

General Outlines and Aspects of a Research and Documentation Project about the "Notting Hill Carnival" in London

1. The object of research and documentation

The object of our critical scientific and practical artistic interest is the Afro-Caribbean Carnival in the form it has evolved in the district Notting Hill of Central London since the decade of the sixties. In 1995 the *Notting Hill Carnival* which has developed both in terms of quantity and aesthetical quality to the size of Europe's largest street festival, a unique and original event in the cultural agenda of contemporary Europe, will celebrate its 30th anniversary.

Nevertheless the large scale street event that attracts today more than two million participants and spectators doesn't receive adequate attention, neither from the general public, the mass media in Britain and Europe, nor from the sector of the international scientific community where topics of culture, or more precisely of popular culture, are investigated and discussed.

It can be supposed that the general blindness towards the phenomenon of the Afro-Caribbean Carnival in a European capital roots in the complex problem of epistemology known as *Eurocentrism*: for the Eurocentric perspective, based on the historically developed assertion of universalism of occidental cultural coordinates, it seems to be immensely difficult to perceive a cultural phenomenon that has been generated and developed by a distinct cultural context and under specific historical conditions: the cultural-historical context of *slavery* that nourished and shaped the origins and the evolution of modern capitalist global society. Slavery as an economical and political program, reinvented and effectuated by modern European rationality, had led to the contact of different cultures under the specific conditions of colonial exploitation of both man and nature on the plantations, to the fusion of distinct cultural elements, the fusion of distinct forms of symbolization and representation and the shaping of a new hybrid form of culture that is discussed today as "black popular culture" and of which Carnival, or more generally along the concepts of M. Bakhtin "the Carnevalesque", forms an essential part.

The Eurocentric perspective 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* which works with a system of categories of *exotism* that only allow a selective perception. It emphasizes some 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 Carnival culture to the size of a consumable object of tourism.

The shift of the Afro-Caribbean Carnival to Britain in the context of global migration is a challenge for the Eurocentric perspective: Since Carnival has moved from the periphery to the centre it is no longer possible to delegate it exclusively to the realm of the industry of tourism. A Carnival celebrated by masses of black people 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 British media is adjusted to traditional cultural politics and therefore emphasizes the negative aspects of mass events, as there are crime, public disorder, uncontrollable crowds, etc. This distorted perspective leads to a highly deficient and insulting public representation and a primarily negative social reputation of the significant cultural event created by black Britons as an expression and affirmation of their complex identity.

Given the existing misconceptions about the Afro-Caribbean Carnival and Carnival culture in general it becomes once again obvious that the Eurocentric point of view which is at last nothing but a monologue of power has to be critically reviewed in order to transform it into what is really necessary today: a serious *dialogue* with the *voices of the margins* which are actually articulating themselves unignorably in every area of human expression: music, dance, theatre, literature, painting, film and - most authentically and originally - Carnival.

2. Areas of research on Afro-Caribbean Carnival

The complex phenomenon of Carnival is composed by a variety of facets that can become objects of critical research and investigation. Carnival can be perceived at the same time as an aesthetical structure and as a cultural process that transports the structure through the course of global history by adapting the structural configuration to the particularities of the respective historical stage. Hence the interest in Carnival is both historically and aesthetically conditioned, and this double-orientation implies a specific structure of a Carnival research project that takes into account and tries to combine both aspects.

2.1 Historical approach to Afro-Caribbean Carnival

The research on the history of the origins, the development and the proliferation of the Afro-Caribbean Carnival form has to focus on three crucial periods of modern global history:

À *colonialism* and *slavery*, Á *decolonization* and *nationalization*, Â *modernisation* and *migration*.

n The origins of the Afro-Caribbean Carnival are related to the period of colonialism and slavery. Carnival is a direct product of the complex relation between the African slave and the European master on the plantation in the Caribbean, especially in Trinidad, and in South America, especially in Brazil. After the abolition of slavery the slaves conquered the streets to celebrate their freedom and to mock their masters. This was the birth of a new form of Carnival which combined from the very beginning original African cultural signatures, that had survived the times of slavery with European cultural elements, signs of power and domination that had maintained the cruel situation of slavery and the hierarchical order of the slave society.

