

The Horrors of the Body: Notes on Mikhail Bakhtin and the Images of the Grotesque Body

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Annotation. This article proposes an interpretation of the horror body as a historical prolongation of Bakhtinian grotesque. I pretend to demonstrate the relevance of the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin in order to study current manifestations where a material bodily principle collaborates with the description of periods of cultural mutations. In the historical transition from cinema to current TV series, the grotesque of body horror surfaces a bodily awareness that reveals our biological and cultural fears, many of which are linked to certain postmodern transformations.

Keywords: M.M. Bakhtin, horror body, grotesque, TV series, postmodernity.

Introduction

This article pretends to collaborate to my ongoing research, which is about the aesthetic variations of fear in current massive culture, from a semiotic point of view and with a strong predominance of cultural critique of Mikhail Bakhtin [9]. This research is situated in CONICET and under the direction of Professor Pampa Arán¹. Before inquiring into the artistic procedures that recently stage an affect as fear, an exploration of traditional genres, like horror, is paramount. In this work, I will carry out such task focusing on a parcel of that memory: the *horror body*.

As it is known, the body has evolved into an object of fear in contemporary culture, not only because the abundance of monsters that invade screens with their rotten aesthetics (zombies, vampires, etc.), but also because our own corporality became perturbing: we live in a “pandemic era” [14] and, in recent times, we have discovered an endless number of agents that circulate in our immune system until its collapse. The idea that the uncanny can come from the inside of our own bodies was early explored by cinema in the late twentieth century when its raw material came mainly from the collective anxieties of the time.

However, I suspect that this artistic work with corporal fears could be inscribed in an older tradition – the one that Mikhail Bakhtin described as a *grotesque aesthetic*. By this, I mean, the system of images that lives by the carnival, with a very particular conception of a hypertrophic body and in metamorphosis, not subdued to the enshrined aesthetic rules. Even though this aesthetics surface in an exemplary way in genres of the serio-comical, Bakhtin’s proposal warns us that this is a manifestation which accompanies the human development, still present currently.

In this article, I will suggest that the category of the grotesque could shed new light on the horror body, proving that corporality, even the terrifying ones, becomes an exchange place where

¹ I would like to thank Professor Arán, who has instructed specialist in Bakhtinian theory in Argentina, also leading a number of investigations in the last decades, among which could be highlighted the edition of the first terminological dictionary of Bakhtin (*Nuevo Diccionario de la teoría de Mijaíl Bajtín*, Córdoba: 2006), and others dedicated to his aesthetic and philosophical thought (*La estilística de la novela en M.M. Bajtín. Teoría y aplicación metodológica*, Córdoba: 1998; and *La herencia de Bajtín. Reflexiones y migraciones*, Córdoba: 2016. URL: <https://rdu.unc.edu.ar/bitstream/handle/11086/4780/La%20herencia%20de%20Bajt%C3%ADn%20Digital.pdf?sequence=1>).

cultures negotiate senses and their contradictions. I will reconstruct the Bakhtinian idea that the grotesque body transfers abstract senses to a material plane, at the time that it embodies ongoing cultural mutations, and signals a period of historical transition, sometimes inaccurately [11]. One section will be devoted to recover these ideas in order to think the horror body as one of those fragments of grotesque, remnants that manifest renewed vitality as Bakhtin once said.

Nonetheless, as the philosopher suggested, the most appropriate medium to judge each prolongation of the grotesque is with “the help of concrete material” in which this tradition is collected [6, p. 58]. Therefore, in the second section, I would like to revise one of the founding fathers in horror body: the director David Cronenberg. An interpretation of the Cronenbergian films in grotesque terms will allow us to understand clearly a quite disseminated premise: that horror body is “a meditation on the transitory nature of the human form” [17]. But this nature is not only a biological precarity, because this contemporary grotesque expresses a bodily awareness which also reveals the collective anxieties, originated in the postmodern transformation: a historical moment to which I will dedicate some reflections in the last section, reviewing recent displays of TV series.

