

Text D

Modular Man

Urbanism—the city dweller’s way of life—has preoccupied sociology since the turn of the century. Max Weber pointed out the obvious fact that people in cities cannot know all their neighbors as intimately as it was possible for them to do in small communities. Georg Simmel carried this idea one step further when he declared, rather quaintly, that if the urban individual reacted emotional to each and every person with whom he came into contact, or cluttered his mind with information about them, he would be “completely atomized internally and would fall into an unthinkable mental condition.”

Louis Wirth, in turn, noted the fragmented nature of urban relationships. “Characteristically, urbanites meet one another in highly segmental roles...” he wrote, “Their dependence upon others is confined to a highly factionalized aspect of the other’s round of activity.” Rather than becoming deeply involved with the total, personality of every individual we meet, he explained, we necessarily maintain superficial and partial contact with some. We are interested only in the efficiency of the shoe salesman in meeting our needs; we couldn’t care less that his wife is an alcoholic.

What this means is that we form limited involvement relationships with most of the people around us. Consciously or not we define our relationships with most people in functional terms. So long as we do not become involved with the shoe salesman’s problems at home, or his more general hopes, dreams and frustrations, he is, for us, fully interchangeable with any other salesman of equal competence. In effect, we have applied the modular principle to human relationships. We have created the disposable person: Modular Man.

Rather than entangling ourselves with the whole man, we plug into a module of his personality. Each personality can be imagined as a unique configuration of thousands of such modules. Thus no whole person is interchangeable with any other. But certain modules are. Since we are seeking only to buy a pair of shoes, and not the friendship, love or hate of the salesman, it is not necessary for us to tap into or engage with all the other modules that form his personality. Our relationship is safely limited. There is limited liability on both sides. The relationship entails certain accepted forms of behavior and communication. Both sides understand, consciously or otherwise, the limitations and laws. Difficulties arise only when one or another party oversteps the tacitly understood limits, when he attempts to connect up with some module not relevant to the function at hand.

Today a vast sociological and psychological literature is devoted to the alienation presumed to flow from this fragmentation of relationships. Much of the rhetoric of existentialism’ and the student revolt decries this fragmentation. It is said that we are not sufficiently “involved” with our fellow man. Millions of young people go about seeking “total involvement”.

Before leaping to the popular conclusion that modularization is all bad, however, it might be well to look more closely at the matter. Theologian Harvey Cox echoing Simmel, has pointed out that in an urban environment the attempt to “involve” oneself fully with everyone can lead only to self-destruction and emotional emptiness.

I. Choose the correct answers.

1. On the basis of the fact that Max Weber declared, Georg Simmel further _____.
 - listed the details of urbanism.
 - pointed out the consequence of urbanism.
 - implied the psychological crisis in urbanism.
 - explained the authenticity of Weber's finding.
 2. Louis Wirth emphasizes that _____.
 - the relationship between urban citizens is not stable
 - urban citizens don't care each other's privacy
 - keeping distance with each other in cities is necessary and generally accepted
 - it is a distinguishing trait of city people that they are partly interlinked
 3. By categorizing "Modular Man" as "disposable person", the author implies that _____.
 - urban dwellers regard their relationship utilitarian
 - city people's interaction is mainly for the exchange of service
 - urban dwellers primarily focus on other's function
 - people in the city are considered as a tool for a routine life
 4. According to the passage, a "module" is more likely to refer to _____.

A. a part of a person	B. a personality component
C. a distinct function of a person	D. an aspect of a person's character
 5. The author regards in urban environment, the fragmentation of relationships as _____.

