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SIGMUND FREUD

## The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious

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*with an Introduction by* JOHN CAREY

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psychical processes involved in its reception (the work of understanding). Only the former is the object of our present investigation.<sup>34, 35</sup>

Are there other examples of the displacement-technique? They are not easy to find. The following joke, which even lacks the over-exaggerated logic of our model, is a very pure example:

A horse-dealer is recommending a mount to a client: 'If you take this horse and set off at 4 in the morning, you'll be in Pressburg<sup>36</sup> at half-past 6.' - 'And what am I supposed to be doing in Pressburg at half-past 6 in the morning?'

The displacement here is flagrant. Obviously, the dealer mentions the early arrival in the little town only to give a proof of what the horse can do. The client disregards the horse's performance, raising no further doubts about it, and dwells merely on the details of the example chosen as the proof. The reduction of this joke is then not difficult to make.

More difficulties are presented by another example which is quite opaque in technique, but which still can be resolved into double meaning with displacement. The joke tells of the excuse made by a *Schadchen* (a Jewish marriage-broker), so it belongs to a group that will occupy us frequently.

The *Schadchen* has assured the suitor that the girl's father is no longer living. After the engagement it emerges that the father is still alive - and serving a term in prison. The suitor then accuses the *Schadchen*. 'So?' says the *Schadchen*. 'What did I tell you? That you call *living*?'

The double meaning lies in the word 'living', and the displacement is made because the *Schadchen* diverts from the usual sense of the word as the opposite of 'dead' and seizes on the sense it has in the phrase: 'That's not living.' In doing so he is retrospectively declaring that his earlier statement had a double meaning, although in this case particularly this multiple sense was very remote. To that extent the technique would be similar to that of the 'golden calf' joke and the bath joke. But there is another factor to be noted here, which strikes us as so prominent that it interferes with our understanding of the technique. One might say that this is a 'characterizing' joke;

it is concerned to illustrate that mixture of brazen dishonesty and quick wit characteristic of the marriage-broker. We shall learn that this is only the joke's outside, its façade; its meaning, that is, its intention, is something else. We shall also postpone attempting a reduction of it.<sup>37</sup>

After these examples, complicated and difficult to analyse as they are, it will be gratifying to recognize an instance of a completely plain and transparent model of a 'displacement joke'. A *Schnorrer* [Jewish beggar]<sup>38</sup> presents the rich Baron with a request for support for his journey to Ostend; the doctors, he claims, have recommended sea-bathing to restore his health. 'Fine, I'll give you something towards it,' says the rich man; 'but does it have to be Ostend you go to, the most expensive of all the seaside resorts?' - 'Herr Baron, comes the answer in rebuke, 'for my health nothing is too expensive.' - Certainly a proper standpoint, but just not proper for the supplicant. The answer is made from the standpoint of a rich man. The *Schnorrer* is behaving as if it were his own money he is to sacrifice for his health, as if money and health applied to the same person.

[G]

Let us take up that most instructive example of 'salmon with mayonnaise' afresh. Like the *Schadchen* joke, it too turned its outer side towards us, noticeable for a striking display of logic-chopping; we learned from our analysis of it that the task of this logic was to cover up a flaw in thinking, namely, the displacement of the train of thought. This may remind us, if only by way of association by contrast, of other jokes which, quite to the contrary, openly put some absurdity, some nonsense, some foolishness on view. We are curious to see what may comprise the technique of these jokes.

I shall put the most forceful and at the same time the plainest example of the group at the head. Again, it is a Jewish joke.

Issy [German: *Itzig*, comic, potentially anti-Semitic, name for a Jew] has been declared fit for the artillery. He is obviously an

intelligent fellow, but stropy and with no interest in army service. One of his superiors, who wishes him well, takes him aside and says: 'Issy, you're no good for us. I'll give you some advice: *Buy yourself a cannon and make yourself independent.*'

The advice, which makes us laugh heartily, is patent nonsense. After all, cannons are not for sale, and it is impossible for one individual to make himself independent as a military power, 'set up on his own', as it were. But we do not doubt for a moment that this advice is not mere nonsense, but witty nonsense, an excellent joke. So by what means does the nonsense become a joke?

We do not need to reflect for very long. From the authorities' discussions touched on in our Introduction, we may surmise that there is sense hiding in this nonsense, and that it is this sense in the nonsense that makes the nonsense a joke. The sense in our example is easy to find. The officer who gives Issy the artilleryist the nonsensical advice is only pretending to be foolish in order to show Issy how foolish he is being himself. He is imitating Issy. 'I'll give you some advice now that is just as foolish as you are.' He picks up on Issy's foolishness and gets him to see sense by making it the basis of a suggestion which is bound to answer Issy's wishes, for if Issy owned his own cannon and ran the trade of war on his own account, with his intelligence and his ambition, how well he would do! How well he would look after it and how closely he would familiarize himself with its mechanism so as to meet the competition of other cannon-owners!

I shall interrupt the analysis of this example to demonstrate the same sense in nonsense in a shorter and simpler, but no less glaring, instance of a nonsense joke.

'Never to have been born would be the best for mortal kind.'<sup>39</sup> 'But,' add the philosophers of the *Fliegende Blätter*,<sup>40</sup> 'that scarcely happens to one in 100,000.'

