

## How much does it cost to fix your smile? (An Essay on the Theory of Comedy)

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### Introduction/Abstract

Comedy is associated with anything that is funny. It is conveyed through various modes such as humour, wit, jokes and irony. The terms “comedy” and “comical” correspond to a conceptual persuasion regarding the procedures and modes of comedy. The frontiers enclosing “comedy” and “comical” are indistinct as we cannot attribute definiteness to these notions. Further, the nuances of comedy necessitate painstaking investigation. It is a tough art to master because the “process is in constant motion” (Zupančič 3). The multifarious methods, techniques and processes associated with the making and execution of comedy makes it a difficult art. While Plato and Aristotle considered comedy as inferior to tragedy, Hegel, Bergson, Freud and Zupančič emphasize on its subjective, relational and social nature. This essay attempts to conceptually discuss and critically understand the art of comedy.

### I

Comedy, in Hellenic philosophy, was assumed to fit the lower human instincts contrary to rational thinking. Plato identifies the polluting features of comedy in the *Republic*:

If there are amusing things which you'd be ashamed to do yourself, but which give you a great deal of pleasure when you see them in a comic representation or hear about them in private company—when you don't find them loathsome or repulsive—then isn't this exactly the same kind of behaviour as we uncovered when talking about feeling sad? There's a part of you which wants to make people laugh, but your reason restrains it, because you're afraid of being thought a vulgar clown. Nevertheless, you don't realize that the almost inevitable result of giving it energy in this other context is that you become a comedian in your own life. (360)

In Plato's terms, comedy is better equipped for “private company.” He launches a distinction that contradicts the crudeness of laughter with superiority of reason. Considering comedy as existing outside the realm of worthiness, he recognizes comedy as having secondary nature and temporary identity. Continuous acquaintance with comic performances results in the corruption of a subject. Aristotle identifies, in comedy, a complete antithesis of tragedy. While comedy and tragedy are the outcome of mimesis, tragedy imitates “admirable” action. Comedy is the “imitation of inferior people—not however, with respect to every kind of defect: the laughable is

a species of what is disgraceful. The laughable is an error or disgrace that does not involve pain or destruction: for example, a comic mask is ugly, distorted, but does not involve pain” (Aristotle 9). More than narrative distinction, Aristotle conceives the non-violent dramatic form as pejorative and inferior. Comedy imitates the ludicrous and contemptible aspects of human nature and behaviour. Therefore, he emphasizes on the counterpoint between the two genres in relation to the literary configuration that reflect human nature.

Unlike Plato and Aristotle, Hegel considers comedy as a spiritual work of art. In Hegel, we do not have a comprehensive theory of comedy. It is not the deflation of the universal, but annulment of the tangible. Neither is comedy an opposition to the universal but the actual functioning and labour of the universal. Rather than offering a departure from the universal values and a movement towards the individual subject, it associates with the deliberative trajectory that moves away from the intangible universal to the concrete universal. The abstract universal represents the uncertain, defective, unfinished and the restricted because “it lacks the moment of self-consciousness, of the self, of the concrete; it is universal and pure only at the price of being ultimately empty” (Zupančič 37). The transition is not from the universal but within the universal. It is within the provisional of the universal, representation of truth is made possible through self-consciousness. The concrete does not incline towards the universal as an inevitable reconfiguration or an integration of the universal idea but as a yardstick of the Spirit. The universal is a symbolic because the concrete relies on subjective representation. It does not move beyond the process of being universal to transact with the concrete. The concrete, therefore, becomes the actual spirit of the universal, the materialist spirit of the comedy.

Schematic Hegelian deliberation interrogates the tradition and rhetoric to destabilise any complicity with conventionalities and ethical suppositions. Deliberations on subjectivity and specificity play significant part in the polemics of comic resolution. When functioning as an aesthetic referent, comedy offers an immanent critique taking a self-contradictory position. The dialectic imposes a value contrary to the innate dissolution. The comic is to evolve a character or a thing that liquefies the internal revelling. The protagonist who works through the comic assumes a central position by revealing his/her absurdity and thereby destroying himself/herself. The nullification is a negative effect resulting in self-cancelling. Comedy, therefore, is a proximate negation present in the promotion of subjectivity or particularity.

Hegel prefers comedy over tragedy. While his preference is subjective and arbitrary, the method employed is systematic. In modern drama, the importance of unity and necessity incline to crumble comic plots into ridicule and entertainment. Unlike tragedy which is instituted on the substantive, comedy accentuate the subjective. In comedy, contemplation precedes, “in the laughter in which the characters dissolve everything, including themselves, the victory of their own subjective personality which nevertheless persists self-assured” (Hegel qtd. in Moland 84). Comedy reconfigures to unify the subject with the essence by explicating the individual’s aim to disprove. Comic plots do not encompass the substance but contradicts to achieve nothing. The interconnections of the plots are determined by nullification as it encircles the oppositions. Hegel also mentions about the external conditions that lay in opposition to the internal character and outer ambience. Accordingly, plots are aligned in opposition to characters with the aim to locate the posture of strategies that nullify each other. While comedy does not always aim at making the audience laugh, the inconsistency in fun and ridicule could also result in laughter. It, fundamentally, ascends to the plot and a language embedded with comic purpose to communicate the witty intentions of the characters. Accordingly, comedy “implies an infinite light-heartedness and confidence felt by someone raised altogether above his own inner contradiction and not bitter or miserable in it all; this is the bliss and ease of a man who, being sure of himself, can bear the frustration of his aims and achievements” (Hegel, *Lectures* 1200). It is, then, the possibility of a character’s self-negating purpose and recognition of a substantive comic presence. The antics involved in comedy are stable when the character recognizes itself with innate purpose and despondently aligns with it. The stability of a comic character makes it free as they disclose themselves in the finite world by engaging with the banal. The comic character eventually masters everything to establish stability.<sup>i</sup> Comedy brings together the banal and self-assurance. It transpires out of a conflict in a self-assured personality encountering and responding to a chaotic ambience. In this sense, comedy involves two disparate elements. It functions by transgressing the “normal.” This is the reason why it is funny. It connects an assemblage of ideas that are normally discrete and develops a surplus psychic energy that results in laughter. By unifying varied comic elements, comedy evokes different responses, one response views comedy as a “subversive form” that challenges the social systems of its

incongruities and another view considers it as an “ideological form” that configures imaginary coalescence so as to cloud those incongruities (McGowan 11).<sup>ii</sup> The hypothetical nature of comedy challenges us to meet with transcendence, transience and immanence of our subjectivity. The subject, as it experiences comedy, manoeuvre the diversification of subjectivity. Is comedy based on the banal? Is it less serious? If comedy involves a complex subjective experience, is it a mere trivial and amusing experience? Comedy challenges our affectations and finitude while explicating the possibility of our apprehensions relating to our existence. Comic experience reveals the transcendence and finitude of the subject at once.

Hegel’s representation of comedy is intricate than his presentation of tragedy. The comic characters, according to him, aim to present themselves without substance and contradictorily position themselves in order to succeed. The attempt results in an innate nullification. In this case, “The hero takes the empty abstraction of wealth as the ultimate reality and excludes every other form of contentment. The hero fails to reach his goal but recognizes the untenability of his claims, and so the play ends on a harmonic note. Since the failure stems from worthless values, nothing is lost. The protagonist deserves to fail and in failing recognizes the stupidity of his claims” (Roche). The situation that is configured to present the purposes require intense gravity and preparations. However, the specificity of the subject does not react to the trivial and the purpose fails. The situation, therefore, overcomes adversity and uninterrupted happiness. The purpose of a (comic) hero is legitimate and restricted, “the converse situation occurs when individuals plume themselves on their substantial characters and aims, but as instruments for accomplishing something substantial, they, as individuals, are the precise opposite of what is required” (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 1201). The hero diminishes the presence of the substantial and the individual is inexpert to decipher the hero’s justifiable goals. The antithesis of such a stance inclines on the intention and how the intention comes to realization. Further, Hegel emphasizes on the agreement arrived at the conclusion based on “external contingencies. Through their various and peculiar complications situations arise in which aims and their accomplishment, inner character and external circumstances are placed in comic contrast with one another and they lead to an equally comic solution” (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 1201).

The disproved antithesis intrinsically recurs in the creation of a sincere art. Comedy should employ “its presentation to bring the absolutely rational into appearance not at all as what



is broken up and perverted in itself but on the contrary as what assigns neither the victory nor, in the last resort permanence in the real world to folly and unreason, to false oppositions and contradictions” (Hegel, *Lectures* 1202). Hegel anticipates reconciliation through unification. Reconciliation involves the unification of substance with undistinguishable combination. It is configured by subjectivity’s assertion into an action that reformulates into a transforming whole. In Harris’s observation, the sublimity of comic creation “is the moment of perfect self-consciousness of what art is. We have left the realm of the immediately natural self and entered that of rational self-certainty. Thinking is now recognized as “absolute might”; God does not need to be embodied in a statue, in an athlete, or in a tragic hero presented to us in an imitative mode, as a model for our imitation” (638). Is art the consummation of reconciliation? How does art unify the inconsistencies into sublimity? Who initiates the consummation of art? Rather than positioning the representations of the divine in comedy, Harris suggests that humans are the divine. Comedy articulates the nullification of a tentative contrast between human and divine. While discussing ancient comedies, Hegel discloses this logical upper hand established by subjective (human) attitudes. Revelling in their self-negation, subjectivity immanently affects its integrity. Therefore, existential claim does not align with ancient morality but rather depicts the disintegration of the way of life. The audience, however, enjoy the moment, they laugh.

