

2. SKI COMEDY: ON THE LIGHT SIDE OF MOUNTAIN FILM

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In the early days of mountain cinema, comedy was a popular genre through which to show the Alps (Mantovani 2020, 35), with skiing at the precipice of the *Bergfilm*. Arnold Fanck, the leading director of the German mountain film genre, referred to his first cinematic works not as mountain but as *ski* films (Haque 2020, 252). These films—above all his comedies *Der große Sprung* (*The Great Leap*, 1927) and *Der weiße Rausch* (*The White Ecstasy*, 1931)—had tremendous impact on the development of ski tourism and the cinematic representation of mountains in general (Peabody 2021). Despite this impact, the discourse on mountain film surprisingly does not consider the role played by ski comedy. Instead, it largely maintains an interest in mountain melodrama, following Siegfried Kracauer's remarks on mountain film as an odd pastiche of "inaccessible steeps and insoluble human conflicts" (1947, 110), and builds on contemporary reviews that saw in the *Bergfilm* a "great tragic symphony" (Rosenfeld 1926). In addition to predominantly melodramatic associations with the genre, the perception of comedy as lowbrow entertainment previously hindered critical perspectives on humorous mediations of mountain cinema. To fully comprehend mountain cinema and gain a broader understanding of its diverse nature, it is crucial to appreciate the contributions of ski comedies as one of mountain film's oldest subgenres.

Recently, Christian Quendler argued that humor is central to grasping the multidimensionality of alpine environments (2022, 137). Indeed, throughout the long history of scholarship on humor, theorists have underlined humor's

potential to produce excess in meaning (Koestler 1964) and transgress boundaries (Freud 1991[1905]). Within the polyvalent landscape of humor, scholars highlight its potential to subvert and sustain norms (King 2002, 8), an instrumental component for gaining a more comprehensive understanding of mountain film. In this chapter, comedy alerts us to traditional conceptions of mountain cinema and animates a productive reconsideration by challenging some of the genre's defining principles that date back to the Weimar tradition. If the *Bergfilm* consolidates hierarchical social structures and national boundaries, establishes the male alpinist hero, and displays control over alpine landscape, the ski comedy exhibits nonhierarchical networks and global circuits, mocks the individual male alpinist hero, and transgresses notions of power and control in mountain cinema. This intervention in key themes of traditional mountain film liberates corseted perceptions of mountains and their mediations in a playful space of comic freedom. Thinking of mountain film in lighter terms not only offers a preliminary assessment of the ski comedy but, as the best (and sometimes even the funniest) comedies do, "achieve[s] something that is more than simply funny" (Mast 1979, x). When the ski comedy trips up the alpinist hero and celebrates the freedom from traditional gender roles, we find that mountain films from the genre-defining 1920s and 30s offer a surprisingly timely value critique that speaks to questions of gender equality and tourist consumption. In its analysis of representative ski comedies from the silent and sound eras, this chapter showcases mountain film's investment in the comic mode and addresses its mutually subversive and affirmative stands in (re)negotiating gender roles and tourist landscapes. It asks how the comedy finds itself on skis and how, in turn, skis find their way into comedy. It explores skis' potential as "gag machines" (Gunning 1995, 96) and symbols for social mobility, asks how the genre popularizes and critiques mountain travel, and demonstrates how global, socio-cultural and economic circuits manipulate the comic landscape of skiing.

