

Ludicrous Inbodiment

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The body has often been thought of as inherently comic, or at least as the cause of comedy. And perhaps this is reversible (though reversibility might itself prove to be entangled with the question at issue), for perhaps all comedy is bodily. There are two senses at least in which this may be so. The first is encapsulated in the Bergsonian claim that what we laugh at is a living creature reduced to the condition of a pure body, or a body reduced to the condition of a mere machinery: 'The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine' (Bergson 1911, 29). The second lies in the account of laughter, as the response to the comic, as a redoubling of this condition, as the properly reflective mind is given over to purely bodily forces. This reflex is visible, and risible, in Kant's analysis of laughter, as occasioned by a joke about an Indian amazed by the quantity of foam that comes from a bottle of beer:

An Indian at an Englishman's table in Surat saw a bottle of ale opened, and all the beer turned into froth and flowing out. The repeated exclamations of the Indian showed his great astonishment. 'Well, what is so wonderful in that?' asked the Englishman. 'Oh, I'm not surprised myself,' said the Indian, 'at its getting out, but at how you ever managed to get it all in.' (Kant 2007, 161)

Laughter is produced, Kant believes, by '*a strained expectation being suddenly reduced to nothing*' (Kant 2007, 161). Here, the strained expectation is aroused by the temporary enigma of the Indian's reaction and the expectation of some as-yet unapparent explanation for it, and released by the flatulent daftness of the explanation when it is supplied. The joke is indeed nowhere near as funny as Kant's painstaking explication of its workings:

For supposing we assume that some movement in the bodily organs is associated sympathetically with all our thoughts, it is readily intelligible how the sudden act above referred to, of shifting the mind now to one standpoint and now to the other, to enable it to contemplate its object, may involve a corresponding and reciprocal straining and slackening of the elastic parts of our viscera, which communicates itself to the diaphragm (and resembles that felt by ticklish people), in the course of which the lungs expel the air with rapidly succeeding interruptions, resulting in a movement beneficial to health. (Kant 2007, 162)

There is even something rather peculiar and even abstractly comic in Kant's grave opening assumption that 'some movement in the bodily organs is associated sympathetically with all our thoughts' – why on earth should this be? I have had occasion before to point to the importance of mathematics to the analysis of joke-making, in which something is made unexpectedly equivalent to nothing; Kant inherits this idea from Schopenhauer, and bequeaths it to Freud. But here there is also an internal alternation, or acceleration of the two-stroke engine of tension and release into a rapid and involuntary flicker: 'when the semblance vanishes into nothing, the mind looks back in order to try it over again, and thus by a rapidly succeeding tension and relaxation it is thrown to and fro and put in oscillation' (Kant 2007, 162). It is this oscillation that is transmitted to the body in the form of laughter: unless, perhaps, it is the very oscillation between mind and body, reflection and reflex, that causes this pleasurable shuddering. Kant concludes that '[t]his alone, and not what goes on in the mind, is the proper cause of the gratification in a thought that at bottom represents nothing [*der im Grunde nichts vorstellt*]' (Kant 2007, 162) The English translation I have quoted allows an ambiguity which is technically disallowed by the punctuation conventions of German, since in English 'at bottom represents nothing' can mean both 'at bottom does not represent anything' or 'at bottom represents Nothing'. The English thus allows for an oscillation between a positive and negative conception of nothing, or between a bodily nothing (whatever we might take that to be) and a mental conception of Nothingness.

There is a further point that we might notice about Kant's joke, namely that, although it is told about an Indian, it has the form of what is known in English as an 'Irish bull'. Indeed, this joke has been offered as an example of the genre. An Irish bull is normally defined as a joke involving an unintentional logical or linguistic blunder. There are many forms which this absurdity can take but there is a particular form of it which is particularly prominent in the Irish bull, namely what might be called body-paradox. This may be observed in the story of the Kilkenny cats, as told by John G.A. Prim in a communication to *Notes and Queries* in 1850:

I would feel obliged if any of your correspondents could give me information as to the first, or any early, published allusion to the strange tale, modernly become proverbial, of the ferocity of the cats of Kilkenny. The story generally told is, that two of those animals fought in a sawpit with such ferocious determination that when the battle was over nothing could be found remaining of either combatant except his tail, – the marvellous inference to be drawn therefrom being, of course, that they had devoured each other. (Prim 1850, 71)

