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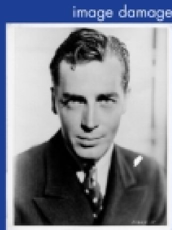

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Yea-Saying Laughter

Maria Hynes and Scott Sharpe

One kills not by anger but by laughter:
Friedrich Nietzsche.[1]

Today, it seems, everyone is a comedian. While wit has long had a place in the politician's arsenal, would-be leaders are now pushed to new lengths to show that they can pass the comic test, as the most recent US elections demonstrated well. From Tina Fey's highly publicized caricatures of Sarah Palin or Letterman's relentless jibes at John McCain, to the candidates' own attempts at carefully tailored self-mockery – all the evidence indicated a close relationship between persuasive power and laughter. Yet, the demand for comedians extends well beyond the political arena. Teachers are increasingly urged by educationalists to enliven their delivery with jocularity. Social protestors train newcomers in the use of humour for non-violent resistance. Teams of doctors dressed as clowns deliver an optimal dose of laughter in children's wards. Psychologists advise organisations on how to use humour to enhance workplace wellness, while negotiating the thorny issue of 'political correctness'. When work pursuits are over, laughter clubs offer a means of relieving stress, and personal column editors supply acronyms to assist in the search for a mate with a G(ood) S(ense) O(f) H(umour). It is little wonder that humour is becoming an increasingly important theme in scholarship, as not only humorologists but analysts of social life more generally seek to understand the peculiar and transformative powers of laughter.

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In evaluations of humour's qualifications as a vehicle of social, cultural and political transformation, it is its unique mode of delivering social *critique* that tends to be celebrated. Laughter is attributed with the quality of stealth, with its ability to fly under the radar of critical argument and deliver its message on the sly.[2] No doubt, the comic treatment of a 'serious issue' may avoid the constraints of serious discourse, as comedians, bigots and politicians well know; the humorist's fallback position that 'it was just a joke', provides an easy refuge. On the streets, laughing together is attributed with the capacity to strengthen collective struggles and much has been made of humorous strategies for ridiculing existing powers, whilst enhancing solidarity among those who join in consciousness-raising.[3]

While humour certainly has a role to play in the service of critique, we argue that the reduction of humour to a purely *negative* understanding of critique ultimately diminishes its potentials. One of the implications of this popular construction

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of humour's role is to subsume humorous resistance to a moral project which, for reasons we shall outline, leads to the atrophy of its transformative capacities. There is a well established relationship between critical thinking and morality. From the Kantian categorical imperative, to the founding of the Frankfurt school, through to contemporary textbooks on the how-to of critical thinking, it is clear that moral integrity and critical thinking go hand in hand. Thus, to argue that humour has capacities as a vehicle of critical thought is already to demonstrate its political and, indeed moral, legitimacy.

Much of this legitimacy derives from the image of thought that is germane to the representational tradition. One of the key motivations of critical thinking is to remove the layer of error that keeps us from the truth. In the gesture of nay-saying we prove that we are not fooled by appearances, that we can strip away things-as-they-seem-to-be and restore the natural relationship between thought and the true. In a single gesture, then, we demonstrate 'a *good will on the part of the thinker* and an *upright nature on the part of thought*'.[4] In the political sphere it is the spectre of ideology that gives added necessity to this already morally upright gesture of saying 'no'. There, restoring the in-principle bond between the true and the good involves revealing the power relations that stand in the way of truth, a capacity that is increasingly attributed to humour.[5]

Elsewhere, we have argued that opening up to a 'politics of affirmation' requires an attempt to think outside the representational tradition, a task for which humour has particular aptitude.[6] Here our concern is with the implications of transcendent judgments of humour, which judge humorous instances against an inherited set of values and criteria. If laughter serves to ridicule oppressive powers or galvanize marginalized peoples, then it is judged as having been put to the service of the good. Conversely, if laughter signals social exclusion or political apathy, then it is said to have been used for malevolent ends. Yet, tied to the conceptual and affective economy of judgment, humour becomes little more than a means of *realising* given values and ideals. Our concern is that this moral order may celebrate humour at its most life-denying moments, when it says 'no' to the actuality and potential of the present moment in the name of inherited ideals and future utopias.