THE DYNAMICS OF SKIING AND FILM COMEDY

Ski slopes are productive playgrounds upon which to illustrate the most common theories of humor: Touching on the superiority theory of humor, skilled skiers might slip into laughter at the misfortune of a beginner struggling to master the sport, experiencing a triumphant, malicious enjoyment that reflects the peculiar power struggles on the ski hill. Novice skiers laughing off their frustrations, then, engage in humor within theories of release as they redirect their emotions. While Sigmund Freud saw in laughter a gratifying mechanism to reduce nervous energy (1991, 167), Immanuel Kant could just as easily have returned from his first ski lesson when he described laughter as "an affect resulting from the sudden transformation of a heightened

expectation into nothing” (2002, 209). The idea of the travel-averse philosopher on skis amusingly follows Kant’s own understanding of humor as a form of release and relaxation. It creates a sense of joy that disrupts an established order, as if all sense of logic, coherence, consistency, linearity, and clarity were momentarily undone to allow unconscious associations free rein, shifting energy into a playful diversification of meanings. This sudden moment of humorous transformation, frequently classified as an instance of incongruity theory, springs from a collision of two different frames of reference, or circuits, that elicits a change of perspective, provokes momentary defamiliarization, and creates a surplus of meaning. In *The Act of Creation* (1964), Arthur Koestler refers to the clash of unconnected matrices, or their tipping into each other, as “bisociation”—a creative act that suddenly, yet logically, links the unrelated, the strange, the incompatible, and incommensurable. The comic unlocks unexpected meaning by means of difference, conflict, and counter-imagery. Humor also develops from contrasts as in the oft-cited mechanical encrustation of the living, the basis of Henri Bergson’s seminal humor theory *Laughter* (1900), which contains elements of release, superiority, and incongruity. His understanding of laughter revolves around the relational and metaphorical opposition of the living and the mechanical and sees comic deviation in moments when automated mechanisms violate an organic progression or habitual expectation (Bergson 1900).

The identification of comedy with the mechanical relates to the circuits that connect our reflections on mountain film in this book; it also connects the methodological pathways within this study. Laughter arises from the collision of semantic circuits, skiing creates circuits between bodies and landscapes (Rapp 1997, 89), and mountain film develops in global circuits of technological and aesthetic modernity (Peabody 2021, 2). If humor develops from “a spontaneous flash of insight” (Koestler 1964, 45) that creates multiple meanings and ends up either in laughter or in intellectual synthesis, then the mountain film operates as a “creative catalyst” (Peabody 2021, 2) that reveals the multiple dimensions of alpine realities and harmonizes what Eric Rentschler and Caroline Schaumann refer to as the *Bergfilm*’s dichotomous epistemologies (Rentschler 1990; Schaumann 2014). Ski comedy has the potential to reconfigure several of mountain film’s oppositions, such as nature/technology, tradition/modernity, stillness/mobility, rural/urban, man/woman, and, perhaps most significantly, tragedy/comedy.

The film comedy’s “in-between state” (Horton 1991, 5), together with “skiing’s ability to reconcile various dichotomies” (Denning 2015, 108), introduces a series of thematic moves away from the ideals of the classic German mountain film. These include an interest in modern mountain imaginaries over Romantic yearnings and a shift of cinematic interest from mountains to skis. If Weimar mountaineering film flees from the thoroughfares of

modernity (Rentschler 1990, 139) and frequently conceals signs of media networks, the ski comedy uses the cinematic apparatus and high velocity of the modern circuits in which it operates to bring to light new forms of mobility. The cinematic interest of ski comedy thus lies less in pitting human fate against alpine nature than in praising the machines that overturn—rather than entrench—the contradictions of alpine modernity. Freed from the tragic constraints of the *Bergfilm*, ski comedy's unsparing display of the human figure's lack of skill and adaptability results in laughter rather than death. Instead of iconic frames of alpinist control, the ski comedy offers volatile projections of modern mobility. Trains, cars, roads, photographs, cameras, telephones, and hotels feature prominently in the ski comedy alongside its eponymous star.

