

Gay Troublemakers

None but Fools¹

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The fool doth think he is wise,
but the wise man
knows himself to be a fool.
Shakespeare, As You Like It
Act 5, Scene 1

Under cover ...

What is a fool? What hides behind the German word *Narr*, whose origin is etymologically not really known? If, uninhibited by academia, we jump headlong into such questions, a multiplicity of associations, possible readings and concepts stumble over each other. This also applies to the word *queer*. As today's star, it enters the assembly of words with a mischievous "grin like a Cheshire cat" and makes an impressive cat hump. Then it performs capers on stage, but unexpectedly falls backwards into Alice's mouse hole, where it disappeared. All that remains is an ironic grin of its hype.

But to be more serious. Is the fool just an idiot? Somebody who is not in his/her right mind? A human being with a mental disability? A "fool by nature" and not a "fool by art", like the fool character in

1 This text was originally published in German under the title "Johnny & Immanuel" in: Böhler, Arno, Susanne Valerie, and Passagen-Verlag. 2018. *Philosophy on Stage: Philosophie als künstlerische Forschung*. First German edition. Vienna: Passagen Verlag.

Shakespeare's dramas, comedies and tragedies? If this was the case, a fool would be a both mentally and physically deformed human who knows and makes the experience of being both psychically and physically – even more powerless than all of us – at the mercy of the world and of him/herself. Abandoned to mishap and disfavour, to scorn and mockery, to glee and humiliation, at best suitable for acting as a powerless scapegoat, for acting out one's own accrued resentment on him/her, because he/she, as already said, is just an imbecile gawk, a goof, a blockhead and a ridiculous oaf. Indeed, a fool who, due to his simplicity, makes us laugh and is laughed at.

Or – on the contrary – he/she is him/herself a jester and giggle, a joker, a rogue, who is laughed at because blatantly he/she makes jokes at the expense of others? Then he/she would be a quick-witted clown making his/her audience look like fools – and of course everybody knows that his/her jokes do not aim at him/herself but certainly always at those others. No question. On the other hand, the jester likes his/her jokes to be rude and dubious. This way he/she may be sure that the audience will laugh, because by way of his/her filthy quotes he/she blatantly “rides the hobbyhorse”, as we commonly say. This kind of fun is entertaining and amusing – and it works.

Insofar, in a way the comedian on stage has *carte blanche* for all kinds of eloquent fun, which he/she presents with the brilliance of an actor. This is much applauded and laughed about, for all of it is just a chimaera, banter and toying with the truth, which is not necessarily believed. Not even if the situation becomes dead serious. Not even if the situation is really urgent – and in Søren Kierkegaard's ironic aphorism this is definitely meant literally:

At a theatre, the props happened to catch fire; the buffoon stepped forward to inform the audience. Everybody believed this to be a joke and applauded. He repeated his announcement: the applause became even louder. This is the way, I think, in which the world will perish, under general applause by funny minds who believe the process to be a joke. (Kierkegaard 1904 [1885], 40)²

2 English translation from the German edition by Mirko Wittwar.

The conclusion to be drawn from this scene is obvious. One need not believe a jester and buffoon. Not even if obviously he/she speaks the truth. Everything he/she is saying up on stage, what he/she is doing, if he/she is laughing or crying, if he/she gurns or keeps a straight face, all this only serves for entertainment, for the audience's amusement. For, it is down there, in the stalls, where there are all those honourable, scholarly and witty minds who know how to distinguish true from false, not up there, on the stage which is said to be the world. As a passage from a poem by Friedrich Schiller says³ which has become a winged word, as the educated know.

If we visualise the described situation, at the apron we see an actor wearing the buffoon's dress, desperately struggling for credibility, *as he knows* he is speaking the truth and the whole theatre, with all the audience, will soon be ablaze. By *why* is he not believed? Why? Because this is a buffoon speaking? Because it is clear that everything happening on stage is defined as fiction? Because, according to this conclusion, what he is saying cannot at all be true, not even if it is actually happening at the moment. The stage is the place of fictitious truth. A "temple of lies". And that's that. That's fact. Let the fool jump about like he wants.

In Kierkegaard's aphorism, not the actor is the problem but it is the oh so prudent minds who are dying of laughter about their own approaching deaths, we feel enticed to say. Thus, in the concrete case it is the self-confident audience who think themselves safe because they *certainly know what is true and what is false*, for one thing is fact: on stage, only fiction is negotiated, no facts. This makes the audience blind, and the buffoon's alleged joke has more weight than the deadly seriousness of the situation. Any trace of instinct is lost. No hazy smell of smoke alerts on time, there is no suspicion. From the perspective of a foolish jester, his desperate alarm is read as a

3 Cf. *An die Freunde*: "Sehn wir doch das Große aller Zeiten/Auf den Brettern, die die Welt bedeuten,/Sinnvoll still an uns vorübergehn./Alles wiederholt sich nur im Leben,/Ewig jung ist nur die Phantasie;/Was sich nie und nirgends hat begeben,/Das allein veraltet nie!" (Schiller 2004, 421)

slick gag, meant for entertainment – and the more he struggles for credibility, the louder the audience's laughter.

Ha, ha, ha ... brilliant that buffoon, spectacular! ... ha, ha, ha ... he is gesturing as if the devil was in pursuit of his poor soul ... ha, ha, ha ... now even his voice goes over the top ... now he even flushes, and now he gets really pale again ... ha, ha, ha ... simply great what he is performing up there!