The modern supplement to the ancient saying is plain nonsense, becoming even more foolish by the addition of the apparently cautious 'scarcely'. But it is linked to the first sentence as an indisputably correct qualification, and so it can open our eyes to the realization that the piece of wisdom we have listened to with awe is not

much better than nonsense either. Anyone who was never born is not a member of mortal kind at all; for them there is no good and no best. So in this case the nonsense in the joke serves to expose and demonstrate another instance of nonsense – as it did in the example of Issy the artilleryist.

At this point I can add a third example, which from its content would scarcely deserve the detailed account it requires, but which is again a particularly clear illustration of the use of nonsense in a joke to demonstrate another instance of nonsense.

A man who has to go away on a journey entrusts his daughter to a friend, requesting him to keep an eye on her virtue during his absence. After months he comes back and discovers she has been made pregnant. Naturally, he reproaches his friend. The friend alleges he cannot explain the misfortune. 'Where did she sleep then?' the father finally asks. – 'In my son's room.' – 'But how can you let her sleep in the same room with your son, when I begged you to look after her?' – 'But there was a screen between them. There was your daughter's bed, and there was my son's bed, and the screen between them.' – 'And what if he'd gone round the screen?' – 'I didn't think of that,' said the other thoughtfully. 'It could have been managed that way.'

It is very easy to arrive at a reduction of this otherwise rather poor joke. It would obviously run: You have no right to blame me. How can you be so foolish as to hand your daughter over to a house where she has to live in the constant company of a young man? As if it were possible for a stranger to be responsible for a girl's virtue under such circumstances! So here too the ostensible foolishness of the friend is only the mirror-image of the foolishness of the father. Our reduction has done away with the foolishness in the joke, but it has also done away with the joke. We are not rid of the element of 'foolishness'; it has found a different place in the context of the sentence that reduced the joke to its underlying sense.

Now we are able to attempt a reduction of the cannon joke as well. The officer would have to say: 'Issy, I know you are an intelligent businessman. But I tell you, it is very foolish of you if you don't see that it is impossible to carry on in the same way in the army as in

business life, where everyone works for himself and against the others. In the army the word is subordination and co-operation.'

So the technique of the nonsense jokes we have dealt with so far in fact consists in the introduction of something foolish, nonsensical, whose underlying meaning is the illustration, the demonstration, of something else foolish and nonsensical.

Does the use of absurdity in the technique of jokes always have this significance? Here is another example which answers in the affirmative:

Once, when Phokion was applauded after making a speech, turning to his friends he asked: 'Have I said something foolish?'

This question sounds absurd. But we understand what it means at once. 'What have I said that could please these foolish people so much? I really should be ashamed of their applause; if it pleased the foolish, it can't have been very clever itself.'

But we learn from other examples that absurdity is very often used in the technique of jokes without the purpose of demonstrating another instance of nonsense.

A well-known university teacher, who was in the habit of spicing his not very attractive specialism with jokes, is congratulated on the birth of his youngest child, granted him when he was of an already advanced age. 'Yes,' he replied to his well-wishers, 'it is remarkable what human hand can do.' - This reply appears quite particularly senseless and inappropriate. After all, we call children a blessing from God, quite the opposite of the work of human hand. But it soon occurs to us that this reply does have a meaning, and an obscene one at that. It is out of the question that the happy father is pretending to be foolish in order to label something or someone else as foolish. The apparently senseless reply has a startling effect on us, 'baffling', as we and our authorities would put it. We have heard that they derive the entire effect of such jokes from the alternation of 'bafflement and light dawning'. We will attempt to form our own judgement on this later; for the moment we are content to emphasize that the technique of this joke consists in the introduction of such baffling, nonsensical elements.

A joke of Lichtenberg's assumes a very special position among these stupidity jokes.

He wonders that cats should have two holes cut in their fur in the very place where they have eyes. But to wonder at something self-evident, at something which is actually only the statement of an identity, is certainly foolish. It reminds me of a seriously intended exclamation of Michelet's (*Das Weib*),<sup>41</sup> which, as I recall, runs something like this: How beautifully Nature has arranged things, so that as soon as a child comes into the world it finds a mother ready to take it to her! Michelet's statement is a real foolishness, but Lichtenberg's is a joke which makes use of foolishness, but purpose, and which has something hidden behind it. But what? At this moment, it is true, that is something we cannot tell.

[H]

We have now already learned from two groups of examples that the joke-work makes use of departures from normal thinking, of displacement and absurdity, as technical devices for creating jokes. We would certainly be justified in expecting that other kinds of faulty thinking might also be put to the same use. And in fact it is possible to offer some examples of this kind:

A gentleman goes into a pastrycook's and orders a cake; but he soon brings it back and asks for a glass of liqueur instead. He drinks this up and makes to go off without paying. The shopkeeper detains him. 'What do you want of me?' - 'To pay for the liqueur.' - 'But I gave you the cake for it.' - 'You didn't pay for that either.' - 'But I didn't eat it.'

