Laughing Matters: Micro-Resistance to Gendered Rationality

by

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Abstract

Since the 1980s, many feminist philosophers have pointed out the association of masculinity and maleness with reason and rationality, and femininity and femaleness with unreason and irrationality. Struck by how these associations influence even ordinary activities and discourse, I sought a more nuanced approach. Examining the dichotomous responses to gendered reason, I argue that resistance to gendered norms of rationality cannot be accomplished through practical reason alone. Allowing unconventional forms of resistance to "count" as political, by reconceptualising resistance on a Foucauldian framework, provides theorists with many new resources. The laughter norms which we are disciplined to follow constitute a subject's gender and her rationality. We can disrupt these norms in at least three ways: by laughing when it is unexpected, by changing our comportment during laughter, and by refusing to laugh when it is expected. Ultimately, I propose that feminist subjects can politically transform our selves, and others, through micro-practices of laughing differently.

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Introduction: Reason, Rationality, and Gender

Several of my friends circulated an article titled "On Labelling Women 'Crazy'" from *The Huffington Post* in November 2013. In it, dating expert Harris O'Malley states:

> Labeling women as "crazy" is a way of controlling them.[…] Once the "crazy" card has been pulled out, women are now put on the defensive: The onus is no longer on the man to address her concerns or her issue; it's on her to justify her behavior, to prove that she is not, in fact, crazy or irrational. Men don't even have to provide any sort of argument back -- it's a classic catch-22: 'The fact that you don't even see that you're acting crazy is just proof that it's crazy.' […] Casually, even reflexively calling women crazy and the stigmatization of "crazy" (i.e., inconvenient or uncomfortable) behavior has become a way of trying to keep women behaving in a very specific and limited manner. (2013)

Although O'Malley's article is pointing out a phenomenon that many women have already acknowledged, it crystallizes some of my motivation for this thesis. In brief, this project came out of my own worries about two issues. I noticed (i) that women were more often than men ascribed the adjectives "crazy", "irrational", or "hysterical" and that these terms were used as grounds to dismiss women; and (ii) that this exclusion of the feminine presupposes that what we call irrationality, or unreason, has little productive value or use. Both sides of this problem concern me, since both femininity and the irrational become dismissed or set aside.

At the same time, my intuition is that what we see as 'irrational' can be useful and powerful. I worry that simply (re)inserting femininity into the realm of reason would continue to characterize the irrational as irrelevant, unimportant, or – perhaps worst of all – apolitical. This thesis began, then, as an attempt to re-value parts of the 'realm of irrationality' and to mobilize them for feminist political change. The problem that my thesis originally sought to answer is: how?

The word 'reason', as I see it, encompasses a cluster of concepts that have a strong hold both in academic philosophy and in everyday life. Throughout the history of western

philosophy, many philosophers argued that reason can lead us to make wise decisions and eventually to the good life. Some, like Aristotle and Descartes, even defined the (hu)man as the 'rational animal': our innate possession of reason is what distinguishes us from other animals. Reason has been heralded as that which allows us to transcend our brute, material bodies and discover truth(s). Alternatively, it has been touted as the nature of the soul (or at least part of it), and the part we should actively cultivate.

In many of these discussions, both historical and contemporary, reason has an exclusive other against which it defines itself. This 'other' is not one thing, but is a cluster of concepts like reason itself. The opposites of reason include unreason, madness, femininity, queerness, emotion, and embodiment. The pairing of reason and its others, furthermore, is evaluative: reason is judged to be superior, and the other terms are inferior. As a result, all of these others are devalued *and* tightly associated with one another. Because of this plurality of others, reason is able to claim status as an inherent, consistent, universal, and useful concept.

Even within the feminist debates on reason that occurred during the 1980s and 90s, reason and rationality have been taken to mean many different things. For example, Margaret Atherton (1993) shows that for at least two prominent female Cartesians "reason − that is, the perception of how ideas go together − is what constitutes any thinking process and is what stands as the basis for human action" (28). For Damaris Lady Masham and Mary Astell, all thinking was reasoning. By contrast, Genevieve Lloyd (1984) sees Cartesian reason as a methodology (rejecting all that is not clear and distinct) that requires women manage the realm of the body so that men might transcend it (50).

In contrast to Atherton and Lloyd, whose projects are primarily historical, I want to target the uses of the terms reason and rationality today. These two words have considerable political weight, both inside and outside philosophy. There are four salient things about 'reason' that are most relevant for my project. First, there is a specific characterization of

reason which I have in mind, which is often referred to as "male reason" or "masculinist rationality". Reason, narrowly defined in this way, is a mode of thought that prioritizes detachment, extreme analyticity, and objectivity. Today, when I am asked to "be reasonable", I am being asked both to think in a certain way and to perform my thinking in an equally narrow manner. One's rationality or reasonableness (or, one's possession of reason) is manifested through, for example:

i. Arguments that are made with detachment or lack of emotion, and the subsequent dismissal of other forms of argumentation. This includes a certain posture and tone of voice.
ii. Prioritizing objective facts over subjective experiences.
iii. One's public disavowal of the influence of contingent factors, such as personal biases, racialization, gender, class background, and materiality. In effect, the more that one can be seen to be operating in a vacuum, the better reasoned one is.

In brief, this reason requires a subject "who believes he can separate himself from his body, emotions, values, past and so on, so that he and his thought are autonomous, context-free and objective" (Rose 1993, 7).[1] When this narrow conception of reason is held to be the gold standard, it favours those with the most power in society. That is, when there is little at stake for me in a discussion, I can afford to be distant. In contrast, if I enter into a political argument already marginalized, I am already glossed as irrational, and submitting to someone else's terms or vocabulary. Gloria Filax points out that "[t]he insistence that an argument will only be taken up if the argument is presented politely comes from a position of social power and privilege in which the person who exercises more social power can dictate the terms of an exchange" (2011).

Second, I am concerned that reason has been traditionally (and still is) valued above most other human traits or faculties. This hierarchy of values dismisses the usefulness of irrationality (except, perhaps, as a strategy for distracting individuals from the matter at hand).

[1] Of course, even if the subject believes he is separable, it seems almost impossible to fulfill this demand one hundred per cent. For example, Susan Bordo (1987) argues that even Descartes' radical exclusion of everything 'external' to him was a product of his context.

Third, reason is often lauded as self-sufficient for doing politics. This is tied in with the valuation of speech and writing as the most important mode of communication, since they are often thought to be mere carriers of disembodied ideas and concepts (St. Pierre 2013, 19). The model of reason-giving, and practical reasoning, seems to have a monopoly in both political and moral argumentation. Fourth, the over-valuation of reason (my second point) is used to dismiss certain groups of people, by aligning them with the 'other' of reason. Since this other is usually deemed inferior, the group characterized as overly irrational gets cashed out as inferior. This may not always be intentional.

It should be clear from my list that I am more concerned about *what reason does* rather than *what reason is.* However, the two are interrelated issues: how we view reason and what we do with it come to affect the concept itself, by endowing it with excess value for example. My critique is not that reason should be thrown away entirely, but that it shouldn't be (and in fact, isn't in practice) the only standard by which we can be persuaded or moved. Furthermore, we ought to consider options other than reason-giving when acting politically.

One might still object: showing that the concept of reason has been gendered throughout history, and that it is used in unsavoury ways, is not *prima facie* justification for suspecting that it is faulty, or only impartial for our politics. That is, even if "masculine ideals seem to offer, at best, only a partial model of human life", certain de-masculinized rational ideals could still work (Haslanger 1993, 217). In contrast to feminist philosophers who would seek to recuperate reason, I still worry about taking the route of 'sexless reason'. Asserting that rationality is a desirable and key quality in humans of all genders still diminishes unreason and irrationality. This devaluing, I will argue, can have at least two consequences: a) it implicitly demotes traditional "feminine" traits (through their lingering association with irrationality) and b) it dismisses the possibility that the unreasonable or irrational could be politically significant, and that they might in fact aid feminist causes.

If the worry in a) is correct, this means that to revalue femininity in a meaningful sense, we need to revalue some of the things through which it has been constitutively defined, of which unreason is one. Many feminists might be concerned that this strategy would lead into a feminist essentialism around sexual difference. I think that we can revalue the feminine and the irrational, while simultaneously pointing out that these characteristics can be possessed (or not) by any number of variably gendered and sexed individuals. However, *even if we could recuperate reason as sexless or genderless* (I am personally skeptical), consequence b) would still follow. And it is my intuition that the straightforward dismissal of the political possibilities of the unreasonable or irrational is an error. It leads to an overly narrow, restrictive conception of what can count as political action. I will unpack how and why it is a mistake in the following chapters.

My task in this thesis, therefore, is dual: to show that there is something we lose in exclusively embracing rationality and reason, and to argue that what we lose there (including forms of laughter) is in fact a potential and powerful ally for feminist resistance. I perform a critique of practical reason in my first chapter. I then contend that feminist resistance to norms of rationality can be undertaken by taking into account how we can alter our laughter-behaviours. This will require re-thinking the notions of power and of the political, which I perform using a Foucauldian framework. Second, it will mean recognizing our laughter behaviours, and how they are shaped by gender, race, ability, etc. Third, it will necessitate realizing that these behaviours are not neutrally constituted or necessarily part of our individual (or gendered) personalities: rather, they are constructed, and *inherently political*.

In my first chapter, I will provide further motivation for my project and situate it in reference to feminism's dilemma of how to resist gendered rationality. I mainly consider recent monographs and articles by Foucauldian feminist scholars Lynne Huffer and Amy Allen. I begin by evaluating Lynne Huffer's proposal in *Mad for Foucault* (2010) that

queer (and feminist) subjects seek out moments of madness in order to pursue desubjectivation. Huffer argues that this is our only mode of resistance because queerness and reason are co-constituted: defined in opposition to one another. However, I also criticize and worry about her approach to feminist resistance. Though she presents a compelling story about the entanglement of queerness and unreason, we are left with few concrete strategies for change.

In contrast, Amy Allen suggests that the solution to the feminist dilemma of gendered rationality lies *within* practical reason. Though she admits that practical reason is impure and always contingent, Allen completely excludes the possibility of choosing a new normative framework without or beyond the use of practical reason(s). In some cases, we do make decisions or persuade others on seemingly 'arbitrary' bases: sometimes, it may even be a better strategy than reason-giving. This is because initiating drastic changes while using the current discourse presents a paradox: speaking a language in order to protest it undermines your own position as an outsider. Furthermore, giving reasons and arguments often fails to persuade people to take action. I will explain in more detail why practical reason is not effective for certain types of political change, and so we should consider alternative means of resistance.

My second chapter retraces Foucault's thoughts about power, showing that "where there is power, there is resistance and yet this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault 1990, 95). I contend that seeing how we are shaped by power relations (in the process of becoming a subject, *assujettissement)* and seeing the limits of power allows us to think of new sorts of practices as political resistance. I then explore two examples of gendered, embodied, 'irrational' resistance in Foucault's Collège de France lectures: hysterical women and possessed Catholic nuns (2003; 2006b). However, it is difficult to reconcile these examples with common-sense ideas of resistance. To more clearly

understand how these examples *count* as resistance, I will appeal to Foucault's concept of transgression: a movement from that which is discursively intelligible to that which is unintelligible by the same discourse. Transgression can take the form of critical philosophy, but also of limit experiences that shatter subjectivity. The idea of transgression strongly suggests that our best path of attack is not to use the terms and discourse of our present society to argue beyond itself, but to start elsewhere: in modifying our practices (McWhorter 1999).

In chapter three, I advocate for laughter as a mode of Foucauldian feminist resistance. I organize my discussion of laughter under three broad headings: (i) it has been inadequately theorized as resistance in political theory and philosophy; (ii) its variations across genders is well-documented, and can be linked to feminine body discipline; and (iii) its disruptive potential for politics has been noted but rarely expanded upon, including by Foucault and several Foucauldians. I begin by reviewing the philosophical literature on laughter, wherein it is viewed primarily as a phenomenon for philosophy of psychology. Following this, I examine the tenuous relationship of laughter to political theory, where it has both been praised as liberatory and criticized as enforcing societal norms. I then examine and analyze the gendered manifestation of laughter practices, by first looking at empirical literature and then expanding upon it with inspiration from Sandra Bartky's and Iris Marion Young's explanations of feminine bodily comportment. I argue that political laughter should be loosened from its usual companion, humour, both because the two are not always coincidental and because conflating the two (as many scholars do) lead to denial of the unpredictable qualities of laughter.

My fourth chapter begins to outline some practices of feminist laughter by working through specific, concrete instances where laughter might be deployed, withheld, or modified. For one, much of women's laughter is prohibited. We are compelled to take seriously, and

respond rationally to, sexist writers, scholars, and academics. Women are often encouraged to be constrained, restrained, and deferential, particularly in 'serious' or 'tragic' situations. In these cases laughter can be used as resistance. For example, laughing in a debate or an argument can be a way of responding that gets out of our dominant discourse. On the other hand, women often face compulsory laughter. I will suggest that just as women are asked to perform happiness, they are also urged to laugh in certain situations: to go along with oppressive jokes, to 'laugh off' catcalling or harassment, to ridicule themselves, and so on (Ahmed 2010). In the face of these norms, not laughing – or 'being a killjoy' – can assert the gravity of a situation and disrupt how others react to it. After explaining some potential feminist practices of laughter and of refusing to laugh ('unlaughter'), I bring these practices to bear upon the Foucauldian subject of resistance. I examine the relation of laughter to transgression, and suggest that in some cases laughter can act as a self-aware contingent critique, while in others it can express otherwise inexpressible limit-experiences (whether pleasurable or painful). Furthermore, I argue that changing our laughter affects our *assujettissement*: as micro-practices of care of the self. Finally, I use examples of contagious laughter to explore how laughing together can create an environment in which oppressed subjects can create new identities and new meanings, drawing upon Ladelle McWhorter and Jacqueline Bussie.

In brief, in this thesis I use both Foucauldian and phenomenological methods to explore ways of resolving the gendered reason dilemma. Ultimately, I argue that it can be resolved not merely through discussion, but by reflecting upon and changing our material, physical habits. Furthermore, excluding non-rational means of political change leaves feminism at a disadvantage. Laughter practices are an ideal locus for this project, because we are made intelligible as gendered and ir/rational subjects through, among other things, how we laugh.

Chapter One: Un/reasonable Politics

This chapter begins by unpacking one feminist critique of reason, that of Genevieve Lloyd, as a way of illustrating the debates around reason and gender that dominated 1990s feminist philosophy. I use this exposition to bring up a central dilemma about feminist resistance, which is still present in contemporary feminist theory and remains stubbornly unresolved. If there is a problem with reason and rationality being gendered, how do we react? Do we posit a sexless reason that applies to all humans? Or, do we reject the notion of reason completely, on the grounds that femininity and reason have been defined as mutually exclusive and that this definition cannot be undone? Next, I examine two recent attempts to grapple with this dilemma, by Lynne Huffer and Amy Allen. I argue that neither's proposal for feminist (or queer) resistance is satisfactory. Although Huffer does not fall into essentialism, her descriptions of desubjectivation give us little for concrete strategies. Allen's proposal errs on the side of valuing practical reason as our only political tool, leaving feminists still trapped in the dilemma. To conclude the chapter, I critically analyze the notion of practical reason as sufficient for politics.

Gendered Reason

The image of reason as an ahistorical, objective, coherent, and universal quality has been widely criticized. One of the strongest critiques of rationality that emerged during these debates asserts that because western societies have been (contingently) patriarchal, both women themselves and stereotypically feminine traits have been excluded from the idea of reason. In *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (1984), Genevieve Lloyd argues that "our ideals of Reason have historically incorporated an

exclusion of the feminine, and that femininity itself has been partly constructed through such processes of exclusion" (xvii). This, she says, has resulted in maleness (or masculinity) and reason (or rationality) co-constituting each other: the ideal of maleness is shaped by the ideal of reason, and vice versa.

One issue with a gendered notion of reason is its potential use to ground certain arguments or conclusions, such as "women are not moral agents". However, Lloyd claims the problem is not just that individual philosophers have used a definition of reason as an *instrument* to oppress women. She contends that the concept of reason itself, not only our use of it, is problematic. To support this argument, she traces the alignment of femininity with the non-rational as a persistent thread in the history of Western philosophy. Although we might claim at first that the metaphors accompanying philosophical arguments are independent of the arguments themselves, she shows that they cannot be so easily extricated. The symbolic associations presented in the background of arguments actually affect us just as powerfully as arguments do. To flesh out Lloyd's critique, I will briefly outline several of these symbolic associations here.

