

CALL FOR CHAPTER PROPOSALS

Second Nature: Comic Performance and Philosophy

Co-editors: Josephine Gray (Iraqi Bodies) and Dr Lisa Trahair (University of New South Wales)

Subject Fields:

Philosophy / Henri Bergson / Jacques Lecoq / Mime / Slapstick / Performance and Theatre Studies / Film Studies / Comedy and Humour / Psycho-Analysis / Object and Manipulation Theatre / Laughter / Jacques Copeau / Commedia dell'Arte / Dance / Clown

For the early twentieth century philosopher Henri Bergson, the key to understanding the comic is to begin with an analysis of laughter, and from there observe the kinds of behaviours and comports that stimulate it. Yet at the end of his essay on laughter and the meaning of the comic, Bergson compares himself to a child playing at the seaside, wondering about comedy as a ‘warfare of the waves on the surface of the sea, whilst profound peace reigns in the depths below.’ The billows of these waves on the surface, he imagines, are like laughter. They

clash and collide with each other, as they strive to find their level. A fringe of snow-white foam, feathery and frolicsome, follows their changing outlines. From time to time, the receding wave leaves behind the remnant of foam on the sandy beach. The child, who plays hard by, picks up a handful, and, the next moment, is astonished to find that nothing remains in his grasp but a few drops of water, water that is far more brackish, far more bitter than that of the wave which brought it. Laughter comes into being in the self-same fashion. It indicates a slight revolt on the surface of social life. It instantly adopts the changing forms of the disturbance. It, also, is a froth with a saline base. Like froth it sparkles. It is gaiety itself. But the philosopher who gathers a handful to taste may find that the substance is scanty, and the after-taste bitter.

Is there anywhere a more eloquent acknowledgment of the failure of philosophy? From Aristotle’s lost second book of the *Poetics* until the 20th century, the comic act seems destined to elude our grasp.

Bergson’s lugubriousness about the success of his endeavour aside, we find much that is compelling in his small study of images of the comic and the social relations that form them than the elusiveness and effervescence of laughter. Even in the short passage cited above there is much to consider: the notion that the comic comprises an ‘unending war,’ that it commits itself to operating on the surface while emerging from placid depths, that its expressive nature defies conventional models of representation in forming itself by simultaneously describing the problem in which it rejoices, and so forth. What Bergson conveys most strongly is that to fully appreciate the comic, to dare ask what it is and what it means, one has to begin with simple observations, that philosophizing about the comic demands that one starts by analysing images by making use of our capacity to see.

While artists, philosophers, psychologists have long undertaken to observe the comic, for this anthology we are seeking essays on how the comic act itself is also an expressive and performative philosophical act that precedes philosophical conceptualisation. Human

existence has always used comedy to express the human condition – we want to continue that tradition by both looking at philosophies that have incorporated its operations into their theories and looking forward to suggest what comedy might mean for future generations and what such meaning will bring to bear on philosophy as we know it.

Second Nature: Comic Performance and Philosophy will be an unprecedented volume of philosophical essays on the comic comprised of newly commissioned essays. Like the nature of comedy itself, the anthology will bring together theory and practice, with practitioner perspectives featured alongside academic essays. To reflect the form's international and interdisciplinary reach, the book will include scholarship by leading and emerging scholars and artists from around the world.

Second Nature: Comic Performance and Philosophy will be a valuable resource for students, scholars, and practitioners alike in the fields of philosophy, performance studies, film studies, psychoanalysis, dance, theatre and comedy studies. The goal of the anthology is to provide a theoretical and practice-based framework for five aspects of the field:

Section 1: History of Philosophy and Comedy – investigations of both the historicophilosophical currents that engage with comedy and how comedy in all its forms has influenced philosophy.

Section 2: Philosophy, Comedy and the Body – studies of the body as medium of comedy as seen in *commedia dell'arte*, mime and physical theatre.

Section 3: Philosophy, Comedy and Film – writing on the philosophy of film and especially on cinematic slapstick, film-clowns and the non-verbal comic expression of silent film.

Section 4: Psychoanalysis and Comedy – examinations of both contemporary and 20th century currents in psychoanalysis that define humour, the comic, the joke and comedy as integral aspects of human behaviour.

Section 5: Comic Performance and the Philosophy of Tomorrow – cross-disciplinary research into the philosophy and practice of the comic act of the body.

We welcome proposals from scholars and practitioners with backgrounds in philosophy, psychoanalysis, film studies, mime, dance, theatre, performance studies, and history on the above topics, and in particular the following topics:

- Corporeal Mime and its Practitioners
- Henri Bergson
- Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, Jacques Tati
- Slapstick
- Hegel
- Nietzsche
- Bataille
- Aristotle
- Plato
- Object Manipulation and Puppet Theatre

- Jacques Lecoq
- Jacques Copeau
- Freud
- Lacan
- Anthropology of Gesture
- Clown
- Automatism and Automata
- Contemporary Comedienne Comedies

Interested individuals may propose chapters structured as conventional academic essays or practitioner reflections. Chapters will be 3000-7000 words in length (with word length set in consultation with the editors) and may include images for which the author will secure reproduction permission.

Please email a one-page essay proposal including a proposed word count and a list of proposed images that you would like to accompany your essay, along with your current bio by 20th of December 2018 to: l.trahair@unsw.edu.au and iraqbodies@gmail.com

The Editors

Josephine Gray is (with Anmar Taha) artistic director of Iraqi Bodies, a physical theatre group based in Gothenburg, Sweden, dedicated to exploring the links between movement and gesture, dance and physical theatre. Her experimental practice is anchored in the theory and method of Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugène Ionesco and Samuel Beckett, among others. She is a graduate of L'école Internationale de Théâtre de Jacques Lecoq and has a Masters Degree in Philosophy from Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, for which she wrote a thesis on the philosophy of comic performance in the work of Henri Bergson and Jacques Lecoq.

Lisa Trahair teaches in Film Studies at the University of New South Wales, Australia. She is author of *The Comedy of Philosophy: Sense and Nonsense in Early Cinematic Slapstick* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2007). She has published widely on film comedy and on the philosophy of comedy in journals devoted to film and the theoretical humanities and has co-edited several special issues of journals devoted to the intersection of film and philosophy. Her current projects include directing the Cinematic Thinking Network and co-authoring a book on Understanding Cinematic Thinking (with Gregory Flaxman and Robert Sinnerbrink).

Further information about them and their work can be found at:

<https://www.iraqbodies.com>

<https://sam.arts.unsw.edu.au/about-us/people/lisa-trahair/>

<https://cinematicthinkingnetwork.org/>