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Grotesque in Use
**Shakespearean Grotesques in German Theatre
Performances**
Ph.D. Thesis

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Introduction

This paper's aim is to show how the grotesque appears in contemporary theatre practice. If one reads a report on a theatre performance, the word grotesque may have different connotations. It could either mean good or bad, sensational or absurd, horrible or funny. This paper is going to undertake a research on how the word grotesque is used by critics of postmodern Shakespeare performances in Germany. These concrete examples are going to show how complex the use of this word is but also that it is not a term for everything but that it has a concrete pattern of use typical for the postmodern theatre. My thesis is that the logic of the grotesque as it is used in the postmodern is similar to the logic of postdramatic theatre. Postdramatic theatre, a term introduced by Hans-Thies Lehmann, basically stands for the performances of the postmodern, where theatre and performance art influence each other in such an extent that Lehmann sees no sense in separating the two and names them postdramatic theatre.¹ Postdramatic theatre and the grotesque as it is used in the postmodern have a similar aim as they both want to unsettle the subject. I argue that the similarity of the logic in practice opens up a possibility for a theoretical criticism of poststructuralist subject theories.

In this introduction I am going to prepare the reader for my line of argumentation and clear relevant aspects that would distort the structure in the main chapters following the introduction. First, I am going to deal with the historical and contextual embeddedness of the notion grotesque. It is important to point out the origins of this word before I come to the first chapter where I undertake a more concrete task: the description of trends the grotesque is defined in the postmodern. The second essential point to discuss in this introduction is how the grotesque and contemporary theatre is connected. In the last chapter I am going to prove

¹ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*. Translated by Karen Jürs-Munby (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 23-24.

through examples that the logic of the postdramatic theatre is similar to the logic of the grotesque. In this introduction I want to argue that the grotesqueness of postmodern German theatre has a history, its roots in Brecht's alienation effect. Brecht's focus on audience experience and evoking critical thinking is still very influential in German theatre practice and theory. Moreover, these are essential elements that theatre critics call grotesque in concrete postmodern theatre performances. The third essential point in this introduction wants to raise attention to a broader, a more theoretical scale of my thesis. The main concern of my thesis is a practical one: the grotesque in use in the. I am going to prove that postmodern grotesque is similar to the way postmodern theatres function. The most important similarity is the aim of both postdramatic theatre and postmodern grotesque: they want to make the spectator uncertain about things they thought to be certain about and thus make spectators (re)act. Descriptions of spectator and critic reactions in the third chapter show that this aim is realizable in practice. What is the reason for this unanimity of practice? I suggest that we see in these examples a reaction to a theoretical problem which is unsolved since some time: the passivity of the poststructuralist subject. In the last part of the introduction I want to describe the helplessness of the subject in poststructuralist subject theories and show how only marked subjects not belonging to the ideology can be named agents. As there is no theoretical solution to the passivity of the postmodern subject, I am going to argue that the practical examples in theatre might open up a possibility of criticizing poststructuralist subject theories.

Let me start with the first point, the notion of the grotesque and its historical embeddedness. First, I am going to clear the common usage of the word 'grotesque' today. The Merriam-Webster dictionary describes the 'grotesque' as an adjective to be "extremely different from what is expected or usual" while the Oxford Dictionaries describe it to be "comically or repulsively ugly or distorted" and "incongruous or inappropriate to a shocking

degree.”² Other terms that should be differentiated from the ‘grotesque’ and mainly function to express a certain artistic or literary style are the words ‘absurd,’ ‘bizarre’ and ‘macabre.’ The three notions are compared to the ‘grotesque’ by Philip Thomson.³ ‘Absurd’ means something that opposes reason. The only difference Thomson finds is that the ‘grotesque’ has a “certain formal pattern” while the ‘absurd’ lacks such a pattern.⁴ Thomson claims that the ‘grotesque’ appears most of the time as a terrifying content in a comic form, thus having an incongruity between its content and form.⁵ There is a difference of degree between the ‘grotesque’ and the ‘bizarre.’ The ‘grotesque’ is more radical, more aggressive than the ‘bizarre.’⁶ The ‘macabre’ has the meaning of “gruesome yet funny” and the difference from the ‘grotesque’ is that the “gruesome element in the macabre considerably outweighs the comic.”⁷ Thomson claims that the terrifying and the comic elements have a kind of a balance in the ‘grotesque’.⁸

The definition of the word ‘grotesque’ varies not only in history, but also among those describing it within one historical period. It lacks consensus already in its origins. The most popular way to define the origin of the word ‘grotesque’ is to go back to its etymology. This way is chosen by Neil Rhodes, Wolfgang Kayser, Frances Barasch and Philip Thomson.⁹ The etymological origin leads us back to fifteenth-century Rome. During excavations Nero’s *Domus Aurea* was discovered. The walls of Nero’s antic palace showed unknown combinations of human, animal and plant forms that disregarded the laws of static and proportionality. These strange forms were named *grottesca/grottesco*, based on the word *grotto* (meaning ‘cave’ in Italian), signalling the excavations, where these frescoes came

² <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/grotesque>; access on 20.3.2015.

<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/grotesque>; access on 20.3.2015.

³ Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque* (London: Methuen, 1972), 29-58.

⁴ Thomson, op. cit., 31-2.

⁵ Thomson, op. cit., 22-4 and 27.

⁶ Thomson, op. cit., 32.

⁷ Thomson, op. cit., 37.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque* (London: Routledge, 1980), 8. Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1963), 20. Frances K. Barasch, *The Grotesque. A Study in Meanings* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1971), 17. Thomson, op. cit., 12.

from. The combination of human, animal and plant forms (*grottesca/grottesco*) was also named as *sogni dei pittori* (dreams of painters) or *antico* (antic). The *grottesca/grottesco* impressed the artists of the fifteenth century so much that the style was copied and later spread in Europe as a fashionable decoration style. Perhaps the best known examples from the Italian Renaissance are the loggias of the Vatican, planned and supervised by Raphael. The word *grottesca/grottesco* reached France in 1532, in the form of *crotesque*. This form was also used in England until 1640 when the word *grotesque* appeared.¹⁰

Beside the etymological origin, there are two more ways to explain the origin of the 'grotesque.' Both of these ideas claim that the idea of grotesque existed long before the word was invented. According to Geoffrey G. Harpham, the visual forms of the grotesque found in Nero's *Domus Aurea* are not the very first examples of such forms. Similar forms were discovered in the cave art of our predecessors already. He brings the example of the "god of les Trois Frères."¹¹ Harpham emphasizes the impure nature of these figures, and also the ambivalent meanings this impurity lends these creatures. The difference he sees in this interpretation of the grotesque is that while the grotesque based on the visual forms in Nero's palace develops into a (meaningless) decoration style, the grotesque as "cave art" is open to innumerable meanings by compressing a "multitude of ideas into a single ambivalent form."¹²

Willard Farnham discovers the origin of the 'grotesque' in the Middle Ages. He contemplates on the ideas of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, the founder of the Cistercian monastic order. Around 1125 Saint Bernard tried to interpret the grotesque motives in medieval manuscript decorations and in church decorations. These motives were similar to the above mentioned monsters, mixing human and animal forms, struggling in the chaotic

¹⁰ Arthur Clayborough, *The Grotesque in English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 2.

¹¹ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque. Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton and New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 62.

¹² Harpham, *op. cit.*, 63-5.

surroundings.¹³ Saint Bernard considered the effect these grotesques could have had on the monks: “what profit is there in that ridiculous monstrosity, a marvellous kind of deformed beauty and beautiful deformity?”¹⁴ Saint Bernard already answered his own question in the way he put the question. He disapproves the grotesque figures in religious art. As Farnham puts it, they are an “enticement away from religious meditation and towards aesthetic meditation ... more than a temptation to engage in idle wonder ... a temptation for a questing spirit.”¹⁵ Farnham shares the opinion on the meaning of the grotesque with Saint Bernard and claims that the struggle the grotesque evokes is not within art, nor within the visual representation, but between art and religion.¹⁶ For Farnham, the meaning of the grotesque is in its functions: it tempts, it diverts attention from God, and it is imaginative and aesthetic. It is exactly this idea of the “questing spirit” which I am going to use in the last chapter when the grotesque is described as something provoking, as something that diverts attention, as something that requires subject (re)action.

		
Engraving from <i>Domus Aurea</i> ¹⁷	God of les Trois Frères ¹⁸	Initial “V” for the Book of Job ¹⁹

Figure 1: Three visual representations to describe the origins of the grotesque

¹³ Willard Farnham, *The Shakespearean Grotesque. Its Genesis and Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 2.

¹⁴ Farnham, op. cit., 1.

¹⁵ Farnham, op. cit., 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Originally in Nicolas Ponce, *Descriptions des bains de Titus* (1736) in Harpham, op. cit., a fragment of illustration 10.

¹⁸ A redesigning of a cave painting by Addé H. Breuil in Harpham, op. cit., illustration 43.

¹⁹ An initial in a Vulgate Bible, MS. Auct. E. inf. 1, fol. 304r; English, late twelfth century in Farnham, op. cit., frontpiece.

The three theories on the origin of the ‘grotesque’ are very different in the elements they find essential to describe the grotesque. What all the scholars take as a basis of their description is a painting or drawing that shows figures that are composed of human, animal or plant elements (see Figure 1). All the three examples support the fact that even though the word ‘grotesque’ came into use in fifteenth century Rome, the idea it covers existed in medieval manuscript decorations, in antic wall decorations and even in cave art. This means that the grotesque is an ever-present phenomenon which appears in use in different ways in different times.

Even though the phenomenon is accessible across history, the fact that the word was used to describe different things shows that the grotesque is a historically and contextually sensitive one. How it works is perhaps best described through the idea of indecorum. Indecorum means impropriety in the Merriam Webster Dictionary and in the *Oxford Thesaurus of English* or “failure to conform to good taste, propriety, or etiquette” in the Oxford Dictionary.²⁰ What good taste and propriety are in the Renaissance is not necessarily propriety in the postmodern. However, there are still some examples that were considered decorum in the Renaissance and it is still decorum today. In simple terms, the grotesque is an extreme and rather special example for indecorum. I draw this parallel to show that it needs a research to say what grotesque is in one period of time.

This research is undertaken in my first chapter where I approach the grotesque in postmodern from a historical as well as from a more practical side in different media. It will become clear that Bakhtin’s carnival theory and the description of the grotesque within this theory is still one of the most popular grotesque descriptions. Mikhail Bakhtin claims that the Renaissance carnival used laughter as a weapon to defeat the fears of everyday life (fear of death, fear of God, etc.) by mocking, debasing and materialising the spiritual (God, Christ or

²⁰ Maurice Waite et al., *Oxford Thesaurus of English*. Third Edition. (Oxford: OUP, 2009).
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/indecorum>; access on 7.11.2015.
<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/indecorum>; access on 7.11.2015.

the Saints) and secular order.²¹ This is called Bakhtin's *grotesque realism*. I am going to search for the reasons for Bakhtin's presence in the 21st century literary, visual and performance theories of the grotesque. Next to Bakhtin, a German theoretician, Wolfgang Kayser also shows presence when the grotesque is discussed. Kayser sees the grotesque in the act of reception. He claims that the grotesque evokes the strangeness of the known structures and thus it has no meaning.²²

Before turning to the second point of this introduction, let me shortly return to the idea of 'indecorum' in order to show a very early example of it where the word 'grotesque' is used. The style of decoration in Nero's palace was not approved by all contemporary architects. Vitruvius, an antic Roman architect rediscovered in Renaissance Italy condemned the grotesque in the following way:

... motifs taken from reality are now rejected by an unreasonable fashion. For our contemporary artists decorate the walls with monstrous forms rather than reproducing clear images of the familiar world. . . . Such things, however, never existed, do not now exist, and shall never come into being.²³

Vitruvius obviously reflects on the disrespect of the laws of static by the grotesque, which was an indecorum for antic Roman architecture. It is also important to see the tone of the quotation because this slightly excited and opposing way of expression is also present in some postmodern theatre critiques I am going to examine. I see my task in pointing out indecorum in the form of the grotesque in postmodern Shakespeare performances in the third chapter. Moreover, I am also going to deal with indecorum in the form of the grotesque in Shakespearean theatre in the second chapter. I find it essential to undertake a research on how the grotesque was used in Shakespeare's time and especially how Shakespeare criticism deals

²¹ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. Transl. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1968), 66, 74, 90 and 256.

²² Kayser, op. cit., 179-188.

²³ Vitruvius, *De architectura* quoted in Kayser, op. cit., 20.

with the term grotesque because both influence postmodern staging of Shakespearean plays. The second chapter is devoted to these topics.

I have arrived to the second corner point of this introduction, the origin of the logic of the grotesque in German theatres. Before returning to Brecht, as I proposed above, let me introduce an essential book that describes grotesque in postmodern theatres. This book is not only essential for my study, but it will also provide a good point of reference between Brecht and the grotesque in postmodern theatre. Ralf Remshardt's inspiring book, *Staging the Savage God: the Grotesque in Performance* uses Bakhtin's carnival theory to build up his arguments on a grotesque theatre in the postmodern. Remshardt claims that the way carnival suppresses the official culture is the same as 'grotesque realism' suppresses reality itself. He argues that especially in the case of performance art, this suppressed reality evokes a moral reaction of the audience.²⁴ Performance art concentrates on the experience of the audience, they seek to maximise the experience value of the audience and, at the same time, minimise the difference between actors and audience and thus eliminate the border between art and the reality of everyday life. Remshardt sees this as ethically problematic, especially when violence is used. He names grotesque theatre those performances that use violence, immorality, etc. in order to provoke moral reactions within the audience and thus educate the audience through a bad example. Remshardt ends his book with the discovery that in grotesque theatres the laws of ethics are transgressed in order to secure the existing order afterwards.²⁵ Although I agree that the grotesque experience consists of transgressing one's (moral) norms, opposed to the ideas of Remshardt I see the return to the norm as only one possible reaction to the grotesque and not as a necessary reaction. The proof of this claim follows in the first chapter, where I propose next to Remshardt's transgressive way of describing the grotesque in postmodern theatre (after Bakhtin), another trend of description exists. Nevertheless, Remshardt's

²⁴ Ralf Remshardt, *Staging the Savage God: the Grotesque in Performance* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 50.

²⁵ Remshardt, op. cit., 261-2.

argument is invaluable for the legitimation of discussing the grotesque in connection to the theatre.

Remshardt uses a very Brechtian idea in his view on how theatre and especially performance art functions when he claims that ethical norms are transgressed in order to provoke moral reactions. After a short glance into the postmodern performative grotesque, I am going to focus now on the logic of the grotesque as it appears in German theatre history, reaching its peak in postdramatic theatre. Bertolt Brecht's *epic theatre* offers pleasures "more intricate, / richer in *communication*, / more *contradictory*, and / more *productive* of results."²⁶ Brecht wants the audience "to emigrate from the merely enjoyable."²⁷ He "beg[s the audience] not to forget their cheerful occupations while [the actors] hand the world over to their minds and hearts, for them to change as they think fit."²⁸ What Brecht requires from the audience is that they should reduce identification and that they should keep their distance so that they are able to reflect on their ordinary working days, as well as on what they receive from the actors. He expects the audience to be ready to communicate with the actors. Brecht adds that the audience should "change" the experience it receives from the actors (e.g. emotions, ideas, visual pleasure, etc.). This change is but a creative activity of the audience and it is supposed to happen in two locations: "minds and hearts", i.e. there should be an emotional as well as an intellectual reaction, a *production* of answer to what one has received from the actors. Brecht claims that a theatre with *contradictions* is needed, a theatre that does not emphasize the continuity of social structures. This is the idea Remshardt sees in performance art. Brecht denies those cosmetic changes that make a different structure look similar to that of the audience's, only to secure continuity. Discarding continuity means discarding the sequence of repeating the same structure again and again, thus discarding the aim of securing the existing structure. Instead of homogenising, differences, "their

²⁶ My emphasis. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre. The Development of an Aesthetic*. John Willet transl. ed. (London: Methuen Drama, 1994), 181.

²⁷ Brecht, op. cit., 179.

²⁸ Brecht, op. cit., 185.

impermanence” should be emphasized.²⁹ If the characters on stage should live according to different conditions from those of the audience, then it is “harder for our spectator to identify himself with them.”³⁰ It is harder, because first the audience needs to say: “If I had lived under those circumstances...” Brecht emphasizes that this “if” is where the “critical attitude begins.”³¹ It means that Brecht promotes a productive theatre, where the audience needs to *produce* something new (not the existing structures) together with the actors. The critical attitude to what is seen is introduced through the empathy with the unknown structures. The *contradiction* lies in the opposing structures and exactly this enables critical thinking. The critical approach begins with the utterance of “if”, i.e. with switching off the usual pattern of thinking and creating new structures. This change in the structures makes the original structure alien and this alienated quality of the original structure makes it possible for the original structure to be manipulated and also changed.³² Brecht names this state of being alienated from the original structure the *Verfremdungseffekt* (translated as distancing or alienation effect).

If Remshardt’s postmodern grotesque theatre is compared with the epic theatre of Brecht, similarities become obvious. The focus on audience experience is essential for both the epic as well as the postmodern theatre. The audience’s critical thinking and the reduction of theatrical illusion to its minimum are both ways of describing the importance of theatrical distance. Also, the presence of a contradiction, of something unusual, like the violence Remshardt described in performance arts, is important for both theatres. While Brecht suggests here an unknown context, in which the audience might part its usual way of thinking, Remshardt sticks to the example of violence and immorality on stage and claims that they will only serve to secure the opposite, i.e. ethics. While Brecht proposes a theatre that might change the original thinking pattern of audiences, Remshardt claims that after these patterns

²⁹ Brecht, op. cit., 190.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Brecht, op. cit., 191.

are shaken, the audience will return to the old patterns. This very last point, the outcome of the performance is where Brecht and Remshardt disagree. I am going to argue in the first chapter of this paper that Remshardt is right when he says that the grotesque is used as a term that evokes transgression and the return to the old structures. However, it is not the only definition used for the grotesque in the postmodern theatres. The reasons for the existence of two main definitions of the grotesque in the postmodern are partly described in the first chapter where I try to give a summary of how the grotesque is described in the postmodern in three different media. The other argument, unfolded beneath, is the fact that Brecht and his idea of the epic theatre is essential for theatre practice even today and the aim of the alienation effect is the opposite of returning to the old structures one succeeded in challenging.

The theatre theory and practice of Brecht is rooted in Germany and it also marks the German theatre theory as well as practice until today. From the most recent leading theatre scholars of Germany, Erika Fischer-Lichte as well as Hans-Thies Lehmann build their theories on the basis of Brecht. Erika Fischer-Lichte uses the notions of presence (phenomenological/bodily presence of the actor) and representation (the actor as the embodiment of the fictional character) to describe a special theatre experience, the *Schwellenerfahrung* (liminal experience).³³ Fischer-Lichte claims that in the moment of shift from presence to representation or from representation to presence the old order of perception is destroyed as the new order is established.³⁴ This experience is called ‘perceptive multistability’.³⁵ An interesting characteristic feature of this phenomenon is that there are no

³³ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2004), 258. She combines a phenomenological and a semiotic aesthetic and argues that it is possible to connect an experience (Wirkung) with meaning (Bedeutung), i.e. for an aesthetics of performance an aesthetics based on phenomenology and semiotics is needed. See Erika Fischer-Lichte, “Ästhetische Erfahrung als Schwellenerfahrung,” in Joachim Küpper and Christoph Menke eds., *Dimensionen ästhetischer Erfahrung* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), 144-5 and 150-2. While semiotics questions the meaning (Bedeutung), phenomenology deals with the description of what one sees (Erscheinung), but also with what kind of effect (Wirkung) this “Erscheinung” has in theatre. Fischer-Lichte claims that semiotics and phenomenology can only be separated by force in theatre, as they belong together. Claimed during a lecture “Einführung in die Theaterwissenschaft” at the Freie Universität Berlin on 5.1.2011.

³⁴ Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik* op. cit., 257.

³⁵ Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik* op. cit., 256.

reasons why our attention shifts from one way of perception to the other, so it is uncontrollable. At the moment of such a shift one order becomes unstable, but the other order is not yet established. Fischer-Lichte calls this state of instability “betwixt and between,” the liminal experience.³⁶ Although we are conscious about this liminal experience, we are not able to control it due to the perceptive multistability. The process of continuous change between presence and representation gives a kind of dynamic to the process of audience perception.³⁷ Fischer-Lichte claims that this liminal experience is an aesthetic experience in the theatre which comes as a reaction to the audience’s feeling of insecurity. The insecurity comes from a crisis, experienced when the ruling structures are questioned.³⁸ *Schwellenerfahrung* comes when innovative performances are experienced, especially such performances where the audience is required to create new strategies for perception.³⁹ Such strategies are what Brecht required from his audience. Although Fischer-Lichte claims that perceptive multistability makes it impossible for the audience to control this *Schwellenerfahrung*, the audience is required to build up new strategies of interpretation during this experience. What Fischer-Lichte claims is actually the realisation of Brecht’s alienation effect in postmodern theatre. Brecht’s requirement for alien circumstances on stage makes the audience think within these patterns. Fischer-Lichte’s example performances annul known strategies of interpretation and require that the audience produces new strategies of interpretations. In both cases the audience is deprived of its usual thinking patterns and it is required to create something new.

Hans-Thies Lehmann describes contemporary theatre practice in Germany. His description also shows Brechtian roots. German theatres use elements of performance art and thus strengthen the social embeddedness of the plays. Lehmann describes such theatres as postdramatic theatres. He lists important characteristic features that mark postdramatic

³⁶ Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik* op. cit., 258.

³⁷ Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik* op. cit., 260.

³⁸ Questioning the ruling structures in theatre comes from Brecht although Fischer-Lichte does not mention him.

³⁹ Fischer-Lichte, “Ästhetische Erfahrung...” op. cit., 146.

theatres. *Plethora* and *play with the density of signs* urges the audience to find new ways of meaning formation within postdramatic theatre experiences. *Plethora* means the rejection of conventional forms and signs, such as unity or symmetry, i.e. it means the rejection of our usual logical structures. Under the *play with the density of signs* Lehmann describes that the audience perception is either overtaxed through the simultaneity of actions and/or language or that there are long pauses when nothing happens and the audience attention is in no way engaged.⁴⁰ Lehmann also argues that the postdramatic theatre does not strive to represent something else as it is. Theatrical fiction and reality are blurred on purpose, so that the audience is not any more certain whether something is real or if it is only acted out as if it was real. Thus the theatre experience becomes an *event/situation* instead of representation.⁴¹ The audience of the postdramatic theatre is driven into a distanced position instead of aesthetic engagement. Thus these are strategies Brecht would have welcomed as tools for creating the alienation effect. For example, Brecht's idea to play with the lights on, so everyone can be seen among the audience is an often used practice in postdramatic theatres.

After an overview of Brecht's alienation effect, as well as its obvious presence in contemporary German theatre theory and practice, I want to open up the topic of theatre and consider the social structures working around it, thus approaching the third corner point of this introduction. Attila Kiss argues that periods of epistemological uncertainties, such as the early modern and the postmodern, show similarities and that the uncertainty of the subject in these periods is thematised in theatres. There is a parallel between the early modern and the postmodern crises of the subject. The early modern subject is in crisis because the medieval structures and securities are endangered by humanism. Similarly, in the postmodern structures of modernity are questioned. Both periods use "self-reflexive theatre" to deal with their

⁴⁰ Lehmann, op. cit., 90.

⁴¹ Lehmann, op. cit., 98-107.

crises.⁴² In theory, exactly this dealing with the subject in crisis makes a Shakespeare play a very good postdramatic play. This is also true for theatre practice. A German director, Karin Beier said that “Shakespeare leaves directors their freedom of trying out different ways of acting his plays. This is very similar to the modern performative theatre.”⁴³ Shakespeare plays are considered suitable for postdramatic theatre performances not only because of the similarities of early modern and postmodern subjects in crisis, but also because they offer a basis for innovative performances.

With the similarities of the subject in crisis in Shakespeare’s time and in the postmodern, I have arrived to the third corner point of this introduction. The critical thinking of the audience as an aim of theatre production of postdramatic theatre inherited from Brecht should be considered here from the perspective of poststructuralist subject theories. If postmodern theatres should function as laboratories of the subject in crisis, the grotesque in a postmodern theatre performance might evoke something that would count to an indecorum in poststructuralist subject theories. As one aim of postdramatic theatres is critical thinking, it seems to be interesting to undertake a theoretical contemplation on how far the practical results of my research can be adapted to what is going on in poststructuralist subject criticism. In the end of the third chapter I am going to open up my perspective of theatre performance and I am going to establish possible connections between the grotesque described in the concrete theatre performances by theatre critics and the theoretical possibility of what these grotesques may cause within poststructuralist subject theories. My concern especially aims at the passivity of subject position. In this introduction I discuss the theoretical possibility and impossibility of a subject becoming an agent, so I can refer back to this when drawing conclusions from my practical examples.

⁴² Kiss Attila, *Double Anatomy in Early Modern and Postmodern Drama* (Szeged: JATEPress, 2010), 51.

⁴³ My translation of the following: “Shakespeare lässt Regisseuren auch die Freiheit, diverse Spielformen auf ihn anzuwenden. Das kommt dem modernen performativen Theater sehr nahe.” See Dorothee Krings’ interview with Karin Beier “Shakespeare trifft einen im Kern des Daseins” *Rheinische Post*. <http://www.rp-online.de/panorama/wissen/shakespeare-trifft-einen-im-kern-des-daseins-aid-1.4183794>; access on 15.7.2014

During my studies on literary criticism it became clear that the postmodern subject is in the focus of literary studies and that this subject lacks agency.⁴⁴ This lack of agency made me search for possibilities for the subject to act against the ideology. Thomas Docherty claims that “[i]n the postmodernism, it has been difficult to make the proposition ‘I know the meaning of postmodernism’ – not only because the postmodern is a fraught topic, but also because the ‘I’ who supposedly knows is itself the site of a postmodern problematic.”⁴⁵ The postmodern subject is in crisis: it can either be totally lost or it might try to overcome this crisis. In order to be able to do something, it has to have a room to play, to act freely, to take responsibility. Poststructuralist subject theories deny this room for the subject to play. Louis Althusser claims that subjects are interpellated as concrete individuals by the ideology. Each subject receives a role s/he has to fulfil. Althusser deals with the double meaning of the word subject (as free individual or as subject to something) in a typically decentring way; he claims that the subject is free as long as it freely accepts his subjection.⁴⁶ Michael Foucault describes different modes by which “human beings are made subjects.” Power makes individuals subjects, it appears in the everyday life of individuals, it categorizes them, “imposes a law of truth on [them] which [they] must recognize and which others have to recognize in [them].” Foucault recognizes two meanings of the word ‘subject.’ It is either “subject to someone else by control and dependence” or “tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge;” in both cases the subject is an object of a form of power. Foucault also claims that we have to

⁴⁴ Although the word ‘postmodern’ is not really definable, it covers some basic thoughts that should be mentioned before situating the subject in such a context. The postmodern covers trends of thinking that show the crisis of modernism. The best known names related to postmodernism are those of Jean Baudrillard and Francois Lyotard. Baudrillard argues that an image cannot stand for reality because it is not real (it is an image), it should rather stand for the lack of reality, pretending to show reality. A *simulacrum* is an image that has replaced the reality it used to represent. See Jean Baudrillard, “The Evil Demon of Images and the Precession of Simulacra,” in Thomas Docherty ed., *Postmodernism. A Reader* (New York, etc: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 194-199. Lyotard called attention to the importance of particularities that consist of “little narratives” instead of sticking to the modernist metanarratives. See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translation Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 60.

⁴⁵ Thomas Docherty, “Postmodernism: An Introduction,” in Thomas Docherty ed., *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York, etc.: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 5.

⁴⁶ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. Translated by Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), 155-6, 173 and 182.

free ourselves from the “modern power structures” and that we should promote “new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.” What kind of ‘new subjectivities’ Foucault imagines is not clear, however, in his vague description it says that the subject should “imagine and to build up what [it] could be.”⁴⁷ To imagine what we could be supposes the refusal of what we are, which is exactly the self-hermeneutics that destroys the self itself.⁴⁸ Therefore, Foucault either refers back to his own decentring subject theory, or indeed suggests a new direction. I understand that Foucault himself argues against ideology and claims that its destruction could be achieved through the refusal of the roles one got. The idea of refusing the norm, to show something new, surprising, something that is other is a pattern we find in several postmodern descriptions of the notion grotesque as well. Moreover, it is also an essential part of the Brechtian epic theatre to refuse the roles that are normal and to try out new structures in order to evoke change. This was the very element of the epic theatre Fisher Lichte actualised in her *Schwellenerfahrung* for the postmodern theatres. It did not only ensure the similarity of how the grotesque in use and postdramatic theatre work, but it also made me think whether the grotesque in use is a practical answer to the unsolvable theoretical question of subject passivity.

Althusser, Foucault or Baudrillard all represent decentring subject theories.⁴⁹ The poststructuralist subject is suppressed by Althusser’s ideology, Foucault’s power or it is

⁴⁷ Michael Foucault, “Afterword. The Subject and Power,” in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow eds., *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 208, 212 and 216.

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, “About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 21 No. 2 (May 1993): 221.

⁴⁹ Both Foucault’s and Baudrillard’s subjects remain oppressed, one by *power*, the other by objects. Baudrillard no longer sees the fear from anonymity out there in the others, but inside the individual. See Jean Baudrillard, *Subjekt und Objekt: fraktal*. Übersetzung Dieter W. Portmann (Bern: Benteli, 1986), 7. I understand this position in a way that the subject is no more objectified by the power and by him/herself, but now the subject is seduced by the object as his/her own (even if not controllable) choice.

Criticising Foucault, Baudrillard finds it suspicious that Foucault ends his discussions on *power* exactly where *power* should be thrown over by the individual. Baudrillard dismisses the idea of *power* as a force and the subject as a sufferer. He claims that the connection of subject and *power* is in the exchanges of seduction. While Foucault’s subject is suppressed and at the same time builds up the ideology, Baudrillard’s subject is seduced by

seduced by Baudrillard's object. The subject is passive, it is not an agent. However, not all subjects are necessarily subject to such powers in poststructuralist criticism. Feminist, postcolonial and queer cultural theorists deal with marked subjects, such as female, black, colonized, homosexual subjects and position them in a different way to those discussed above. These discourses grant agency to their marked subjects without denying the existence of the decentralising subject theories.⁵⁰ Enikő Bollobás argues that because these marked subjects do not fit the white male European subject position, they are able to resist subject positions created by power or ideology.⁵¹ She emphasises that it is in these marked subject-positions that the poststructuralist theories allow for the agency of the subject. Bollobás places the construction of the subject in between these two (decentring subject theories and theories of the other/marked subject) poststructuralist trends. The subject is either constructed "in accordance with" the dominant ideology, or "out of resistance to" this ideology. The first position is based on decentring subject theories which claim that the subject is 'interpellated' by ideology (Althusser) or that the subject position is constructed by power (Foucault). Bollobás names this first position "performance" and claims that it is based on fixed ideology, conventions or traditions. She compares it to an existing script that should be acted out on stage.⁵² The second position is named "performative" by Bollobás because here "new discursive entities come about against or in the absence of existing ideologies."⁵³ *Performative* constructions of the subject challenge the ruling ideology by "transgressions and extensions of categories."⁵⁴ This *performative* subject is constructed through dialogue with the text and is highly influenced by presuppositions (formed by personal experiences, as well as by cultural

objects (such as commodities, capital, etc.). See Douglas Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard. From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989), 157.

⁵⁰ Leela Gandhi, "Postcolonialism and Feminism," in *Postcolonial Theory. A critical introduction* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1998), 83.

⁵¹ Enikő Bollobás, *They Aren't Until I Call Them. Performing the Subject in American Literature* (Frankfurt am Main etc.: Peter Lang, 2010), 81.

⁵² Her emphasis. Bollobás, op. cit., 85-7.

⁵³ Her emphasis. Bollobás, op. cit., 88.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

influences).⁵⁵ The possibility of subject agency Bollobás suggests is only true for marked subjects. These marked subjects are also part of the society and unmarked subjects very well recognize them as such. Marked subjects have a freedom that seems dangerous but that also fascinates unmarked subjects. I believe in the practical possibility of unmarked subjects to notice and (re)act on marked subjects.

Robert Eaglestone approaches this question of subjects belonging to the ideology and subjects outside of the ideology through the other. He claims that there are two kinds of postmodern others: the other who is within the same system, the “same/other” and the “other that is outside and underlies the system.”⁵⁶ He claims that the ‘other’ is both the foundation as well as the limit of western thought and that postmodernism involves the field of ethics in its response to otherness, referring thus to Levinas.⁵⁷ Instead of absolute values and principles (which do not fit the fragmentation of postmodernism), Levinas argues for an ethics of “being-for-the-other-person,” he bases his ethics on responsibility and on the necessary response to the other.⁵⁸ The other’s face is a central term in his ethics. Just like big eyes of children raise a feeling of care, the nakedness of the face for Levinas shows the vulnerability of the other and at the same time requires responsibility from the one facing this other. Levinas claims that response for the other is already taking responsibility for the other.⁵⁹ Response to the other (the subject outside ideology) becomes an essential question in the third chapter, where I discuss responses of theatre critics and focus on how they use the word ‘grotesque.’ Theatre performance is one of the last social activities where producer, buyer, product and enjoyment take place in one room. The ones producing a commodity see and

⁵⁵ Bollobás, op. cit., 93-4.

⁵⁶ Robert Eaglestone, “Postmodernism and ethics against the metaphysics of comprehension,” in Steven Connor ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 189.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity. Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. Translated by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 10.

⁵⁹ Levinas, op. cit., 86-88.

meet the ones buying and enjoying this commodity. They sit physically *facing* each other and in such a situation they cannot but to react on each other's face.

After an overview of poststructuralist subject theories, the connection between the grotesque in postdramatic theatres and the theoretical problem of subject passivity should also be worked out. Here I follow Foucault's appeal to free ourselves from the modern power structures. The way Foucault proposes is to "imagine and to build up what we could be."⁶⁰ To imagine being someone else is easiest with the help of works of art. The ideas of Hans-Thies Lehmann, Attila Kiss and Richard Schechner on theatre made me agree with the opinion that theatre is a good form to deal with the crisis of the postmodern subject. Attila Kiss argues that the "actual theatre or drama model of a cultural period is always in close relation with the *world model* of the era, ... [it] serves as a laboratory to test the most intriguing epistemological dilemmas of the specific culture."⁶¹ Kiss claims that in both the early modern and the postmodern, theatre becomes the laboratory of the self. The crisis of the subject requires that early modern and postmodern theatres "set up laboratories in which the *constitution of the heterogeneous subject* can be scrutinized."⁶² Kiss points out that uncertainty concerning self-knowledge and sovereignty of the subject are the focus of these theatres.⁶³ Kiss moves within poststructuralist arguments, however, the idea that theatre reflects the uncertainties of an age made me think about the contemporary theatre described by Lehmann. He insists that postdramatic theatre offers "not a representation but an intentionally unmediated experience of the real (time, space, body)."⁶⁴ In this postdramatic theatre the "task of the spectator is no longer the neutral reconstruction, the re-creation ... but rather the mobilization of their own ability to react and experience in order to realize their participation in the process that is

⁶⁰ Foucault, "Afterword" op. cit., 216.

⁶¹ His emphasis. Kiss, op. cit., 103.

