

THE VISUAL CONSTRUCTION OF CARNIVAL CULTURE

While the thesis behind this symposium¹ appears to be the radical shift in the status of the visual typical of our age in its opposition to the tradition of its past, this paper aims to present an alternative understanding of the visual that had run parallel to the reigning paradigm all along the history of traditional iconoclasm: that of the medieval carnival as described by M. M. Bakhtin.

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Carnival, including its modern-day incarnation, is of course a feast for the eyes and appears to fit the definition of a spectacle, vaguely justifying our association of it with the visual aspect of culture – but Bakhtin's point about medieval carnival is precisely in its opposition to the spectacular function, for it allows no mere spectators and the feast it prepares welcomes the intestines more warmly than the eyeballs. The specific imagery of the human body Bakhtin distills from the folklore as typically carnivalesque and incorporated within the broader term of »grotesque realism«, as he deems this visual realization of the carnival worldview, is in its basis profoundly anti-scopic. If the classical cannon of depicting the human body prefers man as a creature of sealed cracks and discrete protuberances, but wide-open and profound eyes through which he gobbles up the world in a sterile *theoria*, the grotesque cannon shuns the eyes in favor of gaping mouths, butt- and other cracks, wildly protruding bellies, breasts and phalli. The grotesque body enjoys its world in roaring laughter,

1 The article was first presented as a paper at the international symposium »Visual construction of culture« organized by the Center of visual culture and the journal *Tvrđa*, held in Zagreb, Croatia.

with squinted, beady eyes and through the widely yawning mouth that ingests and digests the world in the most literary of fashions. »The eyes have no part in these comic images; they express an individual, so to speak self-sufficient human life, which is not essential to the grotesque. The grotesque is interested only in protruding eyes (...)«² This is why medieval carnival cannot be called a spectacle: »it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. Footlights would destroy a carnival as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle, seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because it's very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it.«³

96 But while carnival devours and is devoured by its spectators – while it is clearly not an object of aesthetic contemplation – it is just as far removed from common reality in its banal sense. Carnival is neither life nor art but a living picture. Despite the fact that it opposes the ocularly biased imagery underlying the dominant culture of its times, it incorporates its anti-ocular view in vivid imagery – moreover, an imagery much more colorful and visually suggestive than that of its opponent that officially prefers the visual to other senses. The carnival worldview is quite non-metaphorically that – a view – and thus inexistent outside of its pictorial incorporation. Bakhtin never speaks of carnivalesque concepts but of carnival imagery and of carnival pictures and his greatest concern is to stress that this imagery, rather than to be reduced to mere »funny pictures«, is to be understood as the carrier of a profound, complex and immeasurably archaic philosophy inherent to the timeless »people«.

Bakhtin stresses the highly non-artistic, non-theatrical character of the carnival just as strongly as its explicitly pictorial and exhibitionistic character. While expelling the neutral observer, he talks of carnival as composed of scenes and images and forming a literary taken »picture of the world«. Carnival is, paradoxically, an image with no observer; its stance is exhibitionistic but it counts on no neutrally observing Other to be shocked by its shameless display; it somehow manages to conceive the world as a stage lacking an auditorium but nevertheless staying a stage and not blending back into everyday, banal reality. Carnival mobilizes masks and costumes, but conceives them as truer identities than the everyday faces they conceal. It thus appears that carnival values the reality of the picture-plane above the reality of day-to-day life – not merely emotionally – as pleasant fantasies – but ontologically: in their

2 Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Rabelais and his World*, MIT press: Massachusetts, 1968, p. 316.

3 Ibid., p. 7.

reality status and innermost truth-value. In short, while carnival is devised as a release of man from the stress of everyday life into the festive reality of the fanciful masquerade, it does not understand this shift as a temporary escape into a fantasy world that must eventually give way and return to the inescapable, harsh reality of the workday building up outside it, but as a crossing over from the false, ideologically structured banality of a citizen's everyday working life into the festive and holy sphere of the truer and higher reality of the pictorial. Carnival dissects the world with distances concretized in heavy, wooden masks and rearranges its elements into a living picture – just like the savages of Levi-Strauss slice up the world to attain signifiers from which to construct their myths. What the latter claims is the greatest misconception about the primitive mind – the notion that their use of elements from reality in their constructions aims not to signify the world but to mobilize it as a signifier – could also be claimed about the carnival pictorialization of reality: its pictures use the world as a ready material for their creative construction not as their reference for representation.

