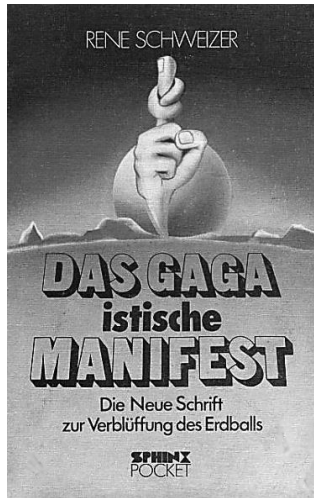


DADA IST THERAPIE



*DAS „GAGAistische MANIFEST“
erschien 1979 im Basler SPHINX VERLAG*

Michael Titze: The Dadaistic Roots of Therapeutic Humor¹

About fifty years ago, sociologist Erving Goffman compared the social world to a large stage performance where the dramatic development is based on thoroughly rehearsed roles. Every actor on this stage is supposed to give a most favorable impression. He or she is expected to take into account certain pre-established and strict rules. These rules guide the individual's rhetoric as well as his or her non-verbal actions. Invisible stage directing as well as the backstage mechanics ensure the precise functioning and narrative continuity of the play. This, in turn, guarantees that the actor does not step out of line.

Goffman's metaphor is no longer apt for today's postmodern social conditions. Society, once described by Emile Durkheim as the unique entirety to which everything is related, presents itself to postmodern man as a kind of patchwork quilt upon which "Everyone crochets at his own patch", as observed by German sociologist Gerhard Schulze (1997).

¹ Aus: Humor & Health Journal, Vol. XV, Nr. 1, Jan/Feb/Mar 2006

POSTMODERN REALITY IS PARALOGICAL

French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979) coined the term “postmodern” in the late seventies. According to Lyotard, the universal stage direction, which is the original “meta narration” that sets the game rules and typecasts the roles we play, has been gradually invalidated. Instead of the unisonous prescriptions of the past (defined by the king, the pope, or traditional customs) there are nowadays many opinion-forming prompters. Their statements and opinions can, of course, be contradictory. Therefore, an undisturbed conformity to one fixed role or game rule would be futile. To put it in Jacques Derrida’s words, in the postmodern world there are no valid points of orientation. And there is no grand script we could complement to enable standardized actions.

Social action in postmodern society is not a stable system in which the output is regulated by the input. Rather, there is a disordered and paradoxical connection between input and output, creating what Michel Foucault terms a “radical discontinuity”. In this sense, rational or logical action strategies are not suitable. Instead, “paralogical” approaches seem more promising. Postmodern individuals must desist from codified rules. Instead, they need to engage in creative impromptu acting, be their own authority, and be responsible for their successes or failures. Since the basic method for achieving success and avoiding failure is perfectionistic performance, everyone strives to project the most favorable figure on the world stage in order to avoid severe negative consequences to one’s self-esteem.

MORE OF THE SAME PERFORMANCE

In a society that favors above-average appearance, increasing numbers of individuals are striving for perfect beauty because even an average appearance may be an indication of failure. This is one of the underlying reasons for the growing statistic of eating disorders in our postmodern society!

Another problem in postmodern society stems from the demands placed upon individuals by the world of employment: In today’s world, knowledge is increasing at a breathtaking pace. According to sociologist Richard Sennett (1998), an educated and qualified first-time employee currently needs to renew his or her professional knowledge base at least three times within a timeframe of forty working years, whereas previous generations of employees were simply expected to continue using what they had already learned throughout their professional careers. As indicated in a survey by Oliver James (1998), all of the above demands exact

their toll on postmodern individuals who may feel caught in the “more-of-the-same” trap, wherein life appears as a cheerless burden. Subsequently, postmodern individuals are up to ten times more prone to experience depression than, their peers did fifty years ago. The violence rate has increased as well, together with increasing incidences of anxiety, compulsion, alcohol/drug abuse, eating disorders and gambling addictions. This is simultaneous with a decreasing *joie de vivre*. According to a 1984 survey published in the German magazine *PM*, the average individual laughed approximately eighteen minutes a day in the 1940s, which was a war and post-war era! However, in the 1980s, an era of economic prosperity and significant leaps in the standard of living, the average individual laughed only six minutes a day.