Prim goes on to propose an allegorical reading of the story:

This ludicrous anecdote has, no doubt, been generally looked upon as an absurdity of the Joe Miller class; but this I conceive to be a mistake. I have not the least doubt that the story of the mutual destruction of the contending cats was an allegory designed to typify the utter ruin to which centuries of litigation and embroilment on the subject of conflicting rights and privileges tended to reduce the respective exchequers of the rival municipal bodies of Kilkenny and Irishtown. (Prim 1850, 71)

The story has also been formed into a double-bridged limerick:

There once were two cats of Kilkenny,
 Each thought there was one cat too many,
 So they fought and they fit,
 And they scratched and they bit,
 Till, excepting their nails
 And the tips of their tails,
 Instead of two cats, there weren't any.

Another version of the story was proposed in 1864, in which the absurdity is foisted on to another nation, the German soldiers from Hesse stationed in Kilkenny, who are said to have been fond of the cruel pastime of tying cats together by their tails and throwing them over a washing line to fight to the death. When an officer approached during the game, which had been strictly forbidden, a soldier swiftly sliced through the tails:

The cats of course escaped through the open windows of the room, which was entered almost immediately afterwards by the officer, who inquired what was the cause of two bleeding cats' tails being suspended on the clothes line, and was told in reply that "two cats had been fighting in the room ; that it was found impossible to separate them ; and that they fought so desperately that they had *devoured each other up, with the exception their two tails,*" which may have satisfied Captain Schummelkettel, but would not have deluded any person but a beery Prussian. (Juverna 1864, 433)

Because they involve bodily illogic - hereafter bodillogic - in which a body is imagined as simultaneously present and absent, the cake both eaten and miraculously intact, the fact of death is often in play in Irish bulls, for example in this example recorded by the Edgeworths:

During the late rebellion in Ireland, at the military execution of some wretched rebel, the cord broke, and the criminal, who had been only half hanged, fell to the ground. The major, who was superintending the execution, exclaimed, 'You rascal,

if you do that again, I'll kill you, as sure as you breathe.' (Edgeworth and Edgeworth 1803, 76)

One of the earliest books of bulls records this interchange: 'One telling another how healthfull a thing it was to live in a good aire, and on the contrary, how unwholesome to live in a bad, The other thus repli'd, what you say I know to be true; for I my selfe dwelt in the Fenny Countrey; vwhere if I had liv'd till this time I had beene dead seaven yeeres agoe' (Chamberlain 1636, 9-10)

One of the most well-known and prolific perpetrators of Irish Bulls was the Irish politician Sir Boyle Roche. One of the more telling utterances attributed to him is recalled in the entry for 'Ubiquity' in Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*:

UBIQUITY, n. The gift or power of being in all places at one time, but not in all places at all times, which is omnipresence, an attribute of God and the luminiferous ether only. This important distinction between ubiquity and omnipresence was not clear to the mediæval Church and there was much bloodshed about it. Certain Lutherans, who affirmed the presence everywhere of Christ's body were known as Ubiquitarians. For this error they were doubtless damned, for Christ's body is present only in the eucharist, though that sacrament may be performed in more than one place simultaneously. In recent times ubiquity has not always been understood — not even by Sir Boyle Roche, for example, who held that a man cannot be in two places at once unless he is a bird. (Bierce 1911, 354)

Bulls of this kind begin to be named as such during the 1630s, and to appear in plays and be collected and circulated in jest-books, among the earliest of which are Robert Chamberlain's *The Booke of Bulls* (1636) and *A New Booke of Mistakes: Or, bulls with tales, and bulls without tales...* (1637). Both volumes contain examples of bodillogic wit, including a brief comic elegy 'Of one *Parkins* a boone Companion in *Essex* who dyed of the rising of the Lights':

*Poore Parkins, now percust here lie
Light hearted, till his Lights did rise.
Lights of the Body, are the Bellowes,
And hee, one of the best good fellowes
That Essex yeelded, (all we know)
And breath'd, till they did cease to blow.* (Chamberlain 1637, 12-13)

