

Carnival and Literature

The focus of this text is to reflect on the *complex historically developed interrelation between Carnival and literature*. We will examine some aspects of the historical *dialogue* between these two distinct cultural forms of expression and representation in order to make transparent the ideas and concepts which, from our point of view, form the basis and the driving force for the Carnival Project.

More Lazy: Carnival penetrates the text

In Sam Selvon's story *Holidays in Five Rivers* [in: *Ways of Sunlight*; first published 1957], we find a strange text passage which is significant for the arguments we want to develop in this text.

In a relaxed and non-spectacular way, Selvon tells about an isolated village in Trinidad, inhabited mainly by East Indian people, and he focusses on the adventures of two boys, Govind and his younger brother Popo, during their long summer holidays.

More Lazy, the only black man in the village, an outsider at the margin of the community, is a striking example of lazyness and lethargy. The only action he is performing in the story consists in moving his body from the samaan tree in the centre of the village, where he used to lie dozing, to the veranda of Chin's shop in order to get more shadow.

In the whole of Five Rivers, or the whole of Trinidad for that matter, there was not another man lazier than More Lazy, and when he moved from under the samaan tree it was the subject of much conversation. They have it to say in the village that once Mr Dosanto, the plantation overseer, went into the shop to buy a drink, and on leaving accidentally dropped a dollar bill near to where More Lazy was, not knowing anything. They say it fell within a foot of More Lazy, and all he had to do was stretch out his hand and put it away without saying a word. But instead he kept an eye on it and waited until someone was passing by, then he asked for the person to bend down and pick it up for him, please.

But More Lazy is not as static as he appears to be. There is another dimension in the construction of the character.

It was only once a year that he stirred and came to life. That was during Carnival, the two-day festival before Ash Wednesday. More Lazy would bestir himself and journey into the capital of Port of Spain to take part in the celebrations. And while others were content to disguise themselves as pirates or Arabian sheikhs, he, strangely enough, had to enjoy himself in a more active impersonation, and would get someone to team up with him to play 'police and thief', he playing the part of a policeman chasing a thief through the streets of the city.

An interpretation of these passages leads to questions about the motivation of this annual ritual which is performed by More Lazy. It is possible to formulate answers on a psychological level about the *need* of More Lazy to get up once a year to participate in the

ritual of Carnival. The possibility to break the rules of everyday life by playing a different role is a force which even moves the absolute incorporation of immobility and lethargy. It is also obvious that the specific role choice of More Lazy indicates Carnival's power to turn the world upside down: The activity of a policeman chasing a thief through the city is the complete opposite of More Lazy's normal existence of being half asleep and dreaming in a remote village. The passive figure at the margin of the order of the village community slips into the role of the active defender of the existing order of the society. Thus, Carnival allows the construction of an alternative identity which settles the marginalised in the centre of the collective. In this light, More Lazy's Carnival action stands paradigmatically for "the genuine need of all peoples for some form of collective identity and collective ecstasy" (*Cy Grant*). This line of interpretation, although completely legitimate, focuses primarily on the phenomenon of Carnival and produces general statements about the ontology of Carnival which, in our opinion, transcend the level of the literary text too fast towards the area of metaphysical speculation about the nature and essence of Carnival. But it does not produce more consolidated knowledge about literature and about the complex interrelation between Carnival and literature.

There is, however, another possible approach which can be more prolific for the specific purposes of this paper which tries to contribute to the construction of an adequate and solid basis for the Carnival Project that aims to combine Carnival and literature in a logical way. We have to ask for the logic of this combination which cannot be taken for granted, but has to be elaborated and revealed by critical reflection.

Concentrating on the narrative structure of the text, we find that the passage which describes More Lazy's Carnival activities, the transformation he is undergoing during Carnival, has no function for the ongoing of the story. Inserted in the action of moving slowly from the tree to the shop, it increases the complexity of the More Lazy figure, but it does not influence the plot, the evolution of the story itself. If Selvon had left out the Carnival passage, we would not miss it. The course of the story would be the same. Under this perspective, Carnival takes an isolated position within the narrative structure of the literary text, it appears like a monolith which was implemented into the fictitious story from outside. When More Lazy goes to Carnival, he leaves the text and enters a distinct sphere. It is not only that the passive character becomes active, he moves from the level of literary fiction to the level of reality. Thus, the Carnival passage can be seen as a hole in the textual network, through which an extra-literary reality enters the text.

Selvon's text constitutes two different spheres: literature (the text) and Carnival (the stranger in the text, the intruder) which are connected by the hybrid character of More Lazy who exists in reversed roles in both spheres. The fictitious story constructs the calm and monotonous reality of the traditional village, Carnival is an intensive part of the reality of the city which occupies the empty spot in the story where More Lazy normally dreams away the year and

which has been left vacant when he goes to the city to become alive during the two days of the celebration. It is the ambivalence of the More Lazy figure, the double identity of this character, which allows the contact between village and city and between literature and Carnival.

In Selvon's literary works, Carnival is no theme of importance. Precisely for that reason, the passage about the extraordinary figure of More Lazy is remarkably outstanding. It demonstrates paradigmatically how Carnival penetrates a literary text. In this example, literature and Carnival appear as two different but nevertheless interwoven systems.

And here we touch the nerve of the Carnival Project because the configuration of literature and Carnival, as it can be seen in Selvon's text, leads us directly into the internal theoretical structure of the project.

The Carnival Project: Why should we combine Carnival arts with literature, theatre and exhibition ?

The character of the Carnival Project is *explorative* and *experimental*. The project intends to transcend existing cultural borderlines and to establish a *dialogue* between different art forms and between different cultural spheres.

Carnival takes place on the streets of many cities throughout the Western world, it is produced and performed in a specific way by specific sectors of the societies. Literature, on the other hand, is a distinct cultural form of expression, which is produced, distributed and consumed according to its own rules. Theatre, in the forms we find it today, is another art form with specific and autonomous rules of the game. The same can be said about exhibitions, a specific form of presentation of artefacts, which fulfills certain functions in the cultural dimension of modern societies.

On a general level, these four elements, Carnival, literature, theatre and exhibition, are the modules of the project. The problem we are facing is *how to combine them to a new aesthetical construction with new functions of cognition in an established socio-cultural context*.

But before we can focus on this problem in its details, we have to answer another question: *Why do we want to combine these elements ?* As we mentioned already, we have to ask for the immanent logic of the project. Why not leave it as it is and just be content with the actual cultural situation: here Carnival and the carnivalists, visible and audible for the public once a year, there literature, the writers and poets and their readers, and there the theatre and its audience and the exhibitions with their spectators ?

The answer is very simple and complex at the same time: The logic of the project roots in the fact that culture has never been, nor is at present, what it appears to be today: a huge supermarket with different departments, where the consumer can choose, according to his own choice and lifestyle, between different prefabricated products of the same value or worthlessness for his daily use.

Culture in contemporary Western society is characterized by fragmentation. Social segregation of modern urban environment and population corresponds with the atomizing of cultural practice to particles without substantial interrelation. The euphemistic notion for this process of disintegration is pluralism.

The individual in modern society: a shimmering patchwork of different, often contradictory identities, a completely unstable construction without solid basis neither in the dissolving social nor in the exploding cultural sphere of the enigmatic configuration of present actuality.¹ The concept of modernity: exhausted, squeezed out, commercialized and commodified. Ambivalent from the outset, it is today definitely broken. The visible result: the disposition of the individual in contemporary western society: lazier than *More Lazy*, paralysed in the *rat race* (Bob Marley) whose speed is determined by unfathomable macro-processes. The signatures of the individual: frustration, fatalism, resignation, loss of perspective and orientation - the darkening of the intellectual horizon and, as always in similar situations, the appearance of new prophets: today the prophets of "postmodernism" who thoughtlessly open the box of Pandora from where new ideologies emerge which are, on closer examination, all too often nothing but old ideologies in new costumes: racism, nationalism, fascism, the well known ideologies of domination, disguised as high-tech, world market and end-of-history-optimism.

