

Uncovering Solitary Laughter

*The Culture and Cultivation
of Laughing Alone*

Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky and Mark Weeks

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Foreword

This book makes me very happy.

As a psychology researcher focused on the costs and benefits of spending time alone, I have explored many aspects of solitude. The study of solitude has kept my rapt attention for more than 30 years because this ubiquitous phenomenon (we all spend time alone) has so many complex facets, encompasses a myriad of different experiences, and can profoundly impact our health and well-being – for good and for bad (Coplan, 2025; Coplan et al., 2021).

Yet, when I was first invited to write the Foreword for this book, I will admit that I had not previously considered the specific intellectual space occupied by the intersection between solitude and... laughter. Indeed, my first reaction was pretty much, is this really a thing?

I wondered how these two constructs might connect and why we might even be interested in this apparently idiosyncratic blending of constructs. This attitude was underscored by my own (perhaps not unique) bias encapsulated by a quote widely attributed to author and humorist P.G. Wodehouse, “When you're alone you don't do much laughing.”

But upon reflection (and with the benefit of hindsight), I should not have considered this almost antithetical combination to be all that surprising, as solitude itself is rife with paradox. By way of an example, solitude routinely serves as both a punishment (such as time out for an unruly toddler) and a reward (such as the gift of ‘me time’ for a stressed-out parent). Spending time alone is also simultaneously viewed as both entirely normative (such as an elderly gentleman

sitting by himself on a park bench feeding pigeons) and as a symptom, cause, and/or consequence of psychopathology (including such mental health problems as major depression, social anxiety disorder, and avoidant personality disorder). These apparent paradoxes underscore the broad duality of solitude as being both 'bad' and 'good'.

The expression of negative views toward solitude can be literally traced back to biblical times: "Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone' " (Genesis 2:18). In my own discipline, psychologists were also early identifiers of the adverse effects of solitude. In one of the first recorded psychology experiments, Triplett (1898) demonstrated that children performed simple tasks less quickly when alone than when paired with other children performing the same task. Since that time, psychologists have warned against the dangers of too much time alone, noting that solitude: goes against our very nature (humans evolved to live in groups); makes us sad (people tend to experience events more positively when they are with others than when they are alone); hinders our development (by depriving children of opportunities to experience the unique benefits of peer interactions); and often leads to loneliness (which has a profoundly negative impact on our mental health and even our physical health). Subsequent experiences of lockdowns and social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic shined an even brighter spotlight on the devastating effects of unwanted solitude for well-being.

Thus, it should not be surprising to hear that many people simply hate spending time alone. How much so? In a series of studies, Wilson and colleagues (2014) asked college students to sit in a room 'alone with their thoughts' for 15 minutes. In one variation of this experiment, students were also given the option of pressing a button in the room to receive a painful electric shock. Amazingly, the majority of students

found this experience of solitude so boring and aversive that they chose instead to fill the time by self-administering painful electric shocks!

Of course, the potential positive side of solitude has also long been lauded, by poets, philosophers, people of faith, and many others. But for decades, despite these passionate pleas, there was actually very little research in support of these assertions. However, over the last few years, there has been a surge of psychological studies providing some of the first direct empirical evidence of the benefits of solitude, as a place for restoration (Johansson et al., 2011); emotion regulation (Nguyen et al., 2018) and creativity (Korde & Paulus, 2017). Good quality time alone even seems to improve our subsequent social interactions with others (White et al., 2022) – and the negative feelings arising from not getting enough time alone (a relatively new concept dubbed *aloneliness*), can make us feel stressed, sad, and angry (Coplan et al., 2019). Attitudes are changing, and even parents recognize the many benefits of solitude for children and adolescents (Coplan et al., 2024).

And it now appears that we can add laughter to the list of things making the case for solitude as being ‘good’. Presumably like many others unfamiliar with the topic, I had previously only really thought about laughing alone, particularly in public, as a somewhat deviant behaviour. Indeed, as is acknowledged and discussed in this book, this has been a prevailing attitude (and this concern is indeed warranted). However, as I have now learned, there is so much more to this topic than that!

Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky and Mark Weeks provide the theoretical bedrock, outlining a conceptual model and nomenclature for characterizing the intersection between solitude and laughter, as well as how/why laughing alone can benefit our mental health and well-

being. But that is just the launching point for a truly fascinating intellectual journey, that takes us from Ancient Greece to a motorcyclist cruising the open road in California. This voyage spans historical periods, hops across cultures, and encompasses diverse disciplines. Along the way, we stop to see the sights, including a deep dive into the anatomy of what makes a joke funny, how a prescription for laughter can help reduce pain in burn victims, and how advances in AI are revolutionizing our understanding of the meaning and implications of solitary laughter.

