

## COMEDY'S TIME SPELL

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper, the authors intend to reflect upon the social time interrupted by humor, as a discourse recipe, and by comedy, as a performative resource. The incongruity of the significations produced by this stylistic form means a suspension of the tipification rules in the life-world daily interactions. These moments of suspension are designated by time out. In this text, the authors show how humour and comedy connect with common time and time out to reveal interpretation keys to disclose the intersubjective social fabric.

### KEYWORDS

Comedy; interruption; intersubjectivity; humour

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## O FEITIÇO DO TEMPO DA COMÉDIA

### RESUMO

Neste artigo, procura-se refletir sobre o tempo social interrompido pelo humor, como fórmula discursiva, e pela comédia, como recurso performativo. A incongruência das significações produzidas por esta forma estilística significa uma suspensão das regras de tipificação nas interações quotidianas do mundo-da-vida. Estes momentos de suspensão são designados por interrupções (*time out*). Neste texto mostramos como a relação do humor e da comédia com o tempo comum e com as interrupções revelam chaves interpretativas do tecido social intersubjetivo.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Comédia; interrupção; intersubjetividade; humor

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### INTRODUCTION

This article intends to discuss how humorous discourses, especially the performative exercise of comedy, present unique features regarding temporality. To achieve this purpose, two levels of analysis are considered. Firstly, the exceptionalities in the social routine time, taken from the concept of time out presented by Stanford M. Lyman and Marvin B. Scott (1989). Secondly, the specific times of comedy performance. To use that analytical framework, it is relevant to place humour and comedy in the field of Social Sciences, within the interactionism theoretical paths, from Alfred Schutz's phenomenology to Lyman and Scott's sociology of the absurd.

Social Sciences have proved that any given subject, as shallow as it may seem, turns out to reveal complex and puzzling phenomena. Social Sciences may fit the role of

deconstructing and disambiguate meanings aiming to place humorous discourses in a larger basis of social significance and to weave comedy performances with social representations of daily life.

Thus, it is necessary to find the proper time of comic formulations inside the phenomenological dynamics of humour, within the societies where it is produced. The need to decode the discourse meanings of social agents in daily life has led Sociology to pay attention to very detailed analysis.

Alfred Schutz (1967) claimed the need to rehabilitate the world of daily life within Sociology. This will to learn further about the minutiae of common life brought some more authors towards a Sociology of Daily Life, enquiring the concentration of sociological thinking in the big structural issues of humankind or an analytical shrivel to inequalities and social problems, claiming an approach towards real using a “rebel naturalism” (Machado Pais, 2015, p. 28) and a “sociology of the mundane” (Brekhus, 2000, p. 89). According to this line of thought, which looks for the sociological distinction of the small things, like conversations or actions, this sociology pursues the ideal of a much closer-to-life social science, more approximate to the daily actions that everyone perform even without being aware of that.

Laughter exhibitions and humorous manifestations are some of those tiny forms of daily communication which arise – even unwillingly – from the interaction between individuals. Laughter, humour, and comedy are socially and culturally shared in the procedures of social interaction and, many times, framed and placed within space and time-based borders.

It is possible to say that producing humorous discourses, with artistic and performative intentions, or in the casual environment of daily interactions, may be close to a microsociology of banalities (Jerónimo, 2015; Watson, 2015). The proponents of a sociology of the absurd also took a similar path, searching for an understanding about how individuals give and produce meaningful references in their daily lives in an ontological senseless world (Jacobsen, 2009; Lyman & Scott, 1989). A sociology of the absurd, thus, would be an existentialist phenomenology of daily life, trying to find cultural constructs of meaning in life-world interactions (Schutz, 2003) where, regarding the essence of reality, such meaning does not exist (Jacobson, 2009).

## **INTERSUBJECTIVITIES**

Schutz (1967, 2003) suggests the concept of intersubjectivity, defining it as how an individual has experiential access to another subject and how it constitutes a community of subjects in the intersection of those experiential accesses. The intersubjective world will be, then, created and kept by the commonsense knowledge that sustains the actions of social actors, as “texture of meaning has its origin in human actions and it was created by them, ours and our fellow humans, contemporary and predecessors” (Schutz, 2003, p. 37). Some authors, like Søren Overgaard and Dan Zahavi (2009) or Jonathan H. Turner (2013), postulate that intersubjectivity may be used to explain how multiple and

diverse experiences are able to produce and organise structures of meaning that produce social reality. Understanding these meanings focus its lenses in personal experiences, shared experiences, learning pre-given meanings, and initiating new meaningful behaviours (Overgaard & Zahavi, 2009).