⁶² His emphasis. Kiss, op. cit., 51.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Lehmann, op. cit., 134. Lehmann claims that performance arts learn how to use media technologies from experimental theatres, while these theatres no longer focus on the psychological unfolding of action and character.

offered to them.”⁶⁵ Thus the agency promoted in postdramatic theatre may be seen as a response in theatre practice to the subject passivity in theory. Richard Schechner’s description of theatre points into a similar direction. He names theatre the “here and now performance of there and then events.”⁶⁶ ‘Here and now’ means the social reality of the audience and actors. ‘Here and now’ is a situation where the audience is entertained sitting in the dark while the actors earn their money with acting, creating art. This is the distanced view of the performance. The ‘there and then’ description leaves the conscious presence of the audience and only considers the actions on stage, the embodied performance. It is the world of fiction. Interestingly enough, the audience is able to hold on to both ‘here’ and ‘there’ as well as ‘now’ and ‘then’ events. Schechner claims that exactly this situation “allows an audience to contemplate the action, and to entertain alternatives. Theatre is the art of enacting only one of a range of virtual alternatives.”⁶⁷ Schechner believes that we go to the theatre in order to experience this way to ‘virtual alternatives.’ I believe that contemporary theatres have the potential to offer a room for activity. Moreover, in case of a *Schwellenerfahrung* audiences need new interpretive strategies and here the audience follows Foucault’s appeal to imagine and to build up what we could be.⁶⁸

After marking the tree cornerstones of this introduction, a short description of my methodology and the structure of this dissertation follows here. The aim of this paper is to show how the word grotesque is used in postmodern theatre performances. My thesis is that the logic of the postmodern grotesque is similar to the logic of the postdramatic theatre and that this similarity in practice is an answer to a theoretical discussion on the passivity of the poststructuralist subject.

In *Chapter 1 Grotesques* I undertake a research on the postmodern grotesque. The aim of this chapter is to describe the grotesque in the postmodern. First, I consider the way the

⁶⁵ Lehmann, op. cit., 135.

⁶⁶ Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 190.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Foucault, “Afterword...” op. cit., 216.

term is defined as a product of a historical development. For an accurate description of this development I sum up and compare major theories on the grotesque from the 1960s on. Here an essential role is given to the descriptions of Mikhail Bakhtin and Wolfgang Kayser as I want to find out the reason why these theoreticians are still so influential in the postmodern descriptions of the grotesque. As a second step I go through examples of grotesque definitions of three media with the aim to find contemporary trend(s) of how the grotesque is defined today. I compare contemporary literary, visual and performative grotesque definitions and draw conclusions on their structure and effect. My hypothesis is that theories of Kayser and Bakhtin give a kind of basis for postmodern definitions of the grotesque.

In *Chapter 2 Shakespearean Grotesques* I approach Shakespeare criticism with focus on the grotesque. The aim of this chapter is to find out which plays and characters of Shakespeare are most typically grotesque according to the critics. I study Shakespeare criticism and focus on writings where the grotesque is described. I assume that great theories of the grotesque, like that of Bakhtin and Kayser, have an essential effect on the interpretation of the grotesques in Shakespeare criticism. I search for common points of the descriptions of the grotesque in Shakespeare criticism and I especially focus on socio-political contexts where the grotesque appears in connection to the subject.

In *Chapter 3 Shakespearean Grotesques in German Theatre Performances* those Shakespeare performances in Germany are reported on that are named grotesque by theatre critics between 2005 and 2015. A distanced view on the theatre performance is essential according to Brecht as it promotes critical thinking.⁶⁹ Also Fischer-Lichte's

⁶⁹ Opposed to distance is the notion of aesthetic identification or engagement. The German Rezeptionsästhetik of Wolfgang Iser and H. R. Jauss deal with the reader's aesthetic identification. Iser describes "the process of absorbing the unfamiliar" as the reader's identification with what he reads. He argues that in this way the subject-object division is dissolved and the text as well as the reader's response will appear within the reader itself. See Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," in Jane P. Tompkins ed., *Reader-response Criticism. From Formalism to Post-structuralism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980), 65-67. Jauss adds that all kinds of aesthetic identification need a kind of distance as well. Hans Robert Jauss, "Ästhetische Identifikation – Versuch über den literarischen Helden," in *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 253.

Schwellenerfahrung requires distance as the subject searches for new strategies of interpretation. To provide as objective a description of the theatre performances as possible, I undertake a research on what theatre critics say about the grotesque in contemporary German performances. A professional theatre critic is multifunctional: s/he knows previous performances of the actual play, as well as literary criticism of that play, s/he can compare how an actress plays a role to other roles she has played in other plays, critics know about theatre politics and see national or international politics in the actual play, they are also aware of certain trends of direction or of certain style of a director and they are also aware of socio-political as well as theoretical discussions. This means that the theatre critic is in a position to connect theoretical discussions with theatre practice. In this paper the theatre critic has an important role, not only because I rely on theatre reviews to find out what the grotesque means in a postmodern theatrical context, but also because the theatre critic is able to see theatre practice as a response to more abstract theoretical problems, such as the passivity of the poststructuralist subject. The method of the last part of my research is to collect theatre reviews where the word grotesque appears. I use German theatre papers (*Theaterheute* and *Die Deutsche Bühne*), prominent newspapers (*Die Süddeutsche Zeitung* known as a left-wing liberal daily newspaper or *Die Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* known as a conservative liberal newspaper) as well as local newspapers. Most of the articles are accessible on the Internet. I discuss a *Hamlet* and a *Richard III* directed by Thomas Ostermeier, a *Midsummer Night's Dream* in the co-direction of Thomas Ostermeier and Constanza Macras, and a *King Lear* in the direction of Karin Beier. I am going to interpret theatre reviews where elements of the performance were called grotesque and compare these elements to the grotesques described in the previous chapters, as well as to techniques used in postdramatic theatres. My hypothesis is that there are similarities within the logic of postdramatic theatres and the logic of postmodern grotesques in use. In case this hypothesis is proved in practice, a question on

its theoretical effects opens up and, as I am going to argue, offers a critique on the passivity of poststructuralist subjects.

Chapter 1: Grotesques

This chapter has two aims: it undertakes a research on the recent history of the definition of grotesque in order to make the origin of postmodern definitions clear and it offers an overview of how the notion “grotesque” is described by critics in postmodern art, literature and theatre in order to find trends of how the notion is defined.

The first aim is to show the way the description of the grotesque developed in the postmodern. I focus on texts that deal with the abstract notion “grotesque” with the aim to define it. It is practically the recent history of the definition “grotesque” I describe. I need to go back as far as the 1960s as I want to explain the reason why still theories of the grotesque from this time are used. I am also going to examine why later definitions are not any more important for the postmodern scholars. This short historical research on how the notion grotesque is defined would not be necessary if the postmodern would have brought new definitions with it. However, as scholars reuse definitions to the 60s, the reason for this should be investigated.

The second aim of this chapter is to show how the notion “grotesque” is defined in different media and thus draw a conclusion on its general pattern in the postmodern. To make things more complicated I found out that there are two parallel patterns in use and both are based on definitions described in the 60s. These patterns are going to provide points I can relate to when I discuss for what German theatre critics use the word grotesque in chapter three. My supposition is that there should be similarities in how the notion in visual arts, in literature or in theatre is described. The historical background of how the notion is defined is also going to be present in this section. I am going to argue that there are two patterns the contemporary grotesque definitions can be based on. In both patterns the basic feature of the grotesque is that it disrespects norms/borders. The difference is in what remains after this act of disrespect. In one case borders are *transgressed* with the attempt to overthrow the existing

order. In the other case borders are *blurred*, so no position can really be located. In the latter case structures are dissolved as no border separates them.

1.1. The Basis of Postmodern Definitions

I am going to discuss the grotesque in literary studies in this section as the grotesque analysed in theatre performances is mainly based on these studies. The grotesque, although it appeared first in a visual form, soon entered the field of literature as well. It was Montaigne who first used the word “grotesque” when referring to his own style of writing: “what are these things I scribble, other than grotesques and monstrous bodies, made of various parts, without any certain figure, or any other than accidental order, coherence, or proportion?”⁷⁰ To reach this point, Montaigne uses the idea of the sisterhood of arts described by Horace in his *Ars Poetica*.⁷¹ Montaigne compares the visual grotesque figure from Horace’s *Ars Poetica* to his own style of composing literature. In the Renaissance this highly visual nature of the grotesque remains an essential feature in literature and thus the grotesque is easily transmittable from the visual to the literary genre.

The aim of this section is to show how the postmodern trends to define the grotesque developed. The description of the notion “grotesque” continuously changes in art and literary history.⁷² The aim of this chapter is not to show the complete history of the grotesque but to show as much of its history as it is necessary to understand how the postmodern grotesque definitions developed. In order to show the basis of postmodern grotesque definitions, I have to go back to the 60s. The recent history of the grotesque will help us understand the contemporary trends discussed in the next section. In the second half of the twentieth century

⁷⁰ Michel de Montaigne, “Chapter XXVII. Of friendship,” in *Essays*. Translated by Charles Cotton, Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/3/5/8/3586/3586.txt>, 28.02.2010.

⁷¹ Interestingly enough in *Ars Poetica*, Horace describes a painting as grotesque without naming it ‘grotesque’: the described visual figure “combine[s] a horse’s neck with a human head, and then clothe[s] a miscellaneous collection of limbs with various kinds of feathers, so that what started out at the top as a beautiful woman ended in a hideously ugly fish.” Horace, “Ars Poetica,” in Vincent B. Leitch ed., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (London and New York: Norton, 2001), 124.

⁷² The way the notion is used is mainly influenced by John Ruskin, Victor Hugo, Friedrich Schlegel and Jean Paul. For the changes in the meanings of the grotesque see Barasch, op. cit. Clayborough, op. cit.

two opposing theories of the grotesque were created by the German Wolfgang Kayser and the Russian Mikhail Bakhtin. Although Bakhtin's work has been much more influential, Kayser should also be mentioned here, especially because I will have a look at how the grotesque appears in German theatres in chapter three. These two scholars formed rather different opinions on what the grotesque was. Later in the 70s and 80s, scholars of the grotesque, like Geoffrey G. Harpham and Philip Thomson struggled to cure this polarity in the definition of the grotesque. However, Kayser and Bakhtin have been so influential with their definitions that a considerable number of scholars use their theories even in the 21st century. To see the differences between their ideas is important in order to see the attempts of contemporary scholars in taking sides or trying to unite these thoughts.

Wolfgang Kayser's book *The Grottesque in Art and Literature* appeared in English translation in 1963. The aim of the book was to find a definition of the grotesque and to use this definition as a tool to make modern art easier to understand. Kayser claims the grotesque is a "structural principle of works of art" and that it is only experienced in the act of perception.⁷³ His first main claim is that "THE GROTESQUE IS THE ESTRANGED WORLD."⁷⁴ Kayser discovers the grotesque in the modern subject when it perceives visual art. Modern visual art disrespects those structures that define the rules of lives.⁷⁵ Visual art presents a world which seems estranged for the subject. The following structural changes appear on the rules of lives during the perception of art:

the fusion of realms which we know to be separated, the abolition of the laws of statics, the loss of identity, the distortion of 'natural' size and shape, the suspension of the category of objects, the destruction of personality, and the fragmentation of the historical order.⁷⁶

⁷³ His emphasis. Kayser, op. cit., 180-181.

⁷⁴ His emphasis. Kayser, op. cit., 184.

⁷⁵ Kayser described a universal, cross-historical grotesque based on his research on the roots of this term, as well as examples from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

⁷⁶ Kayser, op. cit., 185.

Without these structures, there are no rules to keep to for the modern subject. Such a structureless life will become strange and absurd. This experience should not be imagined as a state, but as an action or a situation that is filled with tension. A mysterious rootless confusion is also one of the grotesque features that keep the perceptor of modern art in a kind of uncanny fear. Due to the above mentioned grotesque actions and tensed situations, the disoriented modern subject finds him/herself in a kind of crisis and this lends him/her a feeling of fear from life: the world becomes estranged.⁷⁷ Kayser claims that the grotesque possesses laughter as an element but this laughter appears as an “involuntary and forced attempt to shake off fear.”⁷⁸ Kayser’s second main claim is that “THE GROTESQUE IS A PLAY WITH THE ABSURD.”⁷⁹ Anything becomes absurd if actions are without a structure. This absurdity of structurelessness presented by art leads the subject to meaninglessness. Kayser claims that the grotesque is “AN ATTEMPT TO INVOKE AND SUBDUE THE DEMONIC ASPECTS OF THE WORLD.”⁸⁰ Under the “DEMONIC ASPECTS” Kayser means the crisis of structures that results in a principle of randomness and unforeseeability. Kayser basically claims that the aim of the grotesque is to evoke a crisis of structures for the perceiving modern subject and then offers a possibility to defeat this crisis.⁸¹ From Kayser’s definition of the grotesque the idea that the grotesque evokes the lack of structures is essential for the discussion of poststructuralist subjects. It is important to see that the subject experiencing grotesque described by Kayser is very similar to the postmodern subject position. Kayser thematises the subject in crisis even before the appearance of subject theories in postmodernism.

⁷⁷ Especially the Romantic period focused on evoking this fear with elements such as madness, marionettes, masks and puppets. Kayser, op. cit., 182-4.

⁷⁸ Kayser, op. cit., 187.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ His emphasis. Kayser, op. cit., 188.

⁸¹ Clayborough, op. cit. Clayborough’s book proves the influence of Kayser. He basically accepts Kayser’s theory and gives a Jungian psychological basis to his thoughts (p. 110). Clayborough claims that the conscious part of the mind is interested in the phenomenological reality, while the unconscious part seeks reality as something transcendental or mystical. “[W]hen the perception of incongruity [between the conscious and unconscious parts] arouses an emotional response an impression of grotesqueness is created.” (p. 70).

Shortly after the book of Kayser, Mikhail Bakhtin published his book, *Rabelais and His World* in 1965 (the English translation came out in 1968). Since then it has had an enormous effect, mainly on literary criticism and socio-political studies. In this book, Bakhtin analyses the works of Rabelais in a way that he relates them to popular festivities, and especially to the carnival of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In order to understand the notion of the grotesque in Bakhtin, his ideas on the carnival and the philosophy of laughter are essential to be discussed first. Bakhtin divides the cultural context ('reality') of Rabelais into official reality governed by the church and the state, and into the unofficial reality appearing during carnival. It is a social and collective phenomenon, all the people of that culture participate in it, and the official culture ceases to exist for the time of the carnival. During carnival people only live according to the disorder of the carnival and disrespect the rules of the official culture.⁸² Carnival is accompanied by laughter, which is ambivalent in that it means laughing *with* as well as laughing *at* someone. Renaissance laughter in Bakhtin's understanding has a deep philosophical meaning; it is as good for dealing with universal problems as seriousness. Moreover, Bakhtin claims that the world has certain essential aspects that could only be understood through laughter.⁸³ Carnival laughter is universal, it is free (not official, but tolerated by the official culture), and it expresses the truth of the unofficial reality of the people. This truth is that with the help of laughter, people defeat their fears related to the official culture: fear of God, death, Hell, natural forces. Laughter purifies the mind and makes people see the world from a different perspective, where the fearful becomes grotesque.⁸⁴ It is important to emphasize here that laughter means the purification of inner fears and not only ridding oneself from the outer oppression of the official culture.⁸⁵ This

⁸² Bakhtin, op. cit., 6-7.

⁸³ Bakhtin, op. cit., 66-7. Bakhtin claims that laughter in Rabelais is based on the theories of Hippocrates, Aristotle and Lucian, who all claim that laughter has a healing, regenerating function (p. 70).

⁸⁴ Bakhtin, op. cit., 89-91.

⁸⁵ Bakhtin, op. cit., 94.

philosophy of laughter is present in the examples of eating as well.⁸⁶ While eating, we make a part of the outer world part of ourselves, and thus symbolically we defeat the world.⁸⁷ Eating is a kind of materialisation of the philosophy of laughter. Bakhtin names this *grotesque realism*. He names it 'grotesque' because materialisation is perceived in the form of the *grotesque body*. General features of the grotesque for Bakhtin are oversize, hyperbole and excess. The *grotesque body* is never closed or finished, but it always changes. Therefore, those parts of the body are important for Bakhtin that open it to the outer world. On these points of the body the world becomes part of the body (as by eating) or the body becomes part of the world (as by urination). The grotesque for Bakhtin means that the body crosses its own borders and becomes part of the world (dripping nose, defecation), or when the world or another body violates the integrity of this body (eating, drinking, copulation). All these activities happen on the border of the living body and dead things, or on the border of two living bodies.⁸⁸ Bakhtin brings an example of the *grotesque body* from the Kerch terracotta collection. He describes a figure of a laughing pregnant hag.⁸⁹ There is a considerable ambivalence in this picture: death (the hag) is pregnant with life (a baby). It is, however, not a static ambivalence, but Bakhtin insists that we imagine the birth of the baby and the death of the hag at the same point in time, in order to understand the continually transforming *grotesque body*. The border between the two bodies is difficult to declare in the process of birth. The senile pregnant hag possesses not only the ambiguity of death and life, but she also laughs. Thus, the philosophy and the materiality are connected in *grotesque realism*. Bakhtin argues that laughter, as well as the body are both positive in *grotesque realism*. He claims that the death of one body is followed by the birth of another, and as a result humankind will not die out but renew itself. The positive feature of the grotesque body is based on the immortality

⁸⁶ Bakhtin, op. cit., 285.

⁸⁷ Bakhtin, op. cit., 281.

⁸⁸ Bakhtin, op. cit., 317-8.

⁸⁹ Bakhtin, op. cit., 25.

of people.⁹⁰ Bakhtin perceives the body in *grotesque realism* not as an individual, but as a representation of the ancestral body of the people.⁹¹ During the carnival season *grotesque realism* materialises ideals and abstractions.⁹² This materialisation symbolises the philosophy of laughter in the form of physical activities of the *grotesque body*.

Although Kayser and Bakhtin published their theories nearly the same time, their grotesques describe very different points in literary and art history. Kayser attempts the definition of the 20th century German grotesque, while Bakhtin describes the French Renaissance grotesque that he reads in the works of Rabelais. Nevertheless, Kayser and Bakhtin are considered to hold opposing theories on the meaning of grotesque.⁹³ In this paper I want to relate the passivity of the poststructuralist subject to theatre practice which aims at the activity of the audience. For this link it is important how the two grotesques described above can be related to the ruling structures. In the theory of Bakhtin, the grotesque is a part of the carnival, and as such tolerated by the official order. The carnival functions as a safety valve of society, it is a temporary liberation from the official culture.⁹⁴ In the theory of Kayser, the subject fails to orient him-/herself as “categories which apply to [his/her] world view become inapplicable.”⁹⁵ While the grotesque described by Bakhtin brings only temporary liberation from the ruling structures, the grotesque described by Kayser evokes the loss of structures. This is the main difference between the two descriptions of the grotesque. However, it brings additional differences with itself concerning the meaning of the grotesque. Kayser’s definition emphasises the lack of structure, as well as the loss of the subject’s orientation, both of which bring meaninglessness with themselves. Opposing to this position Bakhtin claims that the grotesque is ambivalent. As an example he claims that within the

⁹⁰ Bakhtin, op. cit., 274 and 324.

⁹¹ Bakhtin, op. cit., 322.

⁹² Bakhtin, op. cit., 18-9.

⁹³ Bernard McElroy, *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 14. Rhodes, op. cit., 15. Harpham, op. cit., xvii.

⁹⁴ Bakhtin, op. cit., 10.

⁹⁵ Kayser, op. cit., 185.

carnival laughing *at* as well as *with* someone is possible. While Kayser argues for the meaninglessness of the grotesque, Bakhtin promotes the ambivalence of the *grotesque body*. Thus, from the three theories on the origins of the grotesque discussed in the introduction, Kayser takes up the origins that are based on the etymology of the grotesque and claim that it became a decoration style. The meaninglessness of the Kayserian grotesque supports such an argument. Bakhtin's *grotesque realism* with its ambiguous grotesque bodies is compatible with the ideas of Harpham, who claims that the original grotesque has ambivalent meanings in one form. The Bakhtinian grotesque is sensitive to multiple meanings as it always expresses an ambiguity.

The first important theoreticians of the grotesque after Kayser and Bakhtin felt the difficulty of dealing with a term that has developed in two different directions. With the aim to create *the* definition of the grotesque, they have also discovered that this phenomenon is only possible if the grotesque contains opposing thoughts itself. Arie Sachs in her introduction to the anthology, *The English Grotesque*, claims that the most important ingredient of the grotesque is "incongruity."⁹⁶ Philip Thomson and Geoffrey G. Harpham are two examples of those theoreticians who attempt to unify and newly define the idea of the grotesque. In the following paragraphs I am going to show how Thomson and Harpham tried to cope with the differences created by Kayser and Bakhtin.

Thomson's aim is to provide a handy definition which he achieves by providing two perspectives on the grotesque: one structural and one concerning the content. The structure of the grotesque is described as "*the unresolved clash of incompatibles in work and response*," while the content of the grotesque is described as "*the ambivalently abnormal*."⁹⁷ The 'unresolved clash' is the clash of the comic and terrifying features ('incompatibles') that

⁹⁶ Arie Sachs, *The English Grotesque. An Anthology from Langland to Joyce* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1969), xxv.

⁹⁷ His emphasis. Thomson, *op. cit.*, 27.

together create a presence of a disharmony.⁹⁸ This clash can be perceived within the ‘work’ of art, or it can be experienced as a ‘response’ to the work of art.⁹⁹ Thomson claims that in most cases the clash happens between the content and the form of the grotesque. The grotesque is usually a horrifying content presented in a comic form. The ‘ambivalence’ comes from the opposing nature of the content and form, while the ‘abnormality’ refers to the unnatural, exaggerated nature of the grotesque.¹⁰⁰ Thomson resolves the clash between two definitions of the grotesque in a way that he builds this clash into his definition itself.

A very similar strategy is to be observed in Harpham’s argument. Harpham also provides two perspectives in defining the grotesque. While Thomson differentiates between the structure and the content as perspectives, Harpham describes the *grottesche* and the *grotto-esque* as different perspectives. The *grottesche* is a process of “transformation” during the perception of the grotesque, a change in the perspective from the margin to the centre.¹⁰¹ This process starts with the focus on familiar and meaningful details of ornaments or margin paintings. The observer continuously shifts the attention and takes up a wider perspective of the whole ornament. In this perspective the familiar elements seem to be put together but they do not fit each other and thus they form a meaningless ornament. Although the ornament cannot evoke meaning in the spectator, an even broader perspective that considers the context might make the observer able to create meanings.¹⁰² At the end of this process the *grottesche* as a meaningless margin decoration becomes the centre of attention and this central position invites the observer to develop various meanings.¹⁰³ This perspective corresponds partly with the etymological origin of the grotesque that claims the grotesque to be a meaningless decoration style. However, the *grottesche* perspective also seems to correspond with the

⁹⁸ Thomson, op. cit., 20-1.

⁹⁹ An alternative between New Criticism and Reader Response criticism is offered here for those who want to experience the grotesque.

¹⁰⁰ Thomson, op. cit., 22-4.

¹⁰¹ Harpham, op. cit., 47.

¹⁰² Harpham, op. cit., 13-4.

¹⁰³ Harpham, op. cit., 31 and 39.

arguments of St. Bernard, who supports that the grotesque is a decoration that diverts attention from the main text. Harpham names the second perspective while defining the grotesque the *grotto-esque*, which refers to the archaic art of caves (*grotto*). The *grotto-esque* enables us to see many forms in a single representation (animal and human features are usually interwoven in cave art) without enabling us to settle on a univocal meaning.¹⁰⁴ The *grotto-esque* is a perspective that shows the ambivalence of the grotesque, creating tension between the mythic, contradictory, formless, instable, anarchic way of thinking and that of the structured, organised, normative way of thinking. This tension between structure and anti-structure is also present in Bakhtin's carnival which parodies the structured everyday life, and in Kayser, whose first definition of the grotesque is based on the loss of structures that make the world strange. While the *grottesche* means meaningless ambivalence, the *grotto-esque* refers to forms compressed into meaningful ambivalence.¹⁰⁵ The ambivalence of the *grottesche* is in changes of margin-centre positions, while the ambivalence of the *grotto-esque* is in the shifts of mythological-historical positions. *Grotto-esque* and *grottesche* provide us with a binocular view of grotesque. However, these two do not divide the field of grotesque, but inhabit each other.

The theoretical attempts of Harpham and Thomson (consciously or unconsciously) turn the notion of grotesque into a paradoxical notion. From a medial perspective, Thomson deals with literary grotesque, while Harpham constructs a theory using visuality that he applies them to literary works. The example of Harpham's approach of the grotesque can be considered trans-medial because he argues using visual examples but then he applies his arguments to literary examples. Harpham proceeds the way Montaigne did. Thomson and Harpham have achieved that scholars of the grotesque after them start their research with the quality of incongruity. This opposition becomes the basis of the grotesque by the end of the

¹⁰⁴ Harpham, op. cit., 51 and 54.

¹⁰⁵ Harpham, op. cit., 65.

twentieth century. However, in the twenty-first century, as we will see in the next section, theoreticians return to Kayser and Bakhtin.

1.2. Postmodern Grotesques

Instead of *the* grotesque, grotesques have been searched for in the postmodern. Lyotard's idea on the end of metanarratives and the appearance of 'little narratives' has certainly influenced this trend. Different disciplines have discovered and use the grotesque. It is most discussed in visual arts and in literature. The grotesque became a tool of expression in music (Brown, Sheinberg), in gender studies (Russo) as well as in performance studies (Remshardt).¹⁰⁶ Although most of the books examine some artworks containing grotesque, minor themes as well as whole discourses are studied with a focus on the grotesque.

In the following paragraphs I am going to reflect on examples for how the grotesque is defined in three different media. Not only that, but I am also going to refer back to the definitions of Kayser and Bakhtin. The postmodern visual, literary and performative grotesques are presented with the aim to sort them under different trends of definitions. These examples will show that the trend of the 80s is not followed. I claim that the visual, literary and performative grotesque definitions can be gathered under two different ways to define grotesque. Both can be described as relations to a norm or convention or border: the grotesque either *transgresses* or *blurs* an already existing border/convention/norm. A legacy of Bakhtin can be seen in the grotesque that transgresses borders and thus opposes an existing order. This transgression does not endanger but only challenge the existing structures. I am going to use the grotesque in the sense of a transgressor of structures when I use the term *transgressive grotesque*. The other description of the grotesque is when borders are *blurred* and thus the two sides of the border are mixed. I am going to use the term *blurring grotesque* in this

¹⁰⁶ Julie Brown ed., *Bartók and the Grotesque: Studies in Modernity, the Body and Contradiction in Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). Esti Sheinberg, *Irony, Satire, Parody and the Grotesque in the Music of Shostakovich: A Theory of Musical Incongruities* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000). Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994). Remshardt, op. cit.

second sense when I write about the grotesque which blurs the borders of structures. This type is the legacy of Kayser, who lists ways in which structures are destroyed. He claims that such destructive strategies are “the fusion of realms which we know to be separated” and “the suspension of the category of objects.”¹⁰⁷ In both approaches the border/norm/convention itself is not respected. For my argument, the important difference between the *transgressive grotesque* and the *blurring grotesque* lies in what remains of the ruling structures. While the *transgressive grotesque* only challenges a structure, the *blurring grotesque* destroys it.

1.2.1. Visual Grotesques

As the grotesque appears in a visual medium first, contemporary theories on the grotesque in visual arts are to be discussed first. In the introduction to Pamela Kort’s *Grotesk!*, Max Hollein and Chris Dercon claim that the most important feature of the grotesque is in its relation to borders. The grotesque “transgresses, blows up, undermines, blurs” borders.¹⁰⁸ In this section first the *transgressive grotesque*, and then the *blurring grotesque* are discussed as two trends of descriptions of the postmodern visual grotesques.

How does *transgressing* borders as the main feature of visual grotesques appear? Harald Falckenberg formulates the role of the grotesque in contemporary art to be in its inversive nature. He claims that the grotesque builds an oppositional world to the one that exists, that the conventional categories and hierarchies are changed by the grotesque into a chance for decoding the conventional categories.¹⁰⁹ The *transgressive grotesque* thus promotes anything that serves the idea of the “verkehrte Welt,” the world turned upside down. Similarly to Bakhtin, Falckenberg uses examples from the carnival of the Middle Ages and

¹⁰⁷ Kayser, op. cit., 185.

¹⁰⁸ The quotation is my translation of “überschreitet, sprengt, untergräbt, verwischt” from Max Hollein and Chris Dercon, “Vorwort,” in Pamela Kort ed., *Grotesk! 130 Jahre Kunst der Frechheit* (München, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel, 2003), 7.

¹⁰⁹ Harald Falckenberg, “Auf Wiedersehen: Zur Rolle des Grotesken in der Gegenwartskunst,” in Pamela Kort ed., *Grotesk! 130 Jahre Kunst der Frechheit* (München, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel, 2003), 184.

the Renaissance to support his ideas.¹¹⁰ At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Falckenberg sees the grotesque to lose its quality of *transgressing* borders. The reason for this change is in the fact that marginal subversive artistic activities have slipped into the mainstream, where they dissolved and became unrecognizable.¹¹¹ A similar supposition of the extinction of grotesque appears in the writings of Harpham, who claims that the growing tolerance of disorder makes the existence of the grotesque impossible.¹¹² Falckenberg and Harpham are right. If there is no order to be transgressed and the grotesque finds itself in the mainstream, the essential subversive nature of the grotesque is endangered and whatever we perceive cannot be named grotesque any more. This means that the postmodern definition trend after Bakhtin and its basis of *transgressing* borders cannot be held long in contemporary visual arts and that opposition is slowly replaced by the mainstream grotesque. However, this does not mean that the grotesque will simply disappear, but it shifts from one trend of description into another, picks up another position towards the borders. The *transgressive grotesque* turns into a *blurring grotesque*.

No fear of the extinction of the grotesque appears in Noël Carroll's essay "The Grotesque Today," which claims that grotesque has not only entered, but it also has a leading role in mass culture.¹¹³ The reason for Carroll's optimism lies in his inclusive approach to the notion of the grotesque. While Falckenberg describes the grotesque as a subversive activity that *transgresses* borders, Carroll emphasises the *blurring* of borders. However, the two borders described are different. Falckenberg described social structures based on Bakhtin, while Carroll describes categories, especially biological and ontological categories.¹¹⁴ The functions of these grotesques are to evoke horror, comic amusement and awe in the spectator.

¹¹⁰ Falckenberg, op. cit., 184.

¹¹¹ Falckenberg, op. cit., 188.

¹¹² Harpham, op. cit., xx.

¹¹³ Noël Carroll, "The Grotesque Today: Preliminary Notes Toward a Taxonomy," in Frances S. Connelly ed., *Modern Art and the Grotesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 293. For the comic grotesque the example of *The Simpsons* and *South Park* are mentioned, while any horror film or science fiction can stand as example for the dark grotesque (p. 292)

¹¹⁴ Carroll, "The Grotesque Today" op. cit., 296-8.

My critique of this description is that in case there is a limited sphere where categories are mixed, we only achieve a simple reaction of wondering. It is not clear from the description of Carroll, whether these categories are essential to keep-up sociocultural structures. If yes, then Carroll promotes the trend of the *blurring grotesque* based on Kayser. Kayser argues that the subject perceiving is in crisis as it observes how the rules of his life turn into a chaos and this makes the subject desperate.

In *Modern Art and the Grotesque*, Frances S. Connelly supports the *blurring grotesque* as a trend of definition for the visual grotesque. She claims that central idea to the grotesque is its “lack of fixity, its unpredictability and its instability,” it is better to be understood as “trans-,” and better “described for what they do, rather than what they are;” it is better perceived in its effects than in its definition.¹¹⁵ The explicit denial of a definition is an important step of Connelly, who nevertheless tries to show some examples of how the grotesque is described. With the denial of a definition, the effect of the grotesque is pushed into the focus of attention. The spectator receives a major role in such schools as Reader Response Criticism or Reception Aesthetics.¹¹⁶ While the *transgressive grotesque* focuses on its action to oppose the order, the *blurring grotesque* becomes interesting in its effects on the spectator. Michael Chaouli borrows the idea of grotesque as border phenomenon from Connelly, but he goes further and asks the following: “What is the boundary of this boundary

¹¹⁵ Frances S. Connelly, “Introduction,” in Frances S. Connelly ed., *Modern Art and the Grotesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.

¹¹⁶ Reader Response Criticism sees the reason for different interpretations of the same work in the difference of interpreter personalities. Stanley Fish claims that reading is employing the already learned interpretive strategies of a reader to construct the texts read “by constituting their properties and assigning their intentions.” He argues that an “interpretive community” is where more readers share similar interpretive strategies even before the act of reading. Different interpretations of a text for Fish mean that the interpreters belong to different interpretive communities. Compare: Stanley E. Fish, “Interpreting the *Variorum*,” in Jane P. Tompkins ed., *Reader-response Criticism. From Formalism to Post-structuralism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 182-3. For Norman Holland different interpretations mean that the readers have different “identity themes” (different sources of pleasure) but belong to the same interpretive community. Norman N. Holland, “Unity Identity Text Self,” in Jane P. Tompkins ed., *Reader-response Criticism. From Formalism to Post-structuralism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980), 120-126. For the Reception Aesthetics of Iser and Jauss see footnote 67.

violation?”¹¹⁷ He claims that the grotesque is about the body's boundary violation. Kayser would agree here that the body's violation is something that shakes identity or at least the natural shapes given. While the *transgressive grotesque* focuses on the order that should be subverted, the *blurring grotesque* mixes borders and thus evokes different reactions in the spectator which can range from laugh to cry.

Theoreticians of the grotesque in postmodern visual arts show two trends of definitions: the *transgressive grotesque* aims at opposing the socio-cultural order, while the *blurring grotesque* mixes and violates categories and thus evokes confused spectator reactions. Theoreticians of the *transgressive grotesque* are right to fear the disappearance of the grotesque as soon as it enters the mainstream. This fault of the *transgressive grotesque* is built in the notion itself. The *transgressive grotesque* aims at subverting the order, but it defines itself through opposing this order. As soon as this *transgressive grotesque* achieves its goal (subverts the order), it ceases to exist as well because the order as a self-defining relational point ceases to exist. The other trend in the grotesque definition within visual arts, the *blurring grotesque*, aims not to subvert an order, but to violate or mix categories. The subject perceiving this grotesque can no longer be certain which categories are affected and for how long. Kayser observes a similar strategy of the grotesque in “the suspension of the category of objects.”¹¹⁸ This kind of definition pays special attention to the one perceiving the grotesque.

1.2.2. Literary Grotesques

Grotesque in literature, as well as grotesque in visual arts developed based on examples, most of the time presented in forms of articles of a collection. Michael J. Meyer in the introduction to *Literature and the Grotesque* claims that all the essays in his collection

¹¹⁷ Michel Chaouli, “Van Gogh’s Ear: Toward a Theory of Disgust,” in Frances S. Connelly ed., *Modern Art and the Grotesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 48.

¹¹⁸ Kayser, op. cit., 185.

include “such paradoxical opposites as fear and laughter, aggression and playfulness, and the merging of fantastical/macabre carnival atmospheres with rational and logical reality.”¹¹⁹ Describing both sides of the opposites as well as writing about merging points, Meyer disregards the *transgressive grotesque*. *Blurring* borders becomes the main feature in his literary grotesques. Moreover, Meyer emphasises that the reader has the opportunity to look “deep within ... [his/her own]... buried psych[e].”¹²⁰ The emphasis of the effect on the reader, as well as the idea that borders are blurred, are arguments that are present in the *blurring grotesque*, a trend to define the postmodern grotesque.

Bernard McElroy discusses modern literary works in his *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque*. McElroy states that in modern art the grotesque is our “most characteristic expression.”¹²¹ He finds that the modern grotesque moves away from the ‘hostile environment’ into the modern individual. The lack of religion and myth in the modern world gives rise to the grotesque.¹²² The grotesque “is found in the fears, guilts, fantasies, and aberrations of individual psychic life.”¹²³ The modern grotesque is “internal” to the modern individual.¹²⁴ McElroy promotes the trend of *transgressive grotesque* definition, but he also emphasises the point that the effect of the grotesque on the reader is essential to consider. He claims that the modern grotesque is “differentiation from the norm,” it is “by nature something exceptional” and that in its most extreme cases it is “unreality” (the world of fantasy, dream and hallucinations).¹²⁵ The exceptional nature lets this description count as a *transgressive grotesque* just like the carnival is an exceptional state, which is followed by the return to the normal way of life. Moreover, if something is exceptional it might challenge the rules or the existing structures but it remains an exception. The grotesque is positioned

¹¹⁹ Michael J. Meyer, “Introduction,” in Michael J. Meyer ed., *Literature and the Grotesque* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995), 2.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Mc Elroy, op. cit., 17.

¹²² McElroy, op. cit., x.