What has all that to do with Carnival and the Carnival Project ?

It is the abstract framework within which the project is conceptualised and against which it is working.

(A personal annotation:

Our first contact with Caribbean-style Carnival in London was a shock. We did not expect to find a cultural phenomenon of that format and intensity in a European city. Used to work on

¹ It is interesting in this context that in the film-essay "LONDON" (UK 1994, written and directed by Patrick Keiller) the metropolis appears as an empty, depopulated space in fragmentation and dissolution, in the process of disappearance. The journey through London with the camera, accompanied by texts of Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Edgar Allan Poe and other literary representants of modernity, leads to the conclusion that the contemporary metropolis is not more than a shadow of its past, a disappearing configuration, unreal and inhospitable, a desert of dead architecture where monuments of representants of a glorious past don't talk to anybody any longer, where empty rituals without any significance, for instance Trooping the Colours, take place and where the only life sign of human beings is the Notting Hill Carnival. Like in Selvon's story, Carnival appears as a counterpoint in the structure of the film: as a symbol for something which is completely different from the rest of the pessimistic message the film is announcing.

quite abstract theoretical levels about art, literature and popular culture, it was the *concreteness* of Carnival, its physical presence within the urban landscape of London, which changed the co-ordinates of our consciousness.

When we got in contact with key figures of the Carnival process in London, we were confirmed in our first impulse that the Notting Hill Carnival contains a potential which could transcend the limitations of Europe's contemporary intellectual horizon.

It also bewildered us when we discovered that the Notting Hill Carnival was not adequately perceived by the public: The British media covered the event in a scandalous way - in Germany nobody had an idea of its existence: Carnival in London ? Don't tell me!

The third step was a reading of British-Caribbean writers in Berlin. We could apply the lessons we had already learned from Carnival to the reception of literature, and the effect was amazing: The experience of the rhythm of the spoken word. The experience of the *concreteness* of literature. It was evident that Carnival and this type of literature have something in common. This was the moment when the idea of a project which combines both forms was born.

All that was quite long ago. The project process is now established and has already produced new communications and collaborations and new artistic results.

But we think it is useful, especially in an experimental project, to stop sometimes and summarize what has been achieved, and to contemplate the basic conditions of the experiment.

The following considerations will try to describe the theoretical core and the significance of the project, as we see it today. Although the complex theme requires a certain level of abstraction, for both the ones who write and the ones who read this text, we should always be aware that this abstraction is directly interrelated with the concreteness of Carnival in Britain and British-Caribbean literature. We will have to make a critical journey through centuries, but it is the concrete existence of living persons which will lead the course of the reflection.)

Eurocentrism: The monologue of power

What we tried to outline in the previous chapter, the pessimistic contents of actual philosophical, intellectual and artistical discourses in view of highly problematic global realities, we can call it *the implosion of the Eurocentric perspective*.

In analogy to the European expansion throughout the last 500 years, European thinking developed some core elements of the European tradition (for instance the concepts of *civilization* and *barbarism* which constructed an epistemological inside-outside pattern, the concept of transcendence and its modification as Christianity, the concepts of linear development and growth) and generalised them for the entire globe, thus subsuming a multitude of distinct realities and patterns of cognition under one certain scheme.

Today, it is obvious that European universalism which was the ideological basis for imperialism and global hegemony, is not able to perceive the multi-faceted shape of global socio-cultural reality.

Europe created global facts without understanding them. The European dream of paradise and a "New World" led to the implementation of mono-culture, not only on the agricultural terrain of the plantation, but also on the terrain of ideas, representation and symbolization.

What we can see from a critical contemporary perspective: The European enterprise was not successful. It intervened in the reality of the globe and initiated global economical, political and cultural processes which are still ongoing but not adequately understood, or to formulate it more precisely: processes which have been systematically ignored or repressed by European mainstream consciousness.

The Eurocentric view constructed a *monologue of power* which is blind for phenomena that exist outside of its own system of co-ordinates. Monologue is the refusal of communication, or it constructs a specific form of restricted communication.

Communication between Europe and the rest of the world has mainly functioned in one direction. Europe talked and the others listened to the master's voice for a long time, staring at him like the rabbit at the snake.

Today, lost in the cobweb of its monologue, a monologue that has dwindled to the monotonous repetition of two suggestive notions: *market!* and *technology!*, the narcissistic Eurocentric discourse has difficulties in perceiving the *voices of the margins* which are actually articulating themselves - unignorably for those who want to listen - in every area of human expression: music, dance, literature, theatre, painting, film and Carnival, demanding a serious *dialogue* with the centre of power.

The theoretical foundations of the Carnival Project are placed within this constellation. The project wants to add a new step to this process.

Mikhail Bakhtin: The roots of modern European literature in medieval Carnival culture

At the beginning of this reflection on Carnival and literature, we saw how Carnival has entered a literary text. Now we want to demonstrate how Carnival and literature are challenging the Eurocentric monologue of power.

For that purpose, we must focus on the evolution of Carnival and literature within the general historical-cultural process. In a first step, we will look at the European development, then we will turn the view to the "New World".

According to the Russian critic and philosopher *Mikhail Bakhtin*, modern European literature, which finds its most adequate expression in the literary genre of the novel, roots in medieval

Carnival culture. Analysing the works of Rabelais, Cervantes and Dostojewskij, Bakhtin discovered what he called the "polyphony" of the modern novel, a dialogical structure which is characteristic and determining for this literary form. Investigating the genesis and evolution of the modern novel form, he found that the dialogical structure, i.e. the reduction of the position and the voice of the omniscient author by the installation of a choir of voices with equal rights within the literary structure, was inspired by the specific medieval cultural configuration from which the process of modern literature emerged.

Bakhtin draws an image of medieval culture in which the cultural patterns of the socially oppressed and dominated majority of the population were extraordinarily important. He outlines a medieval *culture of laughter*, which was based on the experiences and the vision of the popular sectors and constructed against the culture of seriousness which characterized the vision of the power elites, he recognizes the shape of an *authentic popular culture* which rooted in pre-Christian traditions and culminated in the annual ritual of Carnival and other similar festivities throughout the year.

Within the structure of medieval European societies, Carnival culture functioned as a dialogue between the antagonistic social poles of the political-ecclesiastical power elites and the semi-Christianized popular sectors which were forced into the feudal, Christian-Occidental schemes of order. The elites always conceived the popular sectors as a threat to the existing social hierarchy which had been implemented throughout the centuries by force - the popular sectors always called in question the legitimacy of the elites. Carnival was a practical solution for this fundamental problem: embedded in the Christian calendar and tolerated by the authorities, it provided the possibility for the lower classes to react *symbolically* against the established order, to *play* freedom and anarchy by breaking the fixed rules for a certain time in order to accept their social condition for the rest of the year. The exceptional theatrical situation of Carnival, the limited "mob-rule", during which the figure of the "fool" could inscenate the aesthetics of the grotesque, the world turned upside down, in order to express the truth of the existing society from the perspective of the oppressed, facilitated the catharsis for the complex and conflictive psychic disposition of the social actors and functioned as a security valve for the antagonisms and tensions in medieval society which otherwise would have caused - and many times did, nevertheless - open violent rebellion.

It is important that Bakhtin describes medieval European Carnival culture as a highly intensive and powerful cultural form which expressed the *truth of the people against the official vision of the world*. The aesthetics of the grotesque pulled the high and sacred official forms of representation of power down to the profanity of the popular sphere, where they were undressed from the aura of seriousness and respectability, deconstructed and transformed into objects of laughter, the laughter of fearlessness, disrespect and self-confidence.