The presence and purpose of subjectivity in the modern comedy is not different from that of the ancient comedies, “If the effect of modern subjectivity’s intrusion into tragedy was to weaken its essential tie to substance, its effect on comedy’s core, which is already subjectivity, is to dissociate comedy from substance altogether. The effect ultimately will be the same: modern subjectivity loosens comedy’s necessity and prevents it from depicting the reunification that sensuously embodies the Idea” (Moland 98). Modern drama aims to deliberate the obligation towards self-negation. In its attempt to make others laugh, the intentions are ridiculed. The characters are fixed in the mind of the audience so as to be counted really comical. The lack of unity in the comedy is articulate in a pretence-less and creative language. This is a subjective trend where the subjective sensibility is associated to the principles of drama.

Hegel not only deliberates on how comedy presents free subjectivity but also ponders on how it extends an intense rich image of ethically significant freedom. This ethical aspect of comedy is associated with existent social institutions and ways of life. Hegel’s perspectives on

comedy can be interpreted from his aesthetic point of view. His emphasize on subjectivity and specificity as fundamental to the theory of comedy and the demonstration of comedy is the disavowal of negativity or derision of an unsustainable location. Hence, he offers a transhistorical emphasis on the varieties of comedy. However, his classification is limited within his scheme as it negotiates with the structures formulated by him.

Coincidence, in comedy, is conditional and incorporated into the comic purpose. The cause being subjectivity because comedy embodies a metastructure which is substantial. Further, intersubjectivity follows rationality of alternatives in order to accomplish harmony of coincidence. Subjectivity is occupied “with the seriousness of solid relations and strong characters, while the tragic consistency of will and the depth of the collisions are so far mollified and smoothed out, that there can emerge a reconciliation of interests and a harmonious unification of individuals and their aims” (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 1203). The general platform for comedy is a world where a subject is configured to be the master of everything against which he is nullified. Against which he is counted nothing, he desires, accomplishes and fashions a world whose aim is invalidated by insubstantiality. Hegel differentiates between the laughable and the comical. The antithesis between impulse and flimsy action is not comic: “There is also the laughter of derision, scorn, despair, etc. On the other hand, the comical as such implies an infinite light-heartedness and confidence felt by someone raised altogether above his own inner contradiction and not bitter or miserable in it at all; this is the bliss and ease of a man who being sure of himself, can bear the frustrations of his aims and achievements.” (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 1200). The standard, here, is the conditions and impulsive nature of subjectivity, the irregularities of passions that fret in the person which contradicts the anticipation in individuals.

Hegel considers Aristophanic comedy as the finest because it emphatically carries forward social-critical task. Comedy, according to him, can perform art’s supreme task. Art marshals its central task taking into account the dynamics of the existing socio-political order. Comedy contributes to this central task through its presentation of an ideal image of a free subject. In this process, the characters maintain poise and “reveal themselves as having something higher in them because they are not seriously tied to the finite world with which they are engaged but are raised above it and remain firm in themselves and secure in the face of failure and loss. It is to this absolute freedom of spirit which is utterly consoled in advance in

every human undertaking, to this world of private serene cheerfulness that Aristophanes conducts us” (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 1221). When the protagonist endures through the odds, freedom assumes the dominant position as in the case of Aristophanic comedy. Consequently, comedy serves art’s supreme task by involving in the interests of humankind. Aristophanic comedy involves a specific presentation of a social motif. The varied aspects of the social world find vehement representation in and through Aristophanic characters. Hegel observes that Aristophanic “figures of comedy expose the general corruption into which the fundamental tendencies of public life” have forced upon and present “statesmen and their way of steering the state, war and peace, the people and its moral situation, philosophy and its corruption, and so forth” (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 1206). The purpose could be trivial and insignificant. Further, certain characters are incompetent of accomplishing compelling purposes because of their constraints of character. The social institutions are ethically and aesthetically impoverished. Therefore, they focus on social aspects that warranted to be censured. Hegel writes: “Aristophanes, for example, did not make fun of what was truly moral in the life of the Athenians, or their genuine philosophy, true religious faith, and serious art. On the contrary, what he does put before our eyes in its self-destructive folly is the downright opposite of the genuine actuality of the state, religion, and art” (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 1202). Comedy, with its presentation, is undeniably balanced in the presentation of the free subjectivity. However, when it presents the corrupt aspects of the society, it challenges the rationality of the world. It circulates in and through its presentation a vision of the world where freedom prevails. Huddleston explains: “art is not giving a rational argument to the effect that such freedom is possible for human beings, nor is it giving us a detailed portrait therefor. It is showing us the triumph of a kind of freedom, for which the character becomes a sort of avatar. It thereby gestures toward the freedom that Hegel holds in highest esteem” (235).

Subjectivity, in comedy, configures its own function conflictingly to bring things to nothing. It drives the advancement of the self and self-consciousness in contrast to objectivity. The comic self directs the energy to itself and to its desires. Fixation with self-specificity is differentially antithetical to that of the world and the extensive sphere which specificity ignores. Rotscher discusses Aristophanic comedy to explain the move from objectivity to subjectivity, dependence on tradition and objective significance to closure. Aristophanic comic motifs are a

conflict between “simple moral custom, shame before the law, in short unreflected obedience that recognizes the law and moral custom as ultimate and decisive without needing another authority” and a “subjectivity for which moral custom and law are no longer the highest authority and which instead draws determination from its own thinking and imagining” (Rotscher qtd. in Roche). Does this conflict transpire explicitly in Aristophanic comedies? Do they abstractly combat the singularity of ethical essence and objectivity? The self-delved into subjectivity relinquishes this stance. Subjectivity deposes objectivity with a proximate justification and decisive imposition of innate judgment. The foundation of Aristophanic comedies rests on the progress of subjectivity that reflects and interrogates. It results in the dissolution of objectivity and independence of tradition and state. Is this entwined with freedom? How is it determined by nature and the indiscriminate desires of the self? Is it the innate ability of reason and individual will that augment the mobility between subjectivity and objectivity? Rotscher thinks that “The purely formal nature of will, which we call caprice, can choose the lowers as well as the highest, the most moral as well as the most repugnant; it casts its lot with one or the other according to the contingent constitution of the subject” (qtd. in Roche).

Hegel’s reflection on comedy corresponds to a significant negotiation as he considers it as a conflicting genre. He recognizes the comical in “a personality or subject who makes his own actions contradictory and so brings them to nothing, while remaining tranquil and self-assured in the process” (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 1220). While Hegel emphasizes on synthesis, the expurgation of subjectivity takes upper hand than a coalescence of subjectivity and objectivity effected by chance. The comic correspondence between comedy and objectivity guides through a sequence of antithetical perspectives where the hero assumes an intuitive understanding of synthesis. Further, it becomes risky for the hero to achieve his goals owing to his incompetence and shortcomings. It is his desires that he follows along with negation and demonstration of a false purpose. This sequential moment directs the truth to lack and negation through resistance. These moments as “dialectical progressions, the thesis and the synthesis contain the primary moment, the antithesis the secondary moment: the primary moment in comedy is reconciliation; the antithetical moment is the elevation of subjectivity” (Roche).

Hegel positions comedy at the interstices between art and life. It represents subjectivity in its free form accentuating on self-determination. Laughter melts everything, including selves.



Comedy reassures subjectivity and self-assurance. We laugh at ourselves and with others. One who represents comedy rises above the vicissitudes and misapprehensions. Comic ambience entails subjectivity which configures its own functions antithetical to itself and remains self-assured. The antithetical nature arises out of incompatibility between actions and substance. When the characters lack substance and purpose, they fail. The comic encounters occur between values and norms resulting in incongruity and misapprehensions. Comic experience, being circular, enters into a short-circuited proceedings by exceeding itself through self-reflection and self-isolation.

## II

Comedy, according to Bergson, is focused at an instant when human beings become a machine. Laughter exists within the boundaries of “human.”<sup>iii</sup> It is accompanied with the “absence of feeling” (Bergson 4). Laughter is generated in an indifferent environment keeping the surface of the soul calm. It reverberates, we have to listen to it carefully: “it is not an articulate, clear, well-defined sound; it is something which would fain be prolonged by reverberating from one to another, something beginning with a crash, to continue in successive rumblings, like thunder in a mountain” (Bergson 6). The reverberation is transitory, it takes a circular and closed journey. This journey makes laughter collective. Comedy does not exist outside the realm of human. It has a social function of targeting audience. It is produced with specific cultural assumptions. Therefore, what and why things are funny is influenced by culture.