In a fatal way, the actor's "successful" performance combines with the deluded idea of the audience which has no doubt that everything happening on stage is masquerade, travesty, sheer as if. Consequently, it has no sense for the surprising, improbable which is to come. It has neither eye nor ear. There is no creeping doubt. No *perhaps* finds its way to them. They believe their firm knowledge of *what is true and what is a lie* to be axiomatic. To be definitive. This makes them blind and deaf towards the coming threat. There is no sense of danger. Not even their own will to survive raises the alarm, tells them that in a few moments they are going to miserably burn within a sea of flames. And why? This species cannot be extinct, "like the flea", as is Nietzsche's diagnosis, "the last man lives the longest". So, why be afraid?

Nietzsche's conclusion on the last man fits seamlessly – only that the end is different – to Kierkegaard's sarcastic words when writing: *This is the way, I think, in which the world will perish, generally applauded by funny minds who believe the process to be a joke.*

What is interesting is the fact that at the heart of this aphorism there is a buffoon speaking the truth and not being believed. Does this not suggest another character among the fools? Could it not be that Kierkegaard the philosopher might be read as acting the scornful fool who, by his caustic conclusion, makes fun of preconceptions, leading to deadly disaster into which we blindly run? Is thus a fool – perhaps also – a critic of distinction? A troublemaker, a malicious agent who, for the sake of truth, in a sharp-tongued manner attacks the hidden basements of power, using the weapon of language? An ironic revealer of character, whose perception reaches behind the masks of short-sighted self-confidence, and who, for love of the truth, opens the trapdoors to the understage, to trace down hypocrisy, resentment, and corrupt arrogance? By doing his buffoon job,

does he hold a mirror up to both the powerful and the powerless? *Mirror, mirror on the wall ...* Given the mirror's answer, it may well be that the pride is ignited and starts sprawling like weed in the heart, as what the mirror says is the truth. This will not necessarily really set the world ablaze. Or will it? The question is who is going to burn on the pyre then. Or if the hellfire is worldwide, as Kierkegaard the philosopher cynically suggests, should stupid ignorance get the upper hand.

From the prompt box, words can be heard in a low voice, almost whispered, so that one must strain one's ears to understand what is said:

Be careful. The truth is a hot potato. At all times. Not only in the past. Every time has its own sacred cow. Left and right. – (The voice coughs slightly), Oh, pardon me, now I've almost made a mistake. These days you're easily mistaken. Of course, what I was going to say: reft and light. (Original German Text: "lechts und rinks")⁴ – So, one more time, be careful. Not bowing to censorship and attempting to unmask opinions which have become dogmas is dangerous. A pillory is erected with a click – and all licenced fools⁵ are no more.

And furthermore, a prudent fool knows – as is the motto if this paper – "*The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool.*" (Shakespeare [1862], Act 5, Scene 1)⁶ That is, he does not

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- 4 English translation from the German edition by Mirko Wittwar. Cf. Ernst Jandl: "lichtung: manche meinen / lechts und rinks / kann man nicht / velwechsern. / werch ein illtum!" (Jandl 1997, book back cover)
 - 5 In the past, so called court jesters in their special position had a kind of license which protected them: "In any case, the 'all licensed fool' was, by unwritten law or explicitly, entitled to function as a critic of his master, however also of contemporary life, of society, of the court, in short: of his entire environment, and to hold up a mirror to them." (Langenbach-Flore 1994, 36). English translation from the German edition by Mirko Wittwar.
 - 6 Touchstone asks of William, "Art thou wise?" William incautiously replies, "Ay, sir, I have a pretty wit." This is Touchstone's opportunity, and he retorts: "Why, thou sayest well. I do now remember a saying, / The

just laugh at those others but also, clairvoyantly, at himself. This double art is his own. With it, humiliation and elevation change places without any problem – and in this context, *laughter* is his *weapon*, *like medicine*. Such laughter serves for being liberated from narrow-mindedness and dogmatism. In the past and today. By way of these tactics, and by help of witty language games, he camouflages his attacks at ignorance and illusions, thus, in the guise of foolishness, blatantly invalidating rules which dominate minds and bodies. Doing so, he definitely proves to be a philosopher who prudently speaks in tongues and ignites flashes of truth which, by way of liberating laughter, are able to strike sparks of the joy of living on a topsy-turvy world.

Such a fool is per se a happy bloke without shackles of morality which make small and limit possibilities. He, who by his witty-mindedness questions the correctness of everything orthodox and does not play by the rules, might be considered a social outsider. He has little use for the lust of resentment, no matter in the guise of which vocabulary it appears. He is driven by a different motivation. Accordingly, he is no square, no bourgeois, no philistine, no hypocrite, and also he does not belong to those who, blinkingly, ask themselves: “What is love? What is creation? What is yearning? What is a star?” (Nietzsche 2005, 16) – because they have forgotten. By his wit, he shoots the arrow of his desire beyond those others *and* beyond himself. Thus, he is anything but foolish, anything but a stupid goof, but much more a *gate to the truth*, a specific truth-teller, a “truth player” (Handke 1989, 24) and “throughway creator” (ibid., 26) who spies the truth he knows to be promised to. In this sense, he might possibly be attributed a *kind of parrhesia practice* (Foucault 2011, 1–22) and be declared a *truth speaker in a fool’s dress* whose particular method is the depth and sharpness of his joke, by help of which he makes the audience, by way of laughter, the touchstone⁷ for his poisonous

fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool.” (Ibid.)

