his grotesque characters, from 1680 to the end of his career (around 1707), when he created scenery and theatrical machines for the Paris Opera. From his predecessor, Carlo Vigarani, he was inspired by the impressive hall of Pluto, where monsters fly from the upper parts of a palace. We can still appreciate this design of Pluto’s Palace created by Vigarani in 1674 for Lully’s opera *Alceste*. We know that this composition was, however, inspired by an earlier Italian artist, Alfonso Parigi, who created the scenography for *Le Nozze degli Dei*, an opera created in Florence, in 1637. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Italian set designers were the specialists of these sorts of operatic views. One of them became famous in Europe with his “Hellmouth,” created for the 1668 Viennese opera *Il Pomo d’oro*: Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini.

Berain was greatly influenced by Burnacini’s work which he knew from the prints of Matthäus Küsel. This can be observed in the drawings by Berain, used for Lully’s opera

Thésée, probably made for the revival of 1688. The first sketch by Berain is rather small in comparison with Burnacini's final work. However, the French artist was directly influenced by this great entrance and the introduction of devils and monsters among the rocks and in between the different parts of the set. In a later version, Berain did not forget the terrible teeth of this hellmouth surrounded by flames, which also inspired him to design machines for monster's mouths, able to be open or closed in order to frighten the audience of the Paris Opera. We can observe the use of these monsters by Italian comedians in a project for a stage scenery, which proves that this vocabulary was commonly associated in France with Italian art. For his fantastic hell scene, Berain designed other monsters: one playing a musical instrument which appears as a huge mouse with long ears. Using his hands and feet, the interpretation on stage could be assumed by a young actor. Another example is more upsetting: a character with a terrible face and no arms but supported by the legs of a lion.

To realise these "grotesque" creations, Berain referred to the French "ballet de cour" tradition for a part of his costumes, but also to Italian operatic machinery and sets for the most dramatic characters, those devoted to the underground kingdom of Pluto.

„Grotesque comedy“ – Herbert Fritsch at the Viennese Burgtheater

Elisabeth Großegger

In 2014 Herbert Fritsch was invited to the Burgtheater for the first time as stage director. The artistic director at that time was Karin Bergmann, who had „stepped in“ as artistic director at short notice in view of a financial debacle on the basis of which her predecessor Matthias Hartmann had been dismissed. – Herbert Fritsch subsequently enriched the Burgtheater’s repertoire with a total of three productions: Molière’s *The Imaginary Invalid* (2015), Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors* (2017) and *Tent* (2019).

Herbert Fritsch is a trained actor and played in Frank Castorf’s ensemble at the Volksbühne in Berlin until 2007. After that he worked successfully as stage director. From 2011 his productions were invited to the *Theatertreffen* in Berlin and in 2017 he was awarded the Berlin Theater Prize. With his style of directing, Fritsch tries to give the body independence and to free it from the primacy of the head and thought.

Although Herbert Fritsch sees himself as „in the tradition of the Burgtheater“ and reveres the pathos of Josef Kainz or Alexander Moissi, he has little appreciation for the great meaning of the word, the „statement“ on the stage and relies totally on the sound of words – and thus also to a tradition of the Burgtheater that was deliberately excluded in the course of the Enlightenment movement of the 18th century.

The Burgtheater had built up an alternative tradition since the 18th century. This tradition administered the double function of representation – formerly of the Habsburg Monarchy and from 1918 of the Republic of Austria – and as a national theater in the sense of the Enlightenment of the 18th century. As a representative theater, it had sufficient resources to attract the best artists to its ensemble. As a national theater of the 18th century, it was educational theater that, with the help of a “world theater” repertoire, was supposed to shape its audience, as a community of identity. With the prohibition of extemporaries enacted under Joseph von Sonnenfels, the theater became literary and the expulsion of the Hanswurst thus excluded from the Burgtheater all those grotesque and comic theater traditions traditionally at home in Austria, as they are known from the Baroque theater (Burnacini) and which continued for decades, e. g. in the figure of Kasperl, at the sub-urban theater.

Fritsch’s productions are based on this tradition. He himself is nowadays regarded as the „serious harlequin of German-speaking theater.“ The sun of Enlightenment never rises high. For him, theater is “not a university, not a school, not a hospital, but a cultic place”. A performance should „be fun, be a frenzy“. As in the Baroque opera, the individual numbers/scenes/moving images are connected in an arc of tension.

In accordance with Ernst Bloch’s detour philosophy, Fritsch does not try to dominate the room, but rather engages in it playfully. The detour does not strive for the finished system, but always for the process, the draft and the tentative search. The detour plays with space, looks for ironic refraction, eludes the severity and seriousness of the straight line of the direct path.

For his productions, Fritsch is thinking of a room with light effects and music as a laboratory situation. In it, the actors should react as excessively as possible to one another like chemicals: ‚Let’s see what happens!‘ And when they stumble and fall, slip and run against the walls and laugh – ‚just like in life par excellence‘ – Fritsch encourages them euphorically.

His cooperation with the actors is like coaching, he encourages them to “cut their faces, to contort their bodies in order to tell a lot more than words could”. Fritsch sees the intellect not limited to the text, the “intellect must occupy the whole body”. Acting training is not about „dressage“, but about humorous lightness, about „letting go“, about a „lustful fight“ on stage. As in the *commedia all’improvviso*, the actor is supposed to confront the audience – that is used to the omnipresent uniform reality of the embellished human images, as on television – with real expression and wild gesticulation.

Fritsch thus largely coincides with Bakhtin’s reflections on body images, which he describes in his treatise on the theory of romance and the culture of laughter (*Literatur und Karneval. Zur Romantheorie und Lachkultur*. Fischer Wissenschaft. 1990) “as representatives of a grotesque counterworld”. Because – according to Bakhtin – “[the] boundaries between body and world and between body and body [... run] very differently in grotesque art than in classical or naturalistic.“

The grotesque body becomes the center of the universe. It is eccentric, open to the outside, cosmic and universal. He unites with the world in which he incorporates it. Death and birth are equally involved in this transgression, thus the grotesque body is infinite, always in the process of becoming and never closed. Urine as “body + water” or feces as “body + earth” are not hidden, but exhibited as naturalness. E.g. in Fritsch’s staging of the *Comedy of Errors* a clinging sniffing becomes the center of a minute-long pantomime. The linear plot is interrupted or the starting point for wild movement theater, infantile wordplay, crazy slapstick. The glorious nonsense is executed with the utmost seriousness.