Attitudes, gestures and movements makes our body resemble a machine: “When we laugh at persons who are acting like machines, we do feel superior to them, and we are humiliating them, but that humiliation spurs them to think and act more flexibly, less like a machine. So, while laughter stings, it brings the ridiculed person back to acting like a human being” (Morreall 8). However, human being and machine are varied and discrete in its disposition. Life is complex that it cannot be reduced itself into a machine. It is precisely for this reason we laugh when life assumes the performance of actions without conscious contradictory intentions. Comedy transpires out of the impediment between the human being and a mechanical thing. Human beings respond to unexpected actions that remains inexplicable. Machine is predictable, the possibilities of the machine in the present and in the future remains unchanged.

When the difference between the machine and the human being is nullified, comedy emerges. Bergson writes, “The comic is that side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing, that aspect of human events which, through its peculiar inelasticity, conveys the impression of pure mechanism, or automatism, of movement without life” (117). Bergson’s anticipation towards freedom and openness among humanity function as an antithesis because his theory departs from integral subjectivity to attribute temporality. The opposing nature identified in subjectivity depends on transmutation of identities. Mechanization of humans veils the comic spirit as it restricts human beings from being free.

Comedy finds an intricate moment expressed in temporality. Temporality is the foundation of freedom because our existence manifests in time and there is always fresh and new possibilities. Our existence anticipates time, which we experience with a potential cliché. The innate temporality we pursue, often, become mechanistic so as to enable our life to face the challenges each moment we live. Consequently, we are free to perform differently from what we have performed before. Comedy is part of this action that attempts to free us from our burdens and anticipate to accomplish freedom. Is comedy translatable? Is comedy relatable? Laughter necessitates “social signification”<sup>iv</sup> (Bergson 8). Bergson recognizes a mechanical inelasticity in laughter. An external ambience is brought into play in any laughter. Therefore, comic is inadvertent. By emphasizing laughter as a social corrective, Bergson “wants to steer between the twin threats of selfishness and social conformism; he wants us to be individuals, in other words. By taking its distance, comedy in this way encourages self-reflection” (Donougho 212).

Bergson’s theory of comedy focusses on the manifestation of vitality, the progressive and generative life forces that disclose themselves perpetually through social interface is arbitrated. His central supposition is the following:

...something mechanical encrusted on something living. Here, the living being under discussion was a human being, a person. A mechanical arrangement, on the other hand, is a thing. What, therefore, incited laughter was the momentary transformation of a person into a thing, if one considers the image from the standpoint. Let us then pass from the exact idea of a machine to the vaguer one of a thing in general. We shall have a fresh series of laughable images which will be obtained by taking a blurred impression, so to speak, of the outlines of the former and will bring us to this new law: we laugh every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing. (Bergson 97).

The prominent ideas of Bergson's *Laughter* are the mechanical encrusted onto the living and what makes us laugh is a person who gives us the impression of a thing. The basic assumptions of Bergson on the nature of laughter are: a) we laugh at what is human b) laughter does not involve sympathy as humour is intellectual than emotional b) laughter is social in nature. Accordingly, we laugh when a human being behaves in a certain manner so as to appear like machine. Comedy is evoked out of a moment of transmutation of the corporeal into the mechanical. "At its humorous edges, the human begins to blur with the machine becoming an inhuman thing that stands over against the human being. This is why the feeling that often accompanies laughter is not simply pleasure but rather uncanniness. We often laugh because we are troubled by what we laugh at, because it somehow frighten us" (Critchley 56-7). Laughter attempts to alter rigidity into plasticity so as to reclaim the individual because it has the ability to fluster the target. Laughter initiates the individuals to reclaim their attitudes and actions into patterns of behaviour corresponding to the rhythms of society. Joke is not innocent because "it is structured around a certain disjunction between our expectations and the reality we are presented with, it always contains an implicit set of assumptions about what constitutes normal conduct or an acceptable way of life" (Butler 9).

Bergson segregates the basic components of comedy into group groups: a) automatism, rigidity, inertia, uniformity, repetition b) vitality, live energy, elasticity, changeability (Zupančič 122). These groups connect with life or the life instinct as the energy of eternal movement. The comic is inherently related to life, its richness, firmness and automatism over against the elastic and instinctual nature. Bergson convincingly encircles the comical into his "conceptual-matrix," life-automatism pair. He argues:

In the first place, this view of the mechanical and the living dovetailed into each other makes us incline towards the vaguer image of some rigidity or other applied to the mobility of life, in an awkward attempt to follow its lines and counterfeit its suppleness. Here we perceive how easy it is for a garment to become ridiculous. It might almost be said that every fashion is laughable in some respect. Only, when we are dealing with the fashion of the day, we are so accustomed to it that garment seems, in our mind, to form one with the individual wearing it. (Bergson 39)

Let us suppose, however, that our attention is drawn to the material side of the body; that, so far some sharing in the lightness and subtlety of the principle with which it is animated, the body is no more in our eyes than a heavy and cumbersome vesture, a kind of irksome ballast which holds down to earth a soul

eager to rise aloft. Then the body will become to the soul what, as we have just seen, the garment to the body itself—inert matter dumped down upon living energy. The impression of the comic will be produced as soon as we have a clear apprehension of this putting the one on the other. And we shall experience it most strongly when we are shown the soul tantalized by the needs of the body...” (Bergson 49-50).

Zupančič’s interpretation of the above passages is conceptually significant. Bergson attributes a sort of elasticity that is absent in the other theories of comedy. The association between clothes and body focusses on life and its relation to the soul assuming an inert space. Can it be considered dead? Does Bergson reclaim it so as to be considered universal? Bergson’s antithetical hypothesis reveals the comic opposition: everything that flows (flexibility, continuous transformation, absence of iteration) and everything that is static (inflexibility, homogeneity, iteration, automatism). Can this model be applied to every aspect of life? Is it a mechanical imposition of yet another binary? How overwhelmingly is it received at varied possible stances of existence? Within Bergsonian complex binary lies a simplified disintegrated dualism, a predetermined stance that is attributed to the comical. The comic mobility presents a basic contrast from the original intention. Therefore, it becomes problematic to decipher this duality. To present two autonomous yet heterogeneous groups of elements to define living beings is to normatively entwine with the comic. The borders of the Bergsonian suppositions are presumptive and abstract. In the relationship between body and soul, body (static, automatism) is defective. Accordingly, it is this defective aspect that corresponds to the comic or the laughter, however, as a device social curative: “The comic is that side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing, that aspect of human events which, through its peculiar inelasticity, conveys the impression of pure mechanism, of automatism, of movement without life. Consequently it expresses an individual or collective imperfection which calls for immediate corrective. This corrective is a laughter, a social gesture that singles out and represses a special kind of absentmindedness in men and in events” (Bergson 82).

The imposition of inelasticity and inertia is abstract and drawn off from the real life. Therefore, it can only violently yoke onto life rather than effortlessly relate to it. How does comedy get rid of the rigidity that is explicitly connected with it? Is the inelasticity naturally part of the Bergsonian comic duality? When life and machine are two opposite poles, how can it be imposed on the body? The two amalgamating into one is mechanical or is imposed into situation.



Further, Bergson highlights the role of imitation in comedy. When a person speaks, it involves gestures and in order to evoke comedy or to be funny, one imitates the other. How funnier a person depends on how well that person imitates. The person is funny when he or she imitates identically and indistinguishably. The response is mental because our ever-changing mental states follows this intrinsic movements. Bergson explains: “We begin, then, to become imitable only when we cease to be ourselves. I mean our gestures can only be imitated in their mechanical uniformity, and therefore exactly in what is alien to our living personality. To imitate anyone is to bring out the element of automatism he has allowed to creep into his person” (34). The supposition begins with the mental states and moves to inertia, iteration and automatism making it explicit about the material nature of the comic movement. Automatism is a condition where a foreign body exists in our “living personality” till we cease to be ourselves. The living personality within us makes us non-iterative as opposed to the foreign element. The corrective, Bergson mentions, limits the realm of comic elements. Nevertheless, the explicit automatism involves distinctiveness replicating our inimitability to bring out comic effect. Keeping intact the living personality, imitation extracts the mechanical aspect of life entangled within. Comic imitation encompasses the relationship between mechanical elements entailing elasticity and static nature of life. Can we circumscribe life to automatism? The hypothetical affirmation reflects identity and life to shape as an oblique and unseizable residue. Hence, the relation between comic imitation and life is that which is inexplicable and that which is not. ‘What life is’ is proportionally connected to what it is not. Zupančič, however, takes a different stance: “life is not (fully) reducible to itself which is why it does not constitute transcendence to all there is but, rather, a crack in all there is. It is this noncoincidence of life with itself that takes the form of a relationship, and it is this relationship that can occasionally strike us as mechanical. It is in this sense that the mechanical is intrinsic to life, and cannot be satisfyingly conceptualized in terms of exteriority as opposed and foreign to a vivid spontaneous interiority” (Zupančič 129). How do we locate the relation between the mechanical exteriority and the inner spirit of life? How do comic elements find its trajectory in relating mechanism and life? Is language the sole medium between mechanism and life? If the imperfections of language are exposed, the mechanical schematics could expose its inability to connect with life. Language, then, can prove deficient in offering the comic elements encrusted upon our spirit. The portending intentionality that clears

the barriers in the living offers the plinth to express itself and produce comic effects. However, this idea disregards the spirit that kept life with the guidance of language. The creative dimension of language, without any failure, augments the comic expression. The possibility of language, innately, remain creative throughout the comic movement. The comic collective of spirit and automatism of language is mutually productive in the configuration of the life.