This turning of the world into a ready-made object from which to construct a work of art might ring close to the modern subject of the will to power most explicitly embodied in the demonically creative individual of the romantic age, but there is a crucial difference between the two that has to do with carnival's archaic link with the pre-individuated primitive sociality. Because carnival holds no place for the unique individual (on the contrary, carnival thrives on doubling or dividing anything seemingly unique or indivisible), it is also not the creation of a single author but of the »people«. If the ideal romantic work of art demands as the underside of its sublime beauty a diabolically ingenious creator that is at once tragically excluded from it and burdened by the guilt of having mortified the world into a dirigible object, taking part in the co-creation of carnival's reconstruction of the world as a living picture holds the precisely opposite operation as its primary condition: transforming oneself into a comical *object* that will form one the bits of this authorless and spectatorless artwork.

The above reference to primitive consciousness through one of its greatest investigators is not coincidental: despite the fact that Bakhtin explicitly claims that carnival is by no means merely a celebration of the biological, natural cycles and that it transgresses the harvesting festivities by injecting them with a sense of historical time, the origins of its conception of the pictorial can be traced back to the most ancient pagan rituals as described by other celebrated investigations. Mircea Eliade's insistence that the savage that ritually repeats

the events of the mythical time is not merely representing them but actually embodies them fully transgressing into the zero-hour at the beginning of the world is a piece of common intellectual knowledge.⁴ But if the masquerade of the tribe (that also has no spectators) does not merely signify the Dreamtime but lives it and if the masked tribesmen do not merely represent the ancestral gods but *are* them, does that not suggest that the very mythical time itself is nothing more than a masquerade and that a pagan's god is never embodied more fully than in the unlikely combination of a man and a wooden mask?

In the cyclic worldview the pictorial reality is the highest plane of being. Not only do the primitive ritual theaters not represent any real past event from our point of view, they are also fully aware of the fact that they don't – with the addition that they cunningly use the scheme of transference of the holy onto a phantasmatically posited »mythical time« to originally produce it through what poses as its repetition but is actually its sole embodiment.

98 It is on the misapplied logic of pictures as representation that the main thesis of the great James Frazer's work hinges. *The Golden Bough* claims that the ritual of burning or drowning a dummy representing god (as in modern day carnivals that still survive to this day) is actually a watered down, more civilized version of a primary ritual scene, where the society sacrificed a living scapegoat. Faced with the two rituals, Frazer assumes that the pictorial, dummy sacrifice is a representation of the original human sacrifice – a thesis seemingly confirmed by the modern-day extinction of the barbaric human sacrifice and survival of the dummy sacrifice in contemporary relics of cyclic rituals within civilized society. He misses however the blaring fact that the rituals of human sacrifice he lists to support his thesis all stem from relatively advanced social organizations, by rule oligarchic empires (Roman, Aztec), whereas surviving modern-day local celebrations are heir to a much older tradition of tribal rituals whose modern day relics they fit to a T. The conclusion that we have to extract from this, is that, far from the doll burning being a faded reflection of the original ritual murder and the dummy being a sorry representational replacement for the original reality of flesh and blood, the original sacrifice happened in the realm of the pictorial (where the holy unabashedly resided) and its later-day vulgarization into ritual murder is but its ideologically-motivated misappropriation by a fascistic, imperialist state. From the point of view of archaic and carnivalesque consciousness, the ritual murder isn't realizing

4 Comp. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, New York: Princeton University Press, 1974, p. 35.

a fantasy they had only managed to represent by pictorial means, it's simply using unnecessarily messy means to paint the holy sphere, vulgarizing it with use of mortal flesh and blood. After all, the murdered slave-king is merely appointed in god's place for a day, while the puppet burning on Ash Wednesday quite unequivocally *is* god.

