

## Laughing against Patriarchy: Humor, Silence, and Feminist Resistance

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One of the major concerns of Feminist Theory is the way in which women's ability to speak gets silenced, both in relation to sexist situations and to the way in which discourse itself is constructed. Some examples include Catherine MacKinnon's concern about the systematic silence of sexual harassment,<sup>1</sup> Deirdre Davis' concern about silencing through street harassment,<sup>2</sup> and Luce Irigaray's<sup>3</sup> and Monique Wittig's<sup>4</sup> concerns about the silence caused by the construction of discourse itself. Humor often reinforces silence, trivializing climates of sexism<sup>5</sup> and the act of pointing out the existence of patriarchal structures in society.<sup>6</sup> However, it also has been gestured to as a means of breaking silence and as coinciding with the self-articulation of women on their own terms.<sup>7</sup> What is the difference between silencing humor and humor that breaks silence? And what would it look like for humor to serve as a practice of feminist resistance?

In this essay, I will argue that humor is a promising method of feminist resistance, allowing women to shift oppressive scripts of discourse that discourage women from speaking to a context where women can speak on their own terms. First, I will explain the role of humor in silencing women, referring to both Rousseau's writings on laughing at rape and contemporary discussions of jokes about rape in stand-up comedy which frame feminist resistance as humorless. Then I will look at theories of laughter and resistance, arguing that Cixous and Irigaray's endorsement of laughter can be made more specific through Wittig's emphasis on discursive war machines. After this, I will use an adapted form of Raskin's semantic script theory of verbal humor to explain how jokes can shift scripts of discourse to unexpected places, much like *reductio ad absurdum* arguments or Diogenes the Cynic's response to Zeno's paradox,

imbuing humor with the potential to serve as a feminist war machine. Finally, I will turn to everyday deployments of humor by a feminist counter-public on Reddit to show this feminist war machine in action.

### **Silencing Humor**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*, in sections explaining the ideal 'education' of women, employs tactics designed to keep women and girls in silence. For example, he asserts that women are completely dependent on men and their judgments,<sup>8</sup> that girls must be acclimated to constraint because their life will necessarily involve being "enslaved" to a specific etiquette and "the wills of others",<sup>9</sup> and that women can create neither "works of genius"<sup>10</sup> nor engage in science.<sup>11</sup> In this way, Rousseau constructs (and by emphasizing a targeted education causes the construction of) women and girls as unable to speak outside of the judgments, wills, and discourses of men. Mary Wollstonecraft summarizes these views, writing,

Rousseau declares that a woman should never, for a moment, feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her *natural* cunning, and made a coquettish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a *sweeter* companion to man, whenever he chooses to relax himself.<sup>12</sup>

Wollstonecraft here recognizes that Rousseau's ideal world is one in which women have no aims outside of serving men, silencing all other possibilities.<sup>13</sup>

Within his general project of silencing women, Rousseau includes a discussion of rape. After associating men with reason and women with modesty, Rousseau asserts that "[n]ature and reason" go against the act of rape because it involves men attacking their "companion" and threatening fatherhood.<sup>14</sup> He also asserts that women can defend themselves and suggests that when a woman is raped it must have been permitted, writing, "For the attacker to be victorious, the one who is attacked must permit or arrange it..."<sup>15</sup> This causes him to suggest that "[t]he freest and sweetest of all acts," meaning penis-in-vagina sex, "does not admit of real violence,"<sup>16</sup>

resulting in a denial of rape. Rape becomes an action that is “logically incoherent” in Rousseau’s framework.<sup>17</sup>

This denial leads Rousseau to write,

If fewer acts of rape are cited in our day, this is surely not because men are more temperate but because they are less credulous, and such a complaint, which previously would have persuaded simple peoples, in our days would succeed only in attracting the laughter of mockers. It is more advantageous to keep quiet.<sup>18</sup>

Rousseau believes he has shown that men, who are reasonable, do not rape women and hence any reports by women that they have been raped are not credible to the degree that they should be the target of laughter. But how is laughter specifically affecting the response? Rousseau mentions laughter earlier in *Emile*, writing,

All children are afraid of masks. I begin by showing Emile a mask of a pleasing appearance, and presently some one puts it on before him. Thereupon I begin to laugh, and, as everybody joins in the laugh, the child laughs as the others do. Gradually I accustom him to masks that are less pleasing, and finally to faces that are hideous. If I have managed my gradation skillfully, far from being frightened at the last mask, he will laugh at it as at the first one. After this I have no fear that he will be frightened at masks.<sup>19</sup>

Rousseau also indicates that laughter can be used to ease fears of the dark.<sup>20</sup> In these sections, Rousseau is acknowledging that laughter is both a way to deny the ability of something to affect oneself on its own terms against one’s wishes (i.e. beholding a frightful mask and being confronted with fear), and a way to change the terms of that presentation such that the response to the object can be controlled (i.e. beholding a frightful mask and not experiencing it as a confrontation after laughing at it). Rousseau’s suggested response to rape follows a similar pattern: it is prescribed that women who say they have been raped should not be listened to on their own terms, and they instead (like the mask) have any intentions outside of what men want to hear trivialized through laughter. Here laughter is designed as the ultimate seal upon the voice of women who were raped: any argument or evidence against Rousseau’s denial of rape becomes

not worth being engaged on its terms, and hence is trivialized through the play of laughter.

Laughter and excuses of "it was just a joke!" or "why are you taking this so seriously?" may thus be integral to the strategies of an "epistemology of ignorance," which Charles W. Mills describes as a system of "misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception" put in place to cover up the reality of subjugation.<sup>21</sup> The turn to laughter in response to rape thus reinforces Rousseau's general theme of silencing women from speaking on their own terms outside of men's desires.

