TEXTUR, BÜRO FÜR TEXT UND KULTUR, 10 October 2026

Out into the Open!

By Astrid Priebs-Tröger

https://textur-buero.de/hinaus-ins-offene/

Pulcinella!, the latest production by the traveling theatre troupe Ton und Kirschen, opens at the T-Werk with a sustained rumble of thunder and the bleating dance of five half-naked fauns in a forest clearing.

It culminates in Zarathustra's famous round "O Man! Take heed!" In between are dozens of loosely connected, mostly boisterously comic scenes. In these, multiple Pulcinella figures, clad in white robes and dark face masks, interact or clash with one another: they play a wild ball game, vie for the favour of pretty girls, hiss as they cook spaghetti for the Pope, or (attempt to) hang the red devil.

These effervescent scenes are rife with (gender) stereotypes; blows land with a sharp crack and copious tears are shed. Yet, over the course of this hour, they also reveal many facets of (political) world theatre, where for some time now the tone has grown increasingly shrill, and domestic harmony – as represented here by a tattered stage curtain – has been thoroughly shredded.

For these Neapolitan-style buffoons – whose expressions remain indecipherable behind their dark, bird-like masks, and who sport crooked humps, oversized posteriors, or rotund bellies – enact both private dramas and public ones. In the hands of Ton und Kirschen, this includes, for instance, the execution of two insurgents following an uprising, and a desperate escape aboard a steamship, presumably bound for America, with hastily packed suitcases and no passports to be found.

And then, the director (Margarethe Biereye) of this multilingual, international traveling theatre troupe steps out in front of the faded curtain – wearing a brilliant red dress, sporting a long white braid, and appearing unmasked – to recite from Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883/84). This follows a moment in which she glances at a newspaper and immediately begins to retch.

This unusually explicit reference to the current state of the world is a departure from the more poetic, indirect approach that Ton und Kirschen typically employ. However, following this jolt and the profound pain it evokes, the troupe return to its true element. Acrobatics, music and song reclaim the stage, and the all-too-human Pulcinella figures are ultimately propelled out into the open air – sent through the wide-open T-Werk doors by means of a giant pair of bellows.