In-intelligent Comedy

One clearly has a taste for comedy, not all comedy/comedians are considered funny by all audiences. Some audiences are considerably more selective, unless under the influence very seldom does anyone accidentally hurting themselves on YouTube seem funny to the rational mind. To the contrary, it actually creates overwhelming empathy causing most people to switch/click away.

To the failed attempt at some bike stunt, some find comedy in the interpretation 'she/he thought they could do it, and they really could not', or 'this pompous person was overly confident and was dealt with in an interesting and exponentially painful manner'. To me this is nothing more than *Schadenfreude*, for how else are pioneers born if not by such trials? And ridicule at 'pioneering-actions' is a deterrent to innovation (I wonder if this is too much acumen to demand of the amateur comedic enthusiast?) Agreeably however, laughter is a medium by which one points out foolishness; however when the 'foolishness' of the act is unknown/unestablished, then this is only a hindrance, for with perseverance one can, depending on the situation, possibly succeed, is the takeaway point of this statement. If the 'common sense- simulation' of the act is the only measure for its outcome, then the result obtained in this manner is insufficient for conclusion, and does not deserve mockery. These failed attempts at stunts are the dominating comic medium for amateurs and as such can perhaps be forgiven, except for when such recordings create within the exploited person/person's well-wishers; lifelong emotional scarring. I am personally guilty of being possessed by laughter at select edited for effect videos of circumstance, and no amount of rationalism seems an effective deterrent. An unrelated argument with an ex-lover proved disastrous when one such edited video saw fit to steal vision at this opportune moment and put me into: what *coupling* eloquently described as the "*giggle-loop*". The more enraged she got, the more flamboyant the image of blind school children playing soccer to a tune with unique-emphasis on the singular kid running eyes shut and face skyward in determination-! mirrored in my mind. The evening did see resolution; however the social effect of perpetuating such comedy should offend the conscience and be realized.

Mockery however is the primary focus of most comedy nowadays, wasting time by offering nothing new to the intellectual senses than brazen use of uncreative enactment of over-worn concepts and phrases with the inability to articulate and find enlightening reasons/metaphors for 'comedic-situations', which to me is the definition of non-comical. It expresses no effort whatsoever in its presentation and no insights being offered into human behaviour. With ease one can find a handful of such comedians within the first minute of searching. Take for instance Trevor Noah and his 'Advice' to Americans following Donald Trump's nomination:

"Donald Trump just accepted the republican nomination for President, so I urge you to live every day like it's your last."

I ask, what comic ingenuity does this plain statement impart? Another comment around the same topic follows from O'Brian:

"Donald Trump says that if he is president, he will punish women who have abortions, although he doesn't yet know what that punishment would be. You know, aside from Donald Trump being the president."

There are a handful of such phrases that find generic use and are somehow rotated amongst the less talented comedians, which in my opinion, lay in majority. Comedy for me finds purpose in realizations, those which we do not see from an inside out perspective but from a collective external frame of reference, of situations within which we as humans place ourselves by means of some or other contradictory and perhaps genetic beliefs/mannerisms that prevail which are then presented in manner

unique enough to effect remembrance. Offering up the same phrases is more pandering than true comedy, and lacks the payoff of insight delivered in eloquence that only the most gifted of comedians find capable. Other rotations involve stereotype type comedy, that is, enactment/remarks involving gender, race and characteristics of those belonging to certain countries. A *South Park* episode pointed out once that given enough time from the onset of an event, one reaches a point where one is allowed to "make fun of it". Mass migration to America is surely one such event, and has over many years seen comedic concoctions of stereotypical behaviour exhibited by every race, gender and background of the American population. This is also true in South Africa due to its own vast demographic; many comedians have seen opportunity for comedy in the social struggles that prevail. The point is that this avenue too has worn-out in content and presentation and needs revision to effect further comedy, and evades the less talented comedian.

At this time, there exists **less than a handful** of comedians that are well read enough to produce truly fresh content and only **one** that I am aware of; capable of awesome presentation and depth and that is John Oliver. In my opinion, calling John Oliver a comedian is an affront to his talents. His ingenious stunts surrounding many social and political issues; forming efficacy for what I can only deem as a human moral compass makes him a journalist/activist and a capable one. The argument that: broadcasts are too frequent to bare originality and uniqueness at the same frequency, falls flat when one compares content by almost any other comedian to that of John Oliver. Prolific in this period, John Oliver has touched on topics ranging from: the death penalty, bail, 'unscientificness' of some major types of forensic techniques; to corruption amongst televangelists; highlighting epicentral issues in American society, and doing this in comedic-ambience serves the agenda of being heard. One can argue that in doing so; the issue might be trivialized, which in turn might defeat the purpose altogether! One would then only have to watch a single episode to understand the manner in which the message is delivered. Though the episodes are engulfed in humour, the points are brought into vision articulately and when in focus, the tone struck is a serious one. His bravery, especially in taking on cancerous titans such as big tobacco that threaten to sue him is, for lack of a better choice of words, inspiring and uniquely-genuine.