n In the colonial situation of the Caribbean that continued until the second half of the 20th century Carnival developed in different steps and always in antagonism to the ruling order from a genuine underclass expression to an expression of cultural specificity and identity of the colonised people. In the colonial society Carnival was perceived by the colonial institutions as a permanent challenge. All attempts to control, canalize or even prohibit the annual event were unsuccessful. In the contrary, Carnival multiplied in this period its forms of expression and symbolization, its aesthetical repertoire.

n The colonial situation produced its own negation in the global political movement of decolonization. In the context of the decolonization struggle Carnival developed forms of representation of directly political questions and demands. The process that changed colonized peoples into political subjects transformed Carnival into an expression of national culture and an instrument for the construction of national identity.

n The formal liquidation of the colonial system and the inclusion of the Caribbean region into the dynamics of the post-war world market under the global paradigm of "modernization" influenced the evolution of Carnival in two crucial ways: in the Caribbean we find an increasing tendency to commercialise Carnival, to connect the Carnival process with the new economic forces of the postcolonial society. Images distributed by the hegemonial centres of the global market, especially the USA with its powerful cultural industries, are exercising an increasing influence on the traditional aesthetics of Carnival. Today Carnival on the Caribbean islands is, at least partly, embedded in the marketing strategies of the Western industries of tourism that exploit and commodify systematically not only the diversity of nature by transforming it into "exotic places" but also the products of human creativity of peoples by transforming it into "exotic rituals and practices". The fact that the small Caribbean islands are today forced to sell their human and cultural resources is a genuine consequence of the problematic program of "modernization" that has not led to real substantial development of the postcolonial nations and societies, but rather got stuck in stagnation leaving the region in a situation of instability with immense economical, political and social problems. The process of migration set in motion already during the last decades of the colonial regime and kept going by the fatal consequences of the unsuccessful program of "modernization" dispersed people from the Caribbean around the Western industrialized world in search for better conditions of life.

n That was the way the Afro-Caribbean Carnival came to London where it was built up by the immigrants from very humble beginnings to the huge size it has actually reached. The development and growth of the Notting Hill Carnival was always connected with the struggle against racial prejudices and resistance of the dominant white British society, with the struggle for equal rights and equal chances for black people in Britain. What Carnival has increasingly lost in the Caribbean in the course of commercialization, its political character as a cultural weapon on the social battlefield, it has reconstructed in the situation of immigration. In short it can be stated that the Notting Hill Carnival has contributed a major part to the fact that black people in Britain today are able to define themselves as "Black and British", but it has to be added at the same time that the situation of the black Britons and of the Afro-Caribbean Carnival in Britain is not at all characterized by stability. The standards and

positions reached today have to be defended at present and in future against the suspicions of the authorities, the ignorance and misconceptions of the media and the still existing prejudices of a great part of the white society.

It can be interpreted as a sign of strength of the Carnival culture and as a sign of relative stability of the Carnival process that since some years ago Afro-Caribbean Carnivals are produced in many major cities all around Britain in collaboration with the Notting Hill Carnival and with the support of experienced practitioners from London.

This short abstract of the development of the Afro-Caribbean Carnival in relation to the global historical process might have made plain that the form of Carnival connected with the long and violent odyssey of black people is a prolific field of critical-historical research that could lead to interesting perceptions and a better understanding of the interrelation of cultural and historical processes.

2.2 Sociopsychological approach to Carnival

In the actual critical discussion between black intellectuals in the USA and Britain a central motivation for critical research on black popular culture and for the development of the methodology and the instruments of investigation and cognition is what some critics (*Cornel West, Stuart Hall, bell hooks*) call "the nihilistic threat" to black life and black culture, a threat that existed from the times when black culture and black life were subsumed under the concepts of European rationality during the period of the slave trade and the systematic exploitation of human labour force in the economic system of slavery on the plantations of the "New World". The attempt of dehumanization of the slaves was a constituent part of the logic immanent to the structure 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 base for various forms of autonomous African societies, and that was transformed under the specific conditions of slavery into an instrument of resistance against the order of the white masters that threatened the existence of the slaves. The construction of cultural "buffers" (Cornel West) against the threat of extinction was a logical cultural result of the economic system of slavery, the original cultural achievement of the slaves. 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 towards two directions: towards the African heritage that had to be conserved as far as possible as a constituent element of the construction of a new identity, and towards

the white culture of domination that established the conditions of the development of identity for the slaves. Substantial elements of symbolization and representation used in the cultural practices of African societies were transformed and recodified in order to be able to cushion the pressure coming from the dominant culture. It was the concrete situation of the slave in the slave society, the unhuman conditions of systematic exploitation, that forced the slaves to develop hybrid cultural forms that made African culture compatible with European culture. From this perspective slave culture is the construction of a dialogue between two distinct cultural forms. Given no realistic possibility of violent self-defence against or escape from the concentrated European power the dominated pole of the slave society had to affirm its right to exist as a human being by the development of 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 coordinates of the dominant culture. The limbo dancer bending down backwards and slipping beneath a burning stick is a significant symbol of the flexibility of the slave culture.

