

***The Odd One In: On Comedy.* By Alenka Zupancic.
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Alenka Zupancic's *On Comedy* is a refreshingly insightful reading of the genre of comedy through the framework of Lacanian theory, while at the same time uses comedy to read some crucial components of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Overall, the text does a masterful job of both projects, and succeeds in demonstrating how profitably Lacanian methodology can be applied to cultural products. Zupancic rightly finds the comic field a rich area for this type of investigation, as the comic by its very nature, highlights the paradoxes of subjectivity and objectivity. After all, the question 'what is funny' is an inherently subjective question, however, to be successful, comedy must appeal to more than just one person. It is from this struggle of subjectivity and objectivity that Zupancic begins her study: "Comic subjectivity is the very movement of comedy. However...all kinds of fixed and passionate attachments are the other side of this same movement, and constitute a...object related facet of comedy. It is with the scissors of this double perspective that this essay ventures to conceptualize the phenomenon of comedy and the comic"(Zupancic 3).

The book is separated into three parts, each with a number of sections, and an appendix called "(Essential) Appendix: The Phallus", which plays off the multiple meanings of the word: the biological appendage, the essential signifier in Lacan, and generally agreed upon origin point of comedy in the phallus costumes worn by performers and participants in Greek theater and rituals. In "Part I: The Concrete Universal", Zupancic studies the overall theory of comedy as a genre. She begins with Hegel's valorization of comedy in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel is used to mark out the distinctions between the genres of the Epic, the Tragic, and the Comic. Zupancic's primary mode of analysis is the dialectic split between the universal and the particular, and the representation contingent to each. For example, Epic represents the universal to the particular using language, while in Tragedy the universal speaks *through* the particular characters on the stage. The comic then becomes the genre in which essence becomes physical. As Zupancic states, "in the epic, the subject narrates the universal, the essential, the absolute; in tragedy, the subject states the universal...in comedy, the subject is (or becomes) the universal...which is also to say that the universal, the essential, the absolute becomes the subject"(Zupancic 28-29).

In another dialectical insight, Zupancic argues that comedy is materialistic not because it insists on 'grimy' everyday reality, but rather because comedy "gives voice and

body to the impasses and contradictions of this materiality itself” (Zupancic 47). The conclusion of this section insists, against much contemporary thinking on the genre, that comedy is not a genre of the finite, but of the infinite.

In “Part II: Figures of Comedy”, Zupancic provides a practical Lacanian analysis of the various figures, types, and situations which compose the genre. The first section of part two explores comedies which circulate around the psychoanalytic split between desire and satisfaction, and the ego and the id. One result of this analysis is to define the comic type as an embodiment of the unary trait. The second section of this part explores the relationship between one ego and another, or between one ego and its image of itself. This section studies comedies of doubles and identity confusion. It is worth pointing out that Zupancic applies Lacanian theory in a clear and readable manner which even readers without a prior engagement with Lacan’s ideas will be able to understand.

Zupancic’s deft application of Lacanian theory to read comedy, while at the same time using comedy to highlight the importance of psychoanalytic thought, is on display in “Part III: Conceptualizations” in which she examines such concepts as drive, repetition, and Lacan’s three registers of the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Take for example the insight “the comic can be a very good introduction to the psychoanalytic notion of the drive: the bottom line of both is that repetition is life, or perhaps more precisely that life is the inherent gap opened up by repetition itself”(Zupancic 140).

The final part, “Essential Appendix: The Phallus” begins with an analysis of Plato’s *Symposium* and the fact that it is the comic Aristophanes who presents the discourse on love, and uses Lacan’s reading of Aristophanes speech –that this original image of a unity split into two is really a myth of the original loss suffered by all speaking subjects--to connect love and comedy. A rich reading of Lacan’s concept of the phallus and castration leads Zupancic to a culmination of the importance of the genre of comedy: it is both subversive of the currently existing symbolic, and the very possibility of human generative power to replace it. She writes: “Comedy thrives on these impasses as the very stuff of which the social fabric is made. To define comedy as the genre of the copula is in fact to place it at the most sensitive and precarious point of this fabric, the point where it is being generated and regenerated, torn apart and fused together, solidified and transformed”(Zupancic 216). Overall, Zupancic’s *The Odd One In: On Comedy* is a worthwhile text. Those interested in comedy, philosophy, popular culture, and psychoanalysis will find this an enjoyable and insightful read.