Bakhtin describes the degeneration of European Carnival. With the formation of the modern bourgeois society in Europe, the evolution of Protestantism and capitalism, Carnival lost its

sting and degenerated to harmless and innocent amusement with a slight touch of frivolity and a good portion of hypocritical nostalgia.

The spirit of contradiction, enclosed in the universal carnivalesque laughter of medieval popular culture, moved into literature and transformed the traditional literary rules of textual representation. During the Middle Ages, script and literature were signs of power, strictly associated with the social elites, the popular sectors were widely illiterate, i.e. they were not under the domination of the written word and therefore free to elaborate and develop their own oral and mimetic patterns of expression. The transgression from feudal to bourgeois order, the entry into modern times, was accompanied by the restructuring of literature and a significant change of the function of script. The invention of the letterpress printing and the translation of the Bible from Latin, the language of power, into national languages intensified the literary process by extending the sphere of production and reception of literature. The written word, for centuries a symbol of power, became accessible for wider sectors of the population, the educated and cultured bourgeoisie which arose in the cities.

The development of the novel form reflected the way of the bourgeois class to power. At the beginning of the process of modernity, the bourgeois element, developed in the urban European context, was part of the general popular in opposition to the feudal-aristocratic elite. Therefore, bourgeois representation in literature could still carry the signature of unruly laughter as we find it in the works of Rabelais and Cervantes. In the epoch of the Renaissance, Carnival was *simultaneously in the streets and in the books*. The consolidation of bourgeois rule, along with the evolution of Protestantism, banned Carnival from the streets and successively minimized its direct impact on literature. According to Bakhtin, the process of modern European literature is characterized by an increasing reduction of laughter. That means, modern bourgeois literature has lost the popular vision, the vision of totality, it became partial representation of the ideas, questions and conflicts of a certain social class. Only exceptional figures, like for instance Dostojewskij, succeeded in representing the social and cultural totality of their epoch in their works by developing systematically the dialogical structure of the novel.

Thus far Bakhtin.

In our context, it is important to remember that he draws the attention to the fact that the system of modern literary representation is historically interwoven with an extraliterary system of popular representation.

Like in Selvon's story, where Carnival appears as a strange guest from outside, Carnival, or better: the *carnavalesque world vision*, is a permanent resident in the internal structure of modern European literature.

Cultural Production: What is Popular Culture ?

When we talk about European literature, we mean the canon of works, mainly novels, which form an essential part of what can be generally understood as modern European *elite culture*. Bakhtin's historization of the novel form facilitates the understanding that modern elitist culture roots in premodern *popular culture*, that the modern separation of high and low cultural forms is a product of the evolution of the modern bourgeois society, that the transgression from feudal to capitalist organization of European societies lead to the splitting and the transformation of the medieval popular cultural configuration.

We have to ask now what happened to the rests of the carnivalesque popular culture after the separation and evolution of a specific bourgeois culture.

It is a complex subject we are entering with that question, the field of ideologies and projections. It is already an ideological construction to qualify cultural areas as "high" and "low". It becomes easier to move within this field if we use the neutral notion of *cultural production*: in this perspective, culture is something produced by man under specific conditions, a system of representation which is interrelated with the system of social organization.

If cultural production in premodern times elaborated a carnivalesque form of popular culture which was opposed to the cultural products of the elites, not in the way that one system could eliminate the other, but rather in the form of a dialogue in which the two systems mutually stabilized each other for a certain period, the modern cultural configuration has a different shape.

Cultural production in modern western societies falls into two main areas: sophisticated elite culture, i.e. cultural products with high formal standards and with a relatively small expert public, mainly produced by individual artists in the context of the historically developed traditions and conventions about the genera of arts, a very heterogeneous and conflictive cultural area, because its production is based on critical reflection of the contradictory bourgeois reality and experience. Therefore, European elite culture has permanently challenged its own conditions. Torn to and fro between the abstract construction of Utopia and the concrete capitalist reality, between idealism and realism, the cultural production of the artistic avant-garde developed a tendency to complex formal experiments and to auto-destruction.

The second area is the area of industrially produced and media-distributed *mass culture* with strong features of standardization and stereotypization. The evolution of the bourgeois society, along with the evolution of technology, established a cultural industry which transforms premodern popular patterns and patterns from the area of elite culture into standardized programmes, consumable products for the popular sectors of the society. While in the elitist cultural area written language and critical reflection are still predominant, the products of mass culture are today mainly orientated towards images and towards narrative structures which create suspense. If, along the lines of the Bakhtinian considerations,

medieval popular culture was self-produced, self-confident culture, a concentrated product of the creativity and spontaneity of the people, modern mass culture, on the contrary, is produced behind the people's back and it aims at the substitution of creativity and phantasy by *diversion* (Walter Benjamin) and permanent and monotonous *amusement* (Theodor W. Adorno/Max Horkheimer).

Thus, mass culture functions as an instrument of social control and regulation. It is incessant propaganda for the status quo of modern capitalist society. And, as propaganda always does, it promises what it cannot keep: a better life in a better world - this basic principle of the mass cultural process corresponds with the principle of Utopia (from Greek: ou topos = no place; and: eu topos = good place) which is constituent for the process of modern European literature.²

In a talk about Black Popular Culture *Stuart Hall* emphasizes the "importance of the structuring of the cultural space in terms of high and low, and the threat of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. (...) The carnivalesque is not simply an upturning of two things which remain locked within their oppositional frameworks; it is also crosscut by what Bakhtin calls the dialogic."³

And he quotes *Peter Stallybrass* and *Allon White* who wrote about the dialectical interrelation between the "high" and "low" areas of the cultural space:

A recurrent pattern emerges: the "top" attempts to reject and eliminate the "bottom" for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover, not only that it is in some way frequently dependent upon the low-Other...but also that the top *includes* that low symbolically, as a primary eroticized constituent of its own fantasy life. The result is a mobile, conflictual fusion of power, fear and desire in the construction of subjectivity: a psychological dependence upon precisely those

² A strange and significant coincidence: In summer 1509, *Erasmus of Rotterdam*, the great European humanist, travelled from Italy to England to visit his friend, the philosopher and politician *Thomas More* (lat. *Morus*). Both figures stand at the threshold between medieval Europe and European modernity, they mark the transgression to a new era. Erasmus stayed in England from 1509 until 1514 and lived in More's house for some time. There, he wrote his book *Enkomion morias seu laus stultitiae* [The Praise of Foolishness] which was published in 1511. In this work, he criticizes the defects of his time and society and declares that it is the task of the Carnival figure of the "fool" to proclaim the full truth, because a wise man who does so is risking his head. The book has been explicitly dedicated to More. In 1516, More published his famous work *Utopia*, which combined an astute analysis of the social, economical and political defects of Europe with the construction of an imaginary ideal society in the New World. We see the emerging configuration: critical analysis of reality leads Erasmus to a reflection on the potential of the popular carnivalesque fool, while at the same time, with the considerations of his friend More, the fiction of Utopia was implanted in literature. The repercussions of both positions can still be felt in the contemporary cultural configuration 500 years later. By the way: The biography of Thomas More, a wise man who proclaimed the truth about his time, thereby risking his head, can be seen as an evidence for Erasmus's assertion: he was executed by Henry VIII in 1535.

³ Stuart Hall, *What is This "Black" in Black Popular Culture ?* In: *Black Popular Culture*. Edited by Gina Dent; Seattle: Bay Press, 1992; p. 32

others which are being rigorously opposed and excluded at the social level. It is for this reason that what is socially peripheral is so frequently *symbolically* central...⁴

At this point of the argument, we have to leave industrialized Europe, where the evolution of the new cultural configuration of bourgeois modernity took place and turn the view to the "New World", to the Caribbean and the American continent.