Rape still remains a widespread target of laughter, especially among standup comedians. For example, comedian Daniel Tosh, star of Comedy Central's highest rated show *Tosh.0*,<sup>22</sup> told a rape joke at the Laugh Factory in 2012 that was widely discussed on the Internet. News of the joke broke when a woman described her experience attending Tosh's show on Tumblr, a popular blogging and social networking website, writing,

So Tosh then starts making some very generalizing, declarative statements about rape jokes always being funny, how can a rape joke not be funny, rape is hilarious, etc. I don't know why he was so repetitive about it but I felt provoked because I, for one, DON'T find them funny and never have. So I didnt appreciate Daniel Tosh (or anyone!) telling me I should find them funny. So I yelled out, "Actually, rape jokes are never funny!"<sup>23</sup>

After this, Tosh responded with, "Wouldn't it be funny if that girl got raped by like, 5 guys right now? Like right now? What if a bunch of guys just raped her..."<sup>24</sup> She then left the show while the audience watched and laughed at her. Her challenge to Tosh's attempt to cast rape jokes as universally funny was thus responded to by "the laugh of mockers" – this time laden with violence through its threatening style of targeting - her disagreement trivialized as not worth confronting on its own terms. The woman who objected to Tosh, explaining her decision to speak out against his generalizations, wrote,

I did it because, even though being “disruptive” is against my nature, I felt that sitting there and saying nothing, or leaving quietly, would have been against my values as a person and as a woman. I don’t sit there while someone tells me how I should feel about something as profound and damaging as rape.<sup>25</sup>

And yet, because of the humor targeting her, her attempt to break the silence about rape in the comedy club was shifted back into silence again by Tosh and the audience who laughed with him through the evocation of rape.

In this instance, Tosh is not using laughter to assert that claims of having been raped should be silenced as lies in the same way as Rousseau, but his technique of humor nonetheless silences the actuality of rape. By claiming that rape jokes are always funny, Tosh is condoning his following action of using a joke about a woman being raped to silence her words. He is also trivializing, through this violent joke, the fact that actual rape is already used to silence and restrict the lives of women,<sup>26</sup> presenting the idea itself of a woman being raped into silence as something for the audience to laugh at. Additionally, Tosh is condoning jokes such as the one given during his comedy special, *Happy Thoughts*:

I play practical jokes on [my sister] constantly though. I got her so good a few weeks ago. I replaced her pepper spray with silly string. Anyway, that night she got raped. And she called me the next day going, “You son of a bitch! You got me so good!...As soon as I started spraying him in the face I’m like DANIEL! This is gonna really hurt!”<sup>27</sup>

A significant element of this joke involves the simultaneous presentation of a casual reaction to a practical joke with the seriousness of rape. However, laughing at a juxtaposition between rape and triviality, which may initially seem edgy or transgressive, does not confront the actuality that rape is already often trivialized and dismissed. For example, after the Anonymous hackers leaked a cluster of videos exposing Steubenville football players who gang raped a girl who was unconscious, one of the leaked videos showed a group of students laughing about the rape and making jokes that the girl was “deader than Obi Wan Kenobi after Darth Vader cut his head off,”

and laughing while saying, “Is she gonna feel it? She’s dead!”<sup>28</sup> This is only one recent instance of the widespread trivialization of rape. Through his joke, Tosh is reinforcing already existing patterns that result in the silencing of women who were raped and silence about rape in general. The popular comedian Louis C.K. acknowledged this aspect of the controversy in an interview with fellow comedian Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show*, saying,

I’ve read some blogs during this whole thing that enlightened me about some things I didn’t know. This woman said how rape is something that polices women’s lives. They have a narrow corridor that they can’t go out late, they can’t go to certain neighborhoods, they can’t dress a certain way, ‘cause they might get... so that’s now part of me now...<sup>29</sup>

This starts to acknowledge that jokes about rape can be silencing and contribute to the silencing of the actuality of rape and the threats of rape that women must deal with every day.

But in the same interview, though C.K. criticizes the inability of standup comedians to take criticism, he also claims that “any joke about anything bad is great,” including rape. Earlier in the interview C.K. emphasizes the importance of dialogue, conversation, and listening, so it could be that he believes jokes about bad topics that are often not discussed are great because they use the opportunity that a humor venue offers to open the floor for conversation rather than continue the pattern of silence. However, even this fails to recognize that the way in which these jokes are told vary and can often lead to further silence, such as the way that Tosh’s rape joke drove the woman who challenged him from the room, and ignores the intricacies of how jokes and laughter can skew the terms on which people are allowed to speak. This lack of complexity is also present in Tosh’s apology tweets on Twitter, writing, “all the out of context misquotes aside, i’d like to sincerely apologize” but then clarifying the context with, “the point i was making before i was heckled is there are awful things in the world but you can still make jokes about them #deadbabies.”<sup>30</sup> Even if put in such a context, however, the point fails to recognize

the effects of how jokes are made and how they can differentially silence groups of people and experiences.

One response to the discussion of Tosh's joke, made by comedian Dom Irrera, was to say, "Do you think all the things we say we mean, do you think he really thought that? How stupid is the overreaction to this? You might as well say that about all comedy then."<sup>31</sup> Regardless of what was meant by a joke, they can still have harmful effects and Irrera is ironically correct that humor should be open for critique. bell hooks does not let humor and laughter off the hook so easily in her critique of Eddie Murphy's comedy special *Raw*, asserting that it "remains one of the most graphic spectacles of black male phallocentrism."<sup>32</sup> hooks asserts that Murphy uses his jokes to represent black women as betrayers using their sexuality only to receive goods from black men, who are portrayed as "controlled by their penises."<sup>33</sup> hooks argues that *Raw* constructs women's bodies as threatening to black men's autonomy, to the extent that "women's personhood must be erased," seeking to silence black women in relation to black men.<sup>34</sup> hooks thus recognizes that humor, and stand-up comedy in particular, is not an innocent play of jokes but rather can often convey a silencing message. hooks is also aware of the power of laughter to silence, noting that when she specifies patriarchy as "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" during her lectures her audience will often laugh.<sup>35</sup> She asserts that this laughter seeks to trivialize the words she uses, writing, "This laughter reminds me that if I dare to challenge patriarchy openly, I risk not being taken seriously."<sup>36</sup> Laughter here becomes a way to silence and trivialize critique, much like Rousseau and the mask, constructing hooks' confrontation of white-supremacist patriarchy as not worth engaging on its own terms.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, the effort to be taken seriously has often been the aim of feminist theory. For example, Wollstonecraft, pushing against the confinement of women to "barren amusement"

through their education,<sup>38</sup> later turns to "the chaste wife, and serious mother" who should cultivate respectability and not rely on being pleasing.<sup>39</sup> However, even the attempt to be taken seriously and to take the subjugation of women seriously has been used to silence critique through the trope of the "humorless feminist." Indeed, another element of the discussion about Tosh's rape joke was the notion of feminists as humorless. In his own summary of the controversy, C.K. joked,

