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The Humour of Humours: Comedy Theory and Eighteenth-Century Histories of
Emotions

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The first thing I want to observe about tackling humour and emotions history is that
there is nothing new under the sun. From George Farquhar, Corbyn Morris and
James Beattie in the eighteenth century to Stuart Tave in the 1960s and Frank Ellis
in the 1990s,[1] scholars of humour and comedy have consistently relied on the
explanatory power of eighteenth-century emotions theory. Humour, as a disposition
– psychic and bodily – and as a literary genre or mode remained, in both senses,
central to eighteenth-century cultural self-assessments. The way in which humour
conceptually bridges the discursive worlds of medicine, natural and moral philosophy
and imaginative literature and literary criticism makes it a strong gauge of the degree
to which our relationship to literature is imbricated with discourses of selfhood and
embodiment. Patrick Coleman and Eugenia Zuroski summarise the particular
significance of the eighteenth century to studies of humour, observing that this period
saw 'the conversion of ancient medical humours into the cultural materials of a
modern "sense" of humour', arguing that the transition 'generated vexed forms of
embodiment' that, uniquely in the period, serve 'to formalize a pervasive sense of
uneasiness'.[2] Zuroski and Coleman confirm that there is something about the shifting
ground of eighteenth-century concepts of emotion, and particularly of humour, that
names a new, characteristically modern social relationship to funniness.

Here, then, I will bring together two broad surveys, necessarily incomplete, that will serve as a kind of mutual commentary. The first, a survey of methodological and theoretical approaches to emotion and to humour in particular, seeks to understand how studies of emotion have pressed us to find new critical methods and to upend critical norms. Examining the claims of emotions history in contrast to various strands of affect theory, I assess the convergences among these approaches. The second survey, of some key late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discussions of humour, examines in particular the way theories of comedy in this period seize on humour as a critical method. In the eighteenth century, humour could be a critical term of art – as in 'humours comedy' – and an aspect of the self. Humour serves, in different contexts, as a prescription for playwrights, a description of comic characters, a national diagnosis, and a fundamental perceptive capacity. This survey seeks to understand how humour bridges corporeality and cognition in ways that comment on critical axioms then and now. The tentative suggestion of this chapter is that studies of emotion, historical and theoretical, insistently refuse us methodological certainty.

The methods of emotions history have long been established in twentieth-century critical paradigms. From Norbert Elias, who effectively linked cultural revolutions to emotional dispositions in *The Civilizing Process* (1939, trans. 1969) to Raymond Williams, who argued in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) that 'structures of feeling' are the indices of the interpenetration of history and form, and Richard Sennett, who observed that eighteenth-century England was 'a society where intimate feeling is an all-purpose standard of reality',[3] critics across disciplines have agreed that the foundations of cultural materialism relied on a deep recognition of two important truths: that emotion is an essential (perhaps *the* essential) register of

ideology; and correlatively that emotion is historically specific and culturally determined. With regard to studies of humour and comedy in particular, Stephen Halliwell sums up the contrast between the theory and the history of emotions this way: 'the "canonical" modern triad of laughter theories (or, perhaps preferably, theories of humour) -- those of superiority, incongruity and release -- all fail as monolithic explanations of the full gamut of data to be accounted for .... They fail not only because of their unsustainably totalising ambition, but also because they isolate psychology from culture.'[4] This sharp dismissal of ahistorical or universalising approaches to emotion has come into play again more recently in response to an approach to emotion we have gathered under the rubric of 'affect theory'. In contrast to the history of emotions, affect theory has been characterised as resistant to the ideology-critique that is the stock-in-trade of historicist criticism, as regressively universalising and as biologically essentialist.