'Rising of the lights' is, like 'percuss', a medical term, which refers to any inflammatory bronchial condition, such as croup or pneumonia. The joke plays on the mortuary alternation of lightness of heart or spirits, and the deathly constriction of the lights, or lungs, leaving poor Parkins, not lifted up, but lying down dead. The joke plays not just on lightness, but also on lying, since Parkins is dead as the result of a kind of corporeal mendacity, that his rising lights should have such grave consequences, to the point, in fact, of putting out his light. The joke is made better by the fact that the word lungs, which are now only called lights in animals, actually has the same etymological meaning as the word light, deriving from a Germanic root **lung-* itself from Old Aryan **lngh-*, in Sanskrit *laghu-* and Greek *ελαφρός* light. Lying and lying here converge on the body

Andrew Marvell's 'A Dialogue Between the Soul and the Body' depends upon some of the same paradoxes as operate in bulls. The poem may date from the 1670s, but seems to respond to the climate of witty paradox that attends reflections on the relations between the body and the soul earlier in the century. In Marvell's poem, unlike other treatments of the theme, there is no real dialogue, in that the body and the soul do not explicitly address their complaints to each other, nor is any resolution offered to their debate. The effect is to emphasise the cosubstantiality or parallel entanglement of body and soul. The soul begins by complaining of the constraints of embodied existence:

O who shall, from this dungeon, raise
 A soul inslaved so many ways?
 With bolts of bones, that fettered stands
 In feet; and manacled in hands.
 Here blinded with an eye; and there
 Deaf with the drumming of an ear.
 A soul hung up, as 'twere, in chains
 Of nerves, and arteries, and veins. (Marvell 2007, 63)

Feet are normally confined in fetters, just as manacles bind hands; but, for the soul, it is the feet and hands themselves that are constraining. The soul's dysmorphia is not a dissatisfaction with the particular shape of the body, so much as a dissatisfaction with shape or dimensional existence as such. But the longing to escape definition is defined by the particular form of its constraint; to be freed from manacles is to be given the free use of your hands, not freedom from hands altogether. The soul is doubly confined: in the dungeon of the body, and the oubliette of its bodily metaphors which insist on embodiment even in the means imagined as offering manumission from it.

The body groans in its turn, and in equivalent ways, of its spiritual Siamese twin.

O, who shall me deliver whole,
 From bonds of this tyrannic soul?
 Which, stretched upright, impales me so
 That mine own precipice I go;
 And warms and moves this needless frame:
 (A fever could but do the same).
 And, wanting where its spite to try,
 Has made me live to let me die.
 A body that could never rest,
 Since this ill spirit it possessed. (Marvell 2007, 63)

It is a little more counterintuitive to imagine how the body might complain of the space invader which is the soul. What, after all, we might wonder, might the body be complaining with, if not some principle of self-understanding, some feeling of being, that we are accustomed to thinking of as part of the soul's province? Surely the in-itself will always have to borrow from the for-itself to be capable of any kind of complaint? To my mind, the most brilliant conceit in the stanza is that about uprightness. Like the speaker in Sylvia Plath's poem, the body is vertical, but would rather be horizontal ('It is more natural to me, lying down'). The presence in it of its own self-understanding makes it fearful of the fall to which its own uprightness subjects it – the precipitation which is literally headfirst, precipice being formed from *pre-* and *caput* (neatly ironic that the body should have a particular apprehension for its head). The body's puppet-like animation by the soul puts it at risk of pre-capitation. Why should the body fear death, except through the apprehension of its soul-substitute? Yet the uprightness of the body is not an accident of its animation, for it is made, like a watch, to 'go'. The grudging curmudgeonliness of the body emanates from its own kind of body-soul (which is not its own at all, since it seems to be catachretically borrowed from its tenant). This all seems to anticipate the comic metaphysics of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which elaborates the absurdity of a drive to inertness and nescience, that wanting to return to an earlier state of things in which wanting is precisely out of the question. The body must needs enlist the soul in its need to have no need of it. The body can only wish to be freed from the soul once it has been entered and corrupted by it. Hence the nicely-wrought duality of the 'it' of the last line, which may be both subject (the body which unwillingly possesses the soul) and object (the body taken possession of by the soul).

All of this invertible inherence depend upon the possibly, for both body and soul, of articulation, and the language which both allows one both to make distinctions while making those distinctions indistinct (to 'articulate' in fact, a word which joins separation and joining). The soul 'fettered stands/In feet', but is also clapped in the articulatory cage of metaphor and metre. We might hear the words 'emancipate' and 'manumission'

in the way in which the poem contrives to tie its own hands. Emancipation is in fact a word of double intent, which, in the seventeenth century, could mean both to free and to enslave, as noted in Burton's *Babel no Bethel*, 'Emancipate, which is, to captivate ones selfe to another, as well as to free' (Burton 1629, 71).

