

Editor's Introduction

Toward a Feminist Politics of Comedy and History

“A majority of white women, faced with the historic choice between the first female president and a vial of weaponized testosterone, said, ‘I’ll take option B, I just don’t like her.’” —SAMANTHA BEE, “THE MORNING AFTER,” *FULL FRONTAL WITH SAMANTHA BEE*, NOVEMBER 9, 2016

The year 2016, whatever else it may have been, was a tremendous year for women in comedy. Samantha Bee’s show *Full Frontal* became a standard-bearer for feminist news analysis among the stag club of late-night television satire, tackling issues such as rape kit testing, diaper subsidies, workplace sexual harassment, and the international criminalization of feminism (from “nasty women” to *Pussy Riot*).¹ Feminist comedians—including Negin Farsad, Ali Wong, Fawzia Mirza, Leslie Jones, Amy Schumer, Sam Jay, Issa Rae, Tig Notaro, Heben Nigatu, and Tracy Clayton—have forcefully used stand-up, television, filmmaking, and social media as popular platforms for advocating intersectional issues regarding gender, race, and social justice. As Farsad (director of *The Muslims Are Coming!*) put it in her “Scientific Taxonomy of Haters,” “I am a social justice comedian. . . . It is my goal to convert the haters . . . [especially] the swing haters . . . [who] are like ideological sluts because they move from not hating to hating, and they do so because they don’t have enough information.” Farsad explains her own use of comedy as a feminist weapon: “Because on a scale from ‘comedy’ to ‘brochure,’ the average American prefers comedy.”² In this vein, feminist advocacy through popular comedy has tended to set its sights on the political urgencies of the present moment, from intersectional racism to reproductive rights and LGBTQ civil liberties to the absurdities of everyday prejudices and cultural stereotyping.

Yet what this presentism of popular feminist comedy forecloses is a more robust engagement with the complexities of its own histories. Feminism has a long legacy of laughter: from the suffragette poets who deflated patriarchal power with the point of satire (Alice Duer Miller, Dame Ethel Smyth, Marietta



Samantha Bee ✓
@iamsambee



Following

.@VanityFair BETTER



RETWEETS
4,171

LIKES
6,571



10:30 AM - 14 Sep 2015

↩ 120 ↻ 4.2K ❤ 6.6K ⋮

FIGURE 1. Samantha Bee's Twitter response to a *Vanity Fair* feature on the new hosts of late-night comedy, September 14, 2015, 10:30 a.m.

Holley), to second wave feminists who experimented with humor in their art and activism (Flo Kennedy, Yoko Ono, Martha Rosler), to the 2017 Women's March protesters waving signs such as "Girls Just Wanna Have Fundamental Rights," "Sex Offenders Cannot Live in Government Housing," and (dressed as suffragettes) "Same Shit, Different Century." As Virginia Woolf wrote in 1905, "Humour, we have been told, is denied to women. They may be tragic (fatally overambitious) or comic (laughably flawed), but the particular blend which makes a humorist is to be found only in men."³ Woolf refuted this prejudicial notion, arguing that men fear women's laughter so deeply because "like lightning, [it] shrivels them up and leaves the bones bare."⁴ In a very different

context, Karl Marx famously declared in 1852: “Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.”⁵ While this observation bears special attention in the present moment, it fails to account for the gender politics and genre coding of how history is narrated.

We might say, instead, that feminist “world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak,” *first as farce and then as tragedy*. The most basic definition of humor is the reversal of actuality and expectation: the ability to experience the world as otherwise than it appears. Demands for feminist change and social justice, then, often strike society as funny because they envision a future that has yet to materialize, and whose very articulation appears to be irrational, unreal (if not topsy-turvy), and counter to the hegemony of common sense. That sweet spot of humor—between innocuous play and dehumanizing ridicule—provides an ideal conspirator for feminist activists, artists, and authors to represent a social structure that seems untenable (if not unimaginable) within the patriarchal power politics of any present at hand. If first as farce, then, why are histories of feminist struggle so often retold as tragedies? Why does the image of the suffragette always evoke melodrama (battered housewives, force feedings of imprisoned protesters, the prolonged delay of voting rights), rather than Duer Miller’s cutting satire, or the hundreds of suffragette film comedies produced between 1896 and 1920?⁶ The repetition of such erasures—of the vital practice of comedy across histories of feminist politics and culture—then forms a part of the greater tragedy of gendered historical amnesia. But this genre coding is equally arbitrary. Erasures, elisions, blind spots, and slips of the tongue are the lingua franca of humor, not the exclusive property of tragedy or melodrama.