¹²³ McElroy, op. cit., 21.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Mc Elroy, op. cit., 6.

opposed to an order, just like in Bakhtin. Based on ideas of Sigmund Freud, McElroy claims that certain harmless animals evoke a sense of fear that Freud names the ‘uncanny’ and that the reason for that fear is still unknown.¹²⁶ McElroy uses the Freudian idea of the uncanny and John Ruskin’s claim that the grotesque makes the mind “*play[s] with terror*” and claims that the source of the grotesque is in man’s “fascination in the monstrous.”¹²⁷ McElroy describes ‘terror’ as an inner quality of humanity, a quality of childish, primitive and psychotic thoughts. ‘Terror’ is not a fear from the world we know, but a fear from the realisation of our primitive childish fears, a “world as we fear it might be.”¹²⁸ He adds that the grotesque is a balance between the fearsome and the playful which depends on the response encouraged in the reader.¹²⁹ Although McElroy uses arguments of the *transgressive grotesque* trend of definition, his idea that our world ceases to exist as it is now and our childish fears become true is a reference to the *blurring grotesque* trend of definition. If these childish fears are able to dissolve structures and a life-changing phobia develops, we enter the territory of the *blurring grotesque*.

Reader response to unconventional values is the central argument of Myung Choi. Moreover, like McElroy, she also claims that the grotesque expression is characteristic to the postmodern. Through the arguments of Lyotard and Baudrillard she shows that the emphasis in postmodernism shifts from theory to practice and that the grotesque becomes a ‘communication strategy’ in postmodern relativism.¹³⁰ Choi differentiates three levels of the grotesque, from what she discusses only the grotesque related to fear, the one she claims to be present in postmodern literature.¹³¹ Choi argues that postmodern literature “inspire[s] in

¹²⁶ Mc Elroy, op. cit., 9-11.

¹²⁷ Ruskin’s emphasis in Chapter III, §45. John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice. Volume III: The Fall* (London: Ballantyne, 1903), 138. Mc Elroy, op. cit., 1

¹²⁸ Mc Elroy, op. cit., 3-5 and 11.

¹²⁹ Mc Elroy, op. cit., 14.

¹³⁰ Myung Choi, *Employing the Grotesque as a Communication Strategy* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 2009), 1. Choi describes the grotesque as the sum of the notions of “strange, incongruent, and unusual” elements in today’s art.

¹³¹ Choi, op. cit., 71-88. The three levels of the grotesque according to Choi: low (related to fear), high (related to humour) and a mixture of both (p. 2).

readers a morally productive response.”¹³² She bases this statement on Reader Response Criticism, which has influenced the critical texts on the grotesque and pushed the experience of the reader into the foreground.¹³³ She claims that the response of the reader is morally productive. However, Choi also claims that these moral values are not any more part of the “traditional humanistic liberalism,” but they are “open to the reader’s decision.”¹³⁴ Choi emphasises the disappearance of grand narratives in postmodernism and the appearance of subjective critical thinking. Her idea that the grotesque is a key notion in this critical thinking is essential to this paper and with her focus on the reader she belongs to the *blurring grotesque* trend of definition.

Through Meyer, McElroy and Choi we could see that not only the modern visual arts, but also modern literature uses both the *transgressive grotesque* as well as the *blurring grotesque* as ways to define the grotesque. We could also see in the case of McElroy that the two trends can be combined within one definition without making opposites out of them. Moreover, all three theoreticians problematize the ‘deep,’ ‘internal’ and even ‘moral’ reactions of the reader to the grotesque in literary texts.

1.2.3. Performative Grotesques

We have seen how the grotesque changed its medium from visual to literary on Montaigne’s example. After this change, it was only a question of time for the grotesque to appear in theatre. Perhaps the best known group of drama writers connected to the grotesque is the Italian *teatro del grottesco*. Before discussing the postmodern theatrical grotesque, let me start with the introduction of the *teatro del grottesco*. Although this theatre is not postmodern (the group was active between 1916 and 1925), it is worth comparing strategies used by the Italian dramatists to strategies that are used in the postdramatic theatre described

¹³² Choi, op. cit., 99.

¹³³ Choi, op. cit., 70-1.

¹³⁴ Choi, op. cit., 99-100.

by Lehmann. I do this comparison because next to Remshardt's *transgressive grotesque* description, I have not found a study that underlies the other trend of grotesque description, the *blurring grotesque*. I am going to provide practical examples of the *blurring grotesque* in theatres in the third chapter and thus fill the gap in studies on the grotesque. Comparing Lehmann's postdramatic theatre with the *teatro del grottesco* I also do the first step in the line of arguments that aim to prove my thesis, i.e. that the logic of the postmodern grotesque is similar to the logic postmodern theatres work.

Luigi Pirandello is one master of the *teatro del grottesco*. He and his colleagues aimed at disrupting and parodising given aesthetic frames and they did that most of the time by showing split personalities. The conflicts of the social and private self as well as imagination and reality became major topics.¹³⁵ Pirandello problematized the border between the social mask and the identity. The mask is the face showed in a social context. This mask is in opposition to the identity but it is able to become a part of the identity. In this play with the identity not only Kayser's modern alienation from one's own self is to be discovered, but also a strategy of the postdramatic stage, which Lehmann names *plethora*.¹³⁶ Plethora means, among others, the rejection of conventionalised theatrical forms, such as the unity of self and identity with the aim to confuse the audience. In addition to that, Timothy Townhill argues that in the play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Pirandello builds up the grotesque in the opposition of the real and the fictional world.¹³⁷ Pirandello creates a dialogue between the two worlds, just as a dialogue between the Characters and the Actors in the play of *Six Characters*. Townhill's interpretation focuses on the self and how the borders between reality and fiction are capable of *blurring*. For the confusion of real and represented Lehmann uses the expression of *irruption of the real* in postdramatic theatres. Lehmann argues that the aim of this strategy is "the unsettling that occurs through the *indecidability* whether one is dealing

¹³⁵ Remshardt, op. cit., 170. Kayser, op. cit., 135.

¹³⁶ Kayser, op. cit., 137. Lehmann, op. cit. 90-91.

¹³⁷ Timothy Townhill, "Flimsy Masks and Tortured Souls: Luigi Pirandello and the Grotesque," in Michael J. Meyer ed., *Literature and the Grotesque* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995), 85.

with reality or fiction.”¹³⁸ Peter Szondi gives a medium-specific critique of this drama. Szondi claims that the classical approach to drama as a medium is that the *form* and the *content* of the drama are separable, and that it is a kind of trans-historical phenomenon.¹³⁹ After Hegel, Szondi claims that the *form* of the drama is capable of meaning construction. This capability also opens the possibility that the *form* might construct a different meaning than the meaning that is to be found in the *content*.¹⁴⁰ Such an incongruity of *form* and *content* results in the impossibility of drama. Szondi claims that Pirandello had the idea of *Six Characters*, but he also saw that he is incapable of presenting this *content* in a *dramatic* form.¹⁴¹ Because Pirandello was unable to put this content into an opposing form, he made this opposition into his theme itself in the *Six Characters*.¹⁴² The six epic Characters are in search of a dramatic Author who is able to write their story. Pirandello shows the impossibility of this task in the form of a drama.¹⁴³ In the case of *Six Characters* the grotesque can be named as a failure of an ekphrasis, the failure of the epic to be presented in a dramatic form. However, it is specifically this failure that creates the most special atmosphere of the drama.¹⁴⁴ Such a dissonance between form and content would also be a good example for the strategy *plethora* in postdramatic theatres as it certainly exceeds unities. After finding three strategies of the postdramatic theatre among the topics of the *teatro del grottesco*, I can reflect on them as parts of the *blurring grotesque* type of description. Such categories as self vs. identity, real vs. representation and content vs. form are blurred in the Italian theatre as well as in the postdramatic theatre.

¹³⁸ His emphasis. Lehmann, op. cit., 101.

¹³⁹ Peter Szondi, *A modern dráma elmélete* (Budapest: Osiris, 2002), 7-8.

¹⁴⁰ Szondi, op. cit., 8-9.

¹⁴¹ Szondi's content-form opposition of the drama recalls the Thomsonian content-form opposition of the grotesque. Philip Thomson defines the grotesque as “*the unresolved clash of incompatibles in work and response*” and claims that this clash is mostly to be found between the *form* and the *content* of the grotesque. Thomson, pp. 22-4 and 27. His emphasis.

¹⁴² Szondi, op. cit., 135.

¹⁴³ Szondi, op. cit., 138.

¹⁴⁴ It is without question that Pirandello had an effect on later dramatists who claimed to write absurd dramas. Barasch, op. cit., 159.

In the introduction I have already summed up the main claims of Remshardt and compared the grotesque theatre described by Remshardt to Brecht's epic theatre. I have also claimed that Remshardt bases his study on Bakhtin's *grotesque realism* and thus follows the *transgressive grotesque* type of definition. In the following paragraph I go into details on what Remshardt uses from Bakhtin's grotesque realism, what he criticises about it and how he arrives to ethics. Even though he builds his theory on Bakhtin, Remshardt shows that Bakhtin's *grotesque realism* is only a part of the wide spectrum of the grotesque.¹⁴⁵ Remshardt claims that *grotesque realism* cannot fit modernity because of its deeply positive nature.¹⁴⁶ From a postmodern perspective, Remshardt claims that the Bakhtinian *grotesque realism* suppresses a reality in the same way the carnival suppresses official culture. The reality it suppressed is the dead body (neither subject, nor object, but the Kristevan *abject*) that stands for limitedness and final destruction. According to Remshardt this suppressed reality is the ethical side of the grotesque that is present in postmodern performances, and especially in the extreme examples of *body art*.¹⁴⁷ Remshardt claims that art based on performance aims at the pure experience of the spectators. All possible tools are used to stimulate the senses of the audience and thus, through perception, the audience will experience the performance on stage as if it happened to him/her. In this way the positions of the actor and spectator can be easily exchanged.¹⁴⁸ *Body art* rejects symbolism, which is often expressed in situations where the integrity of the performer's body is physically endangered. This danger can be caused by the performer him/herself, but he/she can also create situations for the audience where it is the responsibility of the audience to resist causing danger. For the latter Remshardt brings the example of *Rhythm 0*, a performance of Marina Abramović in Naples (1974). Abramović offered her body with different tools for the spectators. The

¹⁴⁵ Remshardt, op. cit., 46.

¹⁴⁶ After seeing the victims of Nazism and Stalinism, Remshardt claims that the signs of *grotesque realism* used in the carnival (e.g. bulging eyes or opened mouth) can be easily misunderstood, and interpreted as signs of death. Remshardt, op. cit., 48.

¹⁴⁷ Remshardt, op. cit., 50.

¹⁴⁸ Remshardt, op. cit., 51.

performance had to be stopped as an audience member wanted to shoot Abramović. Remshardt finds such performances ethically dangerous, because the border between the performance as art and the performance as the reality of the spectator is demolished.¹⁴⁹ A similar *blurring* of the border between art and life was also thematised by Pirandello. For Remshardt, *body art* has not only *blurring*, but primarily *transgressive* features. Remshardt claims it resembles the carnival in a way that it denies rules. However, instead of the Bakhtinian laughter, *body art* uses terror and thus develops a negative *grotesque realism*.¹⁵⁰ Remshardt believes that postmodern theatre and the grotesque are linked by the morality embedded in culture. The violent grotesque in postmodern theatre shows what should not exist in the form of aggressive and humiliating actions. It is essential that the postmodern subject sees immoral actions and that s/he realizes that each subject is responsible for the elimination of these immoralities and thus responsible for a peaceful society. This strong immorality, non-humanity presented provokes and strengthens the moral, human reactions in the audience. Via perception of immorality, the audience receives a kind of “moral vision” that is aimed to shake the members of the audience, not from immorality but from amorality. This argument goes so far as to promote the morally educative function of these performances. Grotesque theatre advertises those moral principles it violates, therefore it strengthens morality through violating it.¹⁵¹ Remshardt claims that the grotesque in postmodern theatre is a challenge, as well as an affirmation of the culture’s order, and especially the affirmation of ethical principles. Although the *blurring* feature of the grotesque is mentioned in connection with the border of art and life, Remshardt emphasises the *transgressive grotesque*. By showing the opposite of the order, the *transgressive grotesque* achieves exactly that the order is secured.

¹⁴⁹ Remshardt, op. cit., 55.

¹⁵⁰ Remshardt, op. cit., 58-9.

¹⁵¹ Remshardt, op. cit., 261-2.

1.2.4. Transgressive Grotesque and Blurring Grotesque

After the historical overview on the definition of the grotesque, it becomes clear that postmodern critics can choose from the definition which emphasises incongruity (after Harpham and Thomson) or they reach back to older definitions. I argued that the second is the case. Even though the idea of incongruity does not vanish from the grotesque, theoreticians reuse the theories of Bakhtin and Kayser and form them in a way so that it fits to the postmodern and to their medium.

The fact the grotesque is either built on Bakhtinian or Kayserian ideas in the postmodern made it essential to introduce Bakhtin and Kayser first in this chapter. While Bakhtin approached the grotesque through the carnival and claimed that it has a positive nature that helps defeating fears with laughter, Kayser claimed to discover the grotesque in the fear from life, in finding familiar things suddenly alien. It has turned out that the attempt to include this opposition in the notion 'grotesque' itself has failed. Harpham and Thomson, supporters of this inclusive approach have no such influence in the postmodern as Kayser and Bakhtin. In the postmodern different discourses started to form their own personal definitions of the grotesque. Thus literature, visual arts and theatre performances went separate ways in the search for the definition of their own grotesques. However, the grotesque was either described to *transgress* borders, i.e. to oppose an order, or to *blur* borders, i.e. to mix orders. Two trends of definitions developed in the postmodern, which I called the *transgressive grotesque* and the *blurring grotesque*. Among the postmodern performative grotesques, I have only found Remshardt's *transgressive grotesque* but no *blurring grotesque*. Therefore, it was essential to go through postmodern visual and literary grotesque as well, to show that there are two trends of definitions and to argue that this is also the case with the performative grotesque even though there are no studies written on it yet. In this chapter I have taken the

first step to prove that next to the *transgressive grotesque*, the *blurring grotesque* also exists as a trend of description of the postmodern performative grotesque.

An additional element of both the *blurring grotesque* and the *transgressive grotesque* is the characteristic feature that the grotesque itself is a process. I have not emphasised this feature separately, but it appeared in numerous descriptions of the contemporary grotesque. Also, considering the grotesque as a process is a natural development as in the postmodern its effect is emphasised and to evoke an effect it needs the impulse of the grotesque and after that the reaction of the perceiver. Referring back to the visual grotesques, Connelly claims that the grotesque is best described as “what [it] do[es]” and not what is.¹⁵² Describing the literary grotesque, Choi claims that the grotesque is a postmodern “communication strategy” which makes the reader develop his/her own interpretations of what is moral and what is immoral.¹⁵³ McElroy emphasises the reader’s “fascination in the monstrous” and he also states that the grotesque is a reaction of the reader, the realisation of the reader’s own childish fears.¹⁵⁴ Remshardt also describes the performative grotesque as a process: it is the audience perception of immorality followed by a reaction which refuses this immorality. The fact that the grotesque today is described as a process will be essential for the third chapter, where I search the grotesque in postmodern theatre reviews and where the reaction of the critics will be essential.

The effect of the grotesque becomes essential. This effect might be able not only to question the ruling structure (*transgressive grotesque*), but to eliminate the structural elements holding up this structure (*blurring grotesque*) and thus start a real change of the structures. Such a change would require the realisation that the borders of the ruling structure are blurred and this realisation would immediately evoke the action of building up new strategies as human beings are unable to think without structure. Another way to describe the *blurring*

¹⁵² Frances S. Connelly, “Introduction,” in Frances S. Connelly ed., *Modern Art and the Grotesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.

¹⁵³ Choi, op. cit., 1.

¹⁵⁴ McElroy, op. cit., 1

grotesque is to see that the structures are only socially generated, i.e. they are not natural. In this approach to the *blurring grotesque* trend of description, the grotesque calls attention to the unnatural way society is structured and thus erases these artificial borders. No matter which way I argue, the result is the same, the *blurring grotesque* trend of description promotes a change in existing socio-cultural structures.

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Chapter 2: Shakespearean Grotesques

As already claimed in the introduction, the very first appearance of the word grotesque is in a period when the medieval world order is questioned. It is, of course, not an incident. Different factors come together and help by the birth of the word, even though the phenomenon is not something new. Before starting with how the word ‘grotesque’ and its earlier form, the ‘antic’ was used in the early modern England, I would like to give a more general account on a time of transition and uncertainties because this context is not irrelevant for the grotesque.

The age of Shakespeare is a time of transition, a process of change from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern. There are changes in the ways of thinking in different fields. The cosmological order of Earth-centeredness is questioned by Copernicus, who claims that the sun is the centre of the universe. Montaigne argues that the nature of human being is not something special but humans are just a kind of animal. Machiavelli introduces new ideas into politics when he states that the human being is naturally evil and that this nature could only be bent by force. He argues for a politic without moral. Theodore Spencer points out that the cosmological, natural and political orders are so tightly connected in the Middle Ages, that when one of the orders is questioned, it is necessary for the others to be shaken as well.¹⁵⁵

The uncertainty of Shakespeare’s time is important for this paper for two reasons. The first reason is that it was a time of change, so a lot of things appeared which were considered to be indecorum. Let us have a look at how the Middle Age version of theatre is affected by this uncertainty. It is also the time where the practices of the Catholic church as a mediator between God and the human being are questioned by the new Protestants. When the divorce of Henry VIII is denied in Rome, Henry VIII decides to part with Catholicism and establishes

¹⁵⁵ Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (New York: Collier Books, 1967), 21 and 45-6.

the Church of England, thus giving way to new Protestantism already growing in England. This change might seem to be a question of religion, however it is essential for changes in theatre history. Next to miracle, morality and mysteries, new plays appeared with new aims. In the Middle Ages theatre is a tool of the Catholic didactic, it is stuffed with well-recognizable symbolism. I see the tendency of early modern theatres as a production of indecorum and thus as a nest where the word 'grotesque' can hatch. In *The Defense of Poesy* Philip Sidney claims that even a child can understand that the props on stage are not real but that they support the imaginary story told. He assures that "the Poet never maketh any circles above your imagination, to conjure you to believe for true what he writeth."¹⁵⁶ Compared to this idea of theatre Shakespeare's plays are indecorum, claims Ellen Mackay. Her proof is that some audience members are not able to consider the fictional story performed on stage as fiction but they see an urgent need to interrupt, for example to prevent Othello from killing Desdemona.¹⁵⁷ For these audience members it is not so easy to tell the difference between acted and not acted reality. With such a perspective, Shakespeare's plays can well be seen as indecorum in theatre practice.

The second reason why the uncertainty of this period is interesting is that this age of transition did not leave the people unaffected, the subjects were in crisis, as Attila Kiss would say. Kiss claims that in times of structural uncertainties, the theatre becomes a laboratory of the subject. I chose an early modern dramatist to study the grotesque in its postmodern presentations. Here, I rely on the claim of Kiss that early modern and postmodern theatres are similar as they both offer a laboratory to the subject in process.¹⁵⁸ The texts of Shakespeare's plays function as an inspiration and a laboratory for directors and actors to evoke a performance out of the written text. However, the grotesques in Shakespeare cannot be discussed in postmodern performances without an overview of the grotesque in Shakespeare

¹⁵⁶ Philip Sidney, *The Defense of Poesy*. (Glasgow: R. Urie, 1852), 65.

¹⁵⁷ Ellen Mackay, "Indecorum," in Henry S. Turner ed. *Early Modern Theatricality* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 307.

¹⁵⁸ Kiss, op. cit., 51.

criticism. Before discussing actual examples from postmodern theatres in the third chapter, this chapter specifies the use of the word grotesque by literary critics on the Shakespeare oeuvre.

The aim of this chapter is to give an account on the critical history of Shakespearean characters and dramas which are claimed to be grotesque. This critical history is far from being complete as I focus on how the word grotesque is used during the selection of critiques. An additional aim of this chapter is to relate the findings of the first chapter to ideas on grotesques found in Shakespeare's plays. The first chapter has dealt with two postmodern trends in the definition of grotesque (*transgressive grotesque* and *blurring grotesque*). As the postmodern is also an age where the subject is in crisis, I find it useful to compare the two trends of postmodern grotesque definitions with what I find to be grotesque in Shakespeare criticism. This comparison is useful as I am going to refer back to both in the third chapter, where I discuss concrete examples from postmodern theatre practice as grotesques.

Before turning to concrete characters or plays named grotesque in critical texts, I throw a short glance on the use of the word grotesque in early modern England. Such an excursion is necessary to see the turbulence of the time and realize the grotesque as an essential form of reaction, a form to cope with the enormous changes going on. Instead of the word grotesque, Shakespeare uses the word antique or antic.¹⁵⁹ Henry Wotton in his *Elements of Architecture* (1624) claims that "Grottesca (as the Italians) or Antique worke (as we call it)" is actually one and the same thing.¹⁶⁰ The Barnhart dictionary of etymology adds that "[A]ntic' . . . originally *antike*, *anticke*, later *antique*, [is] borrowed from the Italian word *antico* antique, from Latin *antiquus*. . . . *Antic* was originally used as an equivalent to Italian

¹⁵⁹ The primary meaning of the word "antique" is old, but the secondary meaning is humorous, grotesque or bizarre according to the OED. From <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/antic>, access on 4.8.2015. The word "antic" as an adjective primarily means "very playful, funny, or silly", while in its archaic usage means grotesque or bizarre. From <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/antic>, on 4.8.2015.

¹⁶⁰ Henry Wotton, *Elements of Architecture* (London, 1624), 77. Quoted in Barasch op.cit., 65 and in Rainer Lengeler, *Tragische Wirklichkeit als Grotteske Verfremdung bei Shakespeare* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1964), 6.

grottesco grotesque.”¹⁶¹ The word ‘grotesque’ is only slowly integrated into the English language from the seventeenth century on. Lengeler claims that ‘antique’ meant two things in early modern England. The meaning of old comes from the word ‘antiquus’, while ‘antic’ bears the meaning of the grotesque. How they are connected and why could they be both referred to as ‘antique’ stays unclear.¹⁶² It is clear, though, that from the beginning of the sixteenth century, ‘antique’ is used in England with both meanings. England imported two kinds of grotesques and because of their similarities, first both were named ‘antique.’ The first imported grotesque comes from the decoration style that copied newly discovered antic patterns on Nero’s palace. In northern Europe, another kind of grotesque art was practiced in the so-called *Traumwerk* (Germany), or school of *diablerie* (France). These schools developed during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Their greatest member was Peter Brueghel. These schools produced representations of demons and goblins from the Teutonic mythological traditions.¹⁶³ The temptation of St Anthony was a well-known topic, but representing the Dance of Death was also common. These artworks appeared in sixteenth century England through the works of Hans Holbein. These works, as well as others from Italy and France where ornamental work was called ‘grotesque’ was translated into ‘antic’ in England. It is in the seventeenth century the word ‘antic’ is exchanged by the word ‘grotesque’.¹⁶⁴ Barasch claims that in Tudor England the ancient Roman grotesques and the German mythological grotesques were not differentiated and both were named as ‘anticke,’ ‘antique’ or ‘antic.’¹⁶⁵

The word ‘antic’ with its grotesque meaning was also used in religion. Barasch claims that the Puritans saw excess, idle vanity and representations of pagan gods in the meaningless

¹⁶¹ Robert K. Barnhart, ed., *The Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 29.

¹⁶² Lengeler, op. cit., 48.

¹⁶³ Barasch, op. cit., 40.

¹⁶⁴ Barasch, op. cit., 47.

¹⁶⁵ Barasch, op. cit., 41. Farnham also describes ‘antic’ used together with the ‘grotesque’ in English to use as a reference to the ornamental painting found in the excavations in Rome. In Farnham, op. cit., 8.

ornaments.¹⁶⁶ The word ‘antic’ had connotations of deceit in pulpit literature of the seventeenth century. The English Puritans claimed that eloquence was a sign of vanity.¹⁶⁷ The satirical but simple tone of the Martin Marprelate pamphlets are good proofs of a style that tried to avoid eloquence. Roman Catholicism as such was also considered to be ‘antic’ by Puritans, who denied excess in any form and aimed at simplicity.¹⁶⁸ This simplicity was supported by the Vitruvian ideal of functional architecture. Not only the Puritans described the grotesque as an expression of excess. The Catholics considered the vulgar and satiric pamphlets of Martin Marprelate as something grotesque as well, and fought against Marprelate’s wit with his own weapons of the grotesque style. Catholics and Puritans named each other’s style of expression ‘antic’ in the sense of grotesque. Rhodes concludes that the grotesque was a commonly used style in Tudor England. For the Puritans it meant excess or meaningless decorations, while the Catholics used it for degradations and vulgar analogies. Both groups saw something evil, something working against the values they respected in the grotesque. It is difficult to see how both sides could use the word grotesque for totally different things. However, if we have a look on this controversy from a broader perspective and see that the Catholic church is about to lose power and the Protestants are about to establish power, it is just normal to stigmatise the activities of the other group as indecorum, or even as grotesque.

Shakespeare himself used the earlier form of the word grotesque, which is ‘antic’ or ‘antique.’¹⁶⁹ According to Lengeler, Shakespeare uses the words ‘antic/antique/anticke’ and means under them either ‘old’ or ‘grotesque’. The meaning ‘old’ can be seen in the most examples. The expression “senators of th’antique Rome” (Act V, line 26) in the prologue to

¹⁶⁶ Barasch, op. cit., 52.

¹⁶⁷ Barasch, op. cit., 60.

¹⁶⁸ Barasch, op. cit., 62.

¹⁶⁹ Only Barasch and Lengeler mention and analyse this fact. Next to the meaning of “old”, Lengeler differentiates four types within the “grotesque” meaning of the “antic/antique/anticke.” It means excessive ornament in visual culture, unnatural mimicry in theatre, an illusionary mental state and it is a reference to ridiculous death.

the fifth act of *King Henry V* is described as “ancient” in the footnotes.¹⁷⁰ In *Coriolanus* “antique time” (II. 3. 118) is a reference to “ancient traditions” according to the footnote.¹⁷¹ The “antique sword” (II. 2. 407) of Priam in the speech of the First Player in *Hamlet* is an ancient or a comic sword according to the Arden edition.¹⁷² In *As You Like It* there is an “antic root” of an oak (II. 1. 31) as well as an “antique world” where service is done out of duty (II. 3. 57) and both simply mean ‘old’.¹⁷³ The word ‘antique’ as old often appears in the sonnets as well: “antique pen” (Sonnet 106, line 7), “antique hours” (Sonnet 68, line 9), “antique book” (Sonnet 59, line 7). In the footnotes of the Arden edition, “antique pen” (Sonnet 19, line 10) receives the meaning of an “old pen, but also one that produces grotesque or fanciful effects”. Also, the expression of “antique song” (Sonnet 17, line 12) is described as “old and grotesque or eccentric”.¹⁷⁴ Although the ‘antic pen’ may be grotesque in its effects, the ‘the antique song’ seems to offer an equal possibility for the meaning of old and the meaning of grotesque. There is only one obvious example where ‘antic’ is used with its grotesque meaning. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* Theseus claims when he hears the story of the lovers:

More strange than true. I never may believe
 These *antique* fables, nor these fairy toys.
 Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
 Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
 More than cool reason ever comprehends.¹⁷⁵

In its relation to ‘fairy toys,’ it rather refers to the lovers’ dream-like irrational fantasy. The ‘shaping fantasies’ that reason cannot comprehend is, according to the footnote in the Arden

¹⁷⁰ William Shakespeare, *King Henry V*. T. W. Craik ed., *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Thomson, 1995).

¹⁷¹ William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*. Philip Brockbank ed., *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Thomson, 2001).

¹⁷² William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor eds., *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Thomson, 2006), 268.

¹⁷³ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*. Agnes Latham ed., *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1975).

¹⁷⁴ William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*. Katherine Duncan-Jones ed., *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 2010).

¹⁷⁵ My emphasis. William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Harold F. Brooks ed., *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1983). Act 5, scene 1, lines 2-6.

edition, not only ‘ancient’ but also ‘grotesque’ “implying ‘nowadays recognizably absurd’.”¹⁷⁶

2.1 Grotesque in Shakespeare Criticism

What literary critiques claim to be the Shakespearean grotesque requires the analysis of most of Shakespearean plays in order to give a representative result. There are not many scholars who attempted such a work. Usually the grotesque appears in articles on Shakespeare’s dramas. However, before turning to the dramas themselves, the attempts of Rhodes and Farnham to define the Shakespearean grotesque should be outlined.

Neil Rhodes names his own book, *Elizabethan Grotesque* (1980) an “influence study,” meaning that he believes in the literary and cultural effects that form a literary style.¹⁷⁷ With this introduction, Rhodes belongs to the critical wave of New Historicism. Rhodes first defines the Elizabethan literary grotesque, and then uses this definition on examples from Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. He sees the roots of the Elizabethan grotesque in the mixture of different literary styles and forms of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; in the “uneasiness” of the interlocked fusion of satire, saturnalia and sermon.¹⁷⁸ Rhodes does not forget that the grotesque possesses high visibility, he concentrates on pictures that appear in literary descriptions or in puns of literature. The pictorial grotesque has two poles, “frivolity implied by Vasari’s description, and ... the macabre spirit of Bruegel.” He sees the complexity of the grotesque exactly in the mutually incompatible reactions of “laughter and revulsion.”¹⁷⁹ However, the essential element of the literary grotesque is its shocking nature that lacks from the pictorial grotesque. The sixteenth century grotesque is in close connection with the body and it is most of the time expressed as an analogy. Building an analogy, the grotesque connects images which have physical similarity, but which normal experience

¹⁷⁶ Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, op. cit., p. 103.

¹⁷⁷ Rhodes, op. cit., x.

¹⁷⁸ Rhodes, op. cit., 7.

¹⁷⁹ Rhodes, op. cit., 9-10.

classifies separately. The grotesque begins where these analogies fail to be credible. Rhodes finds the grotesque in analogies, especially between the body and the body politic of England.¹⁸⁰ Additional examples for the visual grotesque in Elizabethan prose are the simile, the metaphor, the caricature, comparison, blazon and coinage.¹⁸¹ It is the Marplerate controversy and especially the works of Thomas Nashe that Rhodes sees as the basic examples of the Elizabethan grotesque.¹⁸² Rhodes claims that after Nashe the grotesque exists but due to secularization it becomes social criticism.¹⁸³

In his book, *The Shakespearean Grotesque*, Willard Farnham concentrates on characters and their actions. He claims the English grotesque style roots in the late thirteen and early fourteen century marginal ornament of psalters. These marginal decorations become grotesque if we discover comic elements in them. The most popular topic is the “low being made high, but made so in presumptuous violation of all natural possibility and therefore in a grotesquely incongruous manner that brings laughter.”¹⁸⁴ As an example for his definition, Farnham uses a picture with an ape represented as a noble man. The ‘low’ animal is represented in a ‘high’ position through the clothes he wears. This way is the ‘low being made high.’ This shift should be made in a way nature would not allow it: animals wear no clothes, let alone that of a nobleman. This unnatural and unreal nature of the picture evokes ‘laughter.’ The thirteenth century grotesque is then basically a comic incongruity, something that opposes the laws of nature. Farnham claims that the Renaissance grotesque represents a conflict in nature. He sees this conflict in the Shakespearean grotesque on two levels. On the one hand the Shakespearean grotesque appears on the social level in the clash of comedy

¹⁸⁰ Rhodes, op. cit., 8, 12-14.

¹⁸¹ Rhodes, op. cit., 18-36.

¹⁸² Martin Marpleate wrote pamphlets attacking episcopacy around 1588. These pamphlets were satirical and vulgar. As a reply to this illegal act, the Church also ordered pamphlets in a similar style. One of the pamphlet writers were Thomas Nashe.

¹⁸³ Rhodes, op. cit., 53-4.

¹⁸⁴ Farnham, op. cit., 15-16.

belonging to low culture and religious art belonging to high culture.¹⁸⁵ On the other hand, he sees it in the human as individual, more precisely in the opposing double nature of humans that allows them to think as gods and behave as animals. In his argument Farnham takes the sisterhood of panting and literature for granted and uses the above example of the ape as nobleman to show the inner opposition of the human nature that is close, as well as far from the way animals behave.¹⁸⁶ Although Farnham does not separate these two levels of social and individual grotesques so strictly, I find it important to divide them for a better view on the details of the Shakespearean grotesque. In the time of Shakespeare the medieval world picture of the social, religious community meets the Renaissance world view, where the human body and individuality itself become the centre of attention. Farnham ceases to differentiate the social from the individual level. He argues that the godlike nature of humans is the human reason that is shown in high cultural activities, while the animal nature of humans comes out in low cultural activities, such as comedies.¹⁸⁷

From a sociocultural perspective, Rhodes sees the grotesque in analogies and in other literary expressions used as social criticism, while Farnham sees it in the incongruity of presenting something socially low as high. Rhodes creates the grotesque through exaggerated analogies between the body and the body politic. Rhodes does not discuss the effect of the grotesque on existing structures, so it would be a speculation to say that his description is similar to the *blurring grotesque* or the *transgressive grotesque*. Although Farnham also gives the grotesque a social relevance, just like Rhodes, his description does not state what happens to the social structures. Rhodes and Farnham make clear that the Shakespearean grotesque has a social relevance, but they do not go further than to state that it exercises social criticism. As

¹⁸⁵ Farnham, op. cit., 4 and 13.

¹⁸⁶ Farnham, op. cit., 17.

¹⁸⁷ What Farnham claims about the individual's dual nature reminds me on E. M. W. Tillyard's book, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1943). Farnham did not mention the book, but seems to follow its points. Tillyard claims that Elizabethan human beings have double nature: material and spiritual; and the struggle of these are the roots of inner conflicts (p. 73). Tillyard continues that reason comes from God and the human body is defined by materials of nature. These two faculties "pull in different directions," creating inner conflicts (p. 74).

I have argued in the first chapter, the postmodern grotesque goes further than the Shakespearean grotesque described by Rhodes and Farnham.

What we understand as the Shakespearean grotesque is not only influenced by the literary trends of Shakespeare's time, but also by the plays used as examples for the grotesque. In the following paragraphs I am going to discuss plays and characters of Shakespeare, which are discussed in Shakespeare criticism as grotesques. In the third chapter I want to draw a comparison between the Shakespearean grotesque based on the following textual analysis of literary critics and the grotesque appearing in reviews of theatre critics in order to see how Shakespearean grotesque differs in literary criticism and in practice on stage.

2.1.1. Falstaff

The influence of Bakhtin's carnival theory is well detectable in Shakespeare criticism. Among the Shakespearean characters, Falstaff's figure is most related to *grotesque realism* and the *grotesque body*. Falstaff's body with his obsession of drinking, eating, jokes and lust recalls the open places of the body (mouth, ears, nose, genitals) and the lower bodily functions that are emphasised by Bakhtin. In *grotesque realism* not only the outside world enters the body through these open places (eating, drinking), but these are also points where the body melts into the outer world (defecation, urination).¹⁸⁸ In "The Grotesque in *Henry IV, Part I*" John Kerr describes the grotesque to be primarily an experience of the excessive and distorted body. He claims that the grotesque is composed of the comic as well as the horrific, but that the darker side of the grotesque is only present in the "audience's awareness" but not in the consciousness of the character possessing these values.¹⁸⁹ Falstaff is a good example, not only for the *grotesque body*, but also for *grotesque realism*. Kristen Poole in "Facing Puritanism: Falstaff, Martin Marprelate and the Grotesque Puritan" claims to see a "caricature

¹⁸⁸ Bakhtin, op. cit., 317.