According to what has been pointed out here then, carnival constructs a temporary social utopia from elements that are purely pictorial but that are simultaneously understood as of a higher order of reality than what is normally understood as direct, not-pictorially-mediated reality of everyday life. Being a religious view, this is a point where it coincides with the official religion of medieval Catholicism and its reduction of the everyday world to an illusion. But instead of positing its alternative into an undepictable true reality beyond the grave whose mere pictorial reflection makes up the world we live in, it places it in the *even more pictorial*, even more palpable sphere of carnival festivity that can be experienced here and now on a regular basis (and even with a tendency to establish itself as a permanent state of the world). The reality of carnival society is pictorial, but it is no mere fantasy. More than a pretty picture of a promised better tomorrow to dreamily observe during the relentless march of eternal progress, carnival is a holy, festive sphere, into which one may temporarily cross over numerous times during one's lifetime and eat, drink and be marry in, in a quite unabridged corporeal experience.

»Carnival is the other, true life of the people.« Carnival is indeed a »visually constructed society«, for the utopia it paints is a distinctly social and not a natural paradise, a »life of the people«. Carnival constructs what it understands as the only true form of society in a space left out of both components of a commonwealth found in traditional social theory: it falls neither into the official public sphere under the domain of the ruling government nor into the private sphere of free endeavor. For carnival, society – what Bakhtin insistently call »the people« in a concept that may ring close to the phantasmatic *people* of historically practiced Marxism,⁵ but is radically different from it – happens publicly, in squares filled with fairs and celebrations, where actions are not limited by the concept of private freedom, but attain a universal meaning, while at the same time this public sphere is not presided over by any judging eye and remains »unofficial«. Carnival society is a pictorially created

5 »The people« of practiced Marxism are a fascinating phantom: it is in their name that the Party rules, but nobody knows who comprises their group. Occasionally, masses of listeners can be rhetorically accepted into this elite club and rebellious individuals may be expelled from its ranks – both to great populist effect.

space of freedom emerging between the domains of the private citizen and the official society.

100 From the carnival point of view, both of the latter are also visually constructed, but hide their dependence on the pictorial and are thus deemed ideological constructions based on concealed fantasies. The official catholic society of the middle ages – in consistence with the iconoclastic paradigm of the dominant western historical tradition we could call metaphysical - openly shunned the realm of the pictorial as a sensual lure diverting us from the true domain of the spiritual. Eventually, the pictorial might be allowed in highly controlled usage and even then merely as a pedagogical ladder that could help illustrate difficult concepts of the spiritual domain to the intellectually less fortunate subjects. From the carnival point of view this slight indulgence towards the pictorial is utterly downplayed by the ruling paradigm and in fact holds the key to its ideological aspect that can perform its function of ruling and directing its subjects only with great dependence on the pictorial now taking on the role of fantasy. Visually suggestive images of the prize and the punishment, of the ideal and of the scapegoat are indispensable for ideology, ruling far more effectively then by method of expensive carrots and potentially dangerous sticks. Fantasy is visual and an ideology that uses it can also be described as “visually constructed”, but fantasy differs from a picture in that it is blocked, merely observable and not livable, and always gazed upon only from a distance, from a controlled angle, kept safe behind a frame or a row of footlights. In the ideology of metaphysics, the world is turned into a mere picture by positing a fantasy of a non-pictorial, higher reality behind it. For catholic society of the middle ages, carnival, that insisted on being even more pictorial than the world, could only be condemned as a »representation of a representation« and thus farthest removed from the truth. For carnival, on the other hand, the world as such is pictorial *per se*, without being a representation of a non-pictorial »true« reality. From its point of view, the posited non-pictorial reality is itself a visually based fantasy (making metaphysics guilty of the idolatry it prohibits, the only difference being in that this idolatry is secretive while carnival’s idolatry is obvious and open) and its answer lies in embracing the world as unrepresentatively pictorial in its entirety and thus crossing over into the sphere of permanent festivity of the picture plane. For instance, if catholic ideology was based in graphic images of heaven and hell (downplayed officially as only a subsidiary tool but in reality crucial to the functioning of the power-apparatus), carnival strategically understood them too literary and fully realized them in a single living picture that inevitably fused both diamet-