This little story too displays that appearance of logic which is already familiar to us as the façade appropriate to a flaw in thinking. The flaw obviously lies in the - non-existent - connection the cunning customer has drawn between returning the cake and taking the liqueur for it instead. It is rather that the situation breaks down into two transactions which for the vendor are independent of each

other, but for the customer's purposes can be substituted for each other. He took the cake first and returned it, so he does not owe anything for it, then he takes the liqueur, and that he should pay for. We might say that the customer is using the term of exchange 'for it' with a double meaning; more correctly, that by means of a double meaning he is setting up a connection which as far as the facts of the matter are concerned does not hold water.<sup>42</sup>

Now this is the opportunity to make a – not unimportant – confession. We are engaged here in an inquiry into joke-technique based on examples, so we should be sure that the examples we have chosen really are proper jokes. But it looks as if in a number of instances we have been hesitating as to whether the example in question can be called a joke or not. Indeed, we do not have a criterion at our command until our investigation has yielded one; linguistic usage is unreliable, and itself requires scrutiny; in deciding, all we have to lean on is a certain 'feeling', which we may interpret to the effect that, in judging, our decision is being made according to certain criteria that are not yet accessible to our knowledge. For us to appeal to this 'feeling' will not be admissible as a sufficient explanation. In the last example, we are bound to be doubtful now whether we can call it a joke, a sophistical joke, perhaps, or whether it is just a sophistry pure and simple. We simply do not yet know what goes to make the character of a joke.

By contrast, there is no doubt that the next example, which demonstrates the complementary flaw in thinking, as it were, is a joke. Again, it is a story of a marriage-broker.

The *Schadchen* is defending the girl he has proposed in face of the young man's objections. 'I don't like the mother-in-law,' the young man says. 'She is a malicious, stupid person.' – 'You're not marrying the mother-in-law, you're marrying the daughter.' – 'Yes, but she's no longer so young, and she's not exactly pretty either.' – 'That doesn't matter. If she's not young and pretty, she'll be all the more faithful to you.' – 'There's not much money going, either.' – 'Who's talking about money? Are you marrying the money? It's a wife you want.' – 'But she's got a hump-back as well.' – 'Now what are you after? So she's not to have one single fault?'

So in reality it is all about a girl who is no longer young, not pretty, with a very small dowry, who has a repulsive mother, and on top of everything a terrible disfigurement. Not very inviting circumstances to contract a marriage, for sure. But for every one of these blemishes, the marriage-broker knows what angle to take to reconcile the young man to it; the unforgivable hump he then claims is the one fault that should be granted every person. Again there is the appearance of logic characteristic of sophistry and meant to hide the flaw in the thinking. The girl has obviously nothing but defects, several that could be overlooked, and one that is impossible to ignore; she is simply unmarriageable. The go-between behaves as if his excuses did away with all her defects one by one, when in fact some fall in her value is left over from each to be added to the next. He insists on dealing with each factor separately, and refuses to add them up into a total sum.

The same omission is the heart of another piece of sophistry which has given rise to a great deal of laughter, though one might have doubts about how justified its claim to be called a joke might be.

A. borrowed a copper kettle from B., and after its return is accused by B. because the kettle now has a huge hole in it, making it useless. His defence runs: 'In the first place, I didn't borrow a kettle from B. at all; in the second, the kettle had a hole in it already when I took it over from B.; in the third, I gave it back to him all in one piece.' Each single objection is sound in itself, but taken together they exclude one another. A. treats in isolation what has to be considered in connection in just the same way as the marriage-broker deals with the bride's shortcomings. We could also say: A. puts an 'and' in the place where only an 'either – or' is possible.

We encounter a different sophistry in the following marriage-broker story.

The suitor has complained that the bride has one leg shorter than the other and limps. The *Schadchen* contradicts him. 'You've got it wrong. What if you went and married a woman with sound, straight limbs? Where's the benefit? You won't have a day's rest, worrying that she doesn't fall down. Then she breaks her leg. And then she's lame for the rest of her life. And then the pain, the hassle, the

doctor's bill! But if you take *this one*, it won't happen to you; you've got it all *ready-made*.'

The appearance of logic is pretty thin here, and nobody would want to give a 'ready-made misfortune' any preference over one that was merely possible. The flaw in the train of thought will be easier to demonstrate from a second example, a story I cannot entirely strip of its argot.

In the temple at Cracow the great Rabbi N. is sitting and praying with his disciples. All of a sudden he utters a cry and, when asked by his anxious disciples, pronounces: 'The great Rabbi L. in Lemberg has at this moment just died.' The congregation goes into mourning for the departed. In the course of the next days anyone arriving from Lemberg is asked how the Rabbi died, what was the matter with him, but they know nothing about it, they left him in the best of health. It is finally established quite certainly that Rabbi L. in Lemberg did not die on the hour in which Rabbi N. had a telepathic sense of his death, for he is still alive. A stranger takes the opportunity to mock a disciple of the Cracow Rabbi. 'Your Rabbi did make a fool of himself, didn't he, that time he saw the Rabbi L. in Lemberg die? The man is still alive.' 'No matter,' replied the disciple, 'it was wonderful of him to gaze [Küick]<sup>143</sup> all the way from Cracow to Lemberg anyhow.'

The flaw in thinking shared by both these last examples is openly admitted here. The figments of fantasy are raised disproportionately in value by contrast to reality, possibility put almost on a par with actuality. The rabbi's distant gaze across the sweep of land separating Cracow from Lemberg would be an impressive feat of telepathy if something true had come of it, but that is not the important thing for the disciple. After all, it *might* have been possible that the Rabbi of Lemberg *could* have died in the same moment as the Cracow Rabbi announced his death, and for the disciple the emphasis is displaced from the *circumstance* that makes his master's feat so remarkable on to his unqualified admiration for the feat. 'In magnis rebus voluisse sat est [In great things it is enough to have wished]<sup>144</sup> testifies to a similar point of view. Just as in this example reality is disregarded in favour of possibility, in the previous one the marriage-

broker expects the suitor to consider the possibility that a wife might be crippled by an accident as by far the more important thing, so that in comparison the question of whether she is really crippled or not should fade completely into the background.