¹⁸⁹ John Kerr, "The grotesque in *Henry IV, Part I*," in Harold Bloom ed., *Bloom's Literary Themes: The Grotesque* (New York: Infobase, 2009), 97.

of Oldcastle” in the figure of Falstaff.¹⁹⁰ Although Shakespeare uses the name of Falstaff, the figure of Oldcastle was clearly alluded to for the Elizabethan audience.¹⁹¹ Poole claims that Falstaff as a caricature of Oldcastle has its origin in the Protestant pamphlet writer, Martin Marprelate. Martin Marprelate was silenced after a time and the anti-Marprelate propaganda made him into a grotesque figure.¹⁹² The bodily representation of Falstaff fits very well the tone of the Marprelate controversy, as well as Bakhtin’s idea of the *grotesque body*. Moreover, Bakhtin’s *grotesque realism* is also to be discovered if one reads between the lines of Poole’s argument. She claims that the description of Falstaff has references to Oldcastle and Marprelate and therefore Falstaff can be perceived as a parody of Puritans as well as a parody of Oldcastle.¹⁹³ Poole claims that this duality of laughing *at* and *with* Falstaff is a liminal position that gives, next to the physical insults, the grotesqueness Bakhtin also advertises.¹⁹⁴ Laughing at somebody in the Bakhtinian vocabulary means defeating someone.¹⁹⁵ Falstaff thus becomes an ultimate example for Bakhtin’s *grotesque body* as well as for *grotesque realism*.

Rhodes claims that the Elizabethan grotesque style of writing also appears in the works of Shakespeare. The function of this style is social criticism, and it is best seen in the character of Falstaff in the Shakespearean *oeuvre*. He argues that Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* is a combination of saturnalia and satire and that it is the first play to show the influence of the Nashian grotesque.¹⁹⁶ Falstaff goes through developmental phases, starting in the first part of *Henry IV*, followed by the second part and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Rhodes sees this development not only as a character development of Falstaff, but also as the appearance and

¹⁹⁰ Kristen Poole, “Facing Puritanism: Falstaff, Martin Marprelate and the Grotesque Puritan,” in Ronald Knowles ed., *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 97. Oldcastle was an existing Puritan figure, who led an army against Henry V and was considered to be a martyr and proto-Puritan among the Elizabethan Puritans after his defeat (Note 12 in Poole, pp. 117 and 109).

¹⁹¹ There were only 6 or 7 years between the death of Oldcastle and the production of *Henry IV, Part 1*. In Poole, op. cit., 104.

¹⁹² Poole, op. cit., 102 and 105.

¹⁹³ Poole, op. cit., 108.

¹⁹⁴ Poole, op. cit., 115.

¹⁹⁵ Bakhtin, op. cit., 89-91.

¹⁹⁶ Rhodes, op. cit., 5.

disappearance of the Shakespearean grotesque. The play *1 Henry IV* is the peak of low comedy that focuses on the body of Falstaff. Wit and strong physicality make Falstaff the “supreme dramatic embodiment of the Elizabethan grotesque.”¹⁹⁷ His belly and mind are directly connected and they continually inspire each other. He becomes the representation of carnival and therefore his battles with Hal are compared to the battles of carnival and lent. Rhodes names *1 Henry IV* the “drama of the flesh” where the human body of Falstaff and the body politic become analogies.¹⁹⁸ In *2 Henry IV* Falstaff’s body appears in a more degenerated form, tortured by sicknesses and old age. While the first part has a carnivalesque atmosphere, the second part looks more like lent and is characterised by sickness instead of fertility. Rhodes draws a parallel between the degeneration of Falstaff’s flesh and social corruption that can only be purified by death/war.¹⁹⁹ Death is not only about the physical end of Falstaff, but it is also the end of the grotesque. In the *Merry Wives of Windsor* the lack of political context prevents the development of the grotesque. Falstaff is nothing more than the target of jokes, and this means the death of Falstaff as the figure of the grotesque. Rhodes claims that with Falstaff, Shakespeare places the grotesque from the comic subplot into the historical main plot. Thus the grotesque becomes a tool of satire. While *1 Henry IV* could be considered as a saturnalia, and *2 Henry IV* as satire, in the *Merry Wives* the grotesque ceases to exist and we see a comedy.²⁰⁰ Rhodes claims that Falstaff is so strongly specific in his features of the Elizabethan grotesque that he can barely live longer than the Elizabethan period.

Kerr, Poole and Rhodes see in the figure of Falstaff the ultimate grotesque, especially because of his excessive body and wit. This figure becomes the embodiment of the Bakhtinian *grotesque realism*. Moreover, the behaviour of Falstaff is full of examples where respected norms are broken. Falstaff tries to influence Hal and thus attempts the transgression of the

¹⁹⁷ Rhodes, op. cit., 104.

¹⁹⁸ Rhodes, op. cit., 103 and 113.

¹⁹⁹ Rhodes, op. cit., 113-116 and 118.

²⁰⁰ Rhodes, op. cit., 128-129 and 160.

existing order. However, his attempts are not successful in the end. Falstaff is an obvious example of what I called to be the *transgressive grotesque*. As we will see in chapter three Rhodes is right in his statement that Falstaff cannot survive the Elizabethan age, at least when the postmodern Shakespeare performances are concerned. The plays Falstaff appears in do not belong to the popular plays in the postmodern, however, I will show that this does not mean that elements of the Bakhtinian grotesque has no place in the postmodern.

2.1.2. Hamlet

For Farnham Falstaff and Hamlet are the most marvellous examples of the Shakespearean grotesque. Farnham uses his interpretation of psalter grotesques for Shakespearean characters. In Falstaff one can find both levels of the grotesque. Falstaff is grotesque as an individual, and he is also grotesque as a social being. Farnham names Falstaff the “apostle of the low” culture who is also accepted by Hal from high culture.²⁰¹ The god-like feature of Falstaff comes from his wit, while his monstrosity and animal features come from his fat figure and his possession with eating, drinking and sexual desires. The wit of Falstaff is of high importance, it lifts him out of the line of clowns before him. Hamlet, like Falstaff, takes delight in wit.²⁰² Hamlet’s godlike nature is also in his wit, while his animal nature is in his cowardice to revenge his father’s death. The double social position of Hamlet is in his functions as prince and court fool. These two functions make Hamlet “infinitely comical and distressing,” which results in a “wry jest.”²⁰³ Farnham differentiates Hamlet from Falstaff when he claims that Hamlet is consciously grotesque and therefore he is a tragic

²⁰¹ Farnham, op. cit., 34 and 47.

²⁰² Farnham, op. cit., 56. While the body is led by the four elements of the humoral system, the highest form of the spirit is reason; that can be further divided into “understanding (or wit) and the will.” Compare Tillyard, op. cit., 79.

²⁰³ Farnham, op. cit., 99 and 102-106.

character, while Falstaff is unconsciously grotesque and therefore he stems from the clown's comic role.²⁰⁴ While Hamlet's nature is melancholic, he picks up the role of the fool.

Jan Kott also draws a comparison between fools and Hamlet. He compares Hamlet's language to the language of the Fool in *King Lear* and claims that the language of both "is that of our modern grotesque" as it uses "dialectics, paradox and an absurd kind of humour."²⁰⁵ Similarly to Farnham, Kott claims that for Hamlet, madness is a conscious choice, "a philosophy, a criticism of pure reason."²⁰⁶ The language of Hamlet, as Kott argues

abounds in biblical travesties and inverted medieval parables. One can find in it splendid baroque surrealist expressions, sudden leaps of imagination, condensations and epitomes, brutal, vulgar and scatological comparisons. His rhymes are like limericks.²⁰⁷

The nature of Hamlet lies in hesitation, in postponing. His feelings towards Ophelia are not clear, he is not sure that it was Claudius who killed his father. In addition to that, he feigns or experiences madness where reality is blurred with the imaginary. Feelings are blurred, actions are postponed, so that the nature of the grotesque here is the one that blurs, mixes, and dissolves borders. Both Farnham and Kott support this position when they claim that Hamlet consciously chooses to take up the role of the fool, thus erasing the borders between the role of a prince and the role of a clown. The arguments of Farnham and Kott led me to the conclusion that Hamlet as a character can be an example for both trends of postmodern definitions of the grotesque. The idea of blurring borders of different roles refers to one general trend of definition, the *blurring grotesque*. However, Hamlet also questions authority and plans to kill the king, so his behaviour is also transgressive as he acts, even if in slow motion, against the existing structure. His act against the existing order makes Hamlet a good example for the other postmodern trend of grotesque definition, the *transgressive grotesque*.

²⁰⁴ Farnham, op. cit., 114.

²⁰⁵ Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, Translated by Boleslaw Taborski (London: Routledge, 1991), 132.

²⁰⁶ Kott, op. cit., 132.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

2.1.3. Lear

The tragic elements of Hamlet and the comic elements of Falstaff as grotesque seem to be united in what critics consider to be grotesque in *King Lear*. In 1949 G. Wilson Knight in his collection of critical essays, *The Wheel of Fire* forms the first thoughts on the Shakespearean grotesque. Knight could not entirely part with the Shakespeare-interpretations of A.C. Bradley, but especially his method of close reading and considering each play as an “expanded metaphor” show that he belongs to the New Critics.²⁰⁸ In his essay “*King Lear* and the Comedy of the Grotesque,” Knight describes the grotesque as follows:

A shifting flash of comedy across the pain of the purely tragic both increases the tension and suggests, vaguely, a resolution and a purification. The comic and the tragic rest both on the idea of incompatibilities, and are also, themselves, mutually exclusive: therefore to mingle them is to add to the meaning of each; for the result is then but a new sublime incongruity.²⁰⁹

Knight starts with the idea that the grotesque is composed of the ‘incompatibilities’ of ‘comedy’ and ‘tragic.’ Being oppositions, ‘comedy’ and ‘tragic’ are ‘mutually exclusive’ notions. Oppositions, as they are, create a normally expected ‘tension.’ Knight claims that this tension is ‘increased’ in the way ‘comedy’ and ‘tragedy’ meet. He argues that one needs ‘purely tragic’ as a basis for the grotesque. To this ‘purely tragic,’ a ‘shifting flash of comedy’ should be added in order to arrive to the effect of ‘increased tension.’ The addition of the ‘comic’ to the ‘purely tragic’ increases the ‘pain’ but immediately after that it works as a ‘resolution and purification.’ The end-product, the ‘sublime’ describes best the purifying nature of this ‘incongruity’. The result of the experience of the ‘flash of comedy across the pain of the purely tragic’ is a kind of ‘resolution’ expressed in the notion ‘sublime.’ However, this resolution does not mean the dissolution of the ‘incongruity’. Knight claims that the

²⁰⁸ A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: MacMillan, 1949). Robert Weimann, *Az "új kritika". Az új interpretációs módszerek története és bírálata* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1965), 166-7. G. W. Knight, *The Wheel of Fire. Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1977), 14-5.

²⁰⁹ Knight, op. cit., 160.

grotesque is but a tool, a technique of expression. The effect of this technique sounds like a cruel slap in the face that leaves a 'sublime' dizziness behind, a 'sublime incongruity'. According to Knight in *King Lear* "there is a dualism continually crying in vain to be resolved either by tragedy or by comedy".²¹⁰ Lear starts his own tragedy with a misjudgement of Cordelia. This misjudgement is a failure of his mind, so according to Knight his mind should be purged through madness. Knight draws a parallel between the Lear theme and the Gloucester theme and claims that the first shows physical torment while the second demonstrates mental torment. He sees the grotesque in the cruelty of humour Shakespeare applies.²¹¹

The philosophical nature of the grotesque in *King Lear* is described by Jan Kott in his *Shakespeare our Contemporary*. Kott argues that Lear becomes a character who is "ridiculous, naïve and stupid" and as such, cannot be a tragic character.²¹² The fact that a king divides his kingdom and nevertheless wants to be treated as a king is absurd. Such a king cannot be taken seriously. Moreover, Lear alone is responsible for his own suffering, i.e. his story is a sad one but he is not a tragic hero. Kott further points out that the tragic element of the direction of *King Lear* "has been suppressed by the grotesque." He defines the grotesque to be "more cruel than tragedy".²¹³ According to Kott, the grotesque has the same themes as tragedy, it also deals with "human fate, the meaning of existence, freedom and inevitability, the discrepancy between the absolute and the fragile human order."²¹⁴ In both cases the hero must lose against the absolute. However, while the fall of the tragic hero is the confirmation of the absolute, the fall of the grotesque hero becomes the mockery of the absolute. Both the absolute and the grotesque hero are mocked in a grotesque theatre performance. While

²¹⁰ Knight, op. cit., 161.

²¹¹ Knight, op. cit., 161-165 and 172.

²¹² Kott, op. cit., 102.

²¹³ Kott, op. cit., 103.

²¹⁴ Kott, op. cit., 104.

tragedy brings catharsis, the grotesque “offers no consolation whatsoever”.²¹⁵ The prominent position of the absolute (God, Nature, etc.) vanishes in the grotesque. Kott adds that in *King Lear* the position of God gradually changes. First gods have Greek names, and then they are “terrifying judges high above, who are supposed to intervene sooner or later.” However, this intervention does not take place and the “ruin of man invoking God is ever more ridiculous.”²¹⁶ Kott sees a parallel between the raising cruelty of the action and the raising clownish character of the action. He emphasises that it is only in *King Lear* that “great tragic scenes [are] shown through clowning.”²¹⁷ In *King Lear* the place of the absolute is taken by the absurd. This absurd is a “trap set by man himself into which he has fallen.”²¹⁸ He compares the connection of absolute cruelty and ridicule to the Book of Job. The cruelty of gods is the last theological chance to justify suffering.²¹⁹ Job ceases to talk to God and thus he chooses the only way to escape being a clown. Kott explains that only “by the possibility of refusal can [Lear] surmount the external forces.”²²⁰ It is through madness that Lear crosses over to being a conscious clown.

Kott compares tragedy to the theatre of priests with their belief in the absolute, while the grotesque is compared to the theatre of clowns.²²¹ He also pays detailed attention to the Fool. The Fool is not only a professional clown as Touchstone and Feste but he is the first clown who is really aware of his position as a clown.²²² Kott takes the description of clowns from Leszek Kolakowski and argues that the clown stands outside society and his task is to observe and comment on what others do. The clown questions the most certain things in society and instead of common sense, prefers everything that is absurd. Kott points out that according to the philosophy of clowns, “everyone is a fool; and the greatest fool is he who

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Kott, op. cit., 125.

²¹⁷ Kott, op. cit., 118.

²¹⁸ Kott, op. cit., 105.

²¹⁹ Kott, op. cit., 126.

²²⁰ Kott, op. cit., 118.

²²¹ Kott, op. cit., 112.

²²² Kott, op. cit., 129.

does not know he is a fool.”²²³ Therefore, in the beginning it is Lear is the biggest fool. However, towards the end his madness becomes the ticket into the world of clowns and he ceases to be ridiculous. For Kott it is the mixture of cruelty and ridicule that makes *King Lear* grotesque. The major difference between the interpretation of Knight and Kott is that Kott describes Lear as ridiculous, not tragic and comic. However, both see the grotesque in the cruelty of the humour used. Moreover, the ridiculous nature of Lear described by Kott can also be seen as the result of the incompatibility of tragic and comic.

Bakhtin’s answer to Kott’s philosophical grotesque would be that Lear should make fun of God and purification will come. Of course, becoming a clown is also one way of trying to stop the tragic with the comic. Bakhtin’s influence on Shakespeare criticism remains not only by the body of Falstaff but it turns into a philosophy in *King Lear*. Bakhtin claims that the Renaissance carnival uses laughter as a weapon to defeat the fears of everyday life (fear of death, fear of God, etc.) by mocking, debasing and materialising the spiritual (God, Christ or the Saints) and secular order, and so becomes the existing order relativized.²²⁴ This is Bakhtin’s *grotesque realism*, best represented by the *grotesque body* that is never closed, but always in a process, always changing.²²⁵ Natália Pikli in her book, *The Prism of Laughter: Shakespeare’s “Very Tragical Mirth”* uses the definition of the grotesque by Philip Thomson and the broader perspective of the carnival. Pikli catches Thomson’s definition (“the unresolved clash of incompatibles in work and response”) in the “horrible laughter” of the audience.²²⁶ However, by emphasising the carnivalistic nature of the tragedies, Pikli puts the emphasis on the comical side of Thomson’s definition. Giving the grotesque a comic basis, Pikli turns Knight’s idea of tragic basis inside out. While by Knight the tragic basis only becomes more tragic with any additional comic scene, for Pikli the comic basis is arrived at

²²³ Kott, op. cit., 130.

²²⁴ Bakhtin, op. cit., 66, 74, 90 and 256.

²²⁵ Bakhtin, op. cit., 322.

²²⁶ Thomson, op. cit., 27. Natália Pikli, *The Prism of Laughter: Shakespeare’s “Very Tragical Mirth”* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2009), 15.

through an excess of violence, which becomes only more and more comic with the repetition of violence.

Kayser finds the grotesque to be a structural element that one meets in the act of perception, where the grotesque is a result of the not nameable fear from life that makes the world alien and meaningless; an alienation from the self.²²⁷ Rainer Lengeler adapts Kayser's theory and deals with grotesque alienation in Shakespeare's plays. He goes back to the origins of the term 'grotesque' and finds that it developed from the term 'antic' which meant "fantastic" and "unreal."²²⁸ Lengeler attaches this meaning of the 'antic' to Neoplatonic ideas of the artwork. Thus the physical appearance of the artwork becomes only a sign that points into the direction of the transcendental Idea of the artwork. This Idea is remembered with the help of the artwork.²²⁹ The grotesque for Lengeler is the "lack of order" or the "darkening of the Idea."²³⁰ The darkening of the platonic Idea makes the artwork lose its art character and the artwork becomes an unnatural imitation.²³¹ Lengeler comes to the conclusion that the grotesque does not only go back to Neoplatonic ideas, but it also confirms Kayser's definition of the grotesque as "alienated world."²³² Lengeler claims that the grotesque starts with an alienation from the world or/and self. This is followed by the acceptance of a daemonic reality instead of the real reality. Throughout these phases the main character changes a lot, but at the end s/he reaches the ideal self. Kayser's grotesque requires a psychological character inquiry of the Shakespeare dramas.²³³ This description is similar to Kott's grotesque where the lack of the absolute also means the lack of any order and where the ridiculousness of Lear disappears when he goes mad and thus becomes a conscious clown. Trying out different roles

²²⁷ Kayser, op. cit., 180-8.

²²⁸ My translation of "Phantastische" and "Unwirkliche" in Lengeler, op. cit., 24.

²²⁹ Lengeler, op. cit., 37.

²³⁰ My translation of "Fehlen der Ordnung" and "Verdunklung der Idee" in Lengeler, op. cit., 38.

²³¹ Lengeler, op. cit., 42-3.

²³² Lengeler quotes Kayser's expression in German "entfremdete Welt" in Lengeler, op. cit., 208.

²³³ The psychological Shakespearean grotesque is not yet explicitly discussed, however, the grotesque through psychology is theorised by Clayborough, who relies mainly on the ideas of Kayser in *The Grotesque in English Literature*.

becomes an important feature of the grotesque in theatre performances discussed in chapter three.

Both Pikli and Lengeler describe the grotesque as a process. This similarity makes it possible to compare their interpretations of *King Lear* and see the influences of the Kayserian and the Bakhtinian grotesques.²³⁴ The first acts of Lear where he divides his kingdom and retires mean alienation from his ideal self as a king and from the world around him for Lengeler, but for Pikli it means the beginning of the carnival, where Lear becomes the mocking and the carnival king at the same time.²³⁵ Bakhtin mentions that there were crownings and mock-crownings during carnivals.²³⁶ Pikli refers here to the self-uncrowning of Lear, while at the same time he picks up the role of the carnival king. Lengeler describes the fights with Goneril as the first instance for the appearance of the daemonic (i.e. the appearance of the grotesque), while Pikli sees in the same scene the fight of the female Lenten figure (Goneril) and the male Carnival figure (Lear).²³⁷ Interestingly, for both Pikli and Lengeler, the peak of the grotesque comes in the storm scene. Lengeler sees here that Lear picks up different roles that are alien to his nature, such as the role of the magician while he also faces with the daemonic in the form of the barking dogs.²³⁸ Pikli calls this scene a fusion of pathos and farce, where the king becomes an ass, an “asinine majesty.”²³⁹ The unnecessary death of Cordelia is the last shock of the tragedy. For Lengeler, Lear’s last meeting with Cordelia starts the healing process of his madness and his eagerness to save Cordelia cures his madness and lets him die in his ideal state.²⁴⁰ For Pikli the carnival turns into the Dance of Death at the end and Cordelia is only another human in the line to die.²⁴¹ Pikli sees Lear’s end as desperate, as opposed to Lengeler, who claims that Lear dies in an ideal state. Pikli and Lengeler

²³⁴ Pikli, op. cit., 119-153. Lengeler, op. cit., 141-176.

²³⁵ Pikli, op. cit., 125-6. Lengeler, op. cit., 142-3.

²³⁶ Bakhtin, op. cit., 198.

²³⁷ Pikli, op. cit., 132. Lengeler, op. cit., 145.

²³⁸ Lengeler, op. cit., 151-3.

²³⁹ Pikli, op. cit., 139-42.

²⁴⁰ Lengeler, op. cit., 169-75.

²⁴¹ Pikli, op. cit., 152.

consistently disagree in their interpretations on what the grotesque is in *King Lear*. In the end of their interpretations Pikli's positive grotesque ends in a negative depression, while Lengeler's negative grotesque ends in the ideal state of Lear. These two examples are especially interesting from the point of view of diverse and contradictory interpretations of the grotesque in the same tragedy. In my opinion both interpretations are convincing and support the complex matrix of the grotesque in *King Lear*. Also, the way Pikli and Lengeler handle the comic and tragic nature of the play allows me to refer back to what Knight says about the play, namely that "there is a dualism continually crying in vain to be resolved either by tragedy or by comedy."²⁴² This makes it possible for me to accept contradictory statements about the same scenes.

Pikli and Lengeler are not orthodox followers of Bakhtin and Kayser. Pikli mixes Thomson's ideas with Bakhtin's, thus trying to achieve an equilibrium of the tragic and the comic. Lengeler claims that next to Kayser, the Neoplatonic idea of dividedness is also important for the grotesque in Shakespeare. It might well be that the title of *King Lear* as a tragedy provoked Pikli and Kott to show that there is a strong line of comedy in this play and made them stress the comic nature of the play.²⁴³ Knight suggests that it is exactly this mixture of the two dramatic forms that evokes the grotesque. Thus Knight argues for a meaning of the grotesque which disrespects, blurs borders of tragedy and comedy. If we read the interpretations of Pikli and Lengeler together, it becomes clear that the fact that they claim the exact opposite of what the other claims means that positions and especially what is comic and tragic, are exchangeable in the play or that they are both present and it is the question of perspective which one the critic sees. Thus the grotesque described by Piki and Lengeler and especially that of Knight is a *blurring grotesque*. The *blurring grotesque* becomes a platform where the tragic and comic can openly show their concurrence in *King Lear*.

²⁴² Knight, op. cit., 161.

²⁴³ In the title of the First Quarto, the play is named history. See William Shakespeare, *King Lear*. R. A. Foakes ed., *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Thomson, 2007), 112.

While the *blurring grotesque* has an effect that unsettles and opens up the possibility of change, the *transgressive grotesque* attempts a change but achieves the restatement of the status quo. The absurdity of Lear's retirement is already a grotesque which can be seen as a transgressive one: It is an act against the rule, however no one will expect future kings to give up their kingdom, so it does not change the structure it challenges. The *blurring grotesque* lies in the fact that although Lear gave up his kingdom, he still wants to be treated as a king. Lear blurs the border between the role of a king and an ex-king and makes himself ridiculous. Pikli and Kott emphasise this ridiculous nature of Lear and suggest that the roles picked up by Lear are not natural to him. There is no such role as ex-king: the king either lives or he is dead and the people have a new king. It takes some time until Lear realises that (the origin of his ridiculousness after Kott) he changed his position from king to become an other, someone not strictly belonging to society (clown or madman). From a socio-cultural perspective, Kott claims that Lear should admit that he is a clown and he should leave the existing social structures in order to go against them.

King Lear is also discussed as a philosophical grotesque from two perspectives. In these two perspectives the ideas on the absolute and the ideas on ruling social structure by Bakhtin and by Kayser are mirrored. Based on Bakhtin, Pikli sees the act of making fun of God as a tool to reduce fear. Similar to Kayser, Lengeler and Kott recognize the lack of God in *King Lear* and interpret the accumulation of cruel humour as the lack of order/absolute. While the *transgressive grotesque* based on Bakhtin only makes fun of the absolute and secures its state, the *blurring grotesque* based on Kayser questions the existence of the absolute and proves its lack. Both types of grotesques can be read out of *King Lear*. The grotesque as philosophy in *King Lear* means two ways to deal with the presence (or absence) of the absolute. It will be interesting to see which way directors choose to express the grotesque in *King Lear*.

2.1.4. Villains and/or Vices as Grotesques

We have already seen in the way Catholics and Puritans used the word ‘antic’ that the words also had the meaning ‘evil’. This leads to the fact that in theatre some characters who do not conform the norm and are considered as evil might well be called grotesque. There is a consensus among some of the theoreticians that some characters of Shakespeare are the successor of the Devil and the Vice. The character of the Devil comes from the early morality plays of the fifteenth century. Robert Potter claims that the structure of morality plays is to be summarised in the “innocence/fall/redemption” sequence and their main aim was to convey Christian morals.²⁴⁴ The rather passive main character of the morality play is Mankind, who is tempted by the active Devil. The Devil not only works as the driver of the plot, but he also keeps contact with the audience. J. B. Russell claims that the Devil’s appearance was frightening, often attached to the colour black, as well as having a monstrous, distorted shape, but the Devil’s behaviour and speech were comic. The frightening nature of the Devil originates from the didactic methods of the monks, while the comic nature comes from folklore, thus lending the Devil a ‘double face’ of being comic and horrible.²⁴⁵ Ágnes Matuska argues that the Vice is the successor of the medieval clown and the medieval Devil.²⁴⁶ In the sixteenth century morality plays needed to face secularisation and the Vice character appeared as a helper of the Devil. F. H. Mares claims that the Vice was a favourite with the audience; he was the chorus, the presenter of other characters and the *aside* commentator of happenings. He also stresses that the Vice was often confidential with the audience, foreshadowing what would happen on stage and thus making the impression that he

²⁴⁴ Robert Potter, *The English Morality Play. Origins, History and Influence of Dramatic Tradition* (London and Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 8 and 36.

²⁴⁵ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer. The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1984), 62-87.

²⁴⁶ Ágnes Matuska, *The Vice-Devil. Iago and Lear’s Fool as Agents of Representational Crisis* (Szeged: JATEPress, 2011), 81-4.

is not only outside the play but also outside the moral law.²⁴⁷ Peter Happé claims that the Vice should have a funny appearance, an excellent rhetoric, and he should keep an intensive contact with the audience.²⁴⁸ There is a shift to be observed from the obvious evil, the Devil on stage to the more hidden evil, the Vice and then the Machiavel.²⁴⁹ Russell names this process the internalisation of the evil demons.²⁵⁰ The abstract Devil becomes more human-like and therefore more acceptable for the audience in the form of a Vice or the Machiavel. In the age of Shakespeare, there are still morality plays played with Devils and Vices, but the new character type of the Machiavel is also used. This means that Shakespeare had a wide range of evil characters to choose from when fabricating his stage villains. In this section the comic and horrifying natures of the Vice are discussed as grotesques. As the Machiavel has no humour if compared to the Devil or the Vice, it cannot serve as an example of the grotesque.

Farnham discusses the evil characters of Shakespeare under the term “diabolic grotesqueness.”²⁵¹ Characters that fulfil the function of the medieval Vice belong to this category. Farnham differentiates the Vice from the dramatic villain. He claims that while the Devil was a supernatural character, the Vice was a portion of man’s fallible nature and thus more acceptable and closer to the audience.²⁵² He claims the Vice works against mankind, driven by a joy in doing evil and that he has a peace of conscience.²⁵³ Therefore Thersites, Iago and Caliban stem from the family of the Vice. However, Shakespearean villains are

²⁴⁷ Francis Hugh Mares, “The Origin of the Figure called ‘the Vice’ in Tudor Drama,” in *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 22, 1958-1959/1, 13-4.

²⁴⁸ Peter Happé, “ ‘The Vice’ and the Popular Theatre, 1547-80,” in Anthony Coleman and Anthony Hammond ed., *Poetry and Drama 1570-1700* (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), 17 and 19.

²⁴⁹ The adjective ‘Machiavellian’ comes from Innocent Gentillet’s misinterpretations of Niccolo Machiavelli’s book in 1577. In the *Anti-Machiavel*, Gentillet criticises Machiavelli’s writings, moreover, he relates the author to the Devil himself. Machiavelli’s name thus turns in England into an adjective that refers to an immoral political behaviour. The adjective ‘Machiavellian’ was used in the theatre as the character ‘Machiavel.’ See Wyndham Lewis, *The Lion and the Fox. The role of the hero in the plays of Shakespeare* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1981), 64-74.

²⁵⁰ Russell, op. cit., 261.

²⁵¹ Farnham, op. cit., 128-69

²⁵² Farnham, op. cit., 39.

²⁵³ Farnham, op. cit., 140.

characters who do evil for advancing themselves in the world and they sooner or later have a bad conscience as Cassius, Claudius, Richard III, Macbeth, Aaron and Edmund.²⁵⁴ Farnham claims that the ‘diabolic grotesque’ characters are those resembling the Vice, especially in their “ill will.”²⁵⁵ The main character trait of Farnham’s diabolic grotesque figures is the enjoyment of doing evil. When discussing the “demonic laughter,” similarly to Farnham, Pikli searches for the devilish elements in the characters, but instead of Thersites, Iago and Caliban, she discusses Aaron, Richard III, Iago and Edmund, so she does not make a difference between villains and the characters that succeed characteristic features of the medieval Vice.²⁵⁶ Pikli claims that ‘motiveless malignity’ is characteristic of all Shakespearean villains.²⁵⁷

Ralf Remshardt claims that the inhuman behaviour on stage evokes a negation of this behaviour in the audience. More precisely, the immorality on stage provokes morality in the spectators. Through the violation of morals, the strengthening of morality is realised and thus the grotesque in postmodern theatre evokes an “ethical contradiction.”²⁵⁸ Remshardt considers *Titus Andronicus* to be not a simple revenge play, but something more, an “uncannily sophisticated symbolic and metaphorical undergirding in which it reveals itself to be a tract on language, rhetoric, signs, and epistemology.”²⁵⁹ The grotesque needs a generic environment that can be contradicted. The first act sets this environment by creating a complete romantic comedy that ends with reconciliation. However, as soon as we enter the second act it becomes clear that “anything demonic” is possible.²⁶⁰ The demonic aspect of the following scenes are

²⁵⁴ Farnham, op. cit., 140-1.

²⁵⁵ Farnham, op. cit., 129.

²⁵⁶ Pikli, op. cit., 60-85.

²⁵⁷ Pikli, op. cit., 63.

²⁵⁸ Remshardt, op. cit., 161-2. Remshardt differentiates the classical grotesque and the grotesque in the modern theatre. In a section on the “Classical Grotesque,” Remshardt chooses to discuss *The Bacchae* from Euripides, *Thyestes* from Seneca and *Titus Andronicus* from Shakespeare. He claims these three plays “take human experience to the limit of the generically representable” and compose a “trio of premodern ‘impossible tragedies.’” (p. 128). The motive of self-invention and cannibalism as the ultimate intrusion into the norms is emphasized in all of the three tragedies.

²⁵⁹ Remshardt, op. cit., 155.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

enabled by Aaron, the “play’s hyperconscious built-in dramaturge.”²⁶¹ Aaron turns the forest, a typical place of romantic comedy into a place of tragedy. Remshardt claims that therefore Aaron becomes “an agent of the grotesque.”²⁶² Here Remshardt forms a different view from Farnham. Farnham claims that the human love of his own child puts Aaron among Shakespearean villains, but not among the “diabolic grotesque,” that are the successors of the morality Vice.²⁶³ The ultimate grotesque scene for Remshardt is when Marcus finds the mutilated Lavinia. The grotesque here, as Remshardt emphasizes, is not in the staging of a mutilated, bleeding woman as that causes “plain horror of the violence,” but it is in the manner in which Marcus reacts to Lavinia.²⁶⁴ This is very similar to what Pikli writes about this monologue.²⁶⁵ Remshardt describes the monologue of Marcus as follows:

The discrepancy between exalted language (reminiscent, even to the extent of parody, of the conventional synecdochic figures in which love poetry ‘dismembers’ its object of adulation) and scenic occurrence (the raped and mutilated Lavinia embodying the very opposite of such an object) is both horrible in its verbal misapprehension of the situation and laughable in its inadequacy. It is profoundly grotesque.²⁶⁶

Marcus, by following the language of the first act of romantic comedy causes a completely grotesque effect here. Remshardt stresses that Lavinia’s mutilation is horrible, while the grotesque is the “interpretive gap between the raw barbarity of the act and the civilised rhetoric.”²⁶⁷ It is the discrepancy between the content and the form which evokes the grotesque. Remshardt claims that the play is full of “radical metaphors” that are most of the time ruled and produced by Aaron and Tamora.²⁶⁸ Radical metaphors make bodies of texts and texts of bodies. For example when Aaron chops off the hand of Titus with the words

²⁶¹ Remshardt, op. cit., 156.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ Farnham, op. cit., 141.

²⁶⁴ Remshardt, op. cit., 158.

²⁶⁵ Pikli, op. cit., 20-4.

²⁶⁶ Remshardt, op. cit., 158-9.

²⁶⁷ Remshardt, op. cit., 161.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

'lending a hand,' he makes body out of text "choreographed in the spirit of farce."²⁶⁹ This scene ends with the inappropriate laughter of Titus. Only when Titus decides to "play the cook," when he himself starts producing radical metaphors and thus starts to master the grotesque, is he able to revenge the Goths.²⁷⁰ Remshardt claims that Titus must become "grotesquely literate" in order to revenge.²⁷¹

The Vice is very much influential in how the Shakespearean grotesque is presented. As we have seen, critics agree on the fact that the unnatural, inhuman character of doing evil without purpose gives one characteristic feature of this grotesque. In addition to that, the comic nature of the Vice character makes him famous among the audience. The stock character of the Devil slowly disappears while the Vice-like characters become personalities, integrating the idea of late Antique *Psychomachia* within the characters themselves. Thus it can happen that Claudius learns how to pray or that Richard III's conscience appears in a nightmare. If we have a look at the *transgressive grotesque* and the *blurring grotesque*, we can see that the Vice shows both features. It transgresses rules, moreover, it raises itself above the rules. Also, the character of the Vice is a character in process, it is a successor of the Devil and the medieval clown, so it blurs the borders between an evil and a comic character. From a socio-cultural perspective it is important to note that the Vice as a successor of these two characters is not part of the ruling structure, he rather wants to challenge these structures. It is an excellent role for establishing contact with the reality of the audience through asides and thus keeping contact between the social reality of the audience and the reality of the play.

2.2 Summary Shakespearean Grotesques

In the second chapter I have restricted the field of study to Shakespeare studies and found out that the 'antic', a previous form of the word 'grotesque' is used as indecorum as

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*. Jonathan Bate ed. *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Thomson, 2003), Act 5, scene 2, line 204.

²⁷¹ Remshardt, op. cit., 162.

well as something evil in Shakespeare's time. Shakespeare himself uses the word 'antic' only once with its meaning grotesque. If I compare the best examples for the grotesque in Shakespeare criticism (Falstaff, Hamlet, Lear and the Vices), the grotesque gets an obvious physical touch in Falstaff and an obvious moral touch in the Vices. The grotesque in Hamlet and Lear is less obvious, more subtle.

I have not yet discussed a phenomenon present in all the Shakespearean grotesques discussed above: the parallel presence of comic and tragic. The presence of these opposites is a result of a psychology of insecurity. Shakespeare's time is an age of insecurity a time of transition from the Middle Ages to early modern England. This shift affects most part of the people's lives. Noël Carroll claims that in psychology, reactions to incongruities can contain fear as well as laughter. He finds the common point of horror and humour in their transgression of existing categories, norms, and concepts.²⁷² Finding this common element in horror and humour is crucial to the study of the grotesque because this common point functions as a link between horror and humour, where one can slip into the other. Recalling Robert Bloch, Carroll names comedy and horror the "opposite sides of the same coin" and further claims that "[b]oth deal in the grotesque and the unexpected."²⁷³ This means that the grotesque is an ambiguous point, a psychic state on the verge of laughing as well as crying. The same thing can be funny as well as horrific. A perfect example for this is Pikli's and Lengeler's opposing descriptions of the grotesque in *King Lear*. The presence of comic and tragic as opposition also means that the border between them is not always clear, so this grotesque description is a *blurring grotesque*. Similarly, the character Vice is a successor of the Devil and the clown and thus unites comic and fearful elements. Hamlet, although he is deeply mourning because of his father's death, he feigns/becomes mad or according to some critics even a clown. He picks up incompatible roles: sometimes a tragic prince, sometimes a

²⁷² Noël Carroll, "Horror and Humor," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57:1 (1999 Winter), 148-157.

