



GIORGIO
AGAMBEN
Pulcinella

TRANSLATED BY
KEVIN ATTELL



GIORGIO AGAMBEN *Pulcinella*



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PHILOSOPHY

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Most people think [...] that those are philosophers who sit in a chair and converse and prepare their lectures over their books; but the continuous practice of [...] philosophy, which is every day alike seen in acts and deeds, they fail to perceive. [...] Socrates at any rate was a philosopher, although he did not set out benches or seat himself in an armchair or observe a fixed hour for conversing or promenading with his pupils, but jested with them, when it so happened, and drank with them, served in the army or lounged in the market-place with some of them, and finally was imprisoned and drank the poison. He was the first to show that life at all times and in all parts, in all experiences and activities, universally admits philosophy.

Plutarch,

'Whether an Old Man Should Engage in Public Affairs', pp. 145-7 (1936)

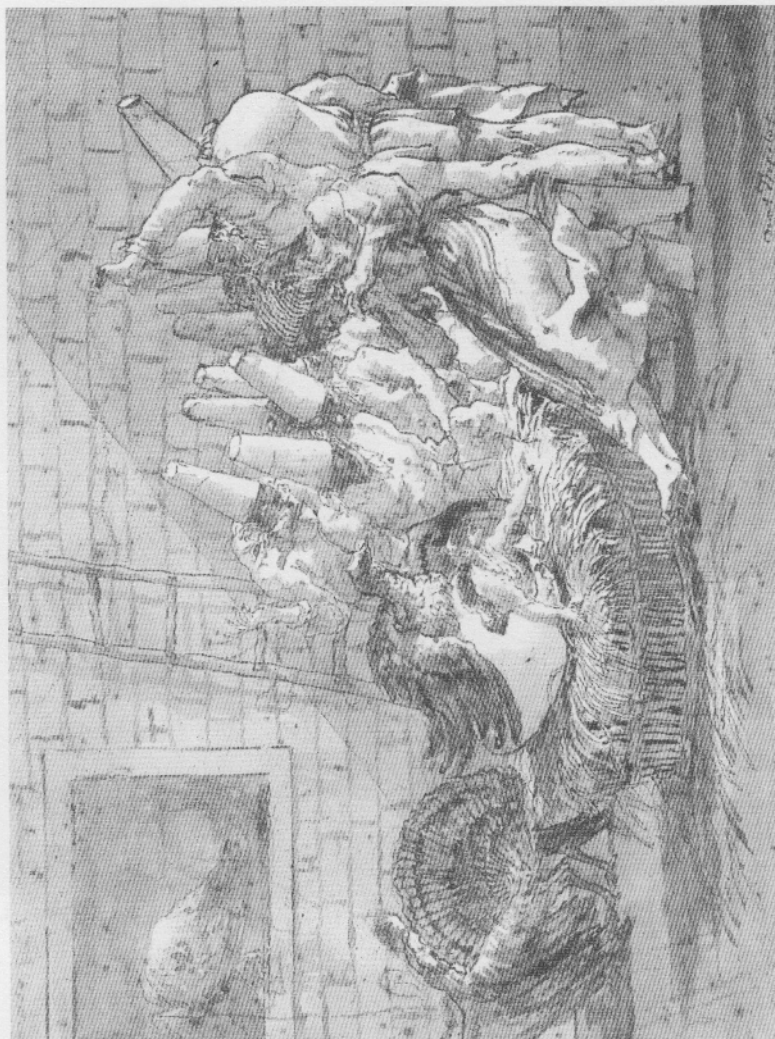
Ubi fracassorium, ibi fuggitorium.

Pulcinella



As his name itself shows, Pulcinella (from *pullecino*: 'chick') is a gallinaceous being, a type of flightless bird; this is also attested by the squeaky voice—similar to Donald Duck's—used by puppeteers when they make him talk. But the etymology is uncertain, since the diminutive of *pullecino* should be *pulleciniello* rather than *pulcinella*, which seems oddly to suggest a female (or at least uncertain) sex. In any case, it is in homage to this etymological tradition that the first pages of the *Entertainment* have Pulcinella being born from a giant turkey egg in a courtyard where the portrait of an ancestor confirms his gallinaceous genealogy.

In the comedy written in 1632 by his inventor Silvio Fiorillo, Pulcinella's full name is given thus: 'Policinella de Gamaro de Tamaro Coccumato de Napole, born in Ponteselice, son of Marco Sfila and Madame Sbrignapriesto,' and later as 'Coviello Cetrullo Cetrulli'. But the name Pulcinella already appears in documents from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.



Giandomenico Tiepolo, *Pulcinella is Hatched by a Turkey*

The status of the name is not the same in tragedy and in comedy. [I]t is only when their plot [*muthos*] is already made up of probable incidents that [the comic poets] give it a basis of proper names, choosing for the purpose any names that may occur to them, instead of writing . . . about particular persons. In Tragedy, however, they still adhere to the historic names' (Aristotle 1984: 2323[1451b, 15-18]). The tragic name is necessary because it traces the fate and the guilt of an individual and not a character; in comedy, on the other hand, the name comes by chance; it is always, so to speak, a nickname and expresses a character and not a destiny. And the character is always innocent. In Pulcinella's case, he has his proper name as a real personage (Pulcinella), but, as a comic mask, he can receive other names at random.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle provides a definition of tragedy from which we can deduce, by contrast, the definition of comedy that is missing from the book. 'Tragedy,' Aristotle writes,

is essentially an imitation not of persons but of actions [*praxeōn*] and ways of life [*bion*]. All human happiness or misery takes the form of action; the end for which we live is a certain kind of activity, not a quality [*poiētēs*]. Character [*ēthos*] gives us qualities, but it is in our actions that we are happy or the reverse. In a play accordingly they do not act in order to imitate the characters [*hopōs ta ēthē mimēsōntai*]; they assume the characters [*ta ēthē sumperilambanousin*]

through the action [*diatas praxeis*]. So that it is the action in it [*ta pragmata*], i.e. its plot, that is the end and purpose of the tragedy. . . . [A] tragedy is impossible without action, but there might be one without Character' (1984: 2320-1[1450a, 14-20], modified).

To understand the definition of tragedy at issue in this passage, let us imagine for a moment that Sophocles' Antigone acts as she does only because she has a certain character (for example, because she is a troublemaker, a contrarian or any other of the characters listed by Theophrastus): the tragedy would no longer be tragedy and immediately turn into comedy. Indeed, in tragedy actions are what is decisive, not characters; in Aristotle's words, the tragic hero does not act in order to imitate his or her *ēthos* but, on the contrary, character is a secondary result of his or her actions—and for this reason could be missing entirely. This is why—that is, insofar as he or she is defined and bound by his or her actions, which can in no way be cancelled—the tragic hero, albeit neither wicked nor immoral, can fall, by error [*hamartia*], into suffering and woe.

The situation of comic personages is the symmetric opposite of this; since they act in order to imitate their character, the actions they perform are ethically indifferent to them and do not touch them in any way. This is why, in their exemplary form, they turn into *lazzi*, that is, into senseless actions and gestures whose aim is solely to interrupt the action and free the character from ever being

held responsible. And for this reason Aristotle can write that the ridiculous, of which comedy is an imitation, is a type of 'errancy [*hamartēma ti*] or deformity not productive of pain [*anōdunon*] or harm to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain' (1984: 2319[1449a, 33], modified).