Phenomenological theory shows that the way of consciously living life-world experiences is through tipification processes (Schutz, 2003), which play a crucial role in social life. Tipifications are continuous processes of arranging the reality, which help individuals to understand the social world, allowing them living and experimenting interactions with others and with the environment. These tipification processes happen with living beings, objects, events, actions, motifs, or thoughts. More, tipifications are made not only from direct interactions with people, objects or social forms, but also from those whom individuals have never met or crossed with (Mann, 2008; Schutz, 2003).

Schutz (2003) suggests that every individual is involved in social environments of intersubjective meanings, which are organised in spatial and time-based references. Thus, individuals experiment the world as a place that contains a set of different and independent zones of meaning. As an example, children's games, religious experiences, or humorous performances present unique time-space features.

The sense of safety and naturalness granted by those structures, properly settled in a pre-existent social order, demands an important element to the tipification patterns: the belief that other people have similar systems of understanding (Schutz, 2003).

Thus, it is possible to state that when a comedian goes on stage for a stand-up comedy show, it occurs from a tipification process which allows the audience to know that, in that space-time context, the discourse they will listen to will be humorous and its references shall be familiar to most of them. The audience go to a specific place at a precise time because they are aware that someone will be there to make them laugh, and it is exactly what the audience expect. That is why John Byrne (2002, p. 1) begins his handbook *Writing comedy* with "go on then, make us laugh!".

Anton C. Zijderveld (1983) acknowledges that humour should be considered as a play of meanings between several aspects of life. Humans have cognitive and social opportunities to play and game with the construction of meanings referring to their cultural contexts during their daily actions and interactions. This allows them managing forms of experimentation and negotiation in a shared manner. Furthermore, these plays also produce awareness to how social life is something constructed, and nothing is naturally ascribed (Kuipers, 2008).

## HUMOURS

Notwithstanding the hard chore of defining humour, especially because such task would lead to roads without exit or return, events or discourses can be considered humorous, either intentional or not, when they enable culturally shared cognitive experiences that provoke laughter and provide amusement.

Before proceeding with a concept proposition for humour, it may be helpful to differentiate humour from laughter. The latter is a visible biological manifestation, although

it may have invisible cognitive and social contours (Carroll, 2014; Critchley, 2002). Additionally, John Morreall (2012) distinguishes the sign (laughter) from the play (humour).

Although there was a myriad of definitions of humour, there is not even one that could be accepted by all disciplines, by all scholars and researchers. Some (Cohen, 2013; Walker, 1998) believe that defining humour is an impossibility.

Humour presents itself in diverse categories of forms and styles. Irony, wit, slapstick (performed or unintentional), ridicule, or parody are just some of the humorous known forms. These comprise a range of linguistic and rhetorical devices, as well as physical ones, use to communicate, socialise and interact (Carroll, 2014). People will consider messages as humorous when they are mutually intelligible and susceptible of provoking laughter, both for the speaker and the listener – or the writer and the reader.

Humour is a key to social cracks full of intersubjective discourse. In a symbolic fashion, humour conveys messages about social expectations, interactions and interpretations. Humorous speeches and their receptiveness are good signs of the cultural meanings, the social representations and even the historic and political context of one community (Jerónimo, 2015; Morreall, 2009). “No social congruity, no comic incongruity” (Critchley, 2002, p. 4).

## COMEDIES

Opposite to a general concept of humour, comedy is defined as “a play (or other literary composition) written chiefly to amuse its audience by appealing to a sense of superiority over the characters depicted” (Baldick, 2008, p. 62). Andrew Stott (2005), Eric Weitz (2009) e Matthew Bevis (2013) validate this essential distinction between humour and comedy.

Comedy is essentially a cultural performance that we identify both with forms of erudition and the cultural industries. In television, cinema, literature, or theatre, comedy is the humorous discourse transformed into an artistic performance.

Across the history of humankind, every faces of human life have been subject of comic stances attempting to illustrate both the common and uncommon situations of daily life. Although within the Western culture, comedy has its origins in the Ancient Greek and Roman cultural realms, it is necessary not to forget that all over the world there were recurrent forms of humorous interims, such as the roles performed by jesters, clowns and, more recently, comedians (Minois, 2007; Otto, 2001; Southworth, 1998).

As a possible reference to a conceptual autonomy, Nuno A. Jerónimo suggests that “humour describes an observation or a worldview, singular or collective, and comedy describes an experience and an ambiance” (Jerónimo, 2015, p. 71).