It's also a fight between comedians and feminists, which are natural enemies, because stereotypically speaking, feminists can't take a joke...On the other side comedians can't take criticism, comedians are big pussies...<sup>40</sup>

While C.K. does say he is speaking of stereotypes, the trope of humorlessness was often used against the woman who spoke out against Tosh. For example, the popular comedian Dane Cook wrote on Twitter, "If you journey through this life easily offended by other people's words I think it's best for everyone if you just kill yourself,"<sup>41</sup> characterizing her criticism of Tosh's joke as reflecting a tendency towards taking humorless offense at everything. Another Twitter user, in defense of Tosh, tweeted, "the only ppl who are mad at you are the feminist bitches who never get laid and hope they get raped so they can get laid,"<sup>42</sup> characterizing women who spoke out against Tosh as humorless and secretly desiring to be raped. Feminism has often been associated with humorlessness.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, whether women are capable of humor in general has often been interrogated, ranging from a statement by the English writer William Congreve in 1695 that he had never seen "true Humour" displayed by a woman to an assertion by TV Producer John Fisher in 1973 that women could not be funny if allowed to do standup comedy<sup>44</sup> to an article by Christopher Hitchens in 2007 explaining that women tend not to be as funny as men unless they are "hefty or dykey or Jewish, or some combo of the three."<sup>45</sup> In a context where both humor and

women's critique of humor is used against us, how can we respond to its ability to silence? What might a theory of feminist humor look like in contrast to sexist, silencing humor?

### **Medusa's War Machine**

Both Cixous and Irigaray stress the importance of laughter for women asserting themselves as women. Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa" stresses that while men have often casted women into a position as "dark" and unintelligible, attempting to centralize women around the needs of men while encouraging women to hate women,<sup>46</sup> women can turn away from the history of male phallogocentric reason<sup>47</sup> and write for themselves.<sup>48</sup> Cixous links women writing themselves at the individual level to women's embodiment, stressing that women's writing also involves allowing their bodies to be heard, "seizing" the ability to speak outside of masculine discourse.<sup>49</sup> Integral to this revolt against masculine discourse through feminine embodiment is laughter, which represents feminine power beyond masculine imposition, where for women "laughs exude from all of our mouths."<sup>50</sup> Cixous embodies feminine self-assertion, distinction, and laughter in the figure of Medusa, writing, "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing."<sup>51</sup> For Cixous, Medusa represents the feminine which is outside of the petrifying male gaze and laughs on its own terms. This laughter can also be used to break the binds of masculine discourse, carrying a power to assert women as women distinct from men by pulverizing masculine-centric institutions, laws, and "truths."<sup>52</sup>

Irigaray, who is also concerned about the erasure of women in the discourse of men, similarly indicates that laughter can be liberating. Similar to Cixous' description of the laughter outside of phallogocentrism,<sup>53</sup> Irigaray states that her first impulse upon envisioning possibilities for women outside of the masculine imaginary "is to laugh."<sup>54</sup> Irigaray notes that laughter can be

the first stage of liberation from subjugation, both contrasted to the masculine "seriousness of meaning" and maintaining a sense of humor among other women in order to prevent the creation of a "simple reversal of the masculine position" (i.e. replacing the hegemony of men with a hegemony of women) that would still involve problematic power relations.<sup>55</sup> Thus, both Cixous and Irigaray give us a picture of laughter as a crucial stage in the process of women asserting their speech outside the totalizing limits of men.

However, though both of these approaches advocate for the power of laughter in relation to women speaking on their own terms, neither of them explains precisely how this happens. Medusa's laughter is only highlighted after the perspective has been shifted such that she can be seen, and though Cixous indicates laughter can crush masculine phallogocentrism, she does not explain the process through which this occurs. Indeed, her essay only uses laughter-related words six times, each of which do not go into much detail. Irigaray similarly when rhetorically asking, "Isn't laughter the first form of liberation from a secular oppression?" does not explain how specifically this laughter would function. Consequently, while both Irigaray and Cixous point towards laughter as potentially disruptive of masculine discourse and productive of women's ability to speak on their own terms, their explanations are too vague and do not provide us with a clear path to follow.

Though often framed in stark opposition to Irigaray and Cixous, Monique Wittig is also concerned with the ability of men to control women (in her framework called the class of women) through language. In contrast to Irigaray and Cixous (who want to affirm sexual difference), Wittig asserts that sex does not exist (at least in its current form) except as the oppressive production of an "ideology of sexual difference,"<sup>56</sup> stressing that this ideology is maintained by "the dominant thought"<sup>57</sup> reinforced by a "body of discourses."<sup>58</sup> Because of these

discourses, sex is asserted as natural rather than socially constructed in order to instate "society as heterosexual"<sup>59</sup> and subjugate women to men through marriage,<sup>60</sup> denying the possibility for the class of women to live on their own terms outside of the heterosexual demands of the category of sex. This category is "totalitarian," enforced through law and violence, and shapes both the body and mind through the control of "all mental production."<sup>61</sup> For Wittig, the heterosexual ideology's silencing language is best understood not as involving a realm of "Ideal" but instead as enacting "material oppression" and violence upon its subjects.<sup>62</sup> Wittig writes, "These discourses of heterosexuality oppress us in the sense that they prevent us from speaking unless we speak in their terms"<sup>63</sup> to the extent that "*Outlaw* and *mad* are the names for those who refuse to go by the rules and conventions, as well as for those who refuse to or cannot speak a common language."<sup>64</sup> Wittig refers to the bundle of discourses that use their totalizing power "materially and actually upon our bodies and our minds" as "the straight mind."<sup>65</sup> The straight mind universalizes itself into "history, social reality, culture, language, and all the subjective phenomenon"<sup>66</sup> and is unable to think outside of its concepts.<sup>67</sup> Wittig asserts that in order to escape the discourse of sexual difference that has been instated by the straight mind such that the class of women can speak outside of it, a revolution must occur at the level of concepts<sup>68</sup> involving "a political semiology" and operating "at the level of language/manifesto" and "language/action" that will "break off the heterosexual contract"<sup>69</sup> and "abolish men and women."<sup>70</sup> In order for women to speak, the totalizing category of sex that subjugates them in a totalizing, heterosexual relationship to the class of men must be destroyed.