Dear reader, buckle up, you are in for quite the trip! This is definitive and seminal work. But beyond that, it is just so much fun! After I turned the final page, I could not help but chuckle to myself...which I proceeded to do with added gusto armed with the knowledge and joy that this book gifted me.

Robert J. Coplan, PhD, July, 2026

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Preface

Among the two of us, one is a devoted Catholic, the other a committed atheist, one a social scientist, the other a humanities scholar. So, bridges have been crossed, and sometimes politely fought across, in order to bring this first book on laughing alone into the world. What made this multidisciplinary work possible, and what brought us together in the first place, was a shared interest in the subject of humans laughing by themselves, and disbelief that so little has been written about it before.

Solitude and laughter are important in both our lives. Neither of us is an extreme introvert, but like many we place a high value on time alone, and we like to laugh there, quite as much as elsewhere sometimes. Why should we or anyone feel that solitary laughter is like a poor substitute, a mild perversion of laughter with others? More than that, and as we show through the following pages, there are ways in which laughter positively transforms solitude, and solitude can liberate laughter. So, we like to see others laughing happily, healthily by themselves, and we want to do a little to encourage them.

A problem we invited upon ourselves is that there's a vast array of solitudes and laughters, which means there's an exponentially vaster range of solitary laughter types. We decided to go ahead anyway. There were surely occasions when both of us regretted that a little, but for the most part it's been a fascinating adventure.

We wanted to hear, read and disseminate other voices through the process, whether they were enamoured of laughing alone themselves or not. Still, since history has tended to conflate solitary laughers, reducing them quite often to pathology or misanthropy, we've

acknowledged the pervasive effects of negative views without feeling a need to amplify them here. While aiming to be as objective as practical, our work reflects a keen interest in what solitary laughter can do, what it can contribute to lives and societies.

The book is a novel hybrid, since it's edited by us and mostly written by us, but with numerous contributors expanding its range across disciplines. We'd like to thank all of the people who have worked with us on this. We thank our families and friends, too, for their support and for giving us the solitude we needed sometimes to bring the book together.

Mark Weeks, Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky, July 2026

In 2021, the following poem, “The Punch Line”, by the American writer Marilyn Nelson appeared in *The Hudson Review* 73(4):

A few times in my life I have awaked
Laughing out loud at a wonderful joke.
I never recall the joke, but keep on laughing
For a minute or two, alone in the dark.
A few nights ago my friend Jacques said something
That laughed me awake, still laughing at Jacques,
Then laughing at laughing myself awake by laughing,
With no idea of what could have been so funny.
I lay there smiling and musing, wondering
If death is the punch line, and life the joke.
Or vice versa. Quack, quack.

(With kind permission of the author.)

Chapter 1

Introduction: A Quiet, Complicated Story

Mark Weeks and Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky

What's the point of laughing alone? In 2024, a rare and quite remarkable essay titled "In Defense of Laughing Alone" was published by writer Nikita Andester at the website "A Merry Loner". In around 1200 words, she associates solitary laughter with the following: an intensified experience of *nowness*, developing resilience, fostering creativity, self-transcendence and self-derived, self-enjoyed pleasure (Andester, 2024). Most of these refer to benefits attainable through laughter in social contexts as well, of course, so her first point is only that there's no particular reason to withhold them when you're alone. Her second point is that for some, and perhaps many of us, laughing alone can at times do more and feel even better than laughing with others. For example, that feeling of *nowness* may be more intense alone, and a special sense of personal empowerment might attend the ability to generate laughter and enjoy it by ourselves. In an early academic commentary article on solitary laughter, I cited a blogger observing, "It's one of the hidden gifts of life. When you can be alone and for whatever strange stirring in the brain, you laugh out loud" (Weeks, 2016). I received similar comments when for the same article I surveyed over a hundred university students from 21 countries in Japan. Almost all of them did laugh alone occasionally and some considered it especially valuable.

It's natural that many of us worry about problems of excessive social isolation amid the breathtaking technologies of AI and the smartphone. Yet broad condemnation of being alone and the

enjoyment of pleasures such as laughter there is hardly a solution. As Andester's essay suggests, solitary laughter cannot only be very beneficial for a person, it can make them better people. In the book *Solitude*, the researcher Netta Weinstein and her colleagues follow others before them in distinguishing "aloneness" from "loneliness" and in affirming the various benefits of solitude for individuals and those around them. The very last lines of the book extoll a desire and capacity to "laugh out loud by ourselves, with ourselves, for ourselves". (Weinstein et al., 2024, p, 225). That's a call to the future rather than a literal summation; unfortunately, the book doesn't discuss solitary laughter, few do. In fact, their bringing together of the concepts of laughing and being alone in a positive way is unusual. The growth in research into positive solitude in recent years has produced little on solitary laughter. Likewise, the flourishing of scholarly work on humour and laughter has provided scarce insight into laughing alone so far. So, what are the various types of solitary laughter doing? How do they differ from laughter shared with others? Where do they come from and how do they affect us and the world? That, in a nutshell, is why the present book came into existence. This is not to say we'll definitively answer all the questions here, but we want to make solitary laughter more visible, elucidate its significance, and begin to advance understanding.