The dynamics of the cultural battlefield of the slave society, the specific rules of the "game of cultural wars of position" (Stuart Hall in the tradition of Antonio Gramsci) have to be researched by focussing on what we could call "the slave psychology": existing work on the economy and the politics of the slave society has to be completed by investigation of its sociopsychological factors, the deciphering of the complex composition of the *slave subject*, the systematic research on the rules of construction of the subjectivity of human beings reduced to the status of slaves, in short the general subjective conditions from which a new form of culture with global impact has historically emerged.

Critical-historical research on the phenomenon of the Afro-Caribbean Carnival necessarily reaches to the point where an increased knowledge about the subjective factor of the period of slavery becomes an obvious necessity. The cultural process of Carnival started after the formal abolition of slavery, but it was a result of the sociopsychological configuration that was shaped *in* the situation of slavery.

We have to ask for the subjective motivation of people in concrete historical and social situations to produce a specific form of expression and representation like Carnival in order to find valid answers to the questions and inquiries about the capacity and value of popular culture in the cultural "war of manoeuvres" (Gramsci) that takes place in modern societies, about the position and the meaning of Carnival and popular culture within the global cultural configuration in the historical process and in our presence. In this context the significance of notions like "hope" and "faith", and in a more abstract sense "vision", has to be emphasized.

Surveying the map of what is sometimes called today "Black Diaspora" we locate the origins and the development of Carnival in regions where the dominant European culture of the slavery period was designed by the conceptions and imaginative potentials of Catholicism (Portuguese, Spaniards, French), while regions under colonial rule and cultural influence of protestant nations (English, Dutch) have produced other forms of black popular culture, other forms of interaction between dominant white and subordinate black culture.

It is noticeable that the cultural contact between Africa and European Protestantism in the colonial period led to a form of slave culture with strong spiritual, religious contents but, in comparison with the symbolic austerity of protestantism, highly expressive forms. The cultural restrictions established by the dominant protestant orientation canalized the shaping of the slave culture in these areas mainly into a certain direction: music produced and exercised in function of divine service. The slave culture developed specific ways of worshipping, a sort of sacral culture in which substantial elements of the African culture like rhythm and dance, elements that nourish direct communication and the sense of community, could survive and could later, under the conditions of secularization, stimulate and influence the development of modern popular culture, the form of western culture we call "pop culture". A variety of studies describes the long and interlaced journey of black popular culture, and within this area especially black music, from the American cottonfields to the modern dancehalls of the urban centres of the world.

On the other side, however, we can notice the lack of critical interest in the parallel line of development of black popular culture, the line where the European catholic repertoire of imaginations and images met with African culture and generated the popular cultural form of Afro-Caribbean Carnival. If protestant culture is the form of illustrated Christian-Occidental cultural orientation that opened European development for capitalism and modernism, catholic culture, which was transferred to the Caribbean by the European planters aristocracy, had conserved elements and cultural signatures of feudalism and the period of the European Middle Ages. In general it can be said that in the "Black Diaspora" African culture got in contact with two different forms of European culture that were related with two different time levels that existed simultaneously in Europe in the period of the crucial changes from pre-modernism to so called modernism. In the "New World" Africa was confronted with a heterogeneous Europe, with the crucial problematic of identity of a Europe in the process of transgression from feudalism to capitalism, from the "ordo"- society of the European Middle Ages to modern civil society, or - most problematically - in terms of culture: from "myth" to "rationality", from the "darkness" and "barbarism" of pre-modernism to the "light" of modernism and "civilization".