For example, Lloyd argues that in Ancient Greece, the division between form and matter reflected views on males and females. Form was the knowable, determinate, and rational aspects of things, whereas matter was vague, indeterminate, disorderly, and feminine. These conceptions influenced Plato and Aristotle, among others. Other philosophers have also made and supported this argument. For example, in "Woman is Not a Rational Animal: On Aristotle's Biology of Reproduction" (2003), Lynda Lange gives a thorough examination of Aristotle's biology and shows that "the important Aristotelian distinctions between 'form' and 'matter', 'mover' and 'moved', 'actuality' and 'potentiality', are all used by Aristotle to distinguish male and female" and that this theory is entangled in his whole philosophy (2).

Lloyd proposes (controversially) that another, more complex example of this association arose from the convergence of Descartes' mind-body dualism with stereotypes of women as more embodied than men. Although Descartes explicitly held that all minds were equal, Lloyd contends that his philosophy negatively impacts women because it requires that women maintain and secure the environment where the mind and body intermingle. That is, "women have been assigned responsibility for that realm of the sensuous that the Man of Reason must transcend" so that his environment does not prevent him from exercising clear and distinct thought (50). This image of woman's immanence as the condition for man's rational transcendence, Lloyd asserts, is echoed in the works of Hegel and Rousseau.

A third, and very striking, example of this association is Francis Bacon's use of metaphors that are explicitly sexed/gendered to explain knowledge acquisition. He saw knowledge not as contemplation of an object, but as its domination. In order to know nature, we have to master it. On his picture, nature and femininity were strongly aligned, both characterized as exploitable and manipulable. Narrators urge us to "*bind [Nature] to your service and make her your slave"* and to "unite you with *things themselves* in a chaste, holy and legal wedlock" (qtd. in Lloyd 1984, 12-13). Lloyd claims that as a result of these explicit metaphors around nuptials and courtship "the intellectual virtues involved in being a good Baconian scientist are articulated in terms of the right male attitude to the feminine" (17).

One way to remedy this historical gendering of reason might be to develop a gender-neutral concept of reason and affirm it for all subjects. For example, this would mean to say that women are no less reasonable than men, that *true* reason is not sexed, and that women are rational. This ascribes one standard of reason to all individuals, regardless of sex/gender, putting all of us on equal footing. However, Lloyd worries that even such attempts will remain susceptible to male bias: "sexless reason is opposed to all that pertains to body, including sexual difference. Here sexual difference is itself equated with the female. The

supposed sexual neutrality of reason demands a male viewpoint" (Lloyd 1993, 78). Asserting that reason is sexless or genderless, while allowing it to remain saturated with masculinised stereotypes and concepts, risks simply reinforcing the view of the male as neutral, default, and the woman as other. Furthermore, it still draws a distinction between rationality and traditionally characteristics deemed feminine, denigrating emotion and embodiment. Rationality and maleness cannot be unentwined overnight.

These symbolic and metaphorical associations are contingent reflections of gender bias, but they nevertheless, Lloyd says, became embedded within philosophical thought. In fact, as Linda Martín Alcoff points out, the denial of the impact of metaphor is itself a result of the construction of rationality: "these [symbolic] readings are a part of the story about reason and truth which we have left aside in our manly refusal to acknowledge the significance of a text's inevitable emotional and aesthetic elements" (Alcoff 1995, 22). Furthermore, although symbols and metaphors do not dictate the social construction of gender, they form part of it. Lloyd's argument, which turns not only on contingent associations but on the power of metaphor to shape our thought, resonates with my own experience.

It is no coincidence that norms around masculinity ask men to perform rationality in a narrow sense, which excludes showing too much emotion lest they be thought of as feminine. As Sally Haslanger (1993) points out, "norms are not gendered simply by being associated with men or women; they are gendered by providing ideals that are appropriate to the roles constituting gender" (93). Yet, there *are* striking exceptions to this rule: certain men are released or held onto less tightly by these norms, such as drag queens, musicians, and other performers. This shows that there is no inherent link between being rational and being male, nor an inherent distinction between femininity and masculinity. Nevertheless, persistent value-judgements made based on gendered ideas of rationality are applied in mundane ways

all the time. The gendering of reason and rationality is not only an issue that feminist *theorists* cannot ignore: it is a practical issue that permeates our everyday experience.

If we accept that reason is gendered, there seem to be two available options, which place us in a classic dilemma. First, we could counter that reason is actually a capacity in all humans. However, as Lloyd mentions, there is considerable risk with this strategy, since it may reaffirm the assumption that the ideal male represents the default or neutral figure for humanity. Second, we could reject reason and undergo a radical re-valuation of unreason and all things labelled feminine. This option, too, presents dangers: it may further entrench gendered stereotypes such as "women are irrational". This dilemma about reason and feminist resistance is taken up in recent works by feminist philosophers, which I will now examine in order to situate and motivate my project.

Feminist Resistance and Madness

Recently this debate has been engaged with by Amy Allen (2008, 2012, 2013) and Lynne Huffer (2010). I suggest that although Allen acknowledges the interplay of power with reason and embraces a weak, impure *practical* reason, her idea of critique ignores important resources beyond the realm of reason. Lynne Huffer, on the other hand, contends that a feminist queer theory should ground itself by rupturing reason, and that a queer Foucauldian ethics can be found through desubjectivation rather than performativity (37). Following a presentation of their views, I will undertake a criticism of practical reason both generally and as Allen presents it. Based on its inefficacy and its inapplicability to change the discourse of reason, I will then argue that feminist resistance to conceptions of rationality should look to a-rational means.

In *Mad for Foucault* (2010), Lynne Huffer argues that we should read Foucault's *History of Madness* (2006a) as continuous with his *The History of Sexuality* (1990), and

understand the former as centrally preoccupied with ethics, sexuality, and queerness. Although an abridged version of the original *Folie et déraison* was published as *Madness and Civilization* in 1964, only in 2006 was the entire volume published in an English translation, allowing for deeper analysis. In *History of Madness,* Foucault performs a genealogy of the concept(s) of madness through the Renaissance and the classical age, examining how asylums and medicalization of madness arose. Huffer follows Foucault in locating the emergence of modern rationality around a historical shift, the physical confinement of the mad and their moral exclusion from the realm of reason (Foucault 2006a, 76). This movement, Foucault points out, simultaneously constituted mad, criminal, and perverse subjects as well as their contrast: the rational subject, who was reasonable, had certain knowledge of the truth, and was morally disciplined.

Prior to this shift, reason and unreason were co-implicated, and unreason was a possible route to the truth. To explain this, Foucault draws upon the *Stultifera Navis,* or the ship of fools. During the Middle Ages, the ship of fools was a popular cultural representation of madness and also a metaphor for the relation of the mad to society. Mad individuals could travel out to the edge or limit of reason (to the edge of the world), on turbulent waves. This trip was dangerous, and on the margins of society, but contiguous with it. Furthermore, it provided the mad with "difficult, hermetic, esoteric knowledge": forbidden knowledge, but knowledge of truth nonetheless (19).

In the classical age, Foucault argues, reason and unreason were violently separated. Unreason was seen as unintelligible, and so the mad could no longer speak. This "absence of dialogue allows science to define madness as something in which there is nothing to hear or see" (142). When the mad were physically confined *within* society, rather than outside of it, they became part of a moral hygiene problem. Traditionally, Foucault scholars have interpreted *History of Madness* as a genealogy of reason and madness, which analyzes how

madness "as a cultural, legal, political, philosophical and then medical construct" arose, and which demonstrates to us an alternative way to read history from the progressive narrative which claims we both know more and treat people better today than we have in the past (Khalfa 2006, xiv).

Huffer does not deny these interpretations; however, she believes that *History of Madness* is much more about sexuality and queerness than it appears at first glance. She argues that the exclusion of madness from reason has a "specifically sexual logic" (Huffer 2010, 60). This is not only because the category 'mad' encompassed queer subjectivities at the time−homosexuals were considered madmen and madwomen. The very *logic* of the exclusion, Huffer says, is sexual because it brings together sins of the flesh with aberrations of rationality. Queer acts (sins of the flesh) become joined to the idea of queerness as a form of madness. Institutionalized knowledges then began to both claim and assume that the two ideas of queer are inherently linked. As a result, Huffer contends, queerness became defined in opposition to reason.

Huffer sees reason as intimately tied up with "bourgeois […] morality as interiority" (76). By this, she means that the subject who is unreasonable (queer or mad) gets excluded from the realm of moral subjecthood (124). Because it is moral hygiene work to enforce rationality, unreason now "remains in our historical present, radically unassimilable and untranslatable" (51). With this loss of translation comes, Huffer thinks, an inability of our discourses to capture the 'thickness' or erotic aspect of lived experience.

Because of the exclusion of queerness from the realm of reason, Huffer thinks any queer attempt to reclaim subjectivity, any "resignification threatens to bring us right back, like the prodigal son, to that place of patriarchy where we started [and so] the trick is to keep things turning into something other" (83). We can turn into that other through *desubjectivation,* "a process of stripping away the structures of thought that produce reason

and madness: an unlearning or releasing of the rationalist subject" (243). What does desubjectivation, or becoming-other, mean? What does it look like? Through a quasi-Deleuzian lens, Huffer explains desubjectivation through the idea of becoming-(organic)-others: becoming an event that is individuated, but not a subject. Deleuze's examples of these include "a wind, an atmosphere, a time of day, a battle, [and] Foucault himself: you weren't aware of him as a person exactly […] it was more like a changed atmosphere, a sort of event, an electric or magnetic field" (1995, 115), while Huffer offers the idea of becoming a storm (2010, 117). This proliferation of forms of existence allows us to think through ways of *being*, of which subjectivation (*assujettissement)* is only one.

In each of these cases, the individual approaches anonymity, but Huffer resists saying that they approach illegibility or madness, although she doesn't "really know what desubjectivation as becoming-other means, *except* as a way to name madness" (123). She claims that desubjectivation is a *transgressive* move that rejects dialectics.[2] However, Huffer wavers on this point, also claiming that "to 'transgress' those limits of thinking itself [is] to put the subject 'to death' or to become 'mad' (120). Because Huffer's characterization of desubjectivation uses ethereal imagery – of atmospheres and storms – it is difficult to get a handle on what a concrete example of an individual undertaking desubjectivation would be.

Desubjectivation has one key function for Huffer: in leaving behind the subject, she argues, we would also reclaim erotic experience or *eros. Eros* is the place we reach through freely exercising strategies of desubjectivation, but it is not a stable state: it is a constant movement of flux and transformation which requires continual work. Huffer draws the concept of *eros* from Foucault: it is a "movement that may remove a subject from his current status and condition" (Foucault 2005, 15-16). Yet, she goes farther than he does by relating it explicitly to queerness and sexual behaviour. Although *eros* and sexuality are not identical,

[2] I will return to and more fully explain transgression in Chapter Two.

they are nevertheless related. Huffer says that part of why it is so difficult to talk about *eros* is that today it is coded and reduced to sexuality or to (demonized) irrational love (268).

Desubjectivation can be triggered by limit-experiences, moments of madness that interrupt our lives, or flashes of lightning (Huffer uses the French term *coup de foudre,* which literally means "flashes of lightning" but also figuratively means "love at first sight"). We can increase the possibility of having these flashes through ethical praxis. One practice Huffer suggests is archival work, inspired by Foucault's own investigations in the archive and his close examination of materiality. If we approach the archive not as a foundation of truth, but with open "curiosity as care", the figures we encounter in the archive – and the archive itself – can act upon our "willingness to be undone by another" (118). Huffer calls this strategic movement toward desubjectivation a "political ethics of *eros*", which is characterized by "attention to the alterity of the past" as well as "to the exclusions of our historical present" (253). The attention is not only contemplative but affective: an "intense thinking-feeling − an erotic curiosity-as-care − toward the wounded vulnerability of the beloved other" (277-8). Unfortunately, Huffer's attempt to give us this new ethics stays mainly at the theoretical level. Any application of *eros,* other than an "ethical listening" during archival research, remains unclear. Furthermore, what makes a political ethics of *eros* queer or feminist is not delineated. The reader of *Mad for Foucault*, though appreciative, is at a loss for concrete strategies.

In "Feminism, Foucault, and the Critique of Reason: Re-reading the History of Madness" (2013), Amy Allen responds to Lynne Huffer directly on two points, which are intertwined with the problem of concrete strategies. First, she charges Huffer with misreading Foucault as overly anti-rationalist. Second, she argues that Huffer romanticizes madness despite her best efforts, and so falls into the very trap she sought to escape. By urging us to seek moments of freedom in madness and desubjectivation, she says, Huffer might be merely

embracing unreason and reinforcing feminine and queer stereotypes of irrationality. This, Allen holds, occurs because Huffer sees reason as despotic and purely negative, when in fact it is also useful and empowering (6).

Contra Huffer, Allen thinks that examining not madness, but unreason is helpful to Foucauldians, because it provides us with *figures of unreason,* such as Nietzsche, Artaud, and Van Gogh. By looking at the limit-experiences of these past figures of unreason, we are forced to consider the limits of our own historical present (25). On her interpretation, then, *History of Madness* encourages us to take up a *rational* critique of rationality (18). Allen sees reason as very closely linked to the concept of critique, and so to critical reflection and autonomy (2). She argues that we must accept "the spiral generated by the irreconcilable tension between reason and power, which means that we accept that our form of rationality is both dangerous and indispensable" (31).

This spiral, Allen says, results in empowerment and subjection being two sides of the same coin. First, for subjects who have historically been excluded from reason or deemed irrational, it can be empowering to assert their own reasonableness (30). Second, however, reason is "entangled with relations of dominance and subordination" and so is always impure (2008, 67). Despite this impurity, Allen maintains that we cannot leave reason behind. Rejecting reason, in her view, is rejecting any critique: our most powerful tool for resistance, and the only tool available within power.

Because we cannot use something from outside reason and power to resist, Allen infers that we cannot use anything *but* reason for resistance. This is problematic, though: even if we assume that there is no outside to power and reason, there are factors within the influence of reason – that play a role in politics − that are not themselves rational. I will discuss some of these factors in my next chapter, revealing hysteria and possession as effects of self-proclaimed rational knowledges. However, since on her account we cannot make

political transformations without reason, Allen claims that our politics should begin by articulating different normative frameworks through practical reason-giving itself.

Once we have shown the contingency of our society and its norms through Foucauldian critique, Allen thinks, we still need help to configure new relations. Allen identifies two sets of resources for this reconstruction or transformation (2008, 183-4; 2012, 768-9*)*. First, she points to the power of sociopolitical movements to provide us with new vocabularies, concepts, and to empower women to act. This is true even for individuals who do not explicitly identify with the movements. She cites an interview by Jane Mansbridge, arguing that resources from feminist movements enabled women to renegotiate certain gendered labour practices they had not previously considered (768). Even without being directly involved in a movement, then, the concepts and emotions behind it can diffuse into society as a whole and promote equality. Second, Allen argues that our cultural imaginaries (developed through art and literature) show us that alternative worlds are possible, and make it clearer that transformations of our selves, our institutions, and our norms are attainable. We can even take clues from these works on how to act: Allen explicitly endorses María Pía Lara's idea that "emancipatory narratives can themselves create new forms of power" (Lara 5; Allen 2008, 184). Through these movements and imaginaries, we can find "new critical vocabularies, alternative modes of recognition and experimental bodily practices" (Allen 2008, 184).

This, then, is Allen's own attempt to escape the double-bind of feminist resistance which looms overhead. Yet, it is not clear whether she succeeds: if Huffer affirms the feminine and the irrational too strongly, Allen persists in reaffirming masculine discourse around norms and rationality. On Allen's picture, we might worry that the feminine and the queer, if not treated as mad, are still seen as irrational. Allen has more faith in rational critique than I do: I do not deny the empowering aspects of reason, but will argue that it is

insufficient for certain political projects. In the following section, I will try to show that neither the more general form of practical reason nor Allen's own formulation is sufficient to solve the dilemma with which I began.

Practical reason

Although the pursuit of pure reason dominated in rationalism throughout the history of philosophy, more and more philosophical argumentation today turns upon principles of practical reason. Broadly, practical reason is used to motivate certain actions: it "takes a distinctively normative question as its starting point. It typically asks, of a set of alternatives for action none of which has yet been performed, what one ought to do, or what it would be best to do" (R. Jay Wallace 2008). Likewise, what we offer to argue for such an alternative are themselves deemed practical reasons. We use practical reason in our everyday lives, when weighing choices, options, and when trying to convince or persuade others. We also invoke it when arguing for women's rights, for democratic government, against government intervention in international civil wars, and so on. Historically, then, many of what we might think to be feminist victories have been established through the use of practical reason.

