Feminist Philosophy of Humor (Author Preprint)

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Abstract: Over the past decades humor studies has formed an unprecedented interdisciplinary consolidation, connected with a consolidation in philosophy of humor scholarship. In this essay I focus specifically on feminist philosophy of humor as an area of study that highlights relationships between humor, language, subjectivity, power, embodiment, instability, affect, and resistance, introducing several of its key themes while mapping out tensions that can be productive for further research. I first cover feminist theories of humor as instability and then move to feminist theories of humor as generative of social relationships. Though I diagnose several tensions between these approaches that require further elaboration and discussion, I conclude that feminist philosophy of humor is a crucial area of humor research that focuses on systematic oppression, political engagement, embodiment, and affective ties.

Key words: Feminist Philosophy, Feminist Theory, Feminist Humor, Feminist Laughter, Feminist Comedy, Women's Laughter, Women's Humor, Continental Philosophy, Humor Studies, Philosophy of Humor, Social and Political Philosophy, Aesthetics, Feminist Poststructuralism, Parody, Affect Theory

Humor and Consolidation

To contextualize the topography of feminist philosophy of humor, it is useful to begin with the broader history of humor theories and their consolidation under the heading of "humor studies." Historically, writing on humor has been conducted from many disparate vantage points on discrete aspects of humor, laughter, and the comic, resulting in an impressive but also disconnected variety of approaches to humor theory. Since the mid-20th century, a growing number of humor scholars have created taxonomies for theoretical approaches to humor and laughter that lay the ground for a more cohesive field of study. This consolidation has offered more comprehensive overviews that reveal promising directions for interdisciplinary humor research.

The collaborative study of humor has been widely named humor studies, including participation by philosophers, computer scientists, linguists, cognitive scientists, and scholars in the social sciences. The International Society for Humor Studies, founded in 1988, serves as a central organization for humor scholars. Lydia Amir founded The International Association for Philosophy of Humor in 2014 and has been organizing conference panels, publication venues, and book series in the interest of building more connected scholarship on the philosophy of humor specifically. Additionally, the Lighthearted Philosophers' Society has served as a venue for both funny philosophy and philosophy of the funny since 2006.

In the context of humor studies and philosophy of humor as a more consolidated form of study, it is useful to pause for a moment and discuss the use of "humor" in humor research. Because so much historical writing has used varying terminology while discussing related phenomena, including terms such as humor, amusement, the comic, laughter, and so forth, it can be difficult to stitch together a field from such varied patches of cloth. Amir, Lippitt, Morreall,

and many other scholars engaging in cross-disciplinary research (including the journal HUMOR) thus often use the term "humor" in a broad sense (Amir 2014, 234; Morreall 2009, 64) or as a "general umbrella term" to refer to "what is perceived, thought of, or experienced, as funny or amusing" (Lippitt 1992, 199). In the interest of collaboration, I employ this usage of "humor" when referring to work in feminist philosophy of humor. I take it to be a feature rather than a discouraging impasse that even the usage of "humor" remains disputable or at the very least tenuous, open to further discussion.

While philosophy of humor has developed a connection to humor studies, the relationship between feminist philosophy of humor and the consolidation of humor studies risks placing humor studies at odds with a feminist focus. Some key approaches to humor studies rely on idealized models of scripts and their linguistic incongruities, bracketing out politicized, gendered, embodied, and affective aspects of humor in favor of determining its purified mechanisms (cf. Attardo 1994, 197). This leaves feminist theory, which often focuses on broader relationships between social practices, gender, systematic oppression, embodiment, and social construction potentially askew from other approaches in the field.