Thankfully, such judgments of humour do not exhaust its potential. While they may raise important questions, they cannot fully grasp its transformative capacities. Our claim is that humour can also play a more affirmative role, not as a vehicle for the banal affirmation of the world as it is (as laughter clubs would have it), but as a disruptive and productive force. The paper attempts to open up to new ways of encountering, rather than merely interpreting, instances of humour. In order to do so we, firstly, characterize an approach to humour that interprets its meaning and judges its value, highlighting the transcendent character of such judgments. Whilst cognisant of the role these judgments can play, we seek to push the analysis of humour further, by making a case for its genealogical credentials. We outline what would be involved in taking laughter at face value – as an event of the body, which transforms us in spite of our ideals and will. Recognising the challenge that humour can provide to our habits of interpretation does mean acknowledging the limits of more programmatic attempts to *use* humour as a tool for transformation. We

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indicate the positivity of these interruptions and the role they play in the revaluing of values.

Which Laughter?

When Nietzsche's Zarathustra makes his descent from the mountains into the village place, his discourse on the truly joyful man – the *Übermensch* – is met with the jeering and mocking laughter of the townsfolk. Throughout his elaboration of the encounters and travails of Zarathustra, Nietzsche makes a clear and, for us, useful, distinction between the 'laughter of the herd' and the 'laughter of the heights'. No doubt jarring for its anti-democratic tendencies today – when the evocation of 'democracy' is commonly used as shorthand for all that is good[7] – Nietzsche's laughter of the heights is not meant as a celebration of the fascistic overcoming of the herd by the *Übermensch*. As Lippitt insists, 'it is not a case of the *Übermensch* overcoming the herd by overpowering it, but of overcoming the herd instinct in himself'.[8] In the following analysis we indicate the significance of this distinction between a nay-saying and more affirmative laughter. From the outset, it can be said that the latter undertakes the task of self-overcoming, to the extent that it challenges our attachment to inherited values and the herd instinct in us that would lead us to accept them as imperatives.

In a more recent and popular version of the lone voice scenario, *South Park's* Gerald Broflovski has come to the car park of a local hardware store to challenge the existing values of the local townsfolk. Gerald's cause in the episode, 'Smug Alert', is environmentalism, and his particular bugbear is the locals' lack of consciousness about the effects of their gas-guzzling car culture. When his efforts 'to care for the earth' are unappreciated by the 'ignorant idiots' of South Park, Gerald Broflovski takes his family to a place 'where everyone is motivated and progressive like us'. 'We need to be with our own kind' are Gerald's parting words to his son's best friend, Stan, as he heads in his new 'Toyonda Pious' to the liberal sanctuary of San Francisco. Gerald doesn't realize that his escape from the 'small-minded town of ignorant boobs' will set off an unforeseeable chain of events: Stan's rising consciousness and his release of a 'gay little song' urging the people of South Park to trade their SUVs for hybrid vehicles; the subsequent increase in popularity of hybrids; and the concomitant rise of a 'smug factor'. Smug, the emissions released by self-satisfied, environmentally conscious hybrid drivers, gathers into huge clouds, eventually culminating in the 'perfect storm' of self-satisfaction. The episode concludes with the near destruction of South Park and the total annihilation of San Francisco. The townsfolk of South Park are driven to the hard conclusion that people are just not ready to take environmentally friendly measures – such as driving hybrids – without being smug:

> Richard: So, I guess there's nothing left to do now but – rebuild.
> Randy: Yeah, and first off we're all gonna need new cars.
> Gerald: And let's make sure that nobody gets a stupid hybrid, right?
> Townsfolk (collectively): Yeah, right! Yeah. That's right! You said it! etc.

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Kyle: No!! Hybrid cars are a good thing!
Mr McKay: But hybrid cars are the leading cause of smug! Mm'kay...
Kyle: Hybrid cars don't cause smugness! People do! Look! Hybrid cars are important! They may even save our planet one day! What you all need to do is just learn to drive hybrids and not be smug about it!
Randy: You mean drive in hybrids but not act like we're better than everyone else because of it?
Kyle: Yeah!
Randy: I'm... I'm not ready.
Gerald: I don't think I can do it either.
Mr McKay: It's simply asking too much.
Randy: Perhaps – one day – we can learn to drive hybrids without being smug about it... but for now... the technology is just too much for us.
Gerald: C'mon everybody! Let's go buy wasteful gas-guzzlers!
Townsfolk (collectively): Yeah! Let's go! C'mon! Yeah! etc.