One further observation needs to be added as this article outlines premises about massive artistic forms, submitted to the demands of global market, a context far from the historical reality that Bakhtin had in mind, because his modern thought was incapable of imagining the fragmented subject and the atomist and mediated society of our postmodernity. However, this work pretends to give continuity to previous investigations in which I have tried to validate the potential of Bakhtinian proposal in the study of other historical modalities of the grotesque, thus bearing witness to the validity of this aesthetic conceptualization which is effective to describe and capture diverse instances of cultural transformations. In other words, my objective is to show the gargantuan fecundity of Bakhtin’s heuristic, who invites us to interpret endless artistic forms: objects of knowledge linked to the social functioning [2].

Grotesque Body: Bakhtin and the Rabelaisian Carnival

It is known that Bakhtin finds a tradition of critical cultural studies with the notions of *carnavalesque* and *cultures of laughter*, from the reconstruction of the popular-comic sources of carnival: phenomenon characterized by the inversion of social structures, the collapsing of distance between people, and the celebration of the relativity of symbolic order [8, p. 139]. According to the philosopher [6, p. 10], the carnival “celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order”: a kind of cultural “suspension” that blossoms in periods of historical transitions when a new *imagen of men* can be perceived, as it happened when the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance met, the point at which the serious and feudal tone dissipates to open the way to a new humanism.

In an exemplary way, the works of François Rabelais captured this transition, allowing Bakhtin to reconstruct one of the lines of the sociohistorical poetics of the novel [3], that is to say, the line of genres of the serio-comical. The vast memory of this genre contains old narratives well-nourished by the popular folklore and fertility rituals which celebrate cosmic cycles of nature [4, p. 86-129], and also many another literary forms that transform carnival imagery, as in Shakespeare [7, p. 173-190], or even in modern writers such as Dostoevsky, whose works are filled with a “carnival sense of the world” [5, p. 107]. This continuity shows that throughout history the carnival elaborated its own heritage and its own language: in other words, a whole critical and rebellious tradition, capable of mutating in time and adopting various manifestations.

In this foundational study, Bakhtin explained that the critic tended to analyze those manifestations of carnivalized culture in isolation, without considering that all of them respond to a “system of imagen” that he would then call *grotesque realism*. In the Bakhtinian appropriation of the term grotesque, there is no pejorative sense, but a peculiar aesthetic imaginery: a world conception that kept signs of a social transformation. It is enough to see the images that appear in the Rabelaisian work: senile pregnant hags, giants whose members merge with the soil, and bodies torn apart whose

fragments acquire new life, are examples of the figures that emerge in the carnal and eschatological atmosphere of carnival.

As it can be seen, in this grotesque a privileged place is given to the images of body or, more precisely, a “material bodily principle” [6, p. 19]. Through the corporal materiality, the carnival questions the asceticism and the absolute and abstract values of the feudal culture, and it does so by “the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level” [6, p. 19]. More than a mere parody, the grotesque aesthetic disrupts the topographical meanings of medieval culture, bringing its celestial and spiritual symbology closer to the earthly images of the tomb, the womb, and the genital organs. With the corporal exaggeration, the exposition of the physiological functions, and the evaporation of limits between youth-old age and life-death, the body comes down to earth, thus redeeming what the feudal institutions considered vulgar. Bakhtin called it degradation:

Degradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time. To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better. To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth. Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one [6, p. 21].

That grotesque and degraded body lacks a univocal reading: it oscillates in an imprecise threshold where negation and affirmation coexist. Life and death are redefined, while the limits between the profane and the sacred are dissolved, as it happens between beauty and monstrosity. As this is so because the grotesque body materialize a period of historical transition when two conceptions of the world live together. Therefore, nothing is finished nor perfect in the grotesque body, given that it shows the human life “in its twofold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness. And such is precisely the grotesque concept of the body” [6, p. 26].