rically opposed fantasies of the ruling paradigm. Most carnivalesque festivities were thus conceived as unabridged repetitions of a paradisaical past Golden age (think of *saturnalia*, for instance, celebrating the *actual* return of the Golden age of Saturn's rule to earth) that were viewed by the official religious institutions as demonic or Satanist rites. Carnival by rule featured merry devils, drinking and dancing within a framework that was at once understood as a temporary return to the Garden of Eden. This sort of realization of an ideological system's positive fantasy into a livable, palpable picture that inevitably fuses it with its precise opposite, effectively disarms ideology by de-fantasizing both phantoms, of the prize and of the punishment. Even though carnival is a temporary affair, the figure of the jester, whose mask coincides with his face, is the carrier of an ethical stance that is applicable all-year round.

A figure in the *Seinfeld* sitcom whose function fits the jester's thus demonstrates the carnival's stance to pictures in a suggestive example: in one of the episodes, the heroes all try to resist the temptation of »touching themselves« posed by a phantom of a naked woman parading between the borders of a window frame across the street. Kramer is the only one that advocates in favor of the fantasy (for this is what the naked lady is: fitted by a frame, unattainable, to be observed but never touched) and also loses the contest in asceticism due to it in comically record time. But the comical hero doesn't stop at opposing the pious by clinging to sweet fantasy: at the very end of the episode, Kramer as the first loser of the contest, manages something none of the others dare to dream – he transcends fantasy by realizing it. Kramer meets the woman and sleeps with her, in short, and the closing of the episode sees his more conservative friends waving, enchanted, to their friend who has somehow made his way into the framed picture across the street.

This meditation on the status of the visual in carnival on one and metaphysics on the other side has perhaps paved a way for an answer to the paradox we encountered at the beginning of our investigation. Namely, why is it that the scarce and ascetic imagery (but nevertheless imagery) of metaphysical culture is so rich in allusions on the scopic while the content of carnival's vivid imagery shuns the very organ of sight it addresses and aims to abolish the spectator it has prepared it for. Of course, we could do away with the problem of the scopic fetishism of metaphysics by applying the logic of our previous argument on fantasy – suggesting that metaphysics openly denies what it secretly builds on and that its iconoclasm is an opposite reflection of its undisclosed voyeurism. But isn't this sort of simple dialectics also keen to suggest that carnival, while proclaiming a war on the visual, also depends on it by writing its mani-

festive in the language of pictures? This would suggest that carnival is not even hypocritical, but a completely naive activist, disavowing its claims already with the very form of their elocution. Surely issues are more complex. And they are too: carnival does not oppose being seen, it opposes »just looking«.

If the metaphysical ideal is an all-seeing eye that no one can see, the body in the carnivalesque conception enjoys being seen in its hideous incompleteness. The point of the Real in the conception of classical metaphysics forbids its subject to gaze upon other gods but it also doesn't demand the subject's gaze to stay fixed on its visage because it knows that in a war of two equivalent idols its odds are always half-chance. Its command is »do not look at others and *do not look at me* but know that I am always watching you.« From the metaphysical point of view, carnival is trapped within the domain of the created – and in complete accord with the classic command its credo is about not seeing and being seen, but the carnival's Real remains immanent to the created world of the visible as the highest and only plane of being in its ontology. If the classic conception is about seeing, carnival is about being seen, but this is not to say that they complement each other in a non-conflicting and mutually supporting way. Carnival, as we have stressed above, not only has no need for spectators but even tends towards their abolition. The exhibitionist trait so typical of carnival does not need an appalled or fascinated Other to sustain it: moreover, its organizing principle is a mechanism devised to suck in any observing Other non-violently into the festivities. This mechanism is laughter.

