



## COMIC

The comic is a category connected to that of laughter, as a typically human form of expression, and to that of comedy, which instead identifies a specific literary, theatrical and cinematographic genre.

The comic is an effect that arises from things and human's relationship with them. A relationship that is organically marked by a gap, a disharmony, an impossibility of harmonious composition, from which a comic effect is generated. When this gap puts us in a position of superiority (Bergson's well-known statement) than we laugh.

All *slapstick comedy* (Keaton, Chaplin, etc.) is based on a comic gap of this kind: the subject finds herself grappling with a hostile and boundless material world, and with a praxis that she is unable to govern. But in the end, however, this failure to govern does not die, on the contrary it emerges moving towards a happy ending.

This gap can also concern a relational dynamic, as in the case of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, where we see at work not only the clumsy practical interaction with the world, but above all within the couple. As in the delayed awareness of what happens in their interaction.

Such unsuccessful, but never devastating, relational dynamic also concerns modern comedy and the communicative (and not merely practical) interactions of the subject with the world: *Play Time* by Tati is a notable example.

Therefore comedy arises from a gap and laughter is an expression of understanding of this gap and of the structurally "eccentric" character – as Plessner says – of human nature.

As far as the comedian is concerned, such gap is above all connected to the body, to its clumsiness or its inadequacy with respect to the situation in which she finds herself.

A central question is therefore that of the comic body, of the feeling we have of the body when practical integration fails.

The comic body also becomes the object of a specific representation, one that characterizes its grotesque representation. As Bakhtin tells us, the grotesque is an exaggerated representation of the

world, which has lost the harmonious and organic integration of its parts. This exaggeration triggers the comic effect because it calls into question the organic form of the world, which identifies the royal power and the hierarchical organization of society, mocking it.

The grotesque exaggeration of the world and its representation determines an effect of mockery and criticism of a near present, which a narratively complete elaboration is unable to take charge of (as Dürrenmatt thought).

Important examples can be attributed to grotesque exaggerations in painting: from Hieronymus Bosch's *The Fight Between Carnival and Lent* to Georg Grosz's *The Funeral*.

Italian cinema has been able to represent very strongly the world in a grotesque form, in a twofold direction: one that of the "pure grotesque" of medieval-Renaissance ancestry (great example are some films by Fellini), another of romantic ancestry, to return to Bakhtin, where the grotesque stops being regenerative and becomes critical and "black": all the great authors of Italian comedy and their "black" masks, from Dino Risi to Pietro Germi, Elio Petri, Marco Ferreri, Lina Wertmüller.

Next, but not coinciding with the comic, is comedy. Which is a literary, theatrical and cinematographic genre, which accompanies Western civilization itself, and whose first theory can be found in the few references that remain in Aristotle's *Poetics*.

It is certain that for there to be comedy there must be a plot. This plot can be associated both with laughter, when a comic effect arises from the plot itself, and with a simple happy ending. In medieval times, as the title of Dante's comedy testifies, comedy was linked more to the happy ending than to the ability to generate laughter. For there to be comedy, there must be final social integration (even with God, as in Paradise).

Naturally, this final social integration is accompanied by mutual recognition between the different characters. Such recognition presupposes previous misunderstandings deriving primarily from what is one of the great tools of the comic-comedy device, namely the mask. Many plot comedies are based on simulations and disguises, through which the subject puts her own desire to the test: from sophisticated comedy (Lubitsch, Hawks, McCarey) to 1930s Italian comedy (Camerini, Blasetti).

The mask allows the subject to play with her identity, therefore to discover the happiness of a non-total identification of herself with herself. A good part of the comic effect arises from the gap within the ego. The happiness of comedy (and therefore also its pedagogy) passes through the acceptance of reality, which is in perpetual becoming (as Frye says).

The comic mask attests to this, allowing the subject to start again without definitively resolving into a single plot (the masks of *commedia dell'arte*).

When the mask cannot be removed and coincides with the subject we have humor, the comic fixation which corresponds to the figure of the social opponent, represented by the *senex iratus* who opposes the marriage of young people (*Two Cents Worth Of Hope* by Castellani). The fixation of the "character" in comedy takes up one of the elements that Bergson declared as generative of the comic, that is, the "fixation", the rigidity opposed to the elasticity of life.

But within the comedy form (and therefore of a narrative architecture) we often have the onset of the comic exception and singularity, the mask that remakes itself by affirming the originality and vitality of the instinctual drive that disavows any social role. Such as for example Totò's mask.

Imagined both in the forms of comic exception and of comedic narrative architecture, everything that identifies the sphere of the comic is deeply rooted in the forms that mark everyday life. And as such, the comic and comedic forms have shown a decisive intertwining (both confirmatory and renewing) with the popularity of cinematographic art.

**Deadline for the submission of the abstract (150 words): February 18, 2024**

**Deadline for the submission of the essay: May 19, 2024**

**Essays should be expressly written for the journal and should strictly respect the following word limit:**

***Focus:* Min 5000 Max 6000 words (including spaces and footnotes)**

***Rifrazioni:* Min 2000 Max 3000 words (including spaces and footnotes)**

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