Fritsch’s productions are eclectic and make use of all forms of entertainment – the artistry of vaudevilles, the poses of the *commedia all’improvviso* or the pathos of the silent film stars. In the course of this, every quoting of genre is parodied again with pleasure. Fritsch stops at nothing. Nothing is sacred to him in terms of civic education: he even makes death ridiculous, or reveals the fragility of identity.

In 2015 this grotesque staging style was tried out for the first time on the Burgtheater stage. His grotesque brings together elements that deviate from the everyday life and therefore transcend natural boundaries set by society. Again and again the grotesque arrangement of the actors on the stage is frozen, creating an iconography that causes laughter in the audience. The expressiveness and bright colors of his stagings available in photographic recordings are reminiscent of the centuries-old pictorial tradition of Viennese comedy, as can also be seen in the oeuvre of Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini in the exhibition. As in Burnacini’s iconography, the focus is “entirely on the deformation, the folly, the corruption of reality – it is a triumph of the imagination”, as Rudi Risatti writes in his introduction to the exhibition catalog.

With Herbert Fritsch's stagings, the Burgtheater was able to reproduce the tradition of the grotesque in three exemplary productions and create an „alternative to the prevailing infatuation with discourse“. The actors and actresses develop their “characters” from movement patterns, quirks, stereotypes and everything else that the body unconsciously opposes the fulfillment of social role expectations.

In *Tent*, Karin Bergmann's farewell production, the counter-position to the literary approach of the 18th century is taken to extremes. Not a word is spoken. There is no text book, only three basic images. The actors (many of them for the last time before the change of directorship, which had announced terminations for new engagements) appeared on stage in wild Baroque, expansive and colorful costumes, scrubbing the stage floor, then the tents were set up in ever new variations of embarrassment and failure and finally, heads “rolled” at the end. – After being expelled in the enlightened 18th century in the course of literarisation, “Hanswurst” finally returned to the Burgtheater stage.

The Grotesque as a Phenomenon of Interaction between Context and Content

Michael Rössner

What is the effect of the grotesque? Wolfgang Kayser had described it in 1957 as a “structure” in which we find an “alienated world which does not admit any orientation, but appears absurd” (Kayser 1961², 199). Carl Pietzker tried to define the grotesque more precisely in 1971, referring to ideas of the *Rezeptionsästhetik*. He understood the grotesque as the frustration stemming from of the reader’s expectations created by the text itself. In this context he refers to the “usual expectations” of a society/civilization which are relativized and blurred by the experience of the grotesque.

Therefore, the grotesque is an ahistorical structure, but manifesting itself in a certain cultural context, i.e. a certain historical moment. In 2001 Peter Fuß, further developing Pietzker’s thesis, had therefore tried to show the variations of the grotesque throughout the cultural history of humankind, explaining the role of grotesque in all cultural contexts as opposing the “classical” tendency of stabilisation. He calls it a “liquidation” (in the etymological sense, i.e. not a destruction, but a restoration of the flexibility and ductility of the liquid status) of a cultural system through the typical practices of the grotesque, i.e. by inversion (*Verkehrung*), distortion (*Verzerrung*) and commingling (*Vermischung*) – in opposition to the culture-forming techniques of hierarchization, dichotomization and categorization. If these practices already recall similar terms of Freud’s *Traumdeutung* (*Verdichtung* and *Verschiebung*), Fuß’s description of the grotesque as a “parergonal frame of culture which forms its border, but is still a part of it and creates a suction effect which pulls marginalized and repelled elements back in the centre” (Fuß 61) explicitly creates a proximity between the grotesque and the unconscious.

Therefore, the grotesque is not merely a critique of the order of a certain social system (as is satire), but a “decomposition” of this system’s order as a whole; more radical is only the absurd – which all theorists conceptualise as inextricably linked to the grotesque, because this would be the “decomposition of the possibility of any cultural order per se” (Fuß 146). Fuß’ definition of liquidation, therefore, approaches poststructuralist concepts of deconstruction, it refers to almost each and every historical period and sees the grotesque as a motor of creativity and change, insofar as it abolishes binary logic and creates a third space of indeterminacy, where creativity can develop. But as the cultural systems change, so does the location of the grotesque as a border/margin of these systems: Fuß argues that it has been gradually transferred from the sphere of religion/mythology in the Ancient World to the sphere of art in early modern times and finally to the sphere of scholarship and philosophy within poststructuralism. This is why deconstruction is described as a “chimera of philosophy and literature” and the deconstruction of differences would lead to a re-construction of *différance*.

However, if we want to follow the global interpretation of cultural development of humankind by Peter Fuß, I think it is necessary to look at the central point of his – and

Pietzker's – definition of the grotesque as an intentional effect of the text/object which takes place during the process of artistic reception. If Freud already defined the work of dreams as "translation", it appears that such an effect has a similar cause as the effects of cultural translation: the interaction between a piece of concrete content and its context, which leads to a process of negotiation – in the case of the grotesque a negotiation that destabilizes and blurs the context.

This paper tries to show this destabilising effect by analysing a range of examples, from medieval texts to literature of the last century, which show how the grotesque, being the part of the respective cultural system that is opposed to the "classical" norms, liquidates said system through interaction of the inverted, distorted or commingled elements with the contemporary context and thereby contributes to a permanent deconstruction of the established structures and to the introduction of "newness", in a comparable way to cultural translation.

We shall start with one of the earliest examples of medieval literature in vernacular, Guilhem de Poitou, "Farai un vers de dreyt nien", which shows that „liquidation“ is not limited to Modern Ages. Here, we find the strategy described by Pietzker: "Farai un vers" – (I shall write a verse) is a formula Guilhem uses in 5 of his 11 known poems, almost 50% of the time. In the remaining 4 it serves to introduce the general subject, be it of courtly love or of sensual pleasure. We can suppose that these words aim at creating a similar expectation which is frustrated not only by the "nothing" which follows, but also by the negation of the most common subjects: joy, joven, amor – and finally by an obviously absurd motivation "Qu'enans fo trobatz en durmen/ Sus un chivau" (because, in the first place, it was conceived while sleeping on a horse). Critics have searched for centuries to find a hidden sense, a kind of code, interpreting the horse as a woman and therefore the song as another example of Guilhem's rather "rude" poems on physical love, disguised in the mysterious "trobar clus" form. But these are speculations, and one could ask why the poet uses all the oxymora that follow ("No soi alegres ni iratz,/No soi estranhs ni soi privat" – I am neither happy nor sad,/I am neither a stranger nor a native") when he had a secret message. The only secure structural element is the continuing negation of the usual form of the cançó until the last strophe which conventionally contains the addressee and the messenger which are again not named: "Fait ai lo vers, no sai de cui,/ Et trametrai lo a celui/ Que lo-m trameta per autrui" – I have written the verse, I don't know about whom,/ and I'll convey it to the one/ who'll convey it to someone else). It seems equally legitimate to read this as intentional deception of the reader's expectations in order to "liquidate" the norms of troubadour poetry. The medieval system has, however, been able to cope with this defiance, because it later on developed a conventional form for nonsense poetry: the *coq-à-l'âne*.

