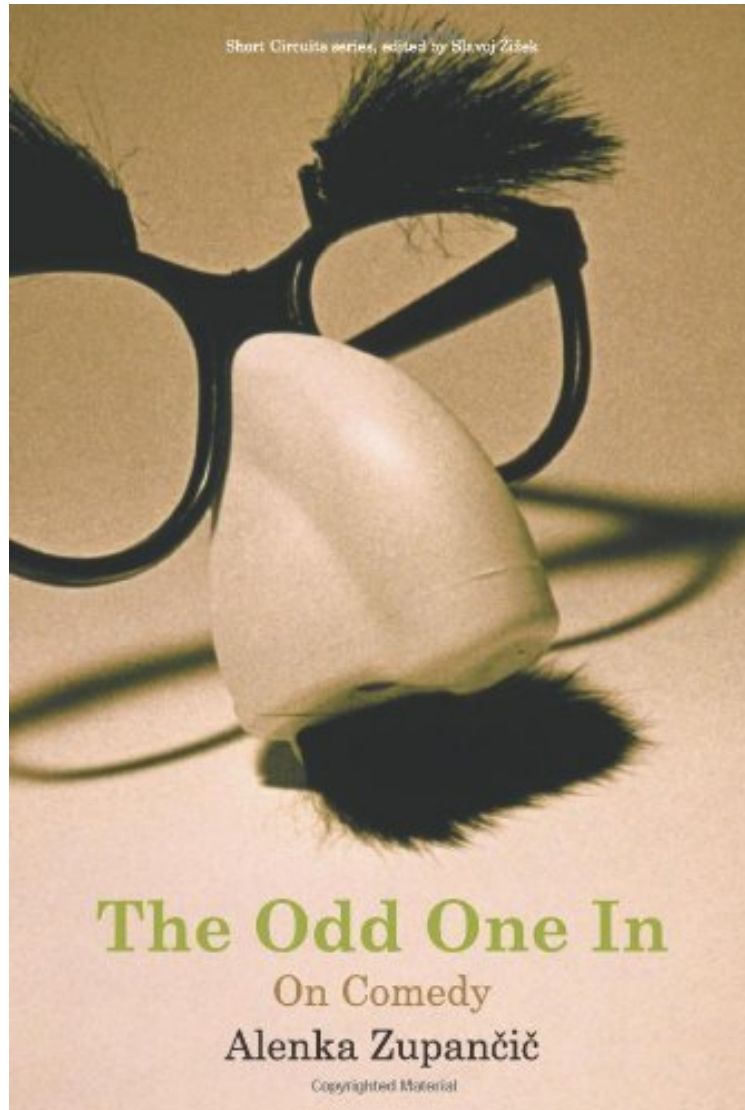


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The Odd One In: On Comedy (Short Circuits)

Alenka Zupancic

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Alenka Zupancic : The Odd One In: On Comedy (Short Circuits) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Odd One In: On Comedy (Short Circuits):

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Hegel and Bergson Revisited by LacanBy Etienne RPTThanks to Umberto Eco's best selling novel The Name of the Rose (and the movie based on it), everybody knows about the second book of Aristotle's Poetics, in which the philosopher discussed comedy and laughter, and which is unfortunately lost. From the antiquity onward, philosophers who address the subject of comedy and try to pin it down with concepts and definitions face an impossible task. Everything and its contrary seem to hold true when speaking about comedy, yet the nature of the comical constantly escapes efforts to circumvent it with categories and statements.