This journal issue is dedicated to the vibrant feminist media histories of comedy that we have seen, time and again, vanish right before our eyes. The ability to laugh in the face of crisis and in the wake of ruins is, after all, the premise of why we commit to archival research: to make visible the forgotten histories of feminist social struggle and of women’s cultural authorship, not just in their own right, but against the recurrence of their political obstruction and historical annihilation. This comedy issue follows from that momentous project. Our goal is not to supplement the archive that we already know to be important, but to challenge the ways in which—as feminist historians with our eyes toward the basis of all future progress in the unrealized potentials of the past—we come to know anything at all. These are and have always been the

epistemological stakes of feminist archival labor, which we hereby unleash onto the feminist and comedic crises of the present historical moment.

FEMINIST COMEDY STUDIES AT THE CROSSROADS: BETWEEN COMEDY AND FEMINISM

Feminist comedy scholarship has tended to focus on examples that directly advance or valorize feminist politics—as Kathleen Rowe Karlyn writes in *The Unruly Woman* (1995), on “the power of female grotesques and [their] female laughter to challenge the social and symbolic systems that would keep women in their place.”⁷ From silent film and vaudeville comedienne (Mabel Normand, Eva Tanguay, Louise Fazenda, Marie Dressler), to mid-century sitcom and late-night heroines (Lucille Ball, Phyllis Diller, Lily Tomlin, Moms Mabley), to present day feminist satirists and stand-up comedians (Samantha Bee, Wanda Sykes, Margaret Cho, Mindy Kaling), compelling examples abound of women who use comedy as a social and political platform to articulate forceful critiques of white patriarchal power and systemic intersectional misogyny.

There has been an explosion in recent years of excellent feminist archival research about forgotten comedienne by scholars including Victoria Sturtevant, Jacqueline Stewart, Jennifer Bean, Susan Glenn, Alison Kibler, Kristen Anderson Wagner, Joanna Rapf, Steve Massa, Rob King, and Lauren Rabinovitz. Methodologically, these accounts interweave rigorous empirical research (using both on-site and digitized media archives such as Lantern), critical theories of capitalist modernity and mass culture (Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, Theodor Adorno), and social histories of modernity’s unstable gender politics (women’s infiltration of the public sphere, their presence in the workplace and labor rights activism, and the political rise of the suffragette movement).⁸ Although less archival in focus, cultural studies of feminist comedians (by Linda Mizejewski, Rebecca Krefting, Kathleen Rowe Karlyn, Patricia Mellencamp, Bambi Haggins, and Yael Cohen) have revealed the political afterlives of irreverent laughter, paying close attention to the complex interplay between individual comedy tropes and the potential for these tropes to circulate and have a transformative effect on social norms and civic life.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque has been a standard-bearer for the argument that comedic subversion can have an impact on everyday gender relations of power. Whether focused on archival research or on popular culture analysis, the vast majority of feminist scholarship on gender and comedy has inherited Bakhtin’s methods—often via feminist historians and anthropologists,

including Natalie Zemon Davis (“Women on Top”), Mary Russo (*The Female Grotesque*), and Mary Douglas (*Purity and Danger*).⁹ Central emphasis is placed on the body politics of female excess—loud laughter, grotesque corporeality, inappropriate exhibitionism, anticlassical displays of femininity—that have the power to defy sexist conventions and unleash the liberating social potentials of extravagant laughter.

