An "ah-ha" After a "ha ha"

TEXT **OUGEZIHAN XIERAILI** ILLUSTRATION **PRANAV KALAMBI**

Why do I have an affinity for comedy or humour? When faced with challenges, I laugh, mocking myself while igniting a fire within me to persevere. In the company of others, I laugh, revelling in the blissful connection that human interaction brings. Even in the face of failure, I laugh, finding solace in realising that the abyss I once feared isn't as fearful as I imagined.

"You're full of shit," a friend once quipped, leaving me momentarily stunned. As I geared up to engage in a spirited debate to prove that I'm full of water (scientifically), she kindly explained the cultural meaning behind her remark. Apparently, it meant that I possess an uncanny ability to unearth humour in the most unlikely places, much to the delight of those around me. Well, hearing that for the first time was quite the revelation. Upon reflection, it oddly aligns with my self-perception. So, I set aside the flooded arguments crushing in my mind about "Actually, it should be water" and pondered a different question: Why do I have an affinity for comedy or humour? I recalled many people telling me, "Why are you always laughing?" and "Every time I'm with you, it's always full of laughter" (I know it sounds pretty narcissistic, like something I made up myself.)

Contrary to their perception, I'm not a carefree, joyous child growing up under idyllic circumstances. I've experienced some storms and traumas since childhood. I consider myself quite the unhappy soul, always shedding tears (I guess I could say I'm full of water now. Ha!). Yet, despite the darkness, laughter has always been my beacon of light and hope. When faced with challenges, I laugh, mocking myself while simultaneously igniting a fire within me to persevere. In the company of others, I laugh, revelling in the blissful connection that human interaction brings. Even in the face of failure, I laugh, finding solace in realising that the abyss I once feared isn't as fearful as I imagined. It's as if laughter has this magical ability to deconstruct the complexities of life, allowing me to embrace its essence with a newfound sense of joy.





As an ENFP, my seemingly endless source of joy comes from various forms of comedy, ranging from globally renowned comedians to late-night talk shows in Taiwan, and even to my hometown's comedy scene, Chaq-Chaq (قاچاق) or yumur (borrowed from English "humour" or Russian "Юмор").

Growing up immersed in the Chinese cultural sphere, I've also enjoyed many traditional comedic arts within this realm, such as cross-talk (相声) and skits (小品). The diverse array of comedic expressions from different cultures and forms fills my life. Listening to people share their unconventional views and experiences has been enlightening. Beyond the laughter, it often sparks profound reflections and resonates deeply with me. Yet, I'm curious about the underlying reasons. Why do we experience this marvellous "aha after haha" phenomenon? (Let's hope I'm not the only one who feels this way. Otherwise, it would be too awkward if I'm the only one who can relate to this article.)

Imagine if someone told you to break up with your partner immediately because he/she/they is



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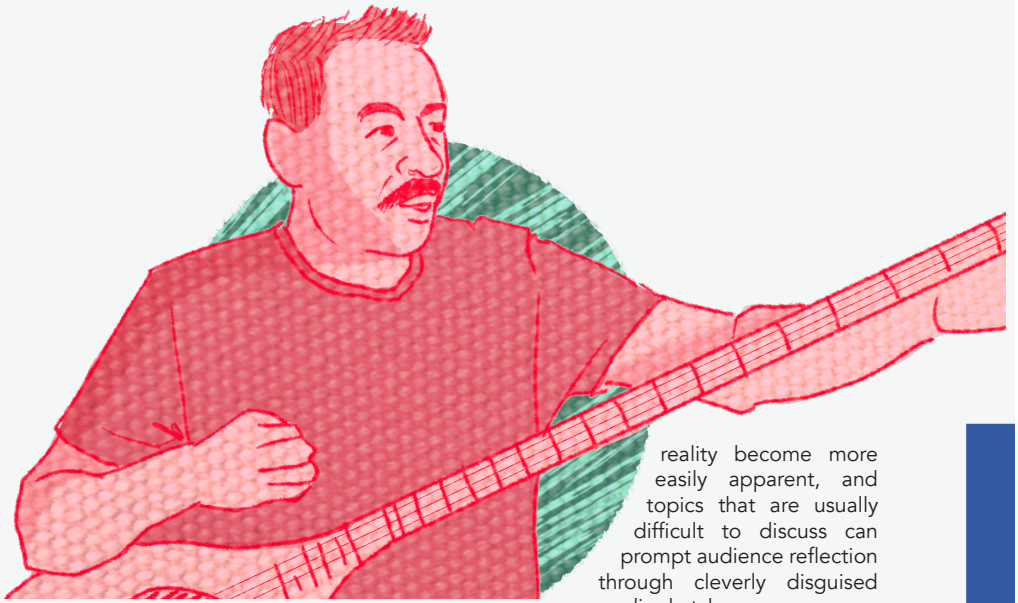