We will have to come back to European actuality later, because the project whose basic construction we are describing in this paper has been developed and will be produced *here*.

Slaves and masters: a cultural contact

We try to continue where Bakhtin stopped. The objects of his research were European literature and European Carnival, from his position in Stalinist and post-Stalinist Russia, his view could not transcend the European continent and the European cultural co-ordinates. Otherwise, he would have seen something that would have awoken his interest: Carnival and literature in the "New World".

Simultaneously with the desintegration of European popular culture, in the period when European Carnival lost its power and transferred its spirit of contradiction into literature, where it fused with Utopia, the seed was layed for the continuation of Carnival as authentic popular culture. It was layed and grew on the plantations, where enslaved people from Africa had to work for the European masters.

In this paper, it is not necessary to tell the detailed history of the Caribbean Carnival, instead, we can concentrate on some key problems which are relevant for the Carnival Project.

The slave society of the "New World" was not only an economical system of exploitation, it also facilitated the contact of different cultures: the cultural patterns and practices of the European masters and the enslaved Africans. This contact is the source of the specific aesthetical power of the Caribbean Carnival.

We have to focus on the internal mechanisms of the contact of two different systems of symbolization under the specific conditions of the slave society in order to understand what kind of *new culture* was born, when the black population celebrated the first Carnival after the abolition of slavery.

In actual critical discussions between black intellectuals in the USA and Britain⁵, a central motivation for critical research on black popular culture is what some critics (*Cornel West*,

⁴ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986; p. 3

⁵ See "Black Popular Culture". A Project by Michelle Wallace. Edited by Gina Dent. Seattle: Bay Press, 1992.

Stuart Hall, bell hooks) call "the nihilistic threat" to black life and black culture, a threat that has existed since the times when black culture and black life were subsumed under the concepts of European rationality during the slave trade and the systematic exploitation of human labour force on the plantation. The attempt of dehumanization of the slaves was a constituent part of the immanent logic of the slave society: the reduction of the human being to a mere body in the sense of a commodity necessarily ignored the fact that these bodies were taken from an existing cultural context, a context that had been the spiritual basis for various African societies, and that was transformed under the specific conditions of enslavement into an instrument of resistance against the order of the white masters that threatened the existence of the enslaved Africans. The master's logic, based on the selective Eurocentric view, could not perceive the working body, transported and traded on the market like a commodity, as a creative being with ideas, wishes and visions.

In an interview from 1991 *Earl Lovelace* declared:

I hold the view that Africans in the Caribbean have not been slaves. To me a slave is someone who gives up responsibility for his life and his future. By every demonstration, every gesture, Africans in the New World struggled to maintain control of their lives. So we haven't been slaves. Slavery, to me, suggests a certain kind of passivity. What I show is people struggling all times against enslavement.⁶

The construction of cultural "buffers" (*Cornel West*) against the threat of extinction was the original and authentic cultural achievement of the enslaved people. The term "buffer" characterizes the specific form of black culture, developed under the conditions of the plantation, as a complex cultural system that had to react in two directions: towards the African heritage that had to be conserved, as far as possible, as a constituent element of identity and towards the white culture of domination that neglected the identity of the Africans. The Diaspora identity was constructed by transforming and recodifying substantial elements of symbolization and representation, used in the cultural practices of African societies, in order to be able to cushion the pressure coming from the culture of domination.

The harmless term *cultural contact* contains a relation of domination and resistance which forced the enslaved Africans to develop new and hybrid cultural forms that made African culture compatible with European culture. From this perspective, black culture, as it was developed by the enslaved people in the Caribbean, is the construction of a *dialogue between two distinct cultural forms*. The people at the dominated pole of the slave society had to

The volume contains texts of participants of a conference on Black popular culture which was held in New York in 1991, as a part of a series of "Discussions in Contemporary Culture". The discussion focussed on Black popular culture in its US-shape, i.e. principally music and film. Caribbean culture and Carnival were not discussed.

⁶ In: *World Literature Written in English*, 31:1, 1991, p.11

affirm their right and their will to exist as human beings by producing highly flexible and thereby subversive cultural strategies that were able to avoid the "nihilistic threat" and - perceived as a long term process - to undermine the system of co-ordinates of the dominant culture.

It is obvious that in the "game of cultural wars of position" (Stuart Hall), the position of the dominated contained more and better strategical possibilities than the position of the dominator. The slave who does not want to be a slave will observe and analyse the master, he becomes an expert in the master's psychology, while, on the other hand, the master's view, based on a complete misconception about his counterpart, is restricted and produces false conclusions. In the process of co-existence on the plantation, the slave will lose his fear, he will redefine and reconstruct his subjectivity in the subversive "dialogue" with the master, while the master's subjectivity will successively be decomposed in the face of fearlessness of his counterpart. The conviction of superiority which incensed the process of enslavement, is affected by fear. The white planter playing the role of the *negre jardin* during Carnival gives clear evidence of the ambivalent psychological disposition of the master.

Caribbean Carnival is a genuine product of the socio-psychological configuration of the colonial slave society. It was shaped by the dialectical process between the enslaved and the enslaving subject.

In this process, we have to emphasize, on the side of the enslaved people, notions like *hope* and *faith*, and in a more abstract sense: *vision*, and on the side of the masters: *fear* and *uncertainty*.

These notions link the Caribbean Carnival form to its medieval European predecessor.

The Catholic French planters, baroque aristocrats who emigrated from a changing Europe not only in search of economical profit but also for a chance to restore their desintegrating ideological horizon in the "virgin reality" of the "New World", brought their aristocratically modified, cultivated and largely devulgarized version of European Carnival to the plantations of the Caribbean. But even if it was a slim version of popular medieval Carnival, it still transported some important elements of the traditional celebration of freedom: Music and dance, masquerading and role change, unconstrained communication and promiscuity. The slaves could experience the cancelling of the strict order of the slave society for a limited time by their own masters, and even if they were excluded from the activities, the Carnival form celebrated by their masters must have corresponded with patterns and elements of their own culture that survived subterraneously under the rule of the whip. Possible that in the exceptional times of Carnival, the slaves learned to understand their masters as fellow human beings and their own situation as produced by man and therefore possible to endure and to overcome at last.

Carnival as a celebration stimulated by *vision*, *hope* and *faith* to transcend a situation of domination: the medieval popular sectors in Europe permanently felt deprived of their hopes. Therefore, the ruling principle in European Carnival could be the *grotesque*. In the *grotesque*

laughter, we see the ambivalence of the medieval celebration: carnival as a security valve for social tensions was never meant to fulfill the hope of freedom, it was mainly symbolic action without concrete experience that could foster the vision.

Caribbean Carnival is the continuation of medieval popular Carnival on a distinct level because it is based on the concrete experience of having overcome a situation of total humiliation, a concrete experience of strength. When we see the amalgamation of the Carnival form with African cultural elements in the streets of the colonial cities of the Caribbean after the abolition of slavery, we can observe the transformation of the complex slave subjectivity into a visible subject of history, a subject that expresses in its own authentic way, in the serious and spiritually charged annual ritual of Carnival, the *joy* to have survived the conditions of slavery, the self-confidence of its own strength and capacity and the imperturbable knowledge of the validity of its own faith, hopes and visions. It is this difference between the grotesque laughter and joy which is interesting, because it indicates a change of Carnival's quality.

The cultural contact between Europe and Africa produced a more mature form of Carnival. What has got lost in the hegemonial centre in the course of modern history between the spheres of elite and mass culture, was reconstructed in the colonial periphery by the slaves, the lowest stratum of modern global society: *true popular culture based on collective experience*. But this new Carnival form is stronger than its European predecessor.