Skis, as historian Andrew Denning argues, are a symbol of modernity (2015, 8), and mountain film scholars highlight how they are emblematic of media and mobility. Throughout the history of the ski film, scholars, directors, and producers have argued that skiing “lends itself to film better than any other sport” (Senn 2022, 4; Rapp 1997; Rapp 2002; Aspetsberger 2002; Herzog 2005; Martin 2017). This close relationship is supported by the joint evolution of ski and mountain film camera techniques, which famously led to the global success of the Arlberg technique (Rapp 1997, 91). Accordingly, Christoph Rapp assigns the roles of both subject and object to skiing in mountain mediascapes. He situates the “continuous dynamic” of skiing in relation to the cinematic dynamism of film and stresses the sport's inherent cinematic properties (Rapp 2002, 81). Like early cameras, skis document movement and project it onto a white surface. They aptly mediate movement between the body, a three-dimensional landscape, and the two-dimensional space of the cinema screen. Body, skis, mountain—in this triangle of mountain mediation, the skiing body is both the athletic medium that prefigures movement and the aesthetic camera that records it (Rapp 2002, 89).

As a type of magic object, skis possess significance beyond the objective and help us make sense of the tangled network of mountain ecology, economics, culture, technology, and semantics. Just how skis connect the scrambled lines of multiple discourses and assemble a variety of projections on mountain space, and how skis might work comedically towards revealing the multidimensionality of mountains, is a question that at least in part requires specific investigation. Thus, I will now begin to schuss through the comedic landscape of the ski film and explore two cinematic sites of slapstick skiing. The first and main site of analysis is the slapstick ski comedy. It highlights the centrality of objects in film comedy at the intersection of vaudeville and early slapstick and explores the role of skis as symbols of social mobility and tourism. To show a very different mode of ski comedy and to honor its accelerated implications for mobility and tourism, the second site of analysis is twenty-first-century travel

ski comedy, in which laughter arises from the human inability to navigate the cultural contact zones and globalized economies of commercial skiing. While slapstick of the 1910s and 20s celebrates skis as instruments of comedy at the expense of skiers, travel ski comedy rarely finds laughs in athletic inability. Instead, it addresses the deplorable state of the ski economy and reminds us of the genre's ability to draw attention to severe socio-cultural and ecological grievances. Each of the two cinematic sites of analysis probes different historical contexts of mountain film and includes a variety of regional, national, and transnational settings of comic skiing. As the "universality of film comedy" (Horton and Rapf 2013, 1) and the omnipresence of skiing in slapstick comedy and mountain film make it impossible to articulate ski comedy in full detail, the films in this chapter are mere examples of the many ways in which mountain cinema has made use of the comedic potential of skiing—or to paraphrase genre theorist John Frow, these films do not belong to the ski comedy but are, rather, uses of it (2014, 2).

SLAPSTICK IN THE SNOW: SOCIAL MOBILITY AND TOURIST EMPOWERMENT

Skiing appears remarkably early in the global history of cinematic comedy. This emergence is situated in the performative, theatrical origins of cinema (Kaes 2006, 56) and positioned in relation to key characteristics of slapstick comedy's humor economy. Along with other instruments and theatrical props, the laughable fall on skis, like the slip on the banana peel, draws attention to slapstick's inherent commitment to physical comedy, while also pointing at the material objects that give rise to laughter (Mast 1979, 23–24; Malakaj and Lyons 2021, 12). In his study on comedy, Andrew Scott understands slapstick as a site "where the body meets the world of things" and underscores the role of objects in negotiating the connection between world and body: "By examining the identity and utility of things and playing with the spaces they occupy, their dimensions, properties, and cultural significance, the body's relationship to the external world is made strange" (2014, 74). His reflections on object-based defamiliarization processes meet, in part, with Tom Gunning's understanding of slapstick devices as "gag machines," which stimulate fresh perceptions by assuming a life of their own and subsequently underscore physical comedy's investment in the mechanical (1995, 96; 2010, 140).