lazy, unmotivated, has a bad temper, treats others poorly, or doesn't love you enough (can be replaced with all the straight heartbroken derogatory words). Although you may know that they have your best interests at heart, and despite them presenting you with various reasons, could you really bear to listen patiently? Our lives are becoming increasingly intense, and everyone can judge anyone and anything. But at the same time, we are all subjected to criticism from others and everything around us. In such times, we become so exhausted from dealing with all the negativity that we bury ourselves in a shell. We find it difficult to distinguish whether criticism or advice from someone, for you or someone you care about, is well-intentioned or deliberate, like a startled hedgehog. However, Daniel Sloss manages to do this on his stand-up stage with a simple, clever, and humorous sketch.

He began by introducing the puzzle theory his father used to explain the meaning of life to him. Slowly, he shifted the focus from his father's notion that the centrepiece of the puzzle should be a perfect partner, suggesting that it wasn't just a feeling his dad gave him but rather the societal values of happiness instilled in us all. Then, he perfectly acted out how we relentlessly try to fit that "perfect person" into the puzzle at any cost to meet this standard of happiness, only to reach middle age and gaze at this puzzle, swearing "Ah-ha! There's a $@!%ing !@#* in this." He didn't refute this theory outright but gently made the audience aware by his act that everyone's puzzle is different, and regardless, we should love ourselves and assemble our own puzzle first.



There's a saying in China now, "Adults are like oysters, hard on the outside, soft on the inside." Daniel Sloss's puzzle theory gently opens each oyster and plants the seeds of thought in the audience's minds. This performance is said to have led to 45,000 couples breaking up and 116 divorces (as of the recording of that performance). However, spoiler alert: this performance took place many years ago. When I attended his live show in Stockholm in January this year, he was already happily married with children. Yet, after watching that performance, you won't be angered; you'll laugh. But as he joked on stage, when your smile slowly fades, and you begin to contemplate, you know you might have a really serious talk with your partner.

However, comedy isn't always gentle, and even Daniel himself is a stand-up comedian who performs on stage while drinking, which is far from gentle. Yet, there seems to be an unwritten rule on the comedy stage, a kind of tacit agreement between creators and audience, allowing comedians to explore society's taboos and discuss issues that are usually difficult to talk about. Last year, I attended Victor Patrascan's club performance in Stockholm on the theme of cancel culture. During the show, we discussed many topics that are often avoided, and I even shared my traumas, releasing the pent-up pressure.

But comedy goes beyond that; comedians don't always probe society's taboos but attempt to reveal overlooked issues through intense or controversial conflicts. I enjoy watching SNL's Colin Jost and Michael Che host the Weekend Update segment or Last Week Tonight with John Oliver. Taiwan also has similar late-night shows called night-night shows. These programs set up an expectation of comedy for the audience, so through humorous yet stark conflicts and contrasts, some of the absurdities of reality become more easily apparent, and topics that are usually difficult to discuss can prompt audience reflection through cleverly disguised comedic sketches.

Still, there's not always "an ah-ha after ha ha." It's unrealistic to think that simply watching a lot of comedy will allow you to grasp life's truths. While comedy can effectively express certain viewpoints and prompt people to think, it's just a trigger. We shouldn't overrate its power. For example, after watching an interesting comedy performance, you might want to delve deeper into a particular topic by watching a related TED talk (or perhaps reading a book). Moreover, comedy is primarily about making us happy. When comedy aims solely to inspire you and neglects its inherent entertainment value, it fails to evoke "an aha after haha" effect and may even ruin the audience's experience. Since life is already so difficult to deal with, when we watch comedy, we just relax, and there's no need for us to expect to be inspired. It's good to resonate with it, But isn't just laughing already being happy, right?



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