The Ears of Hermes

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Death and Its Double

*Imagines, Ridiculum* and *Honos* in the
Roman Aristocratic Funeral

We have already had the opportunity to observe that in ancient Rome the aristocratic funeral offered the opportunity for an extraordinary display of “doubles.” The *veterum instituta* (“institutions of the ancients”), as they were called by Tacitus, required that an *effigies* of the dead should rest on the coffin, in plain sight.¹ Moreover, the *imagines* of the ancestors, according to an extremely impressive and touching ceremonial, were carried behind the coffin in funerary procession. What we learn from ancient descriptions (in particular those of Polybius) is that the *imagines maiorum* were wax images reproducing the faces of the ancestors and that these reproductions bore a “striking resemblance” to the deceased.²

As we have mentioned, the *imagines* were normally stored in wooden shrines in the atrium of the house, but on the day of the funeral of a family member, they were uncovered and worn by those who most closely resembled (both in size and carriage) the dead person whose *imago* they were

1. Tac. *Ann.* 3.5, *praepositam turo effigiem*. I am following the text of the manuscripts, and not the correction by Muretus, *propositam*, accepted by almost all editors. Not only do I think there is no need to correct the text, but I also believe that the correction spoils the subtlety of the original sense. As demonstrated by Benveniste 1966, 132ff., the Latin prefix *pra* generally indicates a forward, leading position, in the sense of “prominent,” “in plain sight”: in this case, Tacitus probably intended that the *effigies* of the deceased were to be “the most visible” among the objects placed on the funerary bed, catching everybody’s attention.

wearing. Furthermore, these men would dress up in clothes appropriate to the social rank that the deceased enjoyed during life, and were accompanied by the signs of his distinction. In this way, the images were “performed,” playing a performative role that consisted in arousing once again the presence of the dead ancestors. And we know how Polybius reacted to the Roman aristocratic funeral: “How can one not be moved, seeing the images of men famous for their virtues, gathered together and, so to speak, living and moving?” The *imagines* were not simply figures that both in features and in complexion resembled the deceased, but they were truly and effectively their Doubles. During a funeral, a family’s ancestors were really “there,” returning from the world beyond in order to escort the recently deceased to the grave and accompany him as he joined the *lignée* of the Dead. As Pliny remarked with almost epic simplicity, “Each dead person was always surrounded by all the deceased members of his family, all those who had lived before him.”

The funerary “double” played a particularly impressive role on the occasion of Julius Caesar’s death. We are told that “somebody raised above the bier an image of Caesar himself made of wax. . . . The image was turned round and round by a mechanical device, showing the twenty three wounds in all parts of the body and the face, that had been dealt to him so brutally.” The *effigies* of the deceased is still placed well in sight on the coffin, in observance of the *veterum instituta*; but according to the dramatic character of the public performance that takes place around the body, the funerary image assumes the uncanny form of a wax automaton.

With funeral practices of the imperial period, the ceremonial importance of funerary “doubles” increased dramatically. During Augustus’ funeral, as many as three *imagines* of the deceased emperor were displayed alongside those of his ancestors. The body was hidden in a coffin within a chariot, but externally, well visible, there was a wax image of the emperor adorned with triumphal garments, another in gold and a third (probably also in gold) carried on a triumphal chariot in procession. Since this was the funeral of the first emperor of Rome, it is evident that the tradition was at the same time respected and multiplied: not one, but actually three *effigies* of the deceased were visible at the funeral. To a certain extent, the following principle was observed: the more distinguished the deceased, the more solemn the funeral and the greater the number of the *imagines* around his coffin,

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3. See above, 197–98.
in a play of reflections that could transformed “doubles” even into “triples.” The importance of such images at funerals reached its peak when, however, the emperor’s funerary ceremony assumed the form of the so-called funus imaginariurn (beginning with Pertinax and Septimius Severus). In these cases, the deceased emperor was granted not one, but two funerary rites: the first regarded the departed person’s actual corpse, while the second regarded his wax statue. Before being solemnly burned, this statue was put on public display for seven days and a sort of ritual pantomime moved around this effigy involving doctors, senators, knights, groups of women and of young boys and so on. So there is little doubt that the noble and imperial Roman funeral was characterized by the category of the Double: without imagines, without the visible imitations of the deceased, these ceremonies would have made no sense at all.