### III

Freud's focus on the unconscious lays the foundation for a process that signifies opposing impulses embedded in subjectivity as a source of laughter. Laughter is not the consequence of inconsistencies within linguistic system but a reflection of incongruous self.<sup>v</sup> Humour attracts unconscious thoughts veiled within social communication. In this sense, humour is relational and subjective as it shapes experiences. Jokes can make public statements on issues that are not otherwise discussed (taboo), "a purpose being satisfied whose satisfaction would otherwise not have taken place" (Freud, *Standard* 117). Laughing is also a perceptible symbol obligated for "cathexis,"<sup>vi</sup> the accretion of energy enveloping an idea, so as to be dispersed in gratifying manner. Therefore, the joker preserves his psychological outlay as his pleasure is encased within this economy. "Our insight into the mechanism of laughter leads us rather to the introduction of the proscribed idea by means of an auditory perception, the cathectic energy used for the inhibition has now suddenly become superfluous and has been lifted, and is therefore now ready to be discharged by laughter" (Freud, *Standard* 148-9).

Humour involves laughing at oneself and recognizing oneself ludicrous. It is not disheartening but empowering and elevating. The childlike features of humour "possesses a dignity which is wholly lacking, for instance, for jokes either serve simply to obtain a yield of pleasure or place the yield of pleasure that has been obtained in the service of aggression" (Freud, *Standard* 163). Here, Freud follows Hobbesian "superiority theory" of laughter. Taking a shot at others to make a laugh is childlike. However, when we make fun of ourselves to evoke humour, we turn inward to look at our childlike, bantam ego in contrast to super-go. When we laugh at others, we find our self superior. Is it an unconscious aggression? Does it assert our ethical superiority? How does super-ego contribute to humour?

The normative precedence of laughing at ourselves than laughing at others engages in a self-communication:

We see how in him one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and, as it were, takes it as its object. Our suspicion that the critical agency which is here split off from the ego might also show its independence in other circumstances will be confirmed by every further observation. We shall really find grounds for distinguishing this agency from the rest of the ego. What we are here becoming acquainted with is the agency commonly called 'conscience'; we shall count it, along with the censorship of consciousness and reality-testing, among the major institutions of the ego and we shall come upon evidence that it can become diseased on its own account. (Freud, "Mourning" 256)

The rupture in and between the ego is an interpretive mediator in the presence of conscience. The ego not only shapes into an object but becomes an *abject object* paving way for super-ego. In this process of subject transforming itself into an *abject object*, the inherent melancholy takes precedence.

Joke, in Freudian psychoanalysis, discloses the hind side of the socially configured rationality. Freud identifies joke as an instance of "parapraxis"<sup>vii</sup> (similar to the unconscious expression of repressed thoughts). Jokes, like dreams, include compelling messages about unconscious thoughts and the features of reticence. The production of a joke is a mode of transacting the psychological frontiers between the conscious and the unconscious. Jokes transpire out of nowhere but carry messages from the unconscious. A joke "has quite outstandingly the characteristic of being a notion that has occurred to us 'involuntarily'. What happens is not that we know a moment beforehand what joke we are going to make, and that all it then needs is to be clothed in words. We have an indefinable feeling, rather, which I can best compare with an 'absence', a sudden release of intellectual tension, and then all at once the joke is there—as rule ready clothed in words" (Freud, *Jokes* 167). It is an involuntary act that encompasses unexpected formations and explanations.

The unconscious process implicated in the making of jokes are similar to dreaming. Desires and impulses are repressed from consciousness in dreaming. They are percolated through the active unconscious part of the psyche and deprived of their agreement to social delimitations upon ethically suitable norms and behaviours. Joke comes to its creator out of nothing indicating their appearance from the unconscious mind. It transforms undesirable impulses and desires into pleasurable impulses and desires by substituting vulgarity with laughter. Dream and jokes

employ similar psychic elements (condensation, displacement and incidental representation) to induce these transformations:<sup>viii</sup>

We know a dream from what seems as a rule a fragmentary memory of it which we have after waking. It appears as a mesh-work of sense-impressions, mostly visual but also of other kinds, which have simulated an experience, and with which thought-processes ('knowledge' in the dream) and expressions of affect may be mingled. What we thus remember of the dream I call 'the dream's manifest content'. It is often entirely absurd and confused - sometimes only the one or the other. But even if it is quite coherent, as it is in the case of some anxiety-dreams, it confronts our mental life as something alien, for whose origin one cannot in any way account. The explanation of these characteristics of dreams has hitherto been looked for in dreams themselves, by regarding them as indications of a disordered, dissociated and so to say 'sleepy' activity of the nervous elements.

By comparing joke-work with dream-work, Freud explains the "process through which perceptions, drives, and affects are pulled into the unconscious resulting in the creation of jokes, of moments of disinhibition, of pleasure, and of controlled as well as uncontrolled laughter" (Newirth 558). Dreams and jokes are two different mental functions. While dream remains asocial in its production and communication, jokes are connected to everyday life and persons around us. Dreams remain incomprehensible. The intersection between dreams and joke is pithily conveyed in Freud's description of preconscious thought and its unconscious reclamation in the formation of a joke. However, "unlike a dream, a joke does not attempt to disguise its displaced "allusions" so strenuously, for such elaborate disguises would only stifle the joke's humour. Thus a typical dream, when properly interpreted, seems like a bad joke" (Sulloway 357). Jokes are formed in the unconscious and serve the purpose of the unconscious. It is social and the aim of jokes is to give pleasure. The condition of deciphering a code is bound to the person involved in it. It can either displace or distort a person's understanding.

We remember very few specifics of our dreams: "The dreams we remember upon waking tend to be incoherent, bizarre, and even uncanny though they can become more accessible when we engage in some serious self-examination, analysis or discussions with others. Likewise, many jokes attempt to point to some of the little incongruities in our lives or to the larger absurdities that characterize human existence" (Gordon 51). Freud compares this with the briefness of jokes. Dreams and jokes involve a process of condensation. Condensation involved in jokes occurs in the unconscious and its progressions of thoughts. The briefness of jokes operates through



economy of words. Freud considers “play with words and thoughts, motivated by certain pleasurable effects of economy, would thus be the first stage of jokes” (Freud, *Jokes* 128). Displacement is the conversion of physical force from significant dream-thoughts during dreaming of the Other that is peripheral or non-existent. It includes, as in the case of jokes, restriction of objectionable ideas finding its way into consciousness and substituting them with acceptable ones. The consequence of displacement is “that the dream content no longer looks the same as the heart of the dream thoughts, that the dream reproduces only a distortion of the dream-wish present in the unconscious” (Freud, *The Interpretation* 235). Representation conveys connections like causativeness and antithesis. “To represent causal relations the dream has two procedures which, in essentials, amount to the same thing. When the dream-thoughts runs something like: ‘because this was so and so, then such and such was bound to happen’, the dream’s main way of representing this is to present the subordinate clause as an introductory dream and then add the main clause as the main dream” (Freud, *The Interpretation* 240). Dreams furnish rational associations with regard to synchronicity and proximity. However, dreams have no representations of this rational relations within the dream-thoughts. Jokes incline on representation through the antithetical and the use of nonsense. Humour is evoked in “saying the opposite of what one intends to convey to the other person, but in sparing him contradiction by making him understand...that one means the opposite of what ones says” (Freud, *Jokes* 174). The chance of recognition and proximity is an impossibility. The spatial difference recognized with others and the function is collectively embodied in the configuration of subjectivity. Consequently, comedy transpires out of the rupture and the fragmented relationship possible in the making of the whole. The signifier splinters the subject so as to accomplish perfection through proximity. The proximity of comedy recognizes its spatial and temporal specificity. Comedy, unlike other aesthetic means, moves differently with age and time. Badiou reminds that “comedy is always comedy of the present” (19). Comedy experiences what it endures existentially in specific time and place: “We laugh at gestures which, for no immediate reason, repeat themselves; at caricatures which capture an inner disbalance in personality; at involuntary acts; at rigidity in dress, manner, expression. The enemy is the mechanical; the weapon is the rapier thrust of wit; and laughter is one aspect of man’s struggle against mechanization, inertia” (Gunter 56).