More narrowly, practical reason is involved in a variety of philosophical positions and arguments, from Kant's conception of practical reason that leads us to a universal moral principle (the categorical imperative), to its use in contemporary critical theory by Jürgen Habermas. [3] In brief, Habermas defines practical reason in terms of intersubjectivity: "a rule of action or choice is justified, and thus valid, only if all those affected by the rule or choice could accept it in a reasonable discourse" (Bohman & Rehg 2011). Futhermore, Habermas grounds his ethics in this rational accountability. He holds that because rationality is

[3] I understand Habermas primarily through Amy Allen's reading / interpretation of his work.

intersubjective and universal, this gives us a common ground by which to determine ultimate, context-transcendent truths and to be able to reflect upon and criticize our current situation.

Amy Allen's own commitment to practical reason for feminist change, which draws upon Habermas, is a central factor in her criticism of Lynne Huffer and in her own positive account of politics. Allen points out in *The Politics of Our Selves* (2008) that practical reason can be highly empowering for oppressed subjects since it is part of what enables us to perform critique of the present situation. She later (2012) states that to find out how "members of subordinate groups [can] constitute themselves in less subordinating ways" we first need to identify which norms and practices are subordinating (767). She argues further that in order to be able to identify those norms and practices "we need some sort of normative framework, and in order to function critically, such a framework cannot be arbitrary but rather must be justified through appeal to practical reason(s)" (767). For her, our normative frameworks cannot emerge *but* through practical reason.

Allen's formulation of practical reason considerably weakens Habermas' principles. What Allen suggests is that we use normative ideals "of universal respect and egalitarian reciprocity" while acknowledging that those ideals are themselves contingent and contextual. "We may take them to be universal and context-transcendent, as long as we realize that the notions of universalizability and context transcendence are themselves situated" (2008, 180). Since these ideas about universalizability are part of what constitute our current *episteme*, she says we cannot think outside them (148).

I find Allen's claim about requiring a framework "justified through appeal to practical reason(s)" troubling (767). This is not because I abhor practical reason; I am employing it currently in writing this thesis. Rather, I am troubled by her exclusion of *other* forms of justification or motivation for alternative frameworks. My aim in this section is not to condemn practical reason, but to show that despite what many political theorists claim,

practical reason itself places many limits and constraints on our politics. If we adhere strictly and solely to a model of practical reason, we miss out on important aspects of political life. Although practical reason is impure, there still remains a core to its conception that is tied up with old stereotypes of rationalism. This includes a preoccupation with masculine traits and disdain for many of the others of reason. However, I believe that there are *at least two other reasons* that we should be suspect of practical reason. These do not mean that we should abandon it, but that alone it is insufficient, and we should look outside of it for strategies of political resistance.

First, using practical reasons and reasoned debate is not useful in certain situations, such as those when the other party refuses to listen to any discourse, or rejects your reason(s). At times, practical reason might fail to change the minds and beliefs of certain individuals. Even when an individual finds that an argument follows or makes sense, she still may not be convinced by it. Practical reason, then, has no guarantee to affect others. Furthermore, often someone's argument or reasons are accepted, but they do not prompt any change or action in the readers or interlocutors (Dean 2012). For example, vegetarians and vegans sometimes find that although their arguments are compelling to omnivores, they have little power to actually change eating practices. These instances are not unusual: we have everyday arguments that may finish with "I see your point, I understand your argument, but it still does not convince me to change my own actions".

Furthermore, there is an even stronger theoretical/philosophical critique of the use of practical reason for paradigm-changing purposes. That is, using another's discourse, and so their concept of reason, to argue for drastic change can potentially rule out your own arguments. Derrida illustrates this nicely, in pointing out that speaking a language in order to protest it undermines your own claim to outsider status:

> Once you have appropriated the language of power […] well enough to try to convince or to defeat someone, you are in turn defeated in advance and

> convinced of being wrong. The other, the king, has demonstrated through the fact of translation that he was right to speak his language and to impose it on you. (2004, 12)

Although Derrida was discussing dialects of French, I believe that this danger applies to discourse as well. To initiate drastic changes, it seems we cannot use the discourse of our current state of affairs. These two problems with practical reason illustrate another dilemma. In order first to have their voice recognized as giving reasons, and second to have a desired practical impact upon the other, subjects *must* offer their reasons within the current normative framework. However, this means tacitly accepting the dominant premises and assumptions about what constitute reasons for change. I do not deny the empowering possibilities and usefulness of practical reason, but I think these shortcomings show that it is neither a guarantee nor often sufficient for the kind of political change feminists might seek.

Conclusion

This chapter began by exploring the feminist critique of reason that was raised in the 1980s and 1990s through contextualizing my project within a debate between Amy Allen and Lynne Huffer on the nature of reason, unreason, madness, Foucault, and feminism. Briefly, although Huffer suggests we pursue limit-experiences and become non-subjects, Allen proposes we use flashes of insight to rationally interrogate our present. I then unpacked the conception of practical reason in Allen's critique of Huffer and in her book *The Politics of Our Selves* (2008). I argued that practical reason is insufficient for many political contexts, in particular for members of marginalized groups. My next chapter will provide a more thorough background context for understanding the relations between reason, subjection, and resistance in Foucault and Foucauldian feminism, in order to show how some unexpected actions might 'count' as resistance.

Chapter Two: Defining Foucauldian Resistance

The Allen-Huffer debate, I have proposed, is helpful to start thinking about feminist resistance with regard to rationality and practical reason. However, it leaves several important questions and problems unanswered, clustered around the issue of how to tell when something counts as resistance. If we are choosing a strategic alternative to practical reason in a feminist political movement, what do we have to choose among? What are our legitimate options for resistance? In brief, what modes of resistance 'count'? Although Lynne Huffer attempts to give us examples of resistance through unreason or queerness, her characterization of strategies remains vague, like the "atmosphere" she seeks. Likewise, Allen's offerings of political tactics do not seem to be true alternatives to practical reason, but precursors to using practical reason effectively. In order to develop a form of resistance that can fill in the gaps with which practical reason leaves us, we first need to determine what other *kinds of practices* can be forms of resistance, and what characterizes resistance. Resistance is a contested concept, however – one's viewpoint of power greatly influences one's opinion of what defines resistance. As such, developing new forms of resistance requires contextualizing my project in reference to the political framework that both Huffer and Allen draw upon: a Foucauldian one.

For example, if we assume that power is a substance that can be held or possessed and later deployed, our picture of resistance will involve power changing hands. We can think of resistance, then, as the exercise of some (minimal) power in order to transfer (more) power from the hands of the oppressor to those of the oppressed. Individuals use the power they each have by combining it or seizing the power of others in order to 'gain' back what they have been deprived of. Because this requires an amassing of power to tip the balance, these political frameworks often present resistance as something that is best accomplished in an

organized manner, in large groups or bodies, and as a sort of direct push-back against some force or power.

In this chapter, I argue that the Foucauldian framework of political power is useful for thinking about feminist resistance, by exploring how Foucault's ideas of power and resistance break from the paradigm of power as a substance. I will try to persuade readers that a widening of our ideas of resistance to include the micro-political impacts both "what 'counts' as resistance and when resistance counts" (Thomas and Davies 2005, 732). I suggest that a Foucauldian account of resistance allows us to expand the concept, to include forms of resistance such as Foucault's own examples of hysteria and possession. We can see even these unintentional acts as resistance when we consider them as transgression, rather than remaining under the assumption that all resistance must be dialectic.

What are we resisting? Or, Power

An initial response to the question of what we are resisting might be patriarchy, or patriarchal power. This is correct, but still too vague. For Foucault, the term 'power' takes on a distinct meaning that it does not in our everyday vernacular. Foucauldian feminist discussions of power describe it as having four main characteristics: power is "exercised rather than possessed", it is productive, it is present throughout social relations, and it is inescapable (Cooper 1994, 436-7). I believe that these four traits are also present in the work of Foucault himself, and this section will trace them back to primary texts.

First, power is not a substance that one possesses. Instead, power exists through our relations and only through its exercise. The closest that Foucault comes to giving us a definition of power is when he explains that the exercise of power is "a way in which certain actions [……] structure the field of other possible actions" (1982, 791). The exercise of power is not pure domination: it works on others' actions through other actions, discourse

and institutionalized knowledges (777). Davina Cooper (1994) gives an excellent example: "in the context of femininity, this might take the form of writing or publishing magazine beauty articles that lead other women to buy new cosmetics, clothes or engage in muscle-toning exercises" (437).

Second, power is not only repressive or oppressive; it is also productive. Because it affects the field of actions, exercising power can both restrict and enlarge the possibilities open to a subject. To continue Cooper's analogy, a woman might learn new skills such as makeup artistry in response to the magazine article. The exercise of power (in this case through discourse) not only blocks certain possible actions, but enables others. As I will show in this chapter, Foucault argues that the exercise of power through discourse does not neutrally describe objects or experiences which already exist (ex. femininity, the mad) but actually *constitutes* them. This includes constituting humans as certain kinds of subjects.

Third, the exercise of power is ubiquitous, although it is never totalizing: "where there is power, there is resistance and yet this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault 1990, 95). It is never totalizing because resistance comes from the residue of freedom present in subjects. In brief, power and freedom are in a relation of reversal: "Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free" (1982, 790). For Foucault, this means that (fourth) we cannot eradicate power, nor "get outside of it" in any meaningful sense. What we *can* do is challenge the forms of power that are currently dominant, show how particular power relations are contingent, and resist specific power relations. Foucault argues that "there is no *relationship* of power without the means of escape or possible flight" (1982, 794 emphasis added).[4] Although we can't escape power, we can wriggle out of individual power relations. To continue the example, the

[4] Foucault does acknowledge that humans can be in certain extreme situations that are not power relations but *domination*: for example, "slavery is not a power relationship when man is in chains [but] a physical relationship of constraint" (1982, 790).

newly-educated makeup artist might choose to use her skills to subvert rather than conform to beauty norms.

Much feminist Foucauldian thought focuses on the form of power Foucault calls disciplinary (or anatamo-political) power.[5] In *Discipline and Punish* (1977b), Foucault argues that prior to the middle of the eighteenth century, the dominant mode of power in the West was sovereign power. Sovereign power works on the model of the power of a queen over her subjects or a patriarch over his family. In contrast, he claims that today our dominant form of power is disciplinary. The first important characteristic of disciplinary power is that it works at the 'micro' level between all individuals, in a capillary manner, and from the bottom up.

Disciplinary power is not only repressive but productive: it gives individuals new capacities at the same time as making them more docile. For example, we can think of the woman from my earlier example, whose education in makeup artistry might make her more attuned to the conventionally poor application of make-up –on herself or other women – and thereby lessen the need for institutions to rigidly police norms of femininity (see also Bartky 1988). Discipline releases some of the need for repressive law when it makes us self-policing.

Two important mechanisms of disciplinary power are (self) surveillance and normalization. Under discipline, individuals are monitored, examined, and recorded by institutional authority and by peers: eventually, they come to perform this work on their own, having internalized the rules and requirements. This surveillance takes place, for example, through the visual surveillance of prisoners and the examination of parishioners in confession (Foucault 1977b, 1990). Normalization draws upon surveillance, using the data to perform constant correction and training of all those who fall outside of the norm.

[5] Although Foucault later discusses the concept of biopower, which has also been very influential in feminist circles, I will restrict my focus here to disciplinary power.

Cressida Heyes (2007) describes normalization, in its robust sense, as

> a set of mechanisms for sorting, taxonomizing, measuring, managing, and controlling populations, which both fosters conformity and generates modes of individuality, and which is at the center of an alternative picture of our history as embodied subjects. (16)

Normalization fixes all individuals in their relation to the norm, or deviation from it: your relation to the norm becomes an integral part of your identity. In order to normalize individuals (including their bodies), we constantly measure the abilities of individuals, not only to surveil but to track their progress. This control of abilities includes bodily habits: discipline seizes our bodies' developmental potential and directs it toward an ideal norm. One of Foucault's paradigmatic examples of normalization is military training.

In fact, the body is the central target of disciplinary power's normalizing mechanisms. Our material bodies' compositions are changed, along with their gestures, actions, and choreographies. Not only our abstracted or rational selves, but our bodies become docile. Sandra Bartky (1988) gives the example of dieting, which requires us to regulate our time and standardize and calculate our consumption, but also demands we change our bodies in very visible and material ways. The developmental quality of our bodies is the site of much of discipline's work and manipulation. It is this capability, however, that also gives us the possibility to change our habits. Because of this potential for change, not all manipulation of the body is normalizing. For example, several Foucauldian feminists argue that female bodybuilding, or the development of a muscular feminine physique, is a desirable form of changing the body because it subverts gender norms, even though it requires discipline, regulation, self-surveillance, etc. (Dean 2011; Haber 1996). I will return to other bodily examples, and this potential for subversion that is present within the body, in my later chapters.

Foucauldian subjects

Another important part of what happens to us through all power – and particularly through disciplinary power – is the constitution of our subjectivity. This includes not only our beliefs or thought-patterns, but our bodies, abilities, and possibilities. As Flynn (1997) argues, Foucault sees the subject, power, and knowledge as three sides of a prism that influence experience and are influenced by it in return (209). The way that we become subjects is central to many problematizations of Foucauldian resistance, and also to my work in this thesis.

We can oppose Foucault's explanation of the subject to theories that see all subjects as having an important, shared capacity. Many theories in the history of philosophy see the subject *as a subject* because she possesses the capacity for reason. This reason can be used to determine the good life, and to pursue it: this kind of subject is rationally self-determining due to free will. These traditional views of the subject see our rational self-making capacity as an inherent vehicle for human freedom. Rational self-making is universal, an essential part of the definition of who counts as a subject, a human, or a person.

In contrast, Foucault believes that over time, we *become* (are constituted as) subjects. This becoming is not an achievement that is ever finished: there is no 'final self' that can be built up or revealed. *Assujettissement*, often translated as subjectivation, is the term Foucault uses to describe the two-sided process of becoming a subject and being subjected. The two sides are mutually constitutive. First, our *assujettissement* is never a pure exercise of freedom: it depends upon our subjection to power. Today, this is manifest in disciplinary power simultaneously making us useful and docile. Subjection to power is both repressive and productive: it not only controls or oppresses people, but also enables us to become subjects by attaining capacities (Foucault 1977, 138). Since certain abilities are developed

and others disallowed, discipline restricts and prescribes the kinds of subject-position which are possible and available (308). In doing so, it narrows the field of what kind of a person, or who, is *intelligible* as a subject. It is only through power that we are able to become a subject. Although many have charged Foucault with a deterministic view of subjecthood, I argue (as have others) that we are not simply 'churned out' by the system. Recall that power can only work where there is a residue of freedom: it is the individual's possibility for change that discipline seizes upon in order to work more efficiently. Furthermore, several of Foucault's own works track individuals on the edges of discipline or other forms of power, who rebel and thus show we are rarely fully dominated by external forces (Foucault 1975, 2010).

Many Foucauldian feminists contend that gender, often seen as a key part of our subjecthood and our identity, is produced through *assujettissement*. That is, as Beauvoir claims, we "become women" − but we also become men ([1949] 2011, 283). On this view, what we see as expressions of an inherent identity (such as the clothing we wear, our adornments, or the sex(es)/gender(s) of our lover(s)) are all acts that contribute to the constitution and re-constitution of gender, *making* us gendered. For example, Judith Butler draws upon Foucault's work to construct her theory of performativity (1990). She asserts that gender (and later in her work, race) is created and maintained through our performances of it. Because it is not a fixed, inherent essence, we can perform gender − and, I think, gendered ir/rationality − differently. Butler's main example of subversive gender performance is the parodic femininity and masculinity enacted in drag shows. Of course, social pressures affect our choices of performance; to some extent our gender is made for us through the workings of disciplinary power, drawing on gendered subjection throughout history. Gender is one of the dominant modes of *assujettissement* at present, although far from the only one, and it is the main example which I will discuss in this thesis.

Recently, several Foucauldian feminist theorists have taken one of two routes regarding *assujettissement*. Some, such as Dianna Taylor (2013) and Lynne Huffer (2010) advocate desubjectivation, or being without being a subject – although it is still unclear what this would mean. Others, such as Ladelle McWhorter (1999), are searching for alternative forms of *assujettissement*, in order to become different kinds of subjects and/or to become subjects differently. In either case, we must grapple with resisting the dominant mode of *assujettissement* of our present, which is at least normalizing (if no longer disciplinary). Whether we wish to become different kinds of subjects or to become non-subjects, changing our *assujettissement* will necessarily require resistance at a bodily level. This is because *assujettissement* and normalization work not only on our beliefs (that we might think could be corrected by learning more) but also on our habits, actions, and materiality.

Resistance

Now that I have explained the role of power and of disciplinary power in particular on a Foucauldian framework, we have an idea of *what* we are resisting. The *method* of resistance is less clear. Foucauldian resistance seems to require defying the mechanisms of discipline, such as normalization and surveillance. However, since we cannot 'get outside' of power, we must create or find ways of resisting while still deep in the grasp of discipline. For example, Linda Martín Alcoff has advocated we reconfigure "the relationship between power and theory, between the ego and the unconscious, between reason and its others, to acknowledge the instability of these categories and the permeability of their borders" (Alcoff 1995, 23). Even this advice remains vague.