Let us continue with our analysis. Dionysius of Halicarnassus provides us with some uniquely interesting information. The author, drawing upon the lost work of the Roman annalist Fabius Pictor, describes a pompa circensis. He explains that, in addition to other groups, a number of armed dancers also took part in the procession, continuing as follows:

Just behind them were dancers who impersonated satyrs performing the Greek dance called sicinnis. Those who represented the Sileni were dressed in shaggy tunics that some called chortaioi, and cloaks made with different types of flowers; those representing satyrs, on the other hand, wore girdles and goatskins and their heads were covered with manes that stood upright and other similar things. These mocked and mimicked the serious movements of those who preceded them, teasing them and turning them into laughter.

Then Dionysius provides the information that—from our perspective—is the most interesting. He introduces it as his own personal experience (eidon, “I have seen”):

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9. The expression funus imaginariurn in the sense of funeral celebrated for an image comes from Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Pertinax 15.1, funus imaginariurn ei [sc. Pertinaci] et censorium ductum est.

10. Herodianus, Ab excessu divi Marci 4.2.1ff., with regard to the funerals of Septimius Severus; Dio Cass. Hist. Rom. 74.4.1ff., who declares he witnessed the funerals of Pertinax. Cf. Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Severus 7.8., funus deinde censorium Pertinacis imagini duxit; Pertinax 15.1, funus imaginariurn ei et censorium ductum est. The funus imaginariurn of the Roman emperor obviously recalls the theme of the “king’s two bodies” in Kantorwicz 1957; with regard to the Italian Renaissance, see also Ricci 1998, with bibliographical references successive to Kantorwicz’s book. For the funus imaginariurn see in particular Dupont 1986b and Pucci 1997.

Even at the funerals of illustrious people I have seen, alongside the rest of
the procession (pompa) preceding the funerary chariot [the author is obvi
ously referring to the parade of the imagines maiorum], bands of dancers
impersonating satyrs who preceded the bier dancing the sicinnis, and this
occurred in particular at the funerals of the rich.\textsuperscript{12}

Together with the solemnity of the funerary procession preceding the
coffin, it was also possible to see groups of satyrs dressed up in eccentric
clothes dancing the sicinnis. We may presume by analogy that they imitated
and mocked the behavior of the serious part of the procession. Furthermore,
according to Dionysius’ description, the position of the satyrs within the pro-
cession was clearly before the coffin—that is to say, together with the solemn
group of imagines. A strange mixture—the imagines maiorum performed by
people representing in their attire the different dignitates of the ancestors,
and the satyrs skipping and jumping while dancing their characteristic sicin-
nis. Granted the seriousness and the almost epic solemnity characterizing the
procession of imagines during the Roman funeral, the contextual presence
of a definitively comic double during the rite is surprising. In fact, we may
have doubts as to the veracity of the information transmitted by Dionysius.
Or, at any rate, we may find it difficult to believe that the sicinnis dancers
mocked the “serious” members of the parade by turning them into objects
of laughter (as they did with the armed dancers who preceded them in the
parade of the ludi magni). Yet what other purpose could the dancers have
served, if not to arouse laughter, dressed, as they were, as satyrs wearing
girdles and goatskins, their heads covered with bristling manes?

There is other evidence for the role of imitation and the comic spirit
during the funerals of illustrious people, e.g., the presence of an archimi-
mus named Favor at Vespasian’s funeral, as reported by Suetonius. Here, we
may add some more explicit information regarding the reproduction of the
“events and sayings” of the deceased during his lifetime, for Suetonius also
reports what Favor actually said during the emperor’s funeral procession:
“Having asked the procurators in the presence of everybody, how much
his funeral procession would cost and hearing that it would cost a hun-
dred thousand sesterces, he exclaimed: ‘give me a hundred sesterces and
then you can fling me into the Tiber!’”\textsuperscript{13} These words pronounced by Favor
must have been an imitation—or better, a comical caricature—of Vespasian’s
character and of the dicta that he used to pronounce during his lifetime.

\textsuperscript{12} This sentence of Dionysius is considered no more than an “interpolation” by scholars
interested only in reconstructing the lost text of Fabius Pictor (so explicitly Bernstein 1998, 261 n.
190); however, for our purposes Dionysius’ personal testimony deserves particular attention.