- 7 A touchstone is a testing stone or a try-out stone. In its concrete sense, it serves for investigating the fineness of gold and silver alloys. This method has been used since ancient times. In a figurative sense the

tongue. Among such fools we may file Touchstone from the guild of Shakespeare's fools.

Touchstone: A Shakespearean Jester

Touchstone as the jester is given in the cast of characters of "As You Like It" – probably written in 1599, first published in 1623 – he is one of the *motley-minded gentlemen* Shakespeare created. It is also him who states that a wise man does not only consider others fools but counts him/herself among them. This gives evidence to Touchstone's prudence and humour, based on which he comments on and criticizes what is going on around him, wearing the mask of the goof. His particular name makes us wonder. Why does Shakespeare call him *Touchstone*? Why not *Feste*, like the jester in *Twelfth Night*, or *Costard* in *Love's Labour's Lost*, or *Lavatch* in *All's Well That Ends Well*? He might as well have gone without a name, like the wise jester in *King Lear*. Thus, why Touchstone, of all?

In Shakespeare's time, a touchstone was originally used to determine the measure of gold in a stone (cf. Granzer 2016). A sample was rubbed on a touchstone (mostly black quartz) until it left a visible line, the colour of which was compared to pure gold. Insofar, Touchstone's name may of course be understood metaphorically. For, like the touchstone must show a sufficient degree of hardness to identify the precious metal, quite in the same way Touchstone the jester, by way of his poisonous tongue and prudent jokes, rubs and cuts the audience, to make them aware of the crazed mixture of truth and blindness, of the tragedy and comedy of all life. Intelligently wrapped in wisdom and screwed pun, laughing is allowed in this context. However, while laughing, one or the other is struck by a flash of lightning, shedding light on man's place in cosmos, on time and being, on error and truth, on power and subject – *striking him/her down to the ground, and suddenly he/she bites a second time into the Apple of Knowledge?*

Cambridge dictionary speaks of a touchstone as an established standard or principle by which someone is touched (Cambridge Dictionary n.d.).

Basking in the forest sun, Shakespeare's fool Touchstone argues with Lady Fortune about her moodiness. Unabashedly, he speaks loudly to himself, as it sometimes happens when we believe to be on our own. However, coincidentally Jacques, the philosophising pessimist, during his stroll through the forest of the Ardennes, hears this motley figure talking – and listens. What he gets to hear makes him burst out laughing, so that he finds it difficult to restrain himself. He is hardly able to utter these words:

A fool, a fool! I met a fool i' the forest, / A motley fool; a miserable world! / As I do live by food, I met a fool / Who laid him down and bask'd him in the sun, / And rail'd on Lady Fortune in good terms, / In good set terms and yet a motley fool. / 'Good morrow, fool,' quoth I. 'No, sir,' quoth he, / 'Call me not fool till heaven hath sent me fortune:' / And then he drew a dial from his poke, / And, looking on it with lack-lustre eye, / Says very wisely, 'It is ten o'clock: / Thus we may see,' quoth he, 'how the world wags: / 'Tis 'but an hour ago since it was nine, / And after one hour more 'twill be eleven; / And so, from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe, / And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot; / And thereby hangs a tale.' / When I did hear / The motley fool thus moral on the time, / My lungs began to crow like chanticleer, / That fools should be so deep-contemplative, / And I did laugh sans intermission / An hour by his dial. (Shakespeare [1862], Act 2, Scene 7)

Laughing may have many meanings. Amusement, rejection, realisation, liberation, insight, fright, resistance and much more. It is a power which grasps our mood without being controlled. A power which may get us beside ourselves. Thus, why does Jacques get so much beside himself with laughter when hearing the words of the fool? What does affect him so much when Touchstone, to his "Good morrow, fool," says: "No, sir, call me not fool till heaven hath sent me fortune", to then take a watch out of his pocket and reason about the fugacity of time. Does Jacques the misanthropist read these words about happiness and being a fool as some funny nonsense which makes him laugh so much that he cannot stop for one hour? Is it the silly mel-

ancholy of a fool who, precociously and by way of dissimulation and nonsensical banter, moans about Fortuna and life slipping through his fingers? Nonsense, after all. Is it this?

Or, does Jacques the melancholiac overexcitedly burst out laughing given the question about the fugacity of time, which we cannot stop and which, by death, presents us with a last finale in all eternity? Is his unrestrained laughter an attempt to escape this dilemma?

Or is it something completely different? Does, perhaps, Touchstone the fool function as a mirror for Jacques? *What was it again? Mirror, mirror on the wall ...* Is it his intention to make him aware, in a parodistic manner, of his melancholic way of philosophizing? Of his cynical view at the world, where man, through all stages of his/her life, is hit by one mishap, by one disaster after the other, to finally and ultimately dive into complete forgetfulness – today we call it dementia – and that's all?! "*Last scene of all, / That ends this strange eventful history, / Is second childishness and mere oblivion, / Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything*" (ibid.), this is, a little later, Jacques' bitter and ironical conclusion about the fate of the humans as sheer actors on the stage of the world. Is his disinhibited laughter thus a paradox reaction to the sudden insight into his own dead-end of interpreting the world solely as a blind calamity, interpreting it from its failure and perishing? Does this explain his almost hysterical reaction?

