

IRENA JAJTE
Łódź

THE STRUCTURE OF THE GROTESQUE —AN INTRODUCTORY ANALYSIS

The variety of forms and functions of the grotesque provokes contemporary critics into constant revision of its references, and ways of analysis, perception and classification. The notion "grotesque" defies codification and definitions.

As the notion is not new or simple and as it escapes any valid definitions, its universal semantic definition has to be reconstructed inductively, according to the classical principles of generalization in empirical sciences. Yet, criteria of grotesqueness, and, consequently, the meaning of the term have had to evolve simultaneously with changes in axiological preferences, in the angle of research, and with the evolution of philosophical and esthetic consciousness. All the meanings of the term arrived at so far can hardly be brought to one plane of comparison, even if one accepts a well-justified principle of selection (seeking the definition through total induction is of course out of the question). The bibliography on the subject and everyday practice show that just like with any abstract complex and fuzzy notions of this type, the more one attempts at precision and completeness, the more the definition shows its one-sidedness and bias. To arrive at a set of properties to tell explicitly what is grotesque still remains an unattainable goal.

Many researchers try therefore to incorporate the temporal moment into the category and so they distinguish "historical varieties" of the grotesque. This is to give more precision to the notion and link it with a particular value category, as well as to avoid an ultimate semantic definition. The problem is that the grotesque is ambiguous not only in its diachronic aspect, but also synchronically. The proof are constant attempts at distinguishing types of the grotesque. Also significant is the variety of analytical categories which the grotesque denotes. Employing a timeless category (as well as distinguishing historical varieties) serves the selection principle. The classification is done from various viewpoints and in various order. Attempts to find particular types of the grotesque

are as numerous as its theories. They were made, for example, by J. Ruskin¹, L. Campbell², J. W. Mann³, W. Kayser⁴. Again, no universal classification is possible because of the "animation" of "grotesque matter".

Considerations of the grotesque often become philosophical discourses nowadays. The matter seems to go beyond the traditional limits of esthetics, it enters ethics, philosophical anthropology, psychology, social philosophy. Therefore, many critics refer it also to extra-esthetic categories. Similarly, within esthetics various forms of the grotesque are distinguished. Here are some examples:

- 1) kind of existence, a peculiar way of existence for the man and/or the world (e.g. Shweizer, Thiel);⁵
- 2) type of philosophy of life (e.g. Onimus, M. Wyka);⁶
- 3) category of moral feelings (e.g. Jennings, Pernusch, Ruskin);⁷
- 4) pre-esthetic form of expression (psychologically perceptible) (e.g. Jennings);⁸
- 5) interdisciplinary structure (e.g. Kayser, Bereza, Gębala, Szewcow-Szewczyk);⁹
- 6) method of constructing the presented world (great form of art, type of representation) (e.g. Bachtin, J. W. Mann, Skwarczyńska);¹⁰

¹ J. Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, chap.: "Grotesque Renaissance", London 1987; after L. B. Jennings, *The Ludicrous Demon—Aspects of the Grotesque in German Post-Romantic Prose*, California 1963; pp. 64, 163—164.

² L. B. Campbell, *The Grotesque in Poetry of Robert Browning*, "Bulletin of the University of Texas", no. 92; Humanistic Series, 1906, no. 5; after F. K. Barasch, *The Grotesque—A Study in Meanings*, Paris 1971, pp. 158—159.

³ J. W. Mann, *O groteskie v literaturie*, Moscow 1966; rev. A. Bereza, „Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich”, 1968, 19 (2), pp. 174—180.

⁴ W. Kayser, *Das Groteske, seine Gestaltung in Malerei und Dichtung*, Oldenburg 1957. I am using the English translation: W. Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, translated U. Weisstein, Bloomington 1963, passim; rev. W. Lipiec, Wolfgang Kayser—„Das Groteske in Malerei und Dichtung”, „Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich”, 1961, 7 (2), pp. 177—182.

⁵ E. Schweizer, *Das Groteske und das Drama*, Franc Wedekinds, Tübingen 1929; M. Thiel, *Die Auflösung der Komödie und die Groteske des Mythos*, Studium Generale 1955, 8, pp. 273—364.

⁶ J. Onimus, *Groteskowość a doświadczenie świadomości*, trans. K. Falicka, „Pamiętnik Literacki”, 1979, 4, pp. 319—320; M. Wyka, *Gatczyński a wzory literackie*, chap. 3: „Kategorie groteski”, Warszawa 1970.

⁷ J. B. Jennings, *op. cit.*; J. Ruskin, *op. cit.*; R. Pernusch, *Das Groteske—Studien zur grotesken Lyrik des 20 Jahrhunderts*, Vienna 1954.

⁸ L. B. Jennings, *op. cit.*

⁹ A. Bereza, *Parodia wobec struktury groteski*, [in:] *Styl i kompozycja*. Konferencja teoretyczno-literacka w Toruniu i Ustroni, ed. J. Trzynadłowski, Wrocław 1969; W. Kayser, *op. cit.*; M. Szewcow-Szewczyk, *Struktura semiotyczna groteski*, *Studia z historii semiotyki*, ed. J. Sulowski, Wrocław 1971, pp. 213—239.