The films of slapstick icon Max Linder show us the degree to which skis are gag machines embedded in the larger historical context around the turn of the twentieth century that saw a renaissance of athleticism, technological advances, and the development of an entertainment industry. Skis figure in a number of films featuring Linder's on-screen persona, also called Max, but they take center stage in *Max fait du ski* (*Max Goes Ski-ing*, 1910), a short that follows Max's clumsy and frantic skiing attempts from inside his hotel

room to a wintery landscape. The film's comic effects build strongly on the corporality of the first Lumière jests and lay the foundation for ski comedy's visceral engagements with modernity, physical gags, and incongruous semantic circuits that will become staples of the genre. These effects include an amusing engagement with emblems of modernity (i.e. hotels, photo cameras, skis) and the temporary violation of conventions in moments of discrepancy when outdoor equipment is tested indoors, bringing down the athletic hero. Max, the upper-class twit, trips, slips, slides, falls, and can only keep on his feet with great difficulty and the help of others. In these moments, the comedy not only offers opportunities to participate in the aesthetic and athletic possibilities of modern life; it indulges in an art of falling that degrades the alpine hero and draws on the social inclusivity of humor to harmonize class difference.

In *Max fait du ski*, skis are a comic object for social mobility that reorder the social fabric by constructing an incongruence between habitus and field. With Pierre Bourdieu's research on embodied social history in mind, Max's ski performance decodes comedy's potential for social mobility.¹ In addition to poking fun at bourgeois attempts at skiing, Max's pitiful athletic feats demonstrate comedy's ability to mess with social order. The ski comedy allows for the dandy Max to pass through his social field and provides an ideal image of Bourdieu's *habitus clivé* along the way. By leaving Max tied to his skis as he exits his hotel room to step into the snow, Linder perfectly captures Max's socio-somatic dislocation that keeps his habitus under tension along with his body (Figure 2.1).

The skiing body's potential to wander through social strata, and the symbolic and cultural capital that structures this potential, becomes even more apparent in Arnold Fanck's ski comedy *Der große Sprung*, in which the ambiguous playfulness of the ski comedy toys with *Bergfilm* paradigms and comic effect contributes to the empowerment of tourists—both male and female. In this sense, skis behave, like bicycles, as a symbol of modernity that is also linked to women's liberation (Hallenbeck 2016). Just as Linder's Max becomes someone else by stepping into his ski gear, the female protagonist portrayed by Leni Riefenstahl is emancipated in the comic landscape of skiing. The film features Riefenstahl in the role of the local goatherd Gita, who manipulates the rules of a ski race, a ski comedy staple, to be conquered by the wealthy urbanite Michel Treuherz (Hans Schneeberger). Gita clearly sets the terms for the courtship and skillfully misleads Michel's rival Toni (Luis Trenker), a native of the Dolomites. Ultimately, Michel wins the race and Gita's heart with the help of clever tricks orchestrated by Gita and his loyal servant Paule. In contrast to Fanck's earlier productions, *Der Berg des Schicksals* (*Mountain of Destiny*, 1924) and *Der heilige Berg* (*The Holy Mountain*, 1926), in which the female leads are either baleful fantastical



Figure 2.1 *Habitus clivé* and the comic skier in *Max fait du ski* (1910)

projections or in desperate need of rescue by a man, Gita rewrites at least some of the contemporary rules for courtship and takes her destiny into her own hands.

Der große Sprung offers a remarkable contrast to Fanck's earlier films in other ways, too. Rather than follow a typical tragic course, it "skillfully satirize[s]" some of the features of Fanck's other films (Horak 1997; Peabody 2021). *Der große Sprung* pokes fun at the sentiments of Fanck's previous pathos-laden mountain dramas—which tend to glorify mountains as places of mythic struggle or naïve innocence—by celebrating the ski as a mischievous device in a vibrant mix of ski acrobatics and slapstick interludes. It is worth noting that in this film, Fanck approaches slapstick from two directions: first, via Paul Graetz, one of the most important Berlin comedians of the 1920s who turns to the slopes for comic effect, and, second, via the professional skier Hans Schneeberger who manipulates his athletic skills to act funny. Throughout the film, it becomes obvious how effectively skis facilitate laughable moments and how strongly the ski comedy contains core elements of early physical comedy: As if it had served Tom Gunning as a basis for his observations on slapstick staples (2010), *Der große Sprung* shows children playing, utilizes strings and threads for the miraculous disappearance of skis, and brings unusual body shapes into play via Michel's inflatable helium suit, which is supposed to prolong the novice skier's jumps and protect him from falling injuries.