Freud mentions three types of comic situations significant to the understanding of social and individual functioning: joking, the comic mode (circumstances that call for comic re/presentation) and humour. Joking is social in nature. Joke is sociological in its presence and presentation. A joke functions as an “event of universal interest” (Freud, *Jokes* 15). Miller observes that Freud’s inclination towards self-reflexive humour was socially grounded in the production of comedy. If humour is automated and spontaneous, it is disconnected from the body and associated with the “subject-in-society.” The singular nature of joke inclines on the subject’s creative and aesthetic capability to disclose the unveiled content. Appropriation of joke as social exchange connects the ability of the subject in presenting the joke artistically.

“No one can be content with having made a joke for himself alone” (Freud, *Jokes* 143-4). Joking involves more than a single subject: the narrator, the addressee, the subject. If the joke evokes laughter from the listener, the listener attempts to bring forth further laughter. This unshackles, provisionally, the dynamic cathected to an inherently exasperating psychical trajectory. The psychic energy employed to suppress emotions is unchained in laughter and cautiously reconfigured. We derive pleasure from this frugal outlay of psychic energy as a repossession of euphoric childhood. The discomfort of repressing/desiring instincts are assuaged and the restricted energy is transformed into a socially suitable dynamic, a joke. This hurried movement of desire with precise intertextual vision is life changing. The acknowledgement and response is a normative act characteristic of dependence.

Jokes are similar to riddles with semantic purpose and obligation. They anticipate a response based on intersubjective and communicable social relations. Jokes are configured by a conceptual association and method directly enclosing the object analogically. The intention of joking is to trigger the absence of the object’s response, being the impossible. Laughter is motivated by the acknowledgement of firmness of the mechanical in living. It acknowledges the right and admit the social inelasticity. In its attempt to redeem itself, the flexibility of life is ethically interlinked with rigidity, absence of feeling and indifference. However, jokes do not accomplish anything by ending or renouncing mockery. Founded on emotion, joking negotiates the mandates of reasonable criticism and the desire to reject pleasure in and through words and

nonsense. This negotiation generates the veiled and repressed foundations of comic pleasure accessible.

The pleasure derived out of joking is “purely aesthetic one, only in itself, its aim only in itself and none of the other aims of life” (Fischer 20). Nevertheless, Freud deliberates: “If we do not require our mental apparatus at the moment for supplying one of our indispensable satisfactions, we allow it itself to work in the direction of pleasure and we seek to derive pleasure from its own activity” (Freud, *Jokes* 96). The nature of joke is a technique that evokes pleasure as an obligatory motivation for deeper instinct. The consequence is a creativity bearing trails of the unconscious drives and phantasies of co-opted object relations. The cognitive result of a joke is incorporated as release antithetical to perceptible objects. Further, there is no cathartic release of subconscious desires. Tendentious jokes aim at deriving pleasure prompting response from the other. It topples hierarchies through discursive devaluation of the amplified and the exclusive:

Pleasure and laughter can come about only if the “saved” energy remains unused for other endopsychical work, and, hence, capable of discharge. This is why the pleasure derive from the new connection of ideas in jokes shows its effect as laughter not in him who constructs the joke (since the latter has to expand substantial energy in constructing and, then, in articulating the joke) but in the joke auditor, who enjoys an easy discharge of cathectic energy, “cheaply” obtained through the simple auditory perception of the joke. (Turk 108-9)

The one who jokes generates a sequence of symbolically intense signifiers passing through intricate psychical procedures where the preconscious thoughts are sunk and reviewed by the function of the unconscious. The one who listens to the joke derives the pleasure as a result of his linguistic skills represented in excess. However, the listener moves beyond the borders of a nonexclusive ontological space he/she occupies. The space involves a signifier composing an excess or plurality of signification which aids the listener cognitively.

In joking, the cathexis involved corresponds to the cognitive procedure perceived to be possibilities and “the energy saved is that of an emotion like anger or fear, which we realize is no longer required” (Gordon 44). However, for Freud, joke is the most social of all mental functions that intent to yield pleasure because it involves specific relationships with one another (See Trahair 110). It is a collective effort involving a mental procedure where the condition of intelligibility binds the possibility of incongruences in the unconscious through condensation and displacement. Freud segregates the conditions entailing comic pleasure, a happy mood is inclined

to humour. The presence of comic effect relates to pleasurable ambience creating a “contagion or fore-pleasure that increased receptivity to the joke or comic event” (Barron 135). It is through transgression a joke works: “Only when we rise to a society of a more refined education do the formal conditions for jokes play a part. The smut becomes a joke and is only tolerated when it has the character of a joke” (Freud, *Jokes* 100). Does smut evoke the comic spirit? Is it a form of entertainment? Reception of obscenity or smut as enjoyment transgresses the frontiers of polite society. However, when a joke is said, we fall back to joke-work, which operates in line with the dream-work. The dream-work disfigures a dormant matter and alters it into a manifest matter. Similarly, the joke-work transmutes smut into comedy.

Jokes revive the non-conceptual circularity and specifies portentous order that establishes our world. Our response to this is laughter. Precariousness and obscurity towards our world are manifested in every joke. Accordingly, joking is a Symbolic function manifesting the functional Symbolic. When we respond to a joke with laughter, we respond not to what it creates but also that it generates with and how it generates. The mechanism of joking is not mere configuration of joke but it is also the object on which the joke is composed. The techniques involved in the production of a joke creates “fore-pleasure,” which is pure and unrelated to the matter relating to the joke. However, the fore-pleasure creates a bad effect by diminishing our reticence. This allows us to negotiate with the joke so that we accept the content even when we do not want to respond with laughter. The joke generates a fore-pleasure which prepares us to bury our inhibitions and accept the content of the joke. This is a process of circular relationship with mutual consequences:

The point of their intersection, the point where the two dimensions imply each other, is the point marked on our schema by the (Lacanian) symbol *a*, the surplus-satisfaction as object that results from the signifying operation of *S1*, the corporeal dimension of the signifier existing, in the case of jokes, in the form of laughter. We must not forget that the success of the signifying operation, the triumph of the new Master-Signifier produced by the joke, is strictly dependent on this corporeal effect/dimension” (Zupančič 156).

The operative of a “comic sequence”<sup>ix</sup> is different from the operative of jokes. The rupture between the two is proximately interfaced with a surplus-object that remains with and indicates the difference through repetition. In the construction of a comic sequence, the signifying



elements are employed as a means for further establishment. The act of furtherance is a possible passage into further events to construct the comic sequence.

The preciseness of Freud's distinction between the joke and the comic emphasizes the techniques and how the physical structure from which they transpire. The relation between the two inclines on the correlation between sense and nonsense. While comic is a corporeal display of action involving the preconscious, joke transpires out of the unconscious. Within the borders of the unconscious, the circulation of energy shapes the pleasure principle. Energy flows unrestrictedly from one precept to the other aided by condensation and displacement. McGowan observes:

Within the structure of comedy, we identify with the unconscious and distance ourselves from our symbolic identity. This is why we experience comedy as a moment of liberation. Even conservative comedies free us from the regime of symbolic identification and grant us distance from the demands that allow society to function. To attend a comic play or laugh at a joke is to escape momentarily into excess, but this escape can never endure. If it did, the excess would transform itself into a normalized symbolic identity and the comic effect would disappear. The structure of identification and distance in comedy condemns comedy to a region of exceptionality. But at the same time, this exceptional structure contains within it a radical power to disturb our usual ways of identifying. (McGowan 141)

Freud's ideas on joke elaborates the disruptive nature of the signifying function in relation to the existence of the real. In this function, the signifier invokes questions and moments that are directed to its roots. The value of the joke "is its possibility to play on the fundamental non-sense of all usage of sense. It is possible, at any moment, to bring into question all sense, as far as the latter is based on the usage of the signifier. As a matter of fact, this usage is itself profoundly paradoxical in relation to every possible signification, since it is this usage itself that creates that what it will have to support" (Lacan, *La relation* 294). The scheme of signification and isolation of the signifier is indistinguishable because every subject can have fragmented and plural symbolic identities.

#### IV

"Comedy is the moment in which substance, necessity, and essence all lose their immediate—and thus abstract—self-identity or coincidence with themselves" (Zupančič 33). Zupančič's emphasis lies on the method of representation and the coupling of contracting positions. The essence is intricately woven into the subject in the moment when it associates

itself without which the representation is furthered. If so, how is the comic moment represented? Does the subject reflect another moment of the same substance? Is there a fundamental difference between the moments that expose the substance? Is there an interlude that appear or disappear with comedy? The central subject in comedy modifies its place. The subject represents itself and something other than itself. The functional self of the comic character associates with one's impersonation and also what one represents. This correspond a double movement by placing the subject in a position where the inner division takes place. Therefore, unlike tragedy, in comedy, we cannot anticipate the comic subject to represent the character of the audience and can responsibly identify the gap through which the character presents itself and what it represents itself.