¹⁰ M. Bachtin, *Twórczość Franciszka Rabelais'a go a kultura ludowa średnio-wieczna i renesansu*, trans. A. and A. Goreń, Kraków 1975; S. Skwarczyńska, *Wstęp do nauki o literaturze*, no. 1, part 2, Warszawa 1954; J. W. Mann, *op. cit.*

7) independent esthetic category (e.g. Gori, Möser, Scheffler, Souriau, Głowiński, Stróżewski);¹¹

8) separate literary, theatrical, film or musical genre (e.g. Gautier, J. W. Mann, Stammer, Wilpert; an approach characteristic of the German theory of art.);¹²

9) comic category (or particular way of achieving comic effect; e.g. Lehman, Lipps, Dziemidok, Gutowski);¹³ as a low variety of the comic the grotesque may be found in many 19th century esthetics, e.g. in Eberhard, Volkelt, Lemcke;

10) form of satire (e.g. Schneegans, Worcester);¹⁴

11) form of caricature (e.g. Petsch, Schneegans, Wright);¹⁵

12) kind of "artistic trick" (e.g. Jewnina);¹⁶

13) element constructing a new style (e.g. Mann, Vieth);¹⁷

14) art motive (e.g. Kayser);¹⁸

15) simple "terminus technicus" (in ornamentation or dance).

The list above does not, of course, deal systematically with the polymorphic character of the grotesque; such was not my intention. Obviously, the categories presented here are difficult to compare. My point was to show how vast and varied the notion of the grotesque can be. There is the grotesque as an attitude of the subject, a subjective record of the grotesque in his psyche. There is also the grotesque as an expression of such an attitude—an objective form. Therefore, the concepts presented

¹¹ G. Gori, *Il grottesco nell'arte e nella letteratura. Comico, tragico, lirico*; Rome 1926; J. Möser's *sämtliche Werke*, Berlin 1842, after: L. Sokół, *Groteska w teatrze Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza*, Wrocław 1973; K. Scheffler, *Vom Wesen des Grotesken*, "Neue Rundschau", 17.2.1906; M. Głowiński, A. Okopień-Sławińska, J. Sławiński, *Zarys teorii literatury*, Warszawa 1971; W. Stróżewski, *Kategorie estetyczne i sztuka współczesna*, "Znak", 1961, 84.

¹² T. Gautier, *Les grotesques par T. Gautier*, Nouvelle édition; Paris 1873, after: L. Sokół, Hugo, Gautier, Baudelaire i teoria groteski, "Przegląd Humanistyczny", 1978, 3, p. 150; J. W. Mann, *op. cit.*; H. Stammer, *Amerikanische Literaturgeschichte im Überblick*, Bamberg 1950; G. von Wilpert, *Groteske*, [in:] *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur*, Stuttgart 1955.

¹³ U. Lehman, *Deutsche Poetik*, Munich 1908; T. Lipps, *Ästhetik: Psychologie des Schönen und der Kunst*, Hamburg 1903—1906; B. Dziemidok, *O komizmie*, Warszawa 1967; M. Gutowski, *Komizm w polskiej sztuce gotyckiej*, Warszawa 1973.

¹⁴ G. Schneegans, *Geschichte der grotesken Satire*, Strasbourg 1894; D. Worcester, *The Art of Satire*, New York 1960.

¹⁵ R. Petsch, *Das Groteske*, "Blätter für deutsche Philosophie", 1933, 7, no. 5; G. Schneegans, *op. cit.*; T. Wright, *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art*, New York 1938.

¹⁶ M. Jewnina, *Rabalais*, Warszawa 1950.

¹⁷ L. Vieth, *Beobachtungen zur Wortgroteske*, Bonn 1931; J. W. Mann, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ W. Kayser, *op. cit.*

above are often not mutually exclusive and can even be logically subordinated. Also in an overall analysis of the grotesque one may find its various forms and definitions, none of them explicitly favoured.

In a study like this comprehensive analysis of the semantic development of the notion "grotesque" is not possible. It is not essential here, anyway, and the problem has been studied widely and thoroughly elsewhere. It is worth while, though, to present conclusions from such an analysis and to notice the way the notion crystallized as an esthetic category, the way its denotation sphere evolved and incorporated various analytical categories.

The notion "grotesque" appeared in esthetics at the turn of the 15th century in Italy, along with the discovery of ancient frescos. Until the mid-17th century grotesque forms of Roman paintings became widespread in West European art.¹⁹ The term "grotesque" was used first in the fine arts. It referred directly to the ancient ornament, it denoted a *thing*, a particular work of art or ornamental style using the ornament as a motive (then it denoted an *arrangement*). When G. Vasari pointed out the "grotesque" structure of Michelangelo's architectural works, he already meant *relationships*, and implicitly also an *abstract property* ("bold beauty").²⁰ The grotesque was understood in a similar way when it was described as "the absurd", "the monstrous", "the comic". Focusing the spectator's attention on the fantastic and irrational character of the decoration enabled him to see the grotesque as the name of an abstract property characteristic of a new style. At the same time, the grotesque started to gain independence from the fine arts and to acquire a more general meaning. But, as Jennings rightly observes, "the term «grotesque» has most meaning when applied to visual things".²¹ Eventually, the term was applied also to *creative attitudes* and *ways of achieving an effect* on the audience. This last process, though, came the latest. That was so