Fanck's readiness to tap into the comic and narrative repertoire of early slapstick extends to the film's participation in cinema's budding fascination with disruption (Gunning 2019, 142). Michel destroys sheds and breaks up crowds on his run and, at one point, delivers an insightful comic assemblage of disparate elements. For Christian Quendler, comic assemblage affords an understanding of a protagonist's placement within the technical and technological landscape of mountains (2022, 137). This is certainly true for Fanck's Michel: When the out-of-control skier tears down a chimney from the roof and continues his descent with a smokestack in his hands, he resembles a locomotive riding through the wintry landscape as if on rails (Figure 2.2). Following Quendler's argument further, forging new connections across different planes also echoes James Beattie's first formulations of incongruity theory as a Horatian monster combining different parts to form a laughable idea (1779, 320). In certain ways, Fanck's locomotive offers an amusing exchange of the monsters of mountain gloom with those of early tourism. Because more than conjuring laughter, the assemblage of skier and chimney contributes to a reevaluation of the relationship between human, objects, and mountains in ski landscapes as it points to the central role of trains as accelerators of cinema and tourism.

As a key element of comic assemblage, skis also take on a central role in an accumulation that, laughable or not, ties together a myriad of stereotypes and



Figure 2.2 Comic assemblage and the human locomotive in *Der große Sprung* (1927)

characterizations of travelers and travelees.² When *Der große Sprung* pits Toni against Michel, the film comically articulates the discursive construction of mountain travelers and mountain locals along notions of difference. Unlike in *Der heilige Berg* and *Der Berg des Schicksals*, Toni does not embody the tragic hero who rescues his beloved and falls to his death with his friend, nor is the mountain an enclosed space for a few protagonists but a permeable setting for the pleasure of many. Instead, he is a lustful local and dimwit resistant to social and technological progress in a well-orchestrated assemblage of stereotypes built on the dominant discourse in mountain travel writing that renders alpine men as stupid, backward, and available for sexual play (Müller 2024). Not only does such cultural Othering carry the film's general comedic atmosphere, but it is communicated and effectively introduced via skis: On one hand, Toni's concupiscence only brings him into unwelcome proximity to Paule and Michel, whose bodies repeatedly become wedged into each other during their ski course. On the other hand, Toni's Nordic skiing technique clearly situates him in the allochronic discourse of a backward mountain man who skis "like Andreas Hofer."³

While the Tyrolean Toni loses his former heroic position in the Fanckian *Bergfilm*, the tourist Michel, rendered a "brave glacier flea" in the original film title, reaches new heights of heroism, evidently recoding what it means to be a mountain hero. The ski comedy hero does not look like a mountain hero, move like one, nor share his traditional qualities: Michel is lanky, unathletic, sickly, shy, and can barely keep up with the physical presence of his rival, who calls him "the little man" and repeatedly pokes fun at the falling urbanite. Diverging from the heroes in Fanck's earlier mountain films, falling does not stand in the way of a happy union; instead, it brings the clumsy Michel straight into Gita's bed, as Fanck's careful editing suggests.