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Interpreted as a vehicle of a critical message, 'Smug Alert' might be seen as a timely critique of insincere or commercialised environmentalism. The value of the sketch would lie in its potential for 'pushing awareness through laughter',[9] confirming its credentials as 'a form of satire that's true in form and educational in moral'.[10] To the extent that one finds the provocation funny, it would be the gap between our expectations of an ideal (or even adequate) environmental consciousness and the laughable faddishness of the South Park residents that amuses. Alternatively, the sketch could be read as a warning against the moralistic tendencies of environmental politics *per se*, in which case one might laugh if his/her own impatience with environmental discourse or practices is confirmed.

These interpretations may or may not be 'right', with respect to the intentions of the programme's creators. The question of correctness aside, we would be loath to affirm this type of encounter with humour as the most creative mode. Transcendent judgment is its *modus operandi*: above and beyond the patent silliness encountered, a message is discovered, which can be judged with the aid of transcendent criteria. Having identified the essential point, pre-existing ideals provide the necessary grounding, enabling us to judge whether the message that is delivered is a *good* one, not just politically efficacious but morally and socially responsible.

Such judgments may help us make sense of the seemingly incongruous and absurd. But they reduce the potential of the encounter with humorous forms and instances considerably, seeming to suggest that the most important, perhaps the only, thing humour can do is to react to a given state of affairs. There is, too, a fine line between the gesture of reaction and a conceptually and politically reactionary stance. If, for example, 'Smug Alert' is essentially a critique of environmental or progressive moralism, what is to prevent the episode being merely reactionary, or itself a form of moralism?

In the idea of the 'laughter of the herd', Nietzsche means to indicate the poverty of laughter arising from a reactive impulse; namely, the impulse to defend a received image of the good. Such laughter scoffs when the world does not conform with, or appears to threaten, inherited and deeply held ideas of good and bad. This is *herd* laughter in a double sense. It involves a bovine submission to received morality, a morality which is founded on accepted notions of what is necessary for the herd's survival. The essential form of the herd impulse is contained in a question familiar to the very best practices of socialisation; namely, 'that persistent question addressed to children, "What if everyone did what you are now doing?"'[11]

If this is the exemplary question of the herd instinct, contemporary environmentalism would have to be a contender in the stakes to identify 'our' herd morality – the morality of 'progressive' late capitalist societies with an eye to the future. As important as environmental politics may be, we should not let our attachment to their principles overwhelm a properly *critical* analysis of their form and their content. This may be a confusing claim, given that we have been outlining some of the limits of attributing to humour a primarily critical function. Yet, following Nietzsche, our argument is that the nay-saying gesture, which judges instances of humour against existing ideals, is not critical, nor destructive, enough. Moving toward a more affirmative understanding of humour does not imply the redundancy of critique, so much as its re-conceptualisation and revitalisation. The critical moment will now be understood as the *genealogical* one: why is this called 'good' and that 'bad' at any given time?[12]

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While the kind of satirical humour we have been discussing through 'Smug Alert' may well be resolved in the closure of an interpretable message or position (the sketch as a critique of insufficiently committed, or overly moralising, environmentalism), it may also function in a more open, *problematising* manner. Satire involves a particular emphasis on context, which immediately introduces a relativising dimension to the material it treats. Or, as Colebrook puts it, 'satire is *immanently* historical'.[13] Satire 'shows the way in which we do *not* author ourselves' and draws our attention to 'the conflicting forces that produce us'.[14] Satire points out 'the follies of human vanity and endeavour – all the ways in which 'we' allow our bodily and particular desires to be dressed up as reason and knowledge'.[15] It may therefore open the way for a properly critical – which is to say, genealogical – form of questioning: why this, and not that, ordering of the impulses? Why, for example, does the moral ordering germane to some environmentalism deem frugality good and excess bad? If 'one of the primary functions of morality is to establish an "order of rank" among the drives or impulses', a genealogy of morality inquires into 'the conditions of any particular moral ranking of the impulses'.[16]