The proof of comedy is in laughter, not in the ratiocinations of philosophers. Aristotle's missing book notwithstanding, there are however a few canonical texts that provide milestones to the philosopher's journey into comedy's territory, and Alenka Zupancic revisits them in order to provide her own interpretation of the comical. The first such milestone is provided by Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which comedy is analyzed as the most spiritual work of art, coming after Homer's epics and Sophocles' tragedy, in a section devoted to religion. Hegel's focus on Aristophanes and Greek theatre plays contrasts with the author's own cultural references, which draw more on the Marx Brothers and Monty Python, not to mention George W. Bush's Bushisms and the film *Borat*. But the two philosophers meet in their taste for the abstract and the dialectical. Zupancic finds it highly revealing that Hegel discusses comedy and art in the context of religion, and that his passage on comedy immediately precedes his discussion on the mystery of Incarnation in Christianity. Following Lacan, who found Hegel's *Phenomenology* hilarious, Zupancic sees the Passion of the Christ as the ultimate comedy, which shows the concrete labor of the universal itself, or the subject as the absolute Being which has absorbed the abstract substance. In her own, deliberately provocative terms, "Jesus is the God that has slipped on a banana peel". Hegel meets Lacan in situating comedy on the ground of true materialism, in what the author labels a "physics of the infinite" as opposed to the metaphysics of finitude that acknowledges human limitation and the absence of a transcendent Beyond. If humans were "only human" and life "only life", there would be no comedy, and not much life to speak of. The truth is that "the human equation doesn't add up", and what is human exists only in a kind of excess over itself. The infinite Beyond is included in the world and in the human as "the heterogeneous element on account of which a man is never simply and only a man". "Object a" is the Lacanian name for this leak or flaw in human finitude. It is the comical surplus-object, the "something in himself more than himself" that Alcibiades ascribes to Socrates in Plato's *Symposium* and which is the object-cause of the subject's desire. The second text revisited by Zupancic is Henri Bergson's essay on laughter. Bergson's famous definition of the comical as something mechanical incrustated upon the living is grounded in his philosophy of life impulse (*elan vital*) as the pure elasticity of everlasting movement. Yet this dualism, which perpetuates the opposition between matter and spirit, body and soul, and so on, overlooks the possibility of this duality already being a retroactive effect of the comical, not simply its elementary starting point. It is the noncoincidence of life with itself that takes the form of a relationship between two poles, and it is this relationship that can occasionally strike us as mechanical. This allows Zupancic to offer her own conceptualization of the comical: it emerges from the structural dynamics whereby One splits into two, yet these two betray a singular connection and unity, quite different from the unity of the One with which we started. In Lacan's own word, "Witz restores to the essentially unsatisfied demand its *jouissance*, and it does so in double (although identical) aspect of surprise and pleasure--the pleasure in surprise and the surprise in pleasure." In comedy, not only do we not get what we asked for, on top of that (and not instead) we get something we haven't even asked for, but that we had somehow been expecting all along. This is why the previous review's title about Zupancic and Lacan tells the joke of the joke, repeating the structure of Groucho Marx's famous line: "He may look like an idiot and talk like an idiot, but don't let that fool you. He really is an idiot." 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Painting the moment of the joke By g.p.g. I've never given enough thought to what it is that makes me laugh at a good joke and Zupancic describes this moment perfectly. 15 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Doesn't look like Lacan, doesn't sound like Lacan, but don't let Zupancic fool you, she is not Lacan! By Lost Lacanian

The last person to do something interesting with Lacan was a French psychoanalyst named Jacques Lacan. What I mean by that is that either a contemporary author simply provides commentary on Lacan's work or they do something so interesting with his conceptual apparatus that the end product is something wholly original, something wholly their own. This new book by Alenka Zupancic achieves the latter. In *The Odd One In*, Zupancic uses the likes of Hegel, Freud, Lacan, Deleuze, and Bergson to come up with a theory of comedy. Now, by comedy, Zupancic will warn you, what is at stake is not what is funny. Although comedies can indeed make you laugh, what is truly comic is not bound up in tickling your funny bone. Rather, it is the otherside of the tragic. If the tragic names a way for relating to some fundamental Trauma, then, comedy names another way of relating--tragedy's otherside. For Zupancic, comedy takes place when One splits into Two, but instead of completely decomposing into to completely different ones, it is held together by some surplus object that was produced by the splitting action itself. The result is a One that is a One + one. Comedy happens when that One cannot be itself but tries nonetheless. So, while John Stewart is merely funny, Stephen Colbert is funnier; but the truly comic is Bill O'Reilly because only Pappa Bear tries to be himself. It is a well known fact that Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, makes reference to a missing book on comedy. That companion book was made famous by Umberto Eco who wrote a book whose plot turns on that lost book being found. But the joke is really on Eco because, like a Classical version of Andy Kaufman, Aristotle never wrote that book and he puts you on a wild goose chase in search of it. The founding gesture of comedy is that absent book. But, as you will find out when you read Zupancic's book, comedy means that at the end of this wild goose chase, you--to your own surprise--find what you were looking for. Zupancic doesn't look like Lacan, Zupancic doesn't sound like Lacan, but don't let Zupancic fool you, she is not Lacan!