¹⁹ Information on the semantic development of the grotesque after F. K. Barasch, *op. cit.*; W. Kayser, *op. cit.*; L. Sokół, *op. cit.*

²⁰ G. Vasari, *Żywoty najslawniejszych malarzy, rzeźbiarzy i architektów*; translated K. Estreicher, Warszawa 1980. In the works cited both Kayser and Barasch point out those works of Vasari in which he is critical about the "grotesque" ornamental style, referring to Vitruvius. They ignore *The Life of Michelangelo*, in which the genius's principle of constructing architectural wholes is positively viewed as "grotesque". Thus, the author expands the meaning of the word from the ornamental style imitating the ancient mural painting onto the relationships between elements of the complex architecture structure. The constitutive features of the ornament-grotesque structure are brought out there and transferred onto the structural plan of a larger spacial whole. An interpretation of grotesqueness as an autonomous esthetic category ("bold beauty") can also be found here.

²¹ L. B. Jennings, *op. cit.*, trans. chap. 1: "Termin «groteska», "Pamiętnik Literacki", 1979, 4, p. 312.

mostly because of the peculiar area of interest in the renaissance, classicistic and romantic views on art. Although Italian humanists described the "grotesque" style as "sogni dei pittori",²² trying to mark a kind of hypothetical "world" for this style, it was yet an exception. The objective and rational esthetics which reigned until the arrival of romanticism did not allow any analysis of the artist's attitude. It was limited, as we know, to objectively perceptible external forms. What was studied was the "grotesque" object or arrangement, sometimes the grotesque quality (the grotesqueness of what is grotesque), and very seldom—the subjective "aura" of grotesqueness. At that time, the grotesque was not an independent general esthetic category. Any problems with that question were dealt with incidentally and no serious attempts at compilation of dispersed views on the subject were made, due to the norms of "The Great Theory" (W. Tatarkiewicz).

It was the appearance of romantic esthetics (of subjective and emotional expression) and, consequently, the fall of "The Great Theory", that increased rapidly an interest in the nature of the grotesque. In the romantic view, it expressed the control of the artist's imagination over reality. Focusing his interest on spiritual activity, which was the demand of the times, he saw the grotesque primarily as a subjective phenomenon and thus interpreted it rather as an autonomous esthetic category.²³ Yet, grotesqueness was still seen as an expression of various attitudes, reactions, ideas and objects, so that it was still difficult to describe adequately their common features and especially to distinguish a new quality.

In the second half of the 19th century the grotesque was degraded to a low variety of comic art closely linked with caricature. It was the practice aspect of the grotesque (as an artistic method) that was being emphasised at that time.

And it was only the 20th century that brought a real explosion in the theory of the grotesque. It brought analyses of its various aspects, a wider range of research methods, and generally—a true reincarnation of the notion. The new art brought new multiple-valued esthetics of effect and reception, which eventually made the grotesque a recognized esthetic category. The contemporary conception of esthetic values, irre-

²² "Painters' dreams", see: L. Sokół, *op. cit.*; W. Kayser, *Próba określenia istoty groteskowości*, translated R. Handke, "Pamiętnik Literacki", 1974, 4, p. 271.

²³ Although already Wieland described the grotesque as "laughter, repugnance and amazement" (W. Kayser), and therefore took into account its effect—a mental act during the perception of a "grotesque" work of art. It was also as early as 1769 that Justus Möser used the term "grotesque" as an esthetic category (see: L. Sokół, *op. cit.*, p. 19).

ducible to the classical "beauty-ugliness" evaluation obviously develops the interest in the grotesque²⁴.

When studying the grotesqueness of a work of art today one can agree entirely with W. Kayser that the grotesque should be seen in the aspect of:

- 1) a creative process (the subject-creator is examined);
- 2) a work of art—its inherent property (the object, its structure and functions are examined);
- 3) a process/act of reception (the effect is examined).²⁵

In this study I am particularly interested in the second aspect. With forms of "grotesque art" multiplying these days, it seems necessary and inevitable, however liquid the semantic field, to try to formulate at least some conditions whereby a given work of art is to be classified as a grotesque "object". I intend to seek these conditions not in the presumed content of the grotesque, but rather in the way the reproducible *interdisciplinary structure* of grotesque works²⁶ is shaped. The structure is seen here as timeless but at the same time open and dynamic.²⁷ My point will be, therefore, to formulate some—in my opinion logically sufficient-conditions of classifying a work of art as grotesque.

When examining a work in detail, one must not forget that grotesqueness can be not only an abstract structure concretized by the work, but also the esthetics and the philosophical/ethical attitude of the artist and the audience. Thus, in the light of most of current theories (which openly base on psychology) the "interpretative experiencing" the grotesque, which is proposed here may seem somewhat artificial. It is justified, however, by the intention to arrive at concrete objective criteria. These can be found not in historically unsteady contents of grotesqueness and their peculiar psychic "aura", but rather in the way grotesque works are constructed.