The movement that Ruth Leys has named the 'turn to affect'[5] can seem like nothing more than an extreme version of the ahistorical approach to emotion of which Halliwell is so critical. Leys' response is principally to the branch of affect theory – most influential about 10 or 15 years ago – that adopted and adapted the conclusions of some neuroscientific investigations to examine the expressions of emotion in the field of cultural production.[6] This particular neuroscientific study purged psychology of its more nuanced approach to cultural and historical specificity and forwarded a one-size-fits-all idea of emotion. Leys considers this kind of affect theory and its adoption by humanities disciplines blinkered partly because of its inattention to extant historical methods and partly because of its insistence on a kind of automaticity that disarms ideology-critique.[7] Leys' critique is typical of an approach to the intellectual history of emotions that has, somewhat polemically, set itself apart

from affect theory and espoused a rigorous historicism. This practice has tended to reinforce a neo-Foucauldian method, in which isolated discursive constructions are sometimes represented as unproblematic mirrors of cultural formations.[8]

Both affect theorists and historians of emotion have been much exercised about the definition of emotion – is it cognitive or affective? To what extent does it participate in cognitive activities like judgement?[9] Can we isolate emotion either by insisting on a distinction between affect – which solely concerns the body – and feeling – the cognitive activities associated with affects[10] – or by refusing a sharp Cartesian distinction[11] and understanding emotions as a subset of mental states defined by their mutual participation in both cognition and affect? This last phenomenological schema emerges primarily out of Merleau-Ponty's argument for a phenomenology grounded in bodily experience and its attendant perceptual variability.[12] The variability of perception leaves room for the expansion of the perceptual field to include the pervasive social and historical influences that shape both the perceiving subject and their material environment, which are mutually determining.[13]

On the whole, cultural criticism in the field of emotions has turned back to (or has never entirely turned away from) the critical concerns that have long animated the study of cultural history. Lauren Berlant, for example, turns to Althusser and Williams to explore 'affective realism'[14] and Sianne Ngai takes Adorno for her starting-point.[15] A careful reading of even Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling*, a particular target of Leys' critique, reveals Sedgwick's interest in affectivity, not as a retreat from social, cultural or political reading, but rather, as a methodology that might intensify, nuance and vary our approaches to cultural texts. Sedgwick understands affect as interpretation – really, as a kind of 'reading' that can be pre- or

paralinguistic[16] – and in this, she embraces a radically non-binary approach in contrast to the binarism she argues inheres in constructionism's focus on discourse. And in fact, if we look to some of the seminal texts of emotions history – Gail Kern Paster's *Humoring the Body*, or Susan James' *Passion and Action*, for example – we will see that the compulsion to examine emotion in particular emerges out of a drive to understand the ways in which the emotional structures of the past might unpick the binarism, not simply of the Cartesian mind/body split, but also of the reified split between discourse and materiality that has sometimes been seen to characterise contemporary post-structuralism.[17] Of the early modern system of emotions, Paster writes that in 'the dynamic reciprocities between self and environment imagined by the psychophysiology of bodily fluids, circumstance engenders humors in the body and humors in the body help to determine circumstance by predisposing the individual subject to a characteristic kind of evaluation and response'.[18] In other words, in early modern emotional schemas, cognitive elements of emotion – 'evaluation and response' (i.e. judgment) – and affects – 'psychophysiology' – are mutually constitutive. In examining the relevance of materiality to past interpretive systems, Paster hints at the integrative potentialities of our own. Laughter in particular, as Halliwell writes, 'exists at the interface, so to speak, between body and mind, between instinct and intention'.[19] For Norbert Elias, writing in the late nineteen-fifties, laughter provides a 'key-problem'[20]: it demands that we reconsider our understanding of the physiology of laughter as an outward expression of an internal state, and thus that we reconsider a sharp distinction between internal states and bodily mechanisms altogether. Affect theory and emotions history are not so readily separable; their mutual object of investigation seems to press for methods that occupy a variety of messy middle grounds. Venturing into the territory of emotion

demands that we turn insides out, that we acknowledge the significance of the material to the discursive, the affective to the cognitive. And of course, humour in particular has a long-standing investment in upsetting orthodoxies, in turning upsides down.[21]

Humour as Method

If we want to know whether we can look to humour as a way of unravelling the binaries that underpin our critical methods, we might best begin with a deeper understanding of its particular invocation in a particular place and time. What does the discussion of humour and comedy in the eighteenth century bring to the excavation of the techniques and cultural impacts of humour across time? This moment, characterised simultaneously by the conceptual reconfiguration of the material body and by clear lexical transitions, seems an ideal target for historians of emotion. Tracking the definition of 'humour' should show us how the historical shifts posited by emotions history are marked out by discursive change. But humour can do more: because humour is both a comic technique and a diagnosis, it is first and foremost a *method*. Humour is the commonly prescribed method for writing comedy in this period, especially at the end of the seventeenth century. But it is equally the property of audiences: it is an interpretive stance as much as it is a disposition. Humour is tied to critical interpretation and eighteenth-century cultural theory in strange and unprecedented ways.