²⁷³ Bloch cited in Carroll, op. cit., 146.

clown. Lear has also problems in finding a new identity after he retired as a king as there is no such position as the ex-king, so he becomes a clown and a madman. Lear and Hamlet are in identity crisis, a crisis of microcosms, which is also present on the social level of Elizabethan England. The way to deal with such uncertainties is, according to Carroll, either to laugh or to cry. The common point in these two reactions makes the grotesque. This is the reason why the grotesque becomes so important: it offers both resolutions of psychological uncertainties.

I also compared the grotesques to the two postmodern trends of grotesque definitions I have described as *transgressive grotesque* and *blurring grotesque* in the first chapter. The most obvious example of the grotesque is the figure of Falstaff. Especially his bodily presence is interpreted as the grotesque body after Bakhtin. However, Falstaff is also interesting from a socio-cultural perspective as he is a figure moving between roles in various social statuses (robber and friend of prince Hal). Falstaff is a good example for the *transgressive grotesque* as he tries to change existing structures but he fails. From a socio-cultural perspective, the figure of the Vice is the most obviously grotesque character. Scholars argue for the grotesqueness of the Vice because of his comic and horrifying characteristic features. Both Falstaff and the Vices belong to the *transgressive grotesque*. They challenge the existing structures but their success is only temporary. Hamlet and Lear also go against the existing structures (Hamlet wants to murder the king and Lear gives up being a king), so they also belong to the *transgressive grotesque*. However, the best examples of the *blurring grotesque* are also Hamlet and Lear. Both blur social roles. Hamlet is a prince and a clown. Lear is an ex-king who becomes a clown. In addition to that, both Lear and Hamlet become insane.

The above described grotesque figures all have to do something with the figures of the Vice, the clown and the madman. They have something in common, namely that they have a special outsider role, they do not fit in the existing ruling structures. I have already described that the Vice is the successor of the clown and the Devil. The Devil is a feared fictional category, a remnant of religion from the Middle Ages. The clown has a special role in society.

He is the part of society, however, the rules of society cannot be applied to him. Clowns are granted freedom of speech and action. Their role is to criticise the ruling structure without being punished. Madmen also have this special freedom.²⁷⁴ It is not a surprise that those characters, which are described as grotesque in Shakespeare criticism are (or become) Vices, clowns, or madmen. These roles allow other characters to see perspectives outside their ideology. The critique of ideology is only possible if one is not part of this ideology. Bollobás uses gender and postcolonial studies because there the subject is an ‘other’ to the ideology and can therefore choose to act in a way that does not correspond with ideology, or even go so far as to grant agency for these subjects outside ideology. Similarly to these others, the Vice, the clown and the madman are roles outside the social structure. Exactly this position makes them an excellent grotesque, this ab-normality, this revolting touch gives these positions the freedom to challenge the ruling structures. However, in chapter three where postdramatic theatre performances of Shakespeare’s plays are discussed, the roles of the Vice, madmen and clown are going to play minor role as they are roles bound to Shakespeare’s time. In postdramatic theatre practice the position of the other, the outsider, the one without a role is going to be essential for postmodern portraits of the grotesque.

²⁷⁴ Barasch, op. cit., 46.

Chapter 3: Shakespearean Grotesques in German Theatre Performances

The reader could now expect to find the grotesques of Shakespeare criticism reflected in theatre performances. This means that the Vice, madmen and fool are expected to be called grotesques in a theatre performance. This is, however, only partly the case. For example Falstaff, the very embodiment of the Bakhtinian grotesque in Shakespeare criticism appears in plays that are rarely played in Germany and thus I had little chance of finding any critique on these plays, let alone such critiques that call some aspects of this performance grotesque. However, this does not mean that the idea of Bakhtinian grotesque is not present on stage, it only means that it is not present in a form one expects. It would be decorum to stage the grotesque as one expects. The grotesque, however, aims at being rather indecorum. Due to the historical embeddedness of this phrase, the grotesque in use is going to be slightly different in postmodern German theatres as it was in early modern England. The reason for these differences is discussed beneath together with the four examples. I undertake a research on the grotesque in theatre critiques of the following Shakespeare performances: *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard III* and *King Lear*. If we compare these plays to those typically grotesque in Shakespeare criticism, the plays *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Richard III* as a Vice or villain reflect the grotesques found there. Why exactly these plays are grotesque will, of course, be not a mirrored reflection of Shakespeare criticism. The play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seems new as grotesque if we consider these plays from the perspective of Shakespeare criticism, however, it was in this single play where Shakespeare used the word 'antic' with its meaning 'grotesque.' Therefore, even though it is a new play for Shakespeare criticism with focus on the grotesque, its appearance among the postmodern performative grotesques is far from being random.

The aim of this chapter is to prove my second and third thesis, i.e. that the logic of postdramatic theatre is similar to the logic of the postmodern grotesque in use and that the content of this similarity (from critical thinking to change) let me draw conclusions on the reason for this similarity and leads to the argument that focus on agency in theatrical practice is the reaction to the theoretical passivity of the poststructuralist subject. In the introduction I have already laid the basis of the first part of this argumentation when I compared Brecht's epic theatre to Remshardt's grotesque theatre, which belongs to the *transgressive grotesque* trend of definition. Next to an emphasis on audience experience, both theatres need something exceptional in order to evoke critical thinking of the audience. In case of Remshardt it is violence, in case of Brecht it is a new, yet unknown context. However, the outcome of the epic theatre and Remshardt's grotesque theatre are opposing. The grotesque theatre makes the audience return to its original thinking structures after questioning these structures while the epic theatre offers the possibility of change. I have also argued in the introduction that postmodern German theatre scholars (Lehmann and Fischer-Lichte) integrate the basic ideas of Brecht's epic theatre into their own theories and their descriptions of theatre practice. The fact that Brecht's epic theatre is still influential in both theory and practice of postmodern German performances and the fact that Remshardt's grotesque theatre has unmistakable similarities with Brecht's epic theatre made me come to the conclusion that there are two trends in how the grotesque is defined in the postmodern. This is my first thesis. Remshardt's grotesque theatre stands for the *transgressive grotesque* trend of definition, while most of the examples discussed in the third chapter are going to prove the *blurring grotesque* trend of definition. This trend of definition follows the tradition of Brecht's epic theatre in the postmodern. In this chapter I am going to undertake a research on the elements of performances critics called grotesque and decide which trend of definition they belong. As most of the plays are also discussed as grotesques in Shakespeare criticism, I am going to compare the grotesques in theatre critiques to those described in chapter two. Next to this

major focus on comparisons, I am also going to emphasise points during my argumentation which are going to be relevant for my very last argument, a relation between my findings and poststructuralist subject theories. My research reaches back to ten years, so the critical reviews on theatre performances I undertook deal with performances between 2005 and 2015. The plays I introduce were named to be grotesque in some way or another in more than one published critique of the performance.

After twenty years of publishing his most famous book, Jan Kott has recently restated his well-known thesis on the contemporary nature of Shakespeare. He especially emphasizes the contemporary nature of *Hamlet*. *Hamlet* is a “transparent” play because contemporary features pierce the old text of *Hamlet*, says Kott. He also claims that Shakespeare is still our contemporary, not because of his text or because of academic discussions on him but it is the performance of Shakespeare in theatre that makes him contemporary.²⁷⁵ Similarly, Peter Brook claims that directors of Shakespeare plays should always interpret these plays and make them “modern” so the audience can come “into direct contact with the plays’ themes” and as a result “time and conventions [are going to] vanish.”²⁷⁶ In an interview given in 2009, Karin Beier, winner of the most eminent German Theatre Prize, The Faust, claims that directing Shakespeare needs courage because of the complexity of his plays. She claims that Shakespeare was a modern author because of two things. First, the texts give directors freedom to try out different forms of playing his plays and thus these texts are in close relation to the modern performative theatre. Secondly, Shakespeare, as all writers belonging to classic literature, deals with themes that Beier calls “the last things”. The plays raise existential questions.²⁷⁷ So Shakespeare is not only present (Kott) in the postmodern and should be

²⁷⁵ Kott, op. cit. Jan Kott, “Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary?” An interview with Jan Kott made public on You Tube on 08.07.2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDrGsrEZIfQ> access on 03.07.2014.

²⁷⁶ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin, 1990), 107.

²⁷⁷ My translation of “um die letzten Dinge.” In Dorothee Krings, “Shakespeare trifft einen im Kern des Daseins. Interview with Karin Beier” *Rheinische Post Online* (19 April 2014) <http://www.rp-online.de/panorama/wissen/shakespeare-trifft-einen-im-kern-des-daseins-aid-1.4183794> ; access on 15.7.2014

directed in a contemporary way (Brook) but the plays of Shakespeare are also open to innovative directions (Beier) in the sense of Lehmann's postdramatic theatre.

Shakespeare performances in Germany are strongly influenced by performance artists. In the following examples of Shakespeare productions the conventional theatre is 'disturbed' by techniques borrowed from performance arts and therefore the performances I discuss belong to the postdramatic theatre.²⁷⁸ Lehmann claims that postdramatic theatre wants to reach private engagement rather than a collective experience. In order to reach this effect, postdramatic theatre sacrifices synthesis, it gives up coherency. Thus "density of intensive moments" are achieved through the freedom of chaos.²⁷⁹ Instead of a hierarchy, on the top of which is the well-known text, the "non-hierarchy of images, movements and words" are put together as fragments, producing something that is similar to a collage.²⁸⁰ Lehmann compares the fragmented presentation of non-hierarchical elements to dream images, which recalls the etymology of the word grotesque discussed in the introduction, where I stated that the figures in Nero's palace were not only named *grottesca/grottesco* but also *sogni dei pittori* (dreams of painters). In Lehmann's postdramatic theatre the lack of hierarchy is disturbing for the audience, it makes no sense. Therefore the audience searches for "traces of connection" between the fragments of the performance text until it finds a kind of unity.²⁸¹ Lehmann claims that the performance text of the postdramatic theatre "becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information."²⁸² Lehmann lists eleven techniques that are typical of postdramatic theatre. I am going to read theatre reviews in this chapter in the context of postdramatic theatrical practice and relate these eleven

²⁷⁸ Lehmann claims that because of the mutual influence of theatre and performance arts, it becomes difficult to separate the two. He suggests that the new mixture of theatre and performance art should be named postdramatic theatre. Lehmann, op. cit. 134.

²⁷⁹ Lehmann, op. cit., 83.

²⁸⁰ Lehmann, op. cit., 84.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² Lehmann, op. cit., 85.

techniques to descriptions of the grotesque found in theatre critiques of postmodern Shakespeare performances.

The nature of the grotesque in German theatre performances will be described in the postdramatic theatre, which does not simply mean a text performed on stage. The Shakespearean text is not above but on the same level with light, costumes, stage props, etc. So the hierarchical position of a text is no longer valid in postdramatic theatre. Also, even if I discuss some elements of the performance text (eg. music, costumes, etc.) we have to bear in mind that the matrix of the performance text cannot be broken down into pieces, but it has to be considered as a whole. Lehmann claims that the performance text in postdramatic theatre is

not composed like a wall out of bricks but like a fabric out of threads. Consequently the significance of all individual elements ultimately depends on the way the whole is viewed, rather than constituting this overall effect as a sum of the individual parts.²⁸³

It is essential to see when something is named to be grotesque that it is the overall effect of these threads of the performance text that leads to such a conclusion. In the conclusion of the first chapter I have stated that postmodern grotesques are seen as a process, which also requires the research in which context the word 'grotesque' appears as not only the part of performance is described which evoked the grotesque but also the reactions on this part of performance text. The context becomes important not only from the perspective how Lehmann's postdramatic theatre works, but also from the perspective how postmodern grotesques work.

Lehmann describes that the effect of senselessness and confusion urges the audience to search for a meaning in theatre practice. Fischer-Lichte describes this phenomenon in theatre theory as *Schwellenerfahrung*. In the introduction I have already stated that this liminal experience is the realization of Brecht's requirement to promote the critical thinking of the

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

audience. Fischer-Lichte describes the *Schwelleenerfahrung* as the result of innovative theatre performances which confuse the usual interpretation of the audience as they do not fit this structure and require the audience that they build up new strategies of interpretation.²⁸⁴ Fischer-Lichte claims that this liminal experience is an aesthetic experience and that mediality plays a key role here. She emphasises the bodily presence and energy of the actors as a basis for this experience. We are going to see on concrete examples how essential the body and aura of actors as media are in postdramatic theatre.

If we compare Lehmann's description of the postdramatic theatre with the logic of the postdramatic grotesque theories, the *transgressive grotesque* and the *blurring grotesque*, we are going to find some parallel ideas. The *transgressive grotesque* trend of definition uses Bakhtin's idea of grotesque realism, which aims at transgressing rules but after the carnival is over people return to their normal way of life. The *blurring grotesque* trend of definition has ideas of Kayser as its basis and claims that the grotesque blurs the borders of usual structures, makes the recognition of these structures difficult and leaves the observer with the lack of structures. If compared to the postdramatic theatre of Lehmann, the *blurring grotesque* type of definition is closer to the aim of postdramatic theatres. Postdramatic theatre wants to confuse its audience through its fragmented, chaotic presentation of events, which should rather be experienced than understood. Although they disagree on the outcome, the two trends of postmodern grotesque definitions share two characteristic features: they are both considered to be a process (an artwork with its effect) and they both emphasise the central position of the audience/reader/observer. It is not difficult to compare the focus on audience experience to the postdramatic theatre as this is exactly its aim. Lehmann emphasises that postdramatic theatres are not representations but *events/situations* which open up a space for

²⁸⁴ Fischer-Lichte, "Ästhetische Erfahrung..." op. cit., 143-146.

communication and that this promotes self-awareness of all participants.²⁸⁵ That postdramatic theatres are rather a “process than product” results in the fragmentedness of these performances and in the audience position of continuously searching for connections among these fragments. Lehmann calls this *synaesthesia* and argues that

[p]erception always already functions *dialogically*, in such a way that the senses *respond* to the offers and demands of the environment, but at the same time also show a disposition first to construct the manifold into a texture of perception, i.e. to constitute a unity.²⁸⁶

Audiences of postdramatic theatres have to work on finding unity in the fragmented presentation and the experience of “disappointment, retreat and rediscovery” is a process they have to go through.²⁸⁷ With these comparisons of the postmodern grotesques to the postdramatic theatre, we have seen that the aims of the two are quite similar and that there are other elements that show similarities as well. These similarities allow for a more detailed comparison of concrete examples taken from performances.

In this chapter Shakespearean grotesques are going to be observed on the German stage. The theatre productions and theatre reviews (most of them) I am going to interpret are in German, so we have to have a look at what the German word “grotesk” means if compared to the English one. In the Duden dictionary the grotesque is described as an exaggeration or as a distortion of something. The effect of the grotesque is described as comic/weird or senseless.²⁸⁸ The German word “komisch” can mean comic but it can also mean weird. In the introduction to this paper I have used two definitions of the grotesque in the English language based on dictionary entries: “extremely different from what is expected or usual” and “comically or repulsively ugly or distorted” and “incongruous or inappropriate to a shocking

²⁸⁵ Lehmann, op. cit. 104-107.

²⁸⁶ His emphasis. Lehmann, op. cit., 85-86.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ My translation of “durch Übersteigerung und Verzerrung komisch oder unsinnig wirkend.” In Matthias Wermke, Kathrin Kundel-Razum and Werner Scholze-Stubenrecht eds., *Duden. Das Bedeutungswörterbuch* (Nördlingen: Dudenverlag, 2010), 458.

degree.”²⁸⁹ These descriptions of the grotesque do not considerably differ from the one that is commonly used in the German language. With this comparison I wanted to make sure that no meaning is lost in the translation from German into English.

3.1. "Shakespeare Once Again Our Contemporary",²⁹⁰ – Ostermeier's *Hamlet*

Hamlet is one of the most often directed Shakespearean tragedies in Germany. In the theatre season 2013/14 there were fifteen new directions of *Hamlet* with 211 performances all over Germany. *Hamlet* was the eleventh most frequently directed play in the statistics of the Deutscher Bühnenverein in this season.²⁹¹ If we have a look at the *Hamlet* productions in the last decade, the year 2008 seems to be the year of the play *Hamlet*. On the one hand the theatre in Stuttgart presented two *Hamlets*: a Volker Lösch direction with the topic of local politics and an attempted "pop-parody," a *Hamlet*-musical directed by the well-known late night TV show master Harald Schmidt.²⁹² On the other hand, two other theatres in Berlin (Maxim Gorki and Schaubühne) also came up with remarkable productions of the play. Anne Blankenberg claims that all these productions use the play *Hamlet* to decode their time.²⁹³ Nicoleta Cinpoes and Lawrence Guntner claim that the role of *Hamlet* in Europe is

no longer simply a vehicle for recovering, or creating, a national cultural memory but has become a trans-national, multi-cultural, "glocalized" site for positioning both play and protagonist between quickly changing geo-political developments and local events.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/grotesque>; access on 20.3.2015.

<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/grotesque>; access on 20.3.2015.

²⁹⁰ Jackie Fletcher, "Shakespeare Once Again Our Contemporary," *The British Theatre Guide* (16 July 2008).

<http://www.britishtheatreinfo.com/articles/160708e.htm>; access on 31.3.2015.

²⁹¹ Statistics of the Deutscher Bühnenverein for 2013/2014.

<http://www.buehnenverein.de/de/presse/presse-meldungen.html?det=427>; access on 13.9.2015.

²⁹² Anne Blankenberg names it a "Pop-Parodie," while Christopher Schmidt does not find real satire in this performance of pop songs. Compare: Anne Blankenberg, "Hamlet in Deutschland 1600 bis heute. Eine Bildgeschichte des Theaters," in Winrich Meiszies and Claudia Blank, *Sein oder Nichtsein. Hamlet auf dem deutschen Theater* (Leipzig: Henschel, 2014), 128. Christopher Schmidt, "Harald Schmidt in "Hamlet" – Musical Bimmel und Bommel in Helsingör," *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung* (17 May 2010). <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/harald-schmidt-in-hamlet-musical-bimmel-und-bommel-in-helsingoer-1.525544>; access on 2.3.2015.

²⁹³ Blankenberg, op. cit., 128-9.

²⁹⁴ Nicoleta Cinpoes and Lawrence Guntner, "Looking for his "Part": Performing Hamlet in New Millennium Europe," *Testi e Linguaggi* (July 2013), 284.

In the 1990s *Hamlet* was used by Heiner Müller to deal with the divided and re-united Germany. Two decades later, *Hamlet* productions in 2008 focused on local politics (director Volker Lösch in Stuttgart) as well as questions on globalisation (director Thomas Ostermeier in Berlin), rather than national issues. Cinpoes and Guntner name these two productions “anything-goes-*Hamlet*” because of their reference to local and global, i.e. ‘glocal’ issues.²⁹⁵ I believe that staging a Denmark in crisis is an appropriate way to deal with the financial crisis in 2008 and it may be one reason for the frequency of new directions in this year.

In theatre reviews on Shakespeare performances between 2005 and 2015, elements in Thomas Ostermeier’s *Hamlet* direction were most frequently named grotesque. Thomas Ostermeier directed *Hamlet* at the Schaubühne Berlin in 2008. The premiere was in Athens in the same year. The play has been performed on several other stages and again at the Schaubühne since then. The reviews I use describe the performance in Berlin, in Sidney (2010), in London (2011) and in Dublin (2014). The success of the performance was so immense that after the London performance the job to direct the Royal Shakespeare Company was offered to Ostermeier.²⁹⁶ The direction of Ostermeier is based on a modern translation of *Hamlet* by a contemporary dramatist, Marius von Mayenburg. The play is performed by only six actors with the consequence that several actors play double roles.²⁹⁷ The character Hamlet is played only by Lars Eidinger. The stage setting created by Jan Pappelbaum is covered with earth. In the back of the stage a long table is hidden behind a golden chain curtain. Both the table and the curtain can be moved off stage, thus gaining an extra space.

Before interpreting what was named grotesque by theatre critics, I am going to report on the view of critics on Ostermeier’s style of direction and on the effect of this *Hamlet*

²⁹⁵ Cinpoes and Guntner, op. cit., 288.

²⁹⁶ Gerhard Jörder, *Ostermeier. Backstage* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2014), 113.

²⁹⁷ Ophelia and Gertrude are both played by Judith Rosmair. The ghost of old Hamlet and Claudius are played by Urs Jucker. Polonius and Osrik are played by Robert Beyer. Horatio and Guildenstern are played by Sebastian Schwarz, while Laertes and Rosencrantz are played by Franz Hartwig.

production. Peter Crawley claims that the program policy of the Schaubühne is to “treat classics as though they were new plays” because “a classic is always ripe for re-evaluation and substantial renovation.”²⁹⁸ Ostermeier does that in the style of the “in yer face” British plays, some of which he directed in Berlin, where he worked as the artistic director of the Baracke theatre between 1996 and 1999.²⁹⁹ Ostermeier also worked with Sarah Kane at that time and she influenced him so much that he claims that “there is a lot of Sarah Kane in everything I do.”³⁰⁰ Ostermeier has a reputation of being an iconoclast.³⁰¹ On an international symposium on his work; Marvin Carlson points out Ostermeier’s “capitalist realism” as a “consistent and defining thread uniting much of his work.”³⁰² Hogan writes in an interview with Ostermeier that his aim with the *Hamlet* performance was to “shake up the conventions of theatre”.³⁰³ Fletcher remarks that the production is “remarkably inventive.”³⁰⁴ Benjamin Flower claims that it is a performance that “taxed, affronted and exhilarated audiences” and that this production challenges aesthetic conventions.³⁰⁵ Thus, it is an exemplary performance in the sense of Lehmann’s postdramatic theatre.³⁰⁶

Three critics find the grotesque already in the opening scene of the performance. The mourning court gathers to bury the king. It becomes clear that the whole stage covered with

²⁹⁸ Peter Crawley, “Ostermeier’s ‘Hamlet’: what did you expect?” *The Irish Times* (26 Sept 2014). <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/ostermeier-s-hamlet-what-did-you-expect-1.1901339>; access on 4.3.2015

²⁹⁹ Emma Hogan, “Deutsche bard,” *Financial Times* (25 November 2011). <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/6f0ea1b4-edc5-11e0-a9a9-00144feab49a.html#axzz3Vy6B7fw>; access on 31. 3. 2015.

³⁰⁰ Andrew Dickson, “Thomas Ostermeier: ‘Hamlet? The play’s a mess’” *The Guardian* (13 Nov 2011). <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/nov/13/thomas-ostermeier-hamlet-schaubuhne>; access on 10.3.2015

³⁰¹ Crawley, op. cit.

³⁰² Peter M. Boenisch, Clare Finburgh, Vicky Angelaki and Daniel Hetherington, *Thomas Ostermeier. Reinventing Directors Theatre at the Schaubühne Berlin*. An International Symposium. Programme Booklet, 22. http://www.cssd.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Thomas_Ostermeier_Programme_Booklet.pdf; access on 11.3.2015

³⁰³ Hogan, op. cit.

³⁰⁴ Fletcher, op. cit.

³⁰⁵ Benjamin Flower, “Hamlet performed at Schaubühne am Leniner Platz,” *Shakespeare Bulletin* Vol. 31. No 4. (Winter 2013), 738.

³⁰⁶ Flower, op. cit., 745.

earth is actually an “open grave.”³⁰⁷ The gravedigger is hardly able to do his job and let the coffin disappear under the earth. This slapstick is supported by an actor holding a hosepipe, producing rain which makes the earth wet and the work of the gravedigger even more difficult. Raudszus names this scene a “grotesque play,” a farce of the sincere funeral.³⁰⁸ It is a long time during which nothing is said. Hamlet’s clownish character emerges in this scene early on, when he falls into the grave face down and has his mouth full of earth when he stands up. Jackie Fletcher observes the “nervous laugh” of the audience as a reaction to this scene. She claims that this scene sets the grotesque tone of the whole performance and adds that the tone of the performance is “as ironical and farcical as it is grotesque.”³⁰⁹ Till Führer also considers the importance of this first scene because it introduces the style of the whole play. Based on this beginning, the play is going to be “muddy, dramatic, with much bodily presence and sometimes foolish grotesque,” claims Führer.³¹⁰ In this paragraph I would only like to comment on the dramatic and foolish grotesque Führer describes. Bodily presence is discussed in the next paragraph. Before I interpret these remarks, let me mention another example where not the first scene is named grotesque but various parts of the performance. David Nice is harsh in his critique on the performance but he admits that “younger spectators roared their way through grotesquerie surely designed to freeze every laugh in its track.”³¹¹ The grotesque described by Raudszus, Fletcher and Führer is a grotesque which emphasises the mixture of comic and tragic elements and the grotesqueness evolves from this unusual match. The unusual nature of this match can be seen on the audience’s nervous or freezing

³⁰⁷ Kate Kellaway, “Hamlet: Schaubühne Berlin – review,” *The Guardian* (4 Dec 2011). <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2011/dec/04/schaubuhne-berlin-hamlet-shakespeare-review>; access on 11.3.2015.

³⁰⁸ My translation of “Ein groteskes Schauspiel, das die Farce der ernsthaften, pietätvollen Beerdigung aufzeigt.” Malte Raudszus, “Thomas Ostermeier inszeniert in der Berliner Schaubühne Shakespeare’s ‘Hamlet,’” *Egotrip* (22 Sept 2013). <http://www.egotrip.de/?p=5364>; access on 17.4.2015.

³⁰⁹ Fletcher, op. cit.

³¹⁰ My translation of “Schon am Beginn also eine Reduktion des Abends: es wird dreckig, körperlich, hochdramatisch und einige Male klamaukhaft grotesk.” In Till Führer, “Livekritik zu Hamlet,” *Livekritik* (17 March 2014). <http://www.livekritik.de/livekritiken/livekritik-von-till-fuehrer-zu-hamlet/>; access on 14.9.2015.

³¹¹ David Nice, “Hamlet, Schaubühne Berlin, Barbican Theatre,” *The Art Desk* (2 Dec 2011). <http://www.theartdesk.com/theatre/hamlet-schaub%C3%BChne-berlin-barbican-theatre>; access on 4.3.2015

laugh, described by Fletcher and Nice, instead of a free laugh. Other critics also noted the mixture of tragic and comic elements in the performance. Kate Kellaway describes the play as “black comedy,” Christine Wahl realises a lot of “trash” which is sometimes more and sometimes less funny.³¹² Daisy Bowie-Sell writes: “it is amazing how funny this tragic play becomes...the desperate madness and bleak humour you witness onstage is compelling nonetheless.”³¹³ The character of Hamlet described as grotesque in Shakespeare criticism also shows the traits of tragic and comic. Farnham sees Hamlet as a grotesque character as he picks up the role of the clown although he is a prince.³¹⁴ Kott also emphasises the clownish nature of Hamlet and names his language to be “our modern grotesque.”³¹⁵ We could say that the way these critics see the grotesque in Ostermeier’s *Hamlet* is compatible with the way Shakespeare criticism sees the grotesque in *Hamlet*, namely, it is an unusual mixture of tragic and comic.

Next to the above described opening scene, Hamlet as a character played by Lars Eidinger was also named grotesque. Emma Hogan claims that Ostermeier’s direction “manages to convey his seriousness with an easy manner.” She continues that Eidinger makes Hamlet

...both profound and entertaining. In the production Eidinger leaps on tables, shouts his “To be or not to be” speech over and over, and acts the part of a gloriously grotesque court clown. This oddly compelling obnoxiousness is helped by a sympathetically modern translation.³¹⁶

Eidinger’s Hamlet as a gloriously grotesque clown is referred to as something overwhelming but unpleasant. Let us start with Hamlet’s obnoxiousness. This Hamlet has nothing to do with

³¹² Kellaway, op. cit. Christine Wahl, “Der kleine Horrorladen,” *Der Tagesspiegel* (19 Sept 2008). <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/berliner-schaubuehne-der-kleine-horrorladen/1328296.html>; access on 11.3.2015.

³¹³ Daisy Bowie-Sell, “Hamlet, Schaubühne Berlin, Barbican, review,” *The Telegraph* (2 Dec 2011). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/8931119/Hamlet-Schaubuhne-Berlin-Barbican-review.html>; access on 11.3.2015.

³¹⁴ Farnham, op. cit., 114.

³¹⁵ Kott, op. cit., 132.

³¹⁶ Hogan, op. cit.

the handsome romantic view on Hamlet. He has a beer gut and an “antic disposition” (Act 1, scene 5, line 170) that Fletcher describes to be a Tourette’s Syndrome, while Blankenberg claims Hamlet is “the insane in a bad mood, who has multiple personalities and borderline personality disorder.”³¹⁷ Other critics also tried to describe his behaviour. Fletcher claims that “Eidinger’s madness is that of a misbehaving and frustrated youth” whose obsession with corruption drives him into real madness.³¹⁸ According to Nicoleta Cinpoes and Lawrence Guntner, Lars Eidinger’s Hamlet “lacked any hint of introspective melancholy and acted out ‘the antic disposition’ with vigorous enthusiasm to the excess.”³¹⁹ These views correspond with the way the director sees the character Hamlet. Ostermeier claims that he sees the personality of Hamlet to be, in simple terms, a “spoiled brat.”³²⁰ In another interview with Susan Shineberg he adds that Hamlet is “the mad fool being a naughty little boy and taking liberties.”³²¹ Hamlet’s obnoxiousness lies in the ungentlemanly, sometimes disgusting way he behaves. Let us now see Hogan’s description of the gloriously grotesque clown as “oddly compelling.” I interpret here compelling as something overwhelming because of his physical presence. I have read out physical presence from the words that describe his physical activity (“leaps on tables, shouts ... over and over”). Here I also refer back to Führer’s description of the play “with much bodily presence.”³²² The performance is dominated by the actor Eidinger, who leaves the stage only once during the whole 165 minutes of uninterrupted production. Eidinger organises a hip-hop concert on the wedding ceremony, attempts to rape Ophelia, madly splatters his naked body with blood and milk and appears to have uncontrolled convulsions, fences with Laertes and plays a part in the mouse-trap scene himself. Raudszus

³¹⁷ In the Arden edition of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* “antic disposition” is described as “wild, fantastic or clownish manner or behavior.” In Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. op. cit., 225. Fletcher, op. cit. Blankenberg, op. cit.

³¹⁸ Fletcher, op. cit.

³¹⁹ Cinpoes and Guntner, op. cit., 287-8.

³²⁰ Crawley, op. cit.

³²¹ Susan Shineberg, “Sorrows come in battalions,” *The Sydney Morning Herald* (4 January 2010).

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/entertainment/arts/sorrows-come-in-battalions/2010/01/03/1262453533859.html?page=3>; access on 31.3.2015.

³²² Führer, op. cit.

describes all this as Eidingers' "physical omnipresence."³²³ Crawley claims that Hamlet becomes a star of his tragicomedy.³²⁴ I have interpreted the grotesque Hogan uses for Hamlet as a result of Eidingers' enormous physical presence during the performance and as a result of his disgusting behaviour.

Hogan and Führer describe the physical presence of Eidingers as grotesque in their critiques. The actor's physical presence is in the centre of attention in Lehmann's postdramatic theatre. Lehmann describes the function of *physicality* i.e. the physical presence of actors not as a "carrier of meaning" but as a body without signification.³²⁵ Eidingers should still represent Hamlet, but he has liberties in how he is doing that. The reason for this freedom is that Eidingers may go on his borders when he acts out madness. Ostermeier claims if he told Eidingers that he "can't do something because it's distasteful – which it is a lot of times – then there wouldn't be a true meeting of madness and the danger of madness."³²⁶ Ostermeier admits that "sometimes [he] has to swallow [his] anger because [Eidingers] doesn't always hit the points he should – but it's the part of the freedom he got."³²⁷ The freedom of an actor to choose the way to act out a madman and a clown bears a double freedom. In the end of the second chapter I have stated that there are key roles from which position the freedom of speech is granted. Such a position is also the clown's and that of a madman. I have stated that Hamlet as a character is an example for the *blurring grotesque*, one of the two trends of defining the grotesque in the postmodern. As argued in Shakespeare criticism, he picks up the role of the clown although he is a prince and this makes him act out and blur two roles. Not only the two roles are mixed, but the two positions of these roles. The prince is a position in the existing order (here the Kingdom of Denmark) and the role of the clown and madman is a role that is outside this structure and thus has the liberty of criticism. Interestingly enough, the

³²³ My translation of "physische Omnipräsenz." In Raudszus, op. cit.

³²⁴ Crawley, op. cit.

³²⁵ Lehmann, op. cit. 95-96.

³²⁶ Crawley, op. cit.

³²⁷ Crawley, op. cit.

freedom of speech or rather action is not only granted for Hamlet as a character in his play, but Eidinger, the interpreter of Hamlet has also freedom in how he acts out the freedom of a mad fool. The mad fool is a position which is typically grotesque in Shakespeare criticism and which is mirrored as grotesque in the Ostermeier production as well. The way Eidinger embodies the mad fool is disgusting because it is not conform to the role of the prince. However, the way he acts is very well 'conform' to the role of a mad fool, whose role is to be non-conform.

Another element of Lehmann's postdramatic theatre is the *irruption of the real*, which is closely related to *physicality* as well as to the role of the mad fool to criticise existing structures. *Postdramatic theatre* does not have the aim to create illusion on stage but it focuses on the presence of actors instead. The border between reality of the audience and the illusion acted out on stage is thus blurred.³²⁸ Lars Eidinger is not only over-present on stage but he also enters the space of the audience on more occasions. At one time he explains Laertes that his (Hamlet's) madness is responsible for Ophelia's death. After finishing his speech, Hamlet rushes between the sitting audience and pushes imaginary swords into their hearts. Benjamin Flower claims that when Eidinger leaves the stage and acts out his madness among the sitting audience, "the boundary between a performed madness and its reality broke down."³²⁹ Raudszus is also not sure about whether this action was still part of the direction or it was a point where the situation threatened to run out of control.³³⁰ These descriptions make me claim that this was an example for Lehmann's *irruption of the real*. Lehmann claims that the aim of this technique is "the unsettling that occurs through the *indecidability* whether one is dealing with reality or fiction."³³¹ The performance of Eidinger reminds me of the *teatro del grottesco* where Pirandello problematizes the border between the social mask and identity.

³²⁸ Lehmann, op. cit. 100-104.

³²⁹ Flower, op. cit., 738.

³³⁰ My translation of "...der Zuschauer beginnt sich zu fragen „ist das noch Teil des Stücks oder eskaliert die Situation bereits?“" Raudszus, op. cit.

³³¹ His emphasis. Lehmann, op. cit., 101.

Although the social mask is an opposition to identity, it is a feigned identity, in the end it becomes part of the identity.³³² In the case of Eidinger as Hamlet, we could see that he picks up the mask of being insane but as the performance proceeds, and he contacts the audience, one is no longer sure that even the actor Eidinger is completely sane. I have claimed in the previous chapters that the *blurring grotesque* blurs borders of existing structures but I have not concretised which structures are meant. In this example the existing structure is the division of illusion and reality. Therefore this example may well be named *blurring grotesque*. Let us see another example for the *irruption of the real* where the borders between real and illusion are destroyed. Eidinger asks whether he is really guilty in the case of Ophelia's death and expects a real answer from the audience. Raudszus describes this part of the performance so:

It is not a rhetorical question, it is a real question and he is waiting until someone answers. And then he starts arguing. The audience feels itself under pressure, it is not a convenient lean-back and enjoy theatre, one feels forced to say something actively.³³³

Essential in this description is not only that it is an example of the *irruption of the real*, but that it creates the feeling that one needs to react, it evokes action. It is an uneasy situation where illusion and reality are not separated any more as audience members are asked questions about the story. An even more important element described here is the pressure and the feeling of the critic that he has to say something, that he has to react.