In plain sight, the power of regeneration and cheerful contradiction celebrated by Rabelais little has to do with the terror and the repugnant that evokes the *horror body*. But it also must be admitted that there can be historical mutations, as Bakhtin proved by describing other systems of images in other traditions, pursuing the long persistence of the grotesque which is weakening in time. An exemplary case is in the Romantic period when “a revival of the grotesque genre but with a radically transformed meaning” emerged, defined by Bakhtin as a *subjective grotesque* [6, p. 36]. Other features characterize this aesthetic that subdue the time of popular utopianism of carnival and vanish the collective human communion with the world: by contrast, in the Romantic forms “the entire world is turned into something alien, something terrifying and unjustified. The ground slips from under our feet, and we are dizzy because we find nothing stable around us” [6, p. 42].

As a matter of fact, the most significant changes comes from a preference for the *terror* that is capable of reelaborating some Rabelaisian motives, as a transposition in the subjective language of Romanticism: for instance, the masks, the marionettes and the scarecrows lose their festive and cheerful character and turn into sinister and melancholic symbols, and madness (that which “makes men look at the world with different eyes”, [6, p. 39]) becomes a feature of an tormented and cleaved subject (see Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde). Bakhtin says that the “ambivalence offers a sharp, static contrast” [6, p. 41], and death is exemplary: while Rabelais represented death as resurrection and mere stage in the eternal continuity of nature, the Romanticism showed it as an irremediable final, or as a relation irreconcilable with life, as can be seen in vampires and other revenant monsters. Bakhtin summarizes that “the images of Romantic grotesque usually express fear of the world and seek to inspire their reader with this fear” [6, p. 39].

It will, of course, be objected that Bakhtin is not interested in digging deep into this Romantic expression, because his focus is on the historical productiveness of grotesque, and on how this aesthetics – always related to the human body representation – reveals a time of social and cultural mutation. Whereas the grotesque images of Rabelais announced the utopian humanism at the dawn

of the Renaissance, in the 19th grotesque heralded the contradictions of a new subject: the Romantic ego whose interiority was besieged by the forces of the unknown, during the expansion of the bourgeois culture. As I understand it, in both revelations resides the artistic and heuristic force of what Bakhtin called the *grotesque method*: an aesthetic linked “to moments of crisis, of breaking points in the cycle of nature or in the life of society and man” [6, p. 9]. However, in our times another aesthetic as body horror seems to revive this temporal critic that sustains the grotesque method, as it will be explained below.

On Body Horror: A Poetic of Flesh

The body horror, also known as biological horror, born in the North American cinematography in the 1970s, specially found in the Class B horror films. By a common agreement, its roots are in the Gothic literature, particularly in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1918), whose terrifying monster made of human pieces opens the way to a bodily tradition that will continue in the 20th century with the popular undead figures (George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead*, 1968) and the bodies as host of extraterrestrial (Ridley Scott’s *Alien*, 1979) or supernatural guests (William Friedkin’s *The Exorcist*, 1973). With different arguments, these films eventually showed the preference for hybrid characters that blur the limits between species. For the critics, that tendency would have developed a whole thematic and formal specialization, and therefore the definitions of body horror tend to be linked to the notion of genre, be it as a sub-genre of terror, as generic manifestation that, alongside porn, explores a bodily excess [19], or as mere tropes of repulsion in the frontiers of different genres [13].

Yet the definition of horror body can also be understood from another profitable point of view when one turns to David Cronenberg, considered a founding father of horror body. This acclaimed Canadian director is well-known by his refusal of the supernatural, isolating the horror from its Gothic tradition. Instead, Cronenberg prefers a biological discourse that exhibits the body as an uncontrollable place, filled with permanent transformations and, at the same time, a precarious shelter of desires and instincts repressed. “New Flesh” is the term which is used to describe this repulsive and abject, characterized by repugnance and certain attraction, and full of motives such as: viral contagion (*Rabid*, 1977), the omnisexuality (*Crimes of the Future*, 1970), the fusion between the organic and technological (*Videodrome*, 1983), and the bodily improvement through mental force (*Scanner*, 1981; *The Dead Zone*, 1983), splitting (*Dead Ringers*, 1988), and mutation (*The Fly*, 1986).