Thus, having regard for the results of study in the field so far I am

²⁴ Although it was as early as in the 19th century that the classical double-valued esthetics was questioned (e.g. Konrad Fiedler), as insufficient for the audience of multivalent art, yet it was only post-impressionism explorers who utilized this observation.

²⁵ W. Kayser, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

²⁶ In the European theory of art the grotesque has been interpreted as a structure since Romanticism. This is also the approach of many 20th century critics; most of them are convinced of the reality of a model of grotesqueness (e.g. P. Thomson, *The Grotesque*, "The Critical Idiom", 24, London 1972).

²⁷ Here the notion of structure is used rather loosely and has little to do, for example, with structuralism as a doctrine. It is more like a general notion of contemporary science than a tool of a specific research method. Yet it is quite useful because the idea of structure helps to grasp the individual character of a phenomenon through grasping its properties and relationships between them.

now going to formulate a set of rules for *fundamental* relationships between elements of a "totally" grotesque work of art.²⁸

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It follows from the analysis of the theory of the grotesque (and from the works themselves) that the basic principle of grotesqueness is *juxtaposition of contrasting or contradictory elements* in both the work itself and the process of reception. The notion of juxtaposition, however, is too imprecise for a definition. One should try then to formulate the "differentia specifica" of the grotesque type of arrangement. According to L. B. Jennings:

Since theories of the grotesque have [...] always fluctuated between the ideas of unearthly horror and ridiculous buffoonery or playful embellishment, it is reasonable to suppose that these seemingly contradictory tendencies are combined in the phenomenon itself and that the mechanism of their combination is the key to its understanding.²⁹

It seems that this mechanism could also distinguish the grotesque from related categories like parody, satire, irony, caricature etc. It must be remembered that also relationships within these categories are based on conflicting juxtaposition.

In this study, I assume that the primary feature of grotesque juxtaposition and its first structural determinant is *ambivalence*. It is understood here as co-existence of antagonistic elements (i.e. contrasted in the double-valued system of classical logic, esthetics or ethics) which are set in contrasting pairs on various plans. Such co-existence creates continuous *semantic and situational iridescence* of the world presented. The juxtaposed elements (values, objects, ideas) or aspects of the work lose their original autonomous character, go beyond their semantic fields and form a new condensed quality which is irreducible to the initial ones, but which still retains the inherent polarity—*bivalence*. The ambivalence principle may refer to relations among elements on each structural level: esthetic, cognitive, ontological or artistic. Grotesque ambivalence may exist between such qualities as "tragic" and "comic" (Kayser),³⁰ "amusement" and "fear" (Jennings),³¹ "concreteness" and "conventionality" of

²⁸ It is worth pointing out that grotesqueness may affect the whole work of art or some of its levels or elements. If the work is based in all its aspects and dimensions on the grotesque structure and if this structure orientates the perception of the recipient, the term "totally grotesque" is commonly used (e.g. L. Sokół, *op. cit.* pp. 189–210).

²⁹ L. B. Jennings, *op. cit.* p. 11.

³⁰ W. Kayser, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

³¹ L. B. Jennings, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

the grotesque world (J. W. Mann),³² "the literal aspect" and "the figurative aspect" of elements (M. Szewcow-Szewczyk),³³ etc. It has to be noted that the ambivalence is often suggested implicitly. This sketchy analysis shows clearly that the internal ambivalence of the grotesque structure comes to life in the reception process and that the process itself retains the polarity and tension. Thus, the ambivalence is decisive for the structure of a grotesque work, as well as for the way in which the audience concretize the "grotesque" object in the reception. The creation and reception of grotesque art, and their analysis within formal and psychological esthetics is not, however, in question here. I am particularly interested in the *direct* (Marciszek) contradiction of the grotesque world which specifies relationships between elements of the work, which P. Marciszek calls "structural contrast". I am less interested in the psychological contrast, perceptible only subjectively in the process of individual reception ("implied, impossible to observe objectively").³⁴ He rightly observes, however, that both types of contrast have in fact the same ambivalence-based structure. The difference is in the character of qualities confronted, in their formulation and description, and not in the relationship in question. I am using the term "ambivalence" again and not "conflict", "contradiction" or "disharmony" (which are commonly used). It seems to me that these terms have certain features which do not let them refer directly to the grotesque type of relations between elements in the structure. For example, "disharmony" refers to a particular ethic and esthetic system, does not avoid evaluation³⁵ and neglects the question of the nature of the grotesque. Besides, these are too broad terms, just like "conflict", on the other hand, is somewhat "static", which stands against the nature of the grotesque. Besides, these are too broad terms, just like "contrast". They can refer also to other categories related to the grotesque.

It seems that the term "ambivalence" suggested here renders well the essence of the grotesque structure (i.e. it formulates the primary law for primary element relationships within the structure). Also, which is important, it states the way the semantic plans function (permanent oscillation).