Does this mean that postmodern individuals have to surrender to endless drudgery and increasing levels of depression? That scenario would only apply if the “more-of-the-same” principle had exclusive validity. However, there is a compensatory tendency at work, as evidenced by the growing interest in using paralogical and paradoxical solutions to address present-day problems. In a time of dislocated orienting or directive social patterns, alternative interests like the New Age movement are in fashion. The same is true for pseudoscientific speculations. According to a survey in *Newsweek* magazine, every second American citizen believes in UFOs and extraterrestrials. This indicates that postmodern individuals are becoming less interested in rationally suggested solutions to the big issues in life. There seems to be a growing readiness to integrate incongruity, absurdity and nonsense into everyday life. William F. Fry (1992) has stipulated that this interest in paradoxical issues is feeding a sphere of “chaotic creativity”, which in turn constitutes a breeding ground for humor!

LESS IS BETTER – DADA IS THE BEST!

In 1974, Paul Watzlawick described the “less-of-the-same” principle, which makes use of an apparently irrational communication to trigger action. He recommended two modes of action for accessing this sphere of communication: to be mad or bad! Initially, this would mean less adherence to the traditional norms that represent reason and good manners. In the case of psychotherapy, this includes an unconditional acceptance of the patient’s presenting symptoms. Traditional psychotherapy originally tried to “repair” symptoms because they were understood as defects. Psychotherapy in postmodern times looks upon such symptoms within a less negative framework. They are approached as positive clues

to underlying creative resources. These resources are frequently associated with what Freudians call “primary processes”, or the private logic of one’s “inner child”.

The road to this perspective was charted by an important art movement of the postmodern era. This movement was founded in Zurich during the disastrous years of the I. World War and soon spread to Berlin and Paris. It was called “Dada”, a French word meaning toy horse. The early Dadaists openly expressed their interest in the pre-logical thinking of primitive, irrational beings like children and so-called lunatics. One of the most important protagonists of Dada was the German psychiatrist Richard Huelsenbeck (1892-1972).

*This is what things have come to in this world
The cows sit on telegraph poles and play chess
The cockatoo under the skirts of the Spanish dancer
Sings as sadly as a headquarters bugler and the cannons lament all day
That is the lavender landscape Herr Mayer was talking about
When he lost his eye
Only the fire department can drive the nightmare from the drawing-room
But all the horses are broken
Ah yes Sonya, they all take the celluloid doll for a changeling and shout:
God save the king
The whole Monist club is gathered on the steamship Meyerbeer
But only the pilot has any conception of high C
I pull the anatomical Atlas out of my toe
A serious study begins
Have you seen the fish standing in front of the opera in cutaways
For the last two days and nights ?
Ah, ah, ye great devils — ah, ah ye keepers of bees and commandments
With a bow wow wow and a bow woe woe who today does not know
What our Father Homer wrote
I hold peace and war in my toga but I'll take a cherry flip
Today nobody knows whether he was tomorrow
They beat time with a coffin lid
If somebody had the nerve to rip the tail feathers
Off the trolley car it's a great age
The zoology professors gather in the meadow
With the palms of their hands they turn back the rainbows
The great magician sat the tomatoes on his forehead
Again thou hauntest castle and grounds
The roebuck whistles the stallion bounds
(And this is how the world is, this is all that's ahead of us.)*

HUMORIZING PUBLIC LIFE

René Schweizer is a contemporary Dadaist based in Basel, Switzerland. His life's work has been dedicated to "The transformation of reality by systematic deception" (1979). As a Dadaist, Schweizer is constantly playing with the grotesque, with nonsense and absurdity.

For example, he swamped Switzerland's administrative system with "naughty inquiries". A state property office received a letter from Schweizer inquiring as to whether his mind, which he had lost the other day, had been handed in by anybody! He also sent the following inquiry to the head office for kindergartens in the City of Basel: "Up to this point, I have not done one thing right in my life. Therefore, I want to start all over again. Is it possible for me to enter one of your kindergartens?"

In the first phase of Schweizer's nonsensical actions, many of the institutions he corresponded with responded quite seriously, thus involuntarily producing a funny effect. Schweizer published all of this correspondence in books with high print runs. This resulted in a tremendous public resonance and triggered a significant attitude change! At this point, most recent replies to Schweizer's letters from administrative bodies have been unequivocally humorous!