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Bergson says it all with pinpoint precision when he describes the comical as »unconscious. As if wrongly using Giges' ring, it makes itself invisible to itself while becoming visible to everyone else.« The universe of comedy – and carnival *is* comedy turned universal – is about being enjoyably oblivious to your own blatant visibility. Beyond the footlights, however, it's a different story: the spectator of a comedy, as Bergson suggests, is akin to a natural scientist⁶ – removed in his theater box, he is the embodiment of the ideal theoretical subject: unflinching, uncompassionate, sharply observing the misunderstandings that have escaped the comic hero's knowledge. The hero's punishment, delivered by the spectator, is laughter, and this is where, undocumented by Bergson, the two merge. The comic hero is full of himself, arrogantly oblivious to the dozens of gazes directed upon him from the numerous audience, thinking he has seen it all and remained unspotted, he also becomes invisible to himself and visible to the silent crowd in the darkened

6 Comp, *ibid*, p. 130.

auditorium. This however – this famous feeling of superiority typical for the spectator of a comedy – puts the spectator in exactly the same shoes as the comic hero: a finite creature seated in the throne of the all-seeing eye. Being an incorporated creature, the spectator is convulsed by the enjoyment of laughter and the darkened, silent auditorium suddenly springs into view in roaring, bouncing laughter. Comedy is a way of recruiting the seemingly invisible spectators into the ranks of the visibly enjoying – and this identity of the two is achieved precisely by a lack of empathy that distinguishes other art-forms. The apathetic observer is transformed in his body-image as well: while laughter demands as its precondition a stance of the classical theoretical subject – an unfeeling, superior and invisible eye observing the comical spectacle from a distance – the moment of laughter not only renders the observer visible in his enjoyment, but simultaneously identifies him with the comical hero in his morphology. In laughter, the observer's eyes shrink into narrow slits, the face explodes into a million wrinkles and the mouth gapes open displaying the depths of the body and inviting the world to enter: the comical mask of the ancients embodies precisely this point of convergence between the comical hero and his seemingly neutral observer.

The grotesque conception of the world, present in comedy and fully realized in carnival, appeared to us to be inconsistent because it operates precisely at this breaking point between seeing and being seen. Its hero is an arrogant but finite creature that prides itself as all-seeing in face of its blatant limitations that breaks up into an image of the body that sees nothing but is also defined by its pronounced visibility, exhibitionistically exposing itself to the gaze of any remaining neutral Other that is – through the bypass of being pushed into the seat of the all-seeing observer – tricked into becoming an equally blind and visible creature of enjoyment through his laughter. The grotesque conception of the world and the human body thus incorporates both body-images and oscillates between the two as each other's prerequisites. It offers images of blind enjoyment with a highly pronounced, exhibitionistic visibility whose function is partly to suck in any passing neutral observers but that also insists beyond the potential exhaustion of the domain of the Other: simply enjoying the exhibition of its blind visibility in the face of an empty sky – a total, all-encompassing picture of the world – lacking an observer, lacking a reference in the real but insisting in its picture-status – as the ideal of carnival society.

Bakhtin insists that the specific carnival worldview was considered a profound and self-sufficient philosophy in its own time and was only later de-

graded into non-binding, superficial and merely ephemerally entertaining play with which to relax between serious endeavors holding the monopoly on approaching the Real. But after centuries of living underground the iconic turn that this symposium addresses among its primary thematic concerns seems to give some key points of carnival philosophy a new life in the spotlight. Could the iconic turn at least in part be understood as a triumphant reemergence of the carnival concept of the pictorial to the dominant surface level of cultural discourse? Bakhtin's insistence on a deeply democratic sentiment essential to carnival utopia seems to offer some ground to this thesis and modern democracy could indeed be understood as a fertile breeding ground for a legalization of the carnivalesque conception of man and world. Optimistically post-metaphysical theory of the postmodern age abounds with concepts aimed at returning dignity to the plane of pictures, freeing them from enslavement to a phantasmatical reality by theories of *mimesis* and representation and reinstating them as a non-referential plane of reality where crucial decisions previously ascribed to presupposed deeper levels really take place. The other crucial trait of the iconic turn, however, the desacralization of the image that occurs with its digitalization and multiplication transferring it from the domain of high art into the domain of the media – despite seemingly tilting in the direction of its status as popular culture, makes for quite a radical break with a key aim of carnival festivities. The technical-digital trait of the iconic turn parts with a tradition that encompasses both the metaphysical and the carnivalesque plane of medieval culture. Carnival takes the idolatry directed at pictures even more seriously than metaphysical systems: whereas catholicism sanctifies a picture because of the object of its representation, carnival holds it for holy in itself. As has been pointed out above, the picture plane in carnival worldview is the only and at once highest plane of reality and its atmosphere is festive rather than banally quotidian. Compared to the culture of dominant metaphysics, carnival in its sympathy for pagan cyclism is much more fond of repetitiveness in the picture plane: its masks come in doubles, triples or whole hordes; epiphany is not a singular event to be recalled annually but repeats itself in its pictoriality year after year and is by definition a repetition already at its potential first occurrence; and if one of the holy images (that not only represent but unreservedly become god in ritual performance) should be damaged or destroyed, it is common tribal practice to remould it – to create god again with our mortal hands – and still conceive of it as something predating its very maker. But the repetition typical for pagan rituals including carnival differs from the repetitiveness of the picture in the age of its techni-