Why philosophize about comedy? What is the use of investigating the comical from philosophical and psychoanalytic

perspectives? In *The Odd One In*, Alenka Zupancic considers how philosophy and psychoanalysis can help us understand the movement and the logic involved in the practice of comedy, and how comedy can help philosophy and psychoanalysis recognize some of the crucial mechanisms and vicissitudes of what is called humanity. Comedy by its nature is difficult to pin down with concepts and definitions, but as artistic form and social practice comedy is a mode of tarrying with a foreign object -- of including the exception. Philosophy's relationship to comedy, Zupancic writes, is not exactly a simple story (and indeed includes some elements of comedy). It could begin with the lost book of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which discussed comedy and laughter (and was made famous by Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*). But Zupancic draws on a whole range of philosophers and exemplars of comedy, from Aristophanes, Molière, Hegel, Freud, and Lacan to George W. Bush and Borat. She distinguishes incisively between comedy and ideologically imposed, "naturalized" cheerfulness. Real, subversive comedy thrives on the short circuits that establish an immediate connection between heterogeneous orders. Zupancic examines the mechanisms and processes by which comedy lets the odd one in.

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche proclaims 'long live physics!' as the motto of his new, post-metaphysical thinking, suggesting that only the careful study of 'everything that is lawful and necessary in the world' allows for genuine creativity in the sphere of human values. It is only with Alenka Zupancic's new philosophical study of comedy, *The Odd One In*, that it finally becomes possible to understand Nietzsche's paradoxical claim. For as Zupancic compellingly and beautifully argues, the physics at issue here is precisely a comedic physics of the infinite -- the true *physis* -- a physics, that is, that attends to the strange carnality of human subjects who not so much fail at achieving transcendence as keep tripping over the hole in their own finitude. This shift of emphasis from the 'tragic' to the 'comic flaw' in human existence opens up a world of new possibilities for thinking about politics, religion, ethics, and everyday life. (Eric Santner, author of *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life*) Arguing that our current 'feel good' society has cheapened the value of comedy, Alenka Zupancic brilliantly restores the genre's subversive edge -- that edge whose glint we glimpse in Brecht's insistence that 'If it's not funny, it's not true,' and in Lacan's statement, 'Communication makes you laugh.' Full of delightful surprises and profound observation, *The Odd One In* is itself odd in the best sense: unique, without peer. (Joan Copjec, author of *Imagine There's No Woman*) The publication of Alenka Zupancic's new book gives us reason to be consoled for the discussion of comedy that is missing from Aristotle's *Poetics*. Zupancic has written a book that presents a major new theory of comedy from a philosophical and psychoanalytic perspective: her ideas are both a contribution to the great tradition of comic discourse and a remarkably original intervention, with exceptionally powerful interpretive implications. This is the great theory of comedy that we have been waiting for, one that can make sense of Hegel and the Marx Brothers, Aristophanes and Borat. It is elegantly written, and spangled with extraordinary philosophical thinking and cultural insights. (Kennet Reinhard, University of California, Los Angeles) About the Author Alenka Zupancic is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Philosophy, Slovene Academy of Sciences, Ljubljana. She is the author of *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two* (MIT Press, 2003).