Eighteenth-century humour theorists came late to the party – in the Western tradition, classical and early modern theorists were fascinated by laughter and its provocations[22] – but they did uniquely insist on the anatomisation of the literary

techniques of humour.[23] They turned their attention away from the physiology of laughter and even, to some extent, its purpose (to establish superiority or, in contrast, ties of fellowship), to explore instead, in analytic detail guaranteed to evacuate its entertaining possibilities, the theory of comedy.[24] This is the period in which the object of laughter takes centre-stage: the object is increasingly protected and treated with a degree of compassion, at least in theory, and the target of ridicule might equally be the popular class clown.[25] Joseph Addison observes that a man who finds himself routinely the butt of jokes has ordinarily 'a good deal of Wit and Vivacity, even in the ridiculous side of his Character'. He adds, 'A *Butt* with these Accomplishments frequently gets the Laugh of his side, and turns the Ridicule upon him that attacks him'.[26]

This is also the period in which the incongruity theory of laughter – still the dominant theory – comes to the fore. Alexander Gerard, in his *Essay on Taste* (1759), identifies a 'sense of ridicule', which is activated by incongruity: 'Objects, conceived to be ... incongruous, always gratify the sense of ridicule'.[27] There are some suggestions of a classical precedent for incongruity theory in Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* and Cicero's *Orator*, but the incongruity here is held to reside principally in the jarring violation of audience expectation.[28] Gerard, followed by James Beattie in 1764, identifies the incongruities that trigger laughter as those observed among objects more generally. Beattie argues that '[l]aughter seems to arise from the view of things incongruous united in the same assemblage', concluding that 'the greater the number of incongruities that are blended in the same assemblage, the more ludicrous it will probably be'.[29] Typifying an empiricist approach to cognition, Gerard and Beattie understand the manipulation of mental objects – ideas – in the mind to be the source of abstract thought, making laughter dependent on the ordering (or

disordering) of our ideas. Kant, the thinker now most commonly referred to in theoretical discussions of incongruity theory, returns in the *Critique of Judgement* (1790) to the classical version: the incongruity specific to deflated expectations: 'Laughter is an affect resulting from the sudden transformation of a heightened expectation into nothing'[30] In Norbert Elias's reading, Kant's discussion of the funniness of naiveté adds a crucial element to the bursting of the 'bubble of our expectation'. The deflation of our expectations is also the revelation of nature, so that the incongruity consists both in the difference between our expectations and what the comedy delivers and in the difference between culture – 'artificiality' – and raw nature.[31] Elias thus links Kant's theory of comedy to Bergson's central argument: that comedy is '[s]omething mechanical encrusted on the living'.[32] We can see, then, that eighteenth-century theories of comedy, laughter and humour track – or even help to inaugurate – the development of the modern self. Moreover, we can see that this investigation embeds a process of accounting for the 'raw nature', the materiality of humour.

In sum, the eighteenth century sees the development of a series of key concepts that still underpin our understanding of humour: it reduces the significance of superiority theory in favour of social bonding theories, develops an idealised notion of the 'humourist' (Addison's 'butt' or Kant's naif), and extends and nuances incongruity theory. Crucially, it works these concepts out through explications of the term 'humour'. The following traces discussions of humour in this period. Though an exhaustive survey is not possible here, I note some key moments in the shift in the dominant definition of 'humour' from temperament to a genre of literature and performance. According to the OED, by 1685, humour had almost entirely lost its relevance as a medical category.[33] It cites Thomas Willis's *The London Practice of*

Physick: 'We do not allow of the Opinion of the Ancients, That the Mass of Blood consists of the four Humours, viz Blood, Flegm, Choler, and Melancholy; ... nor has this Opinion been so generally used for solving the Phænomena of Diseases, since the Circulation of the Blood ... came to light.'[34] Casual uses of the term to describe temperament persist – one can still be in a 'humour' – but Galenic medicine increasingly took a back seat to more mechanistic medical theories and then to vitalism.[35] In its place, literature (in its broad eighteenth-century sense) and its theorists and critics claimed the term for its own, and by the late seventeenth century, dramatists and literary critics had made 'humorous' an essential descriptor for the English nation as well as for English comedy.