Carnival as a form of popular culture, expression of underclasses, roots in medieval Europe where it functioned as a dialogue between the poles of political-ecclesiastical power elites and the semi-christianised popular sectors which were forced into the feudal, Christian-Occidental schemes of order. The elites always conceived the popular sectors as a threat - 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 political and ecclesiastical institutions it provided the possibility for the underclasses to react symbolically against the established order, to "play" freedom and anarchy by breaking the fixed rules for some days in order to accept their social conditions for the rest of the year. The exceptional theatrical situation of Carnival, the limited "mob-rule", was catharsis for the complex and conflictive psychological disposition of the subordinate and the elite subject and social valve for the antagonisms in medieval society, but at the same time it constructed a moment of "truth", a clear image of this society and its social actors, by pulling open the curtains of ideology for the time of the happening.

The catholic French planters, baroque aristocrats who emigrated from a changing Europe not only in search for economical profit but also for a chance to restore their disintegrating ideological horizons in the "virgin reality" of the "New World", brought their aristocratically modified, cultivated and largely devulgarized version of European Carnival to the sugarcane plantations of the Caribbean. But even if it was a slim version of popular medieval Carnival it still transported essential elements of the traditional celebration of freedom: Music and dance, masquerading, 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 subterraneous under the rule of the whip. Possible that only in the exceptional times of Carnival the slaves understood their masters as fellow human beings and their own situation as produced by man and therefore possible to endure and to overcome at last.

After the abolition of slavery we see the amalgamation of the Carnival form with African cultural elements in the streets of the colonial cities of the Caribbean, the transformation of the 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-consciousness of its own strength and capacity and of the validity of its own faith, hopes and visions. Thus the Caribbean Carnival form refers to the original meaning of the medieval European Carnival.

What the Caribbean experience shows is a line of construction of a complex popular cultural identity, of a system of specific values and forms of representation, that started from the situation of humiliation and degradation on the slave ship and in the cane fields, that passed through different periods of colonialism, the period of decolonization and the attempts of modernization, and that actually realises itself in the situation of immigration in the former centre of the power, in the heart of the decomposed empire, in the City of London.

2.3 Research on the level of cultural politics

The Afro-Caribbean Carnival in the Caribbean region evolved in permanent interaction with the restrictions and regulations established by the colonial and later postcolonial authorities.

The development of the Notting Hill Carnival in London is marked by the same attempts of the British authorities to destroy or at least to control the event that gathers hundred thousands of black people in the streets of the British capital.

To understand this continuity of suspicion against the cultural expression of black lower class people it is necessary to investigate black popular culture in its interrelation with other forms of cultural production in modern societies. We have to focus on the various forms of interdependencies between the area of *high culture* that is based on historically developed traditions and conventions about the genera of arts, the area of industrially produced and media-distributed *mass culture* with strong features of standardization that maintain the circulation of stereotypes, and the area of *popular culture* which is very difficult to define in the modern cultural context where it is superimposed and partly substituted by both the areas of high and mass culture. The emergence and evolution of modern mass culture along the lines of industrialization and the development of the modern industrialized society dissolved premodern forms of popular culture or at least pushed them into an area of invisibility where they could not be perceived by the dominant social discourses. Hence European cultural concepts often omit the area of popular culture or degrade works produced in this area to culturally second-class, folkloristic products.

It can be stated that black popular culture is present in three distinct ways in modern western societies: the strongest impact is to be found in the area of mass culture where black music is the fundament of a most powerful sector of the cultural industry and where black actors and film directors are actually increasing their influence in the production of images in the film industry. But in this area black culture has to follow the rules of the cultural industry that transforms culture into commodities to make it consumable by a mainly passive audience.

In the area of high culture black writers are conquering new spaces to tell the generally unknown story of the black experience in the modern world. But the perception of this contribution of black culture to the general actual cultural configuration is limited to the reading, literary educated public which is a small and - in comparison to the expansion of the public of the image industries - even shrinking sector of the population.

In the area of popular culture it is the black form of Carnival celebrated in London and in between in many other European cities that brings hidden subterranean trends back to visibility. It has to be asked why the annual event in London, that had started as a small local event produced by black immigrants, has attracted in the last years more and more white Europeans. It can be supposed it is because the Afro-Caribbean Carnival reacts to human needs that can not be satisfied by the offers of high culture and mass culture developed in modern capitalist societies.

We will have to return to that point when we talk about the aesthetics of Carnival.