\textsuperscript{13} Suet. Vesp. 19.2.
Suetonius also informs us that Vespasian was notoriously greedy,\textsuperscript{14} an aspect of character that Favor’s joke highlights explicitly. Furthermore, we know that the deceased emperor loved “witty remarks, even if rather coarse and covetous.”\textsuperscript{15} In particular, he used to “make jokes regarding unmentionable gains, in order to diminish or cancel their hatefulness, turning them into jokes by word play.” Once again according to Suetonius, Vespasian famously joked with his son Titus, who had found fault with the emperor for contriving a tax on public toilets: “He held some money from the first payment received and he asked his son ‘whether its odor was offensive,’ and to his son’s negative reply he rejoined, ‘and yet, it comes from urine!’”\textsuperscript{16} Favor’s pronouncement—“give me a hundred sesterces and then you can fling me into the Tiber!”—is a witty remark explicitly concerning greed and is based on the rather disgusting possibility of making money off death and funerals. But apparently this is the kind of thing that Vespasian casually uttered during his lifetime!

The person speaking is not Favor, but Vespasian, the deceased. In other words, Favor has identified himself with Vespasian completely: he is his living Double. The only difference is that this living Double is not designed to stir the emotions or to encourage virtue, as occurred in front of the imagines of the ancestors, effigies of the deceased or the wax body of the emperor. Instead, the Double selects “sayings and facts” regarding the deceased with the express purpose of causing laughter. Needless to say, from our cultural perspective, for a dead person to utter “Give me a hundred and then you can do away with this procession and fling me into the Tiber!” is a truly exceptional occurrence.

Let us continue describing the relationship between mimes and comic doubles on the one hand, and the aristocratic funeral on the other. Again, Diodorus Siculus’ remarks on the funeral of Lucius Aemilius Paulus are of particular interest. We have reported a portion of this passage above, but its importance for understanding the role of “doubles” in funerary practice justifies its repetition here in full:

\begin{quote}
Among the Romans, those who were especially noble or who were famous because of their ancestors for are portrayed after death in images (\textit{eidolòpoiountai}). This is done according to resemblances in traits and physical characteristics, and they were accompanied all their life by mimētai who carefully studied their bearing (\textit{poreia}) and any peculiarities in their appearance (\textit{tas kata meros idiotētas tēs emphaseos}). Similarly, each of the
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{14} Suet. \textit{Vesp.} 16.1  \\
\textsuperscript{15} Suet. \textit{Vesp.} 22.1.  \\
\textsuperscript{16} Suet. \textit{Vesp.} 22.1, 23.1
\end{flushright}
ancestors marches past [the coffin] with clothing and such signs of distinction that those observing them can understand from their appearance the grade of honors they have reached and which position they have attained in the city.  

Although the text is incomplete (it is in fact an excerpt by Photius of the works by Diodorus), the allusion to funerary practice is clear: reference is being made to the parade of imagines and to the custom of accompanying them with the clothes and insignia that distinguished the rank of each deceased person. Particularly interesting, however, is the mention of mimētai who follow Roman aristocrats “all their life” and who “carefully studied their bearing (poreia) and any peculiarities in their appearance.” But, once again, who were these mimētai? Perhaps here we can answer this question more fully than our earlier discussion permitted. As suggested previously, Diodorus’ mention of the custom of mimētai “representing” Roman nobles after death may lead us to think that they were simply “artists” or “sculptors.” However, this interpretation is problematic for two reasons.

First, in Greek, mimētēs appears never to have the meaning “sculptor” or “figurative artist.” This idea is designated by terms such as plastēs, andrian-topoios, agalmatopoios, or, more specifically, by grapheus/graphikos, zōgraphos and so forth to indicate a painter. On the other hand, the noun mimētēs was consistently employed to denote an “imitator” (as well as in the negative sense of “forger”), or in any case, to denote the artist as a mime who gave life to certain characters, either as an “actor” or as “poet.” Even Diodorus, who uses this term on two other occasions, assigns it the standard meaning of a person who uses his own body to imitate another’s behavior. If elsewhere Diodorus employs the term mimētēs in its effective and common meaning, there seems to be no reason why he should have to force its meaning when talking about the Roman nobility.