For this purpose, Wittig theorizes what she calls a "war machine," a practice of language that disrupts the discursive order imposed by the class of men. She compares the war machine to the figure of the Trojan Horse, a statue that was accepted because the Trojans thought they

recognized its form, but became their ruin when let in the gates.<sup>71</sup> When considering an existing body of literature, the task of a writer is "either to reproduce existing forms or to create new ones," with language serving as a "raw material" for this purpose.<sup>72</sup> During this process, words can be divested of their typical meaning so that they can be re-fashioned in a way that results in a "shock" upon the listener, forged from a new association, disposition, arrangement, and separate usage of words.<sup>73</sup> Because language as material affects the world in a material way, this refashioning can thus serve as a "war machine," warping the wonted words in such a way that they are initially seen as a familiar formation (like the Trojan Horse) but then revealed as revolutionary and shocking.

While Wittig's ultimate goals are at odds with Irigaray and Cixous, her emphasis on the importance of changing a problematic, totalizing language imposed by men is shared among all three. Hence, the war machine serves as a more specific method of how masculine discourse can be shifted such that women can speak as women or how the totalizing category of sex and its discourses can be shocked into disintegration. Recall that part of the reason why Irigaray and Cixous emphasizes the importance of laughter is because it is able to dismantle masculine language and reveal women as women. With this insight, if we can theorize humor as war machine, we can reach an analysis of how humor specifically can be used on language to warp patriarchal discourse and open up a space for women to speak (either as women or as the oppressed class of women).

### **Humor as Trojan Horse**

One of the most popular approaches to the study of jokes has been through their relation to schemas, frames, and scripts.<sup>74</sup> These consist of organized "knowledge structures" that provide "a dynamic mental representation" allowing the formation of mental maps for the world.<sup>75</sup> In

1977 Roger Schank and Robert Abelson defined a script as the organization of "sequences of events in a particular context" into an organized structure that acts as "an interconnected whole" for various situations,<sup>76</sup> providing stereotyped clusters of information that can be used by humans to understand situations.

Victor Raskin created an influential script-based conception of humor that aimed to describe the necessary and sufficient conditions required for a text to be considered funny<sup>77</sup> in agreement with a natural speaker's judgment of the text.<sup>78</sup> This "script-based semantic theory" has a strong contextual emphasis and only attributes meaning to non-isolated sentences which must be related to the rest of language<sup>79</sup> and necessary background information.<sup>80</sup> The lexicon of scripts consists of "a large chunk of semantic information" that either informs a word or is expressed by that word.<sup>81</sup> Scripts are "a cognitive structure" that native speakers internalize to be used as "knowledge of a small part of the world," including "common sense" such as "certain routines, standard procedures, basic situations, etc." as well as scripts that arise from the person's individual experience of the world and within a specific social situation.<sup>82</sup> These scripts are facilitated by "combinatorial rules" which combine scripts in patterns that are compatible while censoring incompatible scripts from being combined,<sup>83</sup> resulting in rules that seek to "disambiguate" our use of language.<sup>84</sup> Thus, for Raskin the scripts-based semantic theory provides a contextual basis upon which humans conceive of language and organize linguistic information.

Raskin then uses this theory of scripts to formulate a "semantic theory of humor".<sup>85</sup> Specifically, his main hypothesis is that the necessary conditions for a text to be a joke are if it is both "compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts" and if these two scripts are "opposite."<sup>86</sup> These conflicting scripts often contain a "trigger" consisting of some ambiguity or

contradiction that shifts the interpretation provided by an initial script to a conflicting one.<sup>87</sup> Such oppositions are referred to as "local antonyms" that when combined evoke an "unreal" or "incompatible" situation<sup>88</sup> including three opposition pairs that are "actual" versus "non-actual," "normal" versus "abnormal," and "possible" versus "impossible."<sup>89</sup> Each of these pairs shares a conflict between "real" and "unreal."<sup>90</sup> While combinatorial rules would ordinarily attempt to fix this situation in "bona-fide communication," the behavior of play<sup>91</sup> allows the suspension of these rules and a recognition of the joke's "non-bona-fide" mood and its goal not to "convey information" but to cause laughter.<sup>92</sup> Thus, the semantic theory of humor explains jokes as an interaction between incongruous scripts in the service of play and laughter.

Elsewhere, I have argued that this approach to humor is too disembodied and that a more embodied theory of jokes can consider them in relation to emotion, value, and meaning rather than turning to a discharge that gets simplistically dismissed as non-bona fide and releases all of the tension through laughter as if it were some sort of extraneous steam.<sup>93</sup> For the purposes of this essay, then, the salient feature of Raskin's theory of jokes is that jokes involve a shift of existing linguistic scripts towards an unexpected meaning, from which play and laughter springs. As Delia Chiaro emphasizes, jokes are able to exploit hidden traps in language, taking advantage of undetected ambiguities to unexpectedly recontextualize meanings<sup>94</sup> or disrupt stable discourse such that "the text unravels"<sup>95</sup> and the statement joked upon no longer maintains its former cohesion.

As an example of this, and a way to illustrate that humor is often not dismissed as "non-bona fide" but rather can challenge existing meanings by shifting them in an unexpected direction, consider the *reductio ad absurdum* style of argument. These arguments begin by taking the propositions of an argument and showing how they lead to an absurdity, thus revealing

the argument as unacceptable.<sup>96</sup> These arguments can often be humorous, such as the many times Socrates takes someone else's positions to an absurdity that they cannot accept.<sup>97</sup> By taking the scripts of an argument and bringing them somewhere unexpected, the altered arguments have their own terms warped towards laughter rather than to entrenchment, and this process conveys meaning rather than simply being dismissed as non-bona-fide.

Another related style of argument involves refusing to engage with another argument on its own terms to begin with. One of the most famous accounts of this is Diogenes the Cynic's response to Zeno's argument that motion is impossible in which Diogenes started moving himself back and forth.<sup>98</sup> This response disrupts the notion of motion that Zeno presents in its abstract form, disrupting the flow of Zeno's argument by engaging it in terms of the body rather than in the form of Zeno's syllogism. It thus reaches humor by taking the script of argumentation Zeno initially presented (referring to motion) and shifting it to the unexpected realm of the body, disrupting and recontextualizing Zeno's argument in a humorous way involving a play of meaning rather than a simple complete dispersal through laughter.