Pointing out the risk of feminist philosophy of humor becoming marginalized within the broader study of humor is not to condemn it to marginalization. Contemporary approaches in philosophy of humor often explicitly take up or indicate an affinity with feminist approaches. Steven Gimbel, for example, focuses on humor as a practice of cleverness, emphasizing that comedians and joke tellers take a moral risk (Gimbel 2017, 134, 166). Although Gimbel acknowledges that humor creates a "play frame" that can provide extra latitude (164), he also refuses to grant comedians and joke tellers the ability to shirk responsibility by simply iterating it was "all in fun" when gags perpetuate sexism (cf. Bergmann 1986, 65). Arguing that humor

performs a function of revelation, Jennifer Marra makes its work distinctly political, capable of political demystification (Marra 2017, 141; Marra, 2018 163). Additionally, Liz Sills' analysis of humor practiced on social media centers politically engaged individual and collective responses to racist propaganda (Sills 2017, 171). Much of philosophy of humor thus emphasizes the affinity between politics, responsibility, and social action, sharing affinities with feminist theory.

In this essay I focus on feminist philosophy of humor, identifying several key themes and tensions that can be productive for further research. I first cover feminist theories of humor as instability and then move to feminist theories of humor as generative of social relationships. Though I diagnose several tensions that require further elaboration and discussion, I conclude that feminist philosophy of humor is a crucial area of humor research that focuses on systematic oppression, political engagement, embodiment, and affective ties.

Language, Embodied Subjects, and Feminist Revolution

In her book *Laughter: Notes on a Passion*, Anca Parvulescu identifies a rich link between laughter and feminist philosophy, concluding that the 20th century could be called "the laughing feminist century" owing to the work of Francophone feminist poststructuralism (Parvulescu 3, 16 117). In this section I follow Parvulescu's lead by discussing key differences between three prominent Francophone poststructuralists, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, as they discuss the relationship between laughter, language, the embodied subject, and societal revolt.

In her famous essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous celebrates women's writing as it moves beyond the relegation of women to a "dark" or "unintelligible" position imposed by the androcentric construction of language and society (Cixous 1976, 877-878). Focusing on the distinctness of women's social and embodied position, Cixous describes a space

where “laughs exude from all of our mouths” (878). She links this dislocated yet embodied space of laughter with Medusa, a figure of feminine self-assertion, distinction, and laughter (885). Cixous’ Medusa represents feminine positionality on its own terms against totalizing androcentrism, with laughter carving a space beyond androcentric institutions, laws, and “truths” (888). The laugh of the Medusa described by Cixous is thus a revolutionary laughter, or at least a glimpse of Medusa’s unsettling guffaws.

Cixous builds on her discussion of laughter and women’s revolution in her essay “Castration or Decapitation?” Cixous refers to an account from *The Art of War* in which Sunzi has a group of women decapitated for laughing at his orders to ensure that other women will obey his commands (Cixous 1981, 42). Cixous argues this provides an example of a masculine economy of order that forces women to either “lose their heads by the sword” or keep their heads on the condition they surrender and serve as an “automaton” (42-43). In contrast to a masculine order of seriousness that denies women’s capacities for action and self-assertion, Cixous promotes women’s laughter and humor as a force that “breaks out” and “overflows” on women’s own terms (54-55). Bringing both essays together, Parvulescu argues “The Laugh of the Medusa” serves as “a call or something like a manifesto” for the reader to listen for and hear women’s laughter, while “Decapitation or Castration?” provides a powerful “vision of change” (Parvulescu 2010, 102-103). Cixous thus distinctly proposes laughter as a force against androcentric society that seizes upon language through the body, disruptively engendering radical new possibilities for women to live and write on different terms.

Luce Irigaray similarly references the ability of laughter to envision possibilities for women beyond totalizing androcentrism and the positionality of woman as a shadow or servant (Irigaray 1985, 164). Irigaray emphasizes that her first impulse upon envisioning possibilities for

women outside of the masculine imaginary "is to laugh" (162-163). In this context, Irigaray links laughter to the first stages of liberation through its ability to eclipse the masculine “seriousness of meaning,” opening different possibilities for politics on mutual terms between men and women (163). Like Cixous, Irigaray connects women with a reclaimable positionality, connecting women’s laughter with women’s position “at the threshold of utterance.” She argues that women’s subordinated communication such as chattering, gossiping, laughing, and shouting forms a resistance against androcentric modes of discourse, allowing women to “unmask its rituals and failures” (Irigaray 1993, 137-138). Irigaray thus emphasizes that women’s laughter and humorous speech persists as both an everyday contestation and potential first stage of disruption against patriarchal norms.