Zupančič distinguishes between true and false comedies (“subversive and conservative”) based on the comic process. In false comedies “the abstract universal and the concrete do not change places and do not produce a short circuit between them; instead, the concrete (where “human weaknesses” are situated) remains external to the universal, and at the same time invites us to recognize and accept it as the indispensable companion of the universal, its necessary physical support” (Zupančič 30). The foundations of these comedies construct a character or a subject emphasizing on the concrete and the universal. The concrete and the universal cohabit following the concrete being with the crucial foundations of the universal. Consequently, we are put in a position to admit the materialist aspect without which it could incline to an “abstract ideality.” The functionalities discard the universals and the human presence to represent an intangible purity. To separate comedy from abstract duality of the concrete and the universal becomes difficult in false comedy. However, the objects involved in the configuration of the universal can be considered abstract. The model, then, presents the human side of representation by reinforcing the weaknesses through symbolic function and a reverence represented in the object of comic spirit.

True comedy does not allure us into a deceptive acquaintance. It has to generate an intrinsic materiality out of physicality and individuality. The body is the essential foundation of soul, an unbending faith on the corporeality. While the concreteness of corporeality falls to human weaknesses, it does not empirically generate the essence of the universal. The ego shapes itself into a comic object and stops functioning as identification of the given structures on the

hind side. The ego, then, constantly points to the human weakness in a process of identification. The difference between subversive and conservative comedies depend on the subjective comic process and where the “aesthetic ethics” positions it. The imitation of that thrives within the conservative framework which brings together the concrete and the universal to advance the ideology of the weak.

The veiled ideological nature of laughter is revealed here. The manner in which laughter shapes the ideological subject involves its consent to freedom. Keeping away from explicit persuasions, freedom and free will become the functional modes of dominant ideology. Is comedy ideologically complicit? Does comedy pose an intellectual resistance? Is there a subversive quotient to comedy? While disapproval, discontent and displeasure are supposed as moral lapses, there is a vehement call for “bio-morality (as well as morality of feelings and emotions), which promotes the following fundamental axiom: a person who feels good (and is happy) is a good person; a person who feels bad is a bad person” (Zupančič 5). The gap between sensibilities and morality offers decisive flavours to the ideological articulation of contentment. The efficacy of such rhetoric is dubious when the transmutation of all disappointments pose for a participatory future. The bio-morality substitutes responsibility with exploitation in the bare life. The explicit flaws noted here is followed by an inevitable obligation where success and efficacy are configured in a capitalist society.

The self, in comedy, is the “absolute Being.” The divine reappears in complete isolation of substance. The comic consciousness is not isolated from the self or the subject but is isolated from itself. The only functional dynamic, here, is to follow the self-consciousness. However, it is not the alienation of the self but the story of the “alienation of the substance, which has become the subject” (Zupančič 28). The concrete and that which belongs to the substance discard the universal leaving no patronage or concrete and allowing the comedy to alter its foundations. Human attitudes and universal values, therefore, reveal the universal at play but at the cost of individualities. Consequently, the basic scheme of comedy is configured in such a way that the universal impairs the universal and the comic movement can be considered as the negative energy, a movement that embodies the universal.

Zupančič couples her reflective definition of comedy with her understanding of comic subject. In comedy, the “universal at work” (27) discards any functional representation but

present through wilful performance. The contradictory dynamic that veils gods is the power used to represent gods and now the functional subject. While in epic, the subject enters the narration to be the absolute, in comedy, the subject becomes the universal, the functional, the significant and the absolute. In other words, the universal, the significant, the functional and the absolute become the subject.

Comic circumstances present an affable image of the ego where the fundamental aspects of intrusion is satisfactorily incorporated in the ego. Dependable comic presentations allow the situation to enthusiastically offer an elementary medium of the ego. The nonrelation between exclusive realities is a quip than a proper comedy. The parody version collectively accumulates with uncertain differences managed by momentariness. Personalities take significant place in the comic process because it is specific and exclusive. Comic characters are elaborated by the actuality defined by passion and its association to the external objects. They are not intersubjective but interactive and communicative. The formulation of interactive monologues exchanged between two characters transpire out of comic sense as it engages outside the subjects.

The basic difference that explains subjectivity, according to McGown, is the antithesis between lack and excess. The comic character becomes an articulate being through a significant lack. Language detaches from the subject a realm of elements and nullify any connection to the element that would satiate the subject's desires. The existence of the subject is uncertain, inadequate and fragmented within itself. Consequently, the subject desires a lack, the manner in which "we relate to the world, impelling us to seek out what we are missing in the world. The self-identical, non-lacking subject would no longer be a subject and no longer be capable of speaking. Lack is subjectivity" (McGowan 15).<sup>x</sup> Further, the subject is also an embodiment of excess. It associates itself in surplus with its elements and risks its subsistence. Human beings strive for excess. When excess remains veiled, it results in lack. Thus, it is this antithetical relation between lack and excess that lay the foundation of comedy. By transgressing the everyday normal, comedy displays the relationship between lack and excess as a chance. It lays veiled in our everyday life but fundamental to the configuration of our subjectivity. Hence, subjectivity is innately comic but "subjects plunge themselves into everyday life and its



separation of lack and excess in order to avoid confronting their traumatic intersection. Comedy returns us to the trauma of our subjectivity” (McGowan 15).<sup>xi</sup>

How we experience a comedy relies on our relation to lack and excess. Comedy instils in us an intimate relationship to lack and excess. If we fail to connect with the lack and excess, our subjectivity pauses in our effort to depart from lack and excess. This difficult relationship configures the conscious life relating to subjectivity and how we comprehend the possibility of comedy. Here, we find the indecisive political disposition seizing its composition in the trajectory of traumatic correspondence. Comic subjectivity does not cohabit in the subject fashioning the comedy or in the subjects or selves that appear in it but in the perpetual and inevitable encompassing mobility. This is why Zupančič considers comic subjectivity as “the very movement of comedy” (Zupančič 3). This movement does not encompass comic action. The tentativeness, ruptures, uncertainties, punctuations, disruptions, obsessions, fascinations and zealous connections configure the “object-related” nature of comedy. Comedy discloses our conflicting possibilities, our association with self and the Other in lack and excess. “When we laugh at comic moments, we enjoy the contradictory form of our excess and implicitly grasp its connection to what we lack. The contradictory nature of our subjectivity marks the birth of comedy” (McGowan 18). The uniqueness of the art of comedy inclines on the perpetuity through rupture. The perpetuity configures with disjointedness. The comic object enters into a disruptive excess created by comic movement by determining its functioning. It is circumscribed by the cause and effect of the comic movement. The rupture connects the comic object manifested in and through a “continuous discontinuity.”

The functional aspect of comedy is possible because of its transitory nature. When lack and excess are coupled together, it draws a comic connection to everyday life. Everyday activities lack humour. We are engaged with our routine jobs which often results in excessive activities. If a subject exceeds its excess or lack, there would be no comedy.<sup>xii</sup> Subjectivity is the fundamental condition on which comedy is experienced. It is not comic itself but the subject encounters an excessive object in order to accomplish its lack, which remains only a possibility. The subject experiences the object as it encounters excess or lack by its entry into comedy. Comic expression becomes a possibility through language. Language is innately comic because the existence of a being makes comedy possible. It “produces a lacking being that relates

excessively to an object that it doesn't have, thereby producing the model for the comic experience. Language distances the subject from the object it encounters. This distance creates the possibility of comedy" (McGowan 17).

The materialist aspect of comedy, its accentuation on the tangible and the Real of human shortcomings are paradoxical. The comic spirit is durable as it is knit with the comic characters by rising from the disorder that persistently follows the purpose of being themselves. The existence of a comic role is archetypally associated to the imaginary in order to represent the concrete universality. Comedy as reception of human frailties allows us to identify the banal in day today things and "when we wish to be pure discarnate spirit or pure discarnate intellect, the comedian asks us to remember the objective, material conditions of life with which we must make our peace, if we are to retain our sanity and survive. He will not let us forget that we are men, that we are finite and conditioned creatures—not angels" (Scott 113). The problem with such an outlook is that it does not consider the dual movement, one leading the pure discarnate spirit to its corporeality and the other to the abstract forms of discarnate autonomously. The material foundation of comedy reveals the condition of reality and our life. It is at this cross roads body is placed.

Zupančič explains why comedy is materialistic:

Comedy is materialistic because it gives voice and body to the impasses and contradictions of this materiality itself. This is the true incarnation involved in comedy. The body is not the limit of a "pure intellect" seeking to be independent, but the very point of its origin. If the materiality of the body is what stops things from going beyond a certain limit, it is also what sets these things in motion to begin with. Comedy is materialistic because it knows this, not because it counterbalances idealistic escapades with the limitations posed by dense material reality. The fascination with everything that is coarse and dense can be a way of avoiding a crucial lesion of materialism, which refers to the inconsistencies and contradictions of matter itself. Comedy is materialistic because it sees the turning of materiality into pure spirit and of pure spirit into something material as one and the same movement, driven by a difficulty inherent to materiality itself. (Zupančič 47).

In comedy, body is entangled with the incongruencies of materiality. Can intellect be contained within body? Can body be the source of intellect? What is the epistemological relevance of body in comedy? How can the autonomy of intellect be explored? The material nature of the body

cannot encircle the intellect which seeks to be autonomous. Therefore, the materialistic limit set is significant in circumventing the incongruences of matter.