Or, once again, do we have to read Touchstone's passage, where he curses Lady Fortune, who cannot be forced by anything, in yet a completely, completely different way, because in the same breath he is reasoning about man's mortality, who is swallowed up by time? Are, perhaps, the stage of this world and all the colossal fuzz it makes one of the last remaining places where ragtag fools are allowed to caw a melancholic *memento mori* which insists in *for once viewing the world from the perspective of eternity sub species aeternitatis*? (Spinoza 1994, 258–265 [Book 5, Proposition 29–42]) Is that written on the touchstone for the riddle of Fortune which, by such an untimely switch of perspective, may shine in gold – or indeed not? "*And there-by hangs a tale.*" (Shakespeare [1862], Act 2, Scene 7) ...

Johnny:⁸ A Contemporary Jester

A leap from Shakespeare's time to the present, to the year 2015, to *Philosophy on Stage # 4*, titled "Artist Philosophers – Nietzsche et cetera" was a four-day festival which, by different formats, has swapped the traditional accommodations of the Institute of Philosophy of the University of Vienna for those of Tanzquartier Wien. One of the protagonists who, on this occasion, appeared on behalf of Nietzsche, was a late-modern fool by the name of Johnny, a long-standing accomplice and agent of performance artist Barbara Kraus.

High above the heads of the audience, on the balcony of Hall G, like on the peak of a mountain, there appears a young man, somewhat casually. He is wearing a bright yellow shirt, large checked trousers, yellow patent-leather shoes, and a red scarf around his neck. Sunglasses are nonchalant pushed back onto his short, pitch-black hair, and his upper lip is decorated with a narrow, black moustache. A pencil moustache.



Figure 1: Johnny blinded. (Copyright: Austrian Science Fund (FWF): AR 275-G21)

- 8 This is a revised English version of parts of the text "Johnny & Immanuel", first published in German ([Gränzer] 2018). It is based on the intervention "Out there is a field" by performance artist Barbara Kraus during the four-days festival *Philosophy On Stage #4: Artist Philosophers–Nietzsche et cetera* (Kraus 2015).

He himself lacks any kind of French elegance. Instead he is dragging his feet, the real provocateur, with a wicked tongue, he speaks a broad Viennese dialect, behaves badly and unashamedly, and right on his arrival he has a go at those who are still taking their seats. They are, he rants, *time monkeys, being late everywhere*. Like Kraus, he adds. By a “*na hopp, hopp, hopp*” the latecomers are spurred on, who seem to be embarrassed by being addressed like this in the public. They, he complains, are monkeying about with the time for his appearance. The time for his *intervention*. Of which, however, he doesn’t know anyway where to *intervene*, he emphasizes in a complaining manner. Then, when right during the first sentence of his prologue – “*die Kraus hot urndlich vü g’strewert*” (*that Kraus’s been smuggling pretty much*) – suddenly, belatedly a spotlight flashes up right at him, he interrupts himself and stares blinkingly into the light. Another disturbance. Now, the real cavalier, however with a rebellious undertone, he asks: “*wer hot d i e blendende Idee g’hobt?*” (*whose bright idea was that?*) – to immediately add that now he was feeling much more “*pr o – p o t e n t e r, prä-potenter*” (*pro-potent, pre-potent*), or whatever the word was.

This mocker’s sex is unclear. If we look at the moustache, much suggest that he is a young man in the age of puberty, like sixteen years old. His voice, on the other hand, is clearly that of a woman. Now, who is who? Is performance artist Barbara Kraus Johnny’s alter ego? Or is Johnny, the buffoon, Barbara Kraus’s alter ego? The identity of these two remains ambivalent. The perfect tightrope walk. A game without a safety net, played by both in unison and full of verve. Neither Johnny nor Barbara Kraus care about any possible danger to fall. Their appearance is an act of radical improvisation. In *his, her*, its hand *he, she*, it holds a turquoise briefcase, and an exaggeratedly large bag is heavily hanging from *his, her*, its shoulder, stuffed with many books, as one is going to see soon. For, one is told, Kraus has provided him, Johnny, with material for weeks. And this although he has just been granted half an hour for his intervention. He very much extends the word *i n t e r v e n t i o n*, slowly and mockingly he has it melt in his mouth. – This way, rebelliously the rogue casts his bait, with a loud mouth, finally he throws himself into a pose, and both provocatively and narcissistically, definitely in a non-moral sense, he

asks: “Na, wie g’fall i eich da heroben?” (Well, how do you like me up here?) – and with a meaningful look at those sitting down below him he explains: “Des is nämlich des Podest der P h i l o s o p h e n” (For, this is the podium of the p h i l o s o p h e r s). There is smirking and laughing. Johnny is winning their hearts.

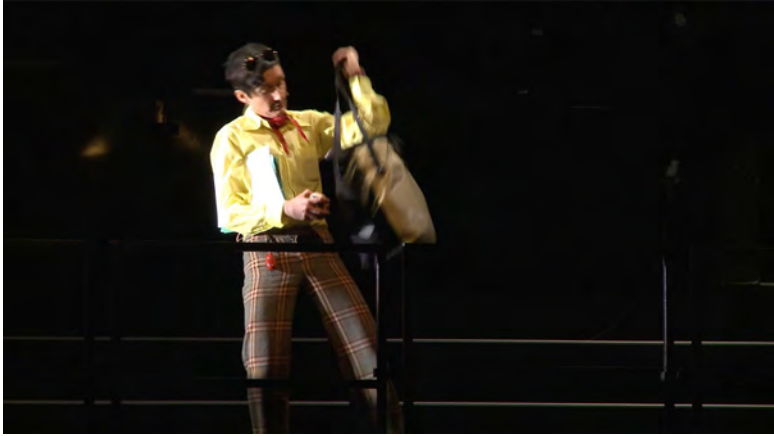


Figure 2: Johnny picks up a bag. (Copyright: Austrian Science Fund (FWF): AR 275-G21)