According to Mark Irwin (Cronenberg’s photography director), these repetitions claim that the sum of his works may be more conclusive than any movie separately [in 16, p. 47]. In fact, when recurrent elements and motives can be observed in the films, this foundational work seems to conceive a whole artistic conception that hides an unusual understanding of the body. Therefore, I would argue that, more than a genre in its own right, Cronenberg composed his own *system of images* which was later appropriated by the massive culture, expanding it in two directions: on the one hand, towards commercial and exaggerated films such as *gore* or Wes Craven’s *slasher*, and on the other hand, towards more subtle forms that I will explore in the next section. This system can be explained when it is inscribed in the material bodily principle of the grotesque tradition. It occurs that, more than once, Cronenberg suggested that his movies are aware of the physical, and I think this expression has relevance if it is interpreted in the light of what we called a grotesque imagery: “that is, the method of construction of its images” [6, p. 30].

For Cronenberg, to be aware of the physical implies to realize that our own bodies are in constant change, although we do not notice it. Disease and, ultimately, death abruptly reveal the ephemeral condition of our existence because we perceive symptoms, alterations and signals of disturbance or decomposition in the normal physiological state. However, the corporality is an unceasing process of transformation, and suffice it to pay attention to cells and tissues successively replace throughout a lifetime. Cronenberg states that this revelation causes one of the most indiscernible fears: “it is disturbing because it is based on an existential fear and terror: it deals with the evanescence of our lives, the fragility of our mental stated and, ultimately, the precarity of all

reality” [in 16, p. 194]². Cronenberg suggests that other films on technology or the supernatural tend to ignore this physical existence that the horror body surfaces as an uncanny strangeness through different techniques.

One of these implies narrating the transformation of the body in detail as a consequence of failed experiments, investigations of governmental conspiracies or scientific discoveries of the time. But the causes are not as important as the result: those bodies are always halfway between humanity and monstrosity, animality or technology. *Fly* (1986) is the perfect example (and I would dare say the emblem of the horror body) as it portrays that scientist who invents two pods to teleport objects which mistakenly fuses the protagonist with a fly at genetic level. One could say that the argument of the film, more than a scientific discovery, is about the deterioration and the slow decomposing of that hybrid body that holds on to its last human remain.

At any rate, this horror body recalls Bakhtin’s reading: “the grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet *unfinished metamorphosis*” [6, p. 48, italics added]. Consequently, these films are interested in this unfinished character, focusing on the process more than on the final product. Also, the deterioration of the body and its disease are treated like an unceasing becoming of which the characters slowly become aware until the acceptance (see *Shivers*, 1975). Accepting this degradation is part of the conception of the physical proposed by Cronenberg, who also asks: “Why not interpreting the process of aging and death as a transformation? [in 16, p. 123]. In a certain way, these films reinscribe death and disease as parts of the life cycle and, in this sense, Cronenberg’s narratives remind of Rabelaisian images, because of their mode of situating the body in a permanent resurrection, a sign of the eternal continuity of human life and biological life in general.

Nevertheless, in contrast to that positive grotesque that celebrates a cosmic time, the horror body highlights mortality and aging in accelerated or decelerated ways. In other words, these biological processes are exaggerated, and this is another technique of horror body: that is to say, the exacerbation of not only the body (deformations, hypertrophies, excretions), but also the endless psychological manifestations that the body cannot contain, such as sexual fantasies, hallucinations, mental illnesses and even addictions. It is important to mention that Cronenberg works all of these mental rampages because they collaborate with that corporality in mutation, given that the idea of a homogenous and lucid identity is, for the director, a mere cultural shelter: “we try to keep a constant identity because we need that stability. Also, our brain is constantly changing, physically changing” [in 15, p. 14]. All this exaggeration is also sustained by the special effects that Cronenberg defines as an extreme conceptual imagery which must “hit first”, as an effective medium to make us aware of “the notion that each one of us carries the seeds of our own destruction willing to germinate is terrifying. In such case, there is no possible defense, no way out” [in 16, p. 96].

