

THE SOCIAL PURPOSES OF THE COMEDIC (cont'd)

The Scatological and Grotesque
The abject and the Carnavalesque

Scatological and Grotesque

- **Scatological Humor is concerned with bodily excrement**, but can be concerned with gas, blood, urine, feces, spit, etc.
- **Grotesque** things display a shocking excess of a physical trait or behavior. We laugh, remember Bergson, sometimes as a corrective.

Scatological and Grotesque

- **Grotesque Biological conditions** can be dwarfism, gigantism, obesity, deformity, etc.
- **Grotesque Behaviors** can be things like compulsiveness, hoarding, lecherousness, addiction, unbridled zealotry.

Example: Westboro Baptist Church



- **Perform grotesque behavior** as a way of shocking people's senses.
- Their beliefs **have little to do with the overblown and confrontational manner** in which they deliver them.

Example: Chris Farley



Used both grotesque physical conditions and mannerisms in comedy

Theories of the Grotesque and Scatological

- Mikhail Bakhtin – **these works celebrate the ‘lower bodily stratum’**, functions of the body that we don’t think about because they’re considered dirty or sinful.
- Julia Kristeva – **certain works remind us of the abject**, a condition that is created by biological processes that keep us alive such as excretion and defecation.

“The Lower Bodily Stratum”

- Health dictates that we remove bodily waste from ourselves and from close proximity to where we live.
- Historically, this task wasn't as unconsciously accepted as it is now. A change in consciousness was needed to make this apparent.

“The Lower Bodily Stratum”

- By having a socially necessary standard of cleanliness, **we intellectually made certain biological functions and the body parts associated with them ‘dirty’, sometimes morally.**
- While it is necessary to find these functions repulsive, it serves to separate our brains from certain parts of our body.

The Carnavalesque

- **A celebration of the lower bodily stratum**, when the conscious demands of polite society are willfully cast aside for a time **to celebrate the abject functions** of the human body, which we have intellectually repressed for health reasons.
- **Carnival is a time when all things may be considered equal.**

Mardi Gras



The Carnavalesque is often considered festive, and is associated with a cultural or religious event such as Lent.

Example: *I Like Opium* (2008)

But The Carnavalesque can be figurative as well, flattening the symbolic or function

- **In/Out, Oral/Anal opposition flattened, made similar.**

Jack White and ICP record little-known Mozart song

[http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/
jack-white-produces-insane-clown-
posse-single-20110831](http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/jack-white-produces-insane-clown-posse-single-20110831)

Reminder of Death

- **The abject thing is something we need to eliminate to survive biologically.** Things like blood can also be abject, wounds, etc.
- The elimination of the abject can be a reminder that we are mortal and constantly produce waste, or that we are destructible and fragile.
- This might be the most obvious reading, but...

A reminder of Life

- **Abject things also remind us that we're alive, and that life goes on beyond death.** You can recognize the abject because you're not dead; being able to create the abject proves we're alive.
- **“corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live.** These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being” (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 3).

Example: Terminator Eye Surgery

- The Terminator is a cyborg, half machine/half human.
- Wounds can also be considered abject. Because he performs surgery, we have an empathic reminder that he is both man and machine.

Regeneration & Revolution

- The carnivalesque celebration of the abject is both regenerative and revolutionary to Bakhtin.
- The repression of the lower bodily stratum is societal, and can be used to control poor and under-represented people.
- By celebrating the abject, **we find the differences between classes is essentially small.**

Synthesis With Freud and Bergson

- Truly scatological or abject humor, not simply potty humor, is routinely castigated as more offensive than most other forms.
- **So, if it is revolutionary, this castigation could very well be for political reasons.**

South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut

- What are the different ways that politics and american popular culture are carnivalized?
- Who, or what is abject? What purpose does their abjection serve? Are there other South Park characters that are abject?
- Who, or what is grotesque? Explain why they are grotesque.