To move forward on the question of which modes of feminist resistance to norms of rationality are effective we need to clarify resistance more through concrete examples. To illuminate the nature of resistance in a concrete way, I will briefly review two of Foucault's

examples of resistance from his lecture series *Abnormal* (2003) and *Psychiatric Power* (2006b): possession and hysteria. These examples show that for Foucault, even those *most* penetrated by power could forcefully resist it. I choose these examples in particular because they are both highly gendered, collective, and a- or irrational.

In *Psychiatric Power* (2006b), Foucault refers to the hysterics of the Salpêtrière (among other institutions) of the nineteenth century as a "front of resistance" and as "the true militants of antipsychiatry" (254). Hysteria, he argues, arose in response to truth claims made by psychiatry. That is, psychiatrists claimed to have access to and knowledge of the "true nature" of madness, without backing up their claim. The symptoms of hysteria, such as silence, convulsions, laughter, and overtly sexual behaviour, were responses to this claim. They were not 'faked' but arose involuntarily in the women. Supporting the idea that hysteria was an internal effect of psychiatry upon itself, Foucault points out that hysteria was contagious only within and across asylums: it was not an illness in play in the general population (137).

Because of their inconsistent symptoms and "constant sexual component[s] of behaviour" hysterics directly challenged psychiatry's claim to knowledge (320). Without a physical lesion or an "organic substratum" to point to, psychiatrists could not prove that hysterical convulsions were pathological, and so came up short on diagnoses and cures at first (254, 307). However, the hysterics' revolt was not effective in the end. Neurologists, in collaboration with psychiatrists, developed a stable symptomatology ("stigmata"), giving the hysterics the "right to be ill" rather than mad (310-11). Their disordered symptoms, which "reproduced and expressed emotions like lustfulness [and] terror" were captured and used against them (310).

In *Abnormal* (2003), Foucault presents a second phenomenon of collective, feminine resistance: the rash of possessions of Catholic nuns that occurred in the sixteenth and

seventeenth century across Europe. Although he acknowledges continuities, he contrasts these cases with the witchcraft of the fifteenth century. Witchcraft, he says, was a response to the physical expansion of the church into rural areas, as well as to the reach and power of the Inquisition: "[W]itchcraft was no doubt simultaneously the effect, point of reversal, and center of resistance to this wave of Christianization and its instruments − the Inquisition and its courts" (213-14). The witches were "bad Christians", peripheral to or outside of pastoral power, and so their criticisms of the Church could be easily dismissed (205). They constituted a form of resistance to pastoral power, but were sadly ineffective. In contrast, Foucault argues that "[p]ossession, although inscribed within this Christianization […] is an internal, rather than an external, effect" (205). That is, the possessions were "the aftereffect of a religious and detailed investment of the body and […] of an exhaustive discourse and exclusive authority" (205): of rigorous confession. In particular, since the nuns had to confess more often than parishioners, they were the most susceptible and the most affected by this deep surveillance and questioning.

Foucault identifies two important characteristics that the possessed woman manifested. First, she was split, indefinite, multiple, and unable to be pinned down. Rather than being taken over completely by the devil, a part of her body resisted and so remained her own: she was fragmented and divided (207). Second, this plurality manifested itself in an "indefinite multiplicity of movements, jolts, sensations, tremors, pains, and pleasures" (207). These convulsions, which became the identifying mark of possession, were meaningful because they were "mechanical effects of the struggle, of the shock of forces confronting each other" (213).

Several possessed nuns accused their confessors of being devils. In the most famous case, Ursuline nuns at Loudun charged Father Urbain Grandier of such, and of committing "carnal disorders of passion" with the nuns (Foucault 2003, 216; Sluhovsky 2002, 1398).

Although they later recanted, the Church executed several confessors in France − Grandier included − as warlocks (Sluhovsky, 1398). This released the women from the constant, scrupulous, mandatory confession, and so from being so heavily disciplined and penetrated by pastoral power. Foucault points out that in the face of these crises, the Church had to give up on possession as being revelatory of truth, and turned instead to the holy vision.

I would like to draw attention to several characteristics of resistance found in these two examples. Foucault emphasizes that they were generated by power itself, often automatic or involuntary, and located in the body. In *Bodies and Pleasures* (1999), McWhorter demonstrates that *despite and because* our bodies have been normalized, we must start our resistance from them. That is, although the normalization of our bodies is often seen as repressive and deterministic, their developmental status provides us with the only jumping-off point to challenge normalization. Of course, this does not ultimately make 'bodily' resistance different in kind than practical reason: practical reason *is* embodied. So are speech and writing, two of the dominant modes through which we exercise practical reason for political purposes. However, many proponents of practical reason – particularly philosophers – still articulate it under the assumption of its separation from the body. In contrast, possession and hysteria (like laughter today) were not, at least immediately, treated with this same discourse of distancing from our materiality.

Alongside their embodied focus, these instances of resistance are also *drastically gendered* and *collective*. In both the case of hysteria and that of possession, the affected subjects were predominantly female or feminine. Although the gendering of a phenomenon does not make it feminist, the fact that in both these cases it was women who were most affected by power suggests that power works differently on differently gendered or sexed individuals. Furthermore, these two instances of resistance often included a hyperbolic performance of femininity: for example, the hysteric was either silent and aphasic, or

extravagant and hypersexual. With their "convulsive flesh", both figures played upon the overly-embodied stereotype of women (Foucault 2003, 213).

In addition, these cases pose a problem regarding agency and resistance in Foucault's work. Foucault uses words and phrases such as "front of resistance", "a phenomenon of struggle", "militants", and "counter-possession" to describe the two groups of women and their actions (2003, 222; 2006b, 137, 253-4). They incited change: hysteria forced psychiatry to medicalize their disorder, and the possessed nuns escaped constant confession temporarily (2003, 227). However, the women's acts seem to be unconscious and unintentional, caused or prompted *by the disciplinary systems themselves*. Furthermore, this resistance does not seem to have empowered either group on a personal level. Since hysteria became a medical problem, it was further entrenched in examination and institutionalization. And although possession was discarded by the church, the nuns did not succeed in permanently disabling the extensive confessional practices. In light of these effects, we might seriously worry whether these instances 'count' as resistance and whether they 'count' as getting us the desired results or consequences.

Yet, we can challenge a results-based analysis of these cases as failures. There have been several interpretations of hysteria, or cases of hysteria, that view it as personally empowering: it allowed some women to escape unwanted marriages and abusive situations. As Bordo claims, it is "essential to recognize in this illness [hysteria] the dimension of protest against the limitations of the ideal of female domesticity" (2003, 159). In particular, the hysteric was seen as a resistant force by several French feminist scholars in the 1970s and 80s.[6] Sarah French (2008) concludes that in Hélène Cixous' *Portrait of Dora* (1983), "the hysteric [Dora] is a privileged figure because she cannot be assimilated into symbolic discourse" (254), and that this reflects Cixous' valuation of the "hysteric's refusal (or

[6] Interestingly, possession has not been taken up as a feminist ideal in a parallel manner: witchcraft seems to hold more allure. See for example Eileraas 1997; R. Gordon 1995; Purkiss 1996; Rountree 1997.

inability) to conform to social expectations as a mode of resistance to the patriarchal system" (248). Indeed, Cixous herself suggests we can imagine "resistance to masculine desire conducted by the woman as hysteric, as distracted" (1981, 50). However, whereas Cixous championed the hysteric's silent refusal as protest, French believes that such feminist idealizations of hysteria ignore "the very real suffering of the victim" and obscure the fact that "she is essentially a damaged person who is too unstable to achieve a satisfactory subject position from which to speak and act" (259). Is there a way to acknowledge the debilitating effects of hysteria and possession on these feminine individuals, while still holding that their actions constitute resistance?

By rethinking what resistance means – which might require a certain reconceptualization of agency as well – we can come to see the hysterics and the possessed women as political. Saba Mahmood (2005) critiques the humanist conception of agency, which sees agency and resistance as manifested exclusively in autonomous, self-interested, action. She argues that "instead of limiting agency to those acts that disrupt existing power relations, Foucault's work encourages us to think of agency: (a) in terms of the capacities and skills required to undertake particular kinds of moral actions; and (b) as ineluctably bound up with the historically and culturally specified disciplines through which a subject is formed" (29). And so one of the ways that we can find these examples meaningful is to rethink what kind(s) of resistance they might be: not necessarily *direct* subversion of repressive regimes, but ways of existing that challenge the very logic of the regime. I suggest that we can do this project of rethinking through an exploration of Foucauldian transgression.

Transgression

I believe that just as a Foucauldian framework requires a rethinking of power, it also requires rethinking resistance. In "A Preface to Transgression" (1977a) and "What is

Enlightenment?" (1984), Foucault proposes pursuing resistance through transgression rather than dialectical opposition. In this section, I will explain his understanding of transgression and of the limit experience. I will then argue that these concepts give us a new and fruitful way to think through feminist resistance, especially as it is done through practical endeavors rather than rationalist planning.

Foucault explains in "A Preface to Transgression" that traditionally, philosophers have thought about experience and philosophy on a dialectical model. On this picture, resistance is direct negative opposition to an external object or force. In order for two opposing arguments to confront one another, there must be some underlying consensus: we can only have an argument about something on the basis of common ground. Furthermore, he suggests that an important part of this dialectical model and of this common ground is the assumption that the speaker (the philosopher) is a unified, stable, unchangeable subject.

In its place, Foucault argues for a language of transgression, which would pursue the "breakdown of philosophical [absolute] subjectivity and its dispersion in a language that dispossesses it while multiplying it" (42). An experience of transgression pushes the limits of our frameworks, destroying any common ground or proceeding without any, and so a language of it in the everyday sense is impossible. Because transgression challenges the framework of dialectical opposition, it suggests to me an alternative route for resistance. When you dispute a statement directly, you reinforce your exclusionary position and define yourself in opposition to it. In contrast, transgressing the limits of the discussion shared by the two positions dissolves them and can transform the problem or debate.

Transgression, though, is not transcendence. When we transgress a norm or limit, another limit is constituted beyond the first: there is no ultimate transcendence. In this way, the limit and transgression form a spiral. Since the experience of transgressing creates a new limit, Foucault defines transgression as an act that "affirms limited being" rather than

negating being or affirming transcendent being (1984, 35). It exposes that the subject is limited and contingent, rather than transcendental. When the subject undergoes this change, she also changes her self-relation and relations to others.

Another Foucauldian rethinking of resistance, which bears similarities to transgression, is formulated by Ladelle McWhorter (1999). Although she uses the term "resistance" for dialectical resistance, her conceptualization of "opposition" aligns well with transgression. She states: "Resistance is merely negative, a no to domination. Opposition involves something positive, a departure from dominating networks. It involves the production of a different sort of self and a different sort of community" (191). On this definition, Foucauldian transgression would count as opposition, since it changes the limits and the self at once. However, McWhorter complicates transgression by exploring its conditions of possibility. She emphasizes that a certain degree of violence – "counterattack" – against practices and institutions must occur (191). In order to be able to transgress, we often first need to enact some dialectical resistance. McWhorter believes that we need to exercise power over others "to force them to allow us to do our self-transformative work" (191).

Once we have cleared the way for transgression to occur, it can take at least two forms. First, we can transgress by interrogating our own limits, through critical philosophy. This is explained best by Foucault in "What is Enlightenment?" (1984), where he argues for a limit attitude, "a way of thinking and feeling; a way too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task" (39). This attitude can be cultivated through a "permanent critique of our historical era", by examining the limits of our present and doing "a historico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond" (42, 47). By critiquing and understanding our historical limits, and how we define ourselves by specific historical events, we can find "the possibility of no longer being, doing,

or thinking what we are, do, or think": we see the contingency of current circumstances and are freer to imagine alternatives (46). When we do this work, it does not just deny a universal *a priori*, but it affects our subjectivity and self relation - it is done "at the limits of ourselves" (46).

Foucault's own work, as Megan Dean (2012) holds, counts as transgression through critique, since his genealogies question the limits of our present through exploring the limits of the past. This argument is made in more depth by Amy Allen, who takes up transgression through critique in "Foucault and Enlightenment: A Critical Reappraisal" (2003). Rather than seeing Foucault as opposed to the Kantian project of critique, she argues that he is performing a "critique of critique" (193), moving from critiquing a universal *a priori* to a historical *a priori*. As philosophers, we can take Foucault's work on critique and his methods as one possible model for transgression.

However, there are instances when a critique of critique in rationalized discourse might be insufficient; recall my criticisms of the inefficacy of practical reason. Foucault identifies a second mode of transgression that might be able to help my project more: limit experience. A limit experience is distinctive because "[n]o form of dialectical movement, no analysis of constitutions and of their transcendental ground can serve as support for thinking about such an experience or even as access to this experience" (1977a, 37). In other words, it is not intelligible within our discourses. The predominant examples of limit experience in Foucault's work are drug use and new sexual pleasures. For example, in a 1978 interview, Foucault stated that certain "uses of the body could be defined as desexualized, as devirilized, like fist fucking or other extraordinary fabrications of pleasures, which Americans reach with the help of certain drugs or instruments" (Foucault 2011, 396). David Halperin takes up this strand of thinking in *Saint Foucault: A Gay Hagiography* (1995), arguing that sado-masochistic sexual practices are resistant because they detach pleasure from genitalia or

'biological' sex. Holmes, O' Byrne, and Gastaldo (2006), in a similar vein, argue that barebacking as "raw sex" constitutes a limit experience. More recently, Cressida Heyes (2012) demonstrates that giving birth can constitute a subject-shattering limit experience, through her phenomenological analysis of childbirth. We can find more possible limit experiences, I think, through the practice of critical philosophy and examination of our limits. If we find the limits of intelligibility of our present, we have a clue of where to start with limit experiences, although they cannot be planned or perfectly orchestrated.

Transgression, then, is an alternative to dialecticism that allows us to deal with contemporary forms of *assujettissement* in a manner that still highlights the contingency of norms, and avoids positing a 'right' or 'true' way that things should be. If we change our *assujettissement* only to assert a new ideal, normative subject-formation, we are in some sense missing the Foucauldian point. Furthermore, having limit experiences will *necessarily* change the sort of subject we are (or possibly, whether we are a subject at all), helping to set our project in motion. Transgression may be on the outside or edge of power, but it nevertheless has an effect on the creation of our selves.

What difference does it make to think of hysteria and possession as *transgressions*? We might view both as limit experiences (the 'symptoms' or phenomena themselves), or as non-discursive expressions of limit experiences (the imposed domestic life of bourgeois women and the compulsory confession of nuns). If we see these Foucauldian examples of gendered resistance as transgressions rather than as traditionally formulated resistance, their status as 'failures' is at least challenged (if not overturned). That is, since transgression changes our subjectivities fundamentally, it unsettles the very humanist idea of rational autonomous agency which Mahmood (2005) identifies. Thinking about resistance in this way requires a mental paradigm shift, but it allows us to broaden the sphere of political action.

Johanna Oksala clarifies limit experience and relates it explicitly to feminist resistance and bodily experience in "Anarchic Bodies: Foucault and the Feminist Question of Experience" (2004). The experiential body, she says, enables us to transgress not only the limit between normalcy and abnormalcy, but that between intelligibility and unintelligibility (110). There are certain bodily experiences, whether they seem extreme or mundane, that are either *not* discursively constituted or are *less so* than others. This remains true even if we use discourse to try and make them intelligible, or to discuss them (112). Oksala believes this shows that "a constitutive outside to the discursive order thus exists, even though there can be no outside to the apparatus or cultural network of practices as a whole" (112). Effective resistance requires determining how we can reach that constitutive outside.

I find two aspects of Oksala's paper particularly helpful for my project. First, she interrogates how we might transgress the limit between intelligibility and unintelligibility. Although intelligibility does not coincide perfectly with rationality, they are caught up with one another: we normally think that the irrational cannot be intelligible. If, as she suggests, we can use the body to challenge the limit of intelligibility, we might also be able to use it to challenge the limit of rationality. Second, her emphasis on the body neither as an object nor as inert matter but as containing possibilities suggests a first step. If this transgressive potential − this possibility to interrupt normalization − manifests in bodily experience, then changing our bodies can be a form of resistance. Indeed, Oksala claims that understanding transgressive experience is "valuable exactly for those feminist analyses that try to understand the important role of the body in resistance to gender discourses" (115). This foreshadows part of what I will theorize in my next two chapters: we need to unleash the unpredictability to which our bodies are open. Although our bodies have been harnessed as developmental organisms, constrained, and made docile, we can make them un-docile. This would not mean disciplining them to be wild and unpredictable constantly (which would be

imposing a new norm). Rather, I will suggest that we can make changes to our behaviour in order to create a background against which laughter – or other movements – can spontaneously arise, uninhibited (or less inhibited) by docility.