Early on, it is clear that 'humour' is a much looser category than its theorists might wish. Ben Jonson's touchstone definition of humour, Asper's speech in *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599), emerges as an irritable response to what he considers a problematically imprecise use of the term. Humour in its medical sense – defined by its liquid incontinence, its 'fluxure' – can also, he argues, be used appropriately in its transferred meaning ('by metaphor') to describe an imbalanced temperament: 'As when some one peculiar quality / Doth so possess a man that it doth draw / All his affects, his spirits, and his powers / In their confluxions all to run one way'.[36] Asper's vow to 'scourge those apes' (l. 116) represents the central claim of satiric comedy. Humours should be scourged, not celebrated. This presents something of a problem for the moral function of comedy. As Corbyn Morris writes, Jonson's enthusiasm for the scourge means that he is 'in Justice oblig'd to *hunt down* and *demolish* his own Characters'.[37] Increasingly after the Restoration, the justification for comedy was correction and cure: impossible if a humour is an incurable natural temperament, as Jonson suggested.[38] Thus, when Shadwell

revives that claim in an energetic embrace of Jonsonian humours at the Restoration, he adds a key classical disclaimer: setting aside Cicero's injunction not to ridicule 'outstanding wickedness' and focusing instead on his parallel interdiction against ridiculing 'outstanding wretchedness',[39] Shadwell argues that 'it were ill Nature, and below a Man, to fall upon the natural Imperfections of Men; as of Lunaticks, Ideots, or Men born Monstrous'. Comedy's targets should be corrigible, its goal the 'Reformation of Fops and Knaves', of artifice, not of nature.[40] Shadwell's emphasis on comedy's (theoretical) obligation not to 'punch down'[41] sets the tone for discussions of the humours in this period and establishes a specific link between the moral function of comedy and what he figures as its obligation to represent humours. In his preface to *The Humourists* (1670), he sets out his commitment to Jonsonian comedy, and the utility of comedy in general. Tragedy, he observes, concerns only a few, but comedy deals with the 'the Cheats, Villainies, and troublesome Follies, in the Common Conversation of the World', and is thus 'of concernment to all the Body of Mankind'.[42] Humour is comedy's moral method: it identifies the comic target, but it also sets the allowable limits of our pleasure. We can be amused by the foolish, but not the pitiable.

Congreve, while following in his mentor Dryden's footsteps in embracing a general disdain for Shadwell's comic theory, nonetheless repeats in the strongest terms the comic obligation to compassion. He writes: 'Sure the Poet must both be very Ill-natur'd himself, and think his Audience so, when he proposes by shewing a Man deform'd, or deaf, or blind, to give them an agreeable Entertainment; and hopes to raise their Mirth, by what is truly an object of Compassion'.[43] Fielding echoes Congreve in *Joseph Andrews* (1742): 'Surely he hath a very ill-framed mind who can look on ugliness, infirmity, or poverty, as ridiculous in themselves.'[44] And toward the

end of the century, even Sheridan, who, along with Goldsmith, professed his resistance to sentimental trends in comedy,[45] adheres to the same compassionate model in his *School for Scandal* (1777). Maria, the moral centre of the play, declares: 'If, to raise malicious smiles at the infirmities and misfortunes of those who have never injured us be the province of wit or humour, heaven grant me a double portion of dullness.'[46] Even playwrights who aggressively championed a satiric emphasis in comedy – from Shadwell to Sheridan – agreed that comic objects could not be objects of pity.