With his colourfully spotted outfit, the checked trousers and the yellow shirt, equipped with a wicked tongue, always ready for a bold, unashamed extempore – does this Johnny not resemble a showman, a carny? A fool and a jester who through and through belongs to the tradition of the buffoon? Only that he is from the 21st century? But was it not precisely that type of buffoon (Müller-Kampel 2003) Leipzig scholar and Enlightenment philosopher Johann Christoph Gottsched, in the 18th century, wanted to ban from the stages of Germany, to reform them and to raise their educated middleclass quality? The theatre was supposed to teach and educate but not to entertain by way of vulgar jokes and ambiguities, so as to become a source of moral hazards for the audience. Emotions and desires were supposed to be tamed, not to be revealed and discharged. The so called “Hanswurststreit (Buffoon Controversy)” began, a struggle for a “clean” theatre, and indeed, in 1737, the buffoon was, in the course of an allegorical play, publicly banned from the stage. However, this

intention was met with resistance, most of all in Vienna with its popular tradition of the *Alt-Wiener Volkskomödie* (Old-Viennese popular comedy) – despite Empress Maria Theresia's ban on extemporising of 1752 (Die Welt der Habsburger 2022). *Sic erat scriptum!*

The fool, the freak with rebellious power who, by way of his jokes, confronts the ruling powers, looks back to a long tradition. He is a counterforce to the elements of suppression, of violence, of threat, of the ban, as well as to fear, weakness, humility, hypocrisy and phoni-ness. He is to be found in antiquity, by the satyr play, which was performed as a liberating aftermath of the tragedies, it is to be found by the institution of the court jester, with the carnival, in Shakespeare of course, as represented by the jester Touchstone, however also by the laughing figures of the Middle Ages which confront this period's subjugating repression and horrifying seriousness (Bachtin 1990, 38–46). This history could be continued until present time Vienna – which has not been subject to any Prussian-Protestant but to a Catholic-Baroque influence – and this city's love of its language games, its specific kind of humour, its Wiener Schmääh (Viennese snide humour). Gimmicks and tricks of everyday life which, by their outrageous linguistic wit, do not “decently” ignore mishaps and mistakes but satirises them with relish. However, after all without any intention of simply humiliating anybody but of dissolving the human, the all-too-human, by way of wittiness and for loosening it by way of humour.

Not self-discipline is pursued, not Freud's delay of instincts, but laughter. You may laugh in a liberating way! For, liberation and freedom are connected to laughter. It is the victory over moral fear, the overcoming of bans and any kind of strictly-by-the-book truth. Quite like in the days of the court jester, when the fool was allowed to appear, in an official function, as the critic of his master. Laughter confronts the power and violence of the rulers, with their frightening servant-tyrant-dynamics. Laughter, on the other hand, tells about the joy of life and about trust in life. In the play of a lustfully intensifying life. It is the affirmation of the becoming, a protection against everything restricting and limiting, against everything terrifying and pretending. It liberates from the black snake of inner censorship and of outward censorship. Did Nietzsche not canonize laughter?

Also, a fool of the post-modern age, a character like Johnny alias Barbara Kraus or vice versa? – this is frequently oscillating, enticing – is such a kind of playful actor, an unmasker and blasphemer. Johnny, who seems to have only superficially and erroneously joined the philosophers, has, as an artist, incarnately achieved a better understanding of Nietzsche than many others by way of their studies. Like his predecessors in the past, also he attacks, makes fun and mocks with the intelligence of a foolish opponent. Also he holds a mirror up to society. In his case, it is no longer the court of some absolutist ruler but it is the high schools, academia, the science business with its flood of congresses, applications and peer reviews, which has traded the books for journals, which sets guidelines and norms which adamantly claim their truth, for example that analytical power is identical with the power of intellect which, with all these issues, celebrates its own masquerades.

Quite in Nietzsche's manner, Johnny doubts all this. "Laughter I have pronounced holy; you superior humans, *learn* from me – to laugh!" (Nietzsche 2005, 259) Only that by this admonition he does not put himself in the balance by way of writing but with the whole weight of his body, from head to toe, by the art of his improvisation, thus risking his skin by his exposed physicality, and not just metaphorically spoken. For, the audience might as well brusquely reject this rogue and his specific fervour by which he attempts to bear down on the spirit of graveness, his arch enemy. They might pursue him with disfavour, they might make him slip during the tightrope walk of his intervention, so that he falls. They might catcall his *Hoppl di hopp!*, they might leave the hall, cheesed off. Or, even worse for a fool, they might react by dead silence to his jokes, to this way make him understand their discontent with this nonsense, with this charade of his.

'The suitor of truth--you?'--thus they mocked me--

'No! Only a poet!

[...]

Only fool! Only poet!