At the moment it is important to state that the increasing participation of white people in the Afro-Caribbean Carnival is an obvious contradiction to the official white politics to discriminate and control the event whose main feature is that it has evolved and is produced beyond the market mechanisms that influence and design the two dominant areas of contemporary culture. Therefore a special effort should be made to further the research on the particular conditions of production of Carnival and to compare them with the conditions and means of production that construct the areas of high and mass culture. This research has to focus on the relation between Carnival production and local community development, on the ways how specific and distinct cultural signs are conserved within specific modes of production that are not primarily characterized by economical rationality but rather by communicative qualities, on the way how the production of Carnival reacts to the general cultural and political conditions established by the dominant sectors of the society. Those who produce Carnival in London call their product "We Ting", a notion that emphasizes the difference between auto-produced Carnival and prefabricated products of the mainstream culture and that is often used in a polemic sense in order to defend the independence of Carnival.

On the other side and in order to reach to a better understanding of the position of popular culture within the historical and actual field of cultural politics it has to be researched in which ways the dominant cultural politics has handled the incalculable and therefore suspicious phenomenon of Carnival: the different political strategies that range from open rejection in the earlier years to the contemporary attempts of integration into the dominant system. The racist paradigm of Enoch Powell that designed the official attitude towards

Carnival during the sixties and the seventies is today being substituted by the paradigm of integration of the strong minority of Black Britons with colonial background that is expressed by the declaration of the British Prime Minister John Major in 1992 that Carnival is part of "our national heritage".

2.4 Research on the artistic forms and the aesthetics of Afro-Caribbean Carnival

Carnival creates an original sphere of interaction of different artistic forms of expression: a specific form of music that is today especially produced for Carnival and historically developed from popular musical traditions that were absorbed by Carnival and fitted into the Carnival context; a specific form of masquerading that joined African with European traditions and a specific form of performing music and masquerading in the urban public space of the street.

u Caribbean Carnival music is characterized by the integration of traditional African musical structures performed by traditional African percussion instruments that were prohibited during the period of slavery and reactivated after its abolition, European musical forms and instruments that were added to the African rhythm basis, the highly communicative song form of the Calypso; the fusion of Calypso with different forms of black music from the USA generated the contemporary form of Caribbean Carnival music: the Soca sound that is produced with modern musical equipment. An original invention of Trinidadian Carnival music in the early forties was the *steel drum* and the *steel band*, an orchestra characterized by multifunctionality both in terms of sonority and repertoire. The specific Carnival form in London furthermore integrates Jamaica-based Reggae sounds and the newest forms of US-black popular music produced by powerful sound systems.

u Carnival masquerading combines mimetic with representative forms of expression thus creating a *play* that allows the actors to slip into the role of their choice. From the very beginning when the slaves imitated their masters by painting their faces white, the element of *parody* became a constituent part of the play. Masquerading provides the possibility to parody the dominant culture and to construct a shape of own identity at the same time. Carnival masquerading creates a specific image of global history, the history of European expansion and hegemony, from the perspective of the victims who were involved in this process by force. The repertoire of costumes includes African warriors in both traditional and fantasized

costumes and masks, a variety of devils from the African and Christian repertoire of symbols, figures from the Bible, Egyptian pharaohs, Roman gladiators, Spanish conquistadors, baroque aristocrats, popes and bishops, pirates and courtesans, Incas and Aztecs, Red Indians, slaves, dragons and all kinds of existing or fantasized animals and creatures. The production of the costumes is based on specific crafts and skills that have been developed in the Carnival context in a dialectical process of combining traditional procedures and technological innovation.