Here, too, is the clear emergence of the more common definition of 'humour' as a comic genre or practice rather than a disposition or foundation of comic character. In Maria's speech, we can see the conceptual yoking of wit and humour, often held to be distinct and even oppositional concepts at the end of the seventeenth century, in a single 'province'. A century earlier, wit was 'the faculty of imagination' and in poetry, consists of 'the delightful imaging of persons, actions, passions, or things',[47] while Locke's famous definition of wit in the 1690 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* considers that its appeal lies in its characteristic 'assemblage of Ideas'.[48] Wit's relationship either to comedy or to humour was tenuous. Congreve, in his 1695 essay, 'Concerning Humour in Comedy', observes censoriously that '*Wit is often mistaken for Humour*':

> when a few things have been Wittily and Pleasantly spoken by any Character in a Comedy; it has been very usual for those, who make their Remarks on a Play, while it is acting, to say, *Such a thing is very Humorously spoken: There is a great Deal of Humour in that Part.* Thus the Character of the Person speaking, may be, Surprizingly and

Pleasantly, is mistaken for a Character of *Humour*, which indeed is a

Character of *Wit.* But there is a great Difference between a Comedy,

wherein there are many things *Humorously*, as they call it, which

is *Pleasantly* spoken; and one, where there are several Characters

of *Humour*, distinguish'd by the Particular and Different Humours,

appropriated to the several Persons represented, and which naturally

arise, from the different Constitutions, Complexions, and Dispositions

of Men.[49]

In 1744, Corbyn Morris repeats this firm distinction between wit and humour in his

Essay Towards Fixing the True Standards of Wit, Humour, Raillery, Satire, and

Ridicule. Returning to Locke's definition of wit as an 'Assemblage',[50] and to the

Jonsonian tradition of humours comedy, Morris attacks the looser conception of

humour that coexisted through the period with Congreve's strict definition. He

critiques Addison's *Spectator* 35, which outlines a genealogy of humour. Addison's

'Humour' is the child of 'Wit' and 'Mirth' and the grandchild of 'Good Sense'. Morris

rejects this filial alignment, insisting that 'HUMOUR is derived from the *Foibles*, and

whimsical *Oddities* of *Persons* in real Life, which flow rather from their

Inconsistencies, and Weakness, than from TRUTH and GOOD SENSE' (xxi). He

also, however, considers that Congreve's definition of humour is faulty, as it

confuses humour with 'disposition': 'At this Rate every *Weakness* of *Nerves*, or

Particularity of *Constitution*, is HUMOUR' (xxiv). It is not enough to be different; to be

comically humorous, one must be strange. Morris's emphasis on the

'inconsistencies' in temperament that define humour in opposition to truth is another

nod to the Lockean subject: Morris's humours character suffers from a

misassociation of ideas of exactly the type that shapes individual temperament and draws us away from truth and reason.[51] At mid-century, humour is still an expression of the fundamental shape of the self, but it has successfully absorbed the empiricist associationism that characterises the eighteenth-century picture of the psyche.

Congreve's censure also, however, makes it clear that the contemporary usages of 'humour' to mean 'comic entertainment' and 'humorous' to mean comical or droll, were already commonplace fifty years earlier. Though the OED records the earliest use of 'sense of humour' in Richard Hurd's 1753 *Dissertation on the Provinces of Dramatic Poetry*, it records a similar definition of 'humour' as 'a sense of what is amusing or ludicrous' emerging much earlier in the seventeenth century.[52] In 1711, Shaftesbury, in 'Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour', had already conflated the terms in arguing for a social practice of 'raillery' as a key ingredient in a liberal society. '[W]ithout wit and humour', Shaftesbury argued, 'reason can hardly have its proof or be distinguished'.[53] For Shaftesbury, comic practice of all kinds tests the rationality of our assumptions, exposing hypocrisy, but equally, validating beliefs and mores unassailable by ridicule. Wit and humour, for Shaftesbury, are intersubjective practices that enshrine the utility of conversational exchange, which can then provide a model for a broadly literary practice.