Merely speaking collorfully,

'From fools' masks shouting colourfully,

Climbing about on deceptive word-bridges,
 On misleading rainbows,
 Between false heavens
 Rambling, lurking –
 Only fool! Only poet!⁹

Johnny's art, his freely improvised talk, based on Nietzsche's thought, with its claim to wittiness and humour, in front of a large audience, discusses *a kind of thought which is different* from the traditional, classical way of doing science. It seeks affinity to the arts and their qualities which, according to his interpretation, cannot be labelled as being third class because they just create shadow images but which have self-creative, poietic power. It is a kind of "post-Platonic image of thought" (Böhler 2018, 59–122), making the material conditions of the body the focus of interest and not shrinking back from emotions. For, is not all thought based on desire? (Böhler 2017, 576–603) Emotions inhibited by reflection find their ways out. In subtle and precarious ways. What can be gained by taming them? They have their say nevertheless. Is it not much more about welcoming them as conversation partners? About cultivating them instead of trying to make them obey by way of self-disciplining and to conceal them by way of sham objectivity? – By way of a common adventure of all those participating in *Philosophy on Stage*, this *different image of thought* attempts to make the exposed dimension of the body visible, its ecstatic nature, its haptic intelligence, and the voice of an open body which is touched and can be touched. For it, the skin is not only, in the classical Euclidian sense, solely boundary and fringe but, just the same, a place of extension and touch, and language is not just in the head, so that the voice becomes squashed and thin and loses its volume and power, but it is in the belly and makes the whole body vibrate from hair to toe, far beyond towards those others it wants to reach. Also the ancient word *temper* may be involved and heart does not just refer, cheesily, to pain. Its potential is a protection against

9 Nietzsche, Friedrich. Dionysus-Dithyrambos: Only Fool! Only Poet! <http://www.thenietzschechannel.com/works-pub/dd/dd-dual.htm> (last accessed: 24 April 2022)

everything negative which tries to make life small, which would rather like to see it unhappy instead of excessive – and it reaches as far as to the non-sensical which cannot be thought but is the intimacy of thought. It knows about this without “knowing”.

By his improvisations with their uncertain outcome, Johnny, by and for this kind of thought, risks himself as an example. He may like it or not, the stage makes sensually visible that bodies act actively and not passively, and quite a few people would be astonished about what the body tells unintendedly and without being noticed. Here now, in the concrete case, Johnny’s intervention makes clearly obvious that he does not solely think and act, as a *subject*, through his consciousness, it is not solely his *I* which is thinking but it is thinking within Johnny, he thinks and reacts by his entire *body*. By his head, heart and sex. And – always it thinks and acts within in relation to those others. Everything happening by taking the risk of his free play happens only together with the audience, by way of a dialogue with those others. It is inspired and nourished from the resonance of a common *being-with-each-other*. Not without reason, Barbara Kraus calls her intervention *Out there is a field*.



Figure 3: Johnny little ears, Nietzsche. (Copyright: Austrian Science Fund (FWF): AR 275-G21)

Thus, is Johnny not somebody who, by his pertness, knows to be promised to the *great reason of the body*? Might he not say, quite in Nietzsche's words, *Body am I and soul*? Is it not that he took on the coxcomb for the sake of this truth, to this way be able to demonstrate that the body and its great reason: "does not say I but does I?" (Nietzsche 2005, 30) Is it not that his tomfooleries simply serve the attempt to give way to affirming *bodying and living*, quite contrary to the regulations, norms and values which are still predominant with academia, which are basically just travesties of ascetic ideals?

For this purpose Johnny keeps the audience on strings, swiftly declaring the people deputies of those *despising the body*; he tries to wake them up, to make them laugh about themselves, and while doing so he calls a spade a spade. "Hoppl di hopp!" he cries out unashamedly, "I glaub ihr seid z'vü g'sessn. Ihr modert's scho dahin. Unter eurem Hintern is da Moder ... und so kann kaa g'scheits Philosophieren entstehen. Hot nämlich scho da Nietzsche g'sogt: So wenig als möglich sitzen. ... Das Sitzfleisch ist die eigentliche Sünde wider den heiligen Geist. ... Na, i kumm jetzt amoi owe zu eich, i bin da oben v ü z'weit weg." (I think you've been sittin' too much. You're already mouldering away. Below your asses there's moulder ... and this way no good philosophy is goin' to happen. After all, already Nietzsche said: Sit as little as possible. ... The backside is the real sin against the Holy Spirit ... Well, I'm going to come down to you, up here I'm much too far away.)

Holding a red rose in his hand, after this speech he climbs down the steps, down from his philosopher's mountain, and joins the audience who, sitting down there in Hall G on black cubes or on the floor, welcome him with curious faces, wondering what he is going to do now.

By the praising call "*ihr habt's das richtig erkannt, ihr sitz't auf da Bühne*" (you've got it right, you're on stage) he swiftly chases the spectators from their seats on one of the large pedestals, and while the audience is laughing he starts pushing it, on its rollers, towards the centre of the room. This way he swiftly makes the audience move, and soon he cries "*aufsteig'n, einsteig'n, mitfahr'n!*" (get on, get in, have a ride!), that is he surprisingly invites for a ride, circling round with the pedestal, just for the fun of it, just for the sake of making the room feel different, as he says. Some support Johnny with his action,

others let themselves actually be shoved. Johnny performs a victory lap, then another one and another one, movement is joy and supports thinking! He takes Nietzsche's demand, which he has quoted himself, literally, while personally integrating those present: "Sit as little as possible; give no credence to any thought that was not born outdoors while one moved about freely – in which the muscles are not celebrating a feast, too. All prejudices come from the testiness. The sedentary life – as I said once before – is the real *sin* against the holy spirit." (Nietzsche 1989, 239–240) At last he has reached a position he likes, for now it is possible for everybody to sit down around his playground in a circle. However, *come closer please, cozier*, this is how he likes it, *even closer! after all, his own bum is not glued to the seat*, he provokes those hesitating, and he keeps on and on until everybody has actually taken their seats close to the edge of the pedestal, in the midst of which the red rose is lying.