I propose that by focusing on the *site* of resistance, the body, rather than our intentions leading into it *or* the effects that arise from it, we can avoid simply positing new norms of resistance. But what is the significance of considering something *as a site of resistance*? A site, quite simply, refers to a place or a location; however, I do not think that the body is something as simple as a backdrop or a container wherein resistance happens. Nor is it a mere tool. Rather, for my purposes, the body is a site of resistance that is not independent from the act of resisting/transgressing: the site is actively involved in resistance and is transformed through it. To discuss resistance in the body is to think of resistance as something which the body inhabits or *lives through*, an ongoing process rather than a task that can be completed. This resistance necessarily (consciously or unconsciously) involves our practices. For example, we can cultivate the capacity to laugh differently and at different moments, without setting new regulations. This allows our resistance to be open-ended. In brief, I believe that transgression located within the body is an important strategy for feminism. A radical feminist project that wishes to "eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels as well as [commit] to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires" needs to start, at least, with resistance that leaves behind our contemporary framework (hooks 1984, 24). Although working through transgressive practices means we have to start without a pre-determined, pre-figured goal state in sight, it may allow us to challenge the current sedimented sex-gender system in a deep manner.

Conclusion

This chapter is meant to clarify what I mean by resistance, and by Foucauldian feminist resistance. I began by explaining how power, the subject, and discipline are all interrelated in a Foucauldian framework. Subjects are formed by power relations and discipline, but still have some freedom available, and so resistance remains possible. I then used Foucault's examples of the possessed nuns and of the hysterics to suggest that rethinking resistance apart from rational intentionality (in both senses), is necessary.

When we regard resistance as transgression, I have argued, acts that contest the limits of our experiences and intelligibility are revealed as particularly powerful, and useful for feminist purposes. I hope to have shown that I consider the defining characteristic of resistance to be neither the intentions of the agent(s) to resist, nor the outcome of the acts of resistance as effective in making change. Instead, the crux of resistance lies within an act's relation to disciplinary and normalizing structures. In my next chapter, I will motivate laughter as one site of resistance to sexist and patriarchal norms.

Chapter Three: Why Laughter?

Now that I have characterized a Foucauldian understanding of power and resistance, I need to bring the thesis back to my question: how can feminists resist gendered norms without seeing practical reason as our only option? Although the actions of the hysterics and possessed nuns can count as resistance, neither of those strategies seems feasible today. In determining what form our feminist resistance could take, I would like to explore laughter**.** I initially thought of laughter because the phenomenon is one that seems to be on the edge of reason – an important mode of communication that is overlooked in comparison to speech. Furthermore, I noticed the disarming role laughter can play in debates and arguments. At the same time, not all laughter is liberatory.

This chapter will give a more thorough justification for investigating laughter as part of my project. My primary goal is to motivate looking at laughter as a site of Foucauldian feminist resistance to gendered norms of rationality. I begin by examining several considerations of laughter by both philosophers and political theorists. In most cases, their conflation of laughter with humour means that laughter as an independent (if correlated) phenomenon is neglected. I present some empirical research which demonstrates the gendered norms around laughter, which affect both *when* we laugh and *how* we laugh, in order to argue that these norms are philosophically significant. I then argue for disruptiveness as a central characteristic of certain laughter, linking it to Foucauldian philosophy. By motivating laughter as a political issue, this chapter is in part a more thorough response to the dismissal of the 'irrational' by strict proponents of practical reason alone, a proof that even these minute, often unconscious actions have political import.

There is an existing tradition within Foucauldian feminism of examining the micro-practices of power and resistance in our ordinary activities, whether these activities initially

seem apolitical or are explicitly politicized. For example, in *Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization* (1999), Ladelle McWhorter uses gardening and line-dancing as examples of her resistance, through which she "engage[d] in activities and [had] thoughts and experiences that defy and undermine" mind-body dualism (175). They constitute micro-practices of resistance because gardening allowed her to see dirt not as an inert carrier, but as a living being that feeds and nourishes, while her disciplined learning of line-dancing gave her a new capacity (to dance) without it being normalizing and revealed to her the depth of mind-body dualisms in everyday practices (167).[7]

More recently, Dianna Taylor (2013) explores feminist interpretations of the micro-resistance of a local grassroots community in Edmonton which fought back against sexual assault. When the Garneau neighbourhood encountered a rash of sexual assaults, institutional power and enforcement seemed to have little effect on offenders. In response, the Garneau Sisterhood formed and used posters and other communiqués to challenge both police and offenders. Taylor interprets their posters and actions as "disobedient articulation[s] of the truth", and argues that they bear a resemblance to the freeing "frank speech" or *parrhesia* of ancient Greece (100). [8] Although this political act might seem very minor, Taylor holds that:

> this is part of what Foucault is trying to get us to see: the potential of seemingly mundane actions to provoke. He also makes clear that this reality is simultaneously discouraging and heartening: it illustrates not only that the effects of normalization are extensive, but that insofar as this is the case what has not been thought or imagined is equally so. (103)

In light of these two examples, micro-practices of refraining from laughter, which seems also mundane and inconsequential at first, could also be fertile ground for resistance in addition to laughing. To build my account of resistance, I will revisit the framework set out by McWhorter in *Bodies and Pleasures* (1999). Recall that McWhorter contends that it is not

[7] Line-dancing also provided McWhorter with an awareness of the deep social associations of cowboy boots with whiteness and rednecks, which allows institutional forms of racism to go unnoticed (175).
[8] *Parrhesia* is one of the examples that Foucault discusses of the *askeses* (self-making practices) of the self in his last two published works (1984a, 1986).

always effective to argue our way out of normalization, and that we can never fully escape it. Instead, our resistance must necessarily start from our already-normalized bodies. For her, individuals can increase their capacities in non-normalizing ways by developing philosophical style, seeking out limit-experiences, and learning new pleasures as well as new practices. On this framework, laughter is interesting because it is a micro-political action that is available to everyone, takes up the use of our current bodies, and has not been widely discussed in philosophy – particularly in feminist philosophy.

Laughter in Historical (and Contemporary) Philosophy

Throughout the history of philosophy, laughter has not been a central topic of contemplation. When it is discussed, there are certain presuppositions that delimit what about laughter is philosophically significant or interesting. The primary interest in laughter has been in *intentional* laughter, or laughter that has an object. For example, Ronald De Sousa (1987) narrows the definition of laughter: "Hysterical laughter is not laughter […] nor are the happy noises and cries of infants, or 'laughing with pleasure'" (226). Roger Scruton (1987) goes so far as to explicitly state that laughter itself is not philosophically interesting: "the phenomenon which we seek to describe has intentionality. It is not laughter, but laughter at or about something, that interests the philosopher" (157). Many scholars of laughter and humour divide theories about it into three schools (superiority theories, relief theories, and incongruity theories).

Almost all philosophical discussions of laughter (both historical and contemporary) focus upon its cause, either an object laughed at or a mental or emotional state. For example, Hobbes claims that "the passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly" ([1650] 1812, 65). For Hobbes, the *cause* of laughter is

noticing inferiority in the other, which incites feelings of superiority, which laughter then expresses. Likewise, in his discussion of the passions Descartes argues that laughter "arises from our perceiving some small misfortune in a person we think to be deserving of it. We have Hatred for this misfortune, and Joy in seeing it in someone who deserves it. And when it springs up unexpectedly, the surprise of Wonder causes us to break into laughter" ([1649] 1989, 117). For both Hobbes and Descartes, the other at whom we laugh is perceived as inferior, and this causes us to feel joyful.

Others theorize that the cause of laughter is the object at which we laugh. For example, in the *Critique of Judgement,* Kant claims that "whatever is to arouse lively, convulsive laughter must contain something absurd […] *Laughter is an affect that arises if a tense expectation is transformed into nothing"* ([1790] 1987, 203). Incongruity as the cause of laughter was also taken up by Arthur Schopenhauer ([1818] 1907), who argued that we laugh when there is a conflict between our perception and our rational expectations or categories. On this picture, when I see an oversized carrot at the grocery store, I laugh because my regular concept of carrot does not include it being three inches in diameter. When an object is incongruous with my state of mind, it causes an outburst of emotion and surprise.

Because so many philosophers see the importance of laughter as lying within *the object that causes it,* many theories of laughter focus not on laughter itself, but on humour, its supposed intentional object. This, however, leads to conflation and confusion: most (not all) of these theories conflate laughter with humour or the comic. By "conflating laughter with humour" I mean that the majority of these works either a) claim to be talking about laughter but end up talking about humour or b) assume that laughter and humour are always coincidental. Clearly, laughter can and does often occur without humour, comedy, or a joke. For example, neuroscientist and psychologist Robert Provine (1993) found that "most naturally occurring conversational laughter was not a consequence of structured attempts at

humor such as joke- or story-telling" (294). In many cases, laughter can arise even without any accidental humorous event: it "punctuates" a conversation at certain moments without any clear referent (1993, 291). Provine also found that 80-90% of laughter occurred after neutral statements such as "I'll see you guys later" or "How are you?" (2000, 40-41).

Other philosophers identify the cause of laughter as a mental or emotional state. While this might apply to the above cases, through feeling superior or feeling surprised, contemporary philosophers focus on the state of amusement (M. Gordon 2014, 4). There is, however, debate over whether it is a cognitive state or an emotional state. For example, John Morreal argues that "laughter is an expression of pleasure at a psychological shift" (136). In *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (1987), several philosophers of mind debate the relation of laughter to aesthetic enjoyment, as well as the status of amusement as an emotion or as a cognitive state. Still, it is not the laughter itself which interests them, but what it *expresses or indicates about our mental-emotional states.*

Regarding the act or practice of laughter and its effects, with which I am primarily concerned, relatively little has been written. One exception is Freud's theory of laughter-as-relief through jokes, comedy, and humour in *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (2002 [1905]). He theorizes that we have built up psychic energy because of repressed feelings and desires, primarily sexual or hostility. For example, one might wish to say something nasty to an interlocutor, but it is socially inappropriate. In this case, the built up energy can be released through laughter, and so we often seek out or make jokes about our socially-inappropriate desires, thoughts, or actions (Morreal 1983, 2012). However, a more notable exception to this disregard of laughter as an act is Friedrich Nietzsche. Sarah E. Fryett (2011) argues that for Nietzsche laughter facilitates transvaluation, or the process by which values are transformed, and it "supports a project of elevation and the overcoming of traditional beliefs" (34). One aspect of Nietzschean laughter is a "laughter of the height", a

way of overcoming the suffering and tragedy in the world (Lippitt 1996, 65). This laughter is not a mere act, but is also transformative: John Lippitt (1996) proposes that Nietzsche embraces "the redemptive potential of laughter as an attitude toward ourselves and our world" (64). For an example, Zarathustra boldly declares "Laughter have I pronounced holy: you higher men, learn to laugh!"‘ (Nietzsche [1883] 1978, 296).

Besides the confusion of laughter with humour, or indeed its *reduction to* humour, I want to identify two other flaws that are present in most philosophy of laughter. First, there is no discussion of the particularity of laughter for different kinds of subjects: rather, a neutral subject of all laughter is assumed. If laughter means the same thing for all people, or has the same cause for all people, it is difficult to make a connection with feminism, gender, or anti-oppression movements. Second, this connects to religious studies scholar Jacqueline A. Bussie's criticism of philosophies of laughter: that they are all written and explained by upper-class, white, heterosexual men, and implicitly only discuss laughter from their own point of view as those higher up in the social hierarchy. In *The Laughter of the Oppressed* (2007), she concludes that laughter steps in to "express the inexpressible" (89), for oppressed characters in literature on American slavery, oppression of Japanese Christians, and the Holocaust. Bussie (2007) holds that there is something important academics can learn by looking at "laughter from below" rather than from above (4). This is my intuition as well, and a strand that I will pursue. It is furthermore supported by *standpoint theory* in feminist epistemology, which argues that, although it is not automatic, members of marginalized social groups often have epistemic privilege compared to those who are 'better off' (Wylie 2003). This means that not only should we look at the laughter *of* marginalized groups and individuals, but we should also examine it from their own viewpoint: and this examination might tell us something important about laughter as a whole. In looking at the laughter of women, I must not only look at the information on how and when women laugh but examine

the specific meaning and material embodiment of laughter for specific women. Theorizing one single laughter, as a unanimous undifferentiated whole that is identical for all subjects, is both erroneous and politically dangerous.

Using Laughter Politically

Theorists working outside of philosophy – both political theorists and social scientists – have focused more on the political effects or potential of laughter than their philosophical counterparts. They have no shortage of material: political laughter seems to be everywhere, from opinion comics in the newspaper, to political satire shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, to stand-up and sketch comedy. Non-academics laugh at the political often: take for example the parodic film trailer compiled from Chris Farley sketches that satirizes the recent drug scandals of Toronto mayor Rob Ford (Gough 2013). Besides laughing *about* politics, it is latent common knowledge that laughing itself can be political: whether it is laughing at an authority figure to their face, or laughing at a racist or sexist joke, laughter has political meaning and consequences.

In the academic sphere, the predominant understanding of laughter in politics seems to be as a positive tool. For example, analyzing Egyptian jokes about Husni Mubarak, political theorist Samer S. Shehata (1991) notes that: "when political freedoms are repressed and open political expression is not tolerated, the political joke becomes a vehicle for the criticism of political leaders, their policies, and government. The joke becomes a form of political protest" (88). In these situations, laughing at the oppressor is cathartic (76). According to Shehata, political humour is often turned to as a necessity– the only way to express certain feelings and opinions under totalitarian regimes.

The relationship of politics to humour has been also been discussed within feminism. For example, Cynthia Willett, Julie Willett, and Yael D. Sherman begin their examination of

feminism and humour through an analysis of norms around rationality, examining "the unraveling and disrupting of conventional norms through ridicule" (218). They map the beginnings of a genealogy of feminist humour in "The Seriously Erotic Politics of Feminist Laughter" (2012), tracing both jokes about women and jokes by women and feminists over the past century. By reviewing both the impact of and constant marginalization of female and feminist comedians such as Roseanne Barr, Wanda Sykes, and Margaret Cho, they conclude that theorists should "bring humor right into the very core of our academic practices as well as our social movements" (218). A key part of their argument is that humour and feminism are too often assumed to be antithetical rather than complementary, as attested to by the feminist killjoy stereotype.

These contemporary political theorizations of laughter have tended to take it as a positive tool, rather than one of malice, which was its stereotype during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, several authors have recently challenged the wholesale acceptance of laughter as liberating, claiming that our opinion has swung too wildly from one extreme to another. Political theorists Villy Tsakona and Diana Popa (2011) argue that political humour both "conveys criticism against the political status quo and […] recycles and reinforces dominant values and views on politics" (2). They highlight that the uses of laughter and humour in *maintaining* norms have been under-examined. Social psychologist Michael Billig echoes this sentiment: "humour is neither as important, nor as good-natured, as its supporters often advocate" (237). In *Laughter and Ridicule* (2005), Billig critiques laughter as a phenomenon that enforces social order: its consequences are conformist rather than rebellious. His suspicions around laughter lead him to propose that unlaughter can also be meaningful and political: "If laughter is rhetorical, then so is the refusal of audiences to respond with laughter" (179). Billig defines unlaughter as "a display of not laughing when laughter might otherwise be expected, hoped for or demanded" (192). For example, verbal

unlaughter can take the form of arguments, "put-downs" or "call-outs" (Billig 193). A friend of mine shares the following story:

> At a large family event, to which a number of important people in my grandparents' rural community were invited, a prominent gay politician arrived. Seeing him walk in, one of my older family members looked at me and commented, jokingly, that he would now have to go stand with his back against the wall (implying that he needed to do so to avoid being raped by this man). He kind of laughed as he said it and then looked at me rather expectantly. I just said 'No' and then told him it wasn't funny, before walking away.

I will pick up on this notion of unlaughter, and explain how it can be used strategically, in my next chapter. In brief, these criticisms suggest that rather than unanimously affirming all laughter, we should critically examine our norms and behaviour around laughter, both in its presence and its absence. Understanding the politics of laughter demands a more nuanced approach.

Overall, the vast majority of political theorizations of laughter share a flaw with the majority of the philosophies of laughter: they conflate laughter and humour, making it seem that the two always accompany each other. Although political theorists are more likely to take into account the "laughter of the oppressed" (as Bussie puts it), they still place the emphasis on humour rather than laughter. That is, many scholars seem to see laughter as a by-product or telling sign of ridicule, assuming that it is ridicule that does the political work.