In this way, humor can operate on language like a Trojan Horse. Like the Trojan Horse, it can manifest itself through forms and scripts that are recognizable, but then find a trap in this form through which it can subvert the text and shift it in an entirely different direction.<sup>99</sup> Recall that Wittig was interested in the ability of literature to recast material words and deploy them in a new way that shocks the listener and that Irigaray and Cixous were interested in the ability of laughter to disrupt discourse. Humor does both of these, taking expected scripts and leading them to unexpected, disruptive directions. This can be taken up in a context of feminist resistance to silence in that the warping potential allowed by jokes can be used upon the discourse of patriarchy specifically. In the context of feminism, humor can shift away from or disrupt the

language of phallogocentrism and move towards a language in which women (as themselves or as a class) can speak. I will use the final section to show examples of the use of feminist humor as resistance to silence.

### **Laughing Against Patriarchy: Reddit and Humorous Counter-Publics**

The Internet site Reddit ([www.reddit.com](http://www.reddit.com)) is a massive hub designed for users to share and prioritize links and discussions on the Internet. This is done by allowing users to create their own Communities with their own Moderators around topics of their choice (such as Funny, Politics, and Atheism) that can be subscribed to based on interest. Each link shared or discussion created, along with comments that can be made in response, can be either voted “up” or “down” in order to receive or deplete points which determine the priority with which the topic will be displayed on the page. In this way, Reddit functions as a customizable newsfeed and discussion board, with more popular (“upvoted”) topics displayed before less popular (“downvoted”) topics and comments. Reddit has become an extremely popular website,<sup>100</sup> its influence indicated by President Barack Obama’s decision when running for election in 2012 to make a post in the Reddit community “IAmA,” where people can offer to answer user’s questions about their lives or activities.<sup>101</sup>

With its massive amount of user-created sharing and discussion, Reddit has the potential to be a place where a diverse group of people can come together and have open discussions. However, Reddit is also a space on the Internet where participants are frequently sexist. For example, on a shared picture of a few Iranian women walking, one user commented, “Some times i wish we could all just get along. So i could go bang these people.”<sup>102</sup> This comment received upvotes from 2049 users and downvotes from 635 after being up for 14 hours. As each area of Reddit is user-moderated, sexist and other problematic comments are often allowed to

stand, and many people are more likely to upvote these comments than to downvote them. This tendency to celebrate sexist jokes combined with a tendency to disapprove of or ignore topics and comments that explicitly contest sexism or are not of interest to men results in a climate where masculine-centric discourse is the norm and women are often silenced from speaking both against these conditions and on their own terms in general.<sup>103</sup>

In response to Reddit's sexism,<sup>104</sup> a group on Reddit has been formed called "Shit Reddit Says." Shit Reddit Says (SRS) began in 2010 as a place to share highly upvoted oppressive comments made by Reddit users in order to discuss their effects, mock them, and expose the general entrenched sexism, racism, and homophobia in the Reddit community.<sup>105</sup> They have since grown to having 34,206 subscribers and in addition to their main page where users share problematic comments, SRS has created its own Communities for discussing humor, video games, politics, and other topics in a safer space with conscientious Moderators away from the rest of Reddit. In this way, SRS and its affiliated boards operate as a space of "counter-public digital democracy," set up to contest the norms of power on Reddit and encourage the voices of marginalized groups.<sup>106</sup> During their time highlighting the terrible things people often say or share on Reddit, SRS exposed that some groups were sharing child pornography or existed to sexualize children in general (such as a Community called "Jailbait"),<sup>107</sup> managing to influence Reddit's operators into changing their policy to not allow "suggestive or sexual content featuring minors" and ban any Communities or posts that "focus on sexualization of children."<sup>108</sup> A few months later, noting that this policy often remained unenforced, SRS started a campaign called Project PANDA as an effort to start contacting media outlets to condemn Reddit's complicity.<sup>109</sup> Thus, in addition to revealing the entrenched sexism on Reddit and form a counter-public against

it, SRS has been committed to changing its policies on a larger scale in an effort to prevent the exploitation of women and girls.

During their activity of calling out oppressive comments, the community of SRS has frequently employed humor. For example, the previously mentioned joke objectifying Iranian women was posted on SRS as an example of a sexist, racist comment.<sup>110</sup> In addition to general comments about how this joke is problematic, several of the SRS users made jokes in response. One joke reads, in the form of satire, "Diplomacy? But how does it benefit Reddit's penis?"<sup>111</sup> The original sexist joke functioned by shifting the initial scripts of diplomacy to an unexpected script of having sex with the Iranian women. The SRS member's joke, contrastingly, shifts the scripts of objectification involved in the original sexist joke to a different framework (likely unexpected by the original joker) highlighting the pettiness and self-centeredness of centralizing the idea of diplomacy around men's desires for women as objects. In another topic criticizing a joke that was upvoted 58 times for referring to a picture of two passed out women as a "Jackpot," (shifting the initial scripts of mocking women who drank too much to scripts about how they could be raped) an SRS user writes, "Haha I like uncritically repeating things I heard on Family Guy haha also Loius CK, South Park and Chris Rock haha."<sup>112</sup> Whereas such jokes as the "Jackpot" joke are often liked for being 'edgy' or 'subversive,' the SRS member's joke shifts its framework so it can instead be rescripted as a cliché repetition of jokes that already see a lot of redeployment in a sexist society. Most topics posted to SRS are responded to by humor, which serves as a war machine against the sexist trends of Reddit by shifting the scripts of sexist discourse such that it can be pulverized.

Even the architecture of the SRS page is designed with humor. The very heading of the page reads "SRS stands for hate and intolerance. It destroys relationships" and its sidebar reads,

“The Shevil Fempire hopes you have a wonderful day!” The bottom of the page also displays a picture of angels (representing the SRS moderators, who are referred to as Archangelles) pelting a group of people with dildos (representing downvotes) who had been saying, “FUNNY JOEKS POST-\*ISM LOGIC REASON RON PAUL”<sup>113</sup> (representing the users of Reddit) while the mascot of Reddit cries in front of a grave labeled “Free Speech.”<sup>114</sup> As SRS is criticized and marginalized in relation to the rest of the Reddit community, this architectural humor of hyperbole serves to shift the swath of criticisms launched by Reddit against SRS, whose mission is simply to call people out who say oppressive things, towards absurdity. SRS users are clearly not dildo-throwing angels who killed free speech on Reddit, but they are often treated by the rest of the community with a disproportionate amount of disdain, and the juxtaposition of the anti-SRS criticisms, their shift to the hyperbolic representations of the picture, and their location below the actual work of SRS results in a humorous dismissal of Reddit’s fear of anti-sexism.