Figure 4: Johnny and the audience push the platform. (Copyright: Austrian Science Fund (FWF): AR 275-G21)



Figure 5: Johnny pushes the podium with the audience. (Copyright: Austrian Science Fund (FWF): AR 275-G21)

By all this to and fro, and to and fro, Johnny moves ever closer towards the audience, who obviously have much fun with this. Now he can take the opportunity. Now, he says, he may go on with freely associating, “*durch Nietzsche und durch mi selba hindurch*” (through Nietzsche and through myself.) This is the keyword for outing himself: “*I bin nämlich, – jetzt hob’ i’s endlich verstonen, wer i bin, – i bin nämlich des Alter Ego von da Kraus Barbara*” (For – now finally I’ve got it – I’m the alter ego of that Kraus Barbara), he admits discreetly and, moving closer to the face of a female spectator, he asks: “*Host mi?*” (Got me?) Laughter. As a reaction to her affirmative nodding, he really acts the fool and thumbs his nose, replying: “*Den Schas glaubst ma?*” (You believe that shit?) Laughter. Immediately after this he tells her, in a reconciliatory tone, that his 16th birthday has been just in July. “*Des host, i bin in da Pubertät.*” (That is, I’m in my puberty.) Renewed laughter. “*Perfect time to make Dionysus, that’s the bloke with the small ears, heard,*” he adds while secretively whispering his name to the room. Philosophy, he says, is exciting! Grasping and being grasped, and, pointing at his body, “*wias aan e i n f a h r t, wos aan h i n t r e i b t*” (as it c o m e s, that’s where one g o e s t o), entering territory where one has never been before. At least, he says, *being a sixteen years old,*

aspiring junior philosopher, this is his idea of philosophizing. Only: beware of universities, they, he says, are dry as dust, and beware of too much reading, this is unhealthy, as already Nietzsche had said. “Scholars who at bottom do little nowadays but thumb books [...] ultimately lose entirely their capacity to think for themselves. When they don’t thumb, they don’t think.” (ibid, 253) Always ready for the dissent, just a little later he will take countless books out of his large bag. Volumes on Nietzsche, volumes by Nietzsche, worn down, tattered volumes – and finally he takes out a snow-white wig.

Why, after all, he asks, was Kraus so much afraid of this event? There was no reason for this, he argues, and he lists: “Die Vernunft, die Wahrheit, die Seele, die Hölle, das Jenseits, der Gott – a l l e s obg’schafft. Also wovor muss ma si da no firchten?” (reason, truth, soul, hell, afterworld, the God – it’s a l l been abandoned. So, what’s to be feared now?) by the way, he says, he is still improvising, even if he is looking like working, he informs the audience, and by the way, during the creative search of his intervention he was feeling “like a blind crab from the sea which is constantly feeling around itself and occasionally catches something: however, he does not feel around to catch anything but because his limbs need movement.” (Nietzsche 1988, Band 9, 19)

During all the stages of his intervention Johnny remains the real buffoon. Scorning and ironizing valid norms and values, unashamedly, outrageously, quite like the court jester of the past, whose social meaning was to immediately and publicly announce inconvenient truths, to maliciously refer to certain individuals, to bluntly call them by their names. Doing so, not always he hits the mark. But relentlessly towards himself and towards everybody around, Johnny fights his fight against the predominance and repression of ascetic ideals, against all those images of thought we are entangled with, he un-masks them and does not shrink back from sometimes happily stumbling over his own feet. Does he not mix *and* unite the foolish with the prudent? Does he not create an alliance of lie and truth? This fool, who is wearing his heart on his sleeve, risking parody, ambiguity and boobery, is he not the personified attempt of embodying Nietzsche’s philosophy of “immorality”, based on a silent hope for a “prelude to a philosophy of the future”?



Figure 6: Johnny: You know you will die. (Copyright: Austrian Science Fund (FWF): AR 275-G21)

“I should only believe in a God who knew how to dance” (Nietzsche 2005, 36), Johnny just quotes *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “and when I saw my Devil I found him serious, thorough, deep, and solemn: it was the Spirit of Heaviness.” (ibid.) “Seid’s ihr lauter Teifeln?” (*Are you a bunch of devils*), he quips provocatively, looking sternly at the audience. “Serious, more serious, most serious, even more serious, more earnest, earnest, Ernestine, Ernest, Enni, Emilia, Erni, Erníberni”. At the same time he warns: “Not with wrath but with laughter does one kill. Come let us kill the Spirit of Heaviness!” (ibid.) – and soon he is extensively flapping his arms and legs. Does he want to make the audience laugh? Or does he want to shake the spirit of graveness, that archenemy of all laughter, off his shoulders? Or, is he indeed a blind crab from the sea whose limbs need movement? For, now Johnny, slapping and swerving his arms and legs, walking through the audience, demonstrates their lust of movement, that fun of bustling and dancing.