Schweizer's homepage includes some of his unpublished poems. One of these poems is entitled "The Grand Being":

*"Blinkee blanke blonkee blank
Feedee fahdee foe
Shlinkee shlankee shlonkee shblank
Didee dahee do
I came here on a mood
I had nothing to jest
The silence was no longer food
I could no longer rest
I sought the tight to see the truth
And knew I was a fool
Was this how I got the blues?
A noise-polluted pool?
Blinkee blanke blonkee blank
Feedee fahdee foe."*

In his book "The Gagaistic Manifest", Schweizer (1979, p. 9) writes: "Everyone talks about the serious side of life. When you open the newspaper or listen to the radio, you are confronted with it. But where does it

say that the world has to obey the principle of seriousness and earnestness? Why should you disfigure your forehead with furrows of pensiveness? Why should you take everything in an enormously serious manner? [...] Creation has established a counterpart of seriousness: humor. But in the official world, in everyday thinking, humor is neglected. Therefore, humor – in all its manifestations and nuances – has to be strategically brought into play. Thus the supremacy of seriousness may be thwarted.”

In 1996, a conference was initiated in Basel, Switzerland, for professionals who had integrated humor into their work. This conference was attended by experts in the therapeutic field and was continued in subsequent years as the “International Congress of Humor in Therapy”. Thousands of participants from Central Europe participated in this event which had remarkable positive consequences in many areas of public life.

DADA AND MODERN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Huelsenbeck’s original intent was to create a “lark regarding the outlook on life” (Hoellen, 1993, p.5). He wanted to offset the contradiction between the subjective world of dreams and delusions and the objective reality of reason. His main concern, however, was to repudiate the rationalism of Western civilization by concentrating on the creative power of the unconscious. This interest, of course, established an affinity with psychoanalysis.

In 1936, Huelsenbeck emigrated to New York, changed his name to Charles T. Hulbeck, and decided to undergo a formal training analysis with the famous neo-analyst Karen Horney. In 1946, Huelsenbeck became a training analyst himself and was contacted by Albert Ellis, who was in turn formally trained by Huelsenbeck until 1953. In 1955, Ellis founded his own “heretical underground approach” (Wolfe, 1977, p.14), Rational-Emotive Therapy (RET), which turned out to be one of the most influential therapeutic systems of our time: While rationality plays a central role in RET, it is quite obvious that Ellis uses important Dadaistic elements in his therapeutic approach. One example is his “shame attacking exercises” that have proven to be successful in the treatment of social phobia. During the course of these exercises, clients are encouraged to be foolish and engage in “shameful” acts, such as:

- Say something stupid
- Confess an embarrassing weakness like: “I can’t spell”
- Act funny, such as singing aloud when one has an awful voice or using a black umbrella on a bright day

- Say something lecherous
- Ask a shoemaker for a wristwatch
- Call out the stops in a loud voice while riding a bus or trolley
- Ask other passengers what day it is.

In an article entitled “Fun as Psychotherapy” Ellis states: “One of the main tenets of rational-emotive therapy consists of unconditionally accepting people with their mistakes and idiocies [...] When one of my clients told me that he could not defecate in a public toilet because someone in the next stall might hear him make improper sounds and might think badly of him, I asked, ‘What do you expect when you sit on your john and make the right noises – that the guy in the next stall will play the Star-Spangled Banner?’” (1977, pp. 264-266).



René Schweizer als Ballerina (Photomontage von Jakob Krattiger in Michael Flumes „Basler Buch Vips vo Basel“)

HUMOR IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Many psychotherapists have been progressively using paralogical methods in their professional work during the past several decades. For instance, Frank Farrelly, founder of Provocative Therapy, turned traditional therapeutic guidelines upside down. In his interventions, Farrelly works with the most absurd exaggerations and ironic insinuations, thus establishing a clear connection between the way he handles clients' neurotic problems and humor. His approach echoes the paralogical or irrational world of fools and clowns. Salameh (2006) describes this world as

the source of a special or non-conforming wisdom, which is displayed by medieval court jesters, American-Indian “tricksters”, Zen Masters, or dervishes like Mulla Nasruddin. When the therapist participates in this “wisdom of the fools”, he or she can then immediately enter the sphere of creative unconsciousness. Frank Farrelly (1991, p. 23) illustrated this viewpoint in an introductory lecture he gave at a 1991 conference: “I am firmly on the side of the angels. I was thinking how I might begin to talk to you this morning. And I thought, I could say I used to know what provocative therapy was. And I think in some ways I know less and less what it is. Now, perhaps that’s not because it’s so complex, perhaps it’s because I am becoming more and more a Dummkopf (idiot).”