These two examples are not explicitly named grotesque in the critiques. However, I am going to argue that they are *blurring grotesque*. Each technique which was named grotesque by the critics is also a strategy of the *postdramatic theatre*. This would not mean that each postdramatic technique is also grotesque. However, critics also named contemporary

³³² Townhill, op. cit., 85.

³³³ My translation of "Er fragt nicht rhetorisch, er fragt tatsächlich und er wartet bis er eine Antwort erhält. Und dann diskutiert er. Der Zuschauer fühlt sich seltsam bedrängt, dies ist kein angenehmes lean back and enjoy-theatre, man fühlt sich genötigt aktiv etwas zu sagen." Raudszus, op. cit.

theatre as such grotesque (detailed argument follows later), so I may well argue that *postdramatic theatre* techniques are grotesque - not every single one separated from the other but as a group. The above described scenes are examples of Lehman's *irruption of the real*, which is a technique of the *postdramatic theatre* where the borders of illusion and reality are blurred so that the audience has no idea where to fix these borders. Critics described the *physicality* as well as the disgusting nature of Eidingen's performance grotesque (Hogan and Führer). The *irruption of the real* cannot be described without Eidingen's physical presence, which is even stronger when he enters the space of the audience and any time he does that the audience feels itself uneasy because of the norm-breaking way Eidingen behaves. This behaviour is granted him because he possesses the role of a mad fool. Based on the descriptions of Hogan and Führer, I name the techniques of *physicality* and the *irruption of the real* as it is described in the above examples a *blurring grotesque*.

The last group of critics named the Ostermeier production grotesque as a whole and then gave references to techniques in the theatre that are inventive. Basically these critics name *postdramatic theatre* techniques in general grotesque. Jackie Fletcher's article has the title Shakespeare "Once Again Our Contemporary" and she starts her article with the following sentence: "Ostermeier has the reputation for grotesque interpretation of the classics."³³⁴ She continues with the description of the innovative approach of Ostermeier. Leaving the grotesque further undefined, she suggests that it simply means contemporary theatre. Later she writes that the performance is "remarkably inventive" and that "if you know the play well, you are still kept on the edge of your seat, never quite knowing what to expect next." She claims that it is an epic theatre in the Shakespearean and the Brechtian sense of the term, which I interpret as a reference to *postdramatic theatre* which requires audiences to search new ways to interpret the performance. Augusta Supple lists the names of stage

³³⁴ Fletcher, op. cit.

designers and ends her sentence so: [they] “create an earthbound world in which the life of the characters seems to be grotesque and gaudy.”³³⁵ Then she continues listing names responsible for video and music in the production. In such a context it is hard to say what Supple meant by grotesque. If I consider the word gaudy in the light of other critiques, it seems to be a reference to the over-presence of Eidinger, which can well be named extravagantly showy, even tasteless. The word grotesque is embedded here in a list of names responsible for different tasks during the performance, so it suggests as if everything put together evoked the grotesque in this performance. For those who are used to the tradition of text-based theatre but not the democratic view of the performance text, *postdramatic theatre* productions, such as Ostermeier’s *Hamlet*, might look cold. Lehmann claims that the *coldness* of the *postdramatic theatre* lies in “the ‘dethroning’ of linguistic signs and the de-psychologisation.”³³⁶ David Nice is not at all fond of Ostermeier’s performance and criticises exactly those points which make the performance a postdramatic one. Nice names it a “*Hamlet cabaret*” and points out that in London, Shakespeare as a text is more respected than it obviously is in Berlin. Nice names himself “conservative” in this respect. For him the *Hamlet* played by Eidinger lacks “interior pathos” and portrays a “largely grotesque-burlesque prince” who cannot be taken seriously.³³⁷ Nice describes the main point of *postdramatic theatres* in a form of a critique: “all the pointedly theatrical stuff becomes otiose with so much business to audience with the lights up.” He describes the fragmented nature of the performance as useless and alludes to the *irruption of the real* when he describes “much business to the audience with the lights up.” He notices it but fails to appreciate that senselessness is an essential part of *postdramatic theatres*.

³³⁵ Augusta Supple, “Hamlet/Schaubühne Berlin and Sydney Festival,” *Australian Stage* (11 January 2010). <http://www.australianstage.com.au/201001113101/reviews/sydney-festival/hamlet-|schaubuhne-berlin-sydney-festival.html>; access on 31.3.2015.

³³⁶ Lehmann, op. cit., 95.

³³⁷ Nice, op. cit.

As a conclusion it can be stated that critics name the opening scene of Ostermeier's *Hamlet* production grotesque because it is a mixture of tragedy and comedy. This tragi-comic touch becomes relevant for the whole atmosphere of the performance. Also, the way Lars Eidinger acts Hamlet is called grotesque because of the showy and disgusting way he does that and because of his over-presence on and off stage. Eidinger's playing embodies *physicality* and evokes the *irruption of the real* – typical elements of Lehmann's *postdramatic theatre*. The last group of critics did not specify the meaning of the grotesque. I interpreted from the textual context in which they used the word grotesque that they simply meant the postdramatic nature of the production under grotesque. The role of Hamlet as a mad fool was also seen as grotesque. Hamlet's role as a mad fool liberates him from the rules of society and grants him a freedom of action and speech. This role also contributes to the *blurring grotesque* as the mad fool is allowed to behave in an inconvenient way and force the audience to react.

3.2. "Pure Loss of Control" – Ostermeier-Macras Production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*³³⁸

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the most popular of the Shakespearean comedies in Germany. In the statistics of the Deutscher Bühnenverein for the theatre season 2013/14, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the eighth most frequently directed play in Germany.³³⁹

Thomas Ostermeier co-directed *Ein Sommernachtstraum frei nach William Shakespeare* with the choreographer Constanza Macras for the Athens & Epidaurus Festival in 2006. The very first performance took place under the address Piraeus 260, a huge place in an industry quarter between Athens and Piraeus. This production is still in repertoire at the

³³⁸ My translation of "Kontrollverlust pur." In Christine Dössel, "Das Tier in dir," *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (06 July 2006): 11.

³³⁹ Statistics of the Deutscher Bühnenverein, op. cit.

Schaubühne Berlin. Jan Pappelbaum created a two-story stage setting in a “seventies-retro-look porch-lounge” with garlands, balloons, paper snakes and two couches.³⁴⁰ Downstairs there is place enough for parties and upstairs is a balcony with doors leading to bedrooms. The audience enters the ‘theatre’ through the stage. Each member of the audience is greeted by the actors in colourful dresses with kisses and something to drink. The music band led by Alex Nowitz plays party music.

The title, ‘*A Midsummer Night’s Dream after William Shakespeare*’ means in times of the postdramatic theatre that elements of Shakespeare’s play will be recognisable in the performance. This is a usual praxis with classics like Shakespeare, and even Barbara Villiger Heilig, who formulates a harsh critique on this production, claims that some parts of the text and the pairs of Oberon/Titania, Hermina/Demetrius and Helena/Lysander are enough to call the play *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.³⁴¹ In an interview for the *Berliner Zeitung* Ostermeier admits that he normally relies on the dramatic text much more in his directions. However, in this co-production with Macras, the co-directors decided to let the dancers and actors improvise freely. Constanza Macras, responsible for the dancers, explains that the Shakespearean text was rather used as a frame-story. Such an improvisation is only possible because the story is well-known. Macras adds that they searched for the basic action in each scene and used these as a basis for improvisations.³⁴² Ostermeier claims that *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is very modern if we look at the “disorientation in love affairs” as it questions monogamy and love that lasts for ever.³⁴³ He adds that with their movements, the dancers could add an erotic touch to this production that would be impossible to achieve with a group of actors.

³⁴⁰ Dössel, op. cit.

³⁴¹ Barbara Villiger Heilig, “Das Lächeln einer Altweibersommernacht,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (04 Sept 2006). <http://www.nzz.ch/aktuell/startseite/articleEFVIZ-1.57701>; access on 2.1.2015.

³⁴² Michaela Schlagenwerth, “Desorientierung in Liebesdingen,” *Berliner Zeitung* (01 Sept 2006). <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/schaubuehne--constanza-macras-und-thomas-ostermeier-ueber-ihren--sommernachtstraum--desorientierung-in-liebesdingen,10810590,10415950.html>; access on 3.1.2015.

³⁴³ My translation of “Desorientierung in Liebesdingen” in Schlagenwerth, op. cit.

Rüdiger Schaper names the performance “a brutal grotesque... a dance with the devil in the style of Ghelderode (*Balade Du Grand Macabre*).”³⁴⁴ Schaper claims that language is lost in the performance and thus bodies overtake communication: “They pull, kick, fasten, foul in a painful way until they are exhausted.”³⁴⁵ So Schaper’s “brutal grotesque” refers to the brutality of body encounters. *Physicality*, the centre of postdramatic theatre is enormous due to the presence of professional dancers. Elastic T-shirts are used to keep contact between bodies until the garments could not stretch anymore and are torn apart in the fierceness of movements. Christina Dössel names the spectacular movements an “expressive body-theatre.”³⁴⁶ This body theatre is used to express affection, as well as disgust, longing as well as pain, sex as well as violence. The actors and dancers wear knee braces to protect themselves. The movements are chaotic and exhausting: bodies fly, bump into each other and rub against each other to the music of Händel, hard rock or electro-pop. The bodies not only behave like animals, they also wear animal masks at some occasions. Katrin Bettina Müller claims this production to be “cruel, clownish, animalistic, artistic.”³⁴⁷ Schaper argues that it is Macras’ specialty to organize a “violence party” and that this energy is cooled down by the scenic direction of Ostermeier.³⁴⁸

Let me describe two additional examples where the physicality of the performance is underlined. After the audience enters the theatre through the stage and the conventional places of audience and stage are re-established, the performers begin to dance. This dance ends with the striptease of Lars Eidinger. After getting rid of his black thong, the audience can see his phallus pushed through a paper mask. This mask speaks directly to the audience, synchronised

³⁴⁴ My translation of “Eine brutale Grotteske ... einen Teufelstanz im Stil von Ghelderode („Der große Makabre”).” In Rüdiger Schaper, “Fliegen lernen,” *Der Tagesspiegel* (02 July 2006). <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/fliegen-lernen/727002.html>; access on 2.1.2015.

³⁴⁵ My translation of “Schmerzhaft, bis zur Erschöpfung wird gezogen, getreten, geklammert, gefoult.” In Schaper, op. cit.

³⁴⁶ My translation of “expressive Körpertheater.” In Dössel, op. cit.

³⁴⁷ My translation of “grausam, clownesk, animalisch, artistisch.” In Katrin Bettina Müller, “Mit vollem Risiko,” *Die Tageszeitung* (04 Sept 2006). <http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/?dig=2006/09/04/a0215>; access on 3.1.2015.

³⁴⁸ Schaper, op. cit.

by the voice of Eidinger. The mask recites the Prologue to the craftsmen's play in the very last act. This image is repeated in the end of the performance where Puck's phallus speaks the Epilogue. The mouth, tongue and phallus recall open places of the body described by Bakhtin. The mask can also be interpreted as travesties of the carnival.³⁴⁹ However, the visual effect of a speaking phallus is one where physicality overwhelms if compared to the text recited. In the second example, one dancer has a costume which makes her look like the naked Venus of Willendorf. The fatness of the body is combined here with the elegant dance and slapstick. The heavy breasts jump during the elegant dance and hit the dancer on the head. This short dance had no 'message', it was the pure physicality of the body present. These examples underline *physicality*. However, Schaper sees the grotesque in the brutal way bodies encounter each other. He sees the reason for the over-emphasis of body language in the loss of language. Of course language is not completely lost in the performance but it plays a minor role if compared to body language. This postdramatic theatre technique is called by Lehmann the *parataxis*. *Parataxis* means that all the different genres employed during the performance (dance, narrative theatre, performance art) are "employed with equal weighing."³⁵⁰ Because the audience can never know when an 'important' fragment appears in the performance, it exercises "evenly hovering attention," searching for connections and correspondences in the performance.³⁵¹ Critics of the Ostermeier-Macras performance remarked that the text is not as important as movements.³⁵² Müller has a very poetic formulation for this: "Truth appears here as physical truth."³⁵³ I have interpreted Schaper's "brutal grotesque" as a result of two postdramatic theatre techniques: *physicality* and *parataxis*.

³⁴⁹ It was surprising that I have not read anything about the Bakhtinian grotesque in the critiques.

³⁵⁰ Lehmann, op. cit., 87.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² Compare with the original text: "... von den Sprachduellen nur ein kleiner Teil geblieben ist." In Müller, op. cit. Alternatively, compare: "Der Text bleibt weitgehend auf der Strecke." In Dössel, op. cit.

³⁵³ My translation of "Die Wahrheit versucht hier, als physische Wahrhaftigkeit aufzutreten." In Müller, op. cit.

Christine Dössel paints a bit more complicated picture of what the grotesque is in the Ostermeier-Macras production. She names the production a “sex party” in her critique in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. To be exact, it is described as a “lustfully charged, grotesquely excessive, ecstatic sex party with a Babylonian confusion of language and with cumulative brutality as well as animalism in the encounter of bodies.”³⁵⁴ I have already described what is meant by the “brutality as well as animalism in the encounter of bodies” in the previous paragraph. The “Babylonian confusion of language” is discussed in the following paragraph. Here I want to focus on the rest of Dössel’s description in order to interpret the grotesque. Dössel names the production a sex party and with this statement she names the main topic of the performance: “It is about Eros, violence and body, about attraction and repulsion, about lust and pain.”³⁵⁵ In addition to that, Dössel uses the following words to describe the performance: charged, excessive, ecstatic, cumulative. I interpret these words as expressions of the ab-normal. Following my line of argumentation, these are examples for a postdramatic theatre technique. Lehmann describes *plethora* as “exceeding the norm,” as the rejection of conventionalised forms (such as unity, self-identity). He claims that “the refusal of the normalized form of the image is often realized by way of recourse to *extremes*.”³⁵⁶ Dössel describes an example for the ab-normal in the frequency of role and gender changes during the performance. There are only performers in this production, and the roles do not belong to one or to the other, but they are picked up and thrown away as fast as the performers move on stage. Hereby gender compatibility is not respected. Most men wear for a shorter or longer time garments that are obviously made for women. A silver bra, a red night dress, skirts ensure that the audience cannot be sure about the gender of the character performed by male actors and dancers. It is Barbara Villiger Heilig’s major point of criticism that there are no

³⁵⁴ My translation of “als geil aufgeladene, grotesk überdrehte, babylonisch sprachverwirrte, körperlich immer brutaler und animalischer in die Ekstase getriebene Sexparty.” In Dössel, op. cit.

³⁵⁵ My translation of “Es geht um Eros, Gewalt und Körper, um Anziehung und Abstoßung, Begierde und Schmerz.” In Dössel, op. cit.

³⁵⁶ His emphasis. Lehmann, op. cit., 90.

identities the actors can lose as they have no specific one from the beginning. Without building up one identity, it cannot be lost.³⁵⁷ Critics agree that the role of Puck is played most of the time by Robert Bayer and Titania is played by Bettina Hoppe.³⁵⁸ Dössel names the frequent exchange of gender and roles as a “pure loss of control.”³⁵⁹ I have interpreted Dössel’s description of the grotesque as result of theatre techniques called *physicality* and *plethora*. As I have discussed *physicality* in the previous paragraph, I focused here on *plethora*. I see *plethora* in the continuous gender and role changes during the performance as this practice refuses the conventionalized unities of role and gender.

An additional grotesque element of this production according to Vito Pinto, Dössel and Schaper is the play with the voices of the actors.³⁶⁰ Not only identities are exchanged in the Ostermeier-Macras production but languages and voices of the actors are also exchanged. Dössel names this phenomenon a “Babylonian confusion of language,” while Schaper states that language is lost in this performance.³⁶¹ We see two actors on stage. Both of them move their lips but only one of them speaks. The one speaking is, however, not in his own role but in the role of the other character on stage. The actor speaking only synchronises the one moving his/her lips. Pinto calls this “sonic cross-dressing” after Tiina Rosenberg and claims that the Ostermeier-Macras production drives this technique to its extremes and thus turns the technique into ridiculous grotesque.³⁶² Pinto names it to be a “grotesque scene” when two actors move their lips on stage but only one of them speaks in the name of the other.³⁶³ Pinto describes that the audience reacts with irritation to this scene. After Gereon Blaseio, Pinto claims that we cannot experience a voice without its gender, i.e. when we hear a voice, we

³⁵⁷ Heilig, op. cit.

³⁵⁸ Dössel, op. cit. and Schaper, op. cit.

³⁵⁹ My translation of “Kontrollverlust pur.” In Dössel, op. cit.

³⁶⁰ Vito Pinto “Das Spiel mit dem vertauschten Geschlecht »sonic cross-dressing«,” in *Stimmen auf der Spur* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2012), 63-66.

³⁶¹ My translation of “babylonisch sprachverwirrt.” In Dössel, op. cit. See also Schaper, op. cit.

³⁶² My translation of “Stimmen-Transvestismus” and “Grotesk-Lächerliche.” In Pinto, op. cit., 64. Tiina Rosenberg, “Stimmen der Queer-Diven: Hosenrollen in der Oper und Zarah Leander auf der Schlagerbühne,” in Doris Kolesch, Vito Pinto and Jenny Schrödl eds., *Stimm-Welten* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2008), 193.

³⁶³ My translation of “groteske Szene” in Pinto, op. cit., 65.

also know the gender of the speaker. Jenny Schrödl claims that this unity of body and voice is systematically used by contemporary theatre performances to cause irritation in the audience by separating body and voice. Schrödl names this theatre technique the "vocal travesty".³⁶⁴ As vocal travesty separates the unity of body and voice, it is also an example of Lehmann's *plethora*.

The "evenly hovering attention" of the audience is the result of the *parataxis*, which is caused by the dominance of *physicality* and the 'loss' of language in this performance. The professional dancers can move their bodies in a seemingly unnatural way. Ostermeier claims that the dancers and actors go beyond the limits of their bodies through movements.³⁶⁵ Then comes the exchangeability of gender, role and the division of body-voice, which is a rejection of the conventionalised actor-role, actor-gender and actor-voice unities and a technique called *plethora*. I argue that Dössel's expression of "pure loss of control" is actually true for the whole performance. There is no text to give a form to the story, i.e. there is no story. There are no fixed roles and genders. Müller claims that the performance text "does not occupy or set limits to audience imagination but it continuously provides a new impulse of showing love, even though it is received with irritation."³⁶⁶ Müller claims that leaving pictures open to interpretation is an obvious influence of Macras in this production. The whole performance seems to be a *Schwellenerfahrung* after Fischer-Lichte because of the lack of structures described above make the audience search new interpretive strategies. I argue that the *blurring grotesque* is the result of the co-presence of three postdramatic theatre techniques: *physicality*, *plethora* and *parataxis*. Parataxis makes sure that the audience has no 'leading text' it can rely on. Instead, emphasised *physicality* appears. While *plethora* even further

³⁶⁴ Pinto, op. cit., 65-66. Jenny Schrödl, "Vokale Travestien. Zu stimmlichen Geschlechtersperformances auf der Bühne," in Doerte Bischoff and Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf eds., *Mitsprache, Rederecht, Stimmgewalt, Genderkritische Strategien und Transformationen der Rhetorik* (Heidelberg: Universität Winter, 2006), 385.

³⁶⁵ Schlagenwerth, op. cit.

³⁶⁶ My translation of "...die Vorstellungskraft nicht besetzen und eingrenzen, sondern ihr [Darstellung der Liebe] mit einem irritierenden Rest ständig neue Anstöße geben." in Müller, op. cit.

destroys the usual way of interpretation with techniques of role, gender and voice are exchanged. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* three techniques of postdramatic theatre are used in such an extreme way that the subject has no other choice but to react to this 'pure loss of control.'

3.3. The Innocent Child – Ostermeier's *Richard III*

Richard III is one of the famous Shakespeare villains and the key to the play is the actor who plays Richard. After his success as Hamlet, Lars Eidinger plays Richard III in the Berliner Schaubühne. The other characters seem to be exchangeable and play like "seduced marionetts".³⁶⁷ They are seduced and corrupted by power. Jan Pappelbaum has built an imitation of the Globe theatre out of steel so the audience is very close to what is happening on stage. The atmosphere of the play is described by Bettina Weber as modern but she calls the direction "calm".³⁶⁸ I have found four examples where parts of this performance were called grotesque. These grotesques have much less effect on the critics than the ones described above, they rather appear in minor details of the performance where they transgress usual theatre practice but the overall effect is not that of audience confusion and its search for new ways of interpretation. Therefore, the grotesques in this performance are rather examples for the *transgressive grotesque*, not the *blurring grotesque*.

Anne Peter calls Richard as presented by Eidinger a "freak."³⁶⁹ His freakish look comes from the multiple signs of bodily distortion. Richard is hunchbacked, has a dental brace in his mouth, walks in a way that suggests that his legs have an extreme distortion and

³⁶⁷ My translation of "verführte Marionetten." In Maria Ossowski, "Mordlust und Selbsthass," *Radio Brandenburg* (8 February 2015). <http://www.rbb-online.de/kultur/premieren/kurz-checks/spielzeit-2014-2015/schaubuehne/richard-der-dritte.html>; access on 5.11.2015.

³⁶⁸ My translation of "unaufgeregte Inszenierung." In Bettina Weber, "Wer hat Angst vorm bösen Mann," *Die Deutsch Bühne* (1 February 2015). <http://www.die-deutsche-buehne.de/Kritiken/Schauspiel/ABENDKRITIK+William+Shakespeare+Richard+III/Wer+hat+Angst+vorm+boesen+Mann>; access on 5.11.2015.

³⁶⁹ Anne Peter, "No-man-show," *Nachtkritik* (7 February 2015). http://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10543:2015-02-08-06-44-31&catid=38:die-nachtkritik-k&Itemid=40; access on 1.1.2016.

form an “x” by standing. His back and legs are bent during the whole performance, only when he becomes a king and he forces his body into a corset becomes his body unnaturally straight. In an interview with Johanna Adorján, Eidinger claims that he tried to copy the movements of a hyena while playing Richard. If it was not for the “underdeveloped hinder legs, the hyena would be the rightful king of animals based on its power of bite,” claims Eidinger.³⁷⁰ Matthias Heine names the exaggeratedly deformed feet of Richard grotesque. He does that in a context where he asks for the political correctness of such an exaggeration of disabilities.³⁷¹ Next to Mr Heine’s description, I have not found another critique where the way Eidinger presented the body of Richard was called grotesque. I believe it is so because Richard is expected to be a hunchback and what Eidinger’s Richard does in this respect only fulfills the decorum and thus cannot be called grotesque. The context Heine used the grotesque was a reference to the excessive use of bodily distortion as a politically incorrect representation.

Multiple disabilities seem not enough to call the way Eidinger plays Richard grotesque. Eidinger’s Richard is named grotesque in a dpa report because it presents the disable-bodied outlaw “in a psychologically comprehensible way.”³⁷² The psychological comprehensibility of Richard as character is described by Eidinger in an interview:

I think that it might well be a misunderstanding that Richard is a deeply evil character. His motives are quite clear and comprehensible. He has a disabled body,

³⁷⁰ My translation of “wenn sie keine unterentwickelten Hinterläufe hätte, zumindest was die Gebiss-Stärke angeht, der rechtmäßige König der Tiere wäre.” In Johanna Adorján, “Alles zwischen Familienvater und Psychopath. Lars Eidinger im Gespräch,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (4 February 2015). http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/lars-eidinger-im-gespraech-winter-ja-missvergnuegen-nein-13401987.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex_2; access on 11. 11. 2015.

³⁷¹ Matthias Heine, “Rutsch mir doch den Buckel runter!” *Die Welt* (9 February 2015). http://www.welt.de/print/welt_kompakt/kultur/article137251220/Rutsch-mir-doch-den-Buckel-runter.html; access on 12.11.2013. Compare with the original text: “Eine ernst gemeinte philosophische Frage: Wieso gilt es eigentlich neuerdings als rassistisch und anstößig, wenn im Theater Weiße mit geschminkten Gesichtern Schwarze spielen – aber wenn ein normal gewachsener Schauspieler mit aufgeschnalltem Buckel und groteskem Pappklumpfuß einen Behinderten imitiert, finden das alle okay?”

³⁷² dpa, “Ein furioser Lars Eidinger als «Richard III.» in Berlin,” From dpa Newskanal on the homepage of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (8 February 2015). <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/news/kultur/theater-ein-furioser-lars-eidinger-als-richard-iii-in-berlin-dpa.urn-newsml-dpa-com-20090101-150208-99-02391>; access on 11.11.2015. Compare with the original text: “entwirft er psychologisch schlüssig das Bild eines Außenseiters, der sich um seinen Lohn gebracht sieht und den Hofschanzen und Opportunisten um ihn herum immer einen Schritt voraus ist. Nur die Frauen durchschauen diese grotesk-komische Figur.”

he is cheated about his rights by the ruling class and he feels himself disadvantaged.³⁷³

Richard is actually not evil but a suffering outsider according to Eidinger. The way Eidinger sees the character is also detectable in his way of playing it. The psychology of Eidinger's Richard is described by Doris Meierhenrich in a way that "good and evil become ... identical" in the character Richard.³⁷⁴ If compared to the other characters at court, Richard is the only one who is sincere to the audience. Meierhenrich emphasises that this Richard is not an excellent villain because he is the master of seduction but because of his "bluntness, his childish innocence. Opposing the usual pretence of the court, he offers a character who does not play and does this with ostentation."³⁷⁵ Meierhenrich claims that this "animalistic directness" of Richard is well detectable in Eidinger's play.³⁷⁶ Meierhenrich does not use the word grotesque but she practically describes it: not only the semantic border of good and evil is wiped away, but good and evil also become identical in Richard and this is the crazy and astonishing about this performance.³⁷⁷ Eva Biringer also writes about the childish nature of Richard as played by Eidinger. She adds that the cruelty of children should not be underestimated.³⁷⁸

The interpretation of Richard as the banality of evil is rather opposed to the picture of the active conscious villain in Shakespeare criticism. James R. Siemon describes that Richard

³⁷³ My translation of "Ich glaube, dass es vielleicht sogar ein Missverständnis ist, dass es sich bei Richard um einen zutiefst bösen Charakter handelt. Seine Motivlage ist ja relativ klar und nachvollziehbar. Er ist körperlich behindert, von der herrschenden Klasse um sein Recht betrogen und fühlt sich zurückgesetzt." In Adorján, op. cit.

³⁷⁴ My translation of "gut und böse fallen in ihm zusammen ... sind identisch." In Doris Meierhenrich, "Der ehrliche Böse," *Berliner Zeitung* (8 February 2015). <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/kultur/berliner-schaubuehne-der-ehrliche-boese,10809150,29782808.html>; access on 11.11.2015.

³⁷⁵ Meierhenrich, op. cit. My translation of "die komplette Stumpfheit, seine kindische Arglosigkeit. Gegen das übliche Verstellungsspiel des Hofes bietet er das demonstrative Nichtspielen".

³⁷⁶ My translation of "tierische Direktheit." In Meierhenrich, op. cit.

³⁷⁷ Meierhenrich, op. cit. Compare with the original text: "Denn gut und böse fallen in ihm zusammen – sind kein Gegensatzpaar, dem nur die semantische Binnengrenze verwischt ist, sondern sind identisch. Und das ist das Verrückte, ja Überraschende dieses sonst unspektakulären Shakespeareabends."

³⁷⁸ Eva Biringer, "Premiere "Richard III.": Die große Eidinger-Show," *Zeit Online* (8 February 2015). <http://www.zeit.de/kultur/2015-02/lars-eidinger-richard-schaubuehne-berlin/komplettansicht>; access on 11.11.2015.

can traditionally be compared to the Vice or the Machiavel as character types.³⁷⁹ He is in possession of humour and self-ridicule, which is an essential feature of the Vice. He is also the one driving the plot, plays roles and the one who sacrifices everything in order to achieve a political aim. Also, his language is argued to be persuasive, a common feature of the Vice.³⁸⁰ Ágnes Heller even goes so far to call Richard a radical evil, an evil which is morally unlimited. Richard is conscious about doing evil and he plans its execution with accuracy. Heller claims that such a radical evil is unable to repent.³⁸¹ Such interpretations of Richard as an active conscious villain are only partly true for Eidingen's Richard. Eidingen's Richard is presented as an outsider who childishly believes to take what originally belongs to him. He remains active but the reason for his activity is not evil but it is the psychology of a disabled person ignored by society. The banality of his evil lies in the fact that he seems to lack the ability to tell good from evil until his consciousness is raised after the death of the princes. Eidingen's Richard shows more similarities with Eichmann than the Richard in Shakespeare criticism.³⁸² Hannah Arendt describes the evil of Eichmann, a figure in the Holocaust, to be a banal one because it lacked the drive of doing evil and rather concentrated on following rules irrespective of their moral value.³⁸³

It might be difficult to imagine Richard as childish and innocent, so let me give an example for his behaviour on a key, and psychologically complicated scene: the seduction of

³⁷⁹ James R. Siemon, "Introduction," in William Shakespeare, *Richard III*. James R. Siemon ed. *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 2009), 6-10.

³⁸⁰ A. P. Rossiter, "Angel with Horns: The Unity of Richard III," in Eugene M. Waith ed., *Shakespeare. The Histories. A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 81-2.

³⁸¹ Ágnes Heller, "Arendtről a gonosztevőről és a gonoszáról," *Ex Symposion* 26-7 (1999), 23.

³⁸² An example for such an inversion is the concealed postcolonial motives of the Americans in the *Stargate* film series. Annamária Hódosy claims that the oppressed people of the new planet (others to be assimilated) are supported in their rebellion against the tyrannical alien Re (other made into the figure of social abjection). Thus the colonising intention of the Americans is inverted into the Americans who rescue those people from a tyrant. See Annamária Hódosy, "A *Csillagkapu* és a kulturális gyarmatosítás szexualpolitikája" *Apertúra* tavasz-nyár 2015. <http://uj.apertura.hu/2015/tavasz-nyar/hodosy-a-csillagkapu-es-a-kulturalis-gyarmatositas-szexualpolitikaja/>; access on 23.1.2016.

³⁸³ "Eichmann was not Iago, and not Macbeth, and nothing would have been farther from his mind than to determine with Richard III 'to prove a villain'. Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all." In Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann and the Holocaust* (London: Penguin, 1963), 114.

Lady Anne (Jenny König). Eidinger as Richard pushes the coffin of Ann's husband on stage. Ann appears and when she notices Richard she spits at him. Richard is obviously affected and deeply hurt about this act, he is on the verge of crying. He reasons that it was his love towards Anne that made him kill Edward. He takes off all his clothes except his fake hunchback. He does this in a very humiliated way, then he kneels down next to the coffin, takes his sword, pushes it against his naked breast and offers it to Anne. Lehmann's *physicality* in practice appears here in a very different way as I have discussed it in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* production. The distortion and the shame about this otherness is showed up through Eidinger's naked body. Anne cannot seize the opportunity, her mourning and hate against Richard overcomes with a kind of pity and pity turns into sympathy and there we have a wild kiss over the corpse of Edward. Even Anne Peter, who is not as convinced by the performance as other critics, writes that the reaction of Richard to this kiss was really good.³⁸⁴ Richard is astonished about the kiss and he can hardly believe his success. Anne Peter reads this from the way Eidinger recites the German version of "Was ever woman in this humour won?"³⁸⁵ Gemma Miller states that these words were "delivered with a sense of both disbelief and delight." Miller adds that Richard was evidently surprised at this reaction and that he "realised the transformative effects of power and desire."³⁸⁶

Eidinger is not the villain one would expect from Shakespeare criticism. Exactly this other-ness makes this character formed by Eidinger an indecorum. Although the audience is very close to the actors, Anne Peter claims that the room given is not used and there is little interaction with the audience.³⁸⁷ Eidinger is not talking to the audience during his monologues but he uses a microphone hanging from above and he talks for himself in order to amuse

³⁸⁴ Peter, op. cit.

³⁸⁵ William Shakespeare, *King Richard III*. James R. Siemon ed. *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 2009), Act 1 scene 2 line 231.

³⁸⁶ Gemma Miller, "Review of Shakespeare's *Richard III* (directed by Thomas Ostermeier for the Festival d'Avignon)," *Shakespeare* (19 Oct 2015). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2015.1089314>; access on 4.1.2016.

³⁸⁷ Peter, op. cit.

himself. Giving a psychologically conceivable reason for his revenge also makes Richard less evil and less resembling to the Vice. Writing about evil characters on the early modern English stage, Russell claims that he observes a shift from the obvious evil, the Devil to the more hidden evil, the Vice and then the Machiavel. This means that the villains get more human characteristic features and so the audience can accept them better.³⁸⁸ In case of Eidingers Richard we have seen that the coinage 'evil' is even denied by Meierheinrich. Eidingers plays Richard as a person who has multiple disabilities, was instrumentalised by the court and who is about to take what he believes that it belongs to him. This Richard interpretation fits well to the theme of "otherness" at the 2015 Avignon Festival. According to Miller, Eidingers Richard "epitomises" this theme.³⁸⁹ Eidingers is capable to turn a great villain of Shakespeare criticism into an innocent child who is astonished and jumps happily after his successes up to the point where it will be too much for him and he goes mad in the very last scene. Presenting a great Shakespearean villain as a childish revenger is certainly an indecorum.

Not only the expectation that Richard is a villain is not satisfied by the performance. The expectation of most of the critics was that Eidingers is going to represent Richard in the style he played Hamlet.³⁹⁰ This was not fulfilled as Richard was played as an other who fights for what he thinks should be his. Strengthened by his small successes this Richard is shown as a career man. He uses his physical distortion as a tool to achieve his goals. Peter Laudenbach argues that after Hamlet as the "hyperactive exhibitionist in late puberty" it was no wonder that the audience expected a Richard with similar qualities. He continues that *Richard III*

³⁸⁸ Russell, op. cit., 261.

³⁸⁹ Miller, op. cit.

³⁹⁰ André Mumot, "Lars Eidingers als "Richard III." Theaterereignis mit Ansage," *Deutschlandradio* (7 February 2015). http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/lars-eidingers-als-richard-iii-theaterereignis-mit-ansage.1013.de.html?dram:article_id=311032; access on 1.1. 2016. Peter, op. cit. Miller, op. cit.

becomes the “psychoanalysis of the one obsessed with power.”³⁹¹ Laudenbach argues that his otherness makes Richard into a “rational psychopath.”³⁹²

The fourth grotesque I found in Gemma Miller’s review. Miller describes her surprise about the fact that the princes were life-sized puppets. The grotesque appears in a scene where Richard is confronted with the death of the princes: “As Richard looked at the puppet-princes, their limbs twisted in a *grotesque* parody of death, he began to retch and sob.”³⁹³ Miller argues that the puppets’ obvious “lack of agency” was an opposition to Richard’s “psychological realism”. She continues that this “was symptomatic of a production in which different aesthetics and dramaturgical devices jostled against one another, denying its audience a stable, or indeed comfortable, viewing experience.”³⁹⁴ Although the grotesque directly refers to the unnatural position the puppets as dead children took, this position was seen unnatural if read against the psychological deepness with which Richard was painted. It would not have been grotesque if all characters would have been puppets. This confusion of style can be considered as a weak example for, or rather an attempt to use a theatre technique Lehmann calls *plethora*, the aim of which is to unsettle the audience.³⁹⁵ The degree of unsettlement is not to be compared with performances where the audience has no idea which character moves on stage, as it was the case by the Ostermeier-Macras production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The audience has an instable, uncomfortable viewing position but at no point is confusion mentioned in the critiques.

The examples for the grotesque in this *Richard III* performance belong to the *transgressive grotesque* trend of definition and not the *blurring grotesque*. The grotesque used in this performance seem to be a surprise about the non-fulfillment of some expectations but

³⁹¹ My translation of “hyperaktiven Exhibitionisten in der Spätpubertät” and “eine Psychoanalyse des Macht-Obsessiven.” In Peter Laudenbach, “Nihilistischer Intellektueller,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (9 February 2015), 13.

³⁹² My translation of “rationaler Psychopath.” *Ibid.*

³⁹³ My emphasis. Miller, op. cit.

³⁹⁴ Miller, op. cit.