While feminism is often claimed to be humorless, in the context of SRS humor becomes a crucial activity as part of resisting a community seething with problematic masculine discourse and a way for the SRS community to both dismiss this discourse and speak against the massive discursive culture engine of Reddit on its own terms. Through humor, sexism itself can become the mask to be laughed at, divested of its power to speak on its own terms by the war machine.

The activity of SRS perhaps does not reach the majestic imagery of Medusa or the revolutionary moment of the Trojan Horse, and it seems unclear at what point Medusa would be revealed in all her laughing glory and at what point the Trojans would lie dead on the ground. Rather, the everyday practice of humor as feminist resistance seems to be a piecemeal, localized method. But it does show the ability of women (and likely some men too) to use humor to shift away from problematic masculine totalizing discourses and gesture towards a world (or at least

situations) in which women are able to speak on their own terms. In these contexts, the difference between silencing humor and humor that breaks the silence is the effects that employments of humor have on who is allowed to speak and on whose terms this speech is allowed to occur. Rousseau, Tosh, and much of Reddit use laughter and humor to silence women and disallow them from speaking on their own terms. The members of SRS, however, use humor to disrupt and shift away from problematic discourses, attempting to create a community on Reddit where women can freely speak on their own terms. While even this humor which breaks the silence technically silences the ability of sexists to express their sexism, overall this silencing aims for a world where ultimately more people can speak without being centralized around the subjugating language and institutions problematically imposed by a group of people upon others. Through this activity, humor is a promising method for feminist resistance.<sup>115</sup>

In sum, humor often silences women and is framed in opposition to “humorless” feminism. However, as shown Irigaray and Cixous when brought into conversation with Wittig, humor can potentially serve as a war machine by shifting the scripts of patriarchal discourse such that women can speak on their own terms. This practice can be seen in action through the SRS counter-public on Reddit, involving a refusal to engage with a climate of sexism through the deployment of humor and the creation of a space where marginalized groups can speak outside of oppressive discourse. Thus, humor is a promising method of feminist resistance, allowing women to shift oppressive scripts of discourse that discourage women from speaking to a context where women can speak on their own terms. Regardless of whether it is used to create a discourse for women as women, to grind apart the category of sex, or for some other end, it is likely that humor will continue to be employed by women (even offstage) who tire of the tendrils of patriarchal discourse and hope to assert themselves in new ways.<sup>116</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup>Catherine A. MacKinnon, *Sexual Harassment of Working Women: A Case of Sex Discrimination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 1.
- <sup>2</sup>Deirdre E. Davis, "The Harm That Has No Name: Street Harassment, Embodiment, and African American Women," in *Gender Struggles: Practical Approaches to Contemporary Feminism*, eds. Constance L. Mui and Julien S. Murphy, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 214.
- <sup>3</sup>Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 164.
- <sup>4</sup>Wittig, Monique, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 40.
- <sup>5</sup>MacKinnon, *Sexual Harassment*, 52
- <sup>6</sup>bell hooks, "Understanding Patriarchy," in *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*, (New York, Ataria Books: 2004), 29.
- <sup>7</sup>(Helene Cixous. "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1.4 (1976): 888. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, 163.
- <sup>8</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *From Emile*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 364.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid. 369.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid. 386.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid. 387.
- <sup>12</sup>Mary Wollstonecraft *The Vindications: the Rights of Men, the Rights of Women*, eds. D. L. MacDonald and Kathleen Scherf (Petersborough, Ontario: Broadview Literary Texts, 1997), 134.
- <sup>13</sup>In this essay, 'silencing' will refer to situations where women are denied the ability to speak on their own terms, either physically or within the construction of language and institutions. Likewise, breaking the silence will refer to the ability of women to warp these situations or structures such that they can speak on their own terms.
- <sup>14</sup>Rousseau, *From Emile*, 359.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid. 359.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid. 359.
- <sup>17</sup>John Darling and Maaïke Van De Pijpekamp, "Rousseau on the Education, Domination and Violation of Women," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 42.4 (1994): 127.
- <sup>18</sup>Rousseau, *From Emile*, 360.
- <sup>19</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or Treatise on Education*, trans. William H. Payne. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1908), 27.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid. 99
- <sup>21</sup>Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 19.
- <sup>22</sup>Erin Carlson, "Comedy Central's Daniel Tosh Apologizes for Rape Joke," *The Hollywood Reporter*. Last modified July 11, 2012, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/comedy-central-daniel-tosh-rape-joke-347986>
- <sup>23</sup>breakfastcookie. "So a Girl Walks into a Comedy Club...." *Cookies for Breakfast*, Tumblr. Last modified July 2012, <http://breakfastcookie.tumblr.com/post/26879625651/so-a-girl-walks-into-a-comedy-club>.
- <sup>24</sup>The owner of the Laugh Factory, Jamie Masada, later claimed, "Daniel [Tosh] came in, and he said, 'Well it sounds like she's been raped by five guys' — something like that. I really didn't hear properly." Even if we were to believe Masada, who disputes what the woman said while

admitting he did not hear it very well, such a joke was still used to silence the woman who spoke out and trivialize the actuality of rape and the speech of victims of rape. See Amy Odell, "Comedy Club Owner Says Daniel Tosh Incident Has Been Misunderstood," *BuzzFeed*. Last modified July 10, 2012, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/amyodell/comedy-club-owner-says-daniel-tosh-incident-has-be>.

<sup>25</sup> breakfastcookie, "So a Girl Walks into a Comedy Club."

<sup>26</sup> Davis, "The Harm That Has No Name," 215-216.

<sup>27</sup> *Daniel Tosh: Happy Thoughts*, perf. & writ. Daniel Tosh (Comedy Central, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> Julia Dahl, "Video Depicts Teens Laughing about Alleged Sexual Assault Victim: 'She is so Raped Right Now'," *CBS News*. Last modified January 4, 2013, [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504083\\_162-57561909-504083/video-depicts-teens-laughing-about-alleged-sexual-assault-victim-she-is-so-raped-right-now/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504083_162-57561909-504083/video-depicts-teens-laughing-about-alleged-sexual-assault-victim-she-is-so-raped-right-now/).

<sup>29</sup> Jon Stewart. "Louis C.K.," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, Comedy Central. Last modified July 16, 2012, <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-july-16-2012/louis-c-k->.