This group of *sophistical* flaws in thinking is joined by another interesting one, where the flaw may be described as *automatic*. It is perhaps only a whim of chance<sup>45</sup> that all the examples I shall offer from this fresh group again belong to the *Schadchen* stories:

'For the discussion about the bride, a *Schadchen* has brought along an assistant to support him in what he has to say of her. She's built like a fir-tree, says the *Schadchen*. — Like a fir-tree, repeats the echo. — And what eyes she has, you have to see them. — And eyes she has, confirms the echo. — And for education, there's nobody like her. — And education! — But it's true, there is one thing, the broker concedes, she has a little hump. — *But such a hump!* confirms the echo again. The other stories are quite analogous, though they have more sense.

'The bridegroom is very unpleasantly surprised when the bride is introduced to him, and draws the broker to one side to whisper his objections. "What have you brought me here for?" he upbraids him. "She is ugly and old, she squints, and she's got bad teeth and watery eyes . . ." — "You can say it out loud," interjects the broker, "*she's deaf as well*."

Together with the broker, the bridegroom pays his first visit to the bride's house and, while they are waiting in the parlour for the family to appear, the broker draws attention to a glass cabinet in which the finest silver objects are displayed. "Look at that, you can tell from these things how rich these people are." — "But," asks the mistrustful young man, "mightn't it be possible that these fine things are borrowed for the occasion to give an impression of wealth?" — "What are you thinking of?" the broker rebuffs him. "*Who would lend these people anything!*"

In all three cases the same thing occurs. A person who has reacted in the same way several times in succession continues this way of speaking on the next occasion too, where it becomes incongruous and contradicts their intentions. They are failing to adapt to the

requirements of the situation, succumbing to automatic habit. Thus the assistant in the first story forgets that he was taken along to dispose the suitor in favour of the proposed bride, and since he had done his job properly up till then by underlining the bride's alleged good points in his repetitions, he now emphasizes the discreetly admitted hump as well, when he should have played it down. The broker of the second story becomes so fascinated by the enumeration of the bride's flaws and frailties that he completes the list out of his own knowledge of her, though that is certainly not his office, nor his intention. Finally, in the third story, he lets himself get so carried away by his eagerness to convince the young man of the family's wealth that, just to stay in the right on the one point that proves it, he comes out with something that is bound to upset all his efforts. In all cases the automatic reaction wins out over adapting his thought and speech to suit the situation.

That is easy to see, of course, but it is bound to be confusing when we notice that these three examples could be described as 'comic stories' with the same right as we have referred to them as 'jokes'. The exposure of psychic automatism belongs to the technique of the comic, as every [act of] unmasking or self-betrayal does. At this point we find ourselves suddenly faced with the problem of the relation of the joke to comedy which we had tried to avoid. (See the Introduction.) Are these only 'comic stories', perhaps, and not 'jokes'? Is comedy operating here with the same means as the joke? And again, what goes to make the peculiar joking character of jokes?

We must keep in mind that the technique of the jokes just studied consists only of the inclusion of 'flawed thinking', but we are compelled to admit that so far our investigation of them has led us more into the dark than to knowledge. Still, we shall not give up our expectation that a fuller knowledge of joke-techniques will enable us to reach a result that may become the starting-point for further insights.

## [I]

The next examples of jokes with which we shall continue our investigation are not such hard work. Their technique reminds us above all of what we already know.

A witticism of Lichtenberg's, for instance:

*'January is the month when we offer our dear friends [our good] wishes, and the others are the months in which they are not fulfilled.'*

As these witticisms are to be called refined rather than coarse, and work with slight and unobtrusive means, let us first reinforce the impression they make by dint of accumulation.

*'Human life falls into two halves, in the first, we wish for the second to arrive, in the second, we wish for the first to return.'*

*'Experience consists of experiencing what we do not want to experience.'* (Both in Kuno Fischer.)

It is inevitable that these examples should remind us of a group we dealt with earlier, which were distinguished by 'multiple use of the same material'. The last example in particular will make us ask why we did not include it there instead of introducing it here in a fresh context. Experience is again described by its own wording, just as previously jealousy was (cf. p. 27). Nor would I object very much to assigning it there. But in the other two examples, which do indeed have a similar character, another factor, I think, is more striking and more important than the multiple use of the same words, which in their case lacks any trace of double meaning. For I would like to emphasize that in these witticisms new and unexpected unities are being set up, ideas are being related to one another and definitions made by reference to one another or to a common third element. I would like to call this process *unification*; it is clearly analogous to condensation by concentration into the same words. In this way the two halves of human life are described by the reciprocal relations discovered between them; in the first, one wishes for the second to arrive, in the second, for the first to return. More precisely, they are two very similar reciprocal relations which were chosen to be described. The similarity of the relations is then matched by the

similarity of the words – which is just what might remind us of the multiple use of the same material (wish – to arrive)/(wish – to return). In Lichtenberg's witticism, January and the months contrasted with it are characterized by setting up a relation, modified in turn, to a third element; that is, the good wishes which are received in the one month and not fulfilled in the others. The difference from multiple use of the same material, which does indeed approach double meaning, is very clear here.<sup>46</sup>

The following is a fine example of a unification joke, needing no explanation:

The French poet J. B. Rousseau once wrote an Ode to Posterity; in Voltaire's opinion, the poem was not at all worthy of going down to posterity, and he remarked wittily: *This poem will not reach its address.* (In Kuno Fischer.)

