

Grotesque and scenography: Virtual Recreation of Anthropomorphic Supports within the Entry of King Philip II in Antwerp (1549)

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This contribution aims to show the presence of a motif from the Flemish repertoire of the grotesque in the configuration of a unique type of anthropomorphic support used in the ephemeral architecture erected on Philip II of Spain's entry into Antwerp in 1549. The whole research was published in an article included in the recent monograph: *Build with the human body*.¹

The well-known triumphant entry into Antwerp in 1549 was the most solemn moment of Philip II's trip from Italy to Flanders. The prince's tour of the Flemish city was punctuated by ephemeral triumphal arches and scenography with *tableaux vivants*, «combining the memory of the classical entrances and the *Royal entries* of Nordic tradition».

Philip II of Spain entered the city of Antwerp in 1549, and a year later, in 1550, Cornelis de Schrijver, secretary to the city and writer, published a book covering the event using the Latinized name: Cornelium Grapheum the book was entitled *Spectaculorum in susceptione Philippi*...²

In addition to Cornelium Grapheum's book just mentioned, the other great chronicle that informs about the characteristics of the entrance of the young prince in Antwerp is the famous story written by the Spanish humanist Juan Cristóbal Calvete de Estrella *The very happy journey of the very high and very powerful Prince Don Felipe*...³

According to Calvete de Estrella, Cornelium Grapheum «invented all the arches except for the arches of the Spanish and Genoese». However, Grapheum himself indicates in his chronicle that the arches and other structures were the work of «Pierre de Allos painter of the Imperial Majesty», better known as Pieter Coecke van Aelst.

Pieter Coecke is a fundamental figure in the diffusion of the new architectural language of the Renaissance for having written the first treatise on architecture in Dutch based on Vitruvio,⁴ and for having translated Sebastiano Serlio's treatise. Pieter Coecke's drawings reproduced in Grapheum's book, regardless of whether they are reliable copies or personal restitutions of the structures erected during this festive event, clearly demonstrate a new architectural culture in the Northern Provinces.

¹ (*Bauen mit dem menschlichen Körper/Constuire avec le corps humain*, (S. Frommel et alt. (eds.), vol. 2. Roma, Campisano Editore, 2018, entitled "From the grotesque to the ephemeral antropomorphic support. Blurring the boundaries between body and building", pp. 171-183).

² *Spectaculorum in susceptione Philippi Hisp. Prin. Divi Caroli. V. Caes. F. An. M.D.XLIX. Antuerpiae aeditorum, mirificus apparatus / Per Cornelium Scrib. Grapheum... descriptus...* Antuerpiae, Pro Petro Alosten, typis Aegidii Disthemii, 1550.

³ *El Felicissimo Viaje d'el Muy alto y Muy Poderoso Príncipe don Phelippe, Hijo d'el Emperador Don Carlos Quinto Máximo, desde España a / sus tierras de la baxa Alemaña... en casa de Martín Nucio. Año de / M.D.LII*, (in *El felicissimo viaje del muy alto y muy poderoso Príncipe don Phelippe*, Madrid, Sociedad Estatal para la Conmemoración de los Centenarios de Felipe II y Carlos V, Turner, 2001).

⁴ *Die Inventie der colommen met haren coronementen ende maten*, Antwerp, 1539.

In the description of the arches made by Calvete de Estrella, we find the explicit allusion to the use of *grotesque* (*brutescos* [sic]) on several occasions, the most detailed being the one referring to the «Public spectacle» (*Pegma Publicum Super Ponte Marinum* -ed. Grapheum-), which was raised after the triumphal arch of the Florentines. But what is more interesting for our purpose here, is the way in which the description of this unique urban scenery continues:

“There were naked images tucked in between those paintings, and their hands were placed on them...”