When two excluding actualities meet, it results in impossibility. Comedy presents and represents this impossibility. The interruption that causes proximity between two actualities react and adjust the linear progression of the story. The actualities co-exist and the connection between them are expressed in a collective. Therefore, one should not diminish comedy to the deliberate ignorance of the comic character. The interruption and alteration from the real progresses to evade confrontation. Thus, it enables the contemporaneity evolved through the expression and sustenance of the actualities. The progress is possible through a limited and momentary collective expression.

Another important aspect of comedy is the motif of the double. In its basic form, it progresses in all possible alterations and perplexed identities. The motif of the double is the outline of the Ego/I into objective reality. The ego embedded in comedy is an object. The ego introduces itself with the I. The “I” is a specific identity introduced by the ego. It is the “to be” of the human and his/her expression. The basic locus of the ego meets “with its image is indeed this immediate reversibility of the position of master and servant” (Lacan, *The Ego* 265). Where does the ego progresses to? Does it progress to the place which it aims to reach? Identity is a creation, not the imaginary. Specific subjects do not exist as it is a collective of the assorted symbolic and imaginary processes and purposes. In a comic process, the imaginary is replaced with a singular subject constitutive of exclusive actualities. The connection between the exclusive actualities correspond the one who articulates the multiplicity of others. Comedy is not enveloped in “the imaginary One falling apart, splitting into multiplicity or into two, but begins only at the moment when we see how these two can precisely not separate or part completely and become simply “two ones.”” (Zupančič 77).

The comic expressions presented by the character is a mimic of a language. Comic characters thrive on the trust in “metonymic object” (Zupančič 83). The belonging of a character rests on humour and the trust which recognizes a possible interface resulting in satisfaction. The relationship is not bound by law but with regularity and stability. Further, the explication conceived by comedy is not inclined to an unbelievable formula that alter relationship by acclaiming the Other. This suggests that we do not believe the Other based on dependability or

consequences of trust in the Other. Trust, however, “is precisely what comes at the point of the lack in the Other, of the Other’s inconsistency and inconstancy. The subject thus credits the Other precisely at the point where the latter escapes reciprocity and predictability” (Zupančič 84). The belief in metonymic object involves the object of ingenuousness, which is validated without any relationship with the Other. It is not naivety that contribute to the comical but the staunch faith in the Other. This saves the comic subject from being the victim of naivety and makes it possible to find satiation.<sup>xiii</sup>

Zupančič identifies the belief in metonymic object as fundamental to the understanding of the comic. The trust on the metonymic object is a possible encounter of importunity and satiation. It is not an unbelievable equation that would alter the relationship by generating the Other but the trust exists in the Other. The subject attributes to the Other mutuality and probability. The trust of the comic subject on metonymic object encompasses ingenuousness, which frequently alters the unvalidated.<sup>xiv</sup> Naivety shapes a character comically by establishing the trust in the unvalidated Other. However, the excess comic object is not easily recognized as the object that plays the error so as to fix the protagonist in different moments generating comic situations. The precise comic suspense evoked are indicators of an anticipation formulated and upheld by the elements of possibility. Consequently, comedy is “produced on the stage in an objectified, material form, as object-symptom of a given situation. This manoeuvre is often seen as a transformation of a real and irredeemable difficulty into a mere inconsequential banality, an escape from whatever Real the Thing involves” (Zupančič 112). This validation is predetermined by the object that evokes the comedy and the comic object contributing to the subject of situation.

Unlike the positioning of subjective sense and purpose in its fundamental disconnection with the subject’s Master-Signifier, comedy assists as a collective of Master-Signifiers. In the passage from the schematic of jokes, Master-Signifiers pass the comic sequence so as to be iterated. Repetition is not an assertion; it is an indistinguishable response of the comic character with suitable consequences on the constancy of the Master-Signifier. Accordingly, comedy is the creation of “right” Master-Signifiers. Master-Signifiers, with its unpredictability and uncertainty, is not the substance of the comic situation but a critical and searching point where the character remains creative and is associated with other objects. The relation between Master-Signifiers and



the objects are constantly negotiated and re-negotiated in order to reclaim the comic spirit. Accordingly, comedy is the function established between Master-Signifiers.

The associations and recurrences inevitably result in a re-direction to the comic. However, in comedy, we are inextricably connected with the present. Present creates a perceptive connection encompassing the purview of comic characters. Therefore, comic experiences are not evoked out of the “past causes and future effects” (Zupančič 189). Comedy does not elaborate on the operatives but it unveils the nuances of subjective functionalities. The elements of the comic react in the present because they obligatorily respond to what happens in front of our eyes. Further it discloses “a radical contingency involved in this very necessity” (Zupančič 189). The indifference is why this aspect of comedy substitutes the cause-effect relationship and its temporal rationality with a collocation of varied objects and their associations is intricate.

Deleuze identifies three moments of repetition:

One is repetition in the temporal mode of “Before” (Avant), repetition in relation to the past, to something that has already been; it is mechanical, stereotypical, “bare” (nue) repetition, which does not bring about anything new and does not change a thing. It operates by insufficiency or failure (par défaut). A subject is confronted with this repetition when an action is absolutely too big for her. The second repetition is a repetition that always appears in some disguise; its temporal mode is that of “During” (Pendant), and it is a repetition that introduces a change (a metamorphosis) into the world. Here, the subject becomes equal to her act and to the metamorphosis it implies. The third repetition implies the mode of the Future, of what is (yet) to come (Avenir). In this singular mode the repetition separates what was created (in the second mode), the product, from its conditions and its genesis, and affirms this product as unconditional and beyond any kind of subject, as an absolutely independent entity, which is the embodiment of the novelty of repetition, of repetition as novelty. (Zupančič 168).

The first moment is the moment of comedy, according to Zupančič. It is dependent but anything that is created anew involves a “dramatic repetition.” Comedy does not signify the failures but opts for an obstinate and schematic endeavour to accomplish the comic spirit. The possibility of repetition is fundamental to comedy because it concerns a method of reclamation. Repetition, in comedy, is positioned differently from that of metonymic departure. It signifies alienation and repression as fundamental to the signifier that causes repetition. It does not arise out of flawed representation or lack of functional signifiers. Comic repetition is galvanized by the suppositions that appear on the object. The different elements created by textual repetition can be viewed as a

singular motive that integrates into a subjective purpose. Instead of confronting us with Real, it iterates ahead of difference and adds to the vitality of life. It is an automatic repetition of the subject's disposition and not the representation that reveals its destiny. The purpose of repetition is not mere subjective recognition but iteration of what occurs to alter the subject within representation. Comic repetition vacillates between the temporal position of the sense in the subject and the sense of the subject that is temporally placed. Therefore, comedy is akin to nonsense but takes an intricate turn to represent the impossible. What comedy encounters is the nonsense but with bunch of repetition and surprises:

Comedy is a practice that repeats and satisfies this demand—in the “laboratory conditions” of its genre, but not outside any relation to the Real. Comic findings and their endless repetition, the repetition of their surprise—all these constitutes a practice which does not stage the difficulty, the impediment, of the subject's relation to the Real, but repeats it. It repeats, endlessly repeats the schism of subject and object a (qua her being)—not so that the subject recognizes herself in this object (there is precisely nothing to “recognize” here); not in order to force a psychotic falling of the subject into the object; but repeating it at the very limit of their incongruence. (Zupančič 192)

A good comedy is a rarity. While the innate emphasis of a comedy is dispensing happiness, the proximity to feelings is naturalized with varied sociosymbolic associations. Therefore, it becomes normative of entertainment/entertainer to emphasize on positive thinking and the delicate sensibilities of our lives. There is no doubt that comedy accentuates on the fundamentals of humanity, its uncertainties, limitations and deficiencies. It summons and empowers us to recognize our frailties and finitude. Human nature is laid bare through comic characters. However, modern representations of comedy are channelized towards pathos, which detracts from the foundations of comedy. Further, representations of human weaknesses are employed to appropriate and validate theoretical speculations. Comedies are constructed, mostly, by striking a balance between logic and actuality of their circumstances. However, it is the comic characters that shape the impractical persistence on the inevitable, that which reasserts itself repeatedly the follies and excesses. Is comedy only about evoking a good-humoured representation of human frailties? Is it an account of how a human being is not/never a human being? Understanding comedy is understanding being human. Human coincidences with the finite and its intrusion with the importance of how human beings are interactive of the comic universe shapes the comic

character.<sup>xv</sup> Consequently, necessity is contingent because the plane of immanence refers to a situation that is configured beyond the substance of actuality. The indulgences of the immanent and the beyond among the human is heterogeneous and tangibly present in the comic spirit.