From the last example we may note that unification is essentially what lies at the basis of what we call quick-witted jokes. Indeed, the quick-wittedness consists in the defence's engagement with the aggression, in 'turning the tables', in 'repaying in the same coin', that is, in creating an unexpected unity between attack and counter-attack.

For example: baker to landlord, who has a sore on his finger: *I suppose you dipped it in your beer?* Landlord: *No, but one of your rolls got under my nail.* (In Überhorst, *Das Komische*, II, 1900.)

His Majesty is travelling through his provinces and notices among the crowd a man who looks remarkably like his own sublime personage. He beckons to him to ask him: *Was your mother once in service at the palace, perhaps?* – 'No, Your Highness,' came the reply, *'but my father was.'*<sup>47</sup>

On one occasion when he was riding out, Duke Karl of Württemberg happened to meet a dyer who was busied with his trade. *'Can you dye my white horse blue?'* the Duke calls out to him, and gets this answer in return: *'Certainly, Your Highness, if he can stand boiling.'*

In this excellent riposte – which answers a nonsensical question with an equally impossible condition – there is another technical factor also at work which would have been missing if the dyer's reply

had run: 'No, Your Highness, I'm afraid the horse won't stand boiling.'

Unification has another, particularly interesting, technical device at its command: putting things together as a series with the conjunction *and*. A series of this kind signifies relationship; we never understand it otherwise. For example, when Heine in his *Harzreise* [chapter 1] tells us of the town of Göttingen: *'In general, the inhabitants of Göttingen are divided into students, professors, philistines and swine,'* we understand this sequence in precisely the sense which is further underlined when Heine adds: 'although these four estates are anything but sharply distinguished'. Or, when he speaks of the school where he had to put up with 'so much Latin, Flogging and Geography', this series, which is made more than clear by the middle position given to flogging between the two school subjects, means to tell us that we should certainly extend the schoolboy's opinion, unmistakably indicated by the flogging, to Latin and Geography as well.

Among Lipps's examples of 'witty enumeration' ('coordination'), we find, quoted as closely related to Heine's 'students, professors, philistines and swine', the line of verse: *'Mit einer Gabel und mit Müh' zog ihn die Mutter aus der Brüh'* [With a fork and effort too his mother pulled him from the stew];<sup>48</sup> as if the effort were an instrument like the fork, Lipps adds by way of explanation. But our impression of the line is that it is not at all witty, though very comical, while Heine's sequence is undoubtedly a witticism. We shall perhaps remember these examples later when we no longer need to avoid the problem of the relation between the comic and jokes.

[J]

We noticed from the example of the Duke and the dyer that it would still be a unification joke if the dyer were to answer: 'No, I'm afraid the horse would not stand boiling.' But in fact his answer ran: 'Yes, Your Highness, if he can stand boiling.' In the replacement of the

properly appropriate 'no' by a 'yes', there is a new technical device for jokes; we shall pursue its use in other examples.

A joke close to the one just mentioned, to be found in Kuno Fischer, is simpler: Frederick the Great hears of a preacher in Silesia who has the reputation of consorting with spirits; he sends for the man and greets him with the question: 'You can call up spirits?' The reply was: 'At Your command, Your Majesty, but they don't come.' It is quite obvious here that the device used by the joke consisted of nothing but the replacement of the only possible 'no' by its opposite. To carry out this replacement, the 'yes' had to have a 'but' added on to it, so that 'yes' and 'but' in meaning are tantamount to 'no'.

This representation by the opposite, as we shall call it, serves the joke-work in various ways. In the following two examples it occurs almost pure: Heine: 'In many respects this woman resembles the Venus de Milo: she too is extraordinarily old, likewise she has no teeth, and on the yellowish surface of her body she has some white spots.'

A representation of ugliness by means of its points of congruity with the most beautiful; though admittedly these congruities can consist only in characteristics expressed in terms with a double meaning or in unimportant items. The latter applies to the second example:

Lichtenberg: *The Great Mind.*

'He had united in himself the characteristics of the greatest men: like Alexander he carried his head lop-sided, like Caesar always had something braided into his hair, like Leibnitz he could drink coffee and, once he was sitting comfortably in his armchair, like Newton he would forget to eat and drink, and like him would have to be woken up; he wore his wig like Dr Johnson, and he always left a button of his breeches undone like Cervantes.'

A particularly fine example of representation by the opposite, which dispenses entirely with using words of double meaning, was brought back by J. v. Falke from a journey to Ireland. 'The scene: a waxworks,' let us say Madame Tussaud's. Also present: a guide, accompanying a group of old and young with his explanations from one figure to the next. [In Freud's English] 'This is the Duke of

Wellington and his horse', whereupon a young lady asks the question: 'Which is the Duke of Wellington and which is his horse?' 'Just as you like, my pretty child,' comes the reply, 'you pay your money and you have your choice.' (*Lebenserinnerungen* [1879], p. 271.)