In the collection of 73 stage actions transcribed by Domenico Biancolelli, the greatest Arlecchino of all time, he refers to himself always with the formulas 'I do my *lazzi*,' 'I do some *lazzi*,' 'I make the gesture,' 'I repeat this *lazzo* two or three times.' Each time, the *lazzo* is not part of a story, an action in a *muthos*, but, according to the probable etymology of the word, something that slows down and interrupts the sequence of actions, only then to suddenly speed it up. 'While Ottavio talks to his belle, who wants to dress him up as a girl and has taken her skirt off to give to him, I show up and make the gesture of dropping my pants to relieve myself' (Taviani and Schino 1982: 222).

This does not mean that the comic performer enjoys a freedom that is denied to the tragic: he seems, rather, to act according to a sort of mechanical necessity, as if, like Arlecchino, Roger Rabbit or Harpo Marx, he cannot resist doing his *lazzo*; but this is precisely his innocence, that he is irreparably assigned to a character. Since the tragic hero could have acted differently, the error [*hamartia*]

consigns him to a destiny and a guilt; the errancy [*hamartēma*] of the comic instead gives him over only to a character.

That someone or something is irreparably as it is: this is Pulcinella. But then the idea of the irreparable, which has been and is so important to me, is in itself comic.

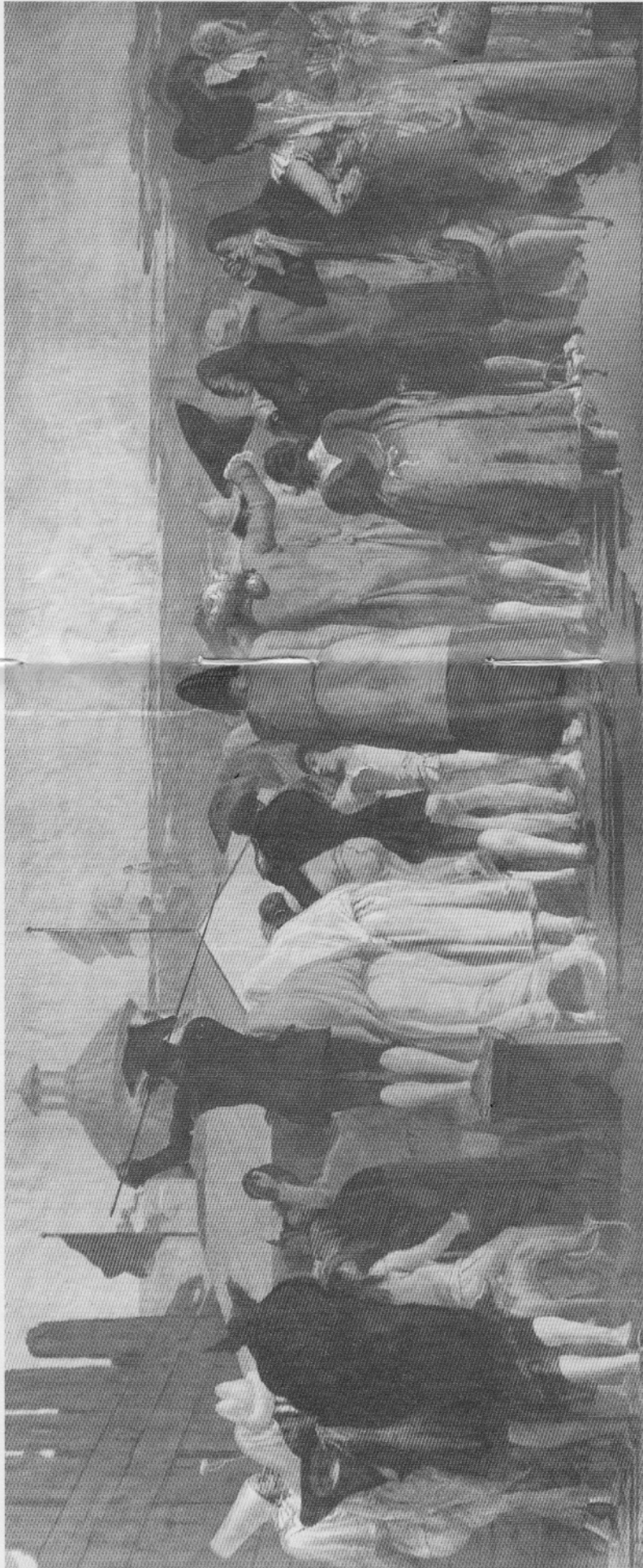
Pulcinella is not a noun; he is an adverb: he is not a *what* but a *how*.

He is neither a character nor an identifiable type: similar to the mask that Pollux calls *panchrestos*, 'good for all uses', he is the underlying collection—hodgepodge, even—of all the features that characterize the personages of comedy.

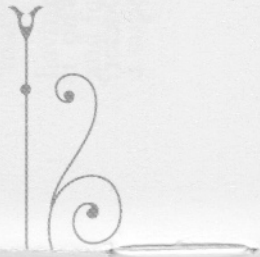
Tragedy: a destiny that one does not desire but which befalls one because of an error in action, for which one must thus be punished in some way.

Comedy: a character that, like its erring, cannot be set right and does not have the form of an action, but of a *lazzo*.

Character is the comic aspect of fate; fate is the tragic shadow of character. Pulcinella is beyond both fate and character. If character is, as Aristotle says, 'that which reveals the choice of the agents,' Pulcinella has chosen nothing; he is that which has never chosen to do or to be—not even by mistake (1984: 2321[1450b, 8]).



Giandomenico Tiepolo, *The New World*



In the salon at Zianigo, Giandomenico depicted himself alongside his father bemusedly watching the 'new world' prophetically embodied in a technological invention, the cosmorama, which can be counted among the precursors of the cinema. As it should be—since the new does not yet have a face—all the personages—and there are many, of all sexes, ages and social classes—have their backs turned, save the two painters in profile who look on and a baby in the centre (to whom the coming world belongs). The beautiful woman's face—also in profile—that barely pokes out from a white bonnet behind Giandomenico reminds us that always, at all times, there will be a place for feminine charm. On the far opposite side, in exact correspondence to the girl's face and under a white cap that recalls her bonnet, one can make out another face, if in fact it is a face at all: the mask of Pulcinella, which announces the timeless kingdom—or dream—that coincides with the end of the historical kingdom and whose triumph will be celebrated seven years later in the Pulcinella room.

PULCINELLA. Lu munno nuovo è cosa vecchia pe' me, ca l'aggio visto chiù de cientocinquanta vote. [The new world is something old for me, something I've seen a hundred and fifty times.]

What is a mask from the Commedia dell'Arte? Who is Arlecchino? Who is Pantalone? Who are Brighella and the Doctor? Who is Pulcinella?