The transition from Medieval to Renaissance culture created a completely new context, a new system of literary genres and conventions based on the imitation of Greek and Roman authors which found its highest expression in the French "doctrine classique" during the 17th century. But quite early during the Renaissance period – long before Boileau's *Art poétique* (1674) – we can find examples of inverted, distorted or commingled

texts. A complete inversion of comedy's traditional scheme (a young couple struggling for their union in conflict with the old generation with a happy ending through a final wedding) can be found already at the end of the 16th century in Guillén de Castro's *Los mal casados de Valencia*, a comedy starting with two married couples and ending with the separation of both. Grotesque distortion seems to become an increasingly central part of *commedia dell'arte*, above all in the figures of the grotesque braggart (*Capitano*) and the pedant (*Dottore*). The former can also be found in a play by Pierre Corneille which could be used as an example for commingling: *L'illusion comique* (1635), defined by the author himself as an "étrange monster" mixing comedy and tragedy, but also meta-theatrical elements.

It goes without saying that Romanticism, as opposed to Classicism, was another strong moment for grotesque liquidation of the classical order, but the strongest moment of grotesque techniques in art history as a whole was certainly the avant-garde at the beginning of the 20th century. On one hand, this liquidation was directed against tradition: the figurative in the arts, and the *mimesis* principle in general; on the other hand, against the rationalistic scientific view of the world. Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism challenged the system of language, the hierarchical order of genres, the habits of consumers of culture – and also quite often used grotesque techniques.

In Spain, Ramón María del Valle-Inclán conceived a new aesthetics he called "esperpento" (deformed mirrors). Distortion is, therefore, a central concept, and his "concave mirrors" are opposed to the central metaphor of realism. The book is seen as a mirror, reflecting reality merely as it is (see Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le Noir*). Valle-Inclán prefers a "mathematically deformed" image of reality, as his figure Max Estrella defines it in *Lucas de Bohemia* (1920): "The classical heroes reflected in concave mirrors give rise to the *esperpento*. The tragic sense of Spanish life can only be understood by an aesthetic which is systematically deformed...The most beautiful images in a concave mirror are absurd... Deformation stops being such when it is subjected to perfect math. My actual aesthetic is to transform the classical norms using the mathematics of the concave mirror." This leads to a new conception of tragedy: the tragical heroes appear as ridiculous dwarfs or animals; instead of catharsis based on empathy, the author/and the reader/spectator look at tragical events with the perspective "of the other border".

Pirandello (being the role model of a group of young Italian dramatists whose works were called by critics the *Teatro del grottesco*) sometimes uses the same technique of distortion and commingling with the animal world (for instance in *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtù* where all characters with one exception appear animalized), but he does not exclude empathy; on the contrary, at the end of this comedy, the "only human" character confesses: "What a beast I have been". So, the grotesque results also here from the context of traditional (realistic, naturalistic) drama, but the liquidation of this system does not lead to a complete distancing of the author or the recipient.

But already the first example of avant-garde dramas sets the standard of distortion in this era: Alfred Jarry's *Ubu roi* of 1896, a parodistic re-enactment of a Macbeth-like story which originated from a student's mockery of a *petit bourgeois* professor. In Jarry's play, the protagonist replacing Macbeth is an already quite distorted figure with an enormously

fat belly, who together with his wife, Mère Ubu, plans to murder the King of Poland in order to become King himself. He is using vulgar language with some distorted words, for instance “merdre” (shit with an “r” in it). He uses meaningless expressions (“par ma chandelle verte”) and does absurd things (e.g. he throws a toilet brush on the table and invites his hosts to eat it which they do – and die immediately as the brush is poisoned). He is cruel and a coward and can only be motivated by the prospect of eating more sausages and becoming richer and richer. But the most obvious sign of distortion is that he always says what he thinks: he is a coward, he is greedy, he is cruel, he is absolutely self-centred and narcissistic – which leads to a similar result as the grotesque “dwarfs” Valle-Inclán’s *esperpento* – no empathy is possible, not even with the victims of Ubu when he kills hundreds of nobles with his “*Machine à décerveler*” (“decerebration machine”).

Ubu is obviously a grotesque figure who challenges not only the rules of realistic/naturalistic and also of symbolistic drama (although the drama was for the first time presented in the traditionally symbolistic *Théâtre de l’Oeuvre*), but also the conception of rational human behaviour with a minimum of ethical standards. It appears, therefore, as an extreme distortion in the context of the late 19th century, but some years later, Ubu could be seen as a prophecy of dictators like Hitler and Stalin, and since then, there have been lots of “remakes” of Ubu, for instance that of *Els Joglars* (“Ubú president” 1995) showing parallels between the Catalan Regional Governor Jordi Pujol and Ubu. Today, we can almost daily see a remake of Ubu if we follow the news on the strange figure acting as President of the United States of America – but is this not the end of distortion if alternative reality becomes reality itself and distortion normality? Could it be that we now live in a grotesque world and what we recall as normal would be a distortion of present reality? This could be another parallel with negotiation as the consequence of translation processes, and it could perhaps explain why – pursuant to Fuß’ thesis – the grotesque had to emigrate from literature to the field of philosophy – or cultural studies – at the end of the 20th century.

Distorted Sounds: Conceptualisation of the Grotesque in Music

Federico Celestini

In my previous attempts to conceptualise the Grotesque in Music, I was critical of the aim to define the essence of the Grotesque. Instead, I used Wittgenstein for orientation and developed an approach in which the Grotesque may be understood to be a historical tradition of motives and figures that are varied and transmitted intermedially over the centuries. To me, the basic similarity – Wittgenstein’s “family resemblance” – between these transmitted figures seems to lie in their combination of contradictory elements. Grotesque figures appear as mixed forms in which the categoric boundaries are overstepped. Here, there are three main areas of grotesque hybridisation, i.e. firstly the mingling of human, bestial and plant elements, secondly a mixture of organic (living) and mechanical elements, and thirdly a blend of living and the dead. The transmission of grotesque figures can be analysed historically as the adoption, variation and transfer of motives and figures, and synchronously as intermedially constructed intertexts. Both of these perspectives must however be supplemented by the examination of grotesque materiality and physicalness. I developed this approach primarily in relation to modern music and am thus thankful to the organisers of this symposium for the opportunity to test and develop these ideas further in relation to the *Commedia dell’arte*.