Its strength is rooted in the flexibility of the enslaved people and therefore it could develop a highly flexible aesthetical system with strong capacities of metamorphosis which could transgress - always in conflict with the ruling order - the period of colonialism and decolonization, and is at present redefining itself in the context of national construction under the conditions of the global market.

Carnival and literature in the Caribbean

We must now focus on the Caribbean version of the interrelation between literature and Carnival.

We have seen that in the European cultural process, Carnival has influenced the development of modern literature but at the same time has largely disappeared in the reality of modern Europe. The degeneration of medieval Carnival corresponded with the dissociation of popular culture, its transformation into mass culture. The process of modern European literature has been permanently stimulated by the conflict between elite and mass culture and by the vacuum which was left after the decomposition of medieval popular culture.

In the Caribbean, the literary process began later and it roots in a distinct basis: the specific historical experience and the existence of an authentic, strong and multi-faceted popular

culture - in the course of history the East Indian and the South American elements were added to the basic African-European configuration - facilitated the production of a distinct form and quality of literature.

The configuration of Carnival and literature, which we found in Selvon's text, is symptomatic for the relationship between Carnival and literature within Caribbean culture. Now we can understand what it means when Carnival enters a text as a lively cultural form. Literary forms which work with the Caribbean experience are inevitably confronted with the existence of Carnival culture. It is significant for Selvon's realistic way of writing that he had to construct the More Lazy figure as a double identity which facilitated the entry of Carnival into the text. In the literary process of the Caribbean, Carnival has conquered a constantly increasing space within literature. The increasing representation of Carnival in literature corresponds with the increased realism of Caribbean literature, the reinforced observation and reflection of the own reality of which Carnival culture forms an essential part.

In *Derek Walcott's* poem *Mass Man*, the interrelation between Carnival and poetry is the central theme:

Through a great lion's head clouded by mange
a black clerk growls.
Next, a gold-wired peacock withholds a man,
a fan, flaunting its oval, jewelled eyes,
What metaphors !
What coruscating, mincing fantasies !

Hector Mannix, water-works clerk San Juan, has entered a lion,
Boysie, two golden mangoes bobbing for breastplates, barges
like Cleopatra down her river, making style.
'Join us' they shout, 'O God, child, you can't dance ?'
but somewhere in that whirlwind's radiance
a child, rigged like a bat, collapses, sobbing.

But I am dancing, look, from an old gibbet
my bull-whipped body swings, a metronome !
Like a fruit-bat dropped in a silk cotton's shade
my mania, my mania is terrible calm.

Upon your penitential morning,
some skull must rub its memory with ashes,
some mind must squat down howling in your dust,
some hand must crawl and recollect your rubbish,
someone must write your poems.

The poetical subject observes the Carnival and the masqueraders and the metaphors they are performing. The poet does not physically participate in the Carnival, he does not create popular metaphors, but he is part of the collective experience and creates poetical metaphors which reach down to the historical foundation of the cultural practice. The poet speaks out what is enclosed in the core of the popular celebration, the poetical system lends its *words* to the popular cultural system. The popular metaphors, the *coruscating, mincing fantasies*

enacted by Carnival, find a concrete basis in the solitary poetical representation of the collective experience. Thus, the literary-poetical system appears as a distinct form, a distinct *style* to express the common historical experience. The poet's *terrible calm mania* is opposed to the *whirlwind's radiance* of Carnival. The function of poetry is to remember, to keep alive the memory of the experience which created Carnival. While others slip into a costume to change their roles, to perform a metamorphosis from clerk to lion or peacock, and to have their catharsis, the poet incorporates the historical experience of the gibbet and the whip. The poet appears as the protector of the historical substance which forms the basis for both the Carnival and the literature system. While the others play "*All o' we is one*", the poet takes the attitude of *I am all of you* and from that position he transforms the *vision* which derives from the collective experience into poetry. And while the others necessarily fall back into reality after Carnival, poetry shelters and protects the vision.

In Europe, the condition for the development of the modern literary process was the dissolution of the Carnival process. In the Caribbean, Carnival and literature are *complementary cultural systems* which develop in a *dialogical* form.

We can examine and describe this dialogue more precisely.

Carnival contains literary patterns. Traditional, ritualized Carnival action inscenates historical experience and social relations in a theatrical form. It tells stories: the story of enslavement, the story of life in the colonial system, the story of decolonization and the story of shaping a nation. And it transforms stories: The stories about the Second World War, the Red Indians, the Egyptians and many others, told by books, mass media and the cultural industry of Hollywood, are transformed in a specific way in the street theatre of Carnival.

Calypso is story telling. The development from the Chantwell who accompanied the stickfight, to the Calypsonian who struggles with words, contains the development of a narrative structure within a social context.

"*The Calypsonians went to the yards to listen to the songs of the people. There, they found the material for their calypsoes*" says Vivian Comma.⁷ Fusion of words and rhythm, direct communication of experience in the medium of *orality*: Carnival culture produces literary expression and communication beyond the written text.

This quality, the strength of the spoken word, influences the written text. In *Earl Lovelace's* novel *The Dragon Can't Dance*, Carnival is the central theme, it has occupied the complete text and it also determines the literary form, the language of the text. It is the Bakhtinian *polyphony* what we find in this novel, but at the same time the *choir of voices* is organized by a poetical principle, a certain rhythm which roots in the historical core experience and the

⁷ In a long discussion we had with him in September 1995.

central vision of Carnival. When Lovelace criticizes the intrusion of mass cultural forms into the popular culture of Carnival, the tendency of commercialization which reduces specifically meaningful, historically developed and distinguishable forms to commensurable, exchangeable forms, just as the respective sponsor likes it, he takes the same attitude as Walcott, he tries to protect the substance of popular culture, to keep up the memory that Carnival is a cultural form which was developed in a social context and that the cultural energy of Carnival contains an alternative social vision.

In Lovelace's novel, we find the dialectical interrelation between literature and Carnival in its clearest form. The text is carnivalized by the reality of popular culture and at the same time, it functions as the critical historical conscience of the Carnival process in a crucial situation in which Carnival runs the risk to forget its roots and its meaning and to be transformed to a branch of the transnational cultural industry.

Migration and Culture Transfer

The integration of the Caribbean region in the modern global market after the Second World War created the phenomenon of modern migration. Together with the Caribbean people, the cultural configuration of the Caribbean, Carnival and literature in their indissoluble relationship which had been woven by the process of Caribbean culture, emigrated to the "Old World", to the industrialized centre.

What we want to emphasize here is not the process of migration and culture transfer in its abstract historical and sociological shape, but rather the concrete story of concrete people.

At the end of the forties, Sam Selvon and Russ Henderson shared a flat in Port of Spain for some months. In 1950, Selvon emigrated to England, where he lived for 28 years. Russ followed in 1951.

In 1956, Selvon published *The Lonely Londoners*, the exemplary novel about the life and the experience of the first immigrant generation. Russ worked as a musician. During the decade of the fifties, the *Russ Henderson Band*, a steeldrum trio, played in clubs and on different occasions.

In the beginning of the sixties, we see the *Russ Henderson Band* with *Mrs Lazlett-O'Brian's* children group performing a *road march* in Notting Hill: it was the birth of the celebration which, since 1965, has been known as the *Notting Hill Carnival*.

When Russ tells about the beginning of the Notting Hill Carnival, he says that "*there was a life before Carnival*"⁸, an atmosphere which prepared Carnival. The life of the *lonely Londoners*, described and reflected by Selvon, was the basis from which the Notting Hill Carnival emerged.

⁸ The informations about Russ Henderson we got from himself in various talks we had during the last years.