The splitting off of humour as it is defined by humours comedy from its popular definition as a generalised comic practice is a deliberate attempt to contain and preserve the idea of humour as part of a medicalised discourse of temperament, and to meld this discourse with a literary-critical ideal of comic genre. Essentially, comedy theory self-consciously refused to countenance the exclusion of the body from aesthetic theories. Retaining the medicalised definition of the humours allows

comedy its own particular affiliation with catharsis which, reworked as medicalised purgation, explained and justified tragedy's arousal of unpleasant emotion,[54] and that, along with the Longinian sublime, became the classical theoretical underpinning of the eighteenth-century sublime. John Dennis writes, 'as the Humors in some distemper'd Body are rais'd, in order to the evacuating that which is redundant or peccant in them; so Tragedy excites Compassion and Terrour to the same end'.[55] Here, the function of tragic catharsis is explicitly to purge the passions in a fashion precisely analogous to the medical purging of the humours. On this reading, the humours are physiological, the passions their intellectual echo. In 1668, Dryden had had the pro-French critic, Lysideus, of his *Essay of Dramatick Poesie*, make a similar claim in a diatribe against English tragicomedy: 'Would you not think that Physician mad', asks Lysideus, 'who having prescribed a Purge, should immediately order you to take restringents upon it?'[56] Here comedy acts to restrain effective catharsis, but the parallel to the physiological action of medicine remains. Dryden observed in 1671 that 'there is the same difference betwixt Farce and Comedy, as betwixt an Empirique and a true Physitian: both of them may attain their ends; but what the one performs by hazard, the other does by skill'.[57] By 1742, Fielding had declared, though somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that farce constituted a 'wholesome Physic for the Mind', and a 'purge' for 'ill Affections'.[58] Retaining the analogy between the physiology of the humours and their literary representation, between the poet and the physician, allows comic playwrights to insist on the key social function of comedy: to purge, like tragedy, the ill temper of the English body politic.[59] This allows comedy a method of direct social action.

In the late seventeenth century, humours comedy becomes a kind of national diagnosis. In 1690, William Temple was the first to insist that the 'variety of Humor'

displayed in English comedy echoed 'a greater variety in the Life' produced by England's heterogeneous soil, climate, and government.[60] In 1695, Congreve influentially reiterated these claims in his essay 'Concerning Humour in Comedy'. He writes that humour is 'almost of English Growth', and is produced by 'the great Freedom, Privilege, and Liberty which the Common People of *England* enjoy'.[61] George Farquhar adds, in 1701, in his 'Discourse Upon Comedy', that comedy's somewhat loose adherence to form is proof of 'its Charter for Liberty and Toleration' (377). He concludes that the purpose of an '*English* Play' is to address the 'new Distempers' of 'an English Audience', characterised by 'the most unaccountable Medley of Humours ... of any People upon Earth' (378). This nationalistic fervour for linking English liberty, English heterogeneity – 'we are a Mixture of many Nations' (378), observes Farquhar – and the English taste for humours comedy was short-lived, disappearing almost completely after the 1737 Licensing Act. Corbyn Morris drops the idea of humours belonging generally to the disorderly liberty of the nation as a whole, naming, instead, comic characters ideal in their capacity to induce feelings of good-fellowship: Falstaff, Sir Roger de Coverley, and Don Quixote.[62] In this brief moment, between the Restoration and the Licensing Act, we can see that humour is associated with a constitutive heterogeneity. Humour serves to interpret the temper of a nation, and it does this work as a literary-critical methodology, showing us why and how the techniques of literature are tied to human states of being.

Even after this stubbornly retained idea of medicalised humour has been allowed to drift away from eighteenth-century ideas about funniness, sometime about the middle of the century, the idea of humour keeps its close relationship to ideas about human subjectivity. When Richard Hurd defines a 'sense of humour' in 1753,

in fact he means something more closely affiliated with the moral sense theory that underpins Alexander Gerard's 'sense of ridicule' than with our modern understanding of the term. Moral sense theory is the eighteenth-century philosophical movement that argues from the proposition that the moral judgments of human beings are not distinct from perceptions: they are automatic and non-cognitive. A 'sense of humour', like a 'sense of ridicule', is, in this schema, a universal human capacity to perceive funniness. In Hurd's pseudo-Horatian dissertation, a 'sense of humour' comes up in the context of his resistance to double plots and his recommendation of the unity of action in comedy. The '*sense* of *humour*' he argues, is preserved by the simplicity of plot, and undermined 'when the *attention* is split on so many interfering objects'.[63] Less a general disposition to appreciate or to create comedy than a period of sustained amusement, Hurd's 'sense of humour' denotes a feeling of funniness that is occasional, triggered by an event or performance rather than the property of an individual person. By the middle of the eighteenth century, though we have moved away from a densely embodied idea of humour toward a more free-floating perceptive ability, humour still carries with it a close association with the sensorium. Our current understanding of a 'sense of humour' emerges directly out of moral sense theory, the philosophical position that rejects a firm distinction between feeling and judgement, corporeal and cognitive 'senses'. From this perspective, moral sense theory begins to look very much like affect theory *avant la lettre.* In investigating eighteenth-century humour, we have slid almost imperceptibly from a history of emotion to a theory of affects, from a comic method to an interpretive methodology.