The pictured etching (Fig. 1) by Jean Berain Snr. (1640–1711) is a concrete example of the Grotesque as a transmission of traditional motives and figures. In this etching we see a network of motives that extend over centuries and latently engage various mediums. The *Commedia dell’arte* plays an important role here. The use of figures from the *Commedia dell’arte* in this design is noteworthy and confirms its intermedial character. One of the most important intermedial elements of the grotesque figures in Berain’s etching is the relatively prominent portrayal of musical instruments in the central panel, indeed exactly where figures from the *Commedia dell’arte* are pictured.

There are countless other examples that show *Commedia dell’arte* figures playing musical instruments, most commonly guitars and lutes. (Several examples will be shown and discussed.)

Francesco Bertelli’s etching from *Il Carnevale Mascherato Italiano* (1643) shows the masked figure *Coviello* with a *colascione*, a long-necked lute (Fig. 2). This etching accentuates one of the attributes of the *Commedia dell’arte* figures that justifies their inclusion in the transmission of the grotesque, namely the blending of human and bestial traits. The disproportionately large noses of the masks look like beaks (and also have a phallic significance), giving the figures a bird-like face. The fusion of human and bestial elements is one of the oldest and most common motives in the tradition of the Grotesque. (Further examples will be shown and discussed.)

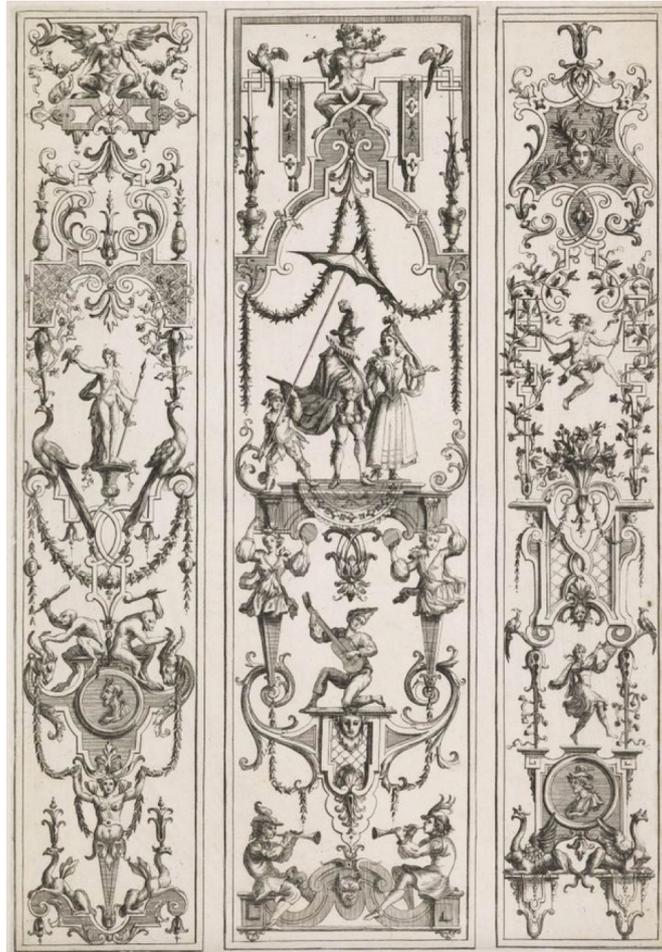


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

The bestial traits of *Commedia dell'arte* figures are particularly evident in etchings by Jacques Callot, whereby it is important to consider that these refer to street theatre, rather than to courtly theatre. In this etching (Fig. 3 from *Balli di Sfessania*, around 1622), Razullo uses his *colascione* as a type of weapon. In Callot's etchings, a further characteristic of street theatre is visible, namely the grotesque presentation of the body. Michail Bakhtin focussed on this element in particular. The grotesque body accentuates the crude physicalness – and hence also the sexuality – of human existence and thus differs clearly from the classical canon, which assumes a “self-contained, strongly differentiated, outwardly unspoilt, individually expressive body”. The characteristics of grotesque physicalness are clearly visible in Callot's etchings. In connection with the evident sexualisation of the body, the musical instruments depicted also bear clear phallic significance.



Fig. 3

Music profits from the withdrawal of speech in the *Commedia dell'arte* and takes on an important role in the process of grotesque performance. This is first manifested in the sound. It is to be expected that the grotesque physicality of a body performing music is expressed through the character of the sound. Here, the term “gesture” is important, as it refers not only to an element of musical expression, but also to the coordination between a musical figure and a physical motion. The anthropologist Helmuth Plessner thus speaks of the “insertability of bodily posture into musical forms”, which in turn portrays the “requirement for the possibility of adequate gestural meaning in music”. This anthropological perspective on musical gesture also suggests a close correlation between the eccentric style of movement of the *Commedia dell'arte* figures and their corresponding gestures in the domain of musical expression.

The depiction of dwarves is an example for the predilection for eccentric physicality in grotesque art. In Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini's drawings *Nani e Maschere ridicole* we

find a duo of musicians that demonstrate almost all of the grotesque elements mentioned, as well as presenting further components such as the mixture of gender. If we compare Burnacini's *Nani e Maschere ridicole* (Fig. 4) with one of its prototypes, namely Callot's *Gobbi* from 1616–22 (Fig. 5), not only similarities but also differences are apparent. Not only does Burnacini transfer the popular motive of performing dwarves into the courtly culture, but also introduces an element of performativity into this transfer, as the figures he depicts are conceived to be *personae* on the theatre stage. Thus, we can say that Burnacini stages the cultural transfer from the popular sphere of street theatre to courtly society graphically.



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

One of the earliest documentations of courtly performances of *Commedia dell'arte* is from the year 1568, in a description of the wedding celebrations of Wilhelm V. of Bavaria and Renata of Lorraine at the court of Albrecht V. in Munich. For this occasion, the court composer Orlando di Lasso was entrusted with the performance of a comedy involving characters from the *Commedia dell'arte* at short notice. Lasso's collection *Libro di villanelle, moresche e altre canzoni*, published in 1581, contains several pieces related to *Commedia dell'arte* characters. Among these is a dialogue between Pantalone and Zanni, "Zanni! Dov'estu?", which is set for four voices respectively, i.e. for eight voices in total. (Discussion of the piece.)

Here, we are confronted firstly with a relational grotesque that is manifested by a discrepant relationship between the cultivated musical compositional style and the linguistic and scenic content respectively, and secondly with a grotesque sound that emerges through the unusual vocal range. The relational grotesque is a consequence of the musical-cultural transfer from street theatre to courtly culture, and is inherent in the courtly appropriation of *Commedia dell'arte*.