<sup>30</sup> Erin Carlson, "Daniel Tosh Apologizes."

<sup>31</sup> Elex Michaelson. "Daniel Tosh Apologizes for Rape Joke at Laugh Factory," *ABC 7 KABC-TV Los Angeles*. Last modified July 11, 2012, <http://abclocal.go.com/kabc/story?section=news/entertainment&id=8733290>.

<sup>32</sup> bell hooks, "Reconstructing Black Masculinity," in *The Feminist Philosophy Reader*, eds. Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 117.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 117.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 117.

<sup>35</sup> bell hooks, "Understanding," 29.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 29.

<sup>37</sup> Sometimes laughter can be a way to engage with the presentation of theory or experiences through play rather than a dismissal. For example, when learning about Foucault, Butler, and social constructionism for the first time a few friends and I decided to play a practical joke on our professor where we taped a message reading, "This door is socially constructed" to his office door. However, none of us rejected or were rejecting the ideas we were presented with, but rather were engaging with them through play and having fun. It is likely that hooks is specifying and experienced dismissive laughter here rather than playful, engaging laughter.

<sup>38</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Vindications*, 111.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 137.

<sup>40</sup> Stewart, "Louis C.K."

<sup>41</sup> Allison Corneau, "Daniel Tosh's Rape Joke Defended by Comedians," *US Weekly*. Last modified July 12, 2012, <http://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-news/news/daniel-toshs-rape-joke-defended-by-comedians-2012127>.

<sup>42</sup> Roxane Gay, "Daniel Tosh and Rape Jokes: Still Not Funny," *Salon*. Last modified July 12, 2013, [http://www.salon.com/2012/07/12/daniel\\_tosh\\_and\\_rape\\_jokes\\_still\\_not\\_funny/](http://www.salon.com/2012/07/12/daniel_tosh_and_rape_jokes_still_not_funny/).

<sup>43</sup> Domnica Radulescu, *Women's Comedic Art as Social Revolution: Five Performers and the Lessons of Their Subversive Humor* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2012), 13.

<sup>44</sup> Gray, Frances, *Women and Laughter* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 3.

<sup>45</sup> Christopher Hitchens, "Why Women Aren't Funny," *Vanity Fair*. Last modified January 2007, <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2007/01/hitchens200701>, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa," 877-878.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 879.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 876-877.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 880.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 878.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 885.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 888.

<sup>53</sup> "Phallogocentrism" refers to the totalizing centralization of Western thought and discourse around meanings created by men. See Emma L.E. Rees, "Phallogocentrism," in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace (New York: Routledge, 2009), 434.

<sup>54</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex*, 162-163.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 163.

<sup>56</sup> (Wittig, *Straight Mind*, 2)

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 25.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 25.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 26.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 27.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 30.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 32.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 72.

<sup>74</sup> Rod A. Martin, *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach* (San Diego: Elsevier Academic Press, 2007), 86-87.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 85.

<sup>76</sup> Roger C. Schank and Robert P. Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals and Understanding: An Inquiry into Human Knowledge Structures* (Hillsdale, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1977), 41.

<sup>77</sup> Victor Raskin, *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor* (Boston: D. Reidel, 1944), 57)

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 58.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 59.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 88.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 91.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 99.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 99.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 114.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 108.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 111.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 111.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 104.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 101.

<sup>93</sup> I argue this in “The Advantages of an Embodied Theory of Jokes: From Ritchie and Raskin to Barsalou and the Body.” In that essay, I follow efforts to emphasize the role of embodiment in cognition by bringing the body back into jokes, arguing that an embodied theory of jokes has significant advantages over disembodied perspectives. First, I explain the disembodied linguistic approaches of Raskin, Attardo, and Graeme Ritchie and the criticisms of them for vagueness, unfalsifiability, and the construction of systems that do not reflect the human experience of jokes. Second, I explain Barsalou’s criticism of amodal symbol systems theories and his emphasis on an embodied, embedded account of multimodal perceptual symbol systems. After this, I use Barsalou’s perceptual symbol systems theory to sketch an embodied theory of jokes. Then I show that this embodied theory of jokes avoids the disadvantages of vagueness, unfalsifiability, and the construction of systems that do not reflect actual human cognition found in disembodied linguistic theories, proving that the embodied theory of jokes has significant advantages over disembodied perspectives. Finally, I emphasize the implication that humor is often laden with a play of values and meaning that cannot be reduced to a simple discharge and dismissal.

<sup>94</sup> Delia Chiaro, *The Language of Jokes: Analyzing Verbal Play* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 28.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 39.

<sup>96</sup> Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), 43.

<sup>97</sup> Many of the arguments in the Platonic dialogues could be recast as standup comedy. Consider, for example, Socrates’ conversation with Polemarchus in the *Republic*, where he takes Polemarchus’ assertion that a just person is someone who is trustworthy in matters of depositing and saving money and leads this to the conclusion that “justice is an art of stealing,” to which Polemarchus responds, “Good god,” and no longer knows what he meant originally. This takes the initial scripts involved with Polemarchus’ assertion and shifts them to a place that Polemarchus did not expect, much like a joke. Indeed, when I taught this passage in my own class, I was able to explain it in such a way that made many of my students laugh at poor Polemarchus. Note that the style also opens up a space for a different conversation about justice rather than entrenching what Polemarchus said. See Plato, *The Republic*, trans. R. E. Allen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 7, 10.

<sup>98</sup> Soren Kierkegaard. *Repetition*, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 131.

<sup>99</sup> Linda Zerilli notes that for Wittig a war machine must start by being recognizable to the forms it seeks to disrupt, which jokes are able to do by latching onto and subverting existing scripts. This contrasts with Julia Kristeva, who associates laughter with “rhythm, intonation, [and] nonsense” which causes laughter through “nonsense abound with sense.” In the war machine theory of humor, because laughter involves an interplay and shifting of meaning it does not necessarily involve the dangerous disintegration of the symbolic order and descent into madness potentially leading to “death” which Kristeva describes. See Linda G. Zerilli, *Feminism and the*

*Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 79. Also see Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows, (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), 30.

<sup>100</sup> In February of 2013 alone it had 55,024,811 unique visitors from around 175 countries viewing a total of 3,930,435,443 pages. And on March 15<sup>th</sup> Reddit had 4358 active user-created Communities, with 2,162,510 users logging in and upvoting or downvoting topics or comments for prioritization 17,798,992 times. See "About Reddit," *Reddit*. Last modified 2013, <http://www.reddit.com/about/>.