This succinct exploration suggests that the horror body revitalizes many senses described by Bakhtin, especially when he warned us that behind every historical expression of the grotesque there is a “bodily awareness” [6, p. 48]. Grotesque body could then be another name for this aesthetic form which composes images of metamorphosis and exaggeration, in order to degrade the idealization that we have of our own physical existence. For this, Cronenberg is foundational and, at the same time, exemplary; it is not casual that “corporization” is a regular term when he explains his own aesthetics procedures [15].

It should be added, however, that Bakhtin claims that in the grotesque lies a problem related to the way in which those non-traditional bodies are inserted into the culture, especially in a time of radicalization of thought and historical transformations. In other words, the grotesque not only deals with bodies that break canons, but also with its own historical time. The same applies to the horror body that keeps a critical attitude as regards its own context: it is not casual that it broke out in the 1970s, when the commercial terror abandoned the collective anxieties introduced by the Cold War, portraying instead an atomist conception of society characterized by the growing individualism and the influence of the media that separated the bodies.

² Translations into English are mine.

In that sense, the horror body is composed by images that seek to provoke a visual and ideological effect. They pursue a revelation and, at the same time, a wake-up call about the cultural imperatives that encourage to deny the irremediable biological processes: the construction of artificial lives and simulacra, the confinement in plastic surgery and rejuvenating treatments, the growing self-administration of medical and psychiatric therapy, and many other phenomena that accompany the global and postmodern cultural stage. These considerations, of course, lead directly back to the Romantic grotesque which expresses the fear of a cleaved subject who cannot reconcile with his world [10, 11]. Although he dispenses with the supernatural explanations, Cronenberg continues this tradition, confining his characters into their own biology so as to offer a tormented vision of the world from there: in terms of Bakhtin, one would say that this current grotesque “acquired a private ‘chamber’ character. It became, as it were, an individual carnival, marked by a vivid sense of isolation” [6, p. 37].

The Long Persistence of Grotesque Body: Current Expressions

That horror in and through a body seems then to be at the service of our own biological, and also cultural, precarity. It is an affirmation that can be validated when, in some current expressions, one follows that particular prolongation of the grotesque line. Clearly, cinema still is one of the privileged vehicles for this aesthetic: from *The Elephant Man* (Lynch, 1980) to *The Human Centipede* (Six, 2009) or *Thanatomorphose* (Falardeau, 2012), numerous films of the last decades have violently spread the mutilation or deformation of the bodies, recognizing more or less explicitly their debt with the New Flesh founded by Cronenberg.

But one can indeed argue that another set of narratives seems to show certain weakening of the horror body, at least in its hyperbolic and eager violence upon bodies. Such is the case of *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (Fincher, 2009), whose protagonist subverts the human growth, playing with the idea of irreversible time and composing a narrative where the body becomes a temporal prison; or the emblematic *Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2011), where the search for perfection locks that young ballerina in a tormented body whose only possible liberation will be the animal metamorphoses. Another considerable number of films choose, in turn, a realist frame, portraying the advancement of diseases and even pandemic paranoia as *Contagion* (Soderbergh, 2011), a film that also seemed to foresee our experience with COVID-19. And these are only some examples that I mention randomly because, as Fredric Jameson sagaciously described [12, p. 651], this “reduction to the body” is a feature of postmodern massive culture whose films reduce “plot to the merest pretext” on which corporal shocks and explosions string (sci-fi and porn are also paradigmatic genres of this postmodern tendency).

Facing this proliferation of topics and genre variants, it is important to question when we consider a body to be a horror body: has the category of “horror body” lost its specificity, becoming a notion liable to describe any corporal ailment? Or is it that, as a consequence of the persistent repetition of the global market, we have naturalized that grotesque and even learned to coexist with it? My perception leads me to think that the horror body can still be valid category when it comes to describing a system of images, in a certain way tied to that awareness of the physical that Cronenberg promoted. Nonetheless, if, back then, the norms and discourses of science and biology could be read on those bodies, in recent times, the social order would be written in that corporal materiality: that it to say, the social rules that fix the limits of the corporal acceptable. I mean, a cultural hegemony that subdues the bodies to a new canon of “normality”, related to beauty standards, the cult-of-celebrity, and the upward social mobility: all of them motives that bloom in the global and postmodern cultural stage.