Fanck also pokes fun at the values that were paramount in his early mountain films. Honorable behavior, still obligatory in *Der Berg des Schicksals* and *Der heilige Berg*, is ridiculed in *Der große Sprung*. This is particularly striking in a scene toward the film's close, in which Toni feels snubbed by his opponent's numerous tricks and wants to punish Michel with a sound beating. Instead of the swindler's quick rebuke, this ski comedy opens up a slapstick arena surrounded by snowcapped mountains for the two suitors to battle it out. Nowhere else in the comedy is the clash of two incongruent circuits as conspicuous as in Michel and Toni's dance of comic beatings. And nowhere else do skis have such countless implementations as a comic weapon—as sticks, shovels, barriers, and jumping aids. By pitting the two suitors against each other, Fanck successfully provides a cinematic mediation of the "*Eifersuchtstanz*" ("dance of jealousy") of a Tyrolean whose pride has been wounded, thus tapping into a stock act of Tyrolean Evenings—those staged spectacles that have served to promote Tyrol since the nineteenth

century and are today synonymous with the problematic development of mass mountain tourism in the region. Thus, with Michel and Toni's dance, Fanck offers yet another instance to consider skis as comic objects connecting various strings within the network of mountain tourism.

What *Der große Sprung* essentially shows is an empowerment of mountain tourists: One does not need to behave like a Tyrolean, one does not need to look like one, and one does not even need to be able to ski like one in order to find happiness in the mountains of Tyrol. This is the ultimate message of Fanck's ski comedy, embodied by the unusual hero Michel Treuherz. Although Michel cheats, falls, slips, relies on the help of his servant Paule, and, in his athletic abilities, is surpassed even by Gita's goat, his happiness seems unfettered. Michel achieves, if not moments of masculine heroism or singular mountain glory, at least the restoration of social order so typical of comedy when, toward the end of the film, he sets off skiing with Gita and their flock of children. The film's comic mode moves away from *Bergfilm* conventions while at the same time reconfirming them in the act of departure that Geoff King describes as an ambivalent move toward and away from harmony (2002, 8). Thus, the inability to move through alpine terrain does not end in tragedy, as it would in Fanck's previous *Bergfilms*, but leaves us with a happy ending. This already indicates that the slapstick ski comedy is not solely about quick gags and physical jests, counteracting persistent scholarly assumptions that label ski films as action-laden and plotless (Rentschler 1990, 148; Horak 1997, 46; Rapp 2002, 80).

Finally, Fanck's ski comedy rejects yet another presumption of the *Bergfilm* as a highly national phenomenon, when the director does not merely foreground transnational interests via the subject matter of travel, but openly reflects on the transnational context of comedic production:

Now hardly any German company would have the courage to produce a full-length grotesque. But fortunately, Ufa had just passed into American hands—the Parufamet; and since Americans are, after all, much more amenable to humor, especially grotesque humor à la Chaplin, Buster Keaton or Harold Lloyd, the film was approved. (König and Trenker 1992, 119)

Transnational networks, whether with regard to production, theme, or genre, have been with the ski film since its first turns at slapstick and remain key in the twenty-first century, with films that critique at least some of the circuits of global ski tourism switched on, in part, by Fanck's ski comedies.

TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY SKI COMEDY: WHEN SKIING IS NO JOKE

Almost a century after Fanck's ski comedies premiered in German movie theaters and contributed to the international promotion of the sport, skiing is considered a common pastime across the globe; and mountains, along with beaches, are deemed among the world's most popular tourist destinations (Müller 2024), sustaining an industry that annually generates 33 billion US dollars in the Alps alone (Martin 2020). While slapstick ski comedy portrayed skis as the great social equalizer in the mountains in the first decades of the twentieth century, ski comedy at the beginning of the twenty-first century disenchanters viewers of the belief that skiing has the potential to harmonize inequalities and adopts a more comprehensive perspective of the ski industry. In this vein, travel ski comedy mobilizes globalized comic visions that engage less with individual skiers and their physical shortcomings in an emerging sport, and instead expose both the human inability to navigate transcultural contact zones and the deplorable state of commercialized skiing. The laughter provoked in the twenty-first-century ski comedy is thus less a result of the mechanics of skiing than of the machinery of ski tourism that encrusts humans (and mountains) in globalized patterns of promotion and consumption. This is a form of laughter, caught up in matrices of power imbalance, that operates within the logics of emotional release, allowing the ski comedy to perform less visible but equally felt shortcomings of humankind. Although an exploitative capitalist system is no joke, the setting of cross-cultural encounters in unfamiliar terrain creates situations in which laughter can provide an almost Freudian relief from sites of hegemony and ecological destruction.