In addition to Cixous and Irigaray, Parvulescu refers to Julia Kristeva as a key figure of her “laughing feminist century,” connecting laughter, poetic practice, and the generation of new possibilities (Parvulescu 2010, 16).” Kristeva is critical of structural linguistics that ignores the subject who produces language, while emphasizing the relationship between language, instability, and embodiment (Oliver 1993a, 91-92). To account for the subject’s involvement in signifying processes, Kristeva turns to the linguistic field of semiotics which focuses on “signifying practices, such as art, poetry, and myth that are irreducible to the ‘language’ object” (Kristeva 1984, 21-22). As a contrast to symbolic structural linguistics, Kristeva seeks to return the semiotic, the body, and its drives to the study of language (3), maintaining both symbolic and semiotic registers of language in their heterogeneity. Highlighting the interplay between these domains brings Kristeva to an analysis of the subversions operative in poetic speech and practice, inclusive of laughter and jokes.

In *Desire in Language* Kristeva identifies the maternal space of the semiotic as a space of laughter (Kristeva 1980, 284). Kristeva associates laughter with practice in addition to space, describing laughter and wordplay as “the site of the most radical heterogeneity” in language (Kristeva 1984, 179-180, 181). In this model, laughter is connected to the “ephemeral” meanings and excesses of a subject and language still in process (204). These excesses rupture the embodied subject who engages in poetry, jokes, and laughter through language, which may generate an internal “process of social change” via a painful play with internalized social censure and prohibition (205, 224). The instability of taking up laughter and excessive speech thus opens up a subject to both new possibilities and dangers.

Despite Parvulescu’s emphasis on the importance of Kristeva’s work to the “laughing feminist century,” Kristeva introduces limits to the practice of women’s laughter that create a potential tension for her inclusion within this grouping. Kristeva’s insistence on the difficulty of taking up laughter as an unstable play upon language leads her to caution against women’s laughter, as she asserts that women who take up the instability of laughter may fall into madness due to women’s connection with the unstable semiotic (Kristeva 1986, 29-30). Kelly Oliver argues that Kristeva is emphasizing the specific unstable relationship women have with language in contrast to men’s ordained access, clarifying that “the semiotic threatens women since it cannot ‘free’ [women] from a symbolic that they have never fully known; but, it ‘frees’ men from a symbolic that they know all too well.” Kristeva’s framework may thus restrict both the revolution of poetic language and revolutionary laughter to men, whereas women “must take the symbolic order very seriously to challenge it” (Oliver 1993a, 111). Beyond Oliver’s analysis, it is important to note that Kristeva is making a claim about women’s embodied, psychical connection with language that challenges women’s access to subversion against the symbolic

through laughter and humor. Kristeva's work on this subject thus highlights the continuing tension between Kristeva's ambivalence to feminist theory that accompanies her continued importance for feminist thought (Oliver 1993b).

Francophone feminist poststructuralists of the "laughing feminist century" link laughter and humor with the unstable positionality of women under androcentrism by connecting language, gender and sex, subjectivity, embodiment, and social change. These theories also present stark differences among considerations of humor and laughter as a source of social instability, as Irigaray and Cixous associate laughter's disruption with women shattering the terms of androcentrism while Kristeva warns against humor as an overly potent site of women's subjective instability in language. This indicates there is a potential tension between the promises and the limits that laughter and humor offer for feminist social change.