The premiere of Manelli's opera *Andromeda* in the Venetian theatre San Cassiano in 1637 marks the beginning of the history of opera as a commercial enterprise. Among the significant changes in social, musical and dramaturgical respects brought about by this caesura is the assimilation of comedic elements and *personae* in opera. The figure of the comic servant, a typical for the *Commedia dell'arte*, was absorbed into opera, which thus bore tragic and comic elements and thus also a predisposition for grotesque situations.

The subject of *Don Giovanni* is a clear example of this phenomenon. *Il Convitato di Pietra* is one of the three pieces that was on the programme of carnival festivities presented by Andrea D'Orso's company at the Court of Vienna in 1660. A wooden theatre building was erected especially for these guest performances, most likely that which was designed by Burnancini's father Giovanni for Regensburg in 1653. The first known version of the *Don Giovanni* subject as a "dramma per musica", *L'empio punito* by Alessandro Melani, to a libretto by Pippo Acciaiuoli, was premiered in Rome in 1669. Many versions followed throughout the 18th century before Mozart and Da Ponte's *Don Giovanni* was premiered in Prague in 1787. Gradually, the servant's name changed from Bibi to Pascariello or Pasquariello, as he was named in the version by Giuseppe Gazzaniga and Giovanni Bertati, which served as a template for Mozart and Da Ponte. Many motives and scenes from the *Commedia dell'arte* are still discernable in Mozart's and Da Ponte's *Don Giovanni*.

The relationship between *Don Giovanni* and Leporello corresponds to the Master-Servant relationship common in the *Commedia dell'arte* tradition, both linguistically (with Giovanni's grandiose bestial salutations and Leporello's cheeky answers) as well as dramaturgically and gesturally. The mixing of comic and tragic elements in the *dramma giocoso* promotes the emergence of grotesque situations. One of these is the cemetery scene in the second act of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Here, the typical grotesque mixture of living and dead, as well as of comic and horror is realised musically in the form of a polyphonic layering, with Leporello's *buffo* voice, with augmented leaps, as a fundament. (Discussion of the score of this section.)

In summary, it can be seen that the *Commedia dell'arte* tradition demonstrates many links to the tradition of the Grotesque. The graphic images of Jacques Callot are clear examples of the grotesque body as described by Bakhtin. This is also clearly demonstrated in the eccentric style of movement of the *Commedia dell'arte* figures. Exactly this gestural dimension provides the connection between grotesque physicalness and the grotesque sound. The latter remains however merely speculative in the grotesque folk tradition. Burnacini's drawings are more than simply documents for the transfer of the *Commedia dell'arte* folk tradition into courtly culture. As they are intended for realisation on a theatre stage, they provide a graphic staging of this transfer. The hybridisation of idioms and stylistic traits from various origins that is effectuated by this transfer offers further possibilities for grotesque forms. The relational grotesque – with which music is involved – is significant here.

The grotesque in the cinema of Wien-Film. Aspects of audio-visual situations, representations, and characters

Stefan Schmidl

In totalitarian contexts the category of the grotesque inevitably functions either as a mode of representing the ideological “Other” or as expression of subversion or sublimation. In both modes it connotes individuality, opposed to an orderly mass. However, an ultimate classification of grotesque manifestations in totalitarian arts is often confronted with the problem of the form’s cardinal ambiguity. To exemplify this phenomenon the paper concerns itself with the grotesque in productions of the Wien-Film under the aegis of National-Socialist Germany. Still known today for its productions starring popular actor Hans Moser, the studio’s trademark virtually centred the grotesque and therein distinguished itself within German cinema. By means of an audio-visual close reading of selected sequences of the Wien-Film, the delicacy of grotesques’ correct interpretation shall become apparent.

The Grotesque as Reflexive Figure of the Revolution

Franz Fillafer

Witnesses of the French Revolution described their times as an age of form failure, i.e. an epoch in which forms disaggregate, are perverted and turned into shambles. In doing so, contemporaries tapped the satirical imagery of the *mundus inversus*, of defiguration and disproportionality, which they map onto new phenomena such as popular sovereignty, the *lève en masse*, and the world republic. Viewed in this light, the grotesque is indispensable for a social and cultural theory of the Age of Revolution, because it permits us to trace the shifting nature of the body politic at stake in that period. The grotesque serves as a site of contestation where the frontiers between the self and the other, above and below, as well as between civilization and barbarism are constantly redrawn, merged into one, and subjected to playful travesty. James Gillray depicted scarecrow-like Jacobins as subaltern parasites and cannibal gluttons who feast on the flesh of their co-citizens, Friedrich Schlegel saw the grotesque as the conceptual link between fashion and the Revolution, while Goya, Blake, and Edmund Burke blurred the divide between the animal kingdom and the realm of humanity. What this selection of cases makes tangible is the crisis of the Enlightenment semantics of nature: Since the Revolution, monarchists and republicans tar each other as beasts and dissolve the mandatory order of nature into a set of rival social models. Concomitantly, the old satire of the ruler is transformed into a pathological reading of the “rabble”. Thereby, the grotesque turns into a template of Counter-Revolution and containment which suffuses quite distinct and discernable contexts with its visual language.

Grotesque Soup: Bakhtin and the Recipes of Literature

Christoph Leitgeb

1)

Bakhtin developed his concept of the “grotesque” with reference to Rabelais and a carnivalesque folk-culture of the Renaissance. An attempt to delineate his definition of the grotesque from this historical context raises typological problems: How can the grotesque be distinguished from the uncanny, the absurd or the satiric when not considering their respective historical appearance? Kafka has repeatedly been cited as a paradigm for this question: Is Gregor Samsa’s *Metamorphosis* grotesque, uncanny, absurd or just comic? Theory has often tried to decide this question in the manner of genre-classifications: But what if all these terms accurately describe Kafka’s text?