Laughing like a girl: laughter and gender[9]

One reason for investigating laughter as a site for feminist resistance is that the norms and discipline around laughter are drastically gendered. I believe that part of being a certain gendered subject means laughing both at certain times and in certain ways. That is, the times when male and female subjects are permitted or required to laugh differ**.** There is a sociological and psychological literature on these differences that, broadly speaking, defends

[9] My thanks to Chloë Taylor for suggesting this excellent title.

the following conclusions: women laugh more often than men, and more often at men's jokes, though never at men themselves; men find women more attractive the more they laugh; and while women laugh with a higher-pitched voice than men, men emit more grunts (Bachorowski, Smoski, & Owren 2001; Bressler & Balshine 2006; Grammer and Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1990; Provine 1993, 2000).

Psychologist John Provine (2000) found that in conversation, men laughed the least when speaking to an audience, and that overall, females laughed more often than males. He speculates that laughter might "be performed by a subservient individual, most often a female, as a vocal display of compliance, subordination, or solidarity with a more dominant group member" (29). While Provine's findings are helpful —if not described sensitively—he doesn't explain the nuances of gender, power, and laughter that underlie these discrepancies. In another study, Jo-Anne Bachorowski, Moria J. Smoski, and Michael J. Owren (2001) found that the laughs of women most often fell into giggles, while men snorted or grunted. The type of noise and volume of noise emitted in laughter can be analyzed in terms of gender performance expectations: the *Stirring Trouble International Blog* published a (now cached) post titled "A Warning to Some Women: You Aren't that Beautiful To Laugh That Loud [sic]" (2011), indicating that a woman's loud laugh is only acceptable if she compensates by excelling at meeting other norms of femininity.[10]

In fact, these gendered laughter norms are strongly ingrained in 'Western' society. For example, how often someone laughs impacts their heterosexual desirability. Grammer and Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1990) found that "when women and men engaged in natural conversation, the extent to which a woman laughed during the conversation was predictive of both her interest in dating the man and the man's interest in dating her" (qtd. in Bressler & Balshine

[10] This echoes two episodes of *Seinfeld,* where Jerry dates and subsequently breaks up with a woman with a loud, persistent, 'funny' laugh, which they describe as "like Elmer Fudd sitting on a juicer" (*Seinfeld* 1992a, 1992b).

2006, 37). We should not, I believe, view these gendered differences as essential reflections of fixed sex or gender categories. Instead, these differences constitute contingent ways of disciplining and maintaining gendered subjecthood.

I argue that the norms around laughter, and their government through discipline, are philosophically significant. Sandra Bartky theorizes a "modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine" and explains how it is produced by discipline in her paper "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" (1988). A major part of this modality is its gestures and postures, which focus upon women taking up less space, making their bodies as small as possible (67). Furthermore, Bartky states, "a woman must not allow her arms and legs to flail about in all directions; she must try to manage her movement" (69). This modality of embodiment is kept up through disciplinary tactics. Iris Marion Young (1980) also provides a phenomenology that highlights the restriction of bodily movement in women: she argues that there is not only a way of throwing like a girl, but a "typical style of running like a girl, climbing like a girl, swinging like a girl, hitting like a girl" (143). I would add that there is also a distinctive way of *laughing like a girl.* Although Young primarily discusses goal-based actions and movements, her observation that women's "bodies [often] project an aim to be enacted, but at the same time stiffen against the performance of the task" applies well to the case of laughter (147). For example, there is a clearly gendered difference between the 'giggle' and the 'guffaw', as well as between laughing with a stiff body or slapping one's knee.

I assert that these bodily restrictions around laughter are linked to the perceived rationality of subjects. Men, despite (or due to) being stereotyped as more rational, are permitted to involve their whole body in a burst of laughter. But women, and other subjects who have been stereotyped as more 'bodily' and less rational, are often expected to cover their mouths and restrain their limbs, without laughing too loudly. In making this case, I

parallel Susan Bordo's argument in *Unbearable Weight* (2003), where she states that because women are stigmatized as more irrational, they need to counter it by showing restraint over eating, while men are stereotyped as rational and can therefore consume with gusto. Similarly, I think that women might have to laugh in a more restrained way because of their historical stereotyping as irrational subjects. However, Bartky and Young have been charged with over-generalizing and homogenizing women. In contrast, I want to think through the multiple archetypes of femininity that exist throughout my examples in this chapter and the next.

My second reason for investigating laughter as a site of feminist resistance is that breaking norms of laughter has a disruptive potential: whether it be by laughing un/intentionally when one "ought not to", or by refusing to laugh and thus making jokes fall flat. In many cases, laughter can disrupt the institutions and disciplinary mechanisms that Foucault makes explicit in his genealogies. One of his paradigm examples of disciplinary institutions is military training. In this context, we might look at a story from Sun Tzu's *Art of War,* where King Wu sends his 180 wives to be trained as soldiers by Sun Tzu:

> Sun Tzu ordered 'right turn.' In response, the women burst out in laughter […]. He then repeated the explanations several times. This time he ordered the drums to signal 'left turn,' and again the women burst into laughter […]. He immediately ordered the women who were at the head of the two companies to be beheaded. (Michealson 2010, xii-xiii)

With two new leaders, the groups now performed their tasks perfectly and in silence. The traditional moral of the story is, according to Sun-Tzu, that if instructions are clear and soldiers disobey, it is the officers' fault (xiii). It is often interpreted to be placing emphasis on military discipline, or on the necessity of punishment for obedience.

However, in Hélène Cixous' brief analysis of the story, she states:

> Women have no choice other than to be decapitated, and in any case the moral is that if they don't actually lose their heads by the sword, *they only keep them on condition that they lose them* - lose them, that is, to complete silence, turned into automatons. […] It's a question of submitting feminine disorder, its laughter, its inability to take the drumbeats seriously, to the threat of decapitation. (1981, 42-3)

My own interpretation and conclusions follow Cixous. This story shows us the power of laughter in the hands of women – it can prevent the obedience and efficiency of an army. But it also shows the risks that come with laughing - sanctions that may border on death. This warning echoes some of the gendered norms around laughter which I just highlighted. It is not male trainees who laugh, but disobedient concubines. Furthermore, these women were not only women, but concubines: submissive to the General sexually as well as disciplined in their behaviour. From reading this tale, it seems that a concubine who defies orders (and others who join her) is more dangerous and more blameworthy than a soldier who does. Otherwise, why wouldn't this story have been told of distracted and chattering male soldiers? These women require training to become soldiers, but they are already in a submissive social position, always under the hypothetical threat of violence.

Purposefully or intentionally laughing can also be powerful and unsettling. For an example of this, I turn to journalist Marina Hyde's discussion of the period following Nelson Mandela's death. She advocates that readers "roar with laughter ourselves at all the rightwing Mandela-venerators crawling out of the woodwork to weave themselves into his achievements" (2013). Politicians such as David Cameron and George W. Bush were among those celebrating him as a hero despite decrying him as a terrorist during his lifetime. In this case, laughter – our own – acts not only as a way to disarm opponents, but as a way to point out the hypocrisy of others. Hyde states: "You have to laugh — mostly because that is probably what Mandela would have done. How often photos showed him roaring with laughter next to fawning leaders or dignitaries or whoever wanted a piece of him that day" (Hyde 2013).

Mandela's laughter and humour seem famous. In 2013 CNN and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, among others, posted lists of his funniest moments on their websites (Curnow 2013; Ricketts 2013). Kenneth Mullinax, former congressional staffer,

states: “[Mandela] had an incredible laugh that resonated throughout the room” (Belanger 2013). Blake Bromley, journalist for the Huffington Post, says:

> [his] humor was not that of a person who told jokes. Nor was it the “good old boy” *bonhomie* of a backslapping politician. Instead, he had a unique ability to respond to any issue with wit and humor -- and while you were comfortably laughing -- inject some observation or statement that instantly transformed that humor into a searing and sobering challenge. (2013)

What are we to make of Mandela’s laughter? One way of analyzing it is to see his laughter as disruptive. When he would erupt with laughter or provoke the laughter of others, it broke apart the pomp and circumstance, the air of gravity of diplomatic politics. A friend pointed out to me that his laughter almost undoubtedly interrupted the whiteness of the political space around him: gender is far from the only axis of oppression that influences, and is influenced by, our laughter behaviours. The laughter of the man who urged us to “tread softly, breathe peacefully, [and] laugh hysterically”, and our laughter in tribute to him, suggest we can laugh to challenge cemented assumptions and practices of politics, not only to rebuff and shock interlocutors (ANDA Adventures 2013).

Foucauldian Laughter

It is in part because of its disruptive potential, as manifested in Mandela’s case, that I argue laughter is not only a feminist issue, but also a *Foucauldian* feminist issue. Laughter is not a concept in the foreground of Foucault’s work, unlike genealogy, discipline, normalization, madness, or sexuality. He does, however, mention laughter in several places − even claiming that it guided his writing of “Lives of Infamous Men” (1994). I propose that laughter for Foucault plays the role of an interrupter, which can both break apart discourses and emerge from the cracks within them. He famously states that his writing of *The Order of Things* (1970) “first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought − our thought, the thought that

bears the stamp of our age and our geography" (xv). He also sometimes responded to interview questions with laughter (Foucault 1996, 378-81). For example, Judith Butler (1990) cites an interview where Foucault responded to a divisive, binary question about male and female homosexuality by laughing and responding, "All I can do is explode with laughter" (139). She concludes: "Foucault, then, seems to laugh precisely because the question instates the very binary that he seeks to displace" (140). Foucault also seems to have believed that laughter can signal a weakness or breakdown: some "discourses of truth […] provoke laughter and have the institutional power to kill" (2003, 6).

Several Foucauldian theorists have made note of laughter, but none in detail. Chloë Taylor (2009) holds that many of Foucault's non-philosophical publications (such as court documents and medical records) function to create laughter. Furthermore, she argues that "[t]his is important because the work of discipline also works at the level of the body and thus can be undone only through the body, through shifts in its pleasures and affects and practices, and not merely through the acceptance or examination of philosophical ideas" (135). Ladelle McWhorter (1999) likens genealogy to mocking "the most sacred of truths" until we dissolve into "peals of laughter" (57), while Michel de Certeau (1986) describes it as witnessing "history laughing at [domains of knowledge]" (195). Butler identifies a need for laughter in her preface to *Gender Trouble* (1990): *"*laughter in the face of serious categories [such as the medicalization of women's bodies] is indispensable for feminism" (xxviii).

I suggest that laughter, as presented in these quotes, is not mere metaphor, but a potential for disruption that is present in our material bodies. A Foucauldian laugh is not the polite or forced 'fake' laugh, but that which emerges involuntarily and without prior reflection from the cracks within regimes of truth and relations of power. I propose that Foucauldian laughter is a crucial form of resistance, though of course it is "never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault 1990, 95). In my next chapter, I will argue that

changing the habits of our bodies *to laugh* at certain moments, and to refrain from laughing, also has a Foucauldian dimension.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to motivate laughter as one particular mode of feminist and Foucauldian resistance that feminists might mobilize. Beginning by examining discussions of laughter in philosophy and political theory, I argued that both disciplines largely conflate humour with laughter, and spend little time looking at the act of laughter itself. I then demonstrated the importance of laughter for feminism by exploring empirical research around gendered laughter and analyzing it through the works of Bartky and Young. As well, I tried to show the importance of laughter to Foucauldians by showing the potential of laughter for shattering limits, inspired by mentions of laughing in the texts of Foucault and his followers. This chapter raises the issue of *how* one can break these norms around laughter, which I have demonstrated through my examples, and of *what effects* these changes to laughter norms might have on normalization's work of gendering and rationalizing subjects. I will address these questions in my next chapter.

Chapter Four: Practices of Laughter and Unlaughter

In my previous chapter, I established some reasons to consider laughter as a mode of feminist resistance, I illustrated several norms around laughter, and I suggested that laughter should be viewed independently of humour. Building upon those arguments, this chapter offers some potential answers to the question: *How can one implement feminist-Foucauldian laughter as a micro-practice of resistance?* Since on a Foucauldian framework resistance can occur unconsciously or unintentionally, feminist-Foucauldian practices of laughter need not be consciously applied nor learnt explicitly. However, they may be. You can begin self-consciously changing your habits, until they are eventually incorporated into all of your (unconscious) actions.

In this chapter, I will give several suggestions for feminist-Foucauldian practices of laughter. When we change our laughter practices, we change not only the gendered norms associated with laughing, but also the dismissal of anything 'irrational' as apolitical. I hope to show that undertaking laughter differently can expose assumptions about rationality and gender, proving their contingency. These practices also constitute an alternative to Huffer's proposals for feminist resistance, giving us a more concrete starting point for resisting norms of rationality. Still, the practices I suggest are initial sketches: because laughter practices are contingent, resistant practices will differ greatly across contexts.

I begin by outlining a first category of practices: 'productive' laughter. This applies both to not suppressing laughter, and to intentionally forcing laughter. For example, a woman might let herself go in a full-bodied fit of laughter that exceeds socially required polite laughter. Second, in certain cases refusing to laugh, which I will call *unlaughing,* can also function as a mode of feminist resistance. The feminist killjoy stereotype – the view that feminists have no sense of humour or cannot 'take a joke' – persists in part because these

practices of unlaughter have already been taken up. I will argue that certain kinds of laughter and unlaughter can count as political action because of the disciplinary norms around women's laughter being always polite, and because of the role these norms play in constituting gender.

To strengthen the case for my proposed practices as resistant and transformative, I relate laughter back to two key Foucauldian philosophical concepts: transgression and *assujettissement*. I will argue that changing our laughter practices can fundamentally change our subjectivities. Finally, I propose that changing our laughing practices can also become a part of our self-understanding and a site for group mobilization. I examine two politicized examples of contagious laughter and Jacqueline A. Bussie's analysis of literary slave laughter through the lens of Ladelle McWhorter's argument that individuals need not share fixed, inherent, intrinsic, or essential identities in order to form a political community. Instead, having shared undertakings, passions, or goals – including laughter practices – can help to create new identities and communities.

In proposing some practices of laughter, I am not suggesting that humans (or women) have an internal, intuitive grammar of laughter that was perverted by sexism. Many scholars take an evolutionary approach to laughter, arguing not only that it gives us social advantages but that humans possess this capacity from birth (see Caron 2002; Gervais & Wilson 2005). As I have shown, there is also evidence that what makes us laugh varies across location, gender, class, race, etc. The social practices of laughter seem to be, as Billig (2005) holds, something "learnt and taught" (177). This brings hope that they can be unlearned and untaught, and that new practices can be learnt and taught in their place. My own theory and praxis, I hope, are not asserting any 'right' and 'wrong' times to laugh, but looking at *what our laughter means in certain situations or scenarios*, *and changing its meaning through using it differently.*

Why feminist laughter?

Feminists are often thought to be humourless, or named 'killjoys' because we point out sexism, racism, and other systematic oppressions: in particular, if we call out jokes that employ these tactics. As a result, "however she speaks, the feminist is usually the one who is viewed as 'causing the argument', who is disturbing the fragility of peace", who is angry, and who upsets others (Ahmed 65). The condemnation of the killjoy both places a weighty burden upon self-proclaimed feminists (since any laughter or unlaughter relates back to the 'killjoy' stereotype) and homogenizes the group, casting 'the feminist' herself as a reified, uniform figure. Indian journalist and activist Nisha Susan (2013) points out this paradox about feminist laughter in her article "So you thought feminists don't laugh?":

> The reason why many people would like feminists to laugh is not the same reasons feminists laugh. Other people would like feminists to laugh so they are easier to like. They particularly would like women to laugh along when unfunny things are said so that they give others permission to continue being thoughtless jackasses.

In brief, the 'killjoy' stereotype is built upon a specific assumption: not that feminists don't laugh, but that they don't laugh *at the 'right' or 'normal' things.* To illustrate this I will give a brief example. The call-out of a feminist killjoy might read like this: Leslie makes a 'dumb blonde' joke, and implores Aaliyah, a self-proclaimed feminist, to laugh along with them. What Leslie means when they ask Aaliyah to laugh is, first, *not* that Aaliyah laugh at or mock Leslie: were she to do so, it would be an insult. Instead, Leslie asks that Aaliyah take part in the shared sexist understanding that makes dumb blonde jokes funny– to, in a sense, laugh at a stereotype of women. There are many variations on this scenario: Leslie might be asking Aaliyah to join them in laughing at women of colour, queer women, or at other members of marginalized groups. If Aaliyah refuses to laugh, she affronts Leslie on several grounds. Her not-laughing, her stubborn opposition to laugh-with Leslie, denies building a

bond with Leslie, and so refuses to align herself with them against others. So the desired laughter has a distinct direction or object: were Aaliyah to point and laugh *at* Leslie, they would certainly still label Aaliyah a killjoy.