Bodillogic jokes therefore often turn on the maladjustment of the body, the soul and the speaking signs that mediate them. So there are as many Irish bulls about people proclaiming their muteness as there are people living posthumously, as in the story of two men sparring, one of whom accidentally knocks the other unconscious: 'Have I killed you, my dear friend?' says the one: 'No', says the other, reviving, 'but you have rendered me speechless.' It is not just speech that produces these interferences of sense, as is attested in this story offered by Robert Chamberlain: 'A foolish Gentleman using alwayes to wipe his britch with the letters he received, having list to goe to the retrait called to his man for a letter; who repli'd that hee had none left, Then said he, take pen & inke quickly and make me one' (Chamberlain 1636, 32).

The joke here is what might be called the essential joke of the signifying body, that it can speak 'in articulo mortis', as it is put in Poe's 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar' – can articulate the fact of its own absence, at the very point, 'in articulo', in the very midst, the very point of the joint, the turning of the tide and the curling of the eddy, of its dissolution. Slowed down, the joke, the articulation in the body of the possibility of unbodied articulation, becomes a horror. In his 1973 analysis of the Poe story, Barthes dwells on, and in, the threshold state:

what is taboo in death, what is essentially taboo, is the passage, the threshold, the dying; life and death are relatively well-classified states, and moreover they enter into a paradigmatic opposition, they are taken in hand by meaning, which is always reassuring; but the transition between the two states, or more exactly, as will be the case here, their mutual encroachment, outplays meaning and engenders horror.

Barthes' analysis proceeds in a fashion which mimics the action of the narrative itself, by cutting it into separate chunks or lexias, in order to observe or articulate the transitions they vehiculate. Process and state are joined through articulations, the articulation offered by Barthes of a process of articulation that the text effects: 'we have not carried out an explication of the text: we have simply tried to grasp the narrative as it was in the process of self-construction (which implies at once structure and movement, system and infinity)'.

The body not only can articulate its time, the body is the articulation of time. For time to be articulated is for it to take the form of bodies. So there is no such thing as a wholly mute body, for all bodies – microbes, thistles, rivers, coaltits, mountains, planets – tell their time and are indeed, primally and ultimately, the only way in which time may be told.

Some of the more theoretical examples of allegedly comical incongruity go to the limit of what could possibly be thought funny. There is, for example, Schopenhauer's illustration of what he would have us see as a Euclidean joke:

Bearing in mind that for an angle two lines meeting each other are required which when produced intersect each other; that the tangent, on the other hand, touches the circle only at one point, but at this point really runs parallel to it; and if we thus have present in our mind the abstract conviction of the impossibility of an angle between the circumference of a circle and the tangent, but yet have such an angle visibly before us on paper, all this will easily make us smile. In this case, of course, the ludicrous is extremely feeble. (Schopenhauer 1966, 2.92)

But, improbable as it might sound, perhaps we might risk a further abstraction and say that not only is all comedy bodily, but all comedy is in fact also geometrical, or arises from a defect of geometry that may also be its perfecting by topology. Comedy arises, that is, from the Zenonian abrasion between the logical and the locomotive, the body conceived as a point-and-line phenomenon of pure space and the kinetic body in geometrically ungraspable movement. Comedy comes from the simultaneous inseparability and nonconvergence of the rational and the real. Comedy is the impossible possibility of being in these two places at once, as in Sir Boyle Roche's bungle. The same comedy of incommensurability is found in the fallacious assertion of divisibility in the indivisible, as in the story of the response of two Irishmen who have travelled on foot from Chester to Barnet, and are told that they still have ten miles to go: ' "By my shoul and St Patrick," cries one of them, "it is but five miles a piece" ' (Edgeworth 1803, 69), this particular example being defended by the Edgeworths against the imputation of being a bull, since it is 'only a piece of sentimental arithmetic [sic], founded upon the elegant theorem, that friendship doubles all our pleasures and divides all our pains' (Edgeworth 1803, 69).