Second, Diodorus says that these mimētai “carefully studied their bearing (poreia).” Why would a sculptor or any artist for that matter, charged with reproducing the features of the deceased, need precise details about the way in which he walked? All he would need was to perform a careful study of the features of the face and body. But an “imitator,” an “actor” who

18. Cf. Liddell-Scott-Jones 1940, s. v.
19. In the former case, mimētēs is referred to the architect Perilaus, when he was invited by Phalaris to “play the part” of the convict imprisoned in the famous bull, later to be burnt himself (9.19.16ff.); in the latter case, it is stated that the soldiers generally “imitate the behavior (mimētai genesthai) of the commanding officers” (29.6.2): in both cases, it is clearly a question of “imitating” someone not by reproducing his features, as a figurative artist would be doing, but of impersonating or reproducing his behavior.
endeavors to personify another human being, will be interested in the way he walks (which, we now know, represents for the Romans a fundamental trait of identity). For this reason, when someone wishes to be mistaken for another, he or she imitates the other’s gressus or incessus. As we have seen, this is precisely Cupid’s method in the Aeneid, when he adopts the appearance of Ascanius in order to fool Dido into falling in love with Aeneas. If someone’s way of walking is something that must be imitated by anyone wishing to pretend to be that person, it seems clear that the mimētai were nothing other than “impersonators,” according to the correct meaning of the word mimētēs. They were actors—mimes—who studied their subjects in detail, because they would have to personify them in the future.\(^\text{20}\) Interpreting Diodorus’ passage in this way (and surely there can be no other way to interpret it), what he tells us coincides perfectly with Suetonius’ description analyzed above.

The reader will also recall what Pliny the Elder said about the active presence of mimētai in the company of Roman nobles.\(^\text{21}\) Finally, an inscription found not far from the tomb of the Scipiones at Vigna Codini likely provides further evidence for the mimētai:

Caesaris lusor
mutus et argutus imitator
Ti. Caesaris Augusti qui
primus invenit causidicos imitari

Caesar’s jester, speechless and expressive imitator of Tiberius Caesar Augustus, who was the first to invent the art of imitating lawyers.\(^\text{22}\)

Tiberius’ lusor—evidently a “jester,” an actor; at any rate, someone involved in entertaining the emperor—is represented as dumb (mutus). It is not clear, however, if this was a natural defect or a precise artistic choice. At the same time, we are told that this personage was also argutus—an allusion to the actor’s nonverbal expressiveness, his ability to convey “meanings” despite his dumbness. This is a meaning of the Latin adjective argutus in other contexts; for example, the eyes are described as arguti when they are able to reveal even the deepest feelings without words.\(^\text{23}\) Even a person’s hands can be described


\(^{21}\) In fact, there may have been seven. If we are to give any importance to the note added in the margin of the Plinian manuscript named Leidensis Lipsi n. 7 (cf. 7.55 in fine): see the note by Schilling 1977, 151. See also Bettini 1999a, 204ff.

\(^{22}\) ILS 5225 = CII. VI 4886; see Purcell 1999, 181–93. (I wish to thank my friend Giuseppe Pucci, who pointed out this interesting work to me.)

\(^{23}\) Cic. Leg. 1.9.27, oculi nimis arguti, quemadmodum animo affecti simus, loquuntur (“eyes
as *argutae* when they are particularly expressive in gesture. Thus, the imperial *lusor* was *argutus*: he was able to “make himself understood” even though he was dumb. Let us now examine the exact function of this *lusor*.

The text of the inscription tells us that he was an *imitator*, a “mime” who had introduced a particularly fortunate type of imitation: of “lawyers.” From our point of view, the genitive that follows the word *imitator* is particularly revealing. Of course, this genitive may indicate that the *lusor* “belonged” to the emperor as part of his family group. However, we cannot exclude the possibility that he was an “imitator of Tiberius Caesar Augustus,” meaning that among his duties was to be the emperor’s *mimētēs*. In other words, this inscription may provide further information about those who were attached to famous people and who “carefully studied their bearing and any peculiarities in their appearance,” in order to represent them at the time of their death according to the *mos* mentioned by Suetonius. However we wish to interpret the syntagm *imitator Ti. Caesaris Augusti*, this inscription proves the presence of mimes at the imperial court and their close association with the person of the emperor.