This example, I think, illustrates a common phenomenon and helps us to see the double-bind of feminist laughter. The killjoy stereotype emerges because of the peculiar kinds of requirements that are made of feminists, both to laugh (at certain individuals and our selves) and not to laugh (at those who make the call). Because this call both demands some laughter and prohibits other laughter, resisting normalization will mean fighting on two sides: laughter and unlaughter. The regulation of women's laughter as polite, restrained, and based in concern-for-others (particularly men) comes out of an idealized femininity, which is also white, heterosexual, bourgeois, and cissexual. As a result, the sexist demands that restrict and constrain laughter are variegated and work differently across intersections and among individuals: it might be enforced differently for an Asian woman stereotyped as submissive, a trans woman asked to 'prove' her identity, or a Muslim woman seen as in need of 'Western' liberation. These differing feminine ideals will change both how an individual takes up laughter practices and how others react.

Laughing, differently

> "At core, men are afraid women will laugh at them, while at core, women are afraid men will kill them." – Gavin DeBecker*, The Gift of Fear* (77)

Since women's laughter is often either prohibited or strictly regulated in its form, and since these regulations are sustained by disciplinary and normalizing regimes, I suggest that many women can enact political resistance by laughing. There are many forms that this could take. First, when individuals explicitly upholding sexist norms present their own oppression as a tragedy, we can turn the tables by laughing *at* them. This can be done face-to-face or

through other mediums. For example, the *LOL @ MRA* blog states it is "dedicated to laughing at the ridiculous things 'Men's Rights Activists' say and believe" (n.d.). Likewise, one of my friends remarks she "once laughed in the face of a philosopher who told [her] that he always wondered what sex with a feminist would be like": his very wondering implies an inability to dissociate any woman from being a sexual object, and to dissociate feminism from sex-negativity. Nisha Susan (2013) says these types of examples fit the "can't-believe-you're-for-real laugh" as well as the "you've-never-read-anything laugh".

Laughter can also be used to deflect possible sexual assault and harassment. Susan speaks of the "warning laugh", which can be used, as in her example, against men who expose themselves or grope others in public. Similarly, an academic mentioned to me that the tactic of laughing at an offender was taught to her a strategy for public humiliation and recruiting bystanders: mocking is a powerful way to dissuade someone. A third occasion where one might practice feminist laughter productively is as a response to a sexist or offensive joke. For example, laughing hyperbolically, or making it clear that your laughter is forced, unamused, or sarcastic might be effective in interrupting the norms around joke-telling, where normally individuals would remain silent or nervously laugh. If you make it clear that you are laughing *at* the speaker of the joke, this runs into the use of laughter as mocking. However, this strategy is tricky: if it is not explicitly hyperbolic, it runs the risks of being taken as complicit laughter. These three examples are kinds of laughter that *discipline* the offender, not only by denying their 'superiority', but by taking advantage of the possibilities of one's own body while simultaneously pointing out to the other person the contingency of their own actions. Laughing in these cases constitutes a non-discursive reaction or refusal to be manipulated by the other.

Women can also resist discipline by laughing differently: not changing *when* we laugh, but *how* we laugh. By allowing our bodies and voices to have more free rein during laughter,

we can counteract many of the pressures that Bartky (1988) and Young (1980) identified. Whereas "feminine existence lives space as *enclosed* or confining", laughter can be a way of taking up space: either physically by moving your limbs or by projecting your voice loudly across the space (Young 1980, 149). For example, I often have the experience of accidentally laughing too loudly and attracting the attention of a room: in friendly environments, classmates have told me that my laugh is "unique" and "like no one else's". Yet, since I have been disciplined to think this is unfeminine and abnormal, it is constant and political work for me to refrain from apologizing, becoming embarrassed, or preventing my laughter in the first place. I propose that allowing yourself to laugh in non-gender-conforming ways, or doing so intentionally, makes others aware of the contingency of norms like laughing quietly and avoiding irrationality. If women snort while laughing, or slap their knees, it is already challenging norms: even more so if we aren't embarrassed. In brief, two initial ways that we might take up feminist practices of laughter are (i) laughing more often when social cues (especially gendered ones) wish we would refrain and (ii) by changing the comportment with which we laugh.

Unlaughing

However, simply increasing the number of times one laughs is not necessarily enough to constitute a feminist practice of laughter. There are political reasons why my investigation must not end with laughter alone. Our society permits and encourages laughter at sexist, racist, or ableist jokes, and as I suggested in the last chapter, these norms are harmful: when we laugh at these sorts of jokes, we implicitly reinforce the social order and status quo (Billig 2005, 211; Popa & Tsakona 2011). In the mouths of the sexist and heterosexist majority, laughter can work to maintain oppression rather than dismiss it. For example, Maria do Mar Pereira documents the common ridicule of and laughing at women's and gender studies

(WGS) approaches and scholars by other scholars within the academy in her article "Dangerous laughter: the mocking of Gender Studies in academia" (2013). She states that WGS is commonly presented as "risible [i.e. laughable], something that the students should not take too seriously, in contrast to […] other approaches mentioned, all of them presented in a balanced, admiring and non-mocking tone". This discourse and the laughing that accompanies it are normalizing and disciplinary, and function to keep gender studies at the margins, distancing it from other disciplines. In order to dispel this use of laughter *as normalizing and disciplinary*, I contend that we need to exercise *unlaughter* in situations where we are faced with what I will call compulsory laughter.

Women's social discipline, I contend, includes moments of compulsory laughter. To flesh out the concept of compulsory laughter and to explore its political valence, I draw upon an argument Sara Ahmed makes in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010). In her chapter "Feminist Killjoys", Ahmed argues that women are held to a specific and higher standard of performing happiness than their male counterparts. What she calls "compulsory happiness" does not express one's own delight or joy; rather, it is a duty a woman bears to others, to perform her happiness in order to make them happy.

For example, regarding the 'happy housewife' image, Ahmed states that "happiness is not so much what the housewife has but what she does: h*er duty is to generate happiness by the very act of embracing this image*" (53). She traces the roots of the idea of women generating happiness back to the training of Sophie in Rousseau's *Emile.* As Sophie's case makes clear, "any deviation from gender roles in terms of women being trained to make men happy is a deviation from the happiness of all" (55). A woman *must* appear happy to ensure the happiness of those around her: parents, spouse, and children. This compulsory happiness, however, is a compulsory *performance*; even if a woman does not feel happiness (as affect or emotion), she must manifest it. For Ahmed, the compulsory aspect of happiness makes it a

political imperative that we "kill joy", which may paradoxically allow us to laugh among ourselves:

> We can talk about being willful subjects, feminist killjoys, angry black women; we can claim those figures back; we can talk about those conversations we have had at dinner tables or in seminars or meetings. We can laugh in recognition of the familiarity of inhabiting that place, even if we do not inhabit the same place (and we do not). (Ahmed 2010, 87)

Just as Ahmed argues that women are held to a specific standard of performing compulsory happiness in 'Western' society, I believe that many women are also compelled to laugh (in a certain way) in many situations. Furthermore, this laughter constitutes a form of gendering, normalizing the idea of a woman who cares more for others than for herself. In brief, the role of a woman's compulsory laughter is parallel to that of her compulsory happiness. That is, just as the ideal woman must perform happiness to ensure the happiness of those around her, she should also laugh in order to facilitate the laughter of those around her. If she refrains from laughing, she lets others down. Compulsory laughter has at least one other function: it not only projects happiness by pleasing others, but maintains and upholds the image of a woman as hyper-polite, subservient, and docile. This occurs not only to please men, but to please other women: for example, a female employer might expect her nanny or maid to laugh along with her. In complying, the nanny or maid would both 'prove' her affective bond to the employer and 'prove' her own satisfaction in her job. A woman might likewise laugh to make her children or coworkers happy, to 'keep up appearances'.

Of course, these are constructions of ideal femininity that no one can completely fulfill. However, an exploration of compulsory laughter might help to explain the sociological findings that women laugh much more often than men (Provine 2000). To illustrate how compulsory laughter works, and what norms it upholds, I will briefly consider some situations where women are compelled to laugh in order to put others at ease. Following these

examples, I will explore the possibility of withdrawing laughter, or unlaughing, to resist normalization and discipline.

Examples of compulsory laughter, like compulsory happiness, are present in our daily lives. First, a woman might be expected to laugh when someone with power over her makes a joke (especially if that person is a man). Furthermore, such a laugh must not be *at* the joke-teller, but in appreciation of his joke. The demand for laughter applies not only to bad puns, but to racist, sexist, or otherwise offensive jokes: whether they be explicitly offensive or 'ironic' or 'hipster sexism', "when people who should 'know better'—progressive people with possible college degrees who are maybe environmentally conscious and probably liberal and might even identify as feminists—are ironically sexist" (K. Wallace 2012). In this case, the normative ideal of femininity asks a woman to laugh nonetheless, even if it is fake. Second, women are frequently asked to laugh at their selves. This downplaying of one's own goals, projects, achievements, bodies and ideas by treating them as "risible" de-legitimizes these phenomena. This demand or social pressure for a woman to laugh at herself might increase if she is racialized, sexualized, or in a work environment with very few successful women. Third, women are often asked to laugh in response to sexist offenses, especially microaggressions such as street harassment ("cat-calling"). Street harassment doesn't target women homogeneously: for example, the cat-calls will differ according to a woman's race and gender expression. Although laughing it off can be an effective mode of resistance for certain individuals, women are often *instructed* to "laugh it off" rather than challenge systemic problems. All three of these examples show that in general, compulsory laughter is a way of instructing women on how to conduct themselves. When this is directed toward women of a marginalized group that has been historically forced into servitude or slavery, it cuts even deeper. These three situations are tangled up in the demand to keep others laughing and to maintain feminine norms of (white, heterosexual) politeness.

In response to such compulsory laughter I suggest we can exercise unlaughter. Unlaughter is not only the absence of laughter - it can take several forms. First, one might perform unlaughter by simply refraining from laughter, in silence. This silence can be very noticeable in some cases, such as one-on-one conversations or interviews. In other situations, silence might communicate complicity, implying that one is willing neither to endorse certain objects as 'laughable' nor to challenge those who claim they are so. Or, in a loud and noisy crowd, your own silence might be overlooked due to the many other peals of laughter. Sometimes it is necessary to do more not laugh: we need to *point out our own lack of laughter verbally.* bell hooks (1992) gives a striking example of this while discussing the spectacle made of black gay male drag ball culture at a viewing of *Paris is Burning* (1990). She found herself:

> disturbed by the extent to which white folks around us were 'entertained' and 'pleasured' by scenes we viewed as sad and at times tragic. Often individuals laughed at personal testimony about hardship, pain, loneliness. Several times I yelled out in the dark: 'What is so funny about this scene? Why are you laughing?' The laughter was never innocent. (154)

In hooks' case, this unlaughter not only defied norms of polite femininity, but possibly resulted in the white crowd around her applying the "angry black woman" stereotype: there are risks with unlaughing.

As well as speaking up and giving reasons why others should not be laughing, non-linguistic unlaughter can also be effective, such as glaring icily at the laughers. Tatyana Fazlalizadeh created a series of posters entitled "Stop Telling Women to Smile" (n.d.), consisting of portraits of victims of street harassment. Fazlalidzadeh's posters feature mainly women of colour, acknowledging the differing forms of street harassment that are plied against them. Alternatively, one might take up the smile, so often seen as a sign of female subservience, and perform it to its parodic limits to interrupt norms of response to humour.

Laughter and Self-Transformation

So far, I have outlined several practices of feminist laughter and unlaughter, and suggested ways in which they are anti-normalizing. Practices of feminist laughter and unlaughter can be politically significant even when they do not occur in an explicitly political context, and adopting them can influence many facets of our lives, including our selves. I will argue first that laughter has a significant relation to the notion of transgression, both as an expression of limit experience and as a form of critique. Second, I will propose that taking up these feminist practices of laughter can constitute an *askesis*, or a technology of the self, as part of a care of the self. These are two ways to consider the effects that laughing differently has on our subjectivities.

We can relate laughter to Foucauldian transgression in at least two initial ways. First, laughter might *emerge from or express* a limit experience. The idea of laughter as occurring when the limits of discursivity or intelligibility are pushed and crumble resonates with the everyday tendency to laugh when we "don't know what to say". Recall that Jacqueline Bussie (2007) argues that the literary characters in the works of Morrison, Endo, and Wiesel – slaves, Japanese Christians, and Holocaust victims – laugh because they *cannot* express their experience otherwise, but cannot leave it unexpressed (33, 36). Such extreme suffering, though more 'negative' than most Foucauldian examples of limit experience, seems to exist on the edge of or outside of discourse: Bussie proposes that ethical laughter both is and emerges from a "rupture of language" (32). Laughing might then be the only way of making sense or meaning out of shattering experiences.

In Bussie's examples, the laughter that expresses a limit experience is liberating, although it need not be so. For example, psychiatrist D.N. Mendhekar reported on the case of a teenage girl in New Delhi who had "a history of laughing without reason, but on detail evaluation [sic], it was found that her laughing was an irrational and egodystonic

phenomenon" (2004, 81). The girl was embarrassed by her laughter, and tried to suppress it, but due to fits happening 7-8 times daily she had stopped attending classes. The psychiatrist interpreted her case as "an obsessive-compulsive phenomenon, having more social consequences than only personal distress, [and as] also associated with childhood sexual abuse" (83). He traced the laughter back to her past obsessive behaviour as a child, and to her father's constant smiling (83). Although this analysis does recognize social factors as an effect of the laughter, it still neglects the possibility of the social sphere as a possible cause of pathology. Childhood sexual abuse intersects with gender oppression, and laughing did not seem to empower her. Nonetheless, I think it may have been political: we can interpret this laughter as an extra-linguistic, perhaps hysterical, symptom that arose when the patient found herself unable to use conventional communication to express her own experiences. We could say that she has undergone a "limit experience" which shattered her subjectivity. This resulted in her experience as a sex-abuse victim is not able to be adequately expressed in language or discourse. Laughter becomes a way to express a truth without falling into normalizing discourse.

On the other hand, laughter and unlaughter might both be part of a project of transgression through critique. If we seek a "limit attitude" that is exercised not only in philosophical writing but in everyday actions, unlaughing can be a way of pointing out the requirements and limits of our own historical present. These include the demand for compulsory laughter, the norms around comportment in laughter, and oppressive assumptions in humour. Actively laughing can also be a way of invoking critique: it can constitute a transgression that *exposes* the limits of rationality (and its insufficiency) while also reminding reason of its contingent, embodied form. By laughing in a philosophical debate, for example, one might bring an idealized view of political communication back to impure, embodied reality.

In Chapter Two, I outlined how the Foucauldian self is made through the double-sided process of subjection and enabling known as *assujettissement.* Furthermore, I suggested that we can find ways of making our selves that are less normalizing and do not result in docility. In *History of Sexuality volume 3: The Care of the Self* (1984), Foucault demonstrates the ethical potential of self-transformation through the example of the "care of the self": practices (and arguably a way of life) performed in ancient Greece. He argues that whereas today we think about the self as something to know and/or discover, the ancient Greeks saw the self as something developed through caring for it.[11] This care often involved governance, strict regimens, or training, around aspects of life such as sexual activity, diet, and physical exercise. It could involve detailed measurements, but fell into the category of "an art" rather than normalization.

A regimen of care of the self is made up of *askeses,* or technologies of the self, actions that:

> permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.
> (Foucault 1988, 18)

For example, one ancient *askesis* that Foucault explores is *parrhesia* (frank speech), a form of truth-telling that changes your self-relation: you come to see yourself as one who speaks the truth, rather than being defined in terms of your status. Dianna Taylor (2013) explains how parrhesia differs radically from confessional practices of truth-telling: in *parrhesia* "access to the truth entails exercising freedom [as a speaking subject] and doing so, moreover, in ways that both generate and promote confrontation with uncertainty and risk" (95). Because care of the self required considerable free time and resources, in ancient Greece it was only high-class men who could truly 'cultivate' their selves at the time. Women, slaves,

[11] Although not all *assujettissement* is care of the self, all care of the self is a mode of *assujettissement.* This means that we never reach an end-point: there isn't a "final self" that can be made or achieved.

and children did not have the privilege to care for themselves. Foucault acknowledged this and did not suggest we imitate the Greeks, whose sexual ethics he found "quite disgusting" (1983, 258). Today, many Foucauldians are searching for alternative *askeses*, taking *parrhesia* and dietetics as models (see for example Heyes 2007; Taylor & Vintges 2004).