A. essential	B. controversial	C. detrimental	D. noticeable
--------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

II. Complete the sentences below by using the words in the passage.

1. James seemed without ambition in any direction at that time being somewhat _____ with family matters.
 2. For this reason many litter boxes are covered and even _____ designed to be easier on the eyes.
 3. Crime _____ society by disrupting our ties with our neighbours.
 4. Amongst the threads, which _____ the wings and legs of intercepted prey, the spiders are perfectly at home and can pounce on the struggling victim at once if it be small and harmless or keep at a respectful distance, checking all efforts at escape, if it be poisonous or strong.
 5. Even though we now have a standardized video games rating system, there are still individuals like Jack Thompson who _____ the violence and mature themes found in many video games.

Keys:

I. 1. C 2. D 3. D 4. C 5. A

II.

1. preoccupied
2. quaintly
3. atomizes
4. entangle
5. decry

Text E

How to Teach Yourself to Be Funnier?

Most of us have strange habits. Here's one of Steve Sultanoff's: From time to time, he goes out in public wearing a clown nose (and carries one with him always). His reasoning is pretty straightforward: "You just never know when a clown nose might come in handy," he says. Sultanoff also carries a false Elvis driver's license, which he presents at hotels whenever he checks in.

[A] The psychologist and self-described "clinical mirthologist" is a hardcore proponent of the idea that humor, experienced often and in everyday life, can enhance one's health, friendships, and even romantic relationships. And he's right: Laughter, humor's external measurement, is clinically shown to reduce blood pressure, increase pain tolerance, and boost the immune system. It even makes you sexier: A survey conducted this year by Discover and Match Media Group found that 67 percent of respondents cited having a sense of humor as "very" or "extremely" important in a potential mate.

Of course, for many of us, seeing someone bust out a clown nose at the DMV is more likely to induce an eye roll than a laugh. But it makes Sultanoff chuckle, and that's the point. Many people misunderstand humor as a purely relational experience — they focus on making better jokes or coming up with the perfect quip. [B] That's because the building blocks of humor are universal: Most of what we find funny will translate to other. So if you're looking for how to improve your sense of humor, you would do well to start by marking yourself laugh. Here's how to get there.

Let's start off by considering what humor really is. "You could start with the simple definition, which is that humor is what makes us laugh," Sultanoff says. However, he notes that humor can be experienced without laughter, like when we type "lol" into a text message without laughing, or read a great *Calvin & Hobbes* strip with a stony face. A better indicator for something humorous, Sultanoff says, is if it induces "mirth," or that internal feeling of "ha" we all experience — a glimmery, satisfying recognition of a specific type of pleasure.

One of the more well-known theories of humor is the "benign violation" theory — the idea that something is funny when it disrupts your sense of normalcy, but only in a way that doesn't present any real harm. That can take the form of simple incongruity, when two unlike things merge (one famous example taken from Harry Potter: Severus Snape wearing Neville Longbottom's grandmother's green dress and hat). It can also take the form of outrageouslyness, like when comedians violate social norms to shock us into laughter.

Understanding the fundamentals of humor is just one small piece of the puzzle, though. To incorporate this knowledge into your life, you'll need to work in three broad categories: First, you need to work on seeing these elements in the world around you; second, you need to consciously increase the amount of humor in your life; and finally, you'll need to learn how to translate all this funny business to others.

Learn what to look for.

As a young boy, Sultanoff remembers, he and his dad once drove past a cemetery near their home. "At the end of the street there was a sign that said, 'dead end,'" he recalls. "Now, some people might not even notice that." But his dad thought it was hilarious, and rightly so. These days,

Sultanoff tries to look for humor everywhere—in street signs, at restaurants, and, of course, after hurricanes.

Sultanoff recalls his father's find as an example of "comic vision", or the ability to see funniness in everyday life. [C] Comic vision is an essential skill for a humorist, he says. By looking at the world through funky-colored lenses, you'll start experiencing humorous situations more often, which will ultimately provide fodder for your interactions with others.

Seek out situations that make you laugh.