u When Carnival conquers the streets it transforms the public space into a huge and unique theatre. The play that it inscenates reflects the process of history from the perspective of authentic, historically developed popular culture that creates and develops its forms of expression beyond both the patterns of European high culture and standardized mass culture. If the central meaning of the dimension of European high culture is the abstract construction of Utopia and that of the dimension of modern mass culture propaganda for commodities in order to create acceptance for the unsatisfying status quo of modern capitalist society - both dimensions reproducing in different forms of secularization and for distinct publics the medieval ideological horizon of Christian-Occidental culture whose main orientation points out to the beyond - the individuals subsumed under these cultural configurations are deprived of the possibility of unrestrained creation and expression. They are reduced to a position of passive consumption of abstract cultural commodities that are prefabricated by the cultural industry and distributed in the sphere of circulation of immaterial commodities, on the market of ideologies. The popular cultural form of Carnival can be understood as an alternative: It is self-produced culture arranged around the concreteness of the human body. It is the body that was pressed into the slave ship, the body that was traded on the slave market, the body that had to bend on the cane field, the body that was ripped by the whip, the body that breaks down and gets up again to wear a costume and to dance and act on the street to the beat of a music that corresponds with the conditions of the body. It is from this simple but fundamental basis -the living human body in free motion- that Carnival creates its own genuine interpretation of history and presence, a counternarrative that questions and challenges the narratives of domination by presenting a 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 process of liberation and the struggle for equal rights, does not accept neither aesthetical nor social limits that were imposed to human expression by the schemes of order established by the European cultural 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 high and mass culture (for instance themes from literature, theatre forms, Hollywood images, etc.) 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 organisation. 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 finds the possibility of self-affirmation. The open space of Carnival is not structured in a hierarchical way, the aesthetics of Carnival don't 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 our opinion a systematic research on the aesthetics of Carnival should focus on the development of the artistical forms of Carnival production in relation with the general historical process in order to reach to a more profound understanding of the structure, the methods and contents of representation produced by the line of popular culture from which Carnival culture emerged. It would also be a prolific contribution to actual debates about popular culture in the context of discussions about "post-modernism" to examine systematically the interrelations between Carnival culture, high culture and mass culture, between Carnival arts and both the canonized genera of arts and the mechanisms and products of the cultural industry. It is evident and a central point of actual discussions that the increasing impact of mass culture on all social levels influences the configuration of established high culture while at the same time the development of modern mass culture has been intimately connected with forms and contents elaborated in the sphere of high culture. The traditional distinction between high and mass culture is being dissolved by the actual global cultural development. The development of technology and its application in the economical context by corporate market institutions as "mass communication" or "mass entertainment" on one side furthers the confluence of the economical and the cultural spheres in modern industrialized societies, on the other side, however, injects a high dose of the element of "communication" and, more politically, "participation" into the sphere of culture. 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 positions into 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. All that means that postmodernist discourses actually observe the emergence of a *new aesthetical subject*: the popular, or more precisely in terms of sociology, the sectors of the population who have nearly never been represented in historical and actual discourses on culture as producers of culture, who have nearly never been conceptualized as creators of their own representations but rather as amorphous, unable and minor masses who have to be controlled, patronized and educated, in short: object of a pedagogical treatment exercised by a sociocultural configuration with the self-assertion (or self-deception) of "civilization".

Carnival, and especially the Carnival form developed by the lowest social stratum of Occidental modernity, the slaves, has to be placed in the field of vision of actual discussions because it cuts through the old and obsolete Eurocentric and hegemonial construction of culture as "Western civilization". The inclusion of Carnival as a cultural phenomenon that stretches from "pre-modernity" and from non-European cultural contexts to present actuality into actual attempts to rethink "modernity" under the paradigm of "postmodernism" could possibly increase the substance of realism in these necessary debates. Reflections on the concrete Carnival phenomenon as it can be studied in the streets of London and on Carnival culture as a genuine form of popular culture in which "the popular" has always been the aesthetical subject could vitalize the actual intellectual debates by challenging the Eurocentric self-consciousness that is still virulent and determinant even in the intellectual areas that work seriously in order to extend our cognitive horizon.

If "the popular" is placed within a historical structure where the principle of domination is constituent, where struggle for and defending of hegemony is an immanent rule of the construction of culture and society, Carnival culture 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 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 seem to be exhausted.

3. Possibilities of practical intervention

The problems that emerge in the attempt to construct a Carnival theory are obvious.

What we tried to outline above was the skeleton of a possible theoretical elaboration of the phenomenon of Afro-Caribbean Carnival. The fact that the memory of slavery resides in the historical under consciousness of modernity makes it difficult to understand the complex cultural consequences of the slave trade and the slavery system, especially when these consequences are inextricably interweaved with contemporary popular culture of the Western world.

The construction of a consistent Carnival theory is confronted with manifold projections, Eurocentric stereotypes and auto-suggestive imaginations that have to be critically reviewed. Therefore Carnival theory can be understood as a theory in progress, its elaboration and construction is an interdisciplinary task because it connects critical historical, psychological and aesthetical knowledge.

As artists and cultural critics our approach to the Carnival phenomenon is unusual: What we are trying is to connect direct artistic experience with critical scientific perception. This combination implies that our work is not limited to an abstract academic level but rather provides the possibility to examine abstract hypotheses about Carnival in practical experiments in the concrete socio-cultural dimension. We actuated a series of projects in different countries in order to initiate and stimulate a far-reaching discussion on popular culture and Carnival.