Pulcinella does not designate a particular artistic personage but rather a *collection of personages*, bound together only by a name, and, up to a certain point, a black half-mask, white smock, and pointed cap. These collections of personages are called, with a rather improper term, *comic types*. But how can we ask and seek to define these collections that are thrown together on the basis of such superficial and external signs? If we try to determine what those personages have in common and proceed by elimination, we run the risk of winding up with nothing in our hands but a name and, perhaps, a costume (Croce 1899: 2).

(Croce's description is inaccurate: in truth the cap is not pointed but cropped. He also seems to accept the image of Callot's Puliciniello in his *Balli di Sfessania* whereas today it is believed that the engraver gave the names randomly.) Only Croce's notorious refusal of any anthropological perspective can explain how name and mask could appear to him as something external and superficial, as if he simply did not know that the 'person', the *rationalis naturae individua substantia*, with which the West has tactlessly branded both the divine and the human, originally just means 'mask' in Latin. Having abdicated all substantial individuality, having remorselessly dropped all personality in order to be wholly and forever only a mask and a name—this really is anything but a superficial undertaking for Pulcinella. Even if he is able to do it

without exertion and without having to make a decision. He is just as he is, without ever having chosen to be it.

It is already clear to Boethius that the (both theological and anthropological) concept of the 'person' derives from the mask and therefore ultimately comes from the theatrical stage. This brilliant writer, who exerted a decisive influence on Western culture also as a translator, sought a Latin equivalent for the Greek term *hypostasis* which the Greek fathers used to designate the three figures of the single divine substance. Since it seemed to him that the Greek term directly transposed into Latin could be confused with 'substance', he chose to render it as *persona*. '[T]he word person,' he writes in *Against Eutyches and Nestorius*,

seems to be borrowed from a different source, namely, from the masks which in comedies and tragedies used to signify the different subjects of representation. [. . .] The Greeks, too, call these masks *prosōpa* from the fact that they are placed over the face and conceal the countenance from the spectator. [. . .] But since, as we have said, it was by the masks they put on that actors played the different characters represented in a tragedy or comedy—Hecuba or Medea or Simon or Chremes—so also all other men who could be recognized by their several characteristics were designated by the Latins with the term *persona* and by the Greeks with

prosōpa. But the Greeks far more clearly gave to the individual subsistence of a rational nature the name *hypostasis*, while we through want of appropriate words have kept a borrowed term, calling that *persona* which they call *hypostasis* (1918: 85-7[3.9-23]).

The 'personal' character of the modern subject—at once metaphysical, psychological and political—has its origin, by way of a 'want of appropriate words', in Trinitarian theology; but through this it refers back to a tragic or comic mask. (It is important to note that Boethius, who is dealing with an exquisitely theological question, evokes both tragic personages—Hecuba and Medea—and comic personages—Chremes and Simon.) As a mask, Pulcinella necessarily has to do with a 'personal' problem, and every personal problem is always also a theological one.

Festus says that the ancient actors of the *Atellan farces* were not obligated, like other actors, to take off their masks on stage at the end of the show (in *scena ponere personam*) (1913: 238). This is why they were called 'personati', as if the mask were consubstantial with them.

The gesture of the modern actor who, like *Eduardo De Filippo*, takes off his mask or raises it on his forehead after having acted his part is simply impossible for *Pulcinella*. *Pulcinella* cannot take off his mask, because there is no face behind it. That is to say, he calls into question the false dialectic between face and mask that has compromised the

theatre and, along with it, the ethics of the West. Interrupting this dialectic, Pulcinella liquidates every 'personal' problem, dismisses every theology.

(Although he wore the mask many times, De Filippo belongs to an anti-Pulcinella tradition: that of Eduardo Scarpetta, who had the image of Pulcinella removed from the Teatro San Carlino. When, in his interview with Franco Zeffirelli, Eduardo shows how the immobile black mask can express all passions and all moods, from laughter to tears, from pride to shame, he betrays the essential inexpressiveness of Pulcinella's face, which is so clear in Tiepolo's drawings.)



Eduardo De Filippo during the filming of
Ferdinando I re di Napoli (1959).

A type is a hybrid of uniqueness and generality, an individual trait that becomes the principle of a serial reproduction. As with angels, each of which, according to theology, constitutes a species in itself, so too it is impossible to distinguish in Pulcinella what is unique from what is a repetition. This is why Pulcinella, like Arlecchino, is never alone, is always in a 'mob' [*masnada*]: the *maisnie Hellequin* which is not simply a multitude nor a 'people' [*popolo*] but, rather, a hellish host of demons and ghosts who plunder and destroy everything within reach. Unlike the Arlecchinos, however, the mob of Pulcinellas is peaceful; their favourite occupations are dancing, doing *lazzi* and playing with animals, falling in love, working their trades—in a word, living. A type of people—but an eternal one, without history, like angels or the plebs. And yet, despite the mob, Pulcinella is intimately alone; he watches us unaware of our watching, in 'blinding solitude'. As the gaze of the most regal and ferocious animals is said to be when they encounter a human and seem not to see it.

Not only do uniqueness and generality enter into a threshold of indistinction but also the flesh-and-blood individual and his or her mask. Arlecchino, Pulcinella, Frittellino, Beltrame are not roles played by Domenico Biancoelli, Silvio Fiorillo, Pier Maria Cecchini, Nicolò Barbieri: rather, actor and mask are here called together in a sphere in which real life and theatrical stage fade into each other and lose all identity. Nothing shows this happy contamination between mask and life as well as the way the actors from the

Commedia dell'Arte sign their names: Nicolò Barbieri known as Beltrame, Domenico Biancolelli known as Arlecchino, Pier Maria Cecchini known as Fiorillo—as if the mask were inseparable from their life (it would be impossible, conversely, to imagine contracts signed: Talma known as Oedipus or Eleornora Duse known as Nora).

GIANDOMENICO. If you are not an actor like Fiorillo, nor a mask like Pantalone or Brighella, nor a character like Hamlet, who are you truly?

PULCINELLA. Chi song' je? Songo 'nu penziero! [Who am I? I'm an idea!]

GIANDOMENICO. You mean you don't exist?

PULCINELLA. Te facevo cchiù addutturato de filosofia. Dice Platone ca l'idee asistono, ca esse surtanto overamente asistono. [I thought you were more learned in philosophy. Plato says that ideas exist, that they are in fact the only things that exist.]

GIANDOMENICO. I didn't know you were a philosopher.

PULCINELLA. E je nun sapeva ca tu filosofo nun iri, dopo ca haje tanto strocolato ncopp' a Pulecenella a Ziniago. [And I didn't know that you were not, after all that philosophizing about Pulcinella at Ziniago.]

GIANDOMENICO. You are an idea, but idea of what?

Carlo Ziniago
Pier Maria Cecchini

Domenico Biancolelli
Nicolò Barbieri

Signatures of actors of the Commedia dell'Arte.

PULCINELLA. Pròpeto chisto è 'o punto: je songo 'na idea senza 'a cosa. [That is the point: I am only an idea, for which there is no thing.]