Parody and the Carnivalesque

The relationship between humor's instability, women's laughter, and feminist resistance is a live topic among feminist theorists beyond Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva. Kathleen Rowe Karlyn analyzes the embodied instability of humor in connection to gender norms, arguing that humorous women can take up the position of the "unruly woman" to assume a risky space of power. Following feminist philosophers of laughter and Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, Karlyn argues that women can transform their position as spectacle of the masculine gaze into a disruption of control through humorous, embodied, and unstable performances of exaggeration, hyperbole, and volume against the position of rationality attributed to men (Rowe 1995, 4-5, 47). Citing Medusa as an example, Karlyn describes the unruly woman as "an ambivalent figure of female outrageousness and transgression with roots in the narrative forms of comedy and the social practices of carnival," associated with excess,

offense, and the grotesque through an oscillation between beauty and monstrosity (10-11). The unruly woman takes up the gaze placed upon her by men as a source of power, redirecting it back against a social and political order that would rather women be seen than heard (11). Taking up unruliness entails risk, since asserting visibility as a form of power can lead to negative exposure and vulnerability (12). The position of humorous unruliness thus serves as a risky and unstable reappropriated source of power that was intended to put women in their place.

Tying together connections between performativity, instability, and revolt, José Esteban Muñoz emphasizes the relationship between humor, parody, and caricature as they work together to produce strategies of disidentification in performances of drag. Muñoz discusses the "comic and even hilarious" performances of drag artist Vaginal Creme Davis, arguing that her practice of humor produces uncertain and uneasy desires that inhabit and subvert the social fabric from within while destabilizing norms to engender cultural critique (Muñoz 2013, 82-83). Humor can thus take the form of a "terrorist drag," through which the instability of parody unsettles and threatens to rupture the social forms they take up and stretch to hilarity (83).

Bringing together both parody and the positionality of unruly women, Celine Parreñas Shimizu argues that comedian Margaret Cho embraces "irrepressibly perverse, carnal, pleasure-seeking, traumatized, different, and uncontainably queer" hypersexuality to destabilize controlling images of Asian women as "small, silent, servile," and heterosexual (Shimizu 2007, 7). Parody and excess thus stand out as a means of contesting dominant narratives by taking them up and stretching them towards dissolution.

Considering parody, unruliness, and the carnivalesque adds more texture when theorizing the relationship between instability and social change through humor and laughter. Through their focus on performance and practice, these theories highlight the ability of humor to not just

suspend patriarchal norms, but also rework norms from within against their own terms. By focusing on the meaning of specific performances and practices of humor, feminist theories of the carnivalesque and parody also help articulate the risks, limits, and powers of unruly humor.

Social Relationships, Affect, and Eros

While feminist theories of humor frequently emphasize the powerful instability of the subject who takes up humor and laughter against androcentric and patriarchal systems of oppression, feminist philosophers also acknowledge humor or laughter as it frays and forges relationships in the context of power and institutions.

Sara Ahmed describes laughter and jokes as a social and political means of occupying or sharing a space. Racist and sexist jokes can signal “a change in atmosphere” that “fills the room,” further entrenching a culture of exclusion (Ahmed 2019, 175-176). In contrast, non-oppressive laughter among good friends can change the atmosphere of a room for the better, sustaining or even rejuvenating social relations. In these moments, deciding to laugh along with or refuse to laugh at an objectionable joke can make or break relationships, adding complexity to the everyday practice of feminism (Ahmed 2017, 171). Ahmed argues that certain modes of laughter and humor may only be accessible for women of color in their own spaces, noting the distinct joy, relief, humor, and talk only possible in spaces not occupied by whiteness (Ahmed 2012, 38). Humor and laughter are thus at their core relational, both shaped through and shaping social spaces, institutions, and their histories.

Maria Lugones’ essay “Playfulness, "World"-Travelling, and Loving Perception” also focuses on the relationship between humor and social spaces. Lugones discusses “worlds” in the sense of multiple “construction[s] of life,” including multiple “relationships of production” and identities that shift from different social, political, and personal vantage points (Lugones 1987, 9-

10). Lugones notes that in some “worlds” she has been attributed with playfulness while in others she has been described as not being a playful person, and she philosophically works through the dynamic through which she can be both playful and not playful across these “worlds” (13). Lugones contrasts models of agonistic playfulness that invoke imperialism and arrogance with a model of loving playfulness that is open to another’s “world,” full of mutual laughter and “an openness to being a fool” (16-17). Following Lugones, Chris Kramer argues that subversive humor invokes a “curdled logic” that can connect across audiences to “crack open” entrenched ignorance, bridging the subversive potential of play and world-travelling against oppression (Kramer 2020 157, fn. 6).