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René Schweizer: Dadaistische Texte

An der Schwelle oder der Große Pop

Der Gesteinigte sprach: Ich kam, sah und Stein

Der Geächtete sprach: Ich kam, sah und 8

So sprachen sie beide

Aber das ist Vergangenheit

Denn jetzt kommt

Der Große Pop

Und der Große Pop sagt:

- Schicksalsschläge sind der Ärmelkanal der Folter
- Gewichtszunahmen sollten steuerpflichtig sein
- Totenköpfe schließen ihr Echo ein, um nicht für hohl zu gelten
- Ein Pfundskerl nimmt zwei Kilo ab

und

- Arbeitslose lösen um Arbeit

Und nichtsdestowurstsalat sagt der Große Pop weiter:

- Sicherheit ist das Amen des Kleinbürgers und das Omen des Schiffbrüchigen
- Embryonale Parabelimitationen schleichen sich empfängnisverhütend in den Garten der höheren Mathematik

Dies sagt der Große Pop. Und der Große Pop sagt auch:

- Generationentunke
- Erbschaftssymphonie
- Hinderniskauen
- Glückseligkeitsbusen
- Kartothekenmayonnaise
- Philistergeknutsche
- Aztekengulasch

Und dann sagt der Große Pop plötzlich:

SELTSAM, DAS ALLES

Aber schon fährt der Große Pop weiter und sagt:

Er war ein gottloser Typ, der ausgerechnet immer an einem Karfreitage eine Bratwurst auf dem Tisch sehen wollte.

Und der Große Pop sagt auch noch:

Nehmt den Armeen ein e weg und streicht dem Ergebnis die Rente!

Gesagt getan

Dies alles sagt euch der Große Pop
Und nun sagt euch der Große Pop noch, was er will

Der Große Pop will:

- Wagnersarkophage stemmen und zu den vestalischen Jungfrauen human sein

Der Große Pop will:

- Glühbirnen zerknirscht begutachten,
- Erbauliches drucken,
- in die Hostien onanieren,
- sich an Grabsteinen die Nägel wund kratzen

Er will sich gegenseitig Datteln in die Augen werfen, und er will Knäcke-
brot, weil es so wohlschmeckend, knusprig, bekömmlich und leicht ver-
daulich ist. Er will es, weil es der Freund seiner schlanken Linie ist und
praktisch wasserfrei, weil es ohne zu belasten sättigt und Kraft gibt durch
den unveränderten Gehalt des Vollmehles etc. Er will es, weil es ein un-
vergleichliches, hochwertiges Produkt zur kräftigen Entwicklung der
Zähne wie zu deren Erhaltung und Pflege, aber auch besonders zur Stär-
kung des Zahnfleisches ist.

Deshalb will der Große Pop Knäcke-
brot

Aber nicht nur der Große Pop will Knäcke-
brot. Auch andere wollen Knäcke-
brot. Viele wollen Knäcke-
brot. Sehr viele wollen Knäcke-
brot. Eine enorme, kaum noch übersehbare Menge will Knäcke-
brot. Der Große Pop sagt euch, es kommt die Zeit, da wollen noch mehr Knäcke-
brot, da wollen alle Knäcke-
brot: die Deutschen wollen Knäcke-
brot, die Letten und die Finnen, die Italiener und Albaner, Bulgaren und Franzosen wol-
len Knäcke-
brot: Europa will Knäcke-
brot, Mao Tse Tung will Knäcke-
brot, das ganze gelbgesichtige Kulturschänderpack will Knäcke-
brot.

Marxistisch-leninistische Knäcke-
brotkommunen schießen aus dem
Boden. Man sagt nicht mehr „Guten Morgen“ oder „Merde“ oder „Ho-
ney where's my prick?“ – Man sagt nur noch „Knäcke-
brot, Knäcke-
brot, Knäcke-
brot“. Die Sintflut des Knäcke-
brotes ist nicht mehr aufzuhalten,
sie rast um die Erde, löscht Kriege aus und das Interesse für Oswalt Kol-
le. Die UNO wird zur Knäcke-
brot Limited umorganisiert. Niemand ruft
mehr: Ho Ho Ho Tshi Minh. Man ruft jetzt: Knä- Knä- Knä-cke-
brot. Und schließlich werden alle Völker, alle Rassen und Religionen, alle Klas-
sen und Kasten, alle, alle, alle werden sie sich zusammenschließen zur
großen Knäcke-
brotfamilie. Die Welt wird sozusagen knäcke-
brotisiert.