Comedy is also athletic in that it involves the principle of reach. The most interesting example of the principle that the body is the means of reaching beyond itself is in fact the so-called out-of-of-body experience, first named by George N.M. Tyrrell in his 1943 book *Apparitions*. Tyrrell described the remembered experiences of a Dr Wiltse of Kansas, who appeared to have died of typhoid, and passed four hours without a detectible pulse or heartbeat:

He seemed to be getting out of his body, rocking to and fro and breaking connection with the body's tissues. He seemed to feel and hear the snapping of innumerable small cords and then, he says, 'I began slowly to retreat from the feet, toward the head, as a rubber cord shortens.' Presently he felt he was in the head and then emerging through the sutures of the skull. 'I recollect distinctly', he continues, 'how I appeared to myself something like a jellyfish as regards colour and form. As I emerged I saw two ladies sitting at my head. I measured the distances between the head of my cot and the knees of the lady opposite the head and concluded there was room for me to stand, but felt considerable embarrassment as I reflected that I was about to emerge naked before her. As I emerged from the head I floated up and down and laterally like a soap-bubble attached to the bowl of a pipe until I at last broke loose from the body and fell lightly to the floor, where I slowly rose and expanded into the full stature of a man. I seemed to be translucent, of a bluish cast and perfectly naked.' The percipient fled towards the door, but when he got there, found himself suddenly clothed, and his elbow came in contact with one of two men standing in the doorway (they were actually there) and to his surprise went through him without encountering any resistance. He tried to attract the attention of his friends but without success, so he walked out of the door and into the street. (Tyrrell 1953, 150)

The particularity of this description of being *hors du corps* evidences perfectly the impossibility of any way of conceiving being out of your body that does not require you to imagine yourself in some alternatively bodily kind or condition. There can be no doubt that there is an experience of some kind involved here, though we must doubt whether it is really an experience of taking leave of the body. For what do I experience an out-of-body experience with? If I am flying or floating, I am still imagining being in some kind of body. I have never heard of anyone vividly imagining being nowhere, or in several places at once, which is what an out of body experience would really mean. If I can, just about, imagine my body as a puff of smoke, or some kind of hovering swarm, or resolved into a dew, it seems I must nevertheless always imagine it somehow as clinging cloud-like together (the words *clod*, *cloud*, *clot* and *glue* are all in fact derivations from Old Germanic *klu-do*, a mass, or agglomeration), and so exhibiting that characteristic of being in one place at one time that is just what we mean when we speak of a being a body.

And yet - and this is both less obvious and more important - if I cannot imagine myself out of my body, or some kind of body, I cannot imagine myself completely in it either. I cannot, for example, feel all of my skin at once, I can only flit the spotlight of my attention from earlobe to elbow to ankle. And at times when I do seem to come close to

being in the whole of my body, in swimming, for example, or, for all I know, skydiving, then this seems paradoxically to approach the condition of a kind of ecstasy, in which I actually come close to being out of my body.

So being embodied, it seems, means being unable either to abandon or fully to inhabit my body. What my body most essentially is is its own power to reach beyond itself, whether for the dropped sixpence, the somersault, or the end of the runway. I can only be in my body when my body is, as we tellingly say, 'in motion', reaching or recoiling between one position and another. In medieval folklore, it was believed that bears gave their cubs their bodies, by literally licking them into shape. When we pat, caress, or even buffet another, we similarly give them embodiment by selectively animating their bodies, giving them the possibility of their bodies. A body is never quite aligned with or contemporary with itself, it is always, like Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, a rippling fan of profiles. We think of embodiment as a kind of confinement, but perhaps to have or be a body at all is always to be partly elsewhere than in it, in some other avatar-body, or body-double. Shakespeare's Jacques describes extreme old age as 'mere oblivion,/Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything', but this remorseless subtraction doesn't seem right. Surely, in fact, the older we grow, the more thickly these other, earlier dream-bodies teem in us; somewhere in that shuffling old man holding up the bus a tremulous boy still teeters on the top board.