³² J. W. Mann, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

³³ M. Szewcow-Szewczyk, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

³⁴ P. Marciszek, *Groteska i absurd. Estetyczny i światopoglądowy aspekt groteski*, part 2, "Przegląd Humanistyczny", 1983, 4, p. 151.

³⁵ It seems that the term "disharmony" is little pejorative even when "harmony" does not refer directly to the demands of the classical theory of beauty (Pythagorean esthetics) but to the consistence of part of a given whole (without specifying and evaluating the integrative principle). The Greek prefix "dys-" ("not ..." and also "badly ...") gives negative meaning to the preceding word and usually places it in a disapproving context (see: "dishonour").

The reason why ambivalence has its distinctive value is that in its semantic field there is an image of polar movement, dynamic tension, resulting from permanent and indivisible alternation of antagonistic principles. This movement, called here "ambivalent", explains why the nature of the grotesque contrast is insoluble and why the perpetual "unfulfilment" is always present.

The grotesque image—says M. Bachtin—shows a phenomenon in the course of its change, in the state of incompleting metamorphosis; in the stage of death and birth, growth and transition. The link with *time* and *transition* is the essential primary characteristic of the grotesque image. The second essential feature is *ambivalence* of the image. Its various forms comprise (or make allusions to) *both poles of the change—the old and the new, what is dying and what is being born, the beginning and the end of the metamorphosis*.³⁶

How the principle of "ambivalent movement" works can be seen on various plans of a grotesque work. For example, semantically, (metaphorically), it can be a simultaneous (i.e. ambivalent) realization in the addressee's mind of the literal and metaphorical sense of a situation or expression (e.g. phrase: "break one's head through the wall" in Mrozek or Afanasjew). Such "literalization of a metaphor" (Jastrzębski),³⁷ "realization of a metaphor" (Bereza),³⁸ "great metaphor" (Szewcow-Szewczyk),³⁹ "[...] has consequences in the plot or it influences the hero's behaviour",⁴⁰ and so it is essential for the construction and meaning of the work. Esthetically and ethically, there are new *double-valued qualities* created through "ambivalent movement" from, as it were, petrified qualities. A simple example is a polarized "accumulated" value often called "tragicomic" and commonly associated with the grotesque. Artistically, a result of the "ambivalent movement" can be the principle of polarity (no reference point), which eliminates or seriously disturbs the main pattern organizing formally the elements of the presented world. And so—in the contemporary grotesque theatre the traditional structure of drama is broken by the variability of *functions* of the hero and the situation (the former initiates the latter, but is also shaped by it) or the hero and the requisite (the requisite can accompany the character, be subject to him and "organize" him as the main element).

Ambivalence is not only a technique here or a way of achieving "grotesqueness". It refers also to the *formal unity* of the accumulated elements (objects, values, ideas) or aspects of the work, and it emphasises its grotesque character.

³⁶ M. Bachtin, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

³⁷ Z. Jastrzębski, *Literatura pokolenia wojennego wobec dwudziestolecia*, ohas.: "Z teorii i historii groteski", p. 173 onwards.

³⁸ A. Bereza, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

³⁹ M. Szewcow-Szewczyk, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

⁴⁰ A. Bereza, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

The relation of ambivalence does not complete, however, the essence of the grotesque. It means unity of extremes and so it links two qualities which are equally strong:

The most intense grotesque effect is achieved when the two aspects of object, the fearsome and the ludicrous, are both present in pronounced form. [...] The fact that a true double aspect is present—a basic interaction of qualities rather than their chance juxtaposition—is suggested, moreover, by the fact that the attitudes of fear and amusement may alternate, under different conditions, with regard to one and the same object⁴¹.

There are also other relations in the grotesque, namely juxtapositions of incommensurable aspects, elements or situations. I call this next feature *incongruity*.

The term "inkongruenz" was used by A. Schopenhauer in his theory of the comic. It referred to a true cause of comic experience.⁴² And indeed, incongruent grotesque confrontations link the grotesque very strongly with the comic. But while in the grotesque the process of incongruent juxtaposition is irreversible (as it creates a new autonomous quality), in the comic a return to the initial qualities is possible.

In this study, by "incongruity" I mean juxtaposition of elements/aspects which are *discordant*, unrelated, incommensurable from the point of view of a particular model (i.e. the real world—for objects perceptible with senses, or a particular norm/convention).

Sometimes the incongruity process provides, as it were, "formal substance" for the ambivalence in the semantic sphere of the incongruent elements. This is not a rule, however, and it would be wrong to deal only with this aspect of the problem.

The incongruity of elements can be seen on various plans of the grotesque composition. For example, on the plan of motivation incongruity shows in the disproportion of the topic to the way it is treated (according to the convention, the former should condition the latter). The classical example is "not serious" presentation of "serious" content. For example, Witkiewicz's "simpletons" of all sorts preach ultimate truths about eidos in a highly formal language. Gombrowicz presents a historic pandemonium in the "divinely idiotic" operetta form. Semantically, the incongruity lies in the discord of the cliché meaning of a notion and its designation in the work of art. It can also lie in the discord between the notions confronted, e.g. a "sickly and frail tyrant", "a habitual dandy" (Witkacy), "fool and blond" (Gałczyński).