What is implied by a genealogy of morals is that desires and impulses are primary with respect to moral justifications. Rather than us desiring something because it is good, we call that which we strive or wish for 'good', and then find reasons for its goodness.[17] This is not the cynical position it may at first appear to be, but opens up new ways of understanding the genesis of our morality and also 'our' desires, which are never entirely our own. It is Spinoza who points out the extent to which the project of morality is founded on what he calls the 'illusions of consciousness' – the

illusory mastery of the body and its desires.[18] We habitually assume consciousness to be the cause of our actions. Yet in 'Smug Alert' we have characters whose awareness that their environmentalism makes them smug gives them no greater power to act. Surely the consciousness of the characters is not the issue here. What is at issue, analytically speaking, is the confidence that we place in consciousness as the cause of our actions and the site of political intervention. Bodies are especially conspicuous in 'Smug Alert,' with their position as a mere vehicle of consciousness being scarcely credible. Consider the following altercation, which precipitates Gerald Broflovski's flight from South Park:

> Gerald: Look, I'm just trying to make the people of South Park aware of a very serious problem . . .
> Randy: The *problem*, Gerald, is that ever since you've gotten a hybrid car you've gotten so smug that you love the smell of your own farts!!
> Gerald: Oh, I'm sorry! I didn't think it was 'high and mighty' to care about the earth.
> Randy: And that too! Stop talking with your eyes closed! That's what smug people do!
> Gerald: Well, I really don't see how that has anything to do with . . .
> Randy: There!! Like that!! Stop That!!

Despite being told to 'stop talking with your eyes closed' because 'that's what smug people do', Gerald seems unable to do so. Closing his eyes is not the product of a conscious decision, but evinces the autonomy of his body with respect to will. Similarly, South Park residents cannot merely change their driving habits and not be smug. The body and its role in the creation and maintenance of desire means that the problem is far more intractable than this.

Humour acutely recalls to us the profound autonomy of the body.[19] As common expressions suggest – from 'belly laughs' to 'pissing yourself laughing' – laughter may hit the body, without, or at least before, the intervention of consciousness. What makes us assume that the *best* forms of laughter are those that pass the test of consciousness, the body's moral police? The relationship of bodily desires to consciousness and morality have been famously raised in Freud's analysis of jokes and form the stuff of what is commonly known as the Relief Theory of humour.[20] But the assumption there is that humour is, at best, a brief reprieve from the constraints of social and subjective life, which is necessarily moral in its order.

What should we make of the laughter that escapes from us in spite of our ideals and best intentions? Is this 'renegade' laughter without social and political value, too temporary or too problematic to have transformative power? Or does it draw our attention to other, less celebrated, potentials of a humorous attitude? We take ourselves too seriously when we succumb to self-flagellation for failing the various tests of goodness. Renegade laughter may better serve as a barometer, a signal that a deeper understanding of the production of desire is warranted. It can tell us much about the social context in which our desires are formed, and the processes by which desires translate into morality at any given historical moment. How is it, for example, that today our consumer choices (such as the purchase of hybrids) can

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become elevated to moral ones? If Chaplin's *Modern Times* remains the quintessential portrayal of the regulation of the body under regimes of production, South Park's 'Smug Alert' may speak to us particularly today, when our desires are so bound up with practices of consumption. How, then, might our desires participate in the very forms of power we seek to criticize?

The Power to Disrupt

These critical inquiries into the conditions under which morality and desire are produced are effectively closed to a programmatic – an impatiently instrumental – approach to humour. In the hurry to show that 'humour and laughter can serve as a powerful tool in social protest',[21] we may overlook the fertile ways in which humour can *disrupt* the logics upon which a programmatic use of humour would depend. We have already indicated that humour may challenge the myth of the *sovereign subject*, who, through the power of will, brings the body and its desires into submission. Using humour as a way of raising political consciousness may, in some instances, miss the mark. Awareness and an increasing capacity for action do not necessarily go hand in hand and our desires, as social productions, are often implicated with power in complex ways. Humour also poses a challenge to the *sovereignty of meaning*. Empirical instances of humour make for 'fascinating and tricky' analysis, because they 'continually exceed the theoretical analysis one is able to give of them – they say more in saying less'.[22] The author of humorous discourse and action may well aim to use it as a vehicle, yet its excess with respect to the order of meaning defies such easy instrumentalism.