At this point, some further reflection. The *mimētai* who studied Roman aristocrats in order to be able to impersonate them were something like “guardian angels.” Aristocrats endured careful “observation” by their imitators, like the constant surveillance undertaken by defendants of their accusers, according to a Roman *lex* recalled by Plutarch. Unlike the “watchman” peering over the accuser’s shoulder, however, the *mimētēs* did not only keep an eye on what the Roman aristocrat was doing. The *mimētēs* conducted his observation in order to reproduce his study. As I have said, accompanied by a *mimētēs* who strove to acquire all the peculiarities of his appearance (to be faithfully reproduced upon his death), the Roman aristocrat inevitably must have imagined his own death in the form of his “double.” The connection is reciprocal, then: the Double signified Death, and seeing one’s own Double was an immediate reminder of aristocratic Death. Doubled after death by an *imago* that was “extremely similar” and “performed,” doubled while still among the living by a *mimētēs* who followed him everywhere, the Roman

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24. Aul. Gell. *NA*. 1.5, *manus argutae admodum et gestuosae* ("very expressive hands and prone to gesticulate"); Cicero (*De orat.* 3.59.218) expressly recommends that the *manus* of the orator should be *minus arguta, digitis subsequens verba, non exprimens* ("be less expressive [than the actor’s hand], and should not express the words but accompany them with the movement of the hands").


26. This hypothesis is also advanced by Purcell, but with no reference to the *mimētai* mentioned by Dio.

27. Plut. *Cat. min.*, 21, 5, “under a particular law the defendant placed a guard day and night next to the accuser, so as to control the evidence he was collecting and preparing for his accusation.”
aristocrat was distinguished from the common citizen for this extraordinary reason: he directly and personally experienced the Double, recognizing that it represented honor and prestige. No doubt he must also have perceived the presentiment of death that its presence evoked.

There is no need to emphasize how powerful and intense the phenomenon of “doubling” was in Roman funerary ceremonies. The presence of the Double ranged from the parade of the *imagines maiorum* to the exhibited images of the deceased, the wax body of the emperor, the satyrs imitating the “serious” part of the procession and the *mimētai* who studied the behavior of the aristocrats to become, after death, their (comical) living substitutes. As already remarked, the presence of “doubles” at the aristocratic or imperial funeral is so constant that this ceremony would have been practically inconceivable without the presence of “doubles.”

This means, however, that the ordinary relation that seems to exist in almost all cultures between the loss of a beloved person on the one hand and the production of images on the other is insufficient to explain the phenomenon of “doubling” in this particular context. We are fully aware that images are often the result of *pothos*, *desiderium* and nostalgia, while funerary doubling seems to function as a rigid and “cold” substitution of the deceased. But in the case of Roman aristocratic funerary practice, the emphasis on this theme is so strong that we cannot but think there must have been something more specific connected with the cultural models of Roman tradition than some general relation between Death and the Double.

What, then, was the real meaning, at Rome, of the connection between the Double on one hand and the aristocratic funeral on the other?

Let us try to answer this question by examining the problem from a different perspective—that of those who were without *imagines* at their funerals. First, poor citizens, whose burial reflected their manner of living: their corpses were thrown onto a *lecticula* or placed into a small *arca* or *sandapila*, barely covered by an old *toga* and then buried outside the Esquiline, where *vespillones* (“grave robbers”) would take care of them. In the case of the poor, then, there was no *pompa* and there were no *imagines*. More interesting from our point of view is the ancient Roman custom that Nero appealed to in order to legitimize the haste with which Britannicus was buried. Tacitus reports:

28. As regards the category of “double” in archaic Greek culture (the *kolossos*, equivalent to the dead and his *psuchē*) see Vernant 1965b and Bettini 1999a, 12–15.


A single night brought together the death of Britannicus and the pyre of his dead body. The preparations of his obsequies were made in advance and were of a humble type. He was buried in the Campus Martius. . . . His rapid funeral rites were justified by Caesar with an edict appealing to a custom of the ancestors (maioribus institutum), according to which the funerals of the dead were to be dispensed with as soon as possible, without lingering on funerary laudationes or any type of pompa. But for himself, as he was deprived of a brother’s aid, the remainder of his hopes were placed in the Republic, trusting that both the nobility and the common man would be only more supportive of a ruler who was the last vestige of a family born to the heights of power.