Changing our practices of laughter, I argue, can be a freeing *askesis* for feminized (and other abnormal) subjects. The practices of laughter and unlaughter upon which I have focused can be done as part of ongoing self-transformation. Because technologies of the self can be micro-practices, seemingly tiny and mundane changes (it is in their repetition that they constitute a self), changing our behaviour in terms of laughter can constitute an ethical project. For example, changing the way we laugh in an open and experimental manner**,** as I suggested earlier, loosens the grip of normalization on our bodies. If we use our discipline to change our habits of laughter, undoing the norms around gender and displays of rationality, this might eventually lead to our unconscious laughter becoming more unpredictable.

Askeses change your self-relation, and so laughing differently changes your self-relation because it opens you up to new possibilities of behaviour and action. Furthermore, this interaction of other-relation and self-relation is symmetrical: changing our relation to others changes our selves, and changing our self-relation changes our relations with others. However, Ladelle McWhorter has pointed out that technologies of the self must sometimes seize and use *technologies of power*, exercising power upon others in order to succeed. That is, we can (and often need to) engage in practices of *governmentality:* "strategies for influencing others while (and as a part of the practice of) caring for one's self" (211). In many cases of unlaughter, as well as in cases of the oppressed using mocking laughter, the 'goal' is precisely to influence others. So feminist laughter practices can be a mode of governmentality: even in cases when we unintentionally laugh hysterically in front of others,

we have an effect upon them. At the same time, these practices are part of a care of the self, because they make you into a certain sort of person.

In addition, changing laughter practices challenges essentialist models of sex and gender. As such, we can view it as an everyday form of 'genderfucking' that goes beyond our heteronormative binaries of masculinity and femininity, of male and female. When we do so, we change our gendered self-relation (and so destabilize our gendered identity), but also reveal to others that they too can participate in these subversions. Thus feminist laughter practices can be seen as practices intimately involved with the care of the self, as *askeses*, as technologies of the self. However, as suggested above, my practices of laughter change others around me. Since power works not only on the individual but on the population, our resistance might also work on both levels.

Laughing-with: Group Resistance

Like many politically resistant tactics, although laughter practices can be changed on an individual level, they can also be done collectively. My own laughter practices change me, but they also change others. In this section, I will briefly discuss the importance of laughing together, under two main headings: contagious laughter and the facilitation of new community identities. The contagious or infectious possibilities of laughter, especially hysterical laughter, are common knowledge, yet the extent to which these laughs can be disruptive is under-theorized and de-politicized. For example, *LaughterYoga.org* (n.d.), like many laughter yoga and laughter therapy organizations, sees itself as a non-political cultivator of mental, physical, and spiritual health. However, as I have shown, much laughter is political and can be put to political uses. Against readings that see all contagious laughter as a quirky anomaly, I will use two examples to show that contagious laughter can have both political causes and political effects.

In 1962, an epidemic of contagious laughter among teenage girls at a mission-run school in Tanganyika (modern-day Tanzania) stymied disciplinary institutions and surveillance (Rankin & Philip 1963). It began at the Kashasha boarding school for girls, where 95 of the 159 students had "attacks of laughing and crying", causing the school to close in March, reopen in May, and close again in June when the epidemic resurfaced (Rankin & Philip, 167). Students sent home from the school apparently gave the laughter disease to others in their villages, primarily other children and young adults. Individual cases lasted an average of 7 days. Although many contemporary accounts of the laughter epidemic skew the details, we know that in total 14 schools were shut down and 1000 individuals were "infected" (Bartholomew 2001, 52).

In my view, this case is notable for the immense impact of laughter. It "interrupted the normal life of the community for six months"; some reports claim as many as 30 months (Rankin & Philip, 167; Hempelmann, 53). In May of 1963, Rankin and Philip noted that "[a]t the time of writing this paper the disease is spreading to other villages, the education of the children is being seriously interfered with and there is considerable fear among the village communities" (168). Their medical exams found no abnormal physical signs, no tremors or lesions, and no toxins. The cause of the outbreaks is now assumed to be mass psychogenic illness. Linguist Christian F. Hempelmann's account (2007) speculates that it was caused by a conglomeration of "sociocultural stress": Tanganyika became independent in December 1961, and the originating schools were runs by missions and had been recently racially de-segregated when the epidemic broke out (62-3). He states that the school was "a point of friction and transition where the students from the traditional tribal society [were] confronted with Western methods of instruction, educational expectations, and religious-moral values" (62). I suggest that the laughter's resistance to clear clinical diagnosis and its social impact of closing schools constitute massive interruptions of disciplinary mechanisms: medicalization

and normalization through education. If we subscribe to Hempelmann's interpretation, it becomes obvious how infectious, contagious laughter can also be political.

Another example of the power of infectious laughter occurred in March of 2014. The Australian Parliament's Speaker, Bronwyn Bishop, remarked during Question Period that the Opposition Labor Party seemed "to have a new tactic of having an outburst of infectious laughter — which I suspect may become disorderly" (Wright 2014). MPs who were already laughing hysterically only laughed harder as she made her comment. Bishop ordered the Member named as culprit for starting the fits – Julie Collins – to exit, and later expelled several other Opposition party members. Whether or not this new political tactic was employed consciously, it seems to have taken up a large amount of Question Period, blocking the disciplinary emphasis on productivity and efficiency. These two cases of contagious laughter are vastly different, with different political, social, and racial contexts: Australia's parliament seems to be mostly made up of upper-class white people who are making ruling decisions, while the Tanganyikan girls were transitioning out of colonial law, and within a compulsory religious institution. However, both examples demonstrate the disruptive potential of laughter when it is performed by a large group: this leads me to suggest that contagious laughter can be used politically.

Contagious potential is not, though, the *only* salient characteristic of group laughter. I propose that paying attention to certain laughter practices can facilitate the creation of feminist or anti-sexist communities. In *Bodies and Pleasures* (1999), Ladelle McWhorter argues that communities need not be build around embracing fixed, inherent, intrinsic identities, but rather around shared interests. She notes that many groups in the United States have people unite around a pre-existing identity−for example, as lesbian, or as LGBTQ allies. In contrast, McWhorter contends that the group Virginians for Justice (of which she is a

member) emerged out of *shared interest* of supporting queer rights (94). Can we use laughter as a shared interest in a parallel manner?

I suggest that Jacqueline Bussie's proposal that a certain attitude regarding laughter can be helpful in creating new counter-identities forms an example of such community-building. In her examination of Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987), Bussie proposes that black laughter not only deconstructs the oppressive white consciousness, but makes room for community through "alternative black consciousness and identity creation" (2005, 128, 132). That is, whereas white society attempted to make slaves feel inferior, hopeless, and to respect "a divinely sanctioned white dominance", the character Baby Suggs "through laughter and dance, […] encourages the people to rediscover themselves as lovable, beautiful, and chosen" (132-33). Although this example and McWhorter's proposal might at first seem antithetical, the black community in *Beloved* seems to be creating a new identity, around their practices and interests, rather than relying on a pre-established, fixed identity. This fictional example of the generative and community-targeted potential of laughter provides us with at least one way of incorporating laughter into our communal anti-oppressive work.

Such communities can function, I believe, as what McWhorter calls *counter-networks* (1999, 207). A counter-network is the result of linking together individual moments of resistance: it becomes an "alternative power/knowledge network" that cultivates "new ways of understanding the world and of living" (207). One example that McWhorter provides is the consciousness-raising groups during the 1960s and 70s.[12] However, based on Morrison's description, we might also consider Bussie's creation of alternative black consciousness as a counter-network. For my purposes, the counter-network and the community built upon interests provide new ways to consider laughter. We can read the examples of the

[12] McWhorter also argues that counter-networks need not result from individuals physically, temporally, and personally meeting. Rather, counter-networks can emerge from "the linkage of events scattered through a lifetime or through history" (207).

Tanganyikan students, and maybe even the Australian opposition, as counter-networks. And this suggests we can build new communities and new identities by using laughter-as-resistance collectively. I have an interest in laughing differently, in changing my laughter practices, and others might as well. That being said, those who undertake laughter practices are not a homogenous group, but full of differences, like Virginians for Justice and African-American slaves. Creating new identities through our interests and practices – of which laughter is one – provides another way to talk about marginalized groups while critically interrogating the concepts of women, feminists, queers, racialized groups, etc.

These laughter practices, then, can emerge from conscious or unconscious collective opposition to normalization. Furthermore, they might form a basis for the construction of new groups and the creation of new meanings. In both the case of changing one's individual laughter practices and of joining others to laugh in ways that create new identities, the practices we undertake change our selves, our subjectivities, our *assujettissement* in politically relevant ways.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have illustrated several ways of constructing feminist practices of laughter as political resistance. I presented some examples of laughing differently, consisting of changing when we laugh and how we laugh. I suggested that in each of these cases, altering our behaviours around laughter − intentionally or unintentionally – can subvert norms of gender and of rationality. These practices have no guarantee of working on others: in fact, if they are transgressive there is no way to predict their effects (Dean 2012, 76). We might end up further medicalized, like the young woman in New Delhi; or we might close down the school, like the Tanganyikan girls. Nevertheless, laughing or unlaughing to interrupt the maintenance of the status quo and of norms of humour and politeness is a way of

using your body in a non-docile manner, and so blocking the machinery of discipline. Whereas one tool of discipline is the use of norms around humour and laughter, becoming an inefficient obstacle through unlaughter disrupts the normalizing process at hand.

I then proposed two ways in which the performance of new laughter practices affects identities. First, I looked back to the Foucauldian notion of *assujettissement,* and illustrated how at an individual level, laughing differently changes the constitution of our selves. Finally, I took up examples of contagious laughter and the work of Ladelle McWhorter and Jacqueline Bussie, to propose that collective laughter can not only be immensely disruptive and political in the immediate sense, but can also aid the creation of new communities that do not presuppose essential identities. That is, whereas Chapter Three focused on proving how and why laughter is a political issue, and a necessary complement to practical reason for political change, this chapter has been a speculative exploration of how we might take up laughter differently.

Many questions remain, but in my conclusion I will focus on questioning how laughter makes a difference to the problems with rationality with which I began. For example, where does my theory stand in relation to the debate between Amy Allen and Lynne Huffer? Does an exploration of laughter lead me to think differently about the relations between reason and unreason, or gender and reason? Can thinking through laughter as feminist resistance give us clues about other strategies?

Conclusion

This project initially grew out of my own personal worry about the attribution of irrationality to female and feminine subjects. The words *reasonable*, *unreasonable*, *rational*, and *irrational* have a normative pull: they make a moral judgement on whomever or whatever you are describing. Ascribing irrationality can be used to dismiss individuals from already-marginalized groups such as queer people, those who experience disability, racialized others, and women. I was confronted with the question: should we embrace reason as a capacity of all individuals, or reject reason because of its close association with masculinity? Although neither option was completely convincing to me, embracing irrationality held a certain allure. Surely, I thought, there is *something* right in viewing some aspects of hysteria or madness as political. My search for non-discursive modes of resistance is also what led me at first to Lynne Huffer's *Mad for Foucault* (2010).

This dilemma bothered me so much in the first place, and I found its proposed solutions so unsatisfying, in part because of the dismissal of irrationality. By this, I mean that in the literature defending rationality as a key capacity in politics, there seemed to be an underlying assumption that aspects of our lives that seem 'irrational' can have little potential for political use. In particular, philosophers often speak about politics as if it were a matter only of rational deliberation, linguistic exchange, and simply giving good enough arguments. But, I would suggest, neither politics nor philosophy itself is that cut-and-dry: that view is an idealization of how we act politically. On the other hand, many feminist critics of rationality acknowledge irrationality's political potential, but still accept that reason and unreason are a true dichotomy. Therefore I began my thesis grappling with this broader question of how a longstanding feminist dilemma about reason and gender has played out.

To narrow my focus, I looked at how it has been taken up by Amy Allen and Lynne Huffer. Maybe, I thought, I could strike a more successful intermediate third path between

Huffer's and Allen's proposals. Although both theorists work mainly within a Foucauldian feminist paradigm, they differ widely on the strategies they prescribe for feminist resistance. Whereas Allen accepts the impurity and danger of reason, she maintains that a rational critique of rationality is still our best and only bet. On the other hand, Lynne Huffer encourages readers to seek out moments of madness, while acknowledging that full-fledged madness often leaves one in a state of despair and non-agency. Neither of these pictures satisfied me. In particular, I argued, practical reason is insufficient for doing politics: not unnecessary, but not able to capture the whole political realm.

I then argued that feminist movements benefit from seeing power not as possessed, but through a Foucauldian lens, as diffuse and spread throughout society. I then argued that we need to rethink not only *what* we are resisting, but the concept of resistance itself. Instead of viewing resistance as only and always dialectical, we should view transgression as a viable and important option. Transgression fundamentally challenges the limits of intelligibility of our discourse instead of staying within its frames. Reconceptualising resistance as transgression broadens the range of political possibility, but also generates uncertainty: we can never know exactly with what transgression will leave us. Furthermore, since transgression departs from the terms of debate, we cannot always have a framework "justified through appeal to practical reason(s)" (Allen 2012, 767).

In light of this, my thesis might seem paradoxical. I am aware of the ironies of this project: I am arguing for the problems with practical reason, but my very use of argumentation, and many of the norms of philosophical writing, draw heavily upon the notions of reason-giving and rationality. However, I am not giving practical reasons in order to mandate a new normative framework: instead of thinking about the specific and exact shape of any new framework, I have presented some possible strategies to diversify our political actions.

Having reconceptualised power and resistance, I looked for a specific site of feminist resistance to gendered rationality. To motivate laughter as that site, I demonstrated how it is already used politically and is itself informed by politics. Empirical literature on laughter shows that it is performed differently by men and women, reflecting the norms with which we are raised. The use of laughter is already political, even when we don't realize it: for example, the way we laugh is part of constituting our gender. The realization of laughter's contingency and changeability suggests that we can perhaps use laughter differently as a political tool. This argument implicitly reinforces my early intuition that if feminists only attend to practical reason, we lose valuable tools.

Our laughter behaviours can be taken up politically to show that norms are contingent and thus changeable; laughter could motivate people to change their perspective when rational persuasion fails. For example, we can unlaugh when laughing is expected, or hyperbolically exaggerate laughter's physicality. I speculatively provided several strategies for practices of laughter that challenge the gendered requirement or prohibition of laughter in certain contexts. Furthermore, changing our individual laughter behaviours changes our subjectivities: both in terms of gender and of rationality. The laughter practices which I suggest – or other practices – can therefore be taken up as part of self-transformative work, as care of the self. Finally, since the self is relational and always embedded within society, these behaviours can also open up new ground and possibilities for collective political action.

This project has posed a number of methodological challenges. As is well established in feminist philosophy, abstract examples often function to privilege a feminist subject who is implicitly white, able-bodied, middle-class, and living in the 'West'. Although I knew that laughter-norms vary by class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and other contexts, constructing an account that did not simply generalize my own experience was a constant challenge.

Furthermore, I was unable to discuss the maintenance and enforcement of laughter norms in childhood as a way of gendering subjects, or to consider deeply the laughter norms that govern men and form their own gender. Although some norms of masculinity seem to be the polar opposite of norms of femininity (laughter in a loud, deep voice), others are more complicated. For example, the requirement to laugh at the boss's jokes (no matter if offensive) surely affects men too. Racialized men in particular are made the butt of jokes that reinforce the dominant norm of masculinity as white, and are expected at the very least 'not to make trouble' in response. Gay men might be expected to laugh more to complement a stereotypical fun, bubbly, easy-going personality. There are many archetypes of femininity and masculinity, multiple and fluid, shaped and imposed differentially. Combine this with the uses of laughter and unlaughter and there are many configurations that need to be explored in the future.

Working through these issues, arguments, and questions changed my project. To some extent, my initial hypotheses were confirmed: laughing differently *can* resist gendered norms and norms of rationality, and attest to the power of 'irrationality'. Laughter *is* a part of those micro-gestures through which one's gender and one's rationality are constituted and performed. However, I think that these findings have lead me to a different question than the one that I thought they would answer. In the end, I seem not to have necessarily given a solution to the feminist dilemma about gendered reason. Instead of paving a clear path forward through a mandate or principle for feminists who wish to challenge norms of gendered rationality, I proposed one possible route for everyday actions of resistance. Maybe the answer is not to always reject reason, nor to always embrace it, but to challenge the very notions of reason, unreason, rationality, and irrationality. By showing that these very categories are contingent and constructed through our micro-political actions (our laughter), we might begin to unravel them or at the very least to lessen their political weight.

My conclusion contributes to the field of Foucauldian feminist explorations of micro-resistance: like many of our modes of comportment, laughter is constitutive of our gendered subjectivity and shapes our relation to rationality. This means that changing our laughter behaviours – consciously or unconsciously – constitutes a political act, no matter how 'micro' it might seem. Exposing the contingency of these norms through laughing differently might lead us to new political tactics, both individually and collectively.

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