Eighteenth-century humour provides us with an ideal 'key-problem' for the study of emotion more broadly. Humour works simultaneously as a quality of art and as a quality of a person. In its defiance of a clear distinction between discourse and

materiality, it presses us to consider the relevance of corporeality to our own critical methods.

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[1] See Farquhar, 'A Discourse Upon Comedy'; Morris, *An Essay Towards*; Beattie, 'On Laughter'; Tave, *The Amiable Humorist*; Ellis, *Sentimental Comedy*.

[2] Jenkins and Coleman, 'Introduction', 509.

[3] Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, 8.

[4] Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*, 11.

[5] Leys, 'The Turn to Affect'.

[6] As Frank and Wilson have pointed out in a critical response ('Like-Minded'), Leys problematically conflates distinct kinds of investigations of affect in different disciplines, gathering all affect theory under the umbrella of 'anti-intentionalism' (Leys, 'The Turn to Affect', 472).

[7] Leys' is in some ways a belated summary of a broad resistance to the extreme end of these essentialist approaches to emotion, often associated with the blunt theoretical instruments used by such emotions researchers as Paul Ekman. Key interventions include Ahmed's *Cultural Politics of Emotion* and Brennan's *Transmission of Affect*, both of which emphatically politicise emotion and resist exclusively non-cognitive definitions of it. See also Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions*. Dixon espouses a strongly historicist view, refusing to countenance any real historical continuity between the experience and definition of emotion in the pre- and early modern world and the modern (post-Darwinian) moment.

[8] See, for example, Freverte, et al., *Emotional Lexicons*, which collects and analyses dictionary definitions of terms having to do with emotion in order to track cultural and historical shifts across time and across European nations.

[9] See, for example, Nussbaum's neo-Stoic *Upheavals of Thought*.

[10] See, for example, Massumi, 'The Autonomy of Affect'. See also Reddy's *The Navigation of Feeling*. Reddy universalises emotion but finds in this essentialism a method of ideological intervention.

[11] In *Passion and Action*, Susan James brilliantly assesses the way in which the passions collapse Descartes's distinction between sensory perception and cognition. James's argument underlines the ways in which emotion has always intervened in binarism.

[12] See Kramnick's reading of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in *Paper Minds*.

[13] See Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice?' Scheer uses Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to reexamine the ways in which emotions history might be able to integrate the study of the human subject in history in ways that do not undermine the historical value of subjective emotional experience and individual perception. Scheer's illuminating use of Bourdieu reaches essentially the same conclusions as Kramnick's discussion of Merleau-Ponty, though Scheer is firmly in the history of emotions camp while Kramnick looks to an 'ecological' approach that would make a less rigid distinction between historicist and new materialist approaches.

[14] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 52, 64.

[15] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*.

[16] She writes, for example, that 'the line between words and things or between linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena is endlessly changing, permeable, and entirely unsusceptible to any definitive articulation' (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 6).

[17] New materialist challenges to this problem have principally emerged out of new readings of Deleuze, and especially of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*.

[18] Paster, *Humoring the Body*, 15.

[19] Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*, 5.

[20] Elias, 'Essay on Laughter', 304.

[21] See Donaldson, *The World Upside Down*.

[22] See, for example, Halliwell, *Greek Laughter* and Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping*. Key early modern primary sources include Goclenius, *Physiologia de Risu et Lacrumis* and Joubert, *Treatise on Laughter*.

[23] For a text that simultaneously represents and undercuts the eighteenth-century tendency to taxonomise literary technique, see Pope's *Peri Bathous* (1727).