In Rome, the mask was related to the dead and the theatre: *larva* is both the ghost and the mask of the dead, and this is the name Petronius gives to a silver skeleton 'put together in such a way that the joints and the backbone could be bent in any direction'—a marionette, then, a sort of Pinocchio (2000: 24[34.8]). This leads one to think that the theatre—at least in Rome, but perhaps everywhere—involved a connection to the sphere of the dead, that the stage were a door from which the dead emerged—a *mundus*, as the Romans called the round opening through which the dead, the Manes, passed three times a year to invade the city of the living. The figures who appear on the stage are certainly not alive (indeed, in the case of the tragic heroes they have been dead since time immemorial): only the actors who 'impersonate' them, who put on the mask, are alive.

That Pulcinella has a special connection to the dead is clear from his ghostlike costume: like the *homo sacer*, he belongs to the gods of the underworld, but he belongs to them in such an exaggerated way that he jumps entirely beyond death. This is shown by the fact that it is useless to kill him; if you shoot him or hang him, he always rises again. And just as he is on this side or the far side

of death, so too is he in some way on this side or the far side of life, at least in the sense that life cannot be separated from death. In any case, the decisive thing is that a grave figure from the underworld has something essentially to do with laughter.

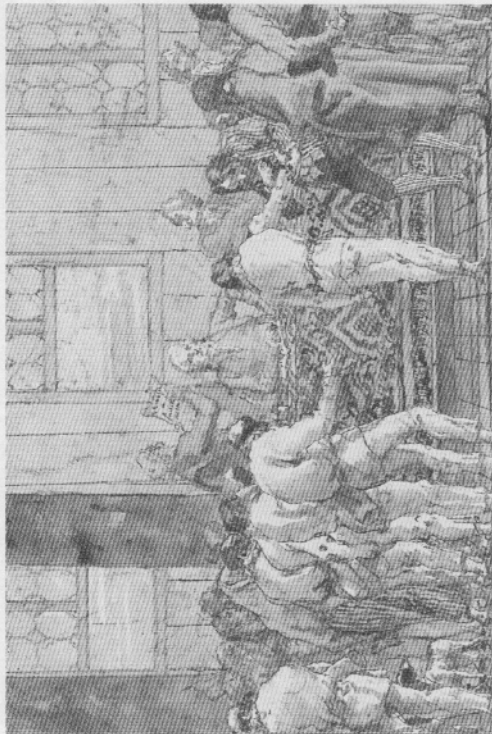
Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo [If Heaven I cannot bend, then Hell I will arouse]: if Acheron is aroused, what comes forth is not the unconscious—it is Pulcinella (Virgil 1999: 1).

Why is it that to make us laugh it is necessary to call forth ghosts and creatures from Hell? How is that a hellish mask can make us laugh? This is in no way a phenomenon of decadence, but a regular development: it is for the philosophers to explain it' (Karl Meuli, in Taviani and Schino 1982: 219).

According to folklorists and historians of the theatre, Pulcinella, like Arlecchino and the Zanni, is part of that entourage of underworld figures that accompany the Monarch of the mad, the Biagio or the King of Carnival in the cycle of carnivalesque festivals that, early on in Christian Europe, were substituted for pagan saturnalias whose *insaniae ludibria* [demented mockeries] and *debauchationes obscenas* [obscene ravings] they reproduce. If we laugh and joke during Carnival, it is because laughter, tumult and disorder in some way reproduced the ancient agrarian rites and served to promote the fecundity of the land and the richness of the crops. But what does Pulcinella have to do with this? Obviously he loves to eat and drink,

but he couldn't care less about agriculture and the harvest. The wild festival usually comes to an end with a formal trial. Carnival is judged and condemned to death as 'insolent, fraudulent, mendacious, voracious, dirty, foolish, shameful, filthy, wicked, mean, lewd, and prodigal' (Toschi 1976: 231). After the sentence, Carnival, personified by a straw puppet or rag doll, is burned, hanged or shot. At times, instead of Carnival being tried and condemned, it is Arlecchino or the 'old Woman.' Or also Pulcinella: 'Carnival is resented,' reads the manuscript of a Calabrian farce, 'in the figure of a short and chubby lout, dressed as a potbellied and humpbacked Pulcinella, with a stringy wig on his head and a bottle and glass in his hands' (Toschi 1976: 217-18).

In the *Entertainment for Kids*, Giandomenico carefully records the arrest, trial, shooting and hanging of Pulcinella. There doesn't appear to be a logical sequence to these events: the drawing in which Pulcinella appears before the judge bears the number 35, but Pulcinella is pardoned and drawings 36 and 37 show him being fêted and carried aloft in triumph by friends and family members. It is not clear, then, why drawing 85 shows him being flogged, which, as with Jesus, happens without a real conviction (in Venice, flogging was reserved for thieves and lazy students), and drawings 97 and 98 show him being shot and hanged. Must we surmise that in the meantime there was a trial that Giandomenico did not want to depict, or that this is a summary execution? In any case, as is



(ABOVE) Giandomenico Tiepolo, *Pulcinella Before the Magistrates*

(BELOW) Giandomenico Tiepolo, *The Hanging*

Row cannot be changed

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clear from the uniforms worn by the firing squad of Pulcinellas and the staff the officer holds in his hand, this is an execution in the name of the law.

Why a trial? Why must the law, in its most extreme and terrible form, intervene in the life of Pulcinella, where it appears as a 'mystery'—the mystery of the trial? Pulcinella, like Pinocchio and Carnival, must undergo a trial, must, like Christ, face a Pilate, who in the tradition of carnivalesque trials is a hulking man 'wearing a topcoat and top hat, with a moustache painted with coal' (Toschi 1976: 235). The essential thing, however, is that there is a judgement, and that this judgement has the form of law. For only after being subjected to the sanctioned forms of law, only after being judged, sentenced and put to death can Pulcinella truly be *as he is*. In the hands of the law, he sheds every substance and every chargeable action: if you believe that I am 'insolent, fraudulent, mendacious, voracious, dirty, foolish, shameful, filthy. . . ' well, then, put on your tragedy, judge me and condemn me for these things that I cannot be and whose remains I abandon and hand over to you in the form of *lazzi* and jeers. The *lazzo* is not a chargeable action, it entails no responsibility—it is a pure, irreparable *how*, with neither substance nor moral person. If I am only a character, a signature, a *how*, then I can in no way be defined by or charged with this character: it is what I ceaselessly shed in the hands of the law, without thereby assuming or denying it.

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The *lazzo* makes us laugh because the action of which it consists is cancelled in the very act in which it is achieved. The action that, according to an ancient and venerable tradition, is the place of politics, no longer has a place, has lost its subject and its substance. The comic is not only an impossibility of saying exposed as such in language but also an impossibility of acting exposed in a gesture. But that does not mean Pulcinella is simply impolitical; he announces and requires another politics which no longer has its place in action but shows what a body can do when every action has become impossible. Hence his relevance whenever politics goes through a decisive crisis—for Giandomenico, the end of Venetian independence in 1797; for us, the eclipse of politics and the reign of the worldwide economy. Calling into question the primacy of praxis, Pulcinella recalls that there is still politics beyond or before action.