However, what these carnivalesque approaches to female comedy and feminist laughter actively exclude is a meaningful engagement with interdisciplinary debates in both feminist studies and comedy scholarship. On the one hand, critical philosophers of comedy (Alenka Zupančič, Slavoj Žižek, Simon Critchley, Lisa Trahair) tend to eschew gender or identity politics as roadblocks to the endpoint of universal validity. On the other hand, feminists who work around the intersections of gender and sexuality, capitalism, and affect theory (Lauren Berlant, Sara Ahmed, Sianne Ngai, Kathi Weeks) have critiqued liberatory accounts of comedy and laughter, arguing that laughing on cue represents yet another coercive mechanism of neoliberal capitalism’s mandate to happiness. Like the droning laugh track of the television sitcom, laughter has come to exemplify what Žižek has elsewhere described as a pervasive cultural “injunction to enjoyment.”¹⁰

For example, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014), Ahmed emphasizes the fragility of communal feelings at play in laughter—comparing it to the precarity of economic subsistence under neoliberalism. She writes: “When I hear the joke . . . I might find that I do not find it funny, or even that I find it offensive. When I hear the joke, it becomes a crisis. . . . If I stop laughing, I withdraw from a bodily intimacy. I might break that intimacy; it can shatter like a jug. I might be left having to pick up the pieces.”¹¹ Berlant refers to this coercive sense of laughing intimacy not as carnivalesque, but as a variant of “cruel optimism”: “when the object/scene that incites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving.”¹² In other words, the thing that you want—the elusive promise that erupts with the joke but vanishes soon afterward—becomes the very thing that prevents you from thriving. As Berlant and Ngai argue in “Comedy Has Issues,” their introduction to a special issue of *Critical Inquiry* (2017), there is no greater comic failure than “having been denied laughter or having had one’s pleasures disrespected or devalued.” This vigorous resistance to the disruption of enjoyment, they suggest, “also explains some of the rage at feminism and other forms of subaltern political correctness that get into the wheelhouse of people’s pleasures and spontaneity.”¹³ For example, Ahmed finds potential in the figure of the “feminist killjoy”: “the one who gets in the way of

the happiness of others or, more simply, the one who gets in the way.”¹⁴ If feminist killjoys view laughter with suspicion, thwarted laughers decry feminist killjoys with outrage and abomination.

However, this rift between recuperative approaches to feminist comedy and critical theories of neoliberal affect presents striking opportunities for articulating their necessary and possible intersections. Examples of laughter in feminist and queer affect theories often rely on either anecdote or generalization. (It is extremely revealing that Berlant and Ngai’s comedy issue of *Critical Inquiry* includes no close readings of individual feminist comedians or affirmative instances of pleasurable feminist laughter.) Beyond the cruel or callous laughter of superiority, comedy can provoke sensations ranging from visceral relief to radical imagination. This point is not lost on interdisciplinary feminist scholarship, though it is often theorized in contexts that would exclude close engagement with hilarious feminist comedians. Yet there are many possibilities for laughter other than the coercive extraction of consent or conformity (for instance Henri Bergson’s undying idea of laughter as a “social corrective”).¹⁵ Even Ahmed writes that “there can be joy in killing joy.”¹⁶ Again, her examples are anecdotal or interpersonal (she mentions bell hooks), and are focused on negating the cultural incitements to affective labor that often fall on marginalized bodies, particularly women of color.

What would it mean, then, for the professional comedian to claim this mantle? Especially given the already marginalized and often defensive position of women in the genres of comedy (see Mizejewski’s excellent takedown of the “Women Aren’t Funny” debates), how could we envision a politics of disruptive feminist humor that goes beyond the imperative for critique (whether the target be patriarchy or neoliberalism) to a more radical practice of anti-coercive laughter?¹⁷ In other words, do the ends (laughter in the face of injustice) always justify the means (greasing the wheels of a pleasurable unjust system)? There is tremendous potential for overlap and critical debate between the Bakhtinian feminist line and the Berlantian “female complaint”—for instance, around rethinking the anti-work politics of slapstick’s malfunctioning automatons (from silent cinema’s “crazy machines” to the flexible labor of the post-Fordist “precariat”), or the affective instabilities of recent awkward-depressive comedians (Maria Bamford, Tig Notaro, Issa Rae, Aparna Nancherla, to name just a few).¹⁸