The result of incongruent juxtaposition is a synthesis of elements or

⁴¹ L. B. Jennings, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁴² A. Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Verstellung*, vol. 2, Munich 1911, p. 99.

aspects of a work into a formal whole. The elements may be *heterogeneous* or *heteromorphic* (see E. Kuryluk).⁴³

Heterogeneous elements (i.e. those of different nature, origin or classification) can be found, for example, in the Pompeian grotesque ornament, which brings together vegetable, animal, human and inanimate motives. E. Kuryluk, when characterizing A. Beardsley's style, calls the above process *heterosynthesis* and remarks that

it means not only the joining of unrelated elements but also the disjunction of elements previously joined. The result of the junction of elements are *heterogeneous* forms, the result of the disjunction are *autonomous* forms.⁴⁴

If the contrasted elements/aspects are of the same "intensity", the new-born form is ambivalent, as has been mentioned. Let us now analyse the situation of "disproportion" type—when one of the elements dominates (usually the domination is made clear by the context, so it is not a question of quantitative domination). The result of such contamination—if the elements joined are "animate" and "inanimate"—may be "*animation* of the inanimate and *mortification* of what is commonly assumed to be animate".⁴⁵ Of course, these processes go beyond the fine arts—E. Kuryluk's domain. The way they function in literature of theatre is perhaps less conspicuous but it provides a more general dimension. An example may be the process of antropomorphisation of nature and time in B. Schulz's prose, which classifies his production clearly as "grotesque".

Also the reverse process of mortification is well exemplified in contemporary art. In the grotesque theatre a sort of "mortification" manifests itself in gradual reduction of the characters, which may be the result of their subordination (as "animate", "live" elements) to the mechanism of an inertial system and the static element ("inanimate"). In the scenic grotesque, the man is often reduced nowadays to the function of a counterpoint for a set of unrelated events (in both cause and result). The reduction is not only a result of subordination to the plot, but also of conditioning by objects. The mortification of characters goes together with the *animation of objects*. An object freed from the man becomes—says A. Trzebiński—an "objective" value, ready and independent (autonomous its grotesqueness).⁴⁶ It may be both a material object and the complete world of closed systems and mental or emotional stereotypes. Objects change their meanings and values during the scenic "happening".

⁴³ E. Kuryluk, *O pojęciu groteski*, [in:] *Salome albo o rozkoszy. O grotesce w twórczości Aubreya Beardsleya*, Kraków 1976, p. 120.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ A. Trzebiński, *Kwiaty z drzew zakazanych*, Warszawa 1970.

They are capable of organizing the plot or creating the hero. Many examples of separation of dependent elements and their "secondary" *autonomous* existence can be found in Leśmian and Morgenstern. The question of the autonomous existence implies the so-called philosophy of fragment. W. Hilsbecher claims that the 20th century thinking is of fragmentary nature and it is the fragment (as a construction unit) that dominates contemporary art (including literature).⁴⁷

If a grotesque whole consists of *heteromorphic* elements the discord between the components lies in *change of proportions* between one element in the grotesque work and another—the *model*—external to the work. Thus, the "other" element exists only potentially, as a horizon or background to the former. The grotesque change of proportions consists first and foremost in "exaggeration" (Kayser, Mann).⁴⁸ It is, therefore, a kind of *hyperbolization* or (not so often) *diminution*. Grotesque art provides numerous examples of monstrous creations (eg. in Rabelais or Dale), diminutions (in Swift), hyperbolizations of time and space.

It seems that *multiplication* of types or situations (which links with the question of grotesque rhythm) also belongs here.

Grotesqueness has often been looked at from the point of view of *congruence with the model* of the real world and of the world of cultural and notional space. This has often provoked critics to employ the name "deformation" to define the grotesque. Deformation—apart from its negative value ("change for worse")⁴⁹—implies the existence of a primary model which has been transformed by a specific force and with which the created grotesque object is compared. However, it seems very difficult to find such a dominating model deformed in the creation. First of all, deformation of this type does not work one way. Rather, grotesqueness is a sum of multidirectional and multiaspectual deformations of various models.

In the grotesque—says A. Bereza—a given model is only one of the elements, it affects only one plan, it appears within definite limits only to give way beyond these limits to other models.⁵⁰

The world of the grotesque and all its elements possess an autonomous value in relation to the models identified. They are totally *independent* from those models. The primariness of the identifying function is a distinctive feature of parody; "the grotesque—says J. W. Mann—

⁴⁷ W. Hilsbecher, *Tragizm, absurd, paradoks. Eseje*, Warszawa 1972, trans. S. Bałut.

⁴⁸ W. Kayser, *op. cit.*, passim; L. B. Jennings, *op. cit.*, passim.

⁴⁹ The notion of deformation always implies departure from order, norm, fixed course of events, and is thus depreciatory, which usually incurs disapproving context (even subconsciously).

⁵⁰ A. Bereza, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

tends to generalize to the extreme"⁵¹ and, consequently, to be "dissolved" in the structure of its models.