³⁹⁵ Lehmann, op. cit., 90-91.

what was named grotesque does not shake the audience with elemental requirement to respond. Two expectations about the performance were not fulfilled: Richard was not played as an evil character even though he is one of the best known Shakespearean villains and Eidingen did not play it with the loud pounding and disgusting energy he used by Hamlet but as a childlike humiliated creature who fights for his rights. Nevertheless, I found three examples where the word grotesque was used in connection to the performance and in the description of Meierheinrich, where the word 'grotesque' was only described but not used. These grotesques describe minor and different parts of the performance and suggest that the grotesque is not an essential part of the performance. As these grotesques leave a status quo behind them, i.e. they do not change much on the outcome or final interpretation of critics, they are interpreted as *transgressive grotesques*. Each grotesque transgressed a line but it did not shake the structure this line belongs to. Heine mentions the political incorrectness of multiple disabilities but he does not follow this argument further. In the dpa report the convincing psychology of Richard is called grotesque but as we saw it was rather meant an indecorum of how Richard was represented if compared to Shakespeare criticism. Miller alludes in her grotesque to the style of direction, which could be called a weak *plethora* but alone this technique of the postdramatic theatre does not evoke the effect of the *blurring grotesque*. In general, I could state that according to the critiques there was little grotesque in this performance. Nevertheless, I find this example as a good contrast if compared to the other three examples where the *blurring grotesque* plays an essential part of the performances.

3.4. Grotesque as Philosophy – Beier's *King Lear*

Karin Beier³⁹⁶ and her theatre in Cologne was awarded the best performing theatre in 2011 by the journalists of the *Die Deutsche Bühne* in their yearly questionnaire about the top

³⁹⁶ Karin Beier was born in 1965. In 2006 winner of the Nestroy-Theaterpreis and in 2009 the German theatre award Faust. She was director of the Schauspiel Cologne between 2007 and 2013 and since then works as a director of Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg.

performances of the year 2010.³⁹⁷ Karin Beier directed *König Lear* at the Schauspiel Cologne in 2009. There was a minimalist stage with a half meter tall clay brick wall stretching horizontally in the middle of the stage. This wall was damaged by the actresses during the performance. Behind this wall, a black box was used by the actresses as a room of reflection. The stage setting was created by Johannes Schütz who designed more settings for Jürgen Gosch.³⁹⁸ The role of Lear was played by a woman. Beier went even further to let six women play all the roles of this Shakespeare drama.³⁹⁹ Three of the actresses played only one role: Barbara Nüsse played Lear, Julia Wieninger played Gloucester and Anja Herden played Kent. Three of the six actresses had to play wild combinations of several roles. The roles of Cordelia and Edmund shared one body, the body of the actress Kathrin Wehlisch. Anja Laiß embodied Goneril and Edgar. Angelika Richter played Regan. The role of the clown was divided among the three daughters of Lear. In the beginning clothes functioned as signs. When one character has changed her role, she also changed her clothes.

Karin Beier's direction of *King Lear* is called grotesque by Andreas Wilink because of the all-female production of a rather cruel drama and because of the double and triple roles one actress has to master and change during the performance. Wilink claims that there is something "vulnerably soft in the figures... when bodies that can bear and nurture children can also cause death or die themselves."⁴⁰⁰ Wilink emphasizes the softness resulting of female bodies. He means the considerable time the actresses play with their breasts naked. For example: Cordelia's dress is torn by her father from waist upwards, showing her nakedness to

³⁹⁷ Detlef Brandenburg, "Autorenumfrage 2011: Das Stadttheater lebt – als Zentrum und Gehäuse einer Vielfalt künstlerischer Formen für viele verschiedene Zuschauergruppen," *Die Deutsche Bühne* (Aug 2011): 26-35.

³⁹⁸ Gosch directed dramas in an existentialist manner. He died in 2009 and received numerous awards for his work.

³⁹⁹ Andreas Rossmann, "Königin Lear, keine Frauensache," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (29 Sept 2009): 39. Lear was played by a woman in the directions of George Tabori (1989), Robert Wilson (1990) and Sebastian Nübeling (2003).

⁴⁰⁰ My translation of "etwas verletzbar Weiches in die Figuren, ... wenn Körper, die gebären und nähren, zugleich den Tod bringen oder ihn erleiden." In Andreas Wilink, "Choreografie der Gequälten," *Nachtkritik* (26 Sept 2009). http://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3266:koenig-lear-karin-beiers-grandioser-saisonauftritt-holt-shakespeares-drama-aus-den-tiefen-der-zeit&catid=84:schauspiel-koeln; access on 19.7.2014.

the public as an act of revenge for her unwanted answer. While other characters have glasses (Edgar) or shirts (Edmund) to signal role changes, the costume of Cordelia becomes this nakedness and makes her recognizable opposed to the other role of Edmund played by the same actress. Wilink argues that these actresses “add to Shakespeare’s Endgame the colours of grotesque, they establish contact between comedy and catastrophe and they remind us on Beckett and Grock with their red noses and slapstick.”⁴⁰¹ I am going to return to Wilink’s comparison with Beckett and comedy, here let me first stay with the six actresses and their effect. Andreas Rossmann also sees the brutality of the play in the fact that female actresses act out cruelty and he adds that they nevertheless appear vulnerable, too.⁴⁰² The actresses are not cruel in an exaggerated way but the physical presence of their naked breasts nevertheless gives them a softness which makes it difficult to bear this cruelty. This ambiguous *physicality* of softness and cruelty is supported by caresses, kisses as well as physical attacks of each other.

There were ambivalent reactions of the critics on this all-female play even though the way Barnbara Nüsse played Lear, at least in the beginning, is described to have much more macho energy than some other Lears played by men at that time in Germany.⁴⁰³ Vasco Boenisch and Ulrich Weinzierl found it difficult to come up with a plausible argument for an all-female production: Boenisch claims that he sees no concept behind it while Weinzierl

⁴⁰¹ My translation of “Sie ergänzen Shakespeares Endspiel um Farben der Groteske, stellen Kontaktstellen zwischen Komik und Katastrophe her und bringen – mit roten Nasen und Narrenpritsche – Beckett und Grock ins Spiel.” In Wilink, op. cit.

⁴⁰² Rossmann, op. cit. Compare with the original text: “Dass es Frauen sind, die so viel Grausamkeit zulassen und ihr ausgesetzt werden, lässt diese fast noch verletzlicher, qualvoller, brutaler erscheinen.”

⁴⁰³ Detlev Baur, “Vier für Lear,” *Die Deutsche Bühne* (Dec 2009): 48. Compare with the original text: “Barbara Nüsse ist von allen Lears der vier Inszenierungen der machomäßigste.” An interesting alternative to the gender of Lear could also be an emphasis on the lack of the mother. In *Life Goes On*, a film adaptation of *King Lear*, Kinga Földváy sees the source of confusion and eruption of repressed conflicts in the death of the mother (Manju), who was a real partner to Lear (Santosh) and the one balancing family life. Here the disorder starts with the death of the mother, with the loss of the personalized common sense. If compared to Beier’s *King Lear*, where Lear is ‘complete’ in the sense as she plays a man with a female body, it becomes nevertheless clear that Nüsse can only change from father to mother but cannot be both at once. In Kinga Földváy, “Lear királyné száriban – Life Goes On,” in Attila Kiss and Ágnes Matuska eds., *Ki mere tart? Shakespeare Szegeden, 2007-2011* (Szeged: JatePress, 2013), 186-188.

finds role and gender changes too confusing.⁴⁰⁴ Hartmut Wilmes claims that it is plausible that the cruelties of the play seem even more cruel when they are committed by women but he adds that the fact that there are only women in the play is more confusing than helpful for gaining an insight.⁴⁰⁵ How helpful postmodern theatres should be in this respect is discussed enough above. The fact that the actresses confused some critics speaks for the postdramatic nature of the performance. The critics complain about the rejection of the unity of gender-role, as well as the expectation that one actor plays one role. Both practices count to Lehmann's *plethora* which is described as a theatre practice that rejects normalized forms. If one thinks about Shakespeare's time, both expectations were not present as only male actors played roles in Elizabethan theatres and double roles were also no rarity. Thus the way Beier directed the play may not only be called postdramatic but Shakespearean as well. Dorothee Krings goes even further in her positive critique and practically describes the effects of *plethora*: "This gender displacement does not only produce the result that the figures appear in their purely human deficiency. Multiple roles also challenge the spectator to constant concentration, decoding and interpreting."⁴⁰⁶ This challenge is exactly the aim of the theatre technique that Lehmann calls *plethora*.

Another application of this theatre technique is also called grotesque in the critique of Dina Netz. Netz points out that the "figures in the play have only one thing in common: they

⁴⁰⁴ Vasco Boenisch, "Ladies Night," *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (1 Oct 2009): 15. Compare with the original text: "...Männerrollen von Frauen spielen zu lassen, erwartete man mehr als einen Aufmerksamkeitsfaktor: ein schüssiges Konzept." Ulrich Weinzierl, "In Köln ist König Lear eine Königin," *Die Welt* (29. Sept 2009). <http://www.welt.de/kultur/theater/article4665204/In-Koeln-ist-Koenig-Lear-eine-Koenigin.html>; access on 19.7.2014. Compare with the original text: "...die Frage bleibt: Was bringt's? Die Geschlechtsverwirrung scheint allgemein und groß." Hartmut Wilmes, "Herrscher und Narr," *Kölnische Rundschau* (27 Sept 2009). <http://www.rundschau-online.de/home/koenig-lear-herrscher-und-narr,15184882,15462640.html>; access on 19.7.2014.

⁴⁰⁵ Wilmes, op. cit. Compare with the original text: "Mag sein, dass die Brutalitäten des Stücks von weiblicher Hand noch stärker verstören. Ansonsten aber übersteigt der Erkenntniswert der 100-prozentigen Frauenquote kaum deren Verwirrungspotential."

⁴⁰⁶ My translation of "Diese Geschlechterverschiebung hat nicht nur den Effekt, dass die Figuren in ihrer rein menschlichen Unzulänglichkeit erscheinen. Die Mehrfachbesetzungen fordern auch zu ständigem Mitdenken, Entschlüsseln, Deuten heraus." In Dorothee Krings, "Karin Beiers grandioser Auftakt in Köln," *Rheinische Post* (30 Sept 2009): A8.

are so grotesque that they are at the edge of being ridiculous.”⁴⁰⁷ Netz continues that “[t]his *Lear* is not a big drama, it is a huge freedom for the actresses to show the innumerable nuances of human madness.”⁴⁰⁸ In her first example, Netz describes Kathrin Wehlisch, who plays Cordelia and Edmund. Netz argues that during the play no exact border can be hold up between the good Cordelia and the bad Edmund, consequently, this double role “shows that categories of good and bad are mixed, no one is only good or bad.”⁴⁰⁹ Let me describe a scene where this confusion of good and bad becomes clear: the battle between the troops of Cordelia and the united troops of Goneril and Regan led by Edmund. The fight starts with Goneril, Regan and Edmund standing with their backs to the audience. They take bricks of the wall and smash them on the earth. This goes on for some minutes until only Edmund is left, breaking together of tiredness. She halfway gets rid of her shirt, crawls on the earth and starts crying. The attempt to take off her shirt (the sign for the role Edmund) and the act of crying are the only allusions for a role change, however, one cannot be sure about that until Goneril pushes an imaginary sword in her belly and Lear appears with Cordelia’s red rock, with which her now lifeless body is going to be covered. This example shows that as Cordelia and Edmund share one body, the border between the two characters becomes very delicate. It is already confusing that obviously bad characters become good or vice versa by sharing one actress who plays both but even more confusing is that not each role-change is obviously communicated with the audience. The audience has, as Lehmann would say, “an evenly hovering attention,” the audience is in constant search for signs to interpret who exactly is now in action on stage. Matching evil characters with good ones only make the confusion more frustrating as the audience not only has to switch between characters but between

⁴⁰⁷ My translation of “Nur eins haben alle Figuren gemein: Sie sind grotesk bis zur Lächerlichkeit.” In Dina Netz, “Frauen spielen Shakespeare,” *Deutschlandradio* (26 Sept 2009). http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/frauen-spielen-shakespeare.1013.de.html?dram:article_id=169583; access on 23.11.2015.

⁴⁰⁸ My translation of “Dieser „Lear” ist kein großes Drama, sondern eine große Freifläche für die Schauspielerinnen, die Zahllose Nuancen des menschlichen Wahnsinns zeigen können.” In Netz, op. cit.

⁴⁰⁹ My translation of “...zeigen, dass sich die Kategorien Gut und Böse verwischen, niemand nur das eine oder andere ist.” In Netz, op. cit.

feelings of sympathy and disgust as well. *Plethora* is the name of the theatre practice used here. Vasco Boenisch claims that “good and evil and the characters blur just like their make-up.”⁴¹⁰ Categories of good and bad merge in one actress playing two roles and although at some points it is obvious which character speaks, there are dumb shows that make sure no audience member could say which character moves along the stage at the moment. Wilmes claims that only those who know the text of *King Lear* well enough can have an overview about who is playing whom.⁴¹¹

Some critics see in the all-female production an answer to a famous all-male production of *Macbeth* by Jürgen Gosch in 2005.⁴¹² The premier of Beier’s *King Lear* was three months after the death of one of the most celebrated German directors, Jürgen Gosch. Vasco Boenisch criticizes Beier for wanting to resemble Gosch and adds that her excesses are rather artificial and not intuitive as by Gosch.⁴¹³ Quite an opposite view is that of Andreas Rehnolt, who interprets the style of Beier’s direction as homage to Gosch.⁴¹⁴ Andreas Wilink goes as far as to name Beier the heir of Gosch.⁴¹⁵ Such a link with Gosch is possible because of the time of Gosch’s death was so close to the first performance of Beier’s *King Lear* and because Beier’s style of direction shows similarities with that of Gosch. For this paper it is irrelevant whether Beier wanted to copy Gosch or not. The fact that she uses elements in her direction that make critics think on the style of direction that was so essential for Gosch is

⁴¹⁰ My translation of “Gut und Böse und die Charaktere verwischen wie die Schminke.” In Boenisch, op. cit.

⁴¹¹ Wilmes, op. cit., Compare with the original text: “Im Wirbel der Rollenwechsel indessen dürften nur sattelfeste Textkenner den Durchblick behalten.”

⁴¹² Gosch directed *Macbeth* in Düsseldorf with only male actors who run around naked most of the time, smeared fake blood on their bodies and destroyed the minimalist prop on stage. For a summary of the critiques with a focus on staged violence compare: Christina Wald, “‘Genuine’ Violence on Stage? Jürgen Gosch’s *Macbeth*”. <http://shakespeare-gesellschaft.de/publikationen/seminar/ausgabe2006/wald.html>; access on 23.11.2015.

⁴¹³ Vasco Boenisch, op. cit.

⁴¹⁴ Andreas Rehnolt, “Ein Irrenhaus,” *Musenblätter* (1 Oct 2009). <http://www.musenblaetter.de/artikel.php?aid=5384>; access on 19.7.2014.

⁴¹⁵ Wilink, op. cit.

much more relevant. Jürgen Gosch directed in an absurdist manner, he was the “master of existentialist play”.⁴¹⁶

The notions ‘absurd’ and ‘existentialist’ both appear in the critiques in connection to the notion ‘grotesque’ and they are also relevant for a theatre technique Lehmann calls *event/situation*. I have already referred to Thomson’s description of the absurd in the introduction. The major difference he found was that the absurd has no structure if compared to the grotesque.⁴¹⁷ The idea of the absurd appears as the description of the atmosphere of the Beier performance and it is compared with a famous writer of the theatre of the absurd, Samuel Beckett.⁴¹⁸ In the following examples the absurd is mentioned in connection to the grotesque by three critics and it also appears in the program leaflet. I have already quoted Wilink who writes about “the colours of grotesque” that reminded him of Beckett.⁴¹⁹ Rossmann adds that the performance shows “the cosmos of Beckett in an archaic and enlarged form.”⁴²⁰ The third critic, Hans-Christoph Zimmermann also writes that tragedy and absurdity are very close to each other in this performance, however, he does not mention Beckett.⁴²¹ In the program leaflet of the play various words are listed in an alphabetic order with reference to other expressions as well as quotations which explain this reference. The very first word in the alphabet is “ABSURD → GROTESK” followed by the quotation of Camus on absurdity. The quotation says that the absurd makes humans feel alienated from their own lives.⁴²² Under “GROTESK→ ABSURD” Kott’s analysis of *King Lear* is quoted.

⁴¹⁶ My translation of “Maestro des existentiellen Spiels.” In Dina Netz, “Zart-Herber Totentanz,” *Akt. Die Kölner Theaterzeitung* (Nov 2009). <http://www.theaterzeitung-koeln.de/archiv/akt7-november-2009/kritisiert-im-november-2009/koenig-lear/>; access on 17.4.2015.

⁴¹⁷ Thomson, op. cit., 31-2.

⁴¹⁸ The theatre of the absurd is often related to interpretations of these plays with the help of existentialist philosophy. The reference of existentialism is also present in the critiques. Compare: Baur, op. cit., 46-48.

⁴¹⁹ Wilink, op. cit.

⁴²⁰ My translation of “Becketts Kosmos, archaisch vergrößert.” In Rossmann, op. cit.

⁴²¹ Hans-Christoph Zimmermann “Berührende ‘König Lear’-Inszenierung am Kölner Schauspiel,” *General-Anzeiger Bonn* (29 Sept 2009). <http://www.general-anzeiger-bonn.de/lokales/kultur/beruehrende-koenig-lear-inszenierung-am-koelner-schauspiel-article213148.html>; access on 15.7.2014

⁴²² Their emphasis. Program leaflet to the performance *King Lear* after William Shakespeare in the direction of Karin Beier. (Köln: Schauspiel Köln, 2009) without page numbers, approximately 18 pages.

The part quoted describes that the grotesque means the lack of absolute and thus the lack of a higher responsibility. The absolute becomes absurd in the grotesque. If one sees how the word absurd is used in the critiques and compares it to the way the absurd refers to grotesque and vice versa in the performance leaflet, one has the feeling that they are used as synonyms. The difference between the two notions is that the absurd is practically the outcome of the *blurring grotesque*: it is the lack of reason, this lack has either the form of structure which is not any more there or the absolute which is not any more there. The *blurring grotesque* is a process of border and structure dissolution. This structure or border can be that of reason or that of the absolute. The lack of both results in a situation which is absurd.

Both the lack of reason for what is happening and the lack of the absolute force the focus into the direction of Camus' existentialism. Of course, the program leaflet on the performance with the Camus quotation is also a strong hint. Absurd is a key term in his philosophy. For Camus the absurd is a result of a relationship between man and the world. In this relationship man has expectations which expectations are rejected by the lack of reason ruling the world. According to Sartre, Camus is a pessimist while he himself tries to be objective when describing the absurd and claims that the world has no reason and therefore it is absurd.⁴²³ Camus' notion of the absurd has a tragic touch. In his introduction to the book *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin quotes Camus in order to describe the broken belief and the loss of hope as a general feeling after the Second World War. He uses the same quotation I have found in the booklet of Beier's *King Lear* production.⁴²⁴ Esslin claims that the metaphysical fear from the absurdity (in the sense of aimless, rootless and reasonless) is the main topic of Beckett as well. The idea of the senselessness of life in existentialist philosophy is represented in the theatre of the absurd.⁴²⁵ Existentialism also has an important element in the description of Lehmann's theatre technique, the *event/situation*. He uses the

⁴²³ Roland Galle, *Der Existentialismus* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2009), 48.

⁴²⁴ Martin Esslin, *Das Theater des Absurden. Von Beckett bis Pinter* (Hamburg: Rohwolt, 1965), 13-4.

⁴²⁵ Esslin, op. cit., 14-15.

word 'situation' borrowed from existentialist philosophy in his descriptions of the theatrical event. Lehmann defines 'situation' as "an unstable sphere of simultaneously possible and imposed choice, as well as the virtual transformability of the situation."⁴²⁶ Participants of the theatrical situation are drawn attention to their own presence in this situation and they are forced into a virtual dialogue with the creators of the performance. Lehmann argues that "[t]he aesthetic object hardly has any substance any more but instead functions as a trigger, catalyst and frame for a process on the part of the viewer."⁴²⁷ Postdramatic theatre ceases to be a theatre of representation, it is a theatre of communication, however, "not primarily as a *confrontation* with the audience but as the production of situations for the *self-interrogation*, *self-exploration*, *self-awareness* of all participants."⁴²⁸ Both existentialism and the works of Beckett search for the 'I' as well. Sartre writes about the books of Camus in general where he comes to the conclusion that first when wo/man has lost hope can find her/himself because then s/he knows that s/he cannot rely on anything but her/himself.⁴²⁹ In his play, *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett thematised the passivity of waiting and that it is during this passivity that wo/men are confronted with questions about their existence, about the 'I'.⁴³⁰

In order to describe the grotesque as an *event/situation* in Beier's *King Lear*, I am going to show the way Barbara Nüsse plays Lear as the catalyst responsible for the self-exploration of critics and as a part of the process of postdramatic theatrical communication. I am going to follow this train of thought during the interpretation of theatre critiques calling the way Nüsse plays Lear grotesque. Nüsse as Lear represses reality with all her strength and this makes her, according to Netz, into a grotesque figure. Netz refers to Beier's opinion that Shakespeare's characters have a reduced view of the world and the fact that they stick to this

⁴²⁶ Lehmann, op. cit., 106.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁸ His emphasis. Lehmann, op. cit., 105.

⁴²⁹ Galle, op. cit., 52.

⁴³⁰ Esslin, op. cit, 35-36.

reduced view makes these figures grotesque.⁴³¹ For Netz this tragedy unfolds itself through the discovery of one's own limited view of the world better than through the suffering of a king without a country.⁴³² Netz claims that thus the audience is "drawn into a new philosophy and self-reflexivity."⁴³³ Similarly, Christian Bos claims that the play as directed by Beier is not about the end of a kingdom but it is "about you and me and anybody who has parents or who has children."⁴³⁴ Bos describes the effect of the performance, and especially the lack of reason that makes human life bearable, as a "struggle" for the audience.⁴³⁵ Even though Bos does not use the word grotesque in his critique, his description is so similar to that of Netz and Krings that it is worth mentioning. Dorothee Krings describes Nüsse's Lear as an "aggressive grotesque."⁴³⁶ She adds that this character shocks, scares and makes one uncertain because of her harsh ridiculousness. According to Krings, Lear goes mad not because Regan and Goneril deny what he wishes but because of the discovery that he made a mistake in judging them.⁴³⁷ The self-reflexivity in Krings' critique was already mentioned above: "Multiple roles also challenge the spectator to constant concentration, decoding and interpreting."⁴³⁸ The critics see the way Nüsse plays Lear as a source for self-reflexivity.

Next to the female actresses who evoke the grotesque with *physicality*, Wilink and Rossmann also agree on the comic nature of the performance when calling it grotesque.

⁴³¹ Netz, "Frauen ..." op. cit.

⁴³² Netz, "Frauen ..." op. cit. Compare with the original text: "In diesem bizarren Beharren auf der eigenen beschränkten Weltsicht ist der „König Lear“ von Karin Beier vor allem grotesk und dadurch besonders tragisch – man erkennt sich in ihm besser wieder als in einem König ohne Reich."

⁴³³ My translation of "...in eine neue philosophische und selbstreflexive Tiefe." In Netz, "Zart-Herber Totentanz," op. cit.

⁴³⁴ Christian Bos, "Der Widerhall des Wahnsinns," *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* (27 Sept 2009).

<http://www.ksta.de/kultur/koelner-schauspiel-der-widerhall-des-wahnsinns,15189520,12848740.html>; access on 22.12.2015. Compare with the original text: "Weil es hier ja nicht um Adelsintrigen geht. Sondern um mich und dich und jeden der Eltern oder Söhne oder Töchter hat."

⁴³⁵ Bos, op. cit. Compare with the original text: "Denn die Landschaft des Lear - wie Beier sie zeichnet - ist eine von jedem Sinn entkleidete Wüste des Realen, frei von den Sinnzuschreibungen, mit denen der Mensch sich seine Umwelt erst erträglich macht. Weshalb auch die Aufführung für den Zuschauer zur Anstrengung, für manche vielleicht sogar zur Zumutung wird."

⁴³⁶ "Eine aggressiv groteske Figur ist dieser König Lear, bestürzend in ihrer grellen Lächerlichkeit." In Krings, "Karin Beiers..." op. cit.

⁴³⁷ Krings, "Karin Beiers..." op. cit.

⁴³⁸ Krings, "Karin Beiers..." op. cit.

Wilink claims that a “contact between comedy and catastrophe” is established, while Rossmann states that the performance is “an elemental Endgame ... between choreography and clownish grotesque, exorcism and excess”.⁴³⁹ Thus Wilink and Rossmann restate the grotesque described in Shakespeare criticism. It seems as if they have rephrased Knight’s text on *King Lear*.⁴⁴⁰ Knight claims “there is a dualism continually crying in vain to be resolved either by tragedy or by comedy”.⁴⁴¹ Opposed to Knight, Kott offers a more philosophical grotesque in Shakespeare criticism and claims that *Lear* is ridiculous, not comic and that the play is cruel, not tragic. He argues that the ridiculousness of *Lear* lies in the absurdity of wanting to live as a king after one stopped being a king. The cruelty of the play lies in the way the downfall of *Lear* is escorted by comedy. Dina Netz and Dorothee Krings do not emphasize the comic but the ridiculous nature of Nüsse’s *Lear* and thus they follow the argumentation of Jan Kott. Krings describes the way *Lear* runs around with emotional explosions in a night gown as a “startling figure for its harsh ridiculousness,” while Netz names all characters “so grotesque that they are at the edge of being ridiculous” in her review.⁴⁴² Especially when Krings calls the whole performance grotesque, it reads as a mirror of the Kottian grotesque:

Beier forces Shakespeare’s tragedy into the grotesque in a bold and determined way. The grotesque is the most severe form of exaggeration as it denies any compassion. The tragic emerges in its ugly senselessness. Nobody has seen yet such a merciless destruction of a dynasty.⁴⁴³

⁴³⁹ Wilink op. cit. Rossmann, op. cit.

⁴⁴⁰ Compare with Knight, op. cit., 160: “A shifting flash of comedy across the pain of the purely tragic both increases the tension and suggests, vaguely, a resolution and a purification. The comic and the tragic rest both on the idea of incompatibilities, and are also, themselves, mutually exclusive: therefore to mingle them is to add to the meaning of each; for the result is then but a new sublime incongruity.”

⁴⁴¹ Knight, op. cit., 161.

⁴⁴² My translation of “bestürzend in ihrer grellen Lächerlichkeit.” In Krings, “Karin Beiers...” op. cit. My translation of “Sie sind grotesk bis zur Lächerlichkeit.” In Netz, “Frauen...” op. cit.

⁴⁴³ My translation of “Kühn und entschlossen treibt Beier Shakespeares Tragödie in die Groteske – die schärfste Form der Zuspitzung, denn die Groteske verweigert jedes Mitgefühl. Das Tragische tritt nackt zu Tage in seiner hässlichen Sinnlosigkeit. So gnadenlos hat man die Vernichtung eines Herrschergeschlechts noch nicht gesehen.” In Krings, “Karin Beiers ...” op. cit.

Both the comic and the ridiculous nature of the play *King Lear* were called grotesque in Shakespeare criticism and thus the theatre critiques on Beier's *King Lear* reflect the grotesque found in Shakespeare criticism.

The director, Karin Beier herself admits in several interviews that the idea of the “philosophical grotesque” was the central one in her direction. In an interview led by Krings, Beier described the “philosophical grotesque” as follows:

There is no divine force, no order will be restored where the right heir should succeed the throne. The play ends in an absolute desolation and brutality. Each character is a perpetrator and this is very terrible. I could best demonstrate this grotesque interpretation with only female actresses because thus codes are broken. I tried to shake the usual way one sees something. Violence was even more brutal because women did it.⁴⁴⁴

Beier names her own interpretation grotesque and directly claims that she wanted to ‘break codes’ and ‘shake the usual way one sees something’. This consideration of a director is a very postdramatic one. Moreover, as we have seen the reactions of some critics who could not see a reason in the all-female performance, it did work what Beier planned. She not only describes the aim of postdramatic theatre after Lehmann but she also refers to one postdramatic theatre technique I have described above. Beier claims she could demonstrate grotesque through breaking codes with the all-female production and that the result of this was the exaggeration of cruelty. Breaking the way the audience expects to see something is a technique Lehmann calls *plethora*. Elsewhere Beier said that she sees the play *King Lear* as a “philosophical grotesque” and referred to Jan Kott's interpretation of Lear. In her direction she wanted to make this interpretation more present, she wanted to accentuate this grotesque.

⁴⁴⁴ My translation of “Weil das Stück eine philosophische Grotteske ist. Es gibt darin keine ordnende göttliche Kraft mehr, es wird keine rechte Ordnung wiederhergestellt, etwa indem der richtige Nachfolger den Thron bestiege. Das Stück endet in absoluter, bedingungsloser Trostlosigkeit und Brutalität. Alle Figuren sind Täter, das ist unendlich grausam. Dies zugleich als Grotteske anzulegen, schien mir mit Frauen am besten möglich, weil man dann Codes durchbricht. Ich habe versucht, an Sehgewohnheiten zu rütteln. Die Gewalt war durch die Frauen noch erschütternder.” In Krings, “Shakespeare trifft ...” op cit.

For Beier, the essence of Kott's grotesque is the lack of the absolute.⁴⁴⁵ In a third interview Beier said that Lear is a language itself and that she has used the notion "philosophical grotesque" to deal with her favorite topic of putting existentialist questions, such as: "What remains of humanity when all the social contacts to others are torn apart?"⁴⁴⁶ The Kottian interpretation can also be seen as an existentialist question: What remains of humanity when s/he realizes that there is no absolute? Beier gives right to the critics who compared her style to the style of Gosh or called this performance absurd. She herself focused her direction of *King Lear* on the philosophical grotesque described by Kott and reduced the play into Camus existentialist philosophy. The latter was, of course, also noticed by the critics. Detlev Baur claims that Beier's performance "shows from the beginning a play reduced to its skeleton, it is a play about the human existence."⁴⁴⁷

After an intensive research on the critiques, I can sum up that *physicality*, the softness and at the same time cruelty of female actresses were called grotesque. Furthermore, the way the actresses played out two or three roles, one having a good, the other a bad character and the way they switched between these roles were also called grotesque. This technique belongs to *plethora*, a technique which aims at destroying any traditional way to interpret theatre. This is also a technique which belongs to the *blurring grotesque* definition. Beier erased the difference between male-female, as well as evil-good characters. She blurred borders of existing, even opposing categories, which is not only typical of *plethora* but also of the *blurring grotesque*. Finally, the performance was also called grotesque when it was related to the notion 'absurd'. The unbearable atmosphere of the lack of reason or the lack of the

⁴⁴⁵ Christoph Leibold, "Shakespeare auf deutschen Bühnen," *Deutschlandfunk* (21 April 2014). http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/theater-shakespeare-auf-deutschen-buehnen.691.de.html?dram:article_id=283307 ; access on 20.7.2014.

⁴⁴⁶ Christian Bos, "Im Moment ernten wir die Früchte," *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* (8 July 2009). <http://www.ksta.de/kultur/interview-mit-karin-beier--im-moment-ernten-wir-die-fruechte-,15189520,12902166.html> ; access on 20.7.2014.

⁴⁴⁷ My translation of "Sie zeigt ein von Anfang an gleichsam auf die Knochen reduziertes Spiel um die menschliche Existenz." In Baur, op. cit.

absolute made critics call the atmosphere of the performance and especially the way Nüsse played Lear grotesque. These grotesques fit to Lehmann's description of the theatre technique *event/situation*. This technique describes the performance as a communication process which offers no representation but instead triggers audience phantasy and evokes self-exploration. In the performance of *King Lear* the way Nüsse played Lear was described as the catalyst of this self-exploration. This grotesque is also similar to the *blurring grotesque* but not to the *transgressive grotesque*. The structure of the *transgressive grotesque* is that of opposing the existing normality, while the *blurring grotesque* erases rules and differences altogether, thus allowing a new structuration process. The all-female performance offered such an opportunity for the audience in a form of a process, which was called grotesque and at the end of which an absurd situation of the lack of reason or the lack of the absolute forced critics into self-reflection. This process is typical of both types of the grotesque, however, the outcome is typical of the *blurring grotesque*. Lack of reason is an especially good catalyst to urge the audience to search for connections, if not in the performance then in themselves.

3.5. Shakespearean *Blurring Grotesques* on the German Stage as Poststructuralist

Subject Criticism

Three of the four postdramatic performances fit the *blurring grotesque* type of definition but not the *transgressive grotesque*. With these examples, I have proven that postmodern performances also use the *blurring grotesque* type of definition and thus offered a worthy equal to Remshardt's *transgressive grotesque*. The *transgressive grotesque* and *blurring grotesque* as two types of postmodern grotesque definitions exist parallel in performance and theatre, just as they are both present in visual arts and literature.

In all four performances discussed above I see an important role in *physicality*. Lehmann also describes *physicality* as the centre of attention in postdramatic theatres.⁴⁴⁸ He lists eleven characteristic features that are essential for the postdramatic theatre and claims that this list does not have to be fulfilled to the last point in order to be given the label of postdramatic performance. From the eleven techniques I have described six. This does not mean that the other techniques are not present in the performances. For example, music also played a role in the discussed performances but it was not connected to the grotesque by the critics in their theatre reviews. The most obviously grotesque theatre technique described by Lehmann is *plethora*. *Plethora* is the technique of “overabundance, chaotic arrangement and the addition of the smallest gags” (at least in the works of the German director Frank Castorf). In general *plethora* means the “refusal of the normalized form of the image,” which is “often realized by way of recourse to *extremes*.”⁴⁴⁹ This technique appears in the Ostermeier-Macras direction of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as a confusion of roles, genders and voices. It also appears in Beier’s *King Lear* as a confusion of roles. *Plethora* communicates disorientation and evokes audience uncertainty. I see in the postdramatic theatre technique *plethora* the best way to achieve Fischer-Lichte’s *Schwellenerfahrung* and thus to realize Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt* in the postdramatic theatre. I have already argued how the two latter notions are connected. I see *plethora* to be a theatre technique, the outcome of which is a *Schwellenerfahrung*, an audience experience of insecurity as the innovative nature of the performance prevents any usual interpretation and the audience needs to invent new ways of interpretations. This outcome of audience confusion makes *plethora* similar to the *blurring grotesque* definition. I argue that the difference between the *Schwellenerfahrung* and the *blurring grotesque*, next to the fact that one is a description of audience experience and the other is an artistic tool, is in the insistence of its outcome. Fischer-Lichte describes a need for

⁴⁴⁸ Lehmann, op. cit., 95.

⁴⁴⁹ His emphasis. Lehmann, op. cit., 90-91.

new strategies of interpretations while the examples for the *blurring grotesque* go further than a need and provoke an audience reaction. The detailed study of how this (re)action is provoked is the subject of this section concluding the third chapter. The *blurring grotesque* puts the audience under pressure so it cannot do otherwise but to become active. I see in this forced agency of the audience a critique in practice on the theoretical passivity of the poststructuralist subject.

In this concluding part to the last chapter I am going to revisit the postdramatic strategies described as grotesque in theatre reviews. The *blurring grotesque* type of definition requires the destruction of the existing order and urges the creation of a new one instead, while the *transgressive grotesque* type of definition after Remshardt and Bakhtin secured the existing order by transgressing some rules of it. For a poststructuralist subject criticism, I need the *blurring grotesque* type of definition as the *transgressive grotesque* would be a grotesque conform to ideology. As the aim of this paper is to detect a critique of the passivity of the poststructuralist subject within theatre and performance discourse, the *blurring grotesque* with its outcome of destroyed structure serves better as a critique than the *transgressive grotesque* which secures the existing structure. In the last line of argumentation in this paper, I interpret what the concrete examples I have found for the *blurring grotesque* mean in the context of poststructuralist subject theories. Hereby an essential link is the presence of the Brechtian tradition in the postmodern, not only in theatre practice shown through Lehmann's postdramatic theatre but also in Fischer-Lichte's theory of *Schwellenerfahrung*. In the following I am going to pay special attention to the way the audience is made active in the examples of this third chapter, so that I can relate this agency in practice to the theoretical passivity of the poststructuralist subject.