Worlds depicted as grotesque, absurd, uncanny or comical are often defined by their contradiction to what is considered as “normal” or “realistic”. However, from a strategic point of view, it is difficult to determine exactly what “realistic representation” means – without getting involved in ideological debates about “realism”: Bakhtin coined his concept of “grotesque realism” as an implicit answer to “socialist realism”. I will try to avoid this discussion by referring to a concept of “frames” (or “scripts”). This concept has the advantage of implying the position of an observer “outside” the “frame” from the very beginning:

Here is the essence of the theory: When one encounters a new situation (or makes substantial changes in one’s view of the present problem) one selects from memory a structure called a frame. [...] A frame is a data structure for representing a stereotyped situation, like being in a certain kind of living room, or going to a child’s birthday party. Attached to each frame are several kinds of information. Some is about what can be expected to happen next. [Minsky, 1975, 212]

A “frame” captures a situation in a narrative. A frame interprets the situation by defining “actors” (“Aktanden” / Latour) – people or objects that can trigger or influence events in this very situation. A frame helps to assess and coordinate these “actors” and influence events according to a reasoning of cause and effect. By insinuating a frame, a reflective observer “outside” confronts a picture “inside”. This confrontation also defines boundaries for what is and what is not part of the situation at hand.

So here is my attempt at a definition: Within the aesthetics of the grotesque, the subject reflecting on a situation identifies with the “actors” within this situation. She or he thus sets those “actors” free from any restrictions usually imposed by a frame. The grotesque thus does not ascribe the breaking of a frame to the shortcomings of the outside observer’s perspective (as does satire), but to the “objective” self-will of actors: The grotesque image is that of a revolution of objects no longer controlled by an outside idea.

2)

Rabelais writes so much about food that Bakhtin dedicates a separate chapter in his book to those “feasts”. “Eating and drinking are among the most important expressions of life of the grotesque body.” The usual “frames” associated with food are defined, e.g., by conceptions of what is edible at all; they contain instructions for the preparation of food; they contain rules of hygiene and good manners for consumption; and last but not least, they describe how food can be aesthetically presented on a platter and when the pleasure of eating reaches its limit through satiation.

Bakhtin thinks that an inner logic of the grotesque and its realism accounts for its preference for food as a motif. Thus, the motif should also help to understand the essential criteria of Bakhtin’s typological concept: It should demonstrate how the concept of the grotesque, e.g., can be applied to Gogol – and it should show distinctions of the grotesque and the satirical, or the uncanny. In his effort to distinguish the grotesque and satire, Dimitri Tschitzewskij refers to the description of a “Ukrainian land of milk and honey” in Gogol’s second volume of *Dead Souls*:

And you make the pie with four corners. In one corner you put the sturgeon’s stomach and chopped fish cartilage, in the other you put buckwheat grits and mushrooms with leek and fish milk and brains and you know, something similar [...] And from one side you let the pâté turn red, from the other side you let it bake more easily. And the bottom, the bottom – you see – bake it so that it becomes crumbly, so that it is completely penetrated by the juice, so that you won’t even notice it in your mouth, so that it dissolves completely in your mouth [...].

According to the proposed definition, the description of this pâté becomes all the more “grotesque”, the more it emphasizes the “objective” self-will of its ingredients. It is this obstinacy of objects Bakhtin means when speaking about “grotesque realism”: At the same time, the coining of this term could be suspected as being a satire of the Stalinist aesthetics of “socialist realism”. Bakhtin, though, makes a very sharp distinction between the grotesque and satire. But the question arises, whether his quotations of Rabelais’ and Gogol’s grotesque descriptions of food do not have a satirical tendency.

In contrast to the grotesque, satire needs a double frame, the simultaneous inclusion of another, second narrative. Without this double frame, satire could not represent the satiric reflection (a reflection that the grotesque suppresses by identifying the observer and the situation’s actors). In Genette’s terminology, satire constructs an extra-diegetic narrator: a narrator who can critically reflect upon the frame demolished by the grotesque. Satire thus uses the emergence of the grotesque to criticize a point of view that it does not fully identify with. In order to qualify Bakhtin’s Rabelais quote as “satire”, the standpoint of description must thus shift to a position beyond the “edge of the plate”.

Bakhtin wrote his treatise on the grotesque realism of Rabelais’ feasts and digestive processes in the starving Russia of the 1940s – and was not able to publish his text until about 20 years later. Around the middle of this period, in 1953, when Stalin had just died, Vladimir Pomerantsev published an essay in the *Nowy Mir* entitled *A Half-Open Word*. As a

released Gulag prisoner, he had described black bread as a grotesque utopia of abundance; now he accused “socialist realism” of hypocrisy in its depictions of food. Emigrant Anya von Bremzen quotes Pomerantsev in her satire on the “Highlights of Soviet Cuisine” as presented by “kniga”, the Soviet “kitchen bible for everyone”. This cookbook depicted an all-Soviet family of peoples: Bremzen’s satirical description culminates in recalling a pork processing plant in Muslim Azerbaijan: It was named after Lawrenti Beria, “Stalin’s butcher”.

It is an open question how far Rabelais and Bakhtin themselves give their descriptions of historic feasting a satirical perspective. Rabelais’ depicts the people as a coherent body that literally digests itself – or, in Bakhtin’s words: “The genuinely grotesque complex of a common, supra-individual physical life is created, a large belly that is devoured and devoured, gives birth and is born.” It is easy to see how these descriptions fit the image of a people consuming itself in the aftermath of a bloody revolution.

Von Bremzen’s ironic stance constantly emphasizes the simultaneity and blending of the culinary and the political frame. Bakhtin’s depiction of the grotesque is much less obvious in this respect, but he, too, refers to the framework of real Stalinism when depicting the Renaissance feast. It is hard to miss the satiric edge in his allusion to the Marxist connection of utopia and work. “As the last victorious stage of the work, the meal represents the work process as a whole. In the oldest systems of motifs there could be no difference at all between food and work, they were two sides of one and the same process, the struggle with the world, which ended with the victory of man”.

3)

“The inner infinity of the individual was alien to the medieval and Renaissance grotesque.” For Bakhtin, the grotesque has nothing to do with an idealistic tendency: It does not project the framing instance of “recognizing self” into an increasingly abstract “outside”. This is why people’s laughter about the grotesque is “pre-modern”, common and socially constructive. For Bakhtin, it is worlds apart from the “destructive laughter” described as the modern reaction to the grotesque. Bakhtin distinguishes between a concept of the grotesque and “satire” and quotes Heinrich Schneegans’ *History of the Grotesque Satyrs* as an example of blurring this distinction: “The problem is that Schneegans applies a concept of satire developed in the spirit of modern times to Rabelais. For him, satire is the criticism of individual private traits and not criticism of the entire order of life (including the prevailing truth), not criticism that is inseparably linked to the affirmation of the new being born.”

Bakhtin’s confrontation of the grotesque and satire can be linked to distinctions made within the long tradition of a theory of irony. Gilles Deleuze, in his essay on the Marquis de Sade and Sacher-Masoch, contrastingly juxtaposes irony and humour: Irony, for Deleuze, laughs at the imperfection of individual experiences because, in the background, it presupposes the unassailable totality of an idea. Compared with this idea, the diversity of life appears insufficient. Humour, in contrast, emphasizes the particular experience: because it cannot integrate the diversity of impressions, humour laughs at the pretence of

an abstract idea. Put in Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque: "The word at the symposium is at once universal and materialistic, it travesties and degrades every purely ideal, mystical or ascetic victory, the victory of an abstract mind over the world."