3.1 London Project

Since 1992 we have produced a series of black-and-white photographs of the Notting Hill Carnival, images that concentrate on individuals participating in the massive street celebration. We came to know the people who had initiated the Afro-Caribbean Carnival in Britain in the early sixties and developed it until today and we made several interviews with them.

We are planning the publication of photographs together with an essay on the history of the Notting Hill Carnival and its meaning within contemporary European culture.

In collaboration with the LONDON ARTS BOARD, different Carnival artists (the costume-designers *Lawrence Noel, Vernon Williams, Clary Salandy, Michael Ramdeen and Carl Gabriel*, the *Ebony Steelband* directed by *Pepe Francis*) and black British writers with colonial background (*David Dabydeen, John Agard, Grace Nichols, Amryl Johnson*) we are at the moment elaborating an exhibition- and performance-project that combines Carnival arts, images of Carnival and poetry/literature in order to initiate a dialogue between different artforms that have a common point of reference: slavery.

[We add the description of the POETRY CARNIVAL - PROJECT that we elaborated last year for the LONDON ARTS BOARD to this paper]

The project is at the moment in the phase of fundraising and negotiations with possible venues in London. The LONDON ARTS BOARD is attending the project in the context of attempts to construct an adequate perception of the 30 years old Notting Hill Carnival in the British public.

Provided that the financing will come about the programme will be realised at the end of 1995.

Furthermore it is planned to add to the artistic programme a conference of black writers and critics from Britain and the Caribbean on the topics of slavery, language, literature, representation and Carnival. The conference will be organized by *Dr. David Dabydeen*, the director of the CENTRE FOR CARIBBEAN STUDIES at the UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK, Coventry.

Of course, also the realization of this meeting depends on finding ways and possibilities of financing.

3.2 Berlin Projects

1 In Berlin the HAUS DER KULTUREN DER WELT is interested to import parts of the London Project, provided it can be realised, as an essential contribution to an exhibition-programme named "*Carnivals of the World*" they are planning for summer 1996. This programme will give a survey of global Carnival culture by integrating Carnival forms from South America, the Caribbean and Europe.

1 In collaboration with the WERKSTATT DER KULTUREN IN BERLIN (Workshop of the Cultures in Berlin), a governmental institution in charge of the cultural and social integration

of foreigners in Berlin, we initiated the experiment to produce a "Carnival of the Cultures" that integrates various youth centres and organizations of foreigners throughout the city. The project is orientated by the example of the Notting Hill Carnival that was implanted and has developed in a protestant European capital without any Carnival tradition.

In order to increase the level of knowledge about the Afro-Caribbean Carnival in Britain and to get the attention and the support of the Berlin media for the Carnival idea we organized together with the WERKSTATT DER KULTUREN an information event in November 94 with films, slides, Caribbean music and the participation of the costume-designer *Lawrence Noel*, the organizer of the first costume band of the Notting Hill Carnival.

The Berlin Carnival experiment is based on general hypotheses outlined above about certain cultural characteristics and political implications of Carnival. It is meant as a possibility for foreigners living in the German capital to create a public expression of their cultural concepts and imaginations thus becoming visible as cultural subjects in the German society. In the German context that is marked by the rise of a dangerous nationalist discourse on different levels it is a necessity of cultural politics to create opportunities to emphasize cosmopolitan cultural elements in order to produce sociocultural structures of dialogue and tolerance as an alternative to the renascent camp mentality that is profoundly rooted in German history.

We support the WERKSTATT DER KULTUREN by making contacts to practitioners and Carnival groups and organizations in London in order to establish a stable Carnival-link and a productive exchange between the British and the German capital. It is planned to invite designers from London to hold workshops in Berlin and also to bring groups of juveniles to London to take part in the production and celebration of the Notting Hill Carnival.

To build up a network of interrelations between different parts of Europe, a cultural context constructed around the Carnival idea that contains efficient mechanisms of expression of immigrant culture, is, in our opinion, a possible and constructive way to react to the threats and challenges that come from concepts that attempt to build a "fortress Europe" in order to strengthen the European position in the competition of the global market and to avoid at the same time the unpleasant consequences of the global market situation: migration enforced by pauperization.