I am not able to be in two places at once. But I am also unable not to want to be able, to be able to want, to be in two places at once where wanting to be may actually mean a certain manner of being able to be. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the principle of equilibrium. To be balanced is thought to be fully in my body. But that innerness could never be complete, since it must involve a rapid, on-the-spot flicker between inner and outer, innerness monitoring and maintaining itself by momentary deviations. In *Variations sur le corps*, Michel Serres supplements the catalogue of bodily joys provided at the end of his earlier book, *The Five Senses*, with that of balance:

the sense that most confederates the other senses remains that of balance and movement. The footstep indeed describes a circle that, if properly maintained properly, joins vision to the sense of touch in the soles of the feet, then quickly sends the latter back to the former, which, after control and anticipation, returns the passage; the eye caresses the rock before the going gets to it and confirms, answering, the easiness, such that the eyeball almost touches and the curve of the undersole has vision. (Serres 1999, 38; my translation)

Human beings are specialised for running, an action that is the precipice of the upright posture prolonged. The upright posture is 'non stable, but unstable, or better, metastable, invariant through variations, constructing itself like a refuge or a habitat,

composed like a musical score, in delicate epicycles and tiny rapid ellipses' (Serres 1999, 40). Indeed, innerness is not thinkable without a preintuition of the body, even as the body itself is not understandable without a precognition of a notion of inwardness. But one can only be in one's body if one is also minimally outside it, beyond its outer edge, in a kind of halo of self-belonging. One can only be in one's body through a sort of elliptical departure and return. Being still is a kind of on-the-spot ambulation. The principle of reach is built in to every posture of the body, which has its excursion from itself knitted in to its fabric:

elasticity only permits metamorphoses, work and even the expression of emotion on account of this feature of fine capacity, which we share with other animals, of adding, if assuredly not cubits then a few centimetres to our limbs and muscles and a few minutes of angle to their articulations at the very limit of their action: we can count on a surplus. Ductiles, they twist, stretching and lengthening without snapping beyond stretching. In extension and rotation, we enjoy a marging of tolerance, in excess. Better than the tension of a bowstring or the line of a ship, we benefit from a supertension. Without this superductility, we could never, on the face of the mountain, reach those out of reach holds, nor vary our way of gripping them, direct or inverted; without this margin, who could dance, what yogi could meditate? In labour or in art, manual dexterity depends on it. Distension [*bander*] remains what is proper to the human, or its pretension. (Serres 1999, 179)

The body is an exposure, and an assay. We are exposed, set out to it and we set out through it. Prehension is its inherence. Its tendings and its tensions deliver it, and ourselves to time. The soul does not exist apart from the body, or sunk in its inaccessible interior, but between the body and itself, between the body as habitat and the body as expedition.

To be in a body means never to be able to be in anybody else's body. Yet, unless I can exchange places with other bodies, to be running up that hill, be running up that building, I cannot say I fully inhabit my own body. Among the many freedoms to which embodiment is constrained is the freedom from itself.

The lesson of the Irish bull may be that embodiment is in fact my undoing, or even undoing itself. It is not my limit but what enjoins me to belong to my unbelonging, so that I am, in John Donne's words, 'he that hath not that earth that he is'. When what humans crave, voluptuously and insatiably, is to have no choice, the fantasy of embodiment as the given helps hem us in to that longed-for inhumation. Let us try to imagine giving up the fantasy of embodiment as givenness, and dream up ways to accept

our agoraphobic internment in the unconfined; in our condition, not of embodiment, but (no such word) inbodiment ('Here lies the body of John Mound/Lost at sea and never found').

Not to put too fine a point on it, there are two things in the universe, or two aspects to everything there is or could be. There is force: and there is form. Pure force, pure impetus or energy, force without any kind of form, is chaos. Pure form is inertness, absolute zero. Both are forms of death, and so can never in fact be, in being. Force can never be freed from form, form depends on force, even as force and form can never be fully identical. Force is what is informed in form. Force moving into form is what we have learned to call information. All thoughts of freedom, and all freedom of thought, must participate in this movement, into and out of form, away from and towards one death or another, the death of pure force and the death of pure form.

Comedy, and the laughter it provokes, are supposed to be, if not freedom itself, a potent promise or portent of it. But the compulsive nature of laughter for human beings, the many ways in which we show ourselves addicted to the coercive force and form of comic convulsion, should be proof that the emancipation it offers is always one that is bound up in, even strains toward, a kind of bondage. The body is always on both sides of the emancipatory undertaking, being the vehicle of emancipation, even as it is that from which we may, even must, demand emancipation. The body, and bodies in general, are the names we give to the collusions of force and form, freedom and necessity; laughter is the body doubled over, freeing itself from and towards itself.

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