## FOLLIES

Before regarding contemporary comedy, especially stand-up comedy, there are some classical approaches to parody and folly from Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) e Roberto

DaMatta (1997) that are important to remember. Popular feasts included moments of humour and laughter as alternative reactions and perceptions, coexistent with the usual (and official) processes of interpretation of daily reality.

Carnival may have the role of a resistance alternative and a freedom sphere. Bakhtin (1984) considers carnival feasts as free and egalitarian community comedies. DaMatta (1997) looks for a dramaturgy of the Brazilian uniqueness in a universal ritual, so widespread that transforms individuality in anonymity. Jürgen Habermas (1992) recognises that Carnival may present itself as an alternative to the bourgeois public sphere. These ritualised forms of calling humour and parody allow a different, more popular, civic participation.

Bakhtin (1984), substantiated by José Mattoso (2012), describes medieval societies based upon the coexistence of two ideologies, fun and seriousness – which correspond to the “two cardinal attitudes in life – play and gravity” (Huizinga, 2003, p. 22). An official ideology, carved by scholastic and Christianity, profoundly circumspect, and another, unofficial and subversive, with popular elements that contradicted, by humorous stances, the guidelines of the official culture. The popular daily world presented like a second world, with peculiarities within the medieval official order, and ruled by specific forms of relationships:

officially, palaces, churches, institutions and private households were dominated by hierarchy and etiquette, but in the market people used a special kind of language, almost an autonomous language, very different from the language of the church, of the palace, of the court, and of the institutions.  
(Bakhtin, 1984, p. 154)

### **INTERRUPTIONS – 1<sup>ST</sup> HALF**

Michael Mulkay (1998) presents the idea of producing eschewed or dissimilar meanings, different from the usual discourses within a context and a worldview and labels it as humorous mode. In this proposition, repertoires of acquired knowledges, either scientific laws or common-sense beliefs, or logic, or sense of property, are suspended during the time contextually settled for the length of comedy or parody. “When the receptors are confronted with a joke, they do not apply the procedures of processing information adequate to serious discourse” (Mulkay, 1988, p. 37).

Thus, the audience presumes that the individual who utters the speech does it within comfortable and known expressed comic guidelines, which are supposed to be different from the meanings taken for granted and true. Mulkay also adds that individuals have the possibility of establishing interpretation and communication processes towards the incongruous experiences that come up in life every day.

Humour can be used to expose and express the contradictory aspects of life or can be used, simultaneously, to share experiences with other groups or individuals. Humour, precisely for being restricted to its own set of meanings, hardly ever replaces the

established order. Therefore, Peter Berger (1999) explains, humour needs well defined borders, in order to avoid outlying and anxiety, when it is expected to create fun. Rather, it helps to keep the social balance as well as to consolidate order. With a sexual joke, sexist humour may relate to the contradictory norms and expectations that guide gender social relations (Bore, 2010; Kuipers, 2008).

As referred above, phenomenology considers that humorous approaches and serious interpretations are quite differentiated. According to Berger (1999), humour has an intrusive attitude towards reality, like religion has. In his opinion, humour and religion represent limited fragments of reality, which produce worlds of meanings detached from the common life-world and they also operate with different rules. The lived experience in a comic situation or formulation promises a form of redemption by laughter. Berger's theory to understand humour comes from the constructivist perspective but also comes close to the psychologists' relief theory through a theological turn (Kuipers, 2008). Although Berger's idea resonates as healing humour, his confidence in the redemptive features of humour and laughter creates a particularly one-sided vision of humour.

The constructivist approach to humour interpretation essentially states that the reality of a humorous context parallels to a flexible contract between joke tellers and their audience. Humour interpretation is regarded as a form of social contract or a form of cooperation within a conversation between the two parts involved. In another words, a negotiated joke is a constructed joke. Interaction gains precedence in this kind of analysis, and the research focus moves from the joke content towards the interaction context. It is not possible to force the sense of humour, this should emerge from the processes of internalisation and externalisation. Norms of social behaviour, like listening without interrupting or smile at the end, may be included in this social contract – and the processes of social construction of norms are strongly connected to typified significations of time with noteworthy ranges and differences in diverse cultural contexts (Hall, 1959). Humorous interaction is, by the nature of humour, an interaction where normal logical rules are suspended, as occurs with many norms about conventions and taboos: “comedians and satirists push the limits of commentary on religion, race, capitalism, gender identity, sexual affiliation, the political system, stereotypes, and a myriad of other topics that parents typically teach their children not to discuss around polite company” (Lan-dreville, 2012, n.p.).