The reduction of this Irish joke would run: 'The barefaced nerve — what these waxwork people presume to offer the public! You can't tell the difference between horse and rider. (Joking exaggeration.) And that's what we pay good money for!' This indignant exclamation is now dramatized, based on a little episode; the place of the public in general is taken by one lady; the figure of the rider is given individuality; it has to be the Duke of Wellington, who is so very popular in Ireland. But the effrontery of the owner or guide who pockets the visitors' money and offers them nothing for it is represented by its opposite, by words in which he stresses what a conscientious businessman he is, whose dearest concern is to respect the rights due to the public on account of the money they have paid. We also see now that the technique of this joke is not an entirely simple one. As the swindler finds a way to assert his conscientiousness, the joke is an instance of representation by the opposite; but he does so when the occasion requires something quite different of him, so that when something about the similarity of the figures is expected, he replies as a respectable businessman, the joke is an example of displacement. The technique of this joke lies in the combination of the two devices.

From this example it is not far to a small group which may be called going-one-better jokes. In these, the 'yes' that would be appropriate in the reduction is replaced by a 'no', but on account of its content this is the equivalent of an even stronger 'yes', and vice versa. For example, Lessing's epigram:<sup>49</sup>

*Die gute Galathee! Man sagt, sie schwärz' ihr Haar;*

*Da doch ihr Haar schon schwarz, als sie es kaufte, war.*

[Good Galatea dyes her hair, 'tis cried,/ Tho' when she bought it, 'twas already dyed.]

far more accurately if we say representation 'by what is belonging or connected' instead of 'by what is related'. Let us even make a start with this feature and elucidate it straight away with an example.

An American anecdote runs: by a number of pretty risky enterprises, two less-than-scrupulous businessmen succeeded in amassing a great fortune, and then devoted their efforts to entering good society. One means to this end, it seemed to them, was to have their portraits done by the most exclusive and expensive painter in town, whose pictures were regarded as great occasions. The precious pictures were first shown at a grand reception, and the two hosts themselves led the most influential connoisseur and critic to the salon wall where the two portraits were hanging side by side, to lure him into giving an appreciative judgement. He gazed at the pictures for a long time, then shook his head as if he were missing something, merely asking as he pointed to the space between the two pictures: [Freud's English] 'And where is the Saviour?' (that is, where is the picture of the Saviour?).

The meaning of this remark is clear. Again it is a question of representing something that cannot be expressed directly. How is this 'indirect representation' brought about? Let us follow a series of readily available associations and inferences and take the path that leads backwards from the representation of the joke.

The question: 'Where is the Saviour, the picture of the Saviour?' allows us to surmise that the speaker has been reminded by the sight of the two pictures of a similar sight, as familiar to him as it is to us, but showing an element that is missing here, the picture of the Saviour between two other pictures. There is only one instance of this kind: Christ hanging between the two thieves. So what the critic wanted to say and could not was: 'You're a couple of rogues; more fully: 'What do I care about your pictures? You're a couple of rogues, I know.' And in the end, by way of some associations and inferences, he did say it, via a route which we would describe as *allusion*.

We recall at once that we have already encountered allusion. In double meaning, that is, in cases where two meanings can be expressed in the same word, and where the more frequent and more current one is so strongly foregrounded that it is bound to occur to

us first of all, while the other, more remote, meaning takes second place, we decided to call this *double meaning with allusion*. In a large number of the examples we had examined up to that point, we had observed that their technique was not a simple one, and now we recognize that the complicating factor in them is allusion (see for example the joke dependent on a switch of phrases about the woman who had been a bit on the side and earned a lot, or the professor's absurd joke on being congratulated on his latest child, that it was remarkable what human hand could do, p. 50).

In the American anecdote we now have before us a case of allusion free of double meaning, and we discover that its distinctive character is substitution by something connected conceptually. It is easy to surmise that the usable connection can be of more than one sort. So that we do not get lost in sheer profusion, let us discuss only the most distinct varieties, and these only in a few examples.

The connection used for the substitution may be a mere similarity in sound, such that this subpecies is analogous to the pun among the verbal jokes. But it is not the similarity of two words to one another, but of whole sentences,<sup>52</sup> or characteristic word-combinations and the like.

For example, Lichtenberg coined the saying: 'Neue Bäder heilen gut [lit: 'New spas cure well']', reminding us at once of the proverb: 'Neue Besen kehren gut [equiv: 'New brooms sweep clean']', as they share the first word-and-a-bit, the last word, and the sentence-structure as a whole. And it certainly originated in the witty philosopher's mind as an imitation of the well-known proverb. In this way Lichtenberg's saying becomes an allusion to the proverb. By means of this allusion, something is hinted that cannot be said outright: that in the success of a spa, there are other factors involved besides the constant of thermal waters.

Another witticism or joke of Lichtenberg's can be analysed technically in a similar way: 'Ein Mädchen, kaum zwölf Moden alt [lit: 'A girl scarce twelve fashions old']'. That sounds like the expression of time 'zwölf Monden [twelve moons]' (i.e., *Monate* [months]), and might perhaps have been a slip of the pen in writing down the second expression, admissible in poetic diction. But it makes good

sense to use the changing fashions instead of the changing moon to indicate the age of a female person.

The connection may consist of similarity up to one single *slight modification*. Again, this technique parallels a verbal technique. Both kinds of joke produce almost the same impression, but, to go by the processes operating in the joke-work, they are better kept distinct from each other.