The French comedy *La Loi de la Jungle* (*Struggle for Life*, 2016), set in French Guiana, is a perfect example that speaks comic truth to the capitalist network of the ski industry. The film, which draws elements from slapstick and screwball comedy, follows Marc Châtaigne (Vincent Macaigne), a hapless intern at the Ministry of Standards, who is sent to Guiana by ministry officer Rosio (Jean-Luc Bideau) to implement European construction standards at "Guya-Neige": the first ski resort in the Amazonian rainforest developed to increase tourism to French Guiana. Such indoor ski halls are implicated in the history of mountain film and travel, as the first indoor ski resorts constructed in Berlin and Vienna in 1927 indicate (Denscher 2022). Built in the wake of Fanck's *Der große Sprung* and embedded in a larger exhibition park to promote new destinations to German travelers, the Berlin "Schneepalast" (Figure 2.3) was a financial success and inspired Dagfinn Carlsen, a Norwegian athlete who starred in Fanck's *Das Wunder des Schneeschuhs*, to initiate the building of a permanent ski hall in Vienna (Denscher 2022). The analysis of *La Loi de la Jungle* in this section shows that, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, indoor ski



Figure 2.3 “Schneepalast” Berlin (1927)

resorts continue to engage with the mechanics of mountain tourism and, in their comedic mediation, address issues of social and environmental justice.

The film, by Grenoble-born Antonin Peretjatko, includes some of ski comedy’s staples already deployed in Weimar cinema and expands them toward more comprehensive comedic refigurations of ski tourism. Similar to the Fanckian ski comedy, in *La Loi de la Jungle* the introduction of skiing goes hand in hand with the planning of a railway line, while an unconventional hero is placed at the center of the film’s humor economy. Like Michel, Marc is an urbanite without ski skills. With his stooping posture, lanky hair, and his tendency to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, Marc is neither in command of his body nor his private life or career. As soon as he arrives at the development site of Guya-Neige, he stumbles over tropical shrubbery, falls to his knees repeatedly and can only navigate the rainforest with the help of the local Duplex (Pascal Légitimus) and the female intern Tarzan (Vimala Pons). Instead of falling on alpine slopes, Marc stumbles through a (neo) colonial landscape and frequently gets in the way of two circuits that repeatedly collide over the course of the film: a tropical ecosystem and capitalist neocolonial desires. When Marc insists “on doing his job” and starts to write a report envisioning Guya-Neige as a “vector to meet and have fun” that “will enrich the social biotope” and soon become “the number one spot in Guiana,” an Anaconda slithers across his laptop, introducing meaning beyond the marketing terminology. In moments like these, Peretjatko uses a form of displacement that goes beyond the rural/urban divide in order to raise awareness of neocolonial ignorance of local environments. Marc remains silent as he witnesses the destruction of forest life, which is replaced with plastic firs. That Guya-Neige is not envisioned as a place to foster understanding but rather as a

money-making machine becomes apparent throughout the film. With very few scenes shot on ski hills and a number of instances that highlight the mechanical nature of the profit-seeking ski industry, skiing as sport remains peripheral in the film, while international investors and corporations with greenwashing agendas work toward initiating ski tourism in Guiana. In the end, the indoor ski resort is never realized: During the opening ceremony, investors discover what they think is a gold nugget and the site is turned into a gold mine. The fake nugget was lost by Damian (Rodolphe Pauly), the auditor for *Cayenne-Manaus-Trains*, who manufactured it to help with local land negotiations. For the investors, skiing is not a sport but a means to an end. Marc fails his internship owing to the closure of the project and remains blind to the profiteering he has enabled, returning to France worried about what might happen with “the ski classes for Guineans” and “public interest,” but, in a quick pun, is reminded by Rosio that “life has other interests.”