The principle of examining the congruence of a grotesque element with the model will hold only in thorough examination when the model is a concrete creation and where such studies are a preliminary stage towards the essence of the grotesque. This is what M. Bakhtin and L. B. Jennings do in the parts of their works devoted to the analysis of the grotesque change of proportions of human body and face. But even there Jennings stresses the peculiar character of the grotesque model identification and says:

The grotesque object is a figure imagined in terms of human form but devoid of real humanity.⁵²

Thus, the grotesque deformation transforms here the essence of the model, its constitutive value (i.e. being human).

The "original"—says Jennings—[...] is not so much distorted in the strict sense as it is destroyed and rebuilt along new lines. There is a recombining of the elements of experienced reality to form something alien to it [...] ⁵³

In the grotesque work, its elements gain their verbal value and the "grotesque" status only when they become motives within one context in which they function as parts of a particular structure and convey particular content. The content is very emotionally coloured. Without that particular kind of emotion the internal incongruity of the grotesque structure would have very formal character; all theoreticians are agreed here.

It follows from the above that another feature of the grotesque structure is "self-being".

As was mentioned before, there are no constant relations in the grotesque structure which are in accordance with logic, ethics or double-valued esthetics. From their point of view, ambivalent or incongruent elements are mutually exclusive. Thus, such relation is contradictory: logically it is false, linguistically (if so concretized) it is nonsensical, esthetically—it does not allow beauty (in the strict sense) to arise, ethically—it may be received as "immoral". Therefore, critics have often denied any great value of the grotesque, seeing it as "something trivial, vulgar, freakish". They kept it outside the systems they acknowledged or treated it marginally, for example, as "unruliness defying all rules" (Rosenkranz).⁵⁴

⁵¹ J. W. Mann, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

⁵² L. B. Jennings, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁴ K. Rosenkranz, *Ästhetik des Hässlichen*, Königsberg 1853.

Most of the current theories no longer interpret the grotesque that way. They rather see it as an artistic shape of such a vision of reality which, while pointing out its inevitable antithetic character, assumes truth and falsehood of a state or value, i.e. assumes their "absolute relativity".⁵⁵

Consequently, to make sense of the oddity of the grotesque world, of its apparent inexplicability, one should make use of the multivalent "esthetic logic". The rules of ambivalent and incongruent juxtaposition create positive values, which helps to reject such notions as "alogicality", "absurdity", "destruction", "internal disorder" which are often used by the critics to define the grotesque. Such formulations characterize it very superficially, "from the outside", and do not look deep into the structure. This can lead to hasty evaluation of grotesqueness—the absence of preconditions for the classical beauty often implies negative evaluation. Also, this may lead to simplifications in interpretation. From this point of view it is inadmissible to reject a priori the autonomy of the grotesque world and to suggest that there are no justifiable relationships between its elements, or to deny any value (esthetic or cognitive) of the newly-created qualities.

The notion of "self-being" of the grotesque structure calls for explanation and exemplification. For the time being, I wish to stress the point that grotesqueness activates a *new* structure based on *correlation* of all elements under the principles of "esthetic logic". In this sense the structure is *artificial*; it is "self-being", it presupposes *distance* and suggests such receptive procedure which leads to the *union of contradictions* (although it does not mean that their semantic incoherence is neutralized). Such a structure becomes a kind of abstract hypothetical *model* common to various grotesque phenomena. The created grotesque world is *universal*; it is experienced by an isolated subject—distant observer.

A last feature of the grotesque structure worth mentioning and a consequence of the afore-said features seems to be *dynamism*.

The dynamics of interelementary relations within the grotesque structure results from ambivalent and incongruous juxtaposition of elements ("ambivalent movement", imbalance and inconstancy). This way of juxtaposing is the reason of constant unreadiness, emergence of grotesque forms, rapid reversal of their natural meanings, iridescence of shapes, colours etc.

Keyser stresses the importance of abruptness and surprise as characteristics of grotesque phenomena and objects.⁵⁶ Jennings gives more attention to the "grotesque movement" and concludes:

⁵⁵ P. Marciszuk, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

⁵⁶ W. Kayser, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

Both the fearsome and ludicrous aspects of the grotesque situation are increased by the factor of motion. The meance of chaos is much more vivid when we see the familiar world actually in the process of dissolution [...]. Indeed, the mere setting in motion of the grotesque object often suffices to give the impression of a grotesque situation, and it is often the case that one or more of these menacing figures preside over the scene, as if to hasten the process of decay. The characteristic motion of the grotesque object is that of dancing, since this is the activity most calculated to call forth fear alongside amusement.⁵⁷

The above considerations lead naturally to the question of *rhythm*, which is often the main determinant of the peculiar order of a grotesque work. The rhythm may mean setting grotesque objects in motion, but also it may mean their multiplication. Cyclic recurrence of situations, motives or objects is very characteristic of grotesque art. Bakhtin very often stresses the importance of movement in the grotesque and sees it as an "artistic image of the internal movement of the essence of existence".⁵⁸ In this view the movement loses its fortuitous character and takes a cosmic dimension.