The anguished political consciousness of his contemporaries Goya and Thomas Rowlandson is often contrasted with Giandomenico's 'sing-song lightness' which takes reality 'with a barely dissimulated touch of heartache' and 'loves the world it depicts and, though it knows its flaws, cannot imagine another one' (Mariuz 1971: 85). But, if it is true that Pulcinella unreservedly and even tenderly adheres to the quotidian, this—if for nothing else but the mask—is raised up to another more inaccessible reality. He is not impolitical—he is, rather, like the man in the chorus of Sophocles' *Antigone*, 'hyperpolitical stateless' [hupsipolis.apolis], stateless because more than political and more than political because 'without a city' (Line 370).

impossible to live 66

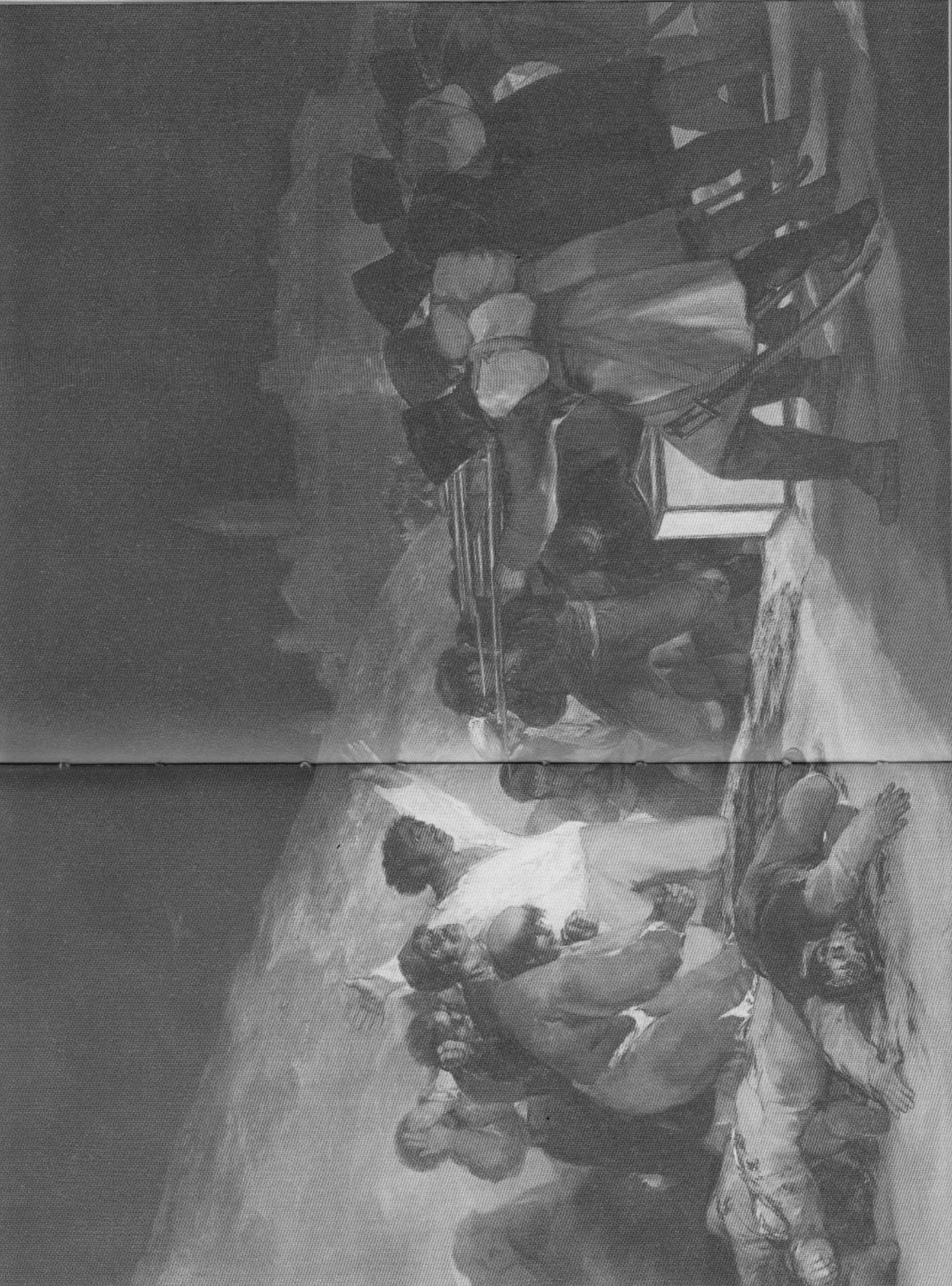
According to Étienne Decroux, the mime is condemned and gagged but his body is free while the actor is condemned and bound to a stake but he is not gagged. Pulcinella is both bound and gagged: he does nothing but say the impossibility of speaking and does nothing but act the impossibility of action. Each time, he bears witness to the fact that one can neither act an action nor speak a word—that living life is impossible and that this impossibility is the political task par excellence.

One can act only beyond—or before—action; one can speak only beyond—or before—the word; one can live only beyond—or before—life.

This is why, when facing Pulcinella, the law shows its comic mask; the trial becomes parody, falling always to the side of (*para*) that which it should judge and seize. And the proof is that the rope will not strangle him, the bullets will not wound him, the flames will not burn him. What remains in the hands of the law—and every time slips out of them—is only a man of straw, the rag puppet that was substituted for the true Carnival.

Facilis descensus Averno [easy the way that leads into Avernus], the door is open day and night, *sed revocare gradum . . . hoc opus, hic labor est* [but to recall your steps . . . that is the labour, that is the task] (Virgil 1971: 137[6.126–9]). For Pulcinella this is the easiest thing; he descends and rises, enters and exits from the underworld as he pleases.

It has been suggested that Pulcinella's execution by firing squad inspired Goya's *Third of May 1808*, now in the Prado Museum. At first sight, Goya's oil painting and Giandomenico's ink drawing (probably inspired by an engraving by Callot) would seem to have very little in common, leaving aside the subject and the hardly negligible fact that Tiepolo, just like Goya for Spain, could have been thinking of the executions of the resisters to the French occupation of Venice that began in 1797. Indeed, in the Goya painting, the condemned stand on their feet and gesticulate wildly while Pulcinella, who could be dead or still alive, is tied to a stake, immobile and nearly indifferent. In the background there appears a city which is missing in the Tiepolo drawing. A close examination, however, reveals a significant correspondence: the two bodies of the Pulcinellas stretched on the ground correspond to the three bodies of the patriots who have already been shot in the Goya painting; the gesture of the girl in the foreground covering her eyes with one hand is recalled by that of the horrified witness who covers his eyes with two hands. And a similar violence animates the two riflemen who shoot Pulcinella nearly at point-blank range and the French executioners who are too close to their target. There is, however, a difference: as is clear from the unmistakable hat and mask on top of their regular uniforms, Pulcinella is shot by other Pulcinellas. Beyond the inexorable opposition of their roles, victims and executioners are united in a single, almost ontological solidarity.



Francisco de Goya,
The Third of May 1808 in
Madrid: The Executions on
Principe Pio Hill

The genealogy of Pulcinella does not simply go back, as folklorists argue, to the realm of the dead. He is neither dead nor a *larva*, that is, a malign ghost that takes the form of the deceased and infests the world of the living. His relation to death is odder and more complex.

