Learning about Leadership: How does “the Comedy Gaze” contribute?

What happens to how we think about ‘leaders’ – and the practice(s) of ‘leadership’ – when we gaze through the lens of comedy? There is much scepticism about the impacts and outcomes of modern leadership practice(s) on wider economy, society and environment. Teaching reflectively about ‘leaders’ and ‘leadership’ in Business School settings poses particular challenges at a time when trust in the character, motivations and behaviours of leaders is breaking down. Drawing on theory of comedy and emancipatory pedagogy, I argue for the value of employing the comedy gaze as an aid to teaching about leadership; as a uniquely engaging way of facilitating insight, reflection and debate about the incongruities and paradoxes inherent in contemporary conceptions of business, political and organisational leadership. However, while thoughtful humour is useful in learning, comedy is neither impartial nor necessarily benign. The use of the comedy gaze as a critical thinking method in the classroom poses a number of ethical questions.

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