The social contract on humorous discourse requires that every participant in a humorous interaction understand the underlying conventions specific to the humour conveyed by each group, in a way that intelligibility do not turn into noise. This is a characteristic of humour that may contribute to the internal cohesion of the group. Just to recognise the distinction between a normal conversation and the beginning of a humorous discourse requires an intimate knowledge of the cultural environment. This may explain why translating humour from a culture to another may present serious difficulties, and often condemned to fail.

## INTERRUPTIONS – 2<sup>ND</sup> HALF

Notwithstanding the conception of time in physics (Rovelli, 2018), ontology (Baker, 2010), history (Holford-Strevens, 2008), and literature (Borges, 2001), this paper intends to reflect the intersubjective notion of social times, moments shared by a social group as owning structural features broadly similar, which, in some form, configure “the rhythm of social life that is the foundation of the category of time” (Durkheim, 1996, p. 489).

For that effect, it is taken into consideration the Lyman and Scott’s formulation of timelines (1989), in their sociological-existentialist theoretical approach to a sociology of the absurd. These authors assume that the perception of timelines is entirely subjective, and individuals may feel in a fatalist time track, or in a humanist one. The following focus fundamentally in Lyman and Scott’s theoretical propositions about lateral time tracks, alternative and parallel to common time, the ones that constitute themselves as variations and time-outs to time continuity. This reflection quests for a comedy framework within these times out of time. The analysis does not focus in the internal times of the artistic performance but tries to decipher the context where comedy folds conventions and creates a set of meanings with discourse autonomy.

Lyman and Scott (1989) present a set of three time tracks, paralleled with common daily life: waiting, time out, and withdrawal. Among these, is it important to focus on the second one. Humour is a time out.

The authors define time out as “a respite in activities related to a specific time track, a period when rules and roles related to that track are relaxed or revoked. During this time-specific state contradictory or irrelevant behavior may be carried out with impunity” (Lyman & Scott, 1989, p. 44).

Time out can also be used to distinguish discursive opposites, like “the serious from the droll, the sacred from the profane, the impersonal from the intimate” (Lyman & Scott, 1989, p. 45).

Similarly, the time out in modern day workplaces is coffee-break; and in some team sports, time outs are the periods of time when the match is interrupted to coaches give new instructions to the players. Likewise, humour is a time out in the daily life match, an interaction where individuals reconstruct social forms (Simmel, 1910) e receive new coding and decoding instruction, to apply to reality (Durkheim, 1996). In situations of performative play, these instructions are the contexts where the comedians’ jokes are uttered.

If humour is understood as an intersubjective process that comprises a denaturalised daily life, woven from the life-world tipifications, it is possible to conclude that humorous discourses show the ridicule and highlight the relativity of social constructs, of daily life, and of cultural structures:

humour transforms itself in a mirror lifted to everyone’s face, giving the possibility of looking into the world and themselves in such a seemingly distorted way, regarding the known tipifications. Humour reveals the path for social construction of what seems to be apparently real but is only really apparent. (Jerónimo, 2015, p. 26)

Humor, as one form of discourse in daily interactions, can be found in the same paths as the common conversations between people. Nevertheless, comedy, with its performative enactment, assumes more clearly its role of time out, aside from the common time track in which regular human lives intertwine.

Without this typified understanding that comedy assumes a time out format, it would fall in the ambiguous territory of post-modern irony. If there are no more linkages between acquired meanings and uttered discourses, there will be no sense of truth and falsehood. Such a world would be profoundly ironic, because no speech could ever be validated, justified or consubstantiated (Colebrook, 2004).

## REPETITIONS

After pessimistic reflections about culture (Adorno, 2003; Arendt, 1996) or about public speech (Frankfurt, 2006; Sunstein, 2010), some less joyful considerations were also made about the contemporary laughter (Billig, 2001; Lipovetsky, 1989; Minois, 2007).

The upsurge of humorous products and creators has filled the media in such a way that is impossible to control, either from the perspective of intervening on meanings, or from the receiver point of view, making it unattainable to follow and to know every single comedy product in every single medium and platform offered by today's technology. This detonation of humour, equally in public and private spheres, spilled over to every moments and facets of daily life, and invaded the most durable social structures. The pervasive impulse of the humorous phenomena embodies all spheres of social life (Lipovetsky, 1989).