It is important to notice how these distinctions within a rhetoric of laughter also conceive antithetical limitations to their respective frames as seen from within. Bakhtin's grotesque and Deleuze's humour do not presuppose distinct boundaries, they do not presuppose a "totality" of the empirical: The limit of their frame is only imaginary, a "whole", where all "actors" have fulfilled their own will. Bakhtin's satire and Deleuze's irony, on the contrary, presuppose the boundaries of a frame by insisting on the "totality" of an external idea. Roland Barthes has described a rhetorical system in which both of those tendencies merge and the "totality of the idea" also seems to be the imaginary "whole" of the represented actors' self-will. Such a system is not grotesque, satiric, humorous or ironic, but a system of myth.

A mythical reading of the early "kniga" will suggest that the totality of the diverse ensemble of food represented really guarantees the idea of a totality of the Soviet peoples. Precisely to the extent that the different dishes unfold their full, independent development as "actors", they also confirm the idea of "folklore". Saša Stanišić depicted a seemingly "grotesque" banquet as an ensemble of the most diverse Bosnian, Serbian, Kosovar and other Yugoslavian national dishes. He thus mythically affirmed the idea of an ethnic family and at the same time satirically opposed purity commandments of a newer, totalitarian nationalism. Stanišić's mythical banquet ends in a shooting.

4)

There is a second, typological contrast through which Bakhtin defines the grotesque: According to him, the grotesque liberates us from fear, from the isolation of romantic and post-romantic individualism. "There is no room for fear in the world and people as a whole, fear can only affect parts that are isolated from the whole [...]" After Romanticism and especially since Freud, the discussion about an aesthetic of fear has been concentrated in a theory of the uncanny, which, like a theory of irony, accompanies Bakhtin's conception of the grotesque. Bakhtin explicitly delineates the grotesque from psychoanalytical interpretations and emphasizes its Renaissance context.

Nevertheless, the parallels in the development of the two concepts are significant. As literary examples of the grotesque, Bakhtin does not only refer to Rabelais, but also, e.g., to E.T.A. Hoffmann or to Gogol's *The Nose*, paradigmatic texts for a theory of the uncanny. He speaks about the "Gothic novel" as a "branch of the new grotesque", albeit "subjective". Motifs such as the hybrid body (part human and part machine or animal), the doll and the independently living body-part, motifs such as the living corpse or the disgusting (the abject) are eminent for both a theory of the grotesque and a theory of the uncanny.

Although Robert Pfaller did not use Deleuze to distinguish irony and humour, he did define an opposition of laughter and the uncanny: The comic for us is what is "specifically uncanny for others"; conversely, this definition suggests that anything uncanny specific for me seems funny to others. This concept allows to align a definition of the uncanny

with the other definitions here. The uncanny no longer “satirically” attacks a foreign point of view by depicting a broken frame from a detached standpoint. It depicts how actors’ independence can turn against a standpoint of one’s own. Like the other concepts, the uncanny hence contrasts a questionable “totality” and a “carnavalesque whole”.

Totalitarianism protects the boundaries of its frames by means of taboos. “Taboo zones attract me”, confesses, for example, Vladimir Sorokin, author of a novel with the grotesque title *The sky-blue bacon* (2000) or a play about the “Pelmeni” celebrated in “kniga”. And “I like to get into it. There is living meat there that you can eat by breaking this taboo. Such zones are rare. Culture is a colossal belly that digests everything and turns it into a commodity.” By presenting culture as a colossal belly that ultimately transforms everything into one and the same, the grotesque image of an imaginary “whole” shifts to the image of an abstract totality hostile to individual expression. The purpose of artistic action in this totalitarian culture is not to fill its stomach endlessly as in the land of plenty. The purpose will be to show culture is uncanny and ultimately, to spoil its stomach.

The image of culture transforming “everything into one and the same” in itself provides for the emergence of the grotesque: Here the self-will, the stubbornness of all the “actors” conspire to converge. Péter Nádas has depicted this “inferno” in a Budapest school-cantine of his youth: Food and its preparation, cutlery and even the grotesque figure of the cooks melt into an ecstasy of fat. Fat turns into a fetish representation of an alleged “totality”. Fat, the epitome of what food culture has to transform and civilize, turns into what Julia Kristeva has called the “abject”. Narrator and reader behold it with a mixture of uncanny fascination and disgust.

5)

My presentation minimises some historical emphasis Bakhtin put on the grotesque. Yet still, I hope that the rhetoric typology corresponds to a basic tendency in his poetics. Generally speaking, Bakhtin does not see the text as an accumulation of linguistically manifest and structurally describable features: He tends to describe the very form of the text as the result of an active intervention of its readers. Readers have to actively position themselves vis à vis the text, thus defining its final form. Their decision to take an interior or exterior stance at the same time necessarily takes an ethical stand.

I might well have added other ingredients to my soup of rhetoric concepts, by contrasting the grotesque and the absurd, e.g., which could have linked the theory of the grotesque to a poetics of the fantastic. But here I cannot let this soup boil any further, its proof will be the eating.

The Laughter of the Grotesque

Rainer Stollmann

1. For Orientation

The laughter of the grotesque is the laughter in Europe before the 16th century; the laughter of farmers all over the world at any time, also of the inner peasant in every human being; the laughter of children; the laughter that is caused by tickling the experiential skin – in contrast to a joke, which tickles the skin of thoughts or language. It is enlightenment before enlightenment, i.e. gentle dominance of laughter over all other human qualities. Laughter is the gravitational center of all oral culture and public life. Institutionalized as carnival, it is a temporary revolution within feudalism, the cement of feudal society. It is the editing mode of irrevocable contradictions (e.g. death, gender relations, domination) and it is dialectics of feeling.

2. Laughter is not a Reflex

Since Pavlov's time, and certainly also in the future, people have repeatedly claimed that laughter is a reflex. The opposite is true. When a young man tickles his sleeping mistress on the sole of her foot on Sunday morning, the foot does not laugh, but withdraws. Only when this protective reflex is inhibited by gentle force, such as following the foot with the tickling fingers, does the nervous energy accumulate and finally escape into all muscles, especially into the largest muscle inside the body, the diaphragm. Laughter is therefore not a reflex, but on the contrary arises from its prevention.

