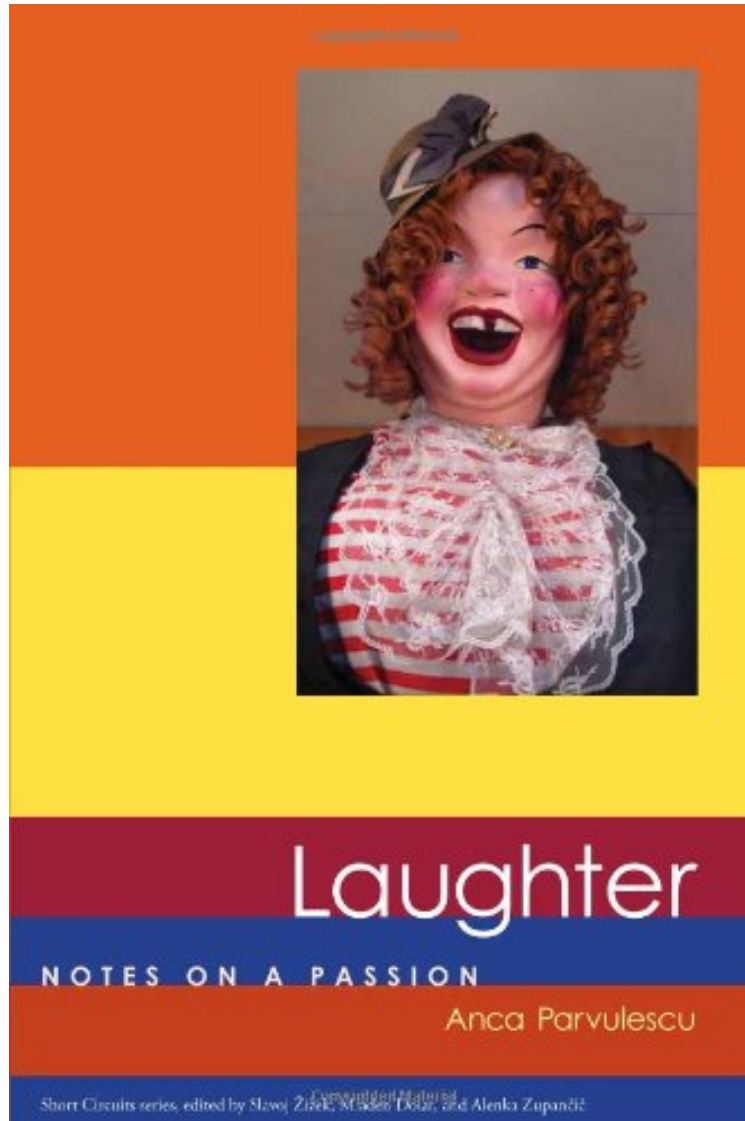


[PDF] Laughter: Notes on a Passion (Short Circuits)

## Laughter: Notes on a Passion (Short Circuits)

Anca Parvulescu

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**Anca Parvulescu : Laughter: Notes on a Passion (Short Circuits)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Laughter: Notes on a Passion (Short Circuits):

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A GemBy omgjhWhile her main focus is laughter itself, Parvulescu effortlessly walks on the thin line that connects laughter to the comic object. I most appreciated her lucid style in dealing with such complex theoretical topics.

Uncovering an archive of laughter, from the forbidden giggle to the explosive guffaw.Most of our theories of laughter

are not concerned with laughter. Rather, their focus is the laughable object, whether conceived of as the comic, the humorous, jokes, the grotesque, the ridiculous, or the ludicrous. In *Laughter*, Anca Parvulescu proposes a return to the materiality of the burst of laughter itself. She sets out to uncover an archive of laughter, inviting us to follow its rhythms and listen to its tones. Historically, laughter--especially the passionate burst of laughter--has often been a faux pas. Manuals for conduct, abetted by philosophical treatises and literary and visual texts, warned against it, offering special injunctions to ladies to avoid jollity that was too boisterous. Returning laughter to the history of the passions, Parvulescu anchors it at the point where the history of the grimacing face meets the history of noise. In the civilizing process that leads to laughter's "falling into disrepute," as Nietzsche famously put it, we can see the formless, contorted face in laughter being slowly corrected into a calm, social smile. How did the twentieth century laugh? Parvulescu points to a gallery of twentieth-century laughers and friends of laughter, arguing that it is through Georges Bataille that the century laughed its most distinct laugh. In Bataille's wake, laughter becomes the passion at the heart of poststructuralism. Looking back at the century from this vantage point, Parvulescu revisits four of its most challenging projects: modernism, the philosophical avant-gardes, feminism, and cinema. The result is an overview of the twentieth century as seen through the laughs that burst at some of its most convoluted junctures.

What's remarkable about Parvulescu's brief history is its fresh and eclectic documentation, and this erudite trait continues throughout the book. The bulk of the work focuses on modernism and the laughs in the African-American tradition (Ellison), the philosophical avant-gardes and their focus on the experience of laughter (Bataille), feminism and the location of Medusa's laugh (Cixous), and film from photograph to cinema and the laugh of culture industry (Adorno). Each chapter includes the context and background necessary for the uninitiated before moving into subtle analyses that allow each laugh to reverberate on the page. No summary, regardless of its completeness, can reveal the impressiveness of Parvulescu's study. (Journal of Modern Literature)"A remarkable tour through the 'archive of laughter'; Anca Parvulescu analyzes a stunning array of texts, concepts, and anecdotes in order to demonstrate the disturbingly nonhuman element of this most human of activities. Parvulescu demonstrates, in her elegant readings and suggestive meditations, that it is not the subject who laughs, but who is laughed. Indeed, her book suggests a revised formulation of the cogito: 'It laughs, therefore I am not.'" Kenneth Reinhard, Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Director, Program in Experimental Critical Theory, UCLA "An intellectual short circuit, and it deserves the careful attention of a broad audience, not just students of 'laughter.'" P.L. Derks, emeritus, College of William and Mary CHOICE "In her *Laughter: Notes on a Passion*, Anca Parvulescu offers a unique answer to the great riddle of the drives in psychoanalytic theory. Eros and Thanatos, life drive and death drive, are in some sense shown to have their common ground in that uncanny convulsion of the body that erupts in a burst of laughter. For Parvulescu, the human capacity to 'die laughing' -- a capacity whose great master was, as the author argues, Georges Bataille -- turns out to be the key to new possibilities of human freedom and new kinds of community. The elaboration of this discovery gathers together its own remarkable community of laughers from the Bible, ancient, early modern, and modern philosophy, the sciences of the passions, African-American literature, feminist theory, and the history of cinema. I know of no book that so rigorously and delightfully gets us to take laughter seriously." Eric L. Santner, author of *The Royal Remains: The People's Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* About the Author Anca Parvulescu is Assistant Professor in the English Department and the Interdisciplinary Project in the Humanities at Washington University in St. Louis.