Fulden Ibrahimhakkioglu focuses specifically on the spaces for activism cultivated by humor alongside feminist punk practices of anger in her essay “The Revolutionary Politics of Love” by focusing on the feminist punk collective Pussy Riot. Drawing from Audre Lorde’s analysis of the erotic, Ibrahimhakkioglu argues that Pussy Riot practices revolutionary art and politics through both anger and love (Ibrahimhakkioglu 2017, 129). Pussy Riot’s activism takes up the mantle of the Dionysian “as joyous disrupters,” challenging oppression through jest, excess, and foolery (131-132). Humor thus emerges as a social practice for sustaining feminist movements and bringing life to the world envisioned through activism (133).

While Ahmed and Ibrahimhakkioglu emphasize the transformative affects of laughter and humor, Naomi Zack argues that comedy frequently stops short of transforming oppression. Zack analyzes performances by black women comedians, emphasizing that they often rely on comic patterns that reify sexist and racist stereotypes targeting black women (Zack 2013, 47). Noting that this dynamic “makes even the best work of black comedy painful to watch,” (48) Zack revisits the relief theory of humor by suggesting that these comic performances may be liberating

to some extent if they distract from the "emotional pain and stress" caused by racism (49). Zack thus indicates that the feelings brought forth by humor may frequently take on ambivalence, offering relief and distraction but not necessarily lasting change.

The work of Cynthia Willett and Julie Willett stands out for articulating a sustained comprehensive feminist philosophy of humor that focuses on eros and connection. In *Irony in the Age of Empire* Cynthia Willett critiques the ongoing American tragedy of hubristic imperialism, proposing that American comedy can provide an alternative ethos (Willett 2008 19, 22). Drawing from Audre Lorde, Willett argues that comedy as an ethos both dissipates hubris through "self-humbling laughter" (33) and aligns with a concept of freedom as interdependence and creativity rather than individualism (33, 35-38). Cynthia Willett and Julie Willett develop this approach to humor together in a later essay, arguing that feminist humor offers a transition from "a politics of resentment to "a politics of joy" (Willett and Willett 2013, 24). While the authors acknowledge that humor is among the "arsenal of tools" that can reinforce gender norms, they remain hopeful that humor can provide a means of love and connection against patriarchy and imperialist hubris (28).

In their 2019 book *Uproarious*, Willett and Willett argue that feminists and "subversive comics" use humor to affectively cultivate solidarity across differences. In contrast to theories of humor and laughter that focus on disembodied, intellectual distancing, Willett and Willett emphasize a practice of feminist humor that specializes in connection, able to bring together mind and body, human and animal, affect and action, and social groups across politically charged divides (Willett and Willett 2013, 19). They build up their feminist philosophy of humor as a means of "ditching" the corpus of humor philosophies based on "mind/body splits and patriarchal reason," instead pointing to the engaged, emotional, and embodied character of

“fumerism” (152). In contrast to a contemporary politically charged “tribalism,” humor can cultivate affects such as empathy to rise above tensions and unite people across differences, empowering feminist and antiracist activism (131-133). Willett and Willett primarily make this case by referring to contemporary feminist protests such as SlutWalk, performances of stand-up comedians including Wanda Sykes and Jeff Ross, and research into the social dynamics of animal play.

Considering the work of feminist philosophers of humor beyond instability raises important considerations of humor as it is both generated by and generative of social spaces, practiced in connection with others. This work has also served as the focus of Willett’s and Willett’s sustained research, forging a vision of feminist humor theory that draws from much of humor studies and philosophy of humor while carving out a distinct path for future feminist humor research.

Fumerist Futures

Because Willett and Willett provide such a groundbreaking picture for a feminist philosophy of humor that connects politics, practice, embodiment, and affect, focusing on their work alongside a larger scope of feminist humor theories raises several areas for further elaboration as the field develops.

