



Control

Dominic Michel, Stuart Middleton
and a text by Elvia Wilk

You can tell if someone's laugh is fake. Real laughter, called Duchenne laughter after the French neurologist Duchenne de Boulogne, contracts the tiny orbicularis oculi muscles surrounding the eye. A non-Duchenne laugh doesn't. Duchenne laughter is involuntary, spontaneous, and uncontrollable — it is an intuitively recognizable expression of joy. Non-Duchenne laughter, on the other hand, is a social tool, used, for example, in peacemaking, appeasement, and dominance reinforcement. Mocking and teasing typically involve non-Duchenne smiles. This empirical distinction that scientists make between Duchenne and non-Duchenne implies that there is a straightforward opposition between “real” and “fake” laughter, that realness and fakeness are total opposites. With this implication it is possible to unpack a host of implicit dichotomies between real and fake behavior in general. For instance, people often accuse others of being fake because their actions appear as social performance rather than an expression of a supposed authentic self. Yet smiling and laughter, even the Duchenne kind, almost certainly evolved within a social context. That is to say that most behavior has always been at least somewhat social, even involuntary behaviors like laughing or voicing a sound of surprise. The distinction between involuntary and voluntary does not neatly map onto distinctions like real or fake, natural versus cultural, authentic or inauthentic, benevolent or malevolent. There is no conceivable baseline back at the beginning of evolution when people were alone with their instincts—no magic moment when history began and people laughed alone. Who knows how or when Duchenne laughter evolved? Research into epigenetics shows that environmental factors including social life have very concrete effects on genetically inherited traits; evolution is the reciprocal interaction of nature and nurture. Biology is never fixed. Even Duchenne laughter is a social tool, since Duchenne laughs please others to hear; it's not inconceivable that frequent Duchenne laughs tend to be more socially successful, meaning that they pass along that propensity to their descendents. To laugh a non-Duchenne laugh is just as authentic, and authentically human, as any other kind of facial expression. You may laugh while alone, but this laughter is the expression of a social being. There is no ancient, true, inner self, giggling outside of time and space. Why try to distinguish between types of laughter at all?

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Stuart Middleton lives and works in Glasgow. Studied BA Painting at Camberwell College of Art in London and graduated from HBK Stadelshule, Frankfurt am Main in 2016. Selected solo exhibitions include *Carlos/Ishikawa*, London (forthcoming 2021); *Attitudes of Animals in Motion*, Castle Toward, Scotland (forthcoming 2021); *Motivation and Personality*, Künstlerhaus Halle für Kunst & Medien, Graz (2018); *Improvers*, Carlos/Ishikawa, London (2018); *Beat*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2017). Selected group exhibitions include *Tourism*, Kunsthaus Glarus, Glarus (2021); *Animation Beyond Cinema*, National Gallery of Art, Washington (2019); *Hello, My Name is Capitalism*, Peak, London (2019); *Techniques of the Observer*, Greene Naftali Gallery, New York (2019).

Dominic Michel lives and works in Zürich. Education at HGK Basel, ASFA Athens and University of Bern. In addition to his artistic work, Michel is active in various curatorial collectives, including RIVERSIDE artist-run space (riverside-space.ch) he cofounded in 2015. Latest solo exhibition at *Over the bed, under the skin, inside the head, Hamlet*, Zürich (2021) and *Caravan* at Aargauer Kunsthaus (2020). Selected group exhibitions at Kunsthalle Bern (2021); Palazzina Basel (2020); Kunsthalle Zürich (2020); Fri Art, Fribourg (2019); Kunsthaus Baselland (2019); TANK Basel (2019); Kunstverein Freiburg im Breisgau (2018); Solonos, Athens (2018); Real Positive, Cologne (2017); Milieu Bern (2017); Kunsthalle Basel (2016) and Garret Grimoire, Vienna (2016).

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