Other speculative possibilities exist for exploring the uncharted commonalities among feminist theories of comedy, affect, sexuality, corporeality, biopolitics, race, and anticolonial liberation. For example, Kara Keeling’s Deleuzian notion in *The Witch’s Flight* (2007) of a “radical Elsewhere, outside homogenous space

and time” (via the image of the “black femme” in popular cinema) could be productively brought to bear on the multifarious “radical elsewheres” made possible during particularly eruptive experiences of feminist laughter.¹⁹ Beyond the image, Mel Y. Chen’s idea of “toxicity” as a form of “queer animacy”—a space for queer-utopian imagining that challenges heteronormative understandings of intimacy—offers a generative opening for considering the very particle matters that enter our bodies through our throats when we laugh exuberantly.²⁰ Chen cites the disciplinary example of a child licking toxic lead paint as a “fantasy of exception” that reinforces a discriminatory taxonomy of toxicity. Whereas the exceptional terror of lead licking informs the expulsion of marginalized bodies from our houses and communal spaces, other sanctioned toxins (perfumes, plastics, cleaning products, et cetera) are “encountered by so many of us as benign or only pleasurable.”²¹ What would it mean, then, to consider the politics of toxicity surrounding the scene of laughter in both cultural studies and archival histories of feminist comedy? I raise these questions here not to assert definitive answers, but to suggest future possibilities for interdisciplinary feminist research at the crossroads of comedy, affect, queerness, sexuality, race, ethnicity, sovereignty, and biopolitics.

ROADMAP TO THE COMEDY ISSUE

Feminist laughter has found a comfortable home within the terrain of media historiography. Since the historical turn of the late 1970s, advocates of “the new film history” have largely rejected universalizing theories of libidinal desire or ideology critique to focus instead on the particularities of archival discovery—such as the importance of establishing empirical evidence and interpreting works in their embedded social contexts, and the challenges of writing history given the preponderance of missing information or lost archival materials.²² As Joan Wallach Scott has generatively argued, “The writing of women into history necessarily involves redefining and enlarging traditional notions of historical significance, to encompass personal, subjective experience as well as public and political activities. . . . Such a methodology implies not only a new history of women, but also a new history.”²³ From Giuliana Bruno’s *Atlas of Emotion* (2007) to Jacqueline Stewart’s *Migrating to the Movies* (2005), feminist historians have enlisted an exciting range of archival materials in order to overwrite the gendered and racial erasures of cultural history and blow up disciplinary notions of archive, historiography, and documentation.²⁴

The contributors to this issue pick up on that important work of establishing evidence to testify to the visibility—and to the very existence—of forgotten

comediennes, drawing our attention to the social contexts and geopolitics of feminist laughter across a range of histories and locations. At the same time, these authors go beyond the positivist imperative to say *this has been* by raising methodological questions in a more speculative historical tense: *What could have been otherwise* and *what will have been* in the aftermath of having fleshed out these unrealized archival potentials?

Salma Siddique and Suvadip Sinha both focus on female character actors in post-partition South Asian film comedies, most of whose works are no longer extant. Each situates their research against the lack of archival scholarship about comediennes in South Asian cinema. Siddique, in “Someone to Check Her a Bit’: Feminine Abandon and the Abducted Woman in Shorey Comedies,” considers the geopolitics of “the droll queen,” Meena Shorey, a popular South Asian film star whose own national identity, gendered lifestyle, and religious faith intersected in complex ways with the geopolitics of South Asian state partition. Born in the Punjabi region in 1921 (later Pakistan) and raised as Muslim, Shorey converted to Hinduism upon marriage during the peak of her 1940s film stardom, but reconverted to Islam after emigrating to Pakistan (often described anachronistically as her repatriation), where she made numerous Urdu-language film and television comedies from the mid-1950s to the 1980s. Drawing on filmed interviews with Shorey, extant archival media, newspaper and magazine reports, and Shorey’s own memoirs, Siddique addresses the blind spots of both South Asian film histories and Eurocentric theories of gender and comedy in order to suggest further linkages between practices of physical comedy and memories of historical trauma. She thus engages the peculiar temporalities of Shorey’s stardom and biography to offer conceptual spaces for feminist revision and comedic imagination.