One continuing tension among feminist theories of humor is the extent to which humor entails taking up a position of instability in contrast to the practice of humor as a creation of shared, open space for anti-oppressive work. Though the Willetts propose a practice of fumerism that includes anger, obscenity, and punching up, they primarily foreground the role of humor in fostering connections and egalitarian unity (Willett and Willett 2019, 33-36, 45, 116). This focus on humor uniting across differences is potentially in tension with feminist theories of humor that

focus instead on instability and challenge without resolution, whether through the subject in revolt (Kristeva 1984) or through a performance of terrorist drag (Muñoz 2013). Comparing theories of instability with theories of social feminist humor may thus reveal that different practices of humor employ different techniques towards different ends. Gayle Salamon argues that even practices of mainstream feminist comedy may be designed to provoke discomfort and bad feelings for the purpose of political change rather than reconciliation and bridging divides (Salamon 2017).

Willett and Willett present a flexible theory that refuses a totalizing approach (Willett and Willett 2019, 18) and conceive of empathy as a force for unsettling hierarchical identities rather than smoothing them over through relief (137-138), so their approach is compatible with considering complicated and varying practices of humor. Willett and Willett also helpfully bridge humor's capacity for destabilization with connection, which has been acknowledged by other humor scholars. Analyzing Hannah Gadsby's performance of comedy in *Nanette*, Lintott emphasizes that Gadsby's performance both forces the audience to sit with tension while also sharing the weight of her trauma to advance stand-up comedy past its limitations (Lintott 2020, 629-630). Exploring the potential limits of the compatibility between instability and connection is thus an interesting opportunity for carving out the importance of these practices for feminist humor rather than a strict impasse in fumerist studies.

Relatedly, a feminist approach to humor may require theorizing the limits of empathetic humor and the connections it can offer. Willett and Willett praise comedian Jeff Ross for his practice of empathy between groups such as police officers and protesters against antiblack police violence. In this context, Ross's comedic practice is explained as a means of crossing divides in the pursuit of calling attention to violence and dehumanization. Willett and Willett

argue that for Ross this practice extends to cultivating a connection with police officers by joining them on their daily routine, cultivating enough comfort to later critically roast an audience of cops about the LAPD getting away with beating Rodney King (Willett and Willett 2019, 142-145). Ross is thus a key example for Willett and Willett to work through as they argue for the ability of comedy to push against the divisions of "tribalism" in an effort to build humanizing connections through empathy.

Recent years have highlighted the potential limits and pitfalls of practices that are framed as crossing divides between, for example, police and protestors when they instead obfuscate continuing violence and oppression. Reflecting on 2020 mass protests against police violence, Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò points out that institutional responses frequently involved adopting pro-diversity and anti-racist language while simultaneously exercising violence against protestors (Táíwò 2022 4-5). It likewise seems unclear if Ross's laughter with both protestors and police managed to achieve change rather than generating the appearance of change while police business was carried out as usual.

Emphasizing the importance of conflict, Rochelle DuFord argues that part of the work of democratic solidarity groups is precisely to agitate and engage in conflict against the existing political order (DuFord 2022, 18-19). Focusing on solidarity as a practice of crossing divides to avoid "tribalism" risks missing that such divides are not merely based on a failure of empathy but also distinct differences in "politics, values, and goals" that lead to distinct communities (6). It is thus unclear when and if cultivating empathy through humor can overcome such divides given the continuing structural roles of state institutions and their agents as distinct from groups banding together in solidarity against violence and domination. Highlighting the political limits of empathetic humor indicates the continuing importance of the feminist killjoy, who may refuse

to laugh and practice amicability in response to systematic police brutality (Ahmed 2017, 209). Again, this is not to claim that Willett and Willett cannot generally account for this, but rather a suggestion that it would be helpful to work through the potential limits of fumerist eros.