Selvon introduced the *language* and the *lifestyle* of the Caribbean people into British literature, Russ introduced the *steelpan* into the musical forms produced in Britain. Another key figure of culture transfer, Vivian Comma who came to Britain in 1956, brought the *calypso* element. There is a remarkable text in which Vivian tells the story of the fifties and the sixties from the perspective of the calypsonian: *Carnival in London*⁹. It is worth to call this text as a witness:

No one person or group could be said to have brought Carnival Caribbean-style to England. It would be right to say that every Trinidadian or West Indian who came to England brought a bit of it in himself. In Trinidad particularly, Carnival is a way of life. Once you were born there you were moulded in it.

Vivian describes how Caribbean culture was unfolding itself in London on different levels and in different quarters.

The biggest single thing was happening at Paddington Railway Station. Here is where many West Indians arrived. The first thing which was noticeable about them was their dress: the bright colours. The women wore bright hats, the men had on white trousers and two-tone shoes and brightly coloured ties. They cut diametrically across the whole style of English dress. What the English would wear in summer, the West Indians wore all through the year. The workers on the station were simply baffled. Before a boat train came in, the station would be packed with West Indians, who had come some time before and now went to meet the new arrivals. The greetings were loud and cheerful. All the latest news had to be told right there, and of course one of the main bits of information was the health of the Carnival and the latest Calypsoes; and certainly they brought the latest Calypso records with them. This brightly dressed and uninhibited gathering was indeed reminiscent of a Carnival band without music, and as long as the boat trains came in, the gatherings got bigger and bigger and more of everything West Indian.

It could easily be said that the spirit of Carnival, that driving force, took root in the railway station of Paddington.

Vivian says that the driving carnivalesque force which was visible at Paddington, inspired Sam Selvon to write *The Lonely Londoners*, and indeed, we can find a scene which is settled at the station, in Selvon's novel.

The implementation of Caribbean cultural forms and lifestyle in London during the fifties had an impact on the existing cultural configuration. Vivian describes how the film industry and the radio took notice of Caribbean culture:

Come the year 1956, the artistic efforts of the West Indians were coming to the boil. Warwick Films of Mayfair decided to make a film called 'Fire Down Below', starring Robert Mitchum, Rita Hayworth, Jack Lemmon and Trinidadian Edric Connor, now deceased. Most of the scenes were shot in Trinidad and the final shots were completed here in England. The writer of this article, Vivian Comma, was chosen to compose some music for the film, and the Katzenjammers Steelband, who were the winners of the 1956 steelband festival, were elected to come to England, together with dancers Popsy Charles, Stretch Cox, Pat Maurice and three other dancers. The Calypso 'Madaleine Oye', which was the Road-March for 1953, was used extensively as background music in the film. On the film set was the largest number of West Indians in mas

⁹ Published in *Masquerading. The Art of the Notting Hill Carnival*. Arts Council 1986, pp. 24-29

costumes ever to come together at that time, to perform like a Carnival band. The spirit of Carnival was all through the making of the film. At the same time, the B.B.C. brought together the best West Indian musicians and organized a programme called Caribbean Cavalcade. They played jazz of the day, and Calypsoes were sung by George Brown and Ricardo, well known West Indian singers of that time. Russ Henderson supplied the steelband flavour. The leader was a famous trumpeter from Jamaica named Jairo Washington, and the arranger was Rupert Nurse of Trinidad. This radio programme ran for thirteen weeks and gave Calypso a great push up the popular music ladder.

In 1957 20th Century-Fox made a film called 'Island in the Sun', with James Mason, Joan Fontain, Harry Belafonte, Joan Collins, Dorothy Dandridge and Cy Grant. There were beautiful scenes of Limbo dancing. Most of the film was made in Grenada and the Carnival scenes were terrific. Harry Belafonte's rendition of 'Island in the Sun' on disc was a hit.

Vivian Comma's text shows how patterns of the immigrant culture infiltrated the configuration of western culture. Of course, the interesting topic for the film industry was not the situation of immigrants from the Caribbean in industrialized countries, but rather the Caribbean as an exotic place with exotic cultural practices which could function as a new scenic framework for conventional stories, but nevertheless the interest of the cultural industry indicates that the European view started to take notice of the existence of Caribbean culture.

Selvon's literary work, splitted in two parts, one which describes the Caribbean reality and another one which describes the reality of the Caribbean immigrants in England, opened British literature for the Caribbean experience. The specific cultural impregnation of the Caribbean immigrants created a cultural basis of distinct activities in London during the fifties, which was amplified by the awakening interest of the cultural industry in Caribbean patterns, and which culminated in the implantation of Carnival in the British capital in the mid sixties.

When the immigrants came to Europe, they did not find anything similar to their Carnival culture in terms of aesthetical power and communicative qualities. Most of them were lonely, not only in terms of being on the lowest scale of the social hierarchy and being confronted with prejudices, hatred and racism, but also in terms of satisfaction of their cultural needs. Nothing in London - with the exception of cricket - represented their specific experience. What they saw around them was the representation of imperial power, monuments and rituals of a glorious white past which was already vanishing when the first wave of immigrants reached the country.

"This city powerfully lonely when you on your own" (Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*), so the Caribbeans in exile had no other choice than to construct their own communication networks.

"Carnival happened accidentally. Nobody planned it" says Russ Henderson. It had to be like that. Popular culture is the culture of the people, invented and produced by the people in order to manage their situation. When the immigrants came to Britain, they found a vacuum in the social sphere where Carnival culture is produced in Trinidad. The white British cultural configuration, the established cultural rituals in Britain, could not integrate the immigrants

because they could not offer them anything helpful for their identification in the new situation of immigration. Therefore, they reconstructed and developed their own forms in Britain. The enthusiasts of the beginning, driven by nostalgia and homesickness and the pure love of Carnival, had no idea about what kind of process they were initiating when they went out to the street with their music and their dancing.

Some years later, in 1973, when *Lawrence Noel's Trinbago Carnival Club*, the first organized masquerade band in London, appeared on the scene, the Notting Hill Carnival was complete: the trinity of Mas, Pan and Calypso could now inscenate the whole potential of authentic self-produced popular culture in Europe.

Notting Hill Carnival: Popular Culture and Cultural Politics

Talking about the Notting Hill Carnival, we face the problem that there is no established critical research on this cultural process yet.¹⁰ This lack of critical interest underlines the experimental and explorative character of the Carnival Project. The project idea was born by the direct contact with key figures of the Notting Hill Carnival and British writers with Caribbean background. Another stimulation was the extreme difference between the magnitude of the event itself and the public reception by the British and European media, the existing public misconceptions about Carnival and its producers.

We see the main reason for these misconceptions in the Eurocentric perspective which subsumes the phenomenon of Carnival, as far as it takes place outside Europe in far-away locations of the non-industrialized world, under the concept of *folklore*. This concept works with a system of categories of *exotism* and projections that only facilitate a selective perception. It emphasizes some isolated aesthetical aspects of the Carnivals in Brazil or in Trinidad and omits completely the historical ground on which the aesthetic of Carnival is based, thus reducing and stereotyping Carnival culture to the size of a consumable object of the image and tourist industry.

The shift of Caribbean Carnival culture to Britain in the context of migration is a challenge to the Eurocentric perspective. The definition of Carnival in the periphery as folkloristic does not take into consideration the European contribution to the creation of the Caribbean Carnival form, the role of the slaveholders at the cradle of Caribbean popular culture. Caribbean Carnival in Britain confronts the European consciousness with a repressed historical guilt. With reference to slavery, modern democratic Europe applies its self-definition and self-esteem primarily to the act of abolition of slavery and omits the historical fact of systematical installation of the slavery system in order to exploit the colonies for the European accumulation of capital.