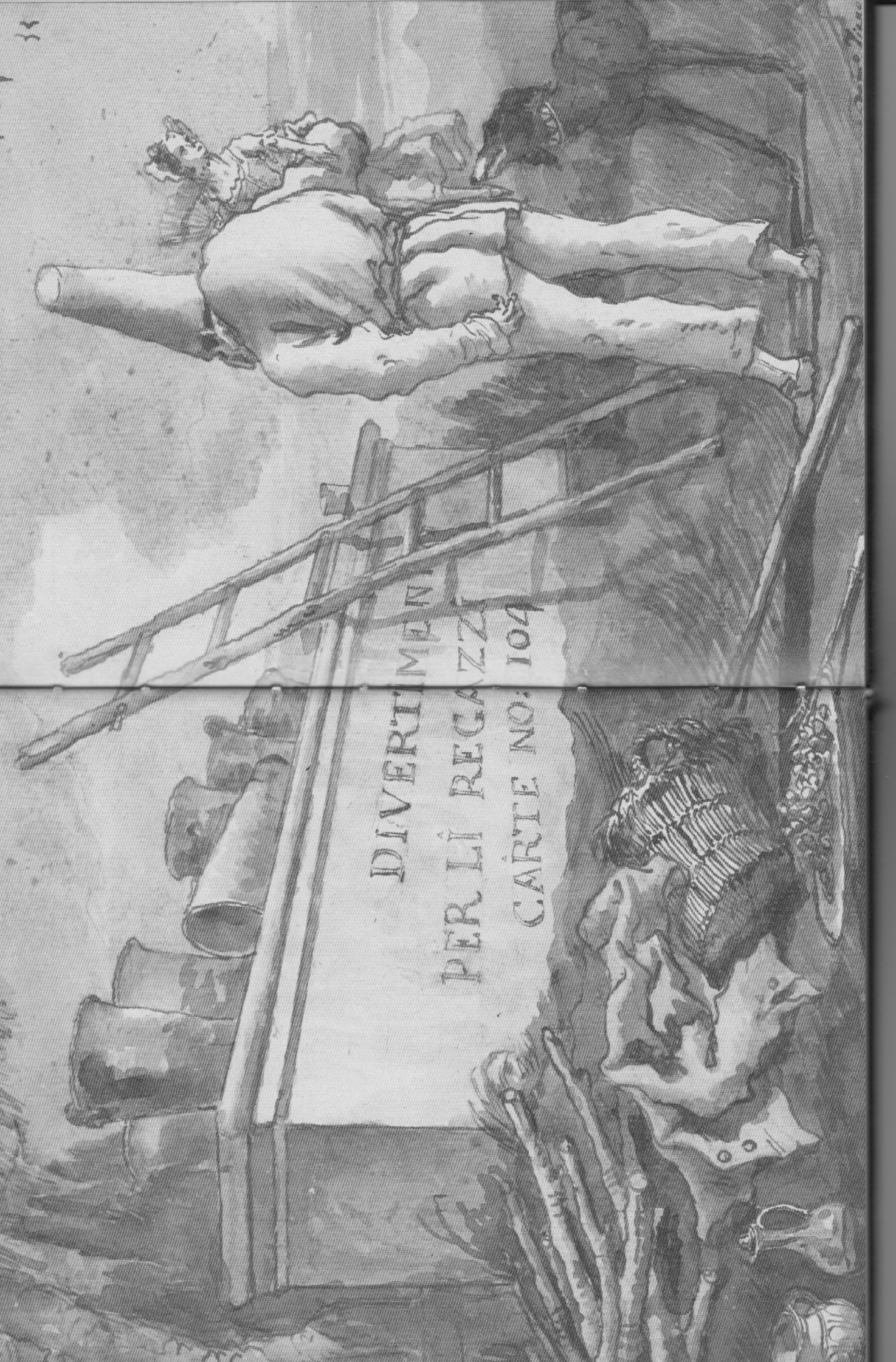
Émile Benveniste and Jean-Pierre Vernant have explicated the nature of what the Greeks called *kolossos*, a puppet made of wood, stone, clay or wax substituted for a missing body in funeral rites and allowing for the re-establishment of the correct relations between the world of the living and that of the dead. That the colossus is not a *larva* or a ghost is proven by that fact that it doesn't look at all like the deceased; it is a vaguely anthropomorphic puppet with joined legs and without, so to speak, a true face, like Pulcinella or Pinocchio. But neither is it a simple substitute for the missing body: indeed, in some cases, one could make a colossus to be substituted for someone still alive. Thus, if the person consecrated to death through the rite of *devotio* had not died in battle as he should have, a 7-foot-high *signum* was buried in his place, and where the image had been buried the Roman magistrate could not walk.

The colossus is, in a certain sense, a fraud: it is a false corpse or a false dead person that is substituted for the real one in order to trick the *larva* and other representatives of the realm of the dead. Pulcinella is a colossus, a non-dead, that stands where a dead person should be, speaks and moves in that person's place and, in this way, mocks and confuses death. He properly belongs to neither the world