An example of a verbal joke or pun of this kind: the great singer *Marte Wilt*, famous for more than the compass of her voice, was offended when the title of a play based on Jules Verne's well-known novel was used as an allusion to her figure: '*Around the Wilt [Welt: 'world'] in eighty Days.*'

Or, of a well-born and over-lifesize lady: '*Every yard a queen*', a modification of Shakespeare's well-known '*Every inch a king*', and an allusion to this quotation. There would really be no serious objection if anyone would rather locate this joke as a substitute-formation among the condensations with modification (p. 19) (cf. *tête-à-bête*).

Of a person who was ambitious, but obdurate in pursuit of his aims, a friend said: '*Er hat ein Ideal vor dem Kopf*' [lit. 'He has an ideal in front of his head', i.e., 'He can't see beyond his ideal']. '*Ein Brett vor dem Kopf haben*' [lit. 'To have a board in front of one's head', i.e., 'He can't see beyond his nose', 'He is stupid'] is the current phrase which this modification is playing upon, also claiming its meaning for itself. Here too we can describe its technique as condensation with modification.

Allusion by means of modification and condensation with substitute-formation are almost indistinguishable when the modification is limited to an alteration of the letters, e.g., arthrit<sup>is</sup>.<sup>53</sup> The allusion to the scourge of arthritis suggests that the practice of poetry by those without a vocation is also a public danger.

Negative prefixes enable very fine allusions to be made at a cost of very small alterations:

'My fellow-unbeliever Spinoza,' says Heine. 'We, by the disgrace of God, day-labourers, serfs, negroes and bondmen . . . is how Lichtenberg begins a manifesto - going no further - for these

unfortunates, who at least have more right to such titles than kings and princely personages have to its unmodified form.

Finally, *omission* is also one form of allusion, comparable to condensation without substitute-formation. In fact, in every allusion something is being omitted, that is, the train of thought leading to the allusion. It depends only on which is the more obvious - the gap in the wording of the allusion or the substitute which partially fills the gap. In this way we might be brought by way of a series of examples from glaring omission back to allusion proper.

Omission without substitution is to be found in the following example: in Vienna there lives a witty and belligerent writer,<sup>54</sup> whose biting invective has repeatedly drawn physical assaults from his victims. Once, when a fresh misdeed of one of his habitual opponents was being discussed, a third party observed: '*If X. hears that, he will get another box on the ear.*' It is part of the technique of this joke that we are baffled at first by the apparent illogicality, for to have one's ears boxed as the direct consequence of having heard something does not strike us as plausible in the least. The illogicality vanishes if we fill the gap with: '*then he will write such a caustic article against the person concerned that, etc.*'. Allusion by means of omission and illogicality, then, are the technical devices of this joke.

Heine: '*He praises himself so highly that fumigating-candles are going up in price.*' This gap is easy to fill. What has been left out is replaced by a conclusion that leads back to it as an allusion. Self-praise stinks! [German proverb.]

Now once again the two Jews outside the bath-house!

'*Another year gone by already!*' sighs one of them.

These examples surely dismiss any doubts that omission belongs to allusion.

A persistent and striking gap is to be found in the next example, which is still a true and proper allusion-based joke. Following a bohemian celebration in Vienna, a joke book was published in which, among others, the following most remarkable aphorism was recorded:

'*A wife is like an umbrella. After all, before long one takes a cab.*'

An umbrella does not give sufficient protection from the rain.

That 'after all, before long' can only mean: if it is raining really hard, and a cab is a public vehicle. But since we have to do with a kind of comparison here, let us postpone a fuller investigation of this joke until later.

Heine's 'Die Bäder von Lucca' contains a real wasps' nest of the most stinging allusions, making the most inventive use of this form of witticism for polemical ends (against Count Platen<sup>55</sup>). Much earlier, before this use dawned on the reader, a certain theme, particularly unsuitable for direct representation, has been introduced by allusions drawn from the most varied material, e.g., in Hirsch-Hyacinth's malapropisms: 'You are too corpulent and I am too lean, you have a great deal of imagination and I have all the more business-sense, I am a practical man and you are a *diarrhetical man*, in short, you are my *antipodex*.' – 'Venus *Urinia*' – 'fat Gudel of *Dreckwall* [lit: "Turd Bank"] in Hamburg', and the like. Then events as the poet describes them take a turn which at first only seems to demonstrate the poet's mischievous ill-nature, but soon reveals its symbolic relation to his polemical aim, and also declares its allusive nature. Finally, the attack on Platen breaks out and allusions to the theme already announced – the Count's homosexuality – now come fizzing and flowing from every sentence Heine aims at the talent and character of his enemy. For example: 'Even if the Muses are not kind to him, he still has the genius of language in his power, or rather he knows how to assault him: for he does not have the free love of this genius; he has to keep running after this boy too, and he is only able to capture the outward forms, which despite their lovely curves have no nobility of expression.'

'And then he is like the ostrich, which believes it is sufficiently hidden if it buries its head in the sand, so that only its backside is visible. Our noble bird would have done better if he had hidden his backside in the sand and shown us his head.'