[24] Though Greek and Roman thinkers listed comic techniques, they did not tend to be interested, as Alison Sharrock observes, in trying 'to find some overarching scheme into which all these causes of laughter may be fitted, [the] centralising drive being more towards the purposes of comedy (a reflection of the Aristotelian cathartic effect of tragedy) rather than its causes': Sharrock, 'Introduction: Roman Comedy', 2.

[25] Again, there is some precedent for both of these theories of comedy in classical comedy theory, but they are not central concerns, neither is treated very extensively and they are balanced by a strong thread of agelasticism. For the first, see Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*, 317-18, and 327-28; for the second, see 21-2. For classical agelastic theory and its impact in the eighteenth century, see Heltzel, 'Chesterfield'.

[26] Addison, *Spectator* 47, vol. 1, 182.

[27] Gerard, *Essay on Taste*, 68.

[28] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, Part 3, Sect 11. Here, novelty works as a kind of incongruity, inducing surprise and thwarting audience expectations.

[29] Beattie, 'On Laughter', 344, 349.

[30] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, 209.

[31] Elias, 'Essay on Laughter', 295.

[32] Bergson, *Laughter*, 84.

[33] 'Humour' persisted in medical texts as a general term for fluid substances in the body, but no longer specifically connoted the humoral system, in which humoral imbalances were linked both to illness and to temperament.

[34] Willis, in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'humour'.

[35] See Brown, 'From Mechanism to Vitalism' and Broman, 'The Medical Sciences'.

[36] Jonson, *Every Man Out*, Induction, 118, ll.101-6.

[37] Morris, *An Essay Towards*, 34.

[38] Corman, *Genre and Generic Change*, 16.

[39] Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator*, quoted in Galbraith, 'Theories of Comedy', 7.

[40] Shadwell, *The Humourists* (1670), preface.

[41] Stuart Tave emphasised this progressive trend in comedy, arguing for a triumphant national progress toward enlightened compassion. Simon Dickie has more recently delivered a sharp riposte to this somewhat self-satisfied view, arguing that cruelty remained an essential component of comic practice through the century. See *Cruelty and Laughter*.

[42] Shadwell, preface to *The Humourists*.

[43] Congreve, 'Mr. Congreve, to Mr. Dennis', 64.

[44] Fielding, *Joseph* Andrews, 7.

[45] See Goldsmith, 'An Essay on the Theatre', and Ellis, *Sentimental Comedy*.

[46] Sheridan, *The School for Scandal*, 2.2.185-88, 230.

[47] Dryden, 'Dedication to *Annus Mirabilis*', 53.

[48] Locke, *An Essay*, II.xi.2, 156.

[49] Congreve, 'Mr. Congreve, to Mr. Dennis', 65.

[50] Morris, *An Essay Towards*, xiv.

[51] Locke, 'Of the Association of Ideas' (1704) in *An Essay*, II.xxxiii.

[52] *OED*, s.v. 'humour', 9.a.

[53] Shaftesbury (Cooper), *Characteristics*, 35.

[54] This theory of Milton's is outlined in his preface to *Samson Agonistes*, and is taken up by Thomas Rymer, who calls tragedy a 'Physick of the mind' (75), and by John Dennis ('The Usefulness', vol. 2, 185). See Martha Nussbaum's objection to a medicalised reading of Aristotle's original text in *The Fragility of Goodness*. See also Elizabeth Belfiore's *Tragic Pleasures*.

[55] Dennis, 'The Impartial Critick', vol. 1, 33.

[56] Dryden, *An Essay of Dramatick Poesie*, 35.

[57] Dryden, 'Preface to *An Evening's Love*'.

[58] Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, 6.

[59] Satire was similarly analogised to medicine: see Gallagher, 'Satire as Medicine'.

[60] Temple, 'Upon Poetry', 333. For summaries of this nationalist trend in discussions of English humours comedy, see Tave, 'Corbyn Morris' and Freeman, *Character's Theater*, 210-11.

[61] Congreve, 'Mr. Congreve, to Mr. Dennis', 71.

[62] Morris, *An Essay Towards*, 26, 32, 40.

[63] Hurd, 'On the Provinces', 233.

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