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This certainly does not mean that the exercise of interpreting humour is thoroughly corrupt, but that if we accept meaning as sovereign we will miss much. As Deleuze suggests, one of the more creative operations of humour is its descent into the forces of life, which are not yet organized by the transcendence of meaning or of the subject.[23] This is particularly obvious with absurd humour, which fractures familiar forms into genetic elements, so as to bring them together in unexpected ways. When Steven Colbert calls his book 'I Am America (And So Can You!)', his nonsensical title *does* something.[24] It does not impart meaning, but can work in a problematising manner. It begs questions: what does it mean for an individual to *be* America? If 'so can you' be America, does this mean that America is simply a performance of Americanness? Is there, then, no real essence of Americanness?... and so on. Working on the surface, absurd humour takes delight in a world that is not yet weighed down with meaning, which has not yet been judged for its significance, and where action is not yet attributed to intentional subjects. We are presented with simply a multitude of tiny events and the potential of problematising anew.

Some caution is needed in speaking of humour's aptitude for the new. For, as Peters points out, an obsession with novelty may be less radical than many theorists of recent years have supposed.[25] Analysing the concept of improvisation (which, he suggests, may escape some of the 'unnecessarily oppositional' implications of the idea of innovation), Peters argues that the comedian who improvises well does not pluck something new from thin air, but has developed the art of *making the old new*.

Undoubtedly, an acute attention to the details of everyday life is a must for the capable comedian, whose task it is to destroy the banality of the everyday. Jerry Seinfeld's recent description of air travel provides a nice example of how a humorous mode of description can bring to life minute details, which might otherwise remain unnoticed:

> I always go in the airplane bathroom, even if I don't have to go, I gotta go in there. It's nice. It's like your own little apartment on the plane, isn't it? Go in there, lock the door, the light comes on after a second. It's like a little surprise party. But I'm always impressed with the amount of equipment that they have in that place. I mean it's little but they've got the tissues, towels, closets, compartments, tiny slot for used razor blades. They always have that. Who is shaving on the plane? And shaving so much they're *using up* razor blades?[26]

Our laughter at Seinfeld's observation is accompanied by a degree of admiration, for we are struck that *we hadn't noticed that*. There is an art involved in this creation of a new perspective, by making what was ordinary noticeable and extraordinary. If part of the absurdity of humour is its descent from the transcendence of meaning and the subject, its aptitude for the new lies in the 'disjunctive syntheses' it produces from these genetic elements.[27] What is important is that this is not a question of subsuming humour's operations to the 'reassuring linearity of innovation', whereby all forms of action are pressed 'into the service of endless novelty'.[28] Humour has a much more complex and ultimately more fertile relationship to time than the obsession with the purely new would imply.

We are raising here a third important way in which humour disrupts attempts to work or apply it programmatically – in the pursuit of ideals or in the name of a political project. That is to say, humour disrupts *the logic of progressive time*. Less bound to the strictures of temporal ordering than serious discourse, humour can interrupt the logic of before and after, cause and effect, old and new. As Kant, Schopenhauer and Hobbes variously recognize, humour frustrates the forward movement of time, which is so crucial to our faith in progress and the impulsion of our projects. Even in the most formulaic jokes, adhering as they often do a predictable narrative structure, laughter momentarily disrupts the 'endless deferral of gratification' that drives us beyond the immediate and toward future progress.[29] A problem thus arises in the use of humour for moral ends and political projects. For if the linear structure of time is disrupted by the incongruity of humour, how reliable can any programmatic use of humour actually be?

In Closing, an Opening

In arguing that humour may challenge the sovereignty of the subject, of meaning and of progressive time, our point is not to celebrate these as merely negative interruptions. This would do little to advance a more affirmative theory and practice of humour. We have argued that, while judgments of meaning and value may wrest from humour something useful, they risk denying the rich actuality and

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the potential of what they encounter, since their judgment point is an already given, ideal image of the world. An evaluation of humour that pushed no further than this kind of reading would thus, for us, be reductive. While such judgments realize the promise of humour's purpose by transcending the absurdity and silliness of humorous forms, we have argued for the significance of an encounter that seeks to persist with, or remain immanent to, the absurdity integral to humour. The trick is to keep a space open to understand the species of laughter that escapes the policing of desire by morality, for it may challenge our habits of causal attribution productively. If humour can teach us something, it is not because it is a pliable medium of moral didacticism. Rather, it may serve as an entry point into understanding our desires, their social formation and the ways they translate as moral justifications. Such a geneological enquiry is already affirmative, because it opens the way to a spirited revaluation of values.