¹⁰ The research process began recently, when THE ROEHAMPTON INSTITUTE established a Carnival research line which settles the phenomenon of the NHC within a new sociological theory of *globalization*.

Self-produced culture of black people, celebrated and performed in a massive way in the centre of London, is mainly perceived under the aspects of control and regulation. The perception of the Notting Hill Carnival by the administration and the media is adjusted to traditional cultural politics which are characterized by deep suspicion of all forms of expression of the lower classes.

We tried to outline that Caribbean Carnival has constructed a new cultural sphere in Europe, an area of independent popular culture which occupied the empty space between elite and mass culture. Since medieval European Carnival has disappeared from the cultural scenery, the authorities of modern European societies do not possess adequate means of handling this sphere: authentic self-produced popular culture is incalculable for them. The problem is intensified by the fact that Carnival in Britain began as a cultural initiative of immigrants, that it was an intervention in the existing cultural order which developed in the context of struggle against racism and for equal rights and equal opportunities. It was not only a cultural line which led to Carnival and developed it during the last three decades. We should remember that political figures like *Claudia Jones*, during the initial phase, and *Darcus Howe*, during the crucial phase after the events of 1976, played an important role in the implementation and continuation of the British Carnival process.

We should now focus on the independence and autonomy of Carnival which is highlighted when its producers call their celebration "We Ting".

Caribbean-style Carnival creates its own genuine interpretation of history and present times, a counternarrative that questions and challenges the narratives of domination by presenting an own cultural and social vision, a concrete vision of humanity beyond the abstract, petrified and motionless concepts of the dominant culture. The creative process of Carnival, always connected with the historical-political process of emancipation and liberation, does not accept neither aesthetical nor social limits that were imposed to human expression by the schemes of order established by the dominant European tradition. Carnival works with the totality of forms of symbolization and it shapes these forms according to its own rules that root in the popular experience. Therefore, Carnival is capable to select elements from both the areas of elite and mass culture and to process them with its own methods of inscenation and amplification to the form of an open spectacle, a huge performance that integrates all possible forms of expression and whose stage is the totality of modern urban organization. The street theatre of Carnival contrasts the urban concrete structure with colour and rhythm, thus constituting for a limited time a genuinely democratic public space, where the own complex identity of the inhabitants of the global city finds the possibility of self-affirmation. The open space of Carnival is not structured hierarchically, the aesthetics of Carnival do not produce the separation of actors and audience, they are based on and promote the principle of *participation*. Carnival cannot be consumed, it has to be experienced. It is a collective

celebration, a ritual of communication in which the individual merges in the collective, in the community that organizes, recognizes and celebrates itself by the medium of *joy*. - In that sense Carnival culture is political.

The fact that the Notting Hill Carnival has survived all attempts to delete it from the cultural agenda of Britain, that, on the contrary, all attacks against the Carnival were replied by an increase of its quantity and quality, is based on the flexibility of this cultural form, its *dialogical structure*. Carnival has always been the inscenation of a dialogue between antagonistic social poles of hierarchically structured social formations: in medieval Europe, in the colonial Caribbean, and in contemporary Europe which faces the phenomenon of global migration as a logical result of the colonial epoch.

We can see that Carnival has come a long way and we are just beginning to understand its impact on the configuration of our present time.

Carnival, a cultural sphere with universal patterns, acts against the construction of the "Fortress Europe" which is motivated by political-economical concepts that are based on the Eurocentric perspective.

It is a fact of high importance that the Notting Hill Carnival, although Caribbean in its origins and its style, is not any longer a mere Caribbean affair. The multi-ethnic mixture of participants, the increasing participation of white Europeans, indicate that the Caribbean Carnival form is today perceived and accepted as an offer to the hybrid identity of the individual in the epoch of globalization.¹¹

From outside, i.e. from Berlin, where this text has been written, the global city of London can be seen as an emerging new paradigm. The old imperial concept of metropolis is dissolving, but at the same time a new configuration becomes visible: The term "Black and British", adequate expression of the self-confidence of the descendants of the *Lonely Londoners*, indicates an absolute novum in Europe. Carnival has significantly contributed to the construction of this self-definition and self-confidence. It has functioned as a *mechanism of auto-integration* of the immigrants and their cultural patterns into the existing hostile socio-cultural structure. But simultaneously, it has changed and still changes the old European configuration by opening the Eurocentric horizon towards global realities. Carnival's dialogue with the dominant European culture develops the power to tear down the old walls of prejudices and opens a realistic perspective towards a society which is based on inter-cultural dialogue, multi-cultural identification and trans-cultural fusion. ¹²

¹¹ See **Martin Albrow**, *Globalization: Myths and Realities*. London: Roehampton Institute 1994

¹² We know that all these statements are on a high level of abstraction. The lack of systematically elaborated empirical data about the Notting Hill Carnival confers on our considerations the character of a philosophical-theoretical construction which works with hypotheses. We think that our abstract considerations about the impact of Carnival in the actual British society can be more concretely underpinned by the study of

New British Literature

After focussing on the socio-cultural significance of the Caribbean Carnival in Britain, we now have to go back to the literary process.

By introducing Caribbean language, imagination and lifestyle into British literature, Sam Selvon (together with others from the older generation of writers) had paved the way for a whole group of young British writers with colonial background who today process their double cultural impregnation, the Caribbean and the European experience, combined in the experience of migration, to new literary contents and vital literary forms that extend the literary horizon of the "old world". The artistic-literary concepts of these writers are highly complex, they produce a virtuoso combination of Caribbean and European literary traditions. Their works represent, with literary self-confidence and sovereignty, what it means to live simultaneously in two worlds with a complex identity as Black and British.

The impact of Carnival in their works is not obvious at first sight. When our reflection left the Caribbean, we stopped with some annotations about the work of Earl Lovelace in which the Trinidad Carnival occupies a central place. As far as we know, this form of clearly visible presence of Carnival in the literary text cannot be found in the works of the young British-Caribbean writers. What we can observe, however, is that Carnival is present in the form, especially in the form of poetry which has similar oral qualities as they can be found in the Calypso tradition. Poetry performances of *John Agard*, *Grace Nichols* or *Amryl Johnson*, for instance, establish an atmosphere of communication between the poet and his audience which resembles the communicative spirit of the calypso tent.

A strong tendency to transcend the hermetic structures of traditional European poetry, to extend the radius of communication of poetry, to open the most complex and individualistic form of literature for the reception and participation of a greater public, is obvious in the works of these authors. The use of patterns from the Caribbean popular cultural sphere, i.e.

Carole Morrison: *Carnival in the Curriculum*. London 1995, where the prolific work of Carnival clubs within the context of Community Development and Community Education and the positive results of different pilot projects of implementation of Carnival Arts and Carnival history in the curriculum are described. Our hypotheses are also based on personal statements of Carnival practitioners who define their aesthetical work within a social context.

Another level which seems to affirm the validity of our hypotheses can be seen in the positive and constructive ongoing of the Berlin Project, which was initiated one year ago, in November 1994, with the participation of Lawrence Noel. The Berlin experiment was inspired by the London example, and if it will lead to successful results, to the implementation of a *Carnival of the Cultures* in Berlin as a stable long-term process with significant impact on the socio-cultural configuration of the German capital, this could be seen as a verification of the hypotheses in this paper.

