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Massih Zekavat and Tabea Scheel, *Satire, Humor, and Environmental Crises* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 248 pp.

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At a time when the environmental humanities grapple with the gap between climate-change awareness and action, Massih Zekavat and Tabea Scheel's intervention offers a theoretical framework through humor. The premise of this book tackles a stubborn problem that, as the authors argue, the environmental humanities has yet to address adequately: why does widespread alarm about accelerating climate catastrophe not translate into collective action? Rather than calling for new narratives and aesthetic forms to address this problem, the authors tap into comedy's established capacity for generating and maintaining collective identities. As Henri Bergson observed, laughter always stands in need of an echo. The question of what strikes one as funny has, in other words, profoundly social consequences: our responses to jokes serve to either reinforce the affinity we have with members of our in-group or emphasize the uncomfortable distance between ourselves and others who do not share our values. While comedy's potential to polarize and divide has drawn scholarly attention from theorists like Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai, the authors argue that this same social power can be redirected toward environmental advocacy.

But, as this book makes clear, comedy's power to polarize and shame should not obscure its latent potential to inform, persuade, and mobilize for environmental causes. The potential value of comedy and irreverence to mobilize pro-environmentalist behavior is explored elsewhere in Nicole Seymour's *Bad Environmentalism* (2018) and, less recently, in Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival* (1974). In contrast to these works, which largely examine historical and contemporary comedic artworks, Zekavat and Scheel's book offers both descriptive and—crucially—prescriptive measures to encourage environmentalist action. To do so, they draw from a wealth of research—spanning literary theory, cultural studies, philosophy, and psychology—to design a model for environmental messaging that amplifies comedy's inherent social power to overcome barriers (ideological and otherwise) preventing individuals and organizations alike from undertaking pro-environmental action. As this last point suggests, Zekavat and Scheel stress their book's relevance to activists and science communicators who might struggle to produce compelling—and, in this case, culturally resonant—messages. The authors

therefore take care to ground their claims in meticulous and thorough literature reviews and contemporary theoretical discussions that, in addition to advancing their argument, provide effective introductions to the respective fields and concepts *Satire, Humor, and Environmental Crises* covers.

Building on this theoretical foundation, Zekavat and Scheel structure their argument across seven chapters, moving from the current gaps in fields such as environmental psychology to concrete proposals for future research. After making the case for comedy and satire's force to engage the imagination in the introduction, the authors provide an overview of the theoretical concepts that inform this approach in Chapter 2. Specifically, the authors identify foundational theories of humor inspired by, among others, Freud and Kant (17). These theories of humor, while differing dramatically in their disciplinary assumptions and orientations, converge on the ameliorative or solidarity-building aspects of laughter. In view of the expansive scholarship on comedy, the authors write, it is safe to say that humor offers significant coping strategies for confronting the mental and physical toll that the environmental emergency imposes.

Having established humor's theoretical underpinnings, the authors advance their central contribution: the Modular Interdependency Model (MIM). This bespoke model aims to provide a large and encompassing overview of "the intersectionality and interdependencies of different determinants of behavior" (86). Because how humor lands always depends upon hyper-specific contexts and socio-cultural factors—who is telling the joke? To whom? Where?—the authors stress that their model's modular approach can account for the complex variables that inform behavior. MIM also strives to move beyond anthropocentric perspectives by locating individual agency among a myriad of social, cultural, and biological variables. Because humor and satire are likewise the products of a complex network of variables, they are best equipped, the authors argue, to change patterns of belief and incite individuals to act upon intentions that might otherwise go unexpressed. To bridge the gap between theories of humor and the rather applied and prescriptive features of MIM, the authors examine how popular satires already exemplify the model's principles. Examples such as *The Simpsons* and *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* demonstrate that satirists have already, the authors write, "intuitively" accounted for many of the same concerns outlined elsewhere in the book (128).

Here and elsewhere, 'satire' and 'humor' appear as inseparable terms, which means that the distinguishing features of satire, in particular, can appear imprecise. For example, the authors write that the comedian and television host John Oliver "uses satire and humor" to raise awareness about environmental causes (159)—and, in general, that "humor and satire can be employed to advocate critical environmentalism" (144). This tendency to collapse humor and satire will likely leave literature scholars, for example, unconvinced. It is also indicative of the slightly uneven impression the book ultimately gives. Readers interested in how the social function of comedy can be directed toward pro-environmentalist behavior will find the book's first half—which covers how evolutionary psychologists and philosophers

alike understand humor and satire—a rich and nuanced introduction to the subject. The more generalized observations about examples of satire and humor that appear in the book’s second half, as the *Last Week Tonight* example suggests, are less compelling. This uneven presentation is, to be sure, difficult to avoid given the impressive breadth of research the authors cover in their text—and does not diminish their overall efforts to orient our attention toward comedy’s mobilizing potential.

Drawing on a range of research affirming the strong social function of humor, Zekavat and Scheel emphatically demonstrate the extent to which it can be deployed for pro-environmentalist messaging. In addition to summarizing important debates regarding the social function of comedy in different disciplines, the book also serves as a worthy guide for future evaluations of humor’s impact on environmental behavior. The arguments laid out here also reverberate well beyond strictly academic contexts. As they indicate, embracing levity is critical if we are to counterprogram the dominant cultural narrative that associates sustainable behavior with shame and self-denial—effectively a dead-end when it comes to motivating action. In this light, the book is aligned with recent calls for moving beyond fear- and shame-based messaging by stressing the joys of living sustainably. In short, taking humor seriously does not involve dismissing the gravity of the environmental crises unfolding before our eyes; rather, it amplifies the innate desire for solidarity and collective well-being that laughter expresses. In reframing environmental discourse through the lens of humor, Zekavat and Scheel reveal how humor might help transform our shared ecological anxiety into a catalyst for collective action.