While humour is increasingly celebrated as a means of realising the trajectory from (good) ideals to (good) outcomes, it is at its most extraordinary, and at its most worldly, when it does something other than this. Rather than helping us to realize a predictable outcome, it can help us to adjust to the inherent unpredictability of all our actions, even the best motivated. As the art of banter demonstrates well, humour involves a kind of training in flexibility, the agility in going with the moment, in all its uncertainty. As Bergson recognized, there is something *funny* about living beings who display the inflexibility of machines.[30] The idea here is not to champion a humorous attitude as some kind of new age tool, which would assist the individual in adjusting to the world and thereby increase personal well-being. If it challenges the rigidity of our perception of the world and our construction of our ideals, humour is already doing something far more pragmatic and worldly than this.

We have suggested that humour's transformative potentials will be best actualised when it helps us to adopt a life-affirming attitude. Yet there is nothing to say that this will be change for the better, that it will be 'progressive'. As the classical theory of humour, the Superiority Thesis, has long recognised, humour is inseparable from the potential for cruelty. Laughter may well question the legitimacy of orthodoxy, yet, viewed from a less sanguine perspective, it may also be the bearer of prejudice, as a glance at any joke book will confirm. The warm feeling of belonging, which shared laughter affirms, necessarily also marks some as outsiders. And if laughter can demonstrate shared sentiments, it is also the censor of difference. By embarrassing and shaming wayward individuals, laughter can effectively enforce the social order.[31]

Yet, to the extent that we imagine moral principles as guarantees against risk or danger, we deny life, with all its positive and negative aspects. Laughter is a great destroyer, insofar as it laughs at the comedy of our existence, which today we must negotiate without transcendent meaning, absolute values or the sureness of progress.[32] This does not amount to the banal proposition that humour cheers us up – that if only we can adopt a light-hearted relationship to living, we won't mind that there is ultimately no purpose to our activities![33] Nor is comic resignation the attitude befitting an affirmative laughter. The figure of the neurotic comedian riddled with existential angst (Woody Allen and Dylan Moran come instantly

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to mind) is hardly a model of self-overcoming. Finally, laughing at the comedy of existence is more than a momentary humbling of a self that is preparing to rise again in the form of good conscience.[34]

If such subjective tricks remain tied to the economy of tragedy, it is the test of the eternal return that is the most telling measure of whether laughter has become comic. For the laughter of the heights affirms life to the point that we would will it all over again. As Lippitt notes, the test of the eternal return is not meant as an ontological statement about the nature of the world but as an experiment in the kind of attitude that would be entailed in affirming life to the full.[35] And its paradigm cry is the one so joyously issued by Nietzsche: 'Was *that* life? Well then! Once more!'[36] There is no final achievement in this gesture of self-overcoming, since even if we were to reconcile in our self all our past and present impulses, there remains the problem of the future. Yet the future is no longer a 'problem' in the negative sense, but an invitation for becoming-otherwise. There is always the possibility that we might be pleasantly surprised by outcomes that we had neither predicted nor hoped for. But it requires a joyous and active laughter, to unburden us of an overly serious attachment to our ideals and to our current selves. Consider, then, the following familiar joke:

> Jones, seated in a movie house, could not help being aware that the man immediately in front of him had his arm around the neck of a large dog which occupied the seat next to him. The dog was clearly observing the picture with understanding, for he snarled softly when the villain spoke, yelped joyously at the funny remarks, and so on. Jones leaned forward and tapped the man in front of him on the shoulder. He said, 'Pardon me, sir, but I can't get over your dog's behaviour'. The man turned around and said, 'Frankly, it surprises me too. He hated the book'.[37]

Still mindful of the value of interpretation, we cannot resist the temptation to read the joke, to look below the surface of its absurdity for its meaning – its moral. But we would at least like to emphasize its more worldly and affirmative aspect. For ultimately, it is the dog who is the least dogmatic, who is not hung up on comparing what he encounters to his prior expectations, but can laugh joyously at the actuality of the movie (even though he hated the book).

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Notes

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.324.

[2] Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour* (London: Sage Publications, 2005).

[3] See for example the recent edited collection, Dennis Bos and Marjolene T'Hart, *Humour and Social Protest (International Review of History Supplements)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[4] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p.131.