3. Evolution of Tickling

We know that chimpanzee mothers tickle their children. It speaks therefore much for the fact that tickling was discovered before approximately eight million years by an anthropoid mother during the fur care of her child. There are two reasons why laughter has become a generic trait within primates, especially homo sapiens: 1. the lust of laughter, 2. its usefulness in the weaning process between mother and child.

4. The discovery of the dialectic of listlessness and pleasure through tickling

Tickle is a fake attack. The skin and the stupid reflexive nervous system see it as an attack, but the soul of the tickled almost at the same moment as the affection of a loved one. The high culture of the hand forces nature to surrender. It abolishes the nature of the reflex in the Hegelian sense by preserving it (tickling works again and again, the vegetative nervous system cannot learn individually), by breaking the reflex with gentle force, and by raising it to a higher level. This higher level, however, is not a philosophical concept, but a new

behaviour not found in nature itself, laughter. One would like to say: The body thinks, and dialectically.

5. All Senses are Ticklish

That laughter comes from a feeling, the ambivalent tickling feeling, nothing can be changed. Once discovered, the fake attack on the reflex and the symbiotic mother relationship can detach itself from the body skin: Fake scolding, fake terror, making an angry face, swinging the child around, thus tickling his sense of balance instead of the body skin, inventing roller coaster and chain carousel, finally: telling funny stories, making jokes, thus no longer tickling the body at all, but only mental skins (= interrelationships). All senses, not only the sensation of the skin, have their ticklish spots. Wherever laughter appears, there must be an analogue to the cancelled reflex. It can be replaced by anything that happens automatically, that lies within the horizon of expectation, that corresponds to habit, that has become second nature, that is part of the generally accepted order. Every interruption, surprise, unpredictability has the possibility to appear ticklish, i.e. to produce laughter. The more senseless the interrelationships, the harder the tickling. In mathematics and physics, there is often talk of the beauty of great simple formulas, but one hears nothing of grotesque, witty or humorous mathematical phenomena. One would have to pay attention to it once. If not the root of minus 1 and the resulting field of complex numbers is really grotesque, you can ask. The Russian writer Andrei Platonov, who writes entirely in the tradition of grotesque realism, defines Russia almost as the root of minus one. Quantum physics with its bold overcoming of space and time also goes in the direction of the grotesque.

6. The Laughter of the Grotesque is the Laughter of the Peasant

The reason for the proximity of peasant life to laughter is that social relations, power, domination, farm and village economy are open to direct sensual experience and can therefore be tickled much more easily than the bourgeois-capitalist society mediated by the abstract exchange value, the abstract work. Rural work is related to laughter. Rural life rests on a paradox. The peasant is more emancipated not because he makes the earth subject to him, but also because he makes himself subject to the earth. With the invention of agriculture an agrarian optimism enters the world, which then also takes hold of social life in the hope that Mother Earth means well with the people.

7. Grotesque and Modernity

7.1. About the Physics of Tickling

Galileo and Descartes use the metaphor of tickling to refute Aritoteles' "qualities". Galileo's condemnation has more to do with tickling than with the Ptolemaic world view. He is an atomist. Atomists must deny the Catholic Eucharist. Galileo refers to the carnival.

7.2. Rationalization of Laughter

In the 16th century the rationalization of laughter began in Europe. It is as if the old peasant laughter of the grotesque is pushed into a melting furnace fired by reason, beauty and

morality, and 400 years later the swearword “grotesque” on the one hand and “humour”, “joke”, “comedy” on the other hand emerge. Reason sits in humour above laughter, in irony next to it, in wit as punchline in the middle of it, and comedy is grotesque in a reasonable corset. This is the price that laughter must pay in order that the ban on laughter in religious feudalism may be lifted and laughter may become part of high culture. If for the church laughter was the devil’s laughter, for the bourgeoisie, at the latest since Descartes and beyond Kant until today, it is, like life in the country, above all “healthy,” i.e., physically reasonable. The laughter of the belly (“grotta”) becomes the laughter of the head. In order to become “beautiful,” as Hegel says, laughter must sublimate to “a smile in tears”.

7.3. *On the Economy of Laughter*

A key idea in Freud’s investigation of the joke already raised doubts among his friends and students. To this day, criticism of the “savings” that Freud said were in laughter has not ceased. Indeed, there is history in this term. For the enlightened forms of laughter, Freud is right, but the grotesque, on the other hand, spares us nothing.

7.4. *Beauty and the Grotesque*

According to Bakhtin, the archetype of the grotesque is the “giving birth” or the “nourishing death”, somewhat weakened the “suckling old woman”. One can ask which is more realistic, a nursing virgin as in the many pictures of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance or a nourishing death? Beauty – and a nursing virgin is for the male eye the most beautiful thing there is: untouched and sign of male potency at the same time – is the stopping of time. All beauty obeys Faust’s wish: “Stay but, you are so beautiful!” In it swings the mourning of transience. The difference between the grotesque and beauty is that between withstanding and escapism.

7.5. *The Grotesque Mona Lisa*

Mona Lisa is not beautiful, but a monster, composed of patriarchal images of women. Michelangelo’s David is the *uomo novo* carved in stone, Mona Lisa, on the other hand, is a painted question mark that invites the viewer in front of the picture to let his fear of becoming a *uomo universale* burst into laughter.

7.6. *Hegel or the Imperialism of the Spirit*

Hegel has translated what a primate mother discovered and invented 8 million years ago on the womb of her child into serious mental behaviour without a rest. Lacan writes: “Laughter has no place in Hegel’s system. Laughter tends to take no contradiction seriously, but draws its pleasure from it. Hegel takes every contradiction seriously and resolves it conceptually. Bertolt Brecht can find this funny.

8. *Plea for the Reintroduction of Court Jesters*

The main problem of laughter is the main problem of most human qualities: the greenhouse-like barracking of a single quality with disinterest in all-sided development. In the *Tagesschau* and similar news programmes, three minutes in a row or separately should be given to changing comedians who comment on world events in their own way. Today's courts can be found in the "system world": parliaments, supervisory boards, shareholders' meetings, company meetings, governments, parties, departmental meetings, church congregations, association meetings and the like. Five minutes of wit and comedy by an independent comedian per hour of session should be made compulsory. In schools, the subject "humour" is introduced, an A in "humour" balances out three Ds in other subjects. Press officers are only hired on condition that they tell a joke at the beginning and end of each press conference. Pensioners are called upon to found the "dadaist scouts" with state support: Every day a nonsensical act, and all in public. From the point of view of laughter, the adult human being is an aberration anyway. Children and old people laugh best, as long as they are not embittered by life.