cal reproduction: it is a repetition that is not completely mechanical and thus thrives on variation (e.g. the art of conceiving new mask-patterns each year that still fall within the limitations of the traditional recipe) and secondly, partly in connection with this, the repetition here does not strip the image of its holy aura, but – paradoxically – is its active generator (the picture is holy as far as it reproduces faithfully a template that may, however, be completely fictitious). In contrast to the progressive reputation that carnival attained in comparison with the paradigm of traditional metaphysics, it is now beginning to look awfully conservative, for it still clings to the creative touch of a human hand, the magic of real matter and insists on a (albeit consciously phantasmatic) template of its repetitions, all of which have been successfully abandoned by the postmodern iconic universe of equally original mechanical digitalized reproductions. This is because carnival is at once revolutionary, timely, historical and, on the other side, archaic, pre-modern, linked to a basic and timeless concept of humanity that is unbound to a specific stage of its technical progress. It is rustic, it works with objects, like sticks and rocks, and despite its utopian tendency towards an unrealistically global totalization, it is in its spirit a local festivity, operating with space-and-time-specific phrases, dialects and mobilizing local flora, fauna and cultural specifics as its building blocks. Carnival opens up the gates of the city to nomadic travelers, exotic animals, freaks of nature and »Indian wonders«, but keeps the highly territorialized village square as its constant backdrop.

But is not carnival in a way still more revolutionary than the technical revolution? Let us examine the concept of virtual reality as a prime example of the real status of the pictorial in the digital world. Virtual reality aims at digitally, artificially creating a disembodied, purely sensual experience of a world that is as close to the sensual experience of the real world we live in. Carnival, on the other hand, actively transforms the actual world its participants live in, by dissecting and rearranging the very material that constructs it, into a picture⁷ in which man in his entirety can temporarily live and enjoy. The ideal of virtual reality is the brain in the tub, enjoying a completely undiminished experience of the world, completely unaware of the fact that it is just a brain in a tub. This image is carnivalesque in its completely unrealistic hyperbolization of

7 In contrast to virtual reality that paints its virtual worlds in relatively classic mimetic fashion reminiscent of the late renaissance or baroque (see Pixar's fascinating projects aimed at artificially synthesising visual sensations of fur, water, tin, food, etc), carnival's pictures are much more modernist in style. The masks used are highly simplified and stylized and were, as is known, a great inspiration to early modernists.

virtual reality and may serve a carnivalesque function of conceiving all experience as potentially pictorial, sensually floating with no anchoring reference – a conception that can ultimately cross out its last bit of the real that serves as its anchoring reference: the actual brain in the tub. The carnival point is that all experience is unreferentially pictorial, sensually unanchored – even if our brains remain skulled.