[5] See for example, Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: Picador, 2002) and Marjolene T'Hart, 'Humour and Social Protest: An Introduction', in *Humour and Social Protest*, pp.1–20.

[6] Scott Sharpe, Maria Hynes and Robert Fagan, 'Beat Me, Whip Me, Spank Me, Just Make it Right Again: Beyond the Didactic Masochism of Global Resistance', *Fibreculture*, 6 (2005) and also Maria Hynes, Scott Sharpe and Robert Fagan, 'Laughing With the Yes Men: The Politics of Affirmation', *Continuum*, 21:1 (2007), pp.107–121.

[7] Jodi Dean, 'Politics without Politics', *parallax* 15:3 (2009), pp.20–36.

[8] John Lippitt, 'Nietzsche, Zarathustra and the Status of Laughter', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 32:1 (1992), p.39.

[9] Matthew Gilbert, 'Green Screen', Boston Globe (22 June 2008), <http://www.boston.com/ae/tv/articles/2008/06/21/green_screen/> [8/4/2010].

[10] Michelle Hershman, 'Sustainable Living: Theme of the Future or a One-Hit Wonder', *Richmond Journal of Law and the Public Interest*, 10: 2 (2007).

[11] Daniel W. Smith, 'Deleuze and the Question of Desire: Toward an Immanent Theory of Ethics', *Parrhesia*, 2 (2007), p.71.

[12] 'Bad' is the more usual term today, though Nietzsche would have used the term 'evil' in this context.

[13] Claire Colebrook, *Irony* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.141 (original emphasis).

[14] Claire Colebrook, *Irony*, p.141.

[15] Claire Colebrook, *Irony*, p.88.

[16] Daniel Smith, 'Deleuze and the Question of Desire', p.70.

[17] Daniel Smith, 'Deleuze and the Question of Desire', p. 70.

[18] Maria Hynes and Scott Sharpe, 'Affected with Joy: Evaluating the Mass Actions of the Anti-Globalisation Movement', *Borderlands*, 8:3 (2009).

[19] The rupture of laughter brings this autonomy of the body to the fore dramatically, though it is as much a feature of the inactive body (see for example, David Bissell, 'Comfortable Bodies: Sedentary Effects', *Environment and Planning A*, 40:7, pp.1697–1712.

[20] Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule,* pp.169–170.

[21] Marjolene T'Hart, 'Humour and Social Protest', p.1.

[22] Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.66.

[23] Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

[24] Stephen Colbert, '*I Am America (And So Can You!)*', (New York: Grand Central, 2007).

[25] Gary Peters, *The Philosophy of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[26] *Jerry Seinfeld: I'm Telling You for the Last Time*, dir. Marty Callner (HBO Home Video, 1999).

[27] Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*.

[28] Gary Peters, *Philosophy of Improvisation*, p.105.

[29] Mark Weeks, 'Beyond a Joke: Nietzsche and the Birth of "Super-Laughter"', *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 27 (2004), p.4.

[30] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesly Brereton and Fred Rothwell (Rockville, Maryland: ARC Manor, 2008).

[31] Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*.

[32] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, p. 324.

[33] Alena D'Vorakova, 'Review of "Laughing at Nothing: Humour as a Response to Nihilism" by John Marmysz', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 45:1 (2005), pp.106–108.

[34] Compare Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of commitment, politics of resistance* (London: Verso, 2007).

[35] John Lippitt, *Nietzsche and the Status of Laughter*, p. 40.

[36] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, p.178.

[37] Isaac Asimov, cited by Marrie Bergman, 'How Many Feminists Does it Take to Make a Joke? Sexist Humour and What's Wrong With It', *Hypatia* 1 (1986), p. 68.

Maria Hynes and Scott Sharpe's collaborative research on affirmation and political resistance has been published as follows: 'Affected with Joy: Evaluating the mass actions of the Anti-Globalisation Movement', *Borderlands*, 8:3 (2009). Accessible at <http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol8no3_2009/hynessharpe_affected.pdf> [8/4/2010]; 'Chasing Democracy: Dissent, Civil Society and Humour', in *Social Alternatives*, 27:1 (2008); 'Laughing With the Yes Men: the politics of affirmation' *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 21:1 (2007); 'Beat Me, Whip Me, Spank Me, Just Make it Right Again: beyond the didactic masochism of global resistance' *FibreCulture*, 6 (2005). Available at <http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue6/> [8/4/2010].

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