The grotesque movement does not refer only to the visual media. Also in literature and drama it governs the "grotesque" language used not only to communicate information but also to connote the character of the grotesque situation just being created. It is a language free from impeding rules, a language which "speeds up" and "slows down", a language which is phonologically, syntactically and semantically dynamic.

The grotesque reality is seen *dynamically* and not statically. This is why the preferable form for a grotesque work is a short, dynamic one. Drama lends itself the best here, and at the same time it guarantees the best simultaneity of presented images or events, their perpetual "formation".

Even whenever there is immobility in grotesque creation, it is not inertness in the strict sense, but rather "congealed movement", a counterpoint to movement.

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In the above considerations I have tried to survey the question of grotesqueness in a way similar to the eidetic method. I have tried to reach the essence of the grotesque, i.e. to formulate its primary properties, no matter how it is related to the real world. I have sought the constant in the inconstant, the invariable in the variable. My remarks do not, claim, of course, to be ultimate solutions or answers. Rather, it has been an attempt at specification of a few main characteristics of the grotesque from the present-day point of view. My point was to show that

⁵⁷ L. B. Jennings, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁵⁸ M. Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

it is possible to analyse a "grotesque" work of art, starting not from its vision of the world but from its internal organization. Such an analysis with ample examples goes beyond the scope of this study. The latter might perhaps be a kind of "theoretical background" to a full-scale research in this field.

Translated by *Krzysztof Lewoc*

STRUKTURA GROTESKI: ANALIZA WSTĘPNA

STRESZCZENIE

Zagadnienie groteskowości w sztuce doczekało się we współczesnej literaturze przedmiotu licznych i różnoaspektowych opracowań. Znamienne jednak, że większość spośród nich została zorientowana na badanie tego, co „znaczy” groteskowość, zaniebując kwestię sposobu jej funkcjonowania, tego „jak” znaczy. W pracy obecnej skoncentrowano uwagę na przedmiocie zjawiska groteskowego, tzn. groteskowość jest tu badana w aspekcie samego dzieła sztuki.

Pierwszą czynnością badawczą stało się najogólniejsze zdanie sprawy z charakteru sfery konotacyjnej i denotacyjnej terminu „groteska” (określenie specyfiki pojęcia, wskazanie zasad typizacji oraz szkicowy rys rozwoju semantycznego „groteski” i jej precyzacji jako pojęcia estetycznego). Następnie postawiono tezę o istnieniu swoiście zorganizowanej, interdyscyplinarnej struktury dzieł groteskowych. Celem rozważań stała się próba sformułowania wystarczających — w logicznym sensie tego terminu — warunków, pozwalających zaliczyć spełniające je dzieło sztuki do dziedziny groteskowości. Wyróżniono cztery wyznaczniki strukturalne konstytutywne dla groteski:

- 1) ambiwalencyjność;
- 2) inkongruencja;
- 3) samoistość;
- 4) dynamizm.

Ambiwalencyjność rozumiana jest tu jako koegzystencja antagonistycznych pierwiastków, zestawionych w pary opozycyjne na różnych planach dzieła sztuki, powodująca bezustanną opalizację znaczeniową i sytuacyjną świata przedstawionego dzieła. Inkongruencja to taki typ zestawienia, w którym połączone zostały elementy czy aspekty niezgodne, obce sobie, nieciągłe, niewspółmierne z punktu widzenia określonego wzoru pierwotnego, który jednakże ulega „rozpuszczeniu” w strukturze groteski, tzn. wszystkie składniki groteski uzyskują samodzielną wartość wobec identyfikowanego wzorca (czy wzorców). Groteskowość bowiem zdaje się aktualizować nową strukturę, której zasadą jest uwspółzależnienie wszystkich składników w oparciu o zasady „logiki estetycznej” i w tym sensie jest to struktura sztuczna;; jest samoistna, zakłada postawę dystansu i sugeruje taką procedurę odbiorczą, która prowadzi do scalenia sprzeczności. Taka struktura jawi się jako rodzaj abstrakcyjnego, hipotetycznego modelu, wspólnego rozmaitym — pod względem zastosowanego tworzywa, przyjętej ideologii, konwencji gatunkowych, itd. — zjawiskom odczuwanym jako „groteskowe”. Wykreowany świat groteskowy ma wymiar uniwersalny, doświadcza go podmiot wyodrębniony, wyizolowany, zajmujący oddaloną pozycję obserwatora. Ambiwalentny i inkongruentny sposób zestawiania składników przesądza o wiecznej „niegotowości”, „stawaniu się” form groteskowych, o dynamizmie wewnętrznych relacji międzyelementarnych struktury groteskowej.

Przyjęty w artykule sposób ujmowania zagadnienia groteskowości w kategoriach powoływanej przez nią struktury artystycznej umożliwia próbę zbliżenia się do „nieredukowalnej istoty” groteski, do tego, co stałe w niestałym, niezmiennie w zmiennym (metoda zbliżona do ejdetycznej). Potrzebę podobnych badań dyktuje pragnienie uzyskania możliwie obiektywnych kryteriów wyróżniania dzieł groteskowych.

Irena Jajte