Sinha, in “Fat Woman in a Car’: The Curious Case of Tun Tun,” looks at the career of Uma Devi Khatri (also known as Tun Tun), “arguably Bombay cinema’s first comedienne,” who appeared in more than 370 films between 1950 and 1991. As he explains, Tun Tun’s liminality derives from her failure to occupy either dominant stereotype of femininity: the ideal/new Indian woman, or the transgressive/sexualized vamp. Tun Tun’s corporeal excess becomes a form of disruptive presence, but one that has largely escaped the gaze of Indian film scholars and cultural historians. Drawing on a range of paratextual materials, including Hindi film magazines, newspaper clippings, and obituary columns, Sinha relates this archival plenitude to Tun Tun’s own fat body, drawing speculative connections between the invisibility of certain subaltern

bodies and the methodological blind spots of postcolonial theory and archival historiography.

Like Sinha, Brandy Monk-Payton elaborates on the gender and racial politics of comedic disruption in “#LaughingWhileBlack: Gender and the Comedy of Social Media Blackness.” While most feminist comedy scholarship tends to focus on specific stars, biographies, and careers, Monk-Payton looks at the everyday affective politics of networked laughter, drawing on an interdisciplinary field of Black feminist theory and critical race scholarship (Anna Everett, Tricia Rose, Moya Bailey, and Henry Louis Gates Jr.). Monk-Payton opens with the genesis of the racialized hashtag #LaughingWhileBlack: “In August 2015, members of the San Francisco East Bay–based book club Sistahs on the Reading Edge were told to exit a Napa Valley Wine Train for purportedly disrupting the ride due to their gregarious displays of fun.” The incident quickly went viral through social media. However, as Monk-Payton argues, the digital circulation of racialized affect is overdetermined by traumatic histories of Black female laughter—implicating the racist strategies of minstrelsy and hyper-performativity by which female laughers of color have been systematically dehumanized. These apparent tensions between mundane gestures of ridicule (such as “sass” and “shade”) and networked social media laughter (branded by the hashtag) are further “animated” (she invokes Ngai’s notion of “animatedness” from *Ugly Feelings*) by the haunted archives of #LaughingWhileBlack.²⁵

To this point, it is no secret that feminist theory has often been accused of universalizing difference around the model of white, European and North American, middle-class, heteronormative sexual difference. Rather than ignoring or refuting this complaint, several of the authors in this issue focus on decentering the mythology of whiteness, thereby opening up intersectional modes of critique to the inevitability of further archival examples that center on white female bodies. Heather Osborne-Thompson, Jason Middleton, and Kristen Anderson Wagner focus on issues of abjection, aging, and fatness—the physical means by which female bodies are dehumanized—as the loci of comedy’s feminist historiographic politics.

Anderson Wagner emphasizes the gendered processes by which time is inscribed on the comedian’s body, or as she puts it, “‘With Age Comes Wisdom’: Joan Rivers, Betty White, and the Aging Comedienne.” She asks, “Exactly what wisdom comes with age?”—especially given the pernicious exclusion of women who have seemingly outlasted their laugh lines. She compares the contrasting styles of two remarkably persistent popular comedienne—acerbic Joan Rivers

and saccharine Betty White—to unlock the power of “aging” (a very gendered signifier) as a form of feminist comedic license. She traces the transformations of Rivers’s and White’s comedic styles (across their intermedial film, television, and stand-up appearances) against the corporeal aging of their female celebrity bodies. She thereby teases out a historiographic politics of female aging, which emerges through the very tension between a joke and its utterance: or the social contingency of comedic context and the gendered corporeality of its messenger.