If Carnival contains a hitherto too less understood paradigm for truly popular and therefore democratic culture what is really required with reference to actual tendencies of exclusion and shrinking perspectives of democratic evolution of European societies is an intervention in the field of cultural politics that implants the genuine popular arts form of Carnival into European societies with the aim to develop in a practical way the principles of *participation* and *emancipation* both in the areas of culture and politics.

3.3 The Colombian Connection

In order to initiate a wider academic discussion about Carnival culture we got in contact with *Dr. Alfonso Munera Cavadia* and *Dr. Nayib Abdala Ripoll*, the deans of the FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS HUMANAS de la UNIVERSIDAD DE CARTAGENA, Colombia, who organize a biannual conference in Cartagena named "*Seminario Internacional de Estudios del Caribe*". This conference should contribute to the construction of a dialogue between scientists who investigate the Caribbean region on distinct levels and with distinct approaches in order to reach to a better understanding and a more adequate definition of "the Caribbean", this unique melting pot and focus of global history, where the contact of different cultures and political concepts through 500 years generated a highly complex cultural fusion and a complex structure of heterogeneous politics.

One main problem of the region is the separation of languages as a genuine heritage of distinct forms of European colonialism. The language barriers between the Spanish, English and French speaking Caribbean render the inner Caribbean dialogue more difficult. This lack of coherence facilitates the control of the region by hegemonial interests. One result of the execution of foreign interests in the region is the high rate of migration from underdeveloped Caribbean islands to the industrialized countries. The fact of migration, however, contains more than the transplanting of persons, it also generates a transplantation of culture, and as the persons forced into migration are from the lower sectors of the population, a transplantation of popular culture. This is the reason for the existence of the Notting Hill Carnival that expanded Caribbean popular culture to Europe thus giving an example of the vitality and creativity of this culture, of the possibilities that are implanted in the cultural resources of the Caribbean.

We think that the construction of inner Caribbean coherence against the existing historical barriers can be facilitated by an intensified concentration on these cultural resources. In the sphere of popular culture we can discover common elements throughout the entire Caribbean region. This sphere that was historically created by the mechanisms of oppression and exploitation, that has developed ways and means of reaction to domination, to resist situations of humiliation and to anticipate symbolically distinct forms of social organization, shows a similar structure in all parts of the Caribbean and is furthermore the link that connects the Caribbean with Latin America. And within the sphere of popular culture it is the concrete event of Carnival that joins and expresses different popular cultural concepts in the clearest form. A Carnival map of the Caribbean and South America would show that the event is produced everywhere where catholic orientated European culture got in contact and initiated

an interaction with autochthonous cultures. A systematic research on the repertoire of symbols and forms of representation developed and used in Carnivals all over the hemisphere would show an abundance of similar or coincident patterns that are not primarily dependent on linguistic conditions but rather on resources of imagination, fantasy, spirituality and creativity.

Considering these possibilities we suggested the organizers of the Cartagena conference to include the dimension of "the popular" and "the Carnevalesque" into their catalogue of themes for one of the next years' conferences. At the moment we are expecting their reply.

Historically Cartagena had a key position in the process of colonization of the American subcontinent and in the Caribbean slave trade, i.e. it would be adequate to initiate a debate on an important cultural consequence of slavery as it is the Afro-Caribbean Carnival at that place impregnated by the history and experience of people from America, Europe and Africa.

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The common denominator of the distinct projects and attempts is to wake interest on different levels for the phenomenon of Carnival, a cultural form that transgresses ages and continents, historical, political and cultural configurations thus keeping alive a general vision of freedom and equality as an alternative to the respectively historical structures of domination established by particular interests.

In the actual global configuration where possibilities and tendencies of growing together are countered by the opening of new gaps and the construction of new borderlines we see it as a necessity and a matter of responsibility to concentrate intellectual and artistic capacities on phenomena of popular culture with universal features in order to avoid the capitulation of human intellect in front of the fulfilled and apparently overpowering facts of a largely negative presence and to shape realistic possibilities for a human future.

It is in this - in the widest sense philosophical - context that we imagine the inclusion of research and reflection on Afro-Caribbean Carnival culture into the UNESCO-project about the economic and cultural consequences of African slave trade could be a prolific substantial contribution.

The intention of this paper is to suggest a reflection and possibly a discussion about forms in which this inclusion - provided our considerations find interest - could be realised.