We will attach a report about the Berlin Project to this paper. The report was made as an appendix to a study of **Christel Hartmann-Fritsch** about innovative youth projects in Europe that use art as a catalyst in youth work in socially troubled areas. The study was commissioned by the European Cultural Foundation, Amsterdam. Christel Hartmann-Fritsch is a consultant to the European Commission and the artistic manager of the Youth and Culture Center "Schlesische 27" in Berlin, an institution which takes part in the Berlin Carnival Project. Our report contains some arguments which also appear in this paper and summarizes the actual state of the Berlin Carnival Project.

the application of popular rhythm on poetical language and of popular images on poetical metaphors, supports this tendency and injects a completely new dynamic into contemporary British poetry. Communicative poetry creates a new form of vital literary experience which is taking the place of the traditional individual and secluded reception. The written word loses its sacred aura. When the texts are performed, the words become alive and interact with the audience.

Another aspect is the rediscovering of the own colonial origins from a complex European perspective.

The new British literature constructs a critical perspective which focusses, through the eye of the migrant, on global constellations of hegemonial power. On the basis of concrete knowledge and experience of what it means to live in Europe, this literature questions the legitimacy of the global hegemony of the industrialized countries. Working with the most elaborated methods of modern literature, it constructs a counternarrative against the narrative of domination and deconstructs the European canon of literature from inside.

While European avant-garde literature has long time ago retreated from the reality of European modernity to the isolated and introspective position of the *l'art pour l'art* concept, the *migrant voices* turn the view of literature back to reality and use their communicative potentials in order to put this reality up for discussion.

If it is allowed to use a metaphor, we could say that the emergence of this new form of literature has the effect of a blood transfusion for the European literary process.

Genuine European literature has nearly lost its communicative quality, therefore, its death was often proclaimed by writers. The reading public, however, never accepted the process of drying out of literature which took place in the sphere of elite culture. Being subsumed under abstract mechanisms of history, the people are in need of stories which make the abstract drama dramatically transparent. So the readers turned their view to other literatures, written in world regions where the tradition of story telling has never ended, or they stopped reading and escaped to the sphere of mass culture where the image and suspense industry offered standardized and stereotyped narrative structures.

Some western writers drew the logical conclusion from this situation. They began to use popular genres like detective stories or patterns of 19th century's gothic novel to transport complex contents. *Umberto Eco* is very interesting in our context because in his work *Carnival* has been re-vitalized in literature. In his famous novel *The Name of the Rose*, Eco tells the story of European pre-modernity costumed as a detective story. The whole story is constructed around Bakhtins considerations about medieval Carnival culture, about the meaning of a culture of laughter as an alternative to the culture of seriousness, about tragedy and comedy, about dialogue and monologue. Eco re-examines the European category of modernity and he finds a "crime" in the epoch of pre-modernity: the attempt of the ruling power to murder popular laughter because it threatened the existing order which was based on fear. The repercussions of this crime are meandering through the culture of modernity. Eco's

novel was very successful because it touches an old wound of European culture which has never healed.

It is visible that the most advanced form of European literature is currently rediscovering the Carnival problem as a central key for cultural regeneration.

The Significance of the Carnival Project

The objective of the Carnival Project, the combination of Carnival arts and literature, is nothing extraordinary. We wonder why it has not been done before this project started.

We have seen that both cultural areas are historically interwoven. In the Caribbean, the existing popular Carnival culture could occupy a central space within literature, in Europe the reflection on the problem of popular culture is reconquering the literary text. The process of migration brought the Caribbean configuration of Carnival and a highly carnivalized literature to Europe. The Notting Hill Carnival, a new cultural form developed in a 30-years process, can be conceived as the reconquista of the public space of a European metropolis for genuine popular expression. It is generating off-springs all over Europe and creating links below the level of institutionalized culture. And it is now beginning to stimulate and inspire the imagination of artists in Europa. It is the cultural backbone of London's globality.

Nevertheless, it is not included in the intellectual European discourse yet. It is the explicit aim of the project to highlight a phenomenon which has largely gone unnoticed by serious critical discussion until today. Carnival is too good to be left to the cynicism of the mass media. Literature which in the Caribbean protects the substance of Carnival against the attacks of the cultural and tourist industries, can support the revaluation of Carnival in Europe, thus paying back what it owes to popular culture.

The alliance between literature and Carnival which the project wants to achieve, can free new cultural energies that can drive forward the European cultural process of transcending the limitations of Eurocentrism.

At the same time, the collaboration of artists from different cultural spheres could produce increased knowledge about each other and their respective cultural area and thereby contribute to the necessary development of an adequate Carnival theory and a theory of literature in the era of globalization.

On the basis of the theoretical lines developed by Bakhtin, the construction of a consistent Carnival theory is not possible without a up-to-date theory of literature and vice versa. The experimental and explorative Carnival project is a practical step in that direction.

What we can see at present is a significant shift of the terrain of culture to *the popular*, or in other words, the transgression of the arts from more or less elitist and sacred positions to spectacularization, the opening of formerly closed and defined terrains and forms to outer

areas, to difference, or in a global view, the decentering of western culture by the intrusion of the margins.

Now, that the configuration of modernity is at the disposal of new formulations of unsolved problems, we can observe the emergence of "the popular" as a new aesthetical subject.

The specific historical crossing of Carnival and literature which roots in the historical experience of the lowest social stratum of Occidental modernity, the enslaved people in the "New World", has to be placed in the field of vision of actual discourses, because it cuts through the old and obsolete construction of culture as "Western Civilization". The inclusion of the phenomenon of popular Carnival culture in actual discourses which attempt to substitute the concept of "modernity" by a paradigm of "post-modernism", could possibly increase the substance of realism in these necessary but also dangerous debates, dangerous in the sense that the abolition of "modernity" can lead to the re-vitalization of the fascist option if there is no visible exit from the collapsing socio-cultural and philosophical construction of our present time.

We know that "the popular" is ambivalent. The popular sectors of the industrialized world are seducible by fascist politics. As *Walter Benjamin* emphasized, the influence of fascist politics on the popular sectors is based on the *aesthetization of politics* - an alternative option to prevent the alliance of fascism with the popular sectors which are in need of aesthetical expression, is the *politization of aesthetics*. And this is exactly what the Carnival Project in London should contribute to: the recognition of the historical-political contents of aesthetics. Where market mechanisms and political concepts of domination are increasingly masking themselves as aesthetical rituals, the political potential of the aesthetical expression has to be set free.

This option we wanted to outline in the previous pages. In our opinion it is the basic constitution of the Carnival Project.

If "the popular" is placed within a historical structure where the principle of domination is constituent, where struggle for, defending of and resistance against hegemony is an immanent rule of the construction of culture and society, Carnival culture, the culture of resistance, emancipation, self-determination and participation, contains the vision and the concepts of the dominated popular in the most authentic form. It is the hybrid cultural form of Carnival into which the popular concepts escape under the pressure of deculturation or acculturation, it is the hidden space behind the mask, where the genuine popular vision has resisted the assault of a catastrophic modernity.

And we think of the possibility that the deciphering of this masked vision and the development of the capacities, enclosed in this vision, could contribute to shape an alternative to the concepts of a dissolving modernity whose promises have been frustrated and whose capacities to solve the accumulated global problems are exhausted.

London today is a symbol for the crucial changes and challenges we are facing at the end of the millenium. But London is also the place within contemporary Europe where the last metamorphosis of Carnival took place, where the positive vision, enclosed in Carnival, took concrete shape, where the Carnival spirit became alive in a new form.

The old mythological image of the Phoenix emerging from the ashes gets a new significance in postmodern metropolis.

.....

From this basis, we can start thinking about the question *how* the project can combine Carnival arts, literature, theatre and exhibition.

X

Der Text wurde 1994 von Wolfgang Janzer im Rahmen eines Projekts, an dem er zusammen mit Marta Galvis de Janzer mit dem London Arts Board zusammenarbeitete. Es handelte sich um die Konzeption einer Performance und einer Ausstellung zur Thematik der karibischen Karnevalskultur und ihrer Migration aus Trinidad in die britische Hauptstadt .