If Rivers and White helped pave the way for women to decry gendered double standards through raunchy humor, Amy Schumer has certainly been carrying the torch. In “A Rather Crude Feminism: Amy Schumer, Postfeminism, and Abjection,” Middleton looks at Schumer’s hilariously abject television, filmmaking, and stand-up as a specter of postfeminism: the ideological project of making the gains and legacies of earlier feminist movements appear repulsive for mainstream cultural consumption. As he puts it, “Post-feminist ideology ‘takes feminism into account’ by framing liberal, broadly acceptable feminist principles as already achieved, thus preempting a more radical feminist politics that is constructed as both unpleasant and irrelevant.” In the aftermath of post-feminism, Middleton reads Schumer’s abject comedy—her sexting, “asshole reshaping,” dirty talk, and overall “rather crude feminism”—as a by-product of the overriding tensions between consumer market forces and the resurgent popularity of feminist politics, which have returned (in an ironic twist) in the very form by which they had been abjected: as monstrous, vile, disgusting, excessively graphic, and a total trainwreck.

Osborne-Thompson digs up the gender politics of comedic self-abjection at their source in “Channeling Totie Fields: Female Stand-Up Comedy on 1960s–1970s Television.” Alongside Phyllis Diller and Martha Raye, Totie Fields performed exaggerated caricatures of her own failed femininity (that is, her failure to conform to normative feminine ideals) as a survival strategy to justify her very presence on the comedic scene: at the mic in stand-up clubs and as a comic guest on talk shows, late-night programs, and televised variety specials. Size jokes were a preferred tactic. At the expense of her own girth, Fields capitalized on the sadism of her fat-phobic popular branding as “dumpling face,” “America’s favorite size 44,” “hard to overlook . . . on the tube or off,” and “Miss Caloric Catastrophe.” Like Tun Tun (“the fat woman in a car” of Hindi cinema), Fields’s frequent erasure from social histories of 1960s and 1970s American comedy (overshadowed by the more politicized punch lines of Lily Tomlin, Carol Burnett, and Moms Mabley) stems from an ambivalence about the cruel legacy of her own comedic self-abasement. While there is something

affirmative about the self-skewering body politics of Schumer's humor, such narratives have missed the mark of Fields's corporeal comedy. Against these ideological blind spots, whereby denigrated female excess becomes an alibi for historical invisibility, Osborne-Thompson persuades us to view Fields's self-deprecating "caloric catastrophe" and "falsetto foghorn" jokes as species of what Rebecca Krefting has named "charged humor": politicized comedy that often exceeds the threshold of pleasure in order to draw attention to realities of systemic injustice and social exclusion.²⁶

Women have long struggled to claim their places in stand-up; female comics are still heavily marginalized from nightclub rosters.²⁷ Yet one genre of laughter where women have felt all too at home is romantic comedy. In "Women, Gender and Romantic Comedy in Brazil: Love on the High Seas in *Meu passado me condena* (2013) and *S.O.S. mulheres ao mar* (2014)," Leslie L. Marsh focuses on the gender and class politics of the Brazilian film industry. She critiques the neoliberal winds at the sails of Brazilian musical comedies (*chanchadas*) set on cruise ships, whose popular production coincided with Brazil's escalating financial growth and increased exports of its national entertainment culture between 2002 and 2014. As she argues, flexible representations of gender and sexuality in the romantic comedy genre served as vehicles for negotiating the contradictory class and social politics driving neoliberalism's crisis-prone liquidity of global capital. She focuses on the economic demands for global cultural flexibility against the limits of social expression in a traditionally very conservative genre, wherein any freedom for sexual experimentation through laughter is easily tied up by the genre's romance machine of ideological reproduction.

Lastly, we are delighted to include two supplemental pieces: an annotated televisual excursus into laughter (by Annie Berke) and an original graphic comic about a forgotten comedienne character (by Katherine Frances Nagels). Berke's "Bad Feminists: The Secret History of TV's *How to Marry a Millionaire*" offers a user's guide to the media archives of feminism's bad histories—what Roxane Gay has described as the "mess of contradictions" endemic to feminist subjectivity (for instance the drive for independence versus the need for financial security).²⁸ Berke looks closely at the uneven emergent feminisms of the television show (which was adapted from a film adapted from a novel) *How to Marry a Millionaire* (NTA, 1957–59). At once a "liberating form of proto-second wave feminist fun" and a crude caricature of single women as gold-digging narcissists, *How to Marry a Millionaire* gives voice to a hotbed of unresolvable conflicts between the desire for gendered liberation and its facilitation by commodity

capitalism. Berke has curated several digitized clips from the show—including “The Truthivac” and “Loco Goes Home”—which she accompanies with thoughtful theoretical framing, incisive visual analysis, social and historical context, and her own lively sense of humor.