Spending time with things you already find funny — TV shows, movies, podcasts, etc. — can do a great deal to help you refine your own personal sense of humor: You learn what type of humor you like, and, just as important, what you don't. For example, Sultanoff, who likes puns and nerdy jokes, regularly watched *The Big Bang Theory*; on the flip side, he's learned that sitcoms about struggling 20-somethings, such as *Friends*, don't satiate his humor appetite, and so he doesn't bother watching something he knows won't benefit from. Once you know what kinds of humor you like, you can expand your palate slowly and consciously — for example, going from *Big Bang Theory* to another nerd-related show, or *Friends* to *Cheers*.

[D] He cites laughter yoga and laughter clubs, in which people make themselves laugh for health benefits and end up experiencing mirth as well. We do this organically in many social situations, too: people, especially women, laugh to facilitate social interactions even if nothing humorous is going on. Laugh generously, and you're building a social environment that's more conducive to future funny moments.

Know your audience.

[E] So the idea of developing something like "workplace-specific humor" is somewhat overrated — as long as you keep the jokes appropriate to the setting, the building blocks of humor will stay the same. But it is important to know what kind of people you're talking to. A joke that works on Americans might not work so well in China, for instance, simply because cultural norms are different.

The trick is to know how to apply the basic principles of humor to specific situations. For instance, the idea of the "gag" — a simple, recurring joke that employs incongruity and perhaps a prop — translates perfectly to a workplace environment in the mockumentary sitcom *The Office*, like the scene in the first episode when Jim places Dwight's stapler in Jell-O. *The Office* is actually full of such gags — the deadpan look at the camera, Michael's recurring speech errors, Creed's weird eating habits — that familiarize us with the absurdity of the characters but are also specific to the world of the show, which is a strange parallel to the corporate workspace that many of us know.

And these gags got funnier over time. Know why? Because Jim and the rest of the *Office* team had time to familiarize themselves with the show's unique and batty sense of humor — and so did we. The more *Office* specific pranks that occurred, and the more each character had their opportunity to joke around, the more viewers developed their taste for the show's unique flavor of humor. We built our relationships with the characters, and internalized their pranks and personalities. Over time, their jokes became our own.

I. Choose the correct answers.

1. Why does Steve Sultanoff have the habit of wearing a clown nose in public?

- A. Because he has a straightforward character.
- B. Because he is obsessed with circus.

- C. Because it's a way to keep the mind and body healthy.
D. Because it's a way of amusing himself.
2. Why does Steve Sultanoff call himself a “clinical mirthologist”?
A. Because he is also a psychotherapist.
B. Because he believes humor could be used to treat psychological disorder.
C. Because he tries to use humor to help people keep healthy.
D. Because he believes laughter could help people become attractive.
3. According to the “benign violation”, humor is produced when _____.
A. a male professor is wearing a dress
B. something strange takes place
C. exaggerated claims or actions surprise us
D. something mildly breaks your habitual thinking
4. With “comic vision”, people could _____.
A. always amuse themselves in daily life
B. accumulate materials for humorous expression
C. face disasters bravely
D. cultivate a sense of humor
5. Which of the following does not agree with the information in the passage?
A. As time goes on, it’s easier for audience to identify with the humorous situation of a show.
B. Steve Sultanoff prefers *The Big Bang Theory* to *Friends*.
C. Humor couldn’t cross cultural barriers.
D. humor could be a subtle enjoyment without being noticed by others.

II. Where could the following sentences be added to the passage? (The possible positions have been marked in the passage.)

1. “Look at the absurdity around you. Check for incongruities,” he advises.
2. But according to Sultanoff, the path to a better sense of humor starts from within.
3. It’s also possible to reverse-engineer humor by laughing, Sultanoff says.
4. Ultimately, most humor translates across situational boundaries, Sultanoff says.
5. Strange as they sound, Sultanoff’s quirks serve a purpose.

Keys:

- I.** 1. D 2. C 3. D 4. B 5. C
II. 1. C 2. B 3. D 4. E 5. A