I have already described the theoretical impossibility of subject agency in poststructuralist subject theories in the introduction. There I claimed after Bollobás that

agency is granted for marked subjects by “transgressions and extensions of categories.”⁴⁵⁰ It is not an accident that each play I discussed as grotesque in Shakespeare criticism shows the development of a marked subject. I see the only possibility of subject agency for unmarked subjects in noticing and reacting on the way marked subjects deal with agency during these performances. Shakespeare criticism declares the marked subject positions of the Vice, clown and madmen as grotesque. These positions reappear in the postmodern performances but play a slightly different role as they did in Shakespeare criticism. On the one hand, after a detailed research on Shakespeare criticism, one would expect to see these marked subject positions as parts of the postmodern grotesque in performance. The grotesque, however, is a term which avoids fulfilling expectations, it is an indecorum. On the other hand the early modern marked subject positions of the Vice, clown and madmen are exchanged into postcolonial, queer, disabled marked subject positions in the postmodern. However, calling such marked subject positions grotesque would be politically incorrect. What remains is the idea of the unknown, the position of being an other which fascinates and evokes an ambiguous reaction within unmarked subjects. While describing *physicality*, Lehmann argues that the “deviant body,” a body which “deviates from the norm” due to illness, disability or deformation “and causes an ‘amoral’ fascination, unease or fear” is often present in postdramatic theatre.⁴⁵¹ A deviation from the norm is an expression which I have seen often enough during my research on the grotesque. However, a critique will not call an actor with disabilities grotesque, even though it would fit the idea of the grotesque well. The essence of the Vice, clown and madmen is not in their physical appearance but in their social roles as other, as outsiders. These roles are not restricted but grant more freedom than anyone else has. This freedom is realised as a freedom of choice among roles in the postdramatic performances. The main characters of the performances discussed above all suffer from a kind of identity crisis. Richard discovers the

⁴⁵⁰ Bollobás, op. cit., 88.

⁴⁵¹ Lehmann, op. cit., 95.

taste of power and attention after the kiss of Lady Anne, which was obviously a new experience for a disabled other at court. Lear also has to find himself after he becomes an ex-king. Hamlet is also torn between being a prince and going mad while planning regicide. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* identities are lost from the beginning. From the perspective of unmarked subjects, the positions of the postmodern other are attractive due to freedom, but they are also dangerous, not conform with ideology and thus only a loose part of the society. The idea of freedom from ideology hides uncertainty and this uncertainty is represented by the position of the marked subject in postdramatic theatres. I have already mentioned that Carroll claims the grotesque is a good expression of uncertainties and that it can either end laughing or crying. The grotesque, just like the instable roles of Lear, Hamlet, Richard and the performers of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is ambiguous. The marked subject positions in the postmodern and in postdramatic theatre performances play the role of a trigger. They present uncertainties, drive the plot and leave an ambiguous effect behind.

The only obvious marked subject position found in Shakespeare criticism reappears in the *Hamlet* performance. Lars Eidinger has the freedom of improvisation while acting out the madness of Hamlet, according to the theatre critics he touches upon madness and makes audience members answer his direct questions. This is an audience action inspired by the role of the mad, the role of the marked subject. Although I do not suggest that the examined theatre performances I describe make an active subject out of the passive one, however, an example for this statement might make the reader even more convinced about my more moderate thesis. A fan has a tattoo of Eidinger playing Hamlet. Interesting in this story is that Eidinger tried to convince the lady to choose a quotation from Hamlet but she wanted the picture of Eidinger as Hamlet.⁴⁵² I mention this example not only as a proof for Eidinger's

⁴⁵² Patrick Wildermann, "Der Narr in dir," *Der Tagesspiegel* (3 February 2015). <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/schaubuehne-als-globe-theater-der-narr-in-dir/11316882.html>; access on 30.1.2016. Compare with the original text: "„Kennen Sie das Foto der Frau, die sich Lars Eidinger als Hamlet auf den Unterarm hat tätowieren lassen?“, fragt Ostermeier. Holt sein Mobiltelefon raus und zeigt's. „Sie war bestimmt 15 Mal in der Vorstellung. Sie hatte mich übers Internet kontaktiert, ob ich ihr Fotos schicken könne,

success as actor but also because I want to reflect on the grotesque in practice in the context of poststructuralist subject theories. I do not want to say that all subjects watching Eidinger as Hamlet will think about tattooing him on their own bodies but I do want to point in the direction of a possibility that the grotesques in the theatre critics I interpreted as *blurring grotesques* can theoretically shake the passive picture of the subject that poststructuralist theories emphasise, at least in the fields of theatre and performance.

But let us proceed step by step. In the following paragraphs I revisit what theatre reviews called grotesque in the performances and focus on possibilities of agency in these descriptions. In *Hamlet* the theatre techniques of *physicality* and the *irruption of the real* are grotesque for the critics. Lehmann calls it also *concrete theatre* when the bodies appearing on stage are merely present, “the sign merely communicates ... its presence.”⁴⁵³ As in the postdramatic theatre there is no aim to create a fictive illusion that takes place on stage, the directors often play with the border between reality and fiction. They try to evoke an audience reaction of “indecidability whether one is dealing with reality or fiction.”⁴⁵⁴ This is the *irruption of the real* where the “self-reflexive” use of reality becomes part of the performance.⁴⁵⁵ Eidinger’s enormous physical presence as well as his intrusion into the sphere of the audience made this performance grotesque for the critics.

I am going to discuss the difference of Fischer-Lichte’s *Schwellenerfahrung* and the *blurring grotesque* on the example of the *Hamlet* performance. Fischer-Lichte’s *Schwellenerfahrung* is described as the insecurity of the audience of how to interpret an innovative performance. This insecurity will make the audience search for new strategies for meaning production. This is the case by the example when Eidinger runs between the audience and pushes imaginary swords into their hearts. Also, Flower and Raudszus describe

die sich anbieten würden”, erzählt Eidinger über die Verehrerin. „Ich habe ihr abgeraten, sie sollte sich doch lieber einen Spruch aus ‘Hamlet’ tätowieren lassen, der ihr gefällt”.”

⁴⁵³ Lehmann, op. cit., 98.

⁴⁵⁴ Lehmann, op. cit., 101.

⁴⁵⁵ Lehmann, op. cit., 103.

the unsettling experience of not knowing whether Eidinger became mad in reality or he is only acting it. Another example is when Hamlet asks the audience whether he is guilty in Ophelia's death. This example goes a step further what audience agency is concerned, it cannot be described as a pure *Schwellenerfahrung* because here the audience is forced, they are put under pressure to react. I have claimed in the first chapter that the postmodern grotesque is described as a process. Therefore, the *blurring grotesque* cannot only be described as the mixture of the postdramatic theatre's techniques of *physicality* and *irruption of the real*, but its effect should also be examined. Here comes the importance of pressure Raudszus described. While *Schwellenerfahrung* is described as a need for new strategies of interpretations, the *blurring grotesque* is more radical as it does not only search strategies of interpretation but it requires an immediate reaction. I argue here that in this *Hamlet* performance the idea of *Schwellenerfahrung* is brought further as the audience is provoked to act.

The *blurring grotesque* appears in *Hamlet* when members of the audience (re)act on these techniques described above. Let us look at a third example of audience (re)action in detail. The way Hamlet treated Ophelia in the play was seen by Flower as a hardly justifiable revenge on Gertrude: "he attempted to undress, rape and bury her alive."⁴⁵⁶ I have described how disgusting as well as overwhelming critics found the presence of Eidinger during this play. The fact that he played a clown and a madman could count as an excuse as he is then not bound by social norms. However, this does not explain why any audience member would answer his questions on his guilt in Ophelia's death after the above described actions. Eidinger is not only over-present on stage but he is also physically present in the space where the audience sits. I explain why anyone would answer his questions on Ophelia with Levinas' encounter of the face of the other. For Lehmann *physicality* means a body without signification. This is also how Levinas sees the encounter with the other's face. Levinas

⁴⁵⁶ Flower, op. cit., 741.

argues that the encounter with somebody's face is where ethics begins as the nakedness of the face shows that the other is destitute but it also bears a commandment of "Thou shalt not kill." Levinas claims that the "face is signification, and signification without context...the Other ... is not a character in a role... the face is meaning all by itself."⁴⁵⁷ The moment Hamlet asks an audience member whether he is guilty in Ophelia's death becomes an encounter of the face through the physical closeness of Eidingen's body (face) and the body of the audience member. The role of Hamlet and the role of an actor vanishes and the face requires an answer. Levinas claims that in the encounter with the other's face, "the face is meaning all by itself."⁴⁵⁸ Levinas explains the necessity to respond in the following way:

...the *saying* is the fact that before the face I do not simply remain there contemplating it, I respond to it. The saying is a way of greeting the Other, but to greet the Other is already to answer for him. It is difficult to be silent in someone's presence; this difficulty has its ultimate foundation in this signification proper to the saying, whatever is the said. It is necessary to speak of something, of the rain and fine weather, no matter what, but to speak, to respond to him and already to answer for him.⁴⁵⁹

So the reason why audience members answer Eidingen lies not only in the provoking way he acts the mad fool, it also lies in the physical closeness of a face asking you, in the combination of *physicality* and *irruption of the real*. Ostermeier himself admits in an interview that

[his] theatre isn't a theatre of images, [he] do[es]n't need a distance so that the spectators perceive its composition. [He] want[s] the audience to feel as if they were among the actors and the characters they play, right alongside them. On top of that, [he] can't stand when actors recite their texts, as if it were a declamation. [He] want[s] them to act 'truthfully' in a very intimate setting.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁷ Levinas, op. cit., 86.

⁴⁵⁸ Levinas, *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁹ His emphasis. Levinas, op. cit., 88.

⁴⁶⁰ Jean-François Perrier, "Interview with Thomas Ostermeier." Translation into English Gaël Schmidt-Cléach. http://www.festival-avignon.com/lib_php/download.php?fileID=1951&type=File&round=54551178; access on 9.1.2016.

This intimacy works against the theatre of representation and reality of the audience becomes thus an essential part of the performance. This mixture of real and fiction as well as the closeness of the face urges the audience to react. Helena Grehan focuses on ‘ambivalence’ when discussing audience participation in postdramatic theatre performances based on the ethics of Levinas. Grehan observes when audiences leave the performance “feeling some degree of ambivalence are likely to continue to reflect on and consider the work for some time.”⁴⁶¹ From my arguments follows that the grotesque enhances the production of such an ambivalence.

In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* directed by Macras and Ostermeier, the grotesque appears as an example for *parataxis* and *plethora*. *Parataxis* means that the different genres (dance, music, performance arts, etc) “are employed with equal weighting” during a performance.⁴⁶² Instead of one emphasised element, such as the text, the audience is flooded with paratactical signals. This simultaneity “overstrains the perceptive apparatus” of the critics.⁴⁶³ The focus of this performance is on *physicality* and this element is also called grotesque by the critics. An additional act against the traditional text-based theatre in this performance is the technique *plethora*. It means the rejection of conventionalised forms. The strategy of role-changes and gender-changes, as well as vocal travesty is driven into extremes in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

The *blurring grotesque* in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* performance is a result of how *physicality*, *plethora* and *parataxis* meet. *Plethora* and *parataxis* are both techniques that work against the usual ways of interpretations and create thus a *Schwellenerfahrung*. They make the text unimportant, genders, roles and voices exchangeable. They create insecurity and a kind of senselessness in the audience. While traditional interpretation techniques are

⁴⁶¹ Helena Grehan, *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship in a Global Age* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 35.

⁴⁶² Lehmann, op. cit., 87.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

weakened by these strategies, *physicality* emphasises the bodily presence of actors and their body language as communication. It is no wonder theatre critics also focused on *physicality* and noted the energy produced through this *physicality*. It is enough to have a look at the titles of the theatre reviews to know there was no lack of energy: “The Animal in You,” “Learning to Fly,” “With Complete Risk” and “High-pressure Steam in the Hormone-kitchen.”⁴⁶⁴ Marvin Carlson claims that “[e]ven actors and dancers presented a nonstop Saturnalia of astonishing energy and physicality.”⁴⁶⁵ Actors and dancers produce a special energy described by Fischer-Lichte in her concept of *radical presence*. Presence means for Fischer-Lichte the bodily presence of actors on stage (as opposed to the roles the actors play). She speaks about radical presence when the presence of the actor is not only present on stage or attracts attention because of his/her action but when the presence of actors makes the audience produce energy itself. This radical presence happens when the actor is able to produce energy the audience feels. The source of this energy comes from the fact that actors and audience share space and time during the performance. Fischer-Lichte claims that the energy is physically felt and co-produced by the audience.⁴⁶⁶ I claim that the above described techniques of postdramatic theatre, and especially the emphasised *physicality* of the performance result in a *radical presence* and make the audience co-produce the circulating energy during the performance. This means that the audience becomes active during the performance. This activity is of a different kind and it is much more difficult to describe than the one described in Hamlet where a real answer of audience members became part of the performance. Nevertheless, this audience activity is another example where theatre practice questions the theoretical passivity of poststructuralist subject positions.

⁴⁶⁴ My translations of “Das Tier in Dir” (in Dössel, op. cit.), “Fliegen lernen” (in Schaper, op. cit.), “Mit vollem Risiko” (in Müller, op. cit.) and “Hochdruckdampf in der Hormonküche” (in Reinhard Wengierek, “Hochdruckdampf in der Hormonküche,” *Die Welt* (04 Sept 2006). <http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article149922/Hochdruckdampf-in-der-Hormonkueche.html>; access on 3.1.2015.

⁴⁶⁵ Marvin Carlson, *Theatre is More Beautiful than War. German Stage Directing in the Late Twentieth Century* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 177.

⁴⁶⁶ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theaterwissenschaft* (Tübingen and Basel: A. Francke Verlag, 2010), 47-48.

In *King Lear* the grotesque is seen in the all-female production. Not only the fact that only women played in this tragedy made the performance into grotesque, but the female *physicality* emphasized the cruelty on stage as well. Another grotesque is the result of the example for *plethora*, a confusion caused by role-changes as well as the vanishing border between good and evil characters. Moreover, the Kottian interpretation of the grotesqueness of *King Lear* becomes a stage experience in this performance. The lack of the absolute drives this grotesque into absurdity and the audience has to endure this process. Especially the way Nüsse plays the existentially shaken Lear is called grotesque in the critiques. The way Nüsse plays Lear becomes a trigger of audience self-reflexivity. I interpreted Nüsse's Lear as an example for the postdramatic theatre technique *event/situation*. This technique emphasizes the communication between audience and actors instead of the enjoyment of a representation.

The *blurring grotesque* appears as a result of three techniques in *King Lear*: *physicality*, *plethora* and *event/situation*. Especially the technique *plethora* is responsible for the confusion of the audience and for the liminal experience. Fischer-Lichte's *Schwellenerfahrung*, or liminal experience is a process of continuous changes of perception between the bodily presence of the actors and the characters they represent. The audience is in continuous search for new interpretive strategies during this experience.⁴⁶⁷ As the actresses play up to three roles in *King Lear*, and the role changes are not always obvious, the audience has numerous opportunities to experience *Schwellenerfahrung*. This liminal experience shows itself in the form of confusion or even frustration. Krings argues that the fact that there are more roles than actresses in the play forces the audience to pay restless attention.⁴⁶⁸ Zimmermann praises the evening to be an impressive one: "disparate and unsettling, annoying

⁴⁶⁷ Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik* op. cit., 256-260.

⁴⁶⁸ Krings, "Karin Beiers ..." op. cit. Compare with the original text: "Diese Geschlechterschiebung hat nicht nur den Effekt, dass die Figuren in ihrer rein menschlichen Unzulänglichkeit erscheinen. Die Mehrfachbesetzungen fordern auch zu ständigem Mitdenken, Entschlüsseln, Deuten heraus."

and touching; not always convincing but full of radicalness.”⁴⁶⁹ Rossmann claims that Beier’s *King Lear* is an “unsettling and confusing” performance.⁴⁷⁰ Important for my thesis here is, that the *Schwellenerfahrung*, a result of the theatre technique *plethora*, unsettles audiences and thus pushes them into the direction of audience agency when it requires new interpretive strategies.

This need of new interpretive strategies due to *plethora* is pushed into a self-reflective contemplation of the critics with the postdramatic theatre technique of *event/situation*. Lehmann argues that the essence of the theatrical communication of postdramatic theatre is the “production of situations for the *self-interrogation, self-exploration, self-awareness* of all participants.”⁴⁷¹ Moreover, Lehmann claims that “theatre becomes a ‘social situation’ in which the spectator realizes that what s/he experiences depends not just on him/herself but also on others.”⁴⁷² Both the *transgressive grotesque* and the *blurring grotesque* in the postmodern emphasize this effect. Actually, their difference lies in the different outcomes. The *blurring grotesque* makes existing structures insecure, while the *transgressive grotesque* strengthens the existing structures. The example in the *King Lear* performance for the *event/situation* is composed of the catalyst, the way Barbara Nüsse plays Lear, and of the result of it in the critics’ self-reflexivity. The way Nüsse plays Lear is called grotesque, which leads to an absurd situation. This absurdity makes the grotesque into philosophy, it becomes existentialism. This idea of philosophical grotesque is very well detectable on the deepness of the effect critics described. The following remarks all touch upon one’s existence. Zimmermann claims that one leaves the theatre as a different person after seeing Beier’s *King*

⁴⁶⁹ My translation of the “disparat und verstörend, nervend und berührend; nicht immer überzeugend, doch von einer Radikalität...” In Zimmermann, op. cit.

⁴⁷⁰ Rossmann, op. cit., Compare with the original text: “So wirkt die Inszenierung, die Shakespeares Altersdrama zur philosophischen Farce verkürzt, verstörend, aber auch verwirrend.”

⁴⁷¹ His emphasis. Lehmann, op. cit., 105.

⁴⁷² Lehmann, op. cit., 107.

Lear.⁴⁷³ Netz is more concrete, she claims that the audience is “drawn into a new philosophy and self-reflexivity.”⁴⁷⁴ This is achieved through the way the audience recognizes him/herself in *Lear* as someone who stubbornly sticks to his/her limited world view. Netz claims that this bizarre way of sticking to one’s limited view makes this performance grotesque.⁴⁷⁵ Wilink goes so far as to claim that after this evening, one knows anew the reason for theatergoing. He calls the performance “painfully intensive, not celebrating, adamant, radical.”⁴⁷⁶ Audience activity in Beier’s *King Lear* is prepared with the theatre technique *plethora*, the result of which is that new ways of interpretive strategies are searched for and these strategies are obviously pushed in the direction of self-reflexivity. In Beier’s *King Lear* a third dimension of audience (re)action is described by the critics with focus on self-reflexivity.

It might seem out of date to reach back to a philosophy which was strong and made much sense after the World War II, where the results of the Holocaust had to be faced. However, if I look at the way the individual is described in existentialism, it becomes clear that the coinage ‘existentialism’ in a context where self-reflexivity of the critics are achieved in theatre practice becomes a critique of the poststructuralist subject passivity. Existentialism focuses on individual existence, on the freedom of individual and on choice. When the “biological being” starts accepting that individuals have responsibility for their actions, the stadium of “existential individual” is achieved. Opposed to this ‘existential individual’ are the ones who do not acknowledge responsibility and “flee their existential individuality into the comfort of the faceless crowd.”⁴⁷⁷ Thomas Flynn interprets Heidegger’s description of the

⁴⁷³ Zimmermann, op. cit. Compare with the original text: “Nach diesen zweieinviertel Stunden verlässt man das Theater anders, als man es betreten hat.”

⁴⁷⁴ My translation of “...in eine neue philosophische und selbstreflexive Tiefe.” In Netz, “Zart-Herber Totentanz,” op. cit.

⁴⁷⁵ Netz, “Frauen ...” op. cit. Compare with the original text: “In diesem bizarren Beharren auf der eigenen beschränkten Weltsicht ist der „König Lear“ von Karin Beier vor allem grotesk und dadurch besonders tragisch – man erkennt sich in ihm besser wieder als in einem König ohne Reich.”

⁴⁷⁶ My translation of “schmerzhaft intensiv, unfeierlich, unerbittlich, radikal.” In Wilink, op. cit.

⁴⁷⁷ Thomas R. Flynn, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), x.

word 'existence' "'to stand out' from the crowd, from the average everyday."⁴⁷⁸ The focus of existentialism is exactly what poststructuralist subject theories lack: responsibility, freedom and choice. The lack of these notions lies in the fact that ideology imposes roles on subjects, they have no choice but to act out the roles given to them. Describing postmodern ethics, Zygmunt Bauman especially criticises the way subjects neglect responsibility due to the fact that they are fragmented, i.e. they have to switch between different roles (and thus switch between different responsibilities). Similarly to the train of thought in existentialism, Bauman argues that taking responsibility (without having the role to which this responsibility belongs) would mean freedom for the subject but this freedom is often feared and considered not to be as comfortable as obeying the authorities one used to obey.⁴⁷⁹ In such a context is revealing to use the word 'existentialism' as a critique on poststructuralist subject passivity.

After these examples it is clear that postdramatic theatre practice is not only grotesque, but it is *blurring grotesque*, it pushes the perceivers into the direction of activity instead of the old role of passivity the audience used to have in theatres. In the above described examples this activity has different dimensions. I see the requirement of audience activity described in the above examples as a reaction within theatre/performance practice on the poststructuralist subject and its passivity. In *Hamlet* it is an oral response on the closeness of the face, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* it is the co-production of physical energy while in *King Lear* audience activity becomes self-reflection of the critic.

Not only these examples, but the focus of postdramatic theatre as such on audience involvement additionally supports my thesis. This focus on audience productivity roots in Brecht's epic theatre I discussed in the introduction. Brecht wants to enhance audience

⁴⁷⁸ Flynn, op. cit., 107.

⁴⁷⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), 18-21. Bauman claims that the choice is not in following or breaking the rules, but it is between "different sets of rules and different authorities preaching them" (p. 20). The possibility to choose between authorities creates a freedom of choice but also a moral ambiguity, as none of the authorities seems to give the reassurance we seek. Bauman shows that one can leave the ideology if one really wants to, but then one needs to take freedom with all its responsibilities.

productivity by offering situations that are new, unknown for the audience members, so they can leave their usual thinking patterns and start to be creative and produce new ways of thinking. In postdramatic theatrical practice described by Lehmann, especially the technique *plethora* can be called without any context a technique which produces audience insecurity and thus the necessity to produce new thinking patterns. The theoretical description of this audience insecurity is Fischer-Lichte's *Schwellenerfahrung*. If the ideology is questioned, if the Brechtian 'if' in its postmodern form, the *Schwellenerfahrung* of Fischer-Lichte appears, then (in the sense of Fischer-Lichte's theory) the audience is already capable of producing new ways of interpretive strategies, i.e. it is capable of producing indecorum. Fischer-Lichte claims that only innovative theatre performances evoke the *Schwellenerfahrung* because such performances deny traditional interpretations and force creation of a new strategy of interpretation. As we have seen the *blurring grotesque* goes even further than *Schwellenerfahrung* as it forces an answer (in *Hamlet*), co-produces energy (in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) or even evokes philosophical self-reflection of the critics (in *King Lear*).

Conclusion

The thesis of this paper moves within theatre and performance studies. Its claim has a practical and a theoretical aspect. The focus of the thesis is on the practical use of the notion grotesque in postdramatic theatres. The thesis emphasises the essential role of the grotesque in postdramatic theatre and that this grotesque, as well as postdramatic theatre in general focuses on audience productivity. The reason for this focus is interpreted as a practical reaction within postdramatic theatres on the passivity of the subject in poststructuralist subject theories. In the following paragraphs I am going to look back on the train of argumentation in order to offer an overview of how I supported the above described thesis.

In the very first chapter I claim that definitions of the grotesque from the 60s are imported into contemporary definitions, giving them a postmodern touch. I argue that though there were newer definitions of the grotesque in the 70s and 80s, postmodern theoreticians adapted the definitions of Kayser and Bakhtin when they described the postmodern grotesque. Kayser and Bakhtin are considered to have opposing definitions on the grotesque and later theoreticians could not deal with this split within the term, so contemporary theoreticians chose either Kayser or Bakhtin as the basis of their grotesque definitions. This is a result of my research in the fields of visual art and in literature. However, in theatre and performance studies I have only found one description which is based on Bakhtin. This illogical uneven representation led to the thesis that also the theatre and performance genres should show definitions of the grotesque based on Kayser. This thesis is proved with my research in chapter three, where I read theatre critiques of four postdramatic performances, three out of which showed a grotesque definition which was based on the ideas of Kayser.

In chapter one, I also gave names to the two trends of definitions of the grotesque I have found in the postmodern. I did so because Kayser and Bakhtin were only used as starting points of these new postmodern definitions, and as such it would be misleading to use the

names of these scholars. Instead, I use essential elements of their grotesque descriptions. Basically, the grotesque in the postmodern is something that disrespects norms/rules/conventions. I also argued that both types of postmodern grotesques are described as a process and that postmodern grotesques include an effect which becomes an essential part of the definition itself. I differentiated between two grotesques on the basis of how successful they are in actually destroying these norms/rules/conventions. The *transgressive grotesque* is a grotesque which transgresses existing structures without harming them. I called it transgressive after Bakhtin's idea of the carnival. The carnival is a safety valve of the society, but it (more often than not) returns to the old structure after the carnival is over. The *blurring grotesque* is described after Kayser. The *blurring grotesque* is a successful attempt to make existing structures alien and thus this grotesque requires the creation of new structures. The *blurring grotesque* holds a potential for real change in itself. This makes the *blurring grotesque* more interesting for my study than the *transgressive grotesque*.

In the second chapter I turned to a more specific grotesque, which has also had to be researched first: the Shakespearean grotesque. I undertook a short research on how the word 'antic,' an earlier form of the 'grotesque' was used in Shakespeare's time. I see the shift from the Middle Ages into an early modern England as a context where the word grotesque as a special form of indecorum was welcomed and slowly integrated into the English language. It was a term commonly used for something exaggeratedly inappropriate or even evil.

The major part of chapter two, however, is an account on how grotesques appear in Shakespeare criticism. Here I focused on characters and plays described as grotesques. The character Falstaff with his fatness and low moral standards becomes the ultimate example for the Bakhtinian carnivalesque grotesque. The grotesqueness of the character Hamlet is seen in his double role of being a prince as well as a clown. The grotesque in the play *King Lear* is in the cruel humour which neither lets the play become a pure comedy nor a pure tragedy. Lear himself is also described to be grotesque because he is a ridiculous character who experiences

cruelty. The character of the Vice is also seen as grotesque because it unites funny and frightening elements. The figure of the Vice, the clown and madmen are roles which embody the grotesque in Shakespeare criticism. These roles are also positions outside the social structure as both the clown and madmen had a freedom of speech in the time of Shakespeare. The figure of the Vice is a successor of the clown and the Devil and its typical characteristic feature is that this role stands above the rules which normally apply for all roles in the play. The Vice, the clown and madmen are excellent positions for criticising social structures without being punished for it. Also, they are marked subject positions. These positions may criticise ideology without being part of it. I argue that the uncertainties in the early modern England led to the increased usage of the word 'antic' in the sense of the grotesque and later the word 'grotesque'. Not only the early modern England but the postmodern can also be called as an age of uncertainty, only that today not Vices and clowns but postcolonial and homosexual people belong to the marked subjects. The similarity lies in the outsider positions they occupy.

In the third chapter I argue for the thesis that the grotesque plays an essential part in postdramatic theatres. The proof of this thesis is demonstrated on four examples from postdramatic theatre practice. I looked at four Shakespeare performances in Germany that were described as 'grotesques' in theatre critiques. First, I looked at the textual context of the word 'grotesque' within the critiques and interpreted what critics meant under 'grotesque'. Later I compared the grotesque described in the theatre reviews with the *blurring grotesque* and the *transgressive grotesque*, as well as the grotesques found in Shakespeare criticism. There were in most cases common points between the postmodern grotesques or the Shakespearean grotesques and those grotesques the critics described in postdramatic theatre performances. However, a more interesting fact is that most of the phenomena described as grotesque are also typical theatre techniques of the postdramatic theatre. For example, *physicality* is present in all four performances and in all four performances it was called

grotesque. Lehmann describes *physicality* as the emphasised presence of the body of actors which cease to be a representation. In the case of *Hamlet*, physicality means the over-presence of the actor playing Hamlet. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* all performers take part in the intense *physicality* when they produce energy during their movements which express either love or hate. Here body language even takes the place of spoken language. *Physicality* appears in Richard's awkwardly over-emphasised disabilities which make him into an outsider, while in *King Lear* the softness and cruelty of naked female bodies are called grotesque.

However, *physicality* alone is not enough to call these performances *blurring grotesque* or *transgressive grotesque*. According to Lehmann, postdramatic performances should be seen as a unity where the physical appearance of the actors is only one element. Directors can only achieve the coinage 'grotesque' if they use a combination of *physicality* with other elements of postdramatic theatre. This combination was different by each performance. While I have found one example for the *transgressive grotesque* in the performance of *Richard III*, all the other examples were *blurring grotesques*. The humiliated nakedness in *Richard III* was of a very different kind than the *physicality* which appeared in the other three performances. The grotesques in this performance had little to do with each other, they were minor parts of the performance which I saw as *transgressive grotesques*, a kind of indecorum with not much effect on the critics. The example of Richard as *transgressive grotesque* is used as a contrast to the other three examples of the *blurring grotesque*.

The postdramatic theatre technique *plethora* has in itself a description that reminds one of the *blurring grotesque* definition. *Plethora* is incoherency, lack of logic and structure and those driven to the extreme. Both in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and in *King Lear* the biggest confusion was reported on by the exchangeability of genders and roles. This technique creates a vacuum, a lack of structure, which cannot be hold by the audience so it is forced to

create new structures of interpretation. I claim that examples of the grotesque critics found in these two performances are *blurring grotesques*. These examples also emphasise the nature of the grotesque as process to which belongs the effect of the grotesque in the form of destroyed structures. *Plethora* is the most obvious theatre technique of postdramatic theatre which can also be related to the *blurring grotesque* without any examples. The emphasis on *plethora* is different in the two performances. While in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* there is no list of actors which could show who plays which character, in *King Lear* it is obviously stated which roles (even if there are up to three roles for one actress) belong to which actress. While in the first example a chaos is staged, in the second those who know the text well can most of the time follow the performance. From the point of view of theatre history, *plethora*, the idea of erasing one structure in order to produce one new is as old as Brecht's epic theatre. I argued in the introduction that I see the postmodern form of Brecht's 'alienation effect' in Fischer-Lichte's 'liminal experience'. Fischer-Lichte's *Schwellerfahrung* is an experience of the audience during a theatre performance when usual ways of interpretation are blocked. The audience has to establish new interpretive strategies, just like during Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, where the alien circumstances of the theatrical context make the audience get rid of their old thinking patterns. In both effects/experiences the audience is deprived of his/her usual thinking patterns, so the production of new ways of thinking is promoted by such effects/experiences.

The *blurring grotesque* is a result of a combination of different postdramatic theatre techniques with an effect that promotes audience agency. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* next to *physicality* and *plethora*, *parataxis* is also described as grotesque. *Parataxis* makes sure the play-text is only as important as other elements of the performance text. In this performance the play-text was even less important than body language. I claimed that the combination of these three theatre techniques are *blurring grotesque* as they evoke audience (re)action. The audience reaction is described with the help of Fischer-Lichte's concept of

radical presence, which claims that in case the audience feels the energy produced by the bodily presence of the actors, audience members are going to react on this energy and co-produce it during the performance.

In the *King Lear* performance next to *physicality* and *plethora*, the theatre technique *event/situation* was also called grotesque. Under *event/situation* Lehmann understands the theatrical communication in postdramatic theatres. He claims that as a result of this communication, self-exploration happens. Lehmann understands the role of postdramatic theatre not as a producer of representations but as a trigger, an inspiration for audience self-reflection. I interpreted the way Barabara Nüsse played Lear as the trigger of self-reflections described in the critiques. The way Nüsse played Lear was called grotesque, absurd, existentialist, it touched the existence of some critics and made them philosophical. That the critics as well as the director reached back to existentialism in this performance is not only because Lear's existence is in danger but I also see it as a recourse, or re-use of formulas poststructuralist subject theories lack (and existentialism focuses on), such as the freedom or responsibility of the individual.

In Ostermeier's *Hamlet* next to *physicality*, the theatre technique *irruption of the real* was called grotesque. Lars Eidinger is not only over-present during the whole performance, he often enters the space of the audience and thus enters their reality. As postdramatic theatre has no aim to show representations, the technique *irruption of the real* is important as it plays with the borders of reality and fiction. Its effect is that the audience has no idea whether an action belongs to the fiction or it happens in reality. Especially the way Eidinger addressed audience members with direct questions evoked the grotesque according to the critics. The critics also noted that there were moments when they could not tell whether Eidinger or only Hamlet went mad. I further argued that the *blurring grotesque* in this *Hamlet* performance is a combination of *physicality* and *irruption of the real*, as well as the fact that Hamlet acts out a mad clown. The social position of this role allows him to act in an ab-normal way and to

provoke with this action a (re)action from the audience. I also argued that this open provocation is not enough to evoke audience reaction but a combination of provocation, physical closeness and the encounter with Eidingers face (after Levinas) force the audience to (re)action.

Although the roles of the Vice, the clown and madman were called grotesques in Shakespeare criticism, in postdramatic theatre practice it was only in the *Hamlet* performance where this role played an essential part in achieving audience (re)action. In *Richard III* we saw a Shakespearean evil who is not typical of Shakespeare criticism and who was not expected from Eidingers after his Hamlet interpretation. Richard as a childish, disabled figure who takes what he sincerely believes to be his is not a typical Vice. In *King Lear* the madness of the king becomes an internal madness which is seen as a part of the philosophical grotesque, as a necessity of the absurd, as a starting point of existentialism. However, the idea of being an other, an outcast connects Richard, Hamlet and Lear. All the three suffer a kind of identity crisis all search for their new places in society. As others they have a kind of exotic freedom unmarked subjects fear and envy.

I also claimed that the focus on audience agency in postdramatic theatre practice is a reaction to the poststructuralist subject passivity within theatre and performance discourse. The audience agency is discovered in the direct pressure Eidingers as Hamlet acts out on his audience, in the subtle pressure produced by the excessive energy use of eleven actors and dancers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and in the introverted philosophy about one's existence the critics described as an effect of Nüsse's Lear. I see all three forms of audience provocation as the *blurring grotesque*, one of the two types of grotesque definitions in the postmodern. This *blurring grotesque* differs from the other type, the *transgressive grotesque* in its outcome. The *blurring grotesque* is capable of blurring, erasing existing structures and thus it is capable of making room for the creation of new ones. The *blurring grotesque* is not only a type of grotesque definition, but it becomes a more general term for the combination of

some postdramatic theatre techniques in the examples I discussed above. The aim of postdramatic theatre is the same as the aim of the *blurring grotesque*: to enhance audience productivity. The answer to the question why it is so should be searched in the discrepancy between the theory of poststructuralist subject passivity and the focus on audience productivity in theatre practice.

Postmodern subject theories repress the subject, so s/he has no room for action outside ideology. Bollobás claims that only marked subjects not belonging to the ideology may act outside ideology. The Vice, the clown and madmen are marked subjects and they are also the embodiments of Shakespearean grotesques. In the postdramatic theatre performances the source of the grotesque becomes an uncertainty of the main characters about which roles they should acted out. The *blurring grotesque* I found in the critiques has an effect which requires audience action. This action is described as an oral response in *Hamlet*, as a co-production of energy with the actors in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and as a philosophical self-reflection in *King Lear*. These are (re)actions of the critics. The discrepancy between poststructuralist subject theories on subject passivity and postdramatic theatre practice with its aim of audience productivity becomes no less if we include Lehmann's description of theatre practice. I claim that audience productivity within postdramatic theatre and the appearance of the *blurring grotesque* there is not simply a postmodern form of the Brechtian tradition of 'alienation effect' but it becomes a reaction to the passivity of the subject in poststructuralist subject theories.

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