It is also important to consider uses of humor that do not seem to be directly related reifying norms, taking up instability, or fostering egalitarian social connections. Lydia Amir argues that women's uptake of self-referential humor as a form of self-knowledge can serve as a primarily personal process for well-being and survival in contrast to disgust and shame (Amir 2019, 112-113). Zora Neale Hurston points out that black Americans may laugh to politely refuse intrusive white curiosity, refusing a distorted connection across differences (Hurston 1995, 10). Feminist theories of humor thus have a wider range of humor to consider than instability and connection.

Another tension in feminist philosophy of humor complicates the relationship between feminist writing on humor and the broader history of humor in philosophy. For example, Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel emphasizes that Bergson's essay on laughter and the comic was discussed by black intellectuals in France through the journal *La Revue du monde noir* as part of a larger conversation on race and belonging in France and its colonized territories (Joseph-Gabriel 2019, 121-122). Drawing from Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, Joseph-Gabriel argues that Bergson's analysis was linked by black intellectuals to a meditation on laughter, objectification, and inclusion (124-126). In addition to discussions of fashion and assimilation, black intellectuals in France and French colonies turned the tables on Bergson's writing to consider the structural position and psyche of the white person who laughs at black people (130-131). While Willett and Willett call for "ditching" the patriarchal, racist history of works in the philosophy of humor (Willett and Willett 2019, 152), Joseph-Gabriel's work indicates that these texts have in some

cases already been a site of detailed engagement and reengineering, sharing the Willetts' goals of complicating the canonization of humor theory.

The complicated historicity of humor theories extends to the wide range of feminist theories I have introduced in this essay. For example, Irigaray, Kristeva, and Cixous are key participants in a movement to bridge language, subjectivity, embodiment, and power in the context of 1960s and 70s Francophone philosophy, among many other philosophical influences (Grosz 1989, 38). Willett and Willett, while certainly knowledgeable of feminist poststructuralism, are also inspired by the rise of politically engaged televised comedians, anti-imperialism against U.S. wars, resistance against the politics of Donald Trump, and intersectional approaches to feminism. More work thus must be done not only bridging feminist philosophy together, but also thinking through historical distinctions that can lead to potential impasses or necessary reconsiderations.

It is also important to note that feminist approaches to humor might refuse the deployment of "humor" as an umbrella term. Anca Parvulescu, for example, turns against the generalized use of "humor" and provides a defense of studying laughter on its own terms. Through this approach, she formulates a distinct genealogy of racist and sexist laughter as it is connected with the racialization and criminalization of the "untamed" mouth (40, 48, 68). Parvulescu thus makes an intriguing case that humor in the broad sense may obscure important dimensions of laughter and other related phenomena.

Finally, I agree with Luvell Anderson that philosophical discussions of sexist humor seem to require more discussion and elaboration regarding the content of humor, the relationship between humor and moral evaluation, and the relationship between humor and injustice, including epistemic and testimonial injustice (Anderson 2015, 507). The field of feminist

philosophical and theoretical research into humor, despite significant previous and contemporary sustained engagement, thus remains a space where much work is to be done.

Laughing-With

Feminist philosophy of humor scholarship centers the relationship between humor, systems of oppression, political engagement, embodiment, and affective ties. This distinct focus indicates that feminist philosophers of humor may shine a light on neglected topics of humor research, including the potential limits of approaches to humor studies that center disembodied, apolitical approaches over others. Likewise, interdisciplinary humor studies research has much to teach feminist philosophers about the practice and structure of humor (cf. Chiaro and Baccolini 2014).

There remains much to map out concerning the instability of humor and its relationship with affect and social ties, and some approaches in feminist philosophy of humor create an intriguing tension with others. These tensions indicate the need for future work building bridges among approaches while also carving out distinctions, maintaining the complexity of humor across philosophy of language, phenomenology, epistemology, aesthetics, ethics, and social and political philosophy, among others. Rather than creating an insurmountable impasse, I am hopeful that these differences among feminist philosophers from various theoretical traditions will not only make vital contributions to contemporary humor research but also continue to inspire many humorful feminist centuries to come.

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