No archival expedition would be complete (even in its politics of fragmentation) without the collusion of silent cinema: a lost garden of comedic productions, the vast majority of which are no longer extant. Nagels highlights the peculiar career of a virtually unknown Italian star, Fernanda Negri Pouget, one of many prolific Italian film comediennes of the 1910s (alongside Lea Giunchi, Nilde Baracchi, Valentina Frascaroli, and Gigetta Morano). Pouget played the popular American comic-strip character Miss Fluffy Ruffles, an endearingly humorous variation on the destructive female vamp. Nagels traces the promiscuous histories of “Flufflymania”—an intermedial and international cultural obsession—from the cartoon columns of the *New York Herald* to the archival remains of its Italian silent-screen adaptations. Drawing on a variety of archival sources, including newspaper excerpts, photographs, and incomplete film prints, Nagels accompanies her dynamic narrative of Miss Fluffy Ruffles with her own original comic illustrations, bringing missing images to life and provoking in us a kind of historiographic laughter that ripples between a forgotten past and its yet-to-be-imagined future. ■

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NOTES

1. Donald Trump infamously addressed Hillary Clinton as a “nasty woman” at a presidential debate, and publicly threatened to indict her for corruption in campaign speeches and rallies. *Pussy Riot* is a Russian feminist punk rock band. Several members of the band were imprisoned after a 2012 guerilla protest concert at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, in which the band pointedly mocked Vladimir Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church.

2. Negin Farsad, “A Highly Scientific Taxonomy of Haters,” Ted Talk filmed February 2006, https://www.ted.com/talks/negin_farsad_a_highly_scientific_taxonomy_of_haters.

3. Virginia Woolf, “The Value of Laughter,” in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. I, 1904–1912, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1986), 58.

4. *Ibid.*, 60.

5. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 2006), 15.

6. Alice Duer Miller, *Are Women People? A Book of Rhymes for Suffrage Times*, originally published in 1915, available at <http://www.fullbooks.com/Are-Women-People.html>. Among the hundreds of examples of suffragette silent film comedies are *If Women Were Policemen* (Clarendon, 1908), *When Women Vote* (Lubin, 1907), *When Women Win* (Lubin, 1909), *When Women Rule* (Selig, 1912), *How They Got the Vote* (Edison, 1913), *For Mayor, Bess Smith* (Pathé, 1913), *The Suffragette Sheriff* (Kalem, 1912), *Cousin Kate's Revolution* (Éclair, 1912), and *Down with Men* (Lubin, 1912).

7. Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 3.

8. Find Lantern at <http://lantern.mediahist.org/>.

9. Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women on Top," in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France, Eight Essays* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975); Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1994); Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002).

10. Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 2008), 237.

11. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 223.

12. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.

13. Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai, "Comedy Has Issues: An Introduction," *Critical Inquiry* 43, no. 2 (Winter 2017): 241.

14. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 224.

15. Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (New York: Macmillan, 1911).

16. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 224.

17. Linda Mizejewski, *Pretty/Funny: Women Comedians and Body Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014).

18. On "crazy machines" see Rob King, "Uproarious Inventions: Keystone, Modernity, and the Machine, 1915–1917," in *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Film Company and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). On the post-Fordist "precariat" see Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). Regarding the latter, Sianne Ngai's notion of "the zany" does some of this work. She defines zaniness as one of three fundamental aesthetic categories of late capitalism (alongside the cute and the interesting). "This is because the zany, the interesting and the cute index—and are each thus in a historically concrete way about—the system's most socially binding processes; production, in the case of zaniness (an aesthetic about performing not just as artful play but affective labor)." Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 1.

19. Kara Keeling, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 137.

20. Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).
21. *Ibid.*, 207.
22. On the new film history see Thomas Elsaesser, "The New Film History," *Sight and Sound* 55, no. 4 (Autumn 1986), 246–51.
23. Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1054.
24. Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (London: Verso, 2007); Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
25. Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
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