This traditional practice, confirmed by a passage of Cicero’s Pro Cluentio, is extremely interesting. Owing to his social position and to his family origins, the young Britannicus was certainly entitled to a ceremonial funeral rich in imagines. But Nero, who wanted to avoid excessive publicity of the boy’s death, appealed to an institutum of the maiores that discouraged protracting the funerals of acerbi, depriving them of laudationes and funerary pompa. Why then were acerbi—even those of the upper classes—not entitled to imagines and to the “double” funerary rites normally characterizing aristocratic funerary practice (being placed instead on the same level as the poor)? What did these two categories have in common? Likely, the absence of images and other funerary rites during the funerals of both the poor and the acerbi points to the profound meaning of the Double in the aristocratic funeral, when its appearance was so “visible” and powerful.

At Rome, ius imaginum—the right to keep imagines of one’s ancestors—was not granted to everyone. This right was instead the exclusive

31. Cic. Cluen. 9.28 (a child). Not only did funerals of impuberes take place at night, but the bier was preceded by torches and wax candles (Serv. in Aen. 11.143; Sen. De tran. anim., 11.7; De brev. vit. 20.6). Since we know that, during aristocratic funerary processions, the imagines maiorum were placed in front of the coffin (Hor. Ep. 8.11; Sil. Ital. Pun. 10.566f.; Tac. Ann. 3.76; see Bettini 1991c, 297 n. 4), it would almost seem that the torches and wax candles were taking the place of funerary imagines.
prerogative of those who counted among their ancestors one who had held a curule magistracy. This custom helps explain the social and cultural meaning of imagines of the deceased. Simultaneously, imagines functioned as a pledge and as a sign of honos. The possession of imagines and the possibility of displaying them in public during a funeral meant that a family had obtained honores. As Florence Dupont states, “le droit aux images est la seule façon d’être noble à Rome,” the right of possessing that “ gloire institutionelle que se dit en latin honos.” Besides, we have already seen that the one thing imagines maiorum were able to (even ostentatiously) express were the specific honores attained by the ancestors. The possibility of “doubling” or of being “doubled” was felt by Romans to be closely associated with the notion of honos. This relates not only to funerary imagines, however: the word that constantly occurs in texts dealing with the question of erecting a statue to somebody is in fact honos. To cite only two examples: When Cicero speaks about the statues that were awarded to four Roman ambassadors killed by Lars Tolumnius, he exclaims iustus honos (“just honor!”); and on the statue awarded to Gnaeus Octavius who was murdered on a mission to King Antiochus, the orator comments, “The senate erected a statue to him, which was designed to honor (honestare) his lineage for many years.” In other words, even in the case of erecting statues the notion of “doubling” by means of images seems to be interchangeable with that of honos.

The anthropological context in which the incredible presence of images takes place during aristocratic funerals is therefore represented by honos. In Roman culture, possession of an image “transmitting the memory of man,” in Pliny’s words, implied the tangible and explicit recognition of honos. How could a poor plebeian or a young boy ever be entitled to honos, if he had not yet been able to give a sense to his life? A young acerbus, even one of good family, was unable to carry out any of the enterprises that might in the future grant him the honos of an imago. This was, of course, a reason for great sorrow. He could not be “doubled” during funerals. He could not even have with him “the people of his family,” as Pliny calls them, in the form of imagines maiorum. In the Roman funeral, Death and its Double meet at one particular point: honos, taking the concrete form of images.

33. Dupont 1986b, 244.
34. Cic. Philipp. 9.2.4–5; 9.1, 3; Plin. Nat. hist. 34.17, 21, 25; Sen. Ep. 64.9.
35. Plin. Nat. hist. 34.17.
36. In an inscription dedicated to young Cornelius Scipio (Degarisi 1963, I, 312), who died approximately at the age of twenty around the year 175 B.C.E., we can read: quoiec vita defecit, non honos honore: what this young Cornelius would have needed to achieve honores was not virtuous behavior, but life.
Let us tarry a moment on the absence of “doubles” during aristocratic funerals. Tacitus narrates that at the funeral of Cassius’ wife, *imagines* of Brutus and Cassius (“whose presence was made visible by their very absence,” Tacitus wryly observes) were not allowed to pass by.\(^{37}\) Parading the images of Caesar’s murderers in a funeral procession would have been inconvenient; their presence would have been “disgraceful” to the family. In this as in other cases, the extremely delicate relationship between funerary images on one hand and the reputation and good name of the family on the other is clear. The same relationship between *imago* and *honos* may also be observed in the even more dramatic practice of *damnatio memoriae*, which consisted in removing the images of the condemned from public display.\(^{38}\)