(ABOVE) Giandomenico Tiepolo, *The Firing Squad*

(OVERLEAF) Giandomenico Tiepolo, *Title Page of the Entertainment for Kids*

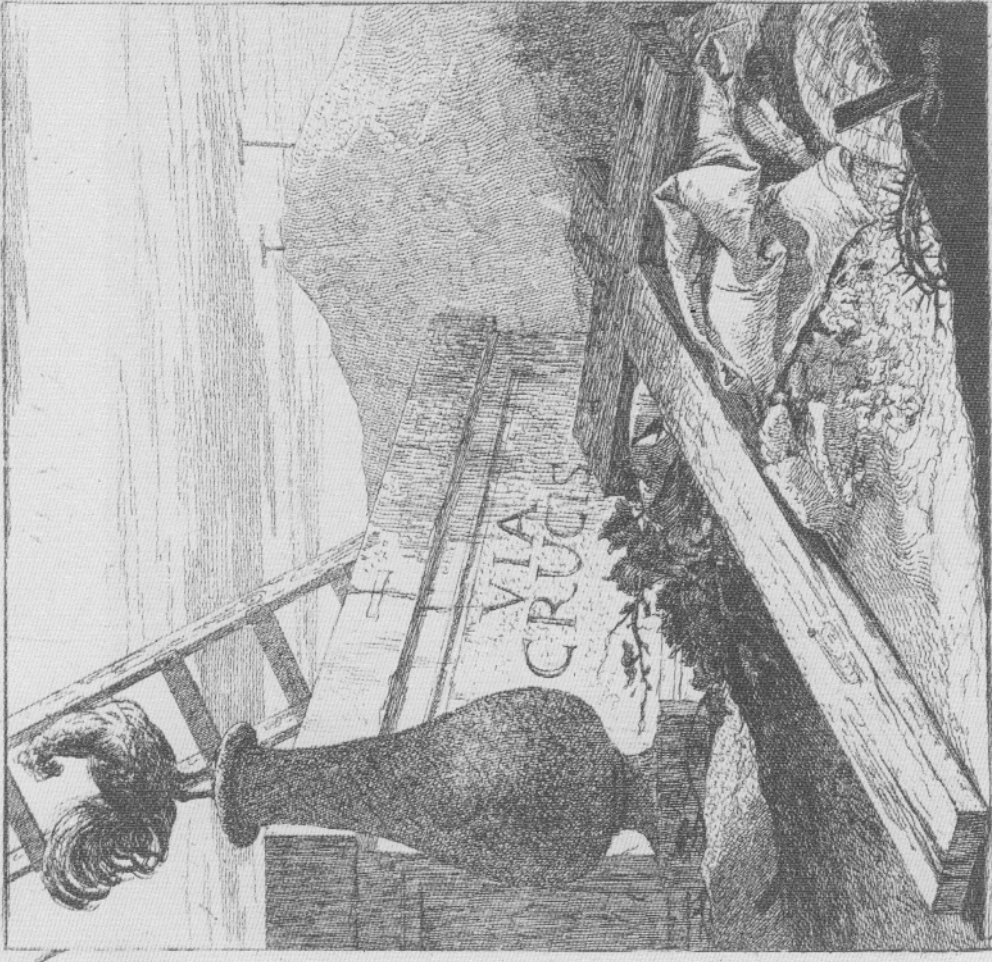


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PER LI REGAZZI
CARTE NO. 104

of the dead nor that of the living: he is here—irreparably here, in an inaccessible elsewhere. And the wax or straw puppet that is burned or hanged instead of Carnival is in this sense also a colossus—neither a dead person nor a demon. There is a living being where there should be a dead one, and this stubborn, intentional, ironic dwelling in the place of the dead makes us laugh, because it frees us from, lets us cheat, death's double—the *larva* which wanders menacingly in the place of the living. The life of Pulcinella is this life that is for death, not because it is devoted to it but because it comically stands in for it, because it mocks death.

This is why, in the opening of the *Entertainment*, Giandomenico has depicted Pulcinella looking at the sepulchre in which he is buried. He lives next to his own death, stands in the place of his own death, and perhaps the sepulchre that he contemplates is neither empty nor full: Pulcinella is both inside and outside it.

This late drawing parodically recalls the frontispiece of the *Via crucis* from his youth: Pulcinella's tomb, with the inscription *Entertainment for Kids*, occupies the same place as the sepulchre of Christ, which bears the title *Via crucis*. The ladder that in the engraving sticks up from behind the sepulchre is here in the foreground, as if for Pulcinella there had been a crucifixion and deposition as well (the ladder will return many times in the drawings, in particular the first one, where this symbol of the passion, leaning against a wall, is

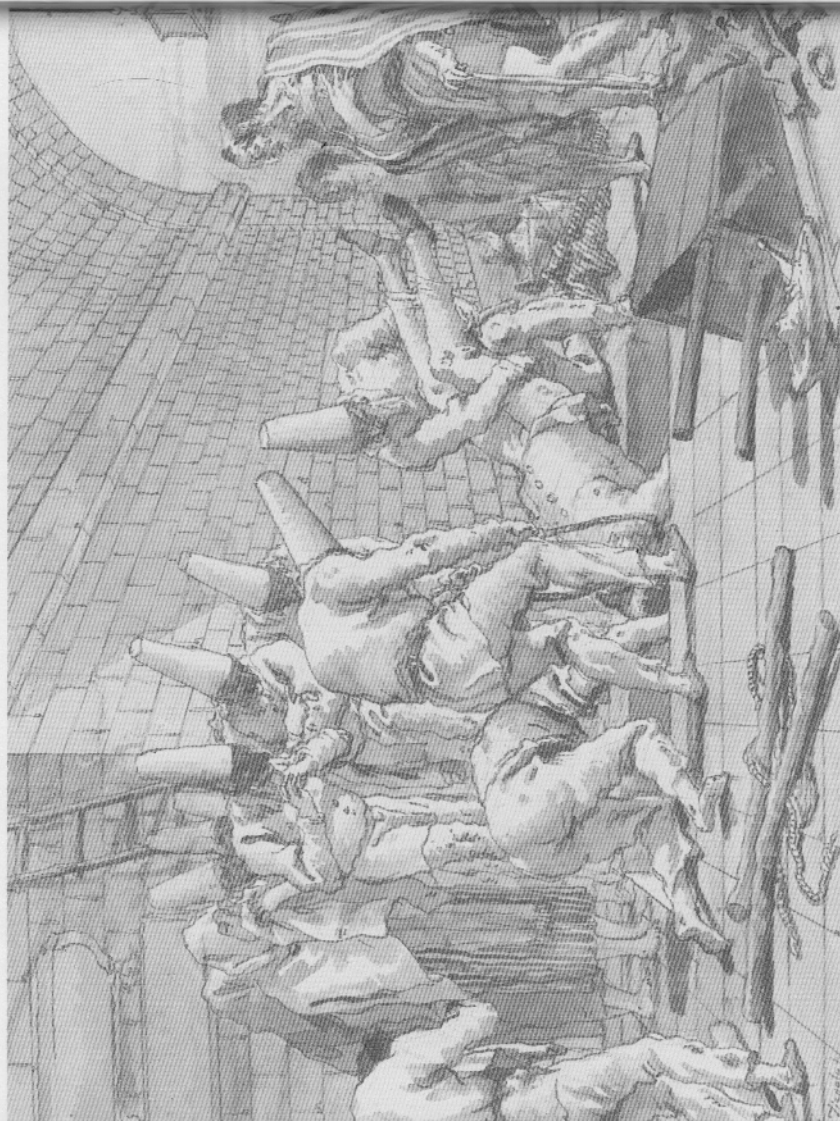


DOMENICO TIEPOLO INVENTÒ, FINSE, ED INCISE
ANNO MDCCCLIX

present at Pulcinella's birth). Also in the foreground, instead of the cross, shroud, hammer and crown of thorns, lie the emblems of Pulcinella: a plate of gnocchi, a jug of wine and kindling wood. The dog that seems to sniff at Pulcinella recalls his closeness to animal life. More mysterious is the doll that he holds in his right arm, in which it is perhaps possible to recognize the girl with the fan in the *New World*.

In old age, Domenico married a much younger woman. A report of the time, certainly a malicious one, coming from the circle of Canova, describes Domenico as a 'simpleton of the first rank' and then says of the young wife (and of the nephew whom she will marry after Domenico's death) 'this lady has married an old man and to tell the truth she has been sacrificed up to now, for he was surely a good man but full of prejudices, and if he had not had this nephew of his who took care of his affairs this poor thing would have risked suffering the woes of penury.' Perhaps the girl with the fan who so often appears alongside Pulcinella in the drawings of the Entertainment is precisely 'this lady' (but, if that is true, then Pulcinella is Domenico).

In a letter of 5 September 1762 to Sophie Volland, Diderot tells the story of a friend who saw a priest on the streets of Venice who, showing the crucifix to passersby who stopped to watch a Pulcinella show, cried: 'Take no notice of those wretches, gentlemen; the Pulcinella you are flocking to is a feeble fool. Here (the crucifix) is the genuine Pulcinella, the great Pulcinella' (1971: 119, modified).