A humorous society do not intend to desacralise, there is nothing left to desacralise. The trifle of laughter encourages the latter to consume itself in emptiness, in a flat world, unidimensional, where everything should be communicated with lightness and bliss, with no ethical worries about what is said, a kind of communication that Harry G. Frankfurt (2006) designates by "bullshit".

If institutional dimensions of life (the State, religion, politics, work) no longer have a serious character and were trespassed by the powerful waves of humour, the comic stance produced by contrast disappears (Minois, 2007). Thus, humour turns itself into a vaguely ironic, somewhat sarcastic, or even plainly cynic cliché (Hernández Sánchez, 2012), but nonetheless clearly irreflexive.

Humour in perpetuity is no longer a proficient method of blasting conventional ideas and ends up transforming itself in another one of the conventions that it previously used to deconstruct. What is left are automatic gazes, ritualised smiles for conventional jokes. Humour becomes repetitive and expectable (Eco, 1991). "The authentic laughter is gradually excused from the feast, and is replaced by the rigid, artificial and mandatory mask of laughter" (Minois, 2007, p. 641).

## CANONS

The intelligibility of the humorous discourse also comprises its timely references (and its non-timely, as well). Comedy, channelling its references to the ridicule features of the anti-hero, does not care with the historicity in its discourse, making those references often confined to audiences from the same epoch.

According to David Lowenthal (2015), the past is a foreign country. Thus, time distance has the same effect on humour as cultural strangeness. Opposite to the classical tragedies, which still provoke emotions after 25 centuries, Aristophanes' Old Comedy will hardly get the same kind of laughter that these plays received in the Dionysia festivals of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC (McGowan, 2017).

The immediate relation with the audience is intensified in stand-up comedy performances, which places it in the boundaries of post-modernity, with its negligence with the past and the future (Martins, 2011). Totally immersed in a present-only sphere that combines the historical moment, the geographical place, and the cultural context, comedy does not look forward to the future nor reflects about the past.

Even comedy audiences being contemporary to the uttered speech, that does not mean that narrative historicity becomes an element of the joke. Usually, comedy performances do not establish chronological orders – unless its required for the joke set up – and do not organise information in the usual telescopic organisation of time.

Humour compromises with the absurdities and ridicules of its time and place highlighted by the comedians' worldview. Before the tragedy of life, Michel Maffesoli says that this attitude towards present time "canonises the existent" (quoted in Martins, 2011, p. 123), suggesting no alternatives nor overcoming.

Humorous discourse, stuck in a fluid lack of historicity, surpasses reality without leaving the present. More accurately, without being in a time track. The presentism of contemporary societies, as Gilles Lipovetsky (1989), Michael Billig (2001) or Roger Minois (2007) have warned, may be the best nourishment to a society contaminated by laughter.

## STAND UP

Many truths are told as jokes and many lies in a serious manner. "A man may speak truth in game and play", wrote Geoffrey Chaucer (2003) in the "Cook's prologue" of his 14<sup>th</sup> century *Canterbury tales*. Those who use comic language, such as jesters, clowns, minstrels, or their historical equivalents, as well as contemporary professional comedians, are usually very popular characters across times and cultures (Apte, 1985; Minois, 2007; Sanders, 1995).

Robin Williams (supposedly) said "stand-up is the place where you can do things that you could never do in public. Once you step on stage you're licensed to do that"<sup>1</sup>. Experimented authors in comedy writing, as John Byrne (2002), Peter McGraw and Joel

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<sup>1</sup> Quote attributed to Robin Williams in several online quotation collections, without reference of time and place where it might have been said.

Warner (2014), or Double (2014), consider the stage as the comedians' primeval home, right there before the audience.

In the United States, the stand-up comedy genre developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from the popular American entertainment traditions, burlesque and vaudeville, which included slapstick, impersonation, and mockery (Todarello, 2006). Stand-up comedy grew in scale and sophistication after World War II, and became, within the American comedy industry, a very popular form of entertainment, reaching radio and television, nesting a large circuit of comedy bars and clubs, and more recently, hitting the world wide web and the digital realms (Lewis, 2006; McGraw & Warner, 2014; Sanders, 1995).

Stand-up comedy may be defined by three features: personalisation; direct communication; present time. The first reports to the presence of the comedian before the audience, be it a version of the comedian's self, or a cartoonish figure. The second one, regards to the relationship established between the comedian and the audience. The last one, the present time, is the comedian's coordination with the moment when the performance is done (Double, 2014, pp. 19-20).