In our study of “doubles” and their particular meaning in aristocratic funerary practice, we must not overlook an important feature whose presence is perhaps the most disconcerting in the context of such rituals: derision and laughter. This topic will permit us some final reflections.

Like the *mimētai* studying the Roman aristocrat in order to mock his vocal and physical idiosyncrasies, there is no doubt that the satyrs dancing the *sicinnis*, imitating and mocking the funerary ceremony in which they take part, constitute a type of “double” quite different from the one represented by the *imagines maiorum* and other funerary statues. This is the kind of “doubling” that Cicero probably would have included in the category of *ridiculum*. In fact, in the *De Oratore*, Cicero evokes the existence of a genus of jokes that “consisted in imitation (*imitatio*) and is always ridiculous. We [sc. orators] can only make use of them in passing, infrequently and speedily, otherwise this is completely inelegant.”\(^{39}\) The orator employs *depravata imitation*—caricature—to create difficulties for his opponent by mocking him. According to Cicero, this grotesque effect is achieved by means of *vocis ac *vultus imitation* (“imitation of the voice and *vultus*”). But also apart from caricature, simple *imitatio* of a person can produce irritation. Seneca was apparently well aware of its effects: “What about the fact that we feel offended when someone imitates the way in which we speak or walk, if someone reproduces the way in which we speak or any of our physical aspects?”\(^{40}\)

We realize, therefore, that in aristocratic funerals—and even before, thanks to the constant presence of the *mimētai*—the relationship between the Roman noble (or indeed the emperor himself) and his Double was a relationship characterized by mockery. But how to explain this curious ten-

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39. Cic. *De orat.* 2.252
sion between solemn and dramatic “doubling” on one hand and derisory and insulting “doubling” on the other? The imitation and “roasting”—so to speak—of important figures such as the emperor was a traditional practice at Rome. This form of abuse was not only tolerated, but actually encouraged. Purcell confirms and emphasizes this with some very interesting examples and arguments.41 However, in the case of aristocratic and imperial funerary practice, this strange and unusual interlacing appears once again capable of being referred to the same concept of honos that represents the anthropological framework in which to situate the “solemn” series of aristocratic Doubles.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus understood that, because of their similar nature, a link could be drawn between the presence of bands of satyrs in solemn contexts (such as the pompa circensis and aristocratic funerals) and the practice of “mockery, raillery and fun-making” during another solemn ceremony: the triumph.42 In ancient Rome, this practice is recorded as dating back to the times of Scipio Africanus, if not earlier.43 It is almost as if in Roman culture the solemn celebration of a citizen could not take place without the act of mockery. In this respect, the triumph is truly emblematic. The attainment of a triumph and the accompanying ceremony represented an extremely important honos for the person in question. At the same time, we know that during this ceremony soldiers were allowed to satirize their commanders freely and sarcastically. The same ambivalence can be observed in the aristocratic funeral: even the honos of the funerary pompa—the final recognition bestowed upon a noble citizen who had played an important role in the life of the city—implied the practice of ridiculum. In the case of the triumph, this was expressed in the form of verbal jokes and satirical elements, while in the case of the aristocratic funeral this was expressed through the language of images, typical of the funerary honos. Funerary “doubling” thus took the shape of depravata imitatio and the funeral ceremony became a play of mirrors, reflecting both solemn and comic doubling. The funus gentilicum, representing the climax and most important moment in the life of an aristocrat, was therefore grounded in a balance between elevation and degradation. This may seem strange to us, but it is typical of Roman culture. In the “dialogue” between the imagines maiorum accompanied by all the grave representations of their dignitas, on one hand, and the clownish mimes pillorying the deceased, on the other, Doubles in Rome spoke the same language: the language of honos.

41. Purcell 1999, 186.
42. Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 7.72.11.
43. Purcell 1999, 186.