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<sup>i</sup> Hegel's presentation of comic nature can be found in Aristophanes' *Clouds*: "Its main protagonist, Strepsiades, is not motivated by substantial concerns such as family, state, or religion. His concern is himself—more particularly, his desire to learn from Socrates how to talk his way out of debt. His scheme is ridiculous and on some level, he knows it—a fact made obvious by his lascivious digressions, punning asides, and other disruptions of Socrates's (likewise ridiculous) lesson plans. His chosen means of attaining his ends are equally self-negating: despite his obvious intellectual limitations, he enrolls as a student in Socrates's Thinkery. When these limitations predictably defeat him, he enrolls his son, who, learning from Socrates that the gods do not exist, promptly abandons his filial duties to Strepsiades, beating and insulting him until Strepsiades flees his own house. The play ends with Strepsiades cheerfully revenging himself by setting fire to Socrates' Thinkery, negating his own attempted negation of the substantial order reconciling himself again to the old order" (Moland 88, See Harris 636)

<sup>ii</sup> The caustic space and laughter operate as an internal ambience of ideology. It is categorized by an arbitrary assertion that binds our self-governing actions. According to Dolar, "Laughter is a condition of ideology. It provides us with the distance the very space in which ideology can take its full swing. It is only with laughter that we become ideological subjects, withdrawn from the immediate pressure of ideological claims to a free enclave. It is only when we laugh and breathe freely that ideology truly has a hold on us—it is only here that it starts functioning fully as ideology, with the specifically ideological means, which are supposed to assure our free consent and the appearance of spontaneity, eliminating the need for the non-ideological means of outside constraint" (Dolar 307).

<sup>iii</sup> "A landscape may be beautiful, charming and sublime, or insignificant and ugly; it will never be laughable. You may laugh at an animal, but only because you have detected in it some human attitude or expression. You may laugh at a hat, but what you are making fun of, in this case is not the piece of felt or stray, but the shape that men have given it,—the human caprice whose mold it has assumed" (Bergson 3).

<sup>iv</sup> The social connection of laughter is explained by Hokenson: "As the social working through the individual, laughter is natural, it is not conscious reflection, and it is not just. Laughter forces up to the surface of the social group "the disturbing elements," the "slight revolt on the surface of social life," which the social corrects to readapt the individual to the whole, utilizing the bad with a view to the social good" (Hokenson 46).

<sup>v</sup> There is also a physiological relation to laughter: "Spencer attributed laughter to a physiological cause, proposing the flow of 'nerve force', internal energy that is generated by cerebral activity and which circulates in the body until it is discharged by muscular action, such as conversation, or respiration. On occasion, nervous energy will be displaced from its proper outlet and redirect itself in short bursts of activity such as heavy breathing, jumping up and down, or rubbing one's hands with glee. Laughter, like released steam pressure, is a manifestation of the internal redirection of nervous energy" (Stott 131).

<sup>vi</sup> Cathexis has two functions: "thing-presentations" and "word-presentations." The latter aspect of cathexis involves an intricate interconnection of relations that are dispersed and complicated. Cathexes "are conceived as literally charging or investing neurones with psychic energy. This notion carries over to the later models of mind where cathexes attach themselves to representations and functions and are intended to account for their salience or significance. This is, of course, problematic, but there is a way of conceiving of cathexes which discards the energetic dimension, and to which Freud himself was drawn" (Pataki 38).

<sup>vii</sup> Freud recognizes varied forms of parapraxis: For instance: "a) forgetting people's names b) forgetting something one intended to do c) slips of the tongue or pen d) misreading or mishearing e) losing or temporarily mislaying things f) bungled actions and accidents g) remembering things wrongly" (Snowden 79).



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viii “In order to describe this economic convergence of the two aims of minimizing displeasure and maximizing pleasure, Freud asked why the person who thought of the joke feels it needs to be told, and what psychic processes take place in the listener, versus the teller. In the teller of the joke, psychic energy is occupied in repressing from consciousness, for example, feelings of aggression towards another person. Through unconscious joke-work, the energy formerly occupied by repression is released, and the aggression becomes expressible, in a now innocuous form a joke. However, the first person uses psychic energy in the unconscious processes of creating the joke. In telling the joke to a third person, and making this third person laugh, the first person is able to observe the laughter of the third person, and share in a further release of energy through mutual laughter. For the listener, the repressed impulse is presented and released in quick succession, allowing for a rapid and intense experience of pleasure. For both the teller and the hearer of the joke, empathy and a placing of oneself into the thought processes of the other are essential for this procedure to be successful” (Christoff and Dauphin 1654-5).

ix The term “comic sequence” designates “the central modality of comic structure, since the term comedy implies a larger field—as a genre designation of a play or a movie it refers to its entire composition, which might also involve other things besides comic sequences—lyric sequences, neutral sequences, jokes...” (Zupančič 156).

x “Identity, similarity, sameness, one—these are all secondary categories which, according to Deleuze, do not enable us to think difference, but are themselves *products* of (the labor of) difference and of thinking difference, its effect. However, if identity, similarity, and sameness are neither the condition of being of difference nor the condition of thinking difference, they are the condition of its representation. (Our) representation of difference necessarily proceeds from categories of identity, similarity, or sameness (and further convokes the operations of analogy and opposition); yet by offering a concept of difference (one could say: by producing difference as a conceptual object), it chases difference from the concept itself. The difference that corresponds to the mode of representation is always an external difference. On the level of representation, difference always appears as a difference between two entities or two identities, whereas Deleuze would like to get to the inner difference that precedes identity. And this is where the elaboration of repetition in all its radicalism leads” (Zupančič 167).

xi “Every comic moment is traumatic. The enjoyment that comedy offers is inseparable from the trauma associated with making conscious and unconscious connection. Comedy forces us to confront, for instance, the failings of those whom we suppose to embody flawless authority. This authority secures the ground of our existence. Though we can laugh at this ground trembling, it nonetheless also delivers a traumatic shock. Or comedy makes explicit the connection between the act of eating and the act of defecating, a connection that might make it harder to enjoy a hamburger. Those how hate all forms of comedy and retreat from every joker they see coming are in some sense right. They recognize the inseparability of the enjoyment that comedy provides from its traumatic impact. There is no comedy without a jolt that potentially shatters the ground of our everyday lives” (McGowan 11).

xii “As soon as the subject obtains an object of desire, it finds itself diverted to another object that appears potentially satisfying. This diversion from the object is an effect of the inherent lack that animates the desiring subject. As a subject of desire, one unconsciously strives not to obtain the truly satisfying object but to sustain the position of oneself as lacking. The subject’s lack creates the very possibility for any enjoyment—any experience of excess—that the subject might attain” (McGowan 23).

xiii In her Lacanian interpretation, Zupančič suggests that “the subject is pinned to the Other, where she is pinned to the lack in the Other by her own lack. Trusting, crediting, the Other refers to and concerns this very point. For the subject’s trust is not simply something which comes to the place of *her* knowledge or ignorance, but concerns knowledge of the Other....those who are obsessed with avoiding all deception, and naivety, are precisely those who ultimately blindly believe that the Other *knows* exactly what she is doing, that is, perfectly consistent in her existence and actions. This kind of belief (or mistrust) is the other side of the belief in a full (not “barred”), consistent Other, the Other without a lack. Disbelief is belief in one’s own autonomy as guaranteed by the consistency of the field of the Other. And this kind of incredulity is ultimately a way of keeping the signifier of our own lack as far away from us as possible, buried in the field of the Other. As for blind trust, on the other hand, it is precisely not a simple belief in the Other’s consistency, but it brings something else to the fore: the noncoincidence of knowledge and truth” (Zupančič 85).

xiv “The paradox that constitutes the core of the comical is, rather, this: although the unshakeable faith in the Other turns out to be unjustified, or at least very much out of proportion, the comic subject is not simply a victim of his naivety; on the contrary, it is this naivety itself that ultimately makes it possible for him to come into his own—that is, to find some satisfaction. And this is precisely what strikes us as comical: not that somebody turns out to be a poor fool who naively believes in his metonymic object, although it is clear to everybody else that the latter is not in

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the least trustworthy, and that (for example) it is merely playing games with the comic character, leading him by the nose, but the fact that this naivety itself makes it possible for the subject nevertheless to find some—from the rational point of view—unexpected, “out-of-place” satisfaction” (Zupančič 95).

<sup>xv</sup> “The predominant contemporary concept of human finitude is, of course, also not simply that of reminding us that sooner or later we will drop dead and no soul will leave our body to join its heavenly Father. It refers—to put it simply—to limits and limitations of *living* human beings. Here finitude is but the emphatic notion, a Master Signifier of all that human life implies in terms of limitation, incompleteness, division, out-of-jointness, antagonism, exposure to others, “castration”; of impasse of desire, of two or more ends that never exactly coincide to form a perfect circle. It is about a chiasm that fundamentally determines the human condition. It is not also, however, that in this discourse, in the way it uses finitude as its Master-Signifier, that latter appears precisely as the closure of that which is said to resist any closure? This is most clearly detectible precisely in the redoubling of a description by prescription, in the passage from “We are limited, divided, exposed beings” to “Be limited, divided, exposed!” (that is to say, you must accept this)—whereby the latter constitutes the ethical part of contemporary thought concerning human finitude” (Zupančič 51).