Der Wunsch nach Knäckebrötchen wird bekehrenden Einfluss haben auf den Ku Klux Klan, den Black Power, die Zeugen Jehovas, die Fußball- und Champagnerfans, auf de Gaulle und die Witwe Bolte. Und zu guter Letzt wird von irgendjemand – vielleicht von mir – das totale Knäckebrötchen ausgerufen. Es werden Knäckebrötchentempel gebaut, Sekten wie „Die Jünger der ersten Tage des Knäckebrötes“ gegründet. Der Knäckebrötchenpapst schleudert den Knäckebrötchenbann und urbt et orbt das Blaue vom Himmel herunter.

Und schließlich beginnt der ganze Rummel von vorne.

Es werden wieder Sätze gesagt wie: Kreativität ist die Fähigkeit, neue Ausdrucksformen zu finden, und: Neues wird nie gesagt, es wird nur Altes neu gesagt, oder: Jedes Datum ist nur eine Eintagsfliege, usw.

Dann kommt vielleicht ein alter Eremit aus seiner Klause, betrachtet sich das Ganze und sagt: *alea jacta est*. Und diesmal endgültig.

Aber – wer hört schon auf den Großen Pop

Mö Mö Mö und nochmals Mö

Haben Sie je überlegt, dass es Mö geben könnte, eine Zahl über die man nicht spricht, und von der man nichts weiß, außer, dass man nicht über sie spricht, weder wie groß noch wie klein sie ist, weder wo sie herkommt noch weshalb es sie gibt? Wozu könnte eine Zahl gut sein, über die man nicht spricht? Könnte sie etwas mit dem Urknall zu tun haben, mit den Kräften, welche die Welt erschufen und die Schöpfung im Innersten zusammen halten? Könnte Mö mehr als eine simple Zahl sein, ein Zahlenverbund vielleicht, eine Formel – die Formel, nach der die Wissenschaft schon so lange sucht, der Schlüssel zur Vereinigung der physikalischen Urkräfte, der alles bisher Unerklärliche erklärbar macht, die dunkle Materie, die Quantentänze, das Higgs-Feld, die Schwarzen Löcher, Heino, den Papst, die Frauen?

Stellen Sie sich vor, sie würden diese Zahl entdecken, über die man nicht spricht. Was würden Sie damit anfangen? Sie könnten sich nie über sie unterhalten. Sie müssten in den Wald gehen und schreiend über sie nachdenken. Oder an eine Techno Party, ins Türkische Bad, ins Café Spillmann. Und was, wenn plötzlich jemand das Tabu bräche und über Mö zu reden begänne, so wie ich jetzt? Was würden Sie dann tun? Sich beschweren? Bei wem? Sie dürfen ja nicht über Mö sprechen. Da saßen Sie ganz schön in der Patsche.

Langsam wird es Zeit, dass wir alle uns mit solchen Dingen zu beschäftigen beginnen; denn wenn wir es nicht tun, werden die grauen Eminenzen der Weltverschwörung unsere Achselhöhlen mit noch mehr Deos malträtieren und den Ansatz der Hundesteuer noch weiter in die Höhe schrauben.

Jetzt hab ich noch das Wort Echtzeit-Gorgonzola im Köcher, aber davon ein andermal. Tschüssi.



*Dieses Foto von René Schweizer entstand im Winter 2002/2003
am Rheinufer,
es wurde von Jakob Krattiger aufgenommen*

15 Fragen an René Schweizer²

Wie würden Sie Ihren momentanen Geisteszustand beschreiben?
Verblüffend luxuriös.

Was möchten Sie sein?
Ein erleuchtetes Nashorn.

Welchen Luxus leisten Sie sich?
Jenen des heiteren Gleichmuts. *Ihre Lieblingsgestalt in der Geschichte?*
Tarzan.

Ihre Helden in der Gegenwart?
Scarlett Johansson und ihre Blusenfreunde.

Ihre Lieblängstugend?
Schlafen.

Ihr größter Fehler?
Das Menschsein.

Lieben Sie jemanden?
Schneewittchen.

Und woraus schließen Sie das?
Der Kavalier genießt und schweigt.

Was verabscheuen Sie am meisten?
Schlechtes Essen.

Welche Gabe möchten Sie besitzen?
Jene des ewigen Verschwindens.

Wem wären Sie lieber nie begegnet?
Meinem Mathematiklehrer.

Wenn Sie König der Schweiz wären: Was würden Sie als Erstes befehlen?
Austausch von Genfer- und Bodensee.

Hinter welches Geheimnis möchten Sie kommen?
Jenes der Frauen.

Wie möchten Sie sterben?
Lebend.

² Auszug aus DER BUND (Bern) vom 17. Mai 2011, S. 32