Quite in accordance with the classical function of a fool, who had also to remind to the perishability of human existence, from dancing he goes on to death, who is waiting for all of us and may claim everybody any moment. This is the moment when, coincidentally, he

encounters somebody who – it may be because of a language barrier, or for whatever reason, Freud's city provides many possibilities of interpretation – comments on Johnny's efforts by quoting Queen Victoria: "*I am not amused*". The opportunity could not be better. This fits perfectly. Any good spectacle needs an opponent, a critic. Even if there is no script in cold print. A carper drives on the action, and this is precisely what is going to happen. Johnny stops short. "*You are not amused?*" he asks, and in a friendly manner, speaking a kind of pidgin English, he explains: "*I just said, how is it for you, that you know, that you will die?*" Loud laughter. Applause. – But his opposite number remains disliking. Johnny's thoughts are flying. One can tell from his face. Quite obviously, he is thinking with lightning speed. Then he rejoices, quite in the Nietzschean, by turning a no into a yes: "*You are not amused? – That was the r i g h t answer! Y e s ! Me neither. I think it's the meanest thing in this fucking crazy universe, that we are reading all this books – for what use?*" Johnny becomes enraged. "*We are not only reading the books, we are fighting, we are struggling and we say yes to it, yes, yes, yes, yes! You enjoy it.*" Taken away by his thinking, Johnny does not forget to say *thank you* – did he even read Heidegger? And as a compensation for all the inconvenience he promises to do his best: "*because you stayed, you will see my Dionysos dancing.*" But still carper is not amused. Also Johnny sticks to his guns and argues by stringent logic "*you see that's what I mean – struggling, fighting, trying your best, giving your best and it's never enough – at the end – you die!*" Great laughter. Everybody likes this fool.

Relieved from the burden of this interlude, Johnny gets back his breath. Vehemently he shakes his body, minces, sprains, like to shake of this burden even physically. As an accompaniment, he roars, the real lion in the desert. Finally, he gets back his speech, he blows up his nostrils and shouts at the audience: "*Wacht's auf, Leit! ... Es geht um L e b e n und S t e r b e n – und ihr sitz't da herum wia a f a d e o i d e S o c k n !*" (Wake up, people! ... It's l i f e or d e a t h – and you're sittin' around like d e a d o l' s o c k s!) But this, he says, is no wonder. Life is normed, tamed, disciplined. Everybody was sitting around well behaved, bearing the burden of their duties on hanging shoulders. Tame and obedient. Morally flawless. Everybody knows how to behave. *Even over here*, he stirs up those sitting around him.

Even over here! Repeatedly he criticizes the audience for their civilised bums. This, he says, is not the way of doing philosophy. The urges are tamed; do not step out of line, no extempore, please, this is banned, already since the days of Empress Maria Theresia, thus no lustfulness, not even some minor lust, you better not! woe be to those whetting on the stools to have just a bit more fun. Don't you! – Everybody is sitting tight and waiting, Johnny in his fight against deadness goes on stirring up the audience, simply everybody, no cockiness, no buffoonery, no sly, bad humour, all he is seeing is socially integrated and good people. "For the good – they *cannot* create: they are always the beginning of the end –" (Nietzsche 2005, 185) is his imaginary lamentation, and maliciously he throws himself into a pose. "Hu! Hu! Hu! Hu! Hu!", could it be that they are "Afraid perhaps of an / Angry blond curly-maned / Lion-monster?" (ibid., 270)

After this sermon, which Johnny accompanies with unfitting excursions, quite in line with the tradition of the fools, he asks how much time is left for his finale, the Dionysian dance he has announced. *Five minutes to go?* that is good. Now he is going to dance! Dance everybody to the ground, sphinx everybody to the ground, hex everybody to the ground! Furthermore, he says, he is seeing clearly how the Yes is growing and sprawling out of everybody's heads. So – there will be dancing! But how? How? The audience is amused and curious. Johnny takes off his shoes and socks. Now, he says, he needs naked feet, *and* he needs the physicality of the spectators. While saying this, he bends and extends his body, his arms and legs to every possible and impossible direction, and again he floods those present with obscenities. Suddenly he stops, with a piercing look at the audience, fixating individual persons "*like is only recognized by like*", and imploringly he raises his arms. Then, with a swift grip, he takes the snow white wig, mutates into a juvenile old man, and while putting it on his head, to everybody's astonishment he has swiftly put one leg on a spectator's thigh, and now one leg is resting on the pedestal while the other one is resting on somebody else's body. Holding this strange position, Johnny is trying to keep his balance and asks himself and the audience what this all has got to do with Nietzsche, after all? "*No o idea*", he admits while the audience is laughing, and continues climbing on and over the shanks and bod-

ies of the spectators, his hands are clinging to their shoulders and heads, and in a low voice he assures them – “zu Eurer Beruhigung, i hob des scho g’übt” (to your reassurance, I’ve practiced that).



Figure 7: Johnny wig, applause. (Copyright: Austrian Science Fund (FWF): AR 275-G21)

Much, very much laughter and applause during all of his shenanigans. This ragged rogue enjoys the privilege of fools. Finally, he is no longer satisfied with all this, and he stages a ride through the crowd on the shoulders of a spectator. After all, he does not want to dance on his own, he wants everybody to join. True philosophy, he says, happens only by playing, and playing is part of Nietzsche’s philosophy, he is just about to explain – when the bell rings. The minutes of the remaining time are over. But Johnny does not allow any interruption, across his imaginary bridge, his bridge made of words and bodies, he tries to reach Krassimira Kruschkova, Director of Theory at Tanzquartier Wien, who loves the blind sea crab so much. To move faster, he calls for a horse, “another horse! please come on!”, he looks for and finds a suitable one among those present, and galloping and yelling triumphantly he arrives at his destination, wearing the snow white wig on his head like a crown. A crown of wisdom, with which this fool, this storyteller and buffoon, this antipode of truth, has crowned himself?

“We have the truths that we deserve depending on the place we are carrying our existence to, the hour we watch over and the element that we frequent.” (Deleuze 1986, 110)

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