His genius can best be expressed by observing; if only just a few of his stunts. 'Jeff the diseased lung', 'website for bill-related voting' and 'the church of perpetual exemption'; are just some of his notable masterpieces. Respectively each of these stunts aimed either to demonstrate disobedience or silliness. 'Jeff', a diseased lung mascot was posted in Australia as an affront to Phillip Morris' challenge to plain packaging laws which failed in the Supreme Court and miraculously saw success in the international courts due to a creative technicality. 'Jeff' posters and t-shirts were distributed to bring awareness to the dangers of smoking, and the classic that was the *church of perpetual exemption* was a "church" registered to showcase just how easy it is to start a church and demand money in the name of God, the singular concept exploited by televangelists for gain. The stunt brought to close this episode with Oliver brazenly demanding money from the audience following characteristic comments as made by shameless televangelists. Aside from the comedic prowess, the point was as clearly demonstrated as possible. His signature move seems to be the highlighting of human error by rationally scaling down the thinking behind the error and ensuing production of a simulation carving out the clear visual statue of the resulting damage, which; but for a few simpler jokes is inspired. Very seldom have I ever experienced a 'jaw-dropping' moment and the gathering of popular *Days of our Lives* actors to express political idiocy surrounding refugees and asylum seekers, raised the bar spaceward.

Ricky Gervais is a serious contender, though not nearly as prolific in terms of content as John Oliver; his comedy can have a nose bleeding effect. His comedy finds success in his unique ability to cherry pick themes and 'things' to scrutinize. There is mastery in his deliverance and the timing is so natural that it's almost conversational and as such conveys a realism that resonates. A choice example of this is during his show *Animals*; after his thorough scrutiny of a book published; which covered the topic of homosexuality amongst animals; Gervais nonchalantly makes an observation: '**all** the pictures contained in the book forming proof of the claimed homosexuality amongst animals were **drawn**'. The timing was perfect! And shows his knack for deliverance. His themes are so fitting for his arrogantly bullying type personality, that

one almost experiences premonitions of what's to come. The arbitrary choice of a pamphlet as the poster theme for his show *politics* was so 'coincidentally' fitting that this obscure choice effectively touched on all the social-political ideas and ignorance prevalent in the homophobic era. Whether he accomplishes choice with careful consideration or not I do not know, nevertheless his choices are a perfect fit for interpolating all the comedic information that he chooses to convey and drove in a massive nail when the items on the pamphlet giving ejaculatory advice to homosexuals reached number 10: 'ejaculate out of a window instead'. I noticed his genius for the first time in *The Office*, which is the embodiment of 'less is more' that almost no other show gets and shows a real knack for observation of human behaviour and thinking; on his part. The themes are so relevant, plausible and enacted in a manner so realistic that the comedy derived is actually from Gervais' well explored use of real character traits associated with an intellectually facile individual with issues of social acceptance and popularity; within the plot. To quote an instance: *David Brent* decides to share a joke with a person of African descent only to later be called into the office of his superior for a disciplinary word for having done so. If one pays attention to his acting, they will find it to be so well orchestrated that feelings of wanting to 'escape the situation' are inevitable.

Gervais does not lack imagination in his ability to produce new situational-ideas lacking in most comedy writers. *Extras* is an example of an idea that only the exploration of *schadenfreude* can produce, and he easily brings it to life by getting the most famous of actors/singers to play along, and this is so in theme with the English sense of humour that the setting spells humour. The scene with *Danial Radcliff* making advances for sex brings to reality the fact that he (at that point in time) was 'only an adolescent teenager'.

Such comedy effectively presents the human ego and its possible transformations. There are in my opinion, three broad categories of comedic-presentation: Asian, European (including British), and American. New Zealand and Australia have seen a surge in their own version of comedy; however these share characteristics with that of European comedy. Generally speaking all categories differ mainly in presentation and behavioural traits being ridiculed and to be fair there is comedy unique to each country that other countries cannot offer. Though presentations/interpretations vary in Asian and American comedy, British humour distinguishes itself in a manner seldom found in Asian and American humour, and this is: depth in natural comedic realization. Much like Gervais, writers of *Death at a Funeral*, *Fawlty Towers* and *My Private Eye* (to quote a few); show daring-depth.

In my experience comedy in Asia is a means of making people laugh and the time spent in the underlying realization of what exactly is the meaning of 'comical' is not of any real concern. This does not mean that good humour is not produced in Asia; one need only see movies like *Just Follow Law* (Singapore) to see just how well presentation can form part of efficacy for humour. Sadly, aside from a few very original ideas such as *The Class* which showed such promise, pandering is the norm in America. To experience character-depth quality of comedy one need only hear *Kat* from *The Class* as she peeps through the door's peep-hole and exclaims: "I can't believe I have to watch this!"...

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