In this sense, I suggest that, today, the horror body seems to dispense with its aesthetic of physical deformity to give way to a degraded “perception” of the body instead. This a grotesque deprived of special effects that visually shock insofar as the focus is on the self-perception, like a grotesque body which characters experience from within, or from those “chamber intimacies” referred by Bakhtin [6, p. 105]. TV series are the territory where this variant is expanded, probably

because they dominate the international audiovisual market, striving to win over cinema's privilege place. At first, one could consider successful TV series as *The Walking Dead* (AMC, 2011-2022), *Black Summer* (Netflix, 2019) or even *Sweet Tooth* (Netflix, 2021), but here the body horror keeps many of its traditional senses, explaining one of the signs of our time: the viral contagion. However, in 2021, when the world was still being shaken by the pandemic, two TV series chose another way to represent the grief-stricken body, becoming representative of a new tendency that may still be shaping its borders.

One of them is *Physical*, launched by Apple TV. This show tells us about the emergence of the aerobic world in the 1980s, and narrates the story of Sheila, a perfect and beautiful housewife, apparently quite traditional, but who hides a secret: a strong eating disorder and a body dysmorphia that led her to bulimia. Yet, it is narrated in a parody-like style by showing, with certain grotesque, the protagonist's gluttony and lack of self-control when it comes to food, and the absurd ways in which she hides these practices. But the TV series also relates introspectively those grievances through the use of stream of consciousness. As a matter of fact, the first scene displays that perception when Sheila, in front of a mirror, underestimates herself ceaselessly: "embarrassing, pale, pasty, fat, gross, disgusting, lazy (...) look at you. Disgusting, sticky. Might as well just give up" [18]. Sheila's body pays the consequences of boredom of the suburban life and a marriage in which, in her own words, she feels "stuck" [18]. The protagonist neither assumes the passage of years, and she longs for the past, the time when she pursues political and cultural utopias, since she used to be part of those countercultural movements that put faith in the political idealism and the hippie subculture ideals.

Sheila then keeps a hold on that world which suddenly vanishes due to the growth of the mediatic and consumer culture that, unexpectedly, captures her. As a kind of epiphany, she discovers exercise videos and workout routines that emerged with VHS, and that actresses like Jane Fonda promoted. So, Sheila built up an empire as a fitness instructor model, even when her body will again be subdued to other pressures: extremes routines, steroids, strict diets and, above all, physical appearance. In both, married life and fitness world, the body always appears as a jail, as a control dispositif which suppress the subjects to the mandates of what is conceived to be a corporal normality in our recent historical context.

However, other TV series chose a lugubrious tone in order to exhibit this contemporary horror through the body, and this is the case of Netflix's *Brand New Cherry Flavor*. The show relates the journey of Lisa Nova in the 1990s, a Brazilian girl who aspires to be a filmmaker that settles in Los Angeles, more precisely in the cinema mecca: Hollywood. Lisa will rapidly get into the world of Hollywood superficiality; that is to say, self-centered and vain actors, obsessed with their physical appearance, and other that we will never get to know because their faces remained covered with plastic surgery bandages throughout the plot. Despite her dreams, Lisa will find a perverse environment, filled with deceptions and false promises, and she will be swindled by one of the most famous directors who stole her first tape. The recording of this rising star called "a young female Cronenberg" [1] is, in fact, a horror body film close to the gore, one which will gradually trespass her personal life when a kind of witch makes her an offer: to take revenge on the director and, at the same time, achieve the success she longs for. In turn, this shaman will demand a payment of "something inside you. Tasty" [1]: kittens that Lisa will vomit one by one. This scene is strongly grotesque, and reminds us Julio Cortázar's classic tale, "Carta a una señorita en París" ("Letter to a young lady in Paris", 1951), whose protagonist grows anxious because she pukes out little bunnies non-stop.