Among the joke's devices, allusion is perhaps the most frequent and the easiest to use; it lies at the basis of most of the short-lived jokes we habitually include in our conversations, which cannot survive removal from their native soil or being preserved on their own. But the case of allusion in particular reminds us of that circum-

stance which began to throw us off course in our assessment of joke-technique. For allusion too does not in itself have the character of a joke or witticism; there are correctly formed allusions that have no claim to this description. Only the 'witty' allusion is a witticism – so that the feature identifying jokes and witticisms, which we have been pursuing into the field of their technique, eludes us there again.

I have occasionally referred to allusion as '*indirect representation*', and I see now that we might very well gather the various kinds of allusion together with representation by the opposite and with the techniques referred to below into one single large group for which '*indirect representation*' might be the most comprehensive name. *Faulty thinking – unification – indirect representation*, then, are names for the aspects under which the techniques we have met belonging to the intellectual joke could be grouped.

As we investigate our material further, we think we recognize a new subclass of indirect representation, which can be described very exactly, but illustrated by only a few examples. This is representation by a *small or very, very small item* which solves its task of giving full expression to an entire character by expressing it by some minute detail. Placing this group under allusion becomes feasible if we consider that this tiny item does indeed have a connection with what is to be represented, as something that can be concluded from it. For example: 'A Galician Jew is travelling on the railway and has made himself very comfortable, unbuttoned his coat, put his feet up on the bench. Then a gentleman in modern dress enters the carriage. At once the Jew pulls himself together, takes up an unobtrusive position in his seat. The stranger turns the pages of a notebook, makes some calculations, thinks, and suddenly turns to the Jew with the question: "Excuse me, when is Yom Kippur?" (Day of Atonement.) "Ai-ai-ai,"<sup>56</sup> says the Jew, and puts his feet up on the bench again before replying.'

It is undeniable that this representation by something small is linked to the tendency to economy which we retained, after our inquiry into the technique of verbal jokes, as their ultimate common factor.

The following is a very similar example: the doctor who has been requested to attend the Baroness at her confinement declares that the moment has not yet arrived, and suggests to the Baron that meantime they play a game of cards in the next room. After a while the Frau Baronin's cry of pain reaches the ears of the two men: 'Ah mon Dieu, que je souffre.' The husband leaps up, but the doctor detains him: 'It's nothing. Let's carry on playing.' A while later they hear her crying out in labour: 'Mein Gott, mein Gott, was für Schmerzen!' [lit: 'My God, my God, how it hurts!'] – 'Won't you go in, Professor?' asks the Baron. 'No, no, it's still not time.' – Finally, from the next room they hear an unmistakable cry of 'Ai, waih, waih [equival: 'O weh', 'Oy vay']; then the doctor throws away his cards and says: 'It's time.'<sup>57</sup>

How pain will allow the original nature to break through all the layers of education, and how an important decision is – rightly – made dependent upon a seemingly unimportant utterance – both are displayed by this good joke in the example of the stage-by-stage transformation in the lamentations of the noble lady in labour.

## [L]

We have saved a discussion of another variety of indirect representation in jokes – *metaphor* – until now, on the one hand because in judging it we came across fresh difficulties or alternatively because difficulties that have already arisen on other occasions can be seen particularly clearly. We have already admitted that in many of the examples we investigated we were unable to banish a hesitation as to whether they were to be counted as jokes at all, and we recognized that this uncertainty and the doubts it raised were a great blow to the foundations of our inquiry. However, there is no other material where I feel this uncertainty more forcibly and frequently than with jokes based on metaphor [*Cleichniswitz*]. The feeling that usually tells me well before a joke's hidden, essential nature is revealed – and, it seems, tells a great number of others too – 'this is a joke, this is something you can claim is a joke' – leaves me in the lurch most

readily in cases of witty comparisons. Even if I have declared without a second thought that a comparison is a joke, a moment later I believe I have noticed that the enjoyment it gives me is of a different quality from the kind I usually owe to a joke; and the circumstance that witty comparisons are only very rarely capable of rousing that explosive laughter which is the sign of a good joke, makes it impossible for me to evade my doubts as I usually do – by confining myself to the best and most effective examples of its kind.

It is easy to show that there are remarkably fine and effective examples of metaphors that do not impress us at all as being jokes. The lovely comparison in Ottilie's *Journal* between constant tenderness and the English Navy's red thread (see p. 17) is one such; and I cannot resist referring to another with equal pleasure, for I have not yet grown tired of admiring it, nor got over the impression it made on me. It is the metaphor with which Ferdinand Lasalle<sup>58</sup> closed one of his famous speeches for the defence (*Science and the Workers*): 'A man who has dedicated his life to the watchword "Science and the Workers", would, as I have explained, be no more impressed even by a judge's verdict that he encountered on his way through life than a retort breaking might impress a chemist engrossed in his scientific experiments. Frowning slightly at the resistance of matter, once the disturbance has been removed he goes calmly on with his researches and labours.'

A rich selection of shrewd and witty metaphors is to be found in Lichtenberg's writings (vol. II, Göttingen ed.); and that is where I shall take the material for our investigation from.

'It is almost impossible to carry the torch of truth through a crowd without singeing someone's beard.'

That surely appears to be a witticism, but on closer inspection we note that the witty effect does not come from the metaphor itself, but from a secondary characteristic it has. The 'torch of truth' is actually not a new metaphor, but one that has long been current and reduced to a fixed cliché, as always happens if a metaphor is lucky and gets accepted by linguistic usage. While we scarcely notice the metaphor in 'the torch of truth' any longer, in Lichtenberg's version it is restored to its full original force, for he builds on it