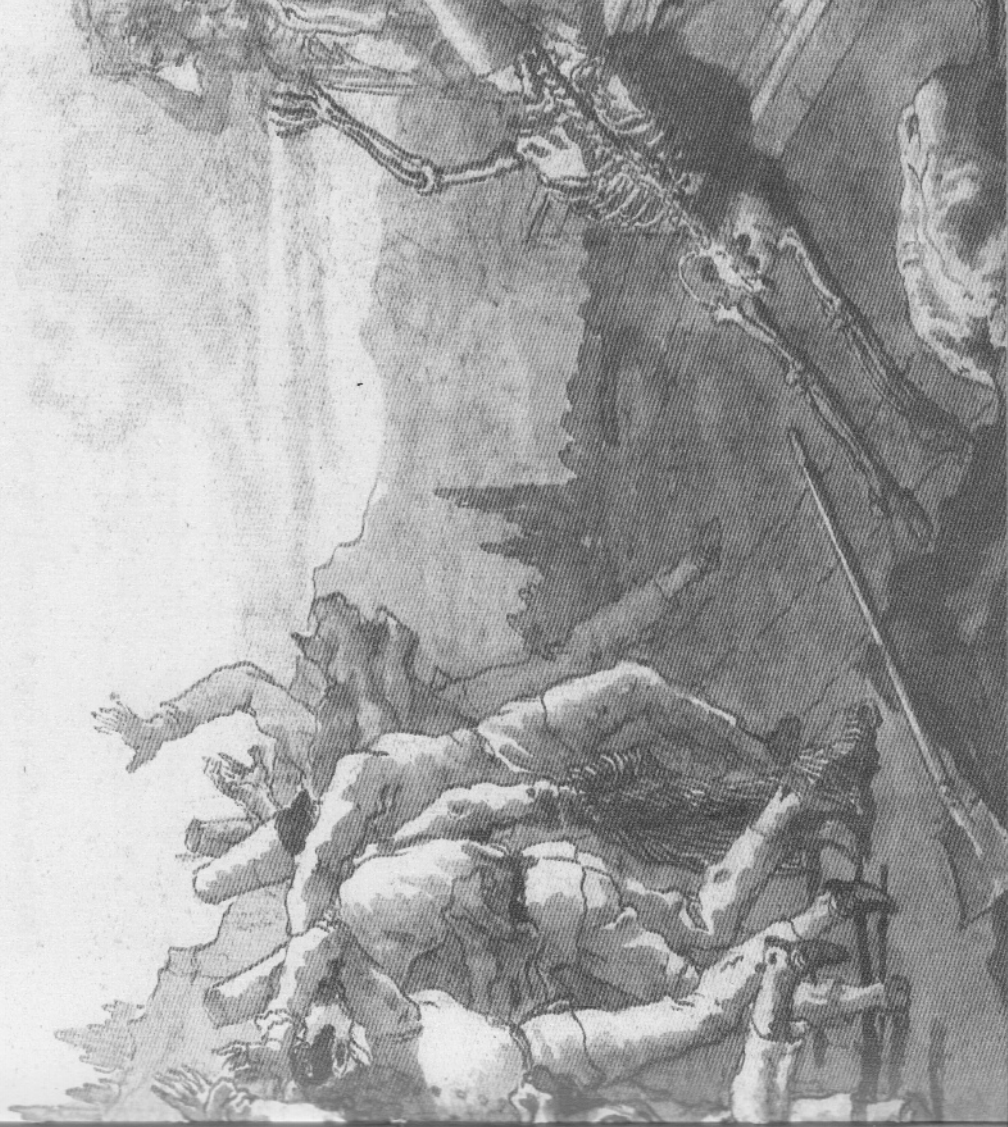
Giandomenico Tiepolo, *The Burial of Pulcinella*



The Christological references in the *Entertainment* can easily increase: Pulcinella triumphant on a donkey among watching companions certainly recalls the entrance of Jesus at Jerusalem; *The Burial of Pulcinella* (drawing 103) resembles a deposition; and, according to some, even the gnocchi and wine that are always laid out evoke the species of the Eucharistic sacrifice in which the body of Christ is present *vere, realiter et substantialiter*.

The last drawing, with the skeleton of Pulcinella chasing away a group of terrified Pulcinellas, is not, however, a resurrection but a sort of extreme prank. The skeleton seems to want to climb atop a sepulchre that looks rather like a pagan altar (in a previous sketch, the skeleton that tries to climb atop a sarcophagus is that of a monkey).

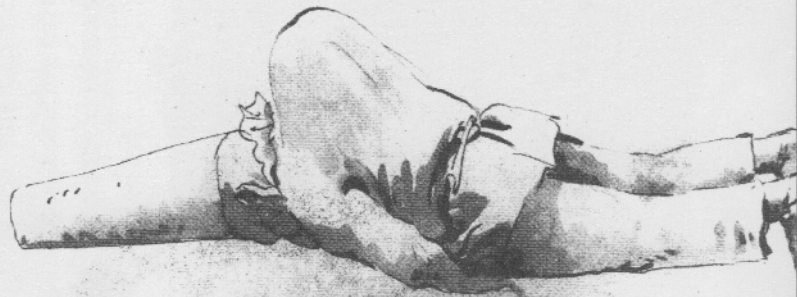
It is possible here that Giandomenico wanted to mockingly evoke Giambattista's etching *The Discovery of the Tomb of Pulcinella*, in which a semi-nude figure in classical style points to the corpse of Pulcinella with a gesture that recalls that of the shepherds in Poussin's *Et in Arcadia ego*. A sketch by Giambattista, now in the Hermitage—in which four characters (as in the Poussin painting) stoop meditatively above a sarcophagus on which we can perhaps glimpse a number of Pulcinellas carved in relief—seems to confirm the allusion: death is present even in the Arcadia of Pulcinella. The violently burlesque final drawing of the *Entertainment* proves the father's sober wisdom to be wrong: for those who do not know how to die ('je nun saccio muri') but simply die, death is not an object of



contemplation but of forgetting and fright. Death is always already there in Pulcinella's Arcadia, but as if it weren't.

'Don't be afraid!'

PULCINELLA. Gnornò, je nun tremmo, me spasso a facere 'no minuetto cu' la paura. [No sir, I am not afraid. I enjoy dancing a minuet with fear.]



Giambattista Tiepolo, *Pulcinella Urinating*

III

That Pulcinella has a special life of his own—even, and especially, beyond his appearances on the stage—is precisely what defines the *Commedia dell'Arte*. We can understand the word 'type', which Croce deems insufficient, only if we remember that the types and masks of the *Commedia dell'Arte* exist, so to speak, outside the stage or theatre in which they are occasionally evoked. It is as if Pulcinella, Pantalone, Brighella, Rosalinda, and Arlecchino had an existence of their own, from which they can occasionally, perhaps unwillingly, be transported onto the stage, always with the same mask and costume but each time in totally different circumstances and social conditions. Here as a servant and there as a lord, here as a dullard and there very shrewd, even changing sex and number: Pulcinella the bride, the two Pulcinellas—just as, depending on the situation, Pulcinella can be an innkeeper or cook, in love or jealous. . . .

Here, therefore, there is not simply the introduction of stock figures, constantly expressing the same sentiments and always fulfilling the same roles in different plots, as in