In its satirization of ski tourism as a neocolonial practice, *La Loi de la Jungle* provides counter-imagery to the blissful ski vacation and conjures a form of laughter that “goes beyond the function of addressing the (erstwhile) colonial” (Reichl & Stein 2005, 12). To demonstrate the film’s role as a comic weapon, Peretjatko installs a key object not of comedy, but of colonial expansion: the arrow. Damian embodies the French colonialist and continually brags about his commercial prospects even if it means that he has to “eat the Indians alive.” Every time he utters this warning, a poison dart hits him out of nowhere and forces him to the floor. The film’s comic vision emphasizes a chain of perpetual exploitation, in which each participant is cast as both villain and fool in a reckoning with the ski industry. Marc sets out to maintain mass ski tourism in the colony but sees it manipulated in comedic circuits.

The display of the human inability to interrupt the mechanics of capitalist usurpation in *La Loi de la Jungle* has a defamiliarizing effect. It “de-automates our perception,” as Heinz Antor explains in his exploration of postcolonial laughter, “and makes us look afresh at what we are surrounded by every day” (Antor 2005, 94). Thus, contemporary ski comedies are not mere light-hearted forms of entertainment. They are comic reflections that deserve a place in unsettling the business with skiing. Curiously, it is the pain more than the pleasure associated with a ski holiday that resonates through contemporary ski comedies. Such comic mediations dredge

the comedy up from a depth of affliction or anxiety, rage or humiliation so as to invest it with the authority of that experience. In articulating the unspeakable, in a sense more exacting than coming up with insults or obscenities, it must transcend the trauma in question without simply negating it, an exercise that demands both courage and truthfulness. (Eagleton 2019, 141)

Awkward physical movements on the way to social mobility in twentieth-century skiing feats and the deplorable state of twenty-first-century ski tourism are clearly not unspeakable in the same way, but they all find articulation and humorous relief in skiing's comic visions.

Ski comedy's slapstick repertoire of comic occasions, instruments, assemblages, appearances, and perspectives creates a cinematic space that allows for joyful liberation and is deployed throughout twenty-first-century ski comedies such as Ruben Östlund's *Force Majeure* (2014) and its US adaptation *Downhill* (Jim Rash & Nat Faxon, 2020). The comic mode in ski films is more than a promise of pleasure. It provides an opportunity to come to terms with human inadequacies and re-evaluate notions such as superiority and control, in mountains and beyond. Ski comedy has the potential to free not just ourselves (or our bodies and value systems) from the constraints of convention but also, as I hope to have demonstrated, our comprehension of mountain film from generic restrictions. Since the early days of film comedy, skiing has helped us to see how we position ourselves in relation to each other and mountains as socio-cultural, ecological, economic, and symbolic spaces. In each of the cinematic examples discussed, comic skiing plays with the boundaries of freedom and control, raises awareness of dominant codes, and manipulates them in comic vision, as if to suggest that ski comedy contains it all—the eager alpinist, the emancipated Other, the exploited landscape, and more—and allows us to see, in miniature, the entire wondrous world of mountain cinema.

NOTES

1. Indeed, Max's skiing attempt and comedy's overall role in transgressing both habitus and field was addressed by Christian Quendler in his talk "Queere Chimäre: Humor und Assemblage" (Innsbruck, University of Innsbruck, June 17, 2021).
2. The term "travelee" was coined by Mary Louise Pratt in analogy with the term "addressee" and in relation to such terms as "colonizer" and "colonized" (*Imperial Eyes*, 258). Just as "addressee" denotes the person addressed by a speaker, "travelee" refers to the person traveled to by a traveler. For a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of "travelee" as a critical term see Catharine Mee, *Interpersonal Encounters in Contemporary Travel Writing: French and Italian Perspectives* (London: Anthem Press, 2015).
3. Unless stated otherwise, all direct references from the ski comedies discussed are translated by the author.

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