The other example of a purely imaginary world that can offer real pleasure in the digital age is the Internet community. Like the carnival square, the Internet is a public space that is (at least officially) uncontrolled by state authority and thus forms a similar sort of a third sociality that spans the bridge between private and the officially public. Like in carnival, people enter into cyberspace behind masks, under assumed personalities – resulting in an equivalent leveling of all hierarchycal and social differences that promotes much more open, familiar contact and much wider socialization than in everyday life. Like the pictorial utopia of carnival, cyberspace could also be described as a »parallel, true life of the people« in which its members take part with an utterly virtual yet somehow truer part of their selves.

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On the other hand, while web-friends regularly treat each other to virtual rounds of drinks and cyber sex is becoming a much discussed option, it cannot be denied that cyberspace in its current form lacks much in the sense of the palpable and corporeal experience that is so accentuated in carnival. Since this is a problem possibly overcome in the utopian vision of virtual reality (again merely a vision and thus highly carnivalesque in its hyperbole: carnival seems to enjoy science fiction much more than realistic technology), the more serious issue is the way cyberspace, while enabling false identities and free socialization, is also heir to the profoundly anti-carnavalesque traditions of the disembodied observer and the private citizen. The more actively the browser engages in his »parallel life« in cyberspace, the less time is spent on transforming everyday life into a permanent festive picture. The closer to reality are fantasies fulfilled in virtual reality, the lesser is the danger of their effect on actuality. The more liberated your desired activity in cyberspace, the more urgent is the need for the purchase of a personal computer that can enable your prosecutable mortal body to remain hidden in the privacy of your own home. The community freely socializing in cyberspace has a backside in a multitude of isolated browsing individuals reduced to disembodied eyes fixed on screens and nervously twitching, operational hands. It is hard to bypass the blatant fact that the function of the overwhelming majority of Internet content is to foster and financially milk the sexual and social frustrations

of the average browser⁸. While Internet may well promote carnivalesque goals of free socialization, it can still only be a tool for the realization of carnival that goes on in corporeal contact with unpredictable individuals under the open sky of public squares (or, of course, in its exact opposite: the absurd perfection of virtual reality to a degree of a complete corporeal and sensual experience of carnival where the real-life browsers can be reduced from shriveling eyes and hands into brains-in-tubs that can be effectively crossed out, amounting to exactly the same). Carnival isn't naively materialistic to accentuate the preciousness of »real matter«, »real flesh« and »real space« as its *milieu*: on the contrary, it already understands all of it as a picture, where cyberspace can only fade into a »blocked« or »not fully realized« picture, thus in effect still a fantasy. Cyberspace is a haven for fantasy that has the power either to perpetuate the current order (by offering consolation in face of harsh reality) if it is fostered in its phantom form or challenge it if it is realized – not into banal reality but into a living picture.

At first glance, it seemed that the difference between the repeatable image of digital world and that of the carnival was in the tie of the former to the possibilities of deterritorialization offered by modern technology while the latter was bound to an organic model of repetition (modeled on “nature” or “life”), but this should prove to be an inaccurate assessment in light of the carnival's intimate relationship with the “unnatural”, “undead” core of nature that forms the insistently repetitive object embodying its holy lack that lies at the heart of its concept of repetition as sanctification. The difference that imposes itself upon attempts at repetition in the carnivalesque cosmos is identical to the rigidity of sticky matter as well as to the undefined region of the gap that lifts the pictorial above the profanity of illustration. The ungraspable difference between individual repetitions of carnival rites that sets them apart from mechanical reproduction is identical to the insistently repeating object itself. The repetition of carnival addresses something beyond the divergence between the natural and the technical. And, on the other hand, the difference between cyclic and mechanical repetition cannot be reduced to the difference between the digital and the analogous either because the very act of creating a picture counts on a digitalization of reality, a cutting-up of the

8 The proverbial pervert now doesn't even have to make the social effort to step up to a newsstand and purchase his favourite naughty magazine, what less mix with dozens of other sexual gourmands in a porn theatre. He can become a virtually disembodied eye browsing the webcams in a voyeur's fantasy and the exact opposite of the anti-voyeuristic, anti-private and highly sociable carnival utopia.

homologous universe into discrete object-bits. As of yet, there is still a slight difference between pictures made out of pixels and pictures made out of objects. And despite being reduced to a repeatable image, the Man of carnival remains ridiculously holy.