Stand-up comedy, by its unique characteristics of authorship and performance, steps away from the humanist and fatalist time tracks, and appear very sharply as a privileged space where every intervenient is conscious about the interruption – time out – of the daily life common time track.

## SCREENS

Professional comedians occupy, in the contemporary world, an important place in the media arena and position themselves in the cultural field as relevant characters for interpreting social discourses<sup>2</sup>.

The "screen culture" manifests itself in its horizontality, a culture of everyone for everyone (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2010). On the same screen where we look at, there is the camera that stares at us. The huge amount of humorous contents of immediate access, like the Brazilian group Porta dos Fundos, or the special comedy shows on Netflix, allows the viewers watching at any time, any place, any device. Gilles Lipovetsky e Jean Serroy (2010) discussed how the cultural consumption of the global screen's second act turned out totally individualistic and personalised. This individuation is also accomplished by the mediation between time and technology, and each person's unique usage of online contents:

videos produced in offline spaces can be exchanged and shared only if placed in a new context (e.g. internet websites), thus being distanced from the original context and exchanged between people who live in different time zones and experience different timing in their everyday schedules.  
(Tsatsou, 2009, p. 14)

<sup>2</sup> This positioning in the cultural and social fields was not always positively seen. Plato standed that "such representations should be left to slaves and hired foreigners, no serious attention should be paid to them, and no man or woman should take any kind of teaching from them" (*Laws*, VII-816).

A curiosity that denotes the audience's power of adjustment to the terms of comedy, regarding the intersubjective perceptions of comedy rules, reports to the length of comedy performances.

*Duration* is the most widely shared implicit assumption concerning the nature of time in the Western world. It seems inconceivable to those of us who have learned to take this one isolate so much for granted that it would be possible to organize life in any other way. (Hall, 1959, p. 171)

Specials produced and streamed by Netflix come in three different forms, reprising the customary lengths of the cafés and theatres – sets of comedians with 15- or 30-minutes performances and special shows of one hour, approximately.

In an individualised streaming platform, one could imagine that the length of one show would suffer the same constraints as the classical television schedules, where a strict timetable forced time-checked shows. Only in those few minutes besides the hour that comedy specials (and some episodes of other shows) have can one notice a small reflection of the freedom these streaming platforms enjoy.

All comedy specials that Netflix originally streamed in 2018 had approximately 60 minutes. If not by any technical or schedule restriction, it is probably because of a cultural guideline, the usual duration that the audience is accustomed to in live shows and classical television broadcasts.

The channel *Porta dos fundos* on YouTube looks more like an example of freedom concerning comedy time. This may happen because they do not have to compile the sketches for a classic sketch show. *Porta dos Fundos'* sketches are released one by one three times a week, therefore there is no need to edit a 25- or 45-minute show. This is a significant difference to the 1969 BBC show, *Monty Pythons' flying circus*, in which the authors had to insert Terry Gilliam's post-surrealistic animations to fill in the time gaps so that every episode would last the time requested by the British network.

## CONCLUSION: PUNCHLINES

What if we would laugh, / Laugh about everything, so much / That because of so much  
laughing / We became tears?  
Alexandre O'Neill

The reflections presented in this paper are an attempt to frame humour as a discourse formulation of daily interaction and an intersubjective process of producing meanings that subvert the usual order of the life-world, however properly organised by tipification processes ensuing social practices which concern humorous formulations.

Humour is understood, in sociability spaces, as an alternative communication intervention. Humour occupies a time with a unique set of rules of pragmatic and style, recognised by everyone involved. Humour is an interruption to common time, a time out

period, and comedy, with its performative forms acknowledged across the history of art and entertainment, assumes evidently that condition of a time out track.

As a subversive time out, comedy takes the risk of becoming repetitive and of colonising the public sphere, and thus create a permanent condition of interruption, caused by an artificial humour locked up in its own iterations.

A permanent time out does not allow returning to common time, which, in turn, would become the real alternative and subversive discourse.

The risk for a public sphere in a state of perpetual parodical time out is the risk of a public sphere centred in its lack of temporality, the canonisation of the present endorsed by the typical features of the humorous discourse. It would be a society without time for historical thinking and reflexiveness.

Technologies promoted an individualisation of consumer practices in general, likewise for comedy shows, although they did not break up the direct relationship between the audiences and the performers.

Nevertheless, despite the changes that individualisation created, comedy did not lose its time-shaped forms to which the audiences are used since the old comedies in the Lenaia festivals. ✍

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