Brand New Cherry Flavor looks back at that literary tale, composing a parodic interpretation where another anxiety will emerge: the desperation to achieve success and thus repair a family abandonment. But, as the fame increases, Lisa's body pays unusual consequences: it undergoes a metamorphosis and deformities appear, while she keeps on vomiting other weird things as the witch feeds her with exotic and rare banquets. As can be seen, the role of food in this TV series is also important, rightly introduced by its title: flavors matter. However, this taste is the bittersweet flavor of the price paid for a provisional fame, and therefore it is not casual that *Brand New Cherry Flavor* locates that body in a historical period of media victory, reality shows, instant celebrities and

paparazzi that besiege personal life: a context where the body is subdued to permanent scrutiny by the show-biz, without opportunity to preserve their privacy.

Both series, in the border of black humor, work different fears that were born in the culture of the image. They demonstrate that, up to some extent, all horror body contains certain carnivalesque spirit because of their way to parody and exaggerate the limits of corporal materiality, but also this TV series suggest that, as Cronenberg once said, “to film terror is always to walk the thin line between horror and the ridiculous” [in 16, p. 89]. Still, it is evident that, through a humor quota, the current narratives can propose certain historical revisionism of a hinged moment when the consumer culture expands, swallowing the bodies: the last bastions where subjectivities can shelter, as Jameson rightly hypothesized [12]. And I could not only refer to corporality, because both stories develop in a daily environment, paralleling the loss of control over the body with the deterioration of intimacy and family as an institution. I would then say that, behind those bodily material metamorphoses, lie some cultural mutations: the decline of family as a utopia, and the siege of media culture which turn privacy into public. It is a horror body that seems to be closer to Kafka than Shelley, as the Kafkian monster refuses to coexist with the monstrous body that suddenly he no longer recognizes, becoming aware that he has always been cornered in the bureaucratic boredom of daily life.

Either way, the tradition of Gothic horror is a grotesque that remains attentive to the new sensibilities that appear in the culture horizon, finding creative methods to become aware of our own bodily participation in the world. In this article, I have only glimpsed some general features in order to draft a complex hypothesis, even an immeasurable one when one observes the broad system of grotesque-horrific images expanding in our culture: the celebration of a monstrosity in the streets on Halloween, the grotesque performances of artists with a great mercantile attractive like Lady Gaga, the craze for piercings, tattoos and scarifications that fashion consecrate as “body art”, but also other disturbing phenomena, like the ceaselessly attempt to stop aging with plastic surgeries and digital filters, the increase of eating disorders in the youth, the accident and torn bodies that go viral on social media, the genetic manipulation in every realm of living beings, and the mutations caused by nuclear contamination and agrottoxins.

In this context where nature give constant signs of exhaustion, and where the accelerated mutation of an unexpected virus that will eventually use every letter of the Greek alphabet, the representation of corporal materiality takes a central place, claiming an investigation more extended and systematic. Certainly, little remains of the utopian and collective encounter celebrated by the Rabelaisian carnival, because those grotesque bodies reveal the horror of our physical fugacity, encouraging us to question about the ephemeral character of our existence. On the whole, however, it would seem clear that is also proof of the artistic and heuristic force of a grotesque that always speaks its own time. Because, as Bakhtin taught us, in the unfinished metamorphosis of grotesque images what is finally read is “the relation to time, its perception and experience, which is at the basis of these forms was bound to change during their development over thousands of years” [6, p. 48].

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Ужасы тела:

Заметки о Михаиле Бахтине и образах гротескного тела

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Аннотация: В статье предлагается интерпретация концепции тела в фильмах ужасов как исторического продолжения теории гротескного образа тела М.М. Бахтина. Статья демонстрирует актуальность теории Бахтина для изучения современных реалий, в которых материально-телесный принцип взаимодействует с описанием периодов культурных мутаций. В историческом переходе от кино к современным телесериалам гротеск телесного ужаса обнажает телесное самосознание, раскрывающее наши биологические и культурные страхи, многие из которых связаны с определенными постмодернистскими трансформациями.

Ключевые слова: М.М. Бахтин, боди-хоррор, гротеск, телевизионный сериал, постмодерн.