<sup>101</sup> Reddit Admins, "POTUS IAMA Stats," *Blog.Reddit*. Last modified August 31, 2012, <http://blog.reddit.com/2012/08/potus-iama-stats.html>.

<sup>102</sup> DevilsGooch, "RE: Women of Iran," *Reddit*. Last modified March 16, 2013, [http://www.reddit.com/r/pics/comments/1aet54/women\\_of\\_iran/c8wr0nl](http://www.reddit.com/r/pics/comments/1aet54/women_of_iran/c8wr0nl)

<sup>103</sup> While there has been no systematic study of sexism on Reddit, some media outlets and many Internet blogs have commented on this issue. For example, one woman user on Reddit wrote, "...any comment that leans towards any kind of talk of womens issues, equal rights etc gets downvoted to hell so it's not even capable of being discussed. It seems like it's an US vs THEM mentality more and more..." in a topic they created called "Why is Reddit so anti-women?" and many women commentators said that they preferred to use gender-neutral usernames to avoid harassment and downvotes. See Esther Zuckerman, "'Why is Reddit so Anti-Women?': An Epic Reddit Thread Counts the Ways," *The Atlantic Wire*. Last modified July 26, 2012, <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/entertainment/2012/07/why-reddit-so-anti-women-epic-reddit-thread-counts-ways/55080/>.

<sup>104</sup> I am not claiming that Reddit always makes sexist comments and jokes. For example, in the wake of media outlets portraying the convicted rapists in Steubenville as victims, a joke criticizing these portrayals was upvoted near the top of the page I am instead stressing the general sexist climate of Reddit. See TFJ, "Oh, CNN and Your Misplaced Priorities (Captain Hindsight)," *Reddit*. Last modified March 18, 2013, [http://www.reddit.com/r/AdviceAnimals/comments/1aht0e/oh\\_cnn\\_and\\_your\\_misplaced\\_priorities\\_captain/](http://www.reddit.com/r/AdviceAnimals/comments/1aht0e/oh_cnn_and_your_misplaced_priorities_captain/).

<sup>105</sup> ArchangelleStrudelle, "[META] In Celebration of the One Year Anniversary of SRS As We Know It, Here Is a Not That Brief History of SRS," *Reddit*. Last modified 11 Aug. 2012, [http://www.reddit.com/r/ShitRedditSays/comments/y2wag/meta\\_in\\_celebration\\_of\\_the\\_1year\\_anniversary\\_of/](http://www.reddit.com/r/ShitRedditSays/comments/y2wag/meta_in_celebration_of_the_1year_anniversary_of/).

<sup>106</sup> Lincoln Dahlberg, "Reconstructing Digital Democracy: an Outline of Four 'Positions,'" *New Media Society* 13.855 (2011): 862-863.

<sup>107</sup> ArchangelleGabrielle, "[META] CELEBRATION: VICTORY IS OURS," *Reddit*. Last modified April 12, 2012, [http://www.reddit.com/r/ShitRedditSays/comments/pmk89/meta\\_celebration\\_victory\\_is\\_ours/](http://www.reddit.com/r/ShitRedditSays/comments/pmk89/meta_celebration_victory_is_ours/).

<sup>108</sup> reddit, "A Necessary Change in Policy," *Reddit*. Last modified February 12, 2012, [http://www.reddit.com/r/blog/comments/pmj7f/a\\_necessary\\_change\\_in\\_policy/](http://www.reddit.com/r/blog/comments/pmj7f/a_necessary_change_in_policy/).

<sup>109</sup> ArchangelleDworkin, "[META] Project PANDA: The FuckRedditbomb," *Reddit*. Last modified September 16, 2012, [http://www.reddit.com/r/ShitRedditSays/comments/1006qd/meta\\_project\\_panda\\_the\\_fuckreddit\\_bomb/](http://www.reddit.com/r/ShitRedditSays/comments/1006qd/meta_project_panda_the_fuckreddit_bomb/).

<sup>110</sup> God\_Of\_Djinns, "Top Comment on Picture of Iranian Women – 'Some times i wish we could all just get along. So i could go bang these people.' [+453]." *Reddit*. Last modified March 16,

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[http://www.reddit.com/r/ShitRedditSays/comments/1af3xf/top\\_comment\\_on\\_picture\\_of\\_iranian\\_women\\_some/](http://www.reddit.com/r/ShitRedditSays/comments/1af3xf/top_comment_on_picture_of_iranian_women_some/).

<sup>111</sup> el\_ritmo\_tropical, “RE: Top Comment on Picture of Iranian Women – ‘Some times i wish we could all just get along. So i could go bang these people.’ [+453],” *Reddit*. Last modified March 16, 2013,

[http://www.reddit.com/r/ShitRedditSays/comments/1af3xf/top\\_comment\\_on\\_picture\\_of\\_iranian\\_women\\_some/c8wvzrk](http://www.reddit.com/r/ShitRedditSays/comments/1af3xf/top_comment_on_picture_of_iranian_women_some/c8wvzrk).

<sup>112</sup> firebadmattgood, “RE: Comment on a picture of two passed out women: ‘Dear Diary, Jackpot.’ [+58],” *Reddit*. Last modified March 13, 2013,

[http://www.reddit.com/r/ShitRedditSays/comments/1a870g/comment\\_on\\_a\\_picture\\_of\\_two\\_passed\\_out\\_women\\_dear/](http://www.reddit.com/r/ShitRedditSays/comments/1a870g/comment_on_a_picture_of_two_passed_out_women_dear/).

<sup>113</sup> POST-\*ISM refers to the idea that we live in a society that has moved beyond prejudices (e.g. post-sexism or post-racism).

<sup>114</sup> “ShitRedditSays,” *Reddit*. Last modified March 17, 2013,

<http://www.reddit.com/r/ShitRedditSays/>.

<sup>115</sup> Of course, the resistance of SRS is occurring in an Internet space, and though there is always the risk of identity exposure, it typically does not affect their non-Internet activities. Hence, more work needs to be done in the context of other situations where humor as resistance can be more dangerous (or even less dangerous through its effect of laughter and play).

<sup>116</sup> These new ways achieved through laughter likely do not achieve innocence and escape from power: as Judith Butler notes, though laughter is often imagined to completely reach outside of power, it typically occurs within a context of power from which it cannot be removed. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 139-141.

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