(“*Estaban unas imágenes desnudas metidas entre aquellos cuadros, y puestas las manos sobre ellos, de las cuales avía una de cada lado del remate de medio, que sostenía con las manos alçadas y cabeça una obra de follajes, como la que tenía el remate de medio sobre el cuadro...*”)

In fact, the engraving, in the finishing of the upper body, shows a series of anatomical figures that appear surrounded by a frame or structure, such as the so-called *rollwerk* or *strapwork*, features of the Nordic Mannerist grotesque. In the same finishing, we also see larger figures that, like caryatids, hold floral decorations. The anatomy of these unique caryatids is integrated into the ornamental structure of this ephemeral apparatus, since, at the level of the abdomen, we observe rigid strips that surround them.

I would like to highlight that the spirit of the decoration of these ephemeral arches at the triumphal entry into Antwerp is strongly marked by a taste for the grotesque and *rollwerk* of the Fontainebleau style, and precisely, Pieter Coecke, the author of the scenographies of the triumphal entry, was one of the artists who used the *rollwerk* most. This decorative repertoire can also be found in the designs created by other Dutch artists, such as Cornelis Floris, who, together with Frans Floris and Vredeman de Vries, collaborated with Pieter Coecke in the production of ephemeral structures for the entry into Antwerp. This ornamental spirit is what determined the curious and infrequent anthropomorphic support in ephemeral architecture for the entry of Philip II.

Another ephemeral structure (*Arcus Pub. Ad Pontem Minoritarium*, -ed. Grapheum-), whose grotesque crowning was similar to the one mentioned above, was erected on another site along the princely urban route. However, in this «public spectacle» as Calvete calls it, situated at the door of the Friars of San Francisco, the architectural structure reproduces a type of support that to this day seems to have gone unnoticed by art historians (usually more interested in the symbolic content and iconographic reading of ephemeral architecture). I am referring to the anatomical figures that, embedded in pillars, bear the cornice that limits the first body and act as atlantes. It is a curious invention that does not fit into the typology of other anthropomorphic supports so frequent in the Nordic architectural vocabulary such as *hermes*, *termini*, caryatides or atlantes. This motif of a body integrated into the surface of the wall, in the form of an atlante, is also inspired by the Flemish ornamental repertoire.

A similar anthropomorphic support, whose bodies also appear to be embedded in the wall, is found in the triumphal arch situated “... in the middle of the street they call Vacaria... (where) there was an arch with a round door and above it a spectacle”. («*en medio de la calle que llaman Vacaria*», where «*avía un arco con una puerta redonda y encima d’él un espectáculo...*»¹ (*Arcus Pub. In via Vaccaria*, -ed. Grapheum-)). On this occasion, they are pairs of naked female bodies, each embracing the backs of their partners, with one arm and the other holding the cushion on their heads, which serve as a base for the entablature

When establishing the origin or source of inspiration for the type of support we are analysing here, we must also consider the urban scenography created by the Flemish Rhetoric Chambers. In both the north of France and the Netherlands, these citizen bodies were the main centres for the creation of poetry, music and theatre performances, and actively participated in the design of *tableaux vivants* for royal entries, as was the case with the princely entry into Antwerp that we are discussing here. Of the few graphic testimonies that are preserved of those scenographies, I am interested in the one corresponding to the *landjuweel* of 1561, organised by the Wallflower chamber of rhetoric (*De Violieren*). The engraving reproduces a façade on whose lower body we find the embedded anatomical figures again, this time imprisoned by a piece of wall decorated with a diamond tip, and whose crossed arms rest on it.

To conclude, I would say that the influence of the Flemish decorative repertoire in northern Europe, both theoretically and artistically, has been highlighted on several occasions, especially in reference to Wendel Dietterlin's treatise (*Architectvra*, 1593). Nevertheless, the unique scenographic character illustrated by Dietterlin had an important precedent, concerning the anthropomorphic architectural supports, in the suite of seventeen designs for caryatids and terminal figures entitled *Caryatidum* (Antwerp, ca. 1565) made by Vredeman de Vries. In my opinion, both of them have a common model in ephemeral constructions made a few decades ago, which were inspired by the Flemish and Netherlands grotesque. This way we can detect, through the *grotesque*, the relationship between scenography used in festivals and theatre performances, and artistic and theoretical creations in northern Europe on 16th century.

ⁱ *Ibidem*, p. 409.