In researching and compiling this book we wanted to explore freely, but we had six broadly guiding issues in mind. Firstly, we've applied the formal models introduced in our previous work (Gonot-Schoupinsky et al., 2025) to distinguish types of solitary laughter and sometimes solitary humour. The other five relate to making sense of the following things: how laughing alone and attitudes towards it might change over time; the ways solitude can alter the experience, meaning and practical range of laughter; conversely, how laughter might transform the experience of solitude, and attitudes towards

being alone; the ways laughing alone can transform our sense of self; and how laughing alone might positively affect societies. These issues come up throughout the book, and in the final chapter we'll discuss the key points emerging under each issue in turn.

The complexities of solitary laughter

Most people are aware of an association between laughing alone, perhaps especially in public, and mental illness; it can indicate cognitive or emotional dysregulation, even serious neurological disorders such as pseudobulbar affect. We don't make light of that. It's clear, though, that most of us don't associate all signs of solitary laughter, in public or alone, with ill health. With so many people carrying smartphones, talking with others and watching funny videos on them anywhere, a person laughing alone in public now is commonplace and far less likely to be immediately identified as a problem.

Nevertheless, there's still a hesitancy around laughing alone and much of that comes from a certain notion that laughter belongs naturally to the social realm, an idea that areas of psychology have enthusiastically supported. There's an academically popular concept that even the most solitary laughter is "fundamentally social"; it's argued that when we laugh alone, there's sure to be an "imagined or implied presence of other people" (Martin & Ford, 2018, p. 3). In that case, there would seem to be little need to delve into laughter in isolated or detached individuals other than as pathology. If those laughing alone are deemed to be, psychologically speaking, operating socially, the behaviour becomes wholly comprehensible within the same conceptual tools applied to social interaction. There's no mention of the idea that the thoughts inducing solitary laughter might easily be about myself, or a huge coffee stain on my book that looks remarkably like broccoli, or some wild fantasy about a planet made of

chocolate. Perhaps my solitary laughter wasn't even the effect of something funny but a sudden burst of joy at an unbelievably beautiful skyscape stretched out before me. Perhaps it was a way of relieving stress from a situation I'd suddenly found myself in. Perhaps I was laughing intentionally simply because it makes me feel good. These are not the most conspicuous laughs, but they're hardly uncommon, and they can sometimes be extremely important moments for us precisely because they happen while we're alone.

The most influential proponent of the "essentially social" view of laughter was Robert Provine, who presented evidence from a small psychological study he did showing laughter is much more likely to occur in social contexts than alone (Provine & Fischer, 1989): "Thirty times more likely!" was, and remains, the popular cry. He wrote in the book *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation* (2000):

Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard noted the rarity of solitary laughter when he inquired of a friend, "Answer me honestly ... do you really laugh when you are alone?" Kierkegaard concluded that you have to be "a little more than queer" if you do. Indeed, laughter is the quintessential human social signal. Laughter is about relationships. (Provine, 2000, p. 44.)

As discussed in Chapter 6, this truncated quote is misleading. It's also a highly selective example given that many important philosophers, from the ancient Democritus through Montaigne, Nietzsche and Arendt, are positively associated with laughing alone, as this book will return to in depth. But for now, the crucial issue is that blanket assertions like those above can have unspoken consequences. For us, the most pertinent is that laughing alone is thrown into intellectual darkness, or kept there.

Another problem is that the figure “thirty times” was attained by discounting laughter alone while using media, even passively, non-interactively. That made considerable difference, rendering what was left, laughing completely alone, quantitatively insignificant. The pivotal question this raises is, what constitutes solitude? Koch (1994) argues that solitude can occur even in a social context if one feels disengaged from others. More recently, this has been supported by solitude researchers surveying large numbers through various methods to ascertain how people themselves define solitude. The conclusion: “Solitude is a state in which the dominant relationship is with the self. If not physically alone, people in solitude are mentally distanced from others”; this includes passive use of media (Weinstein et al., 2023, p. 1633). It’s not exactly how the taxonomic model we ourselves use works, but it’s consistent with how solitude is regarded through much of this book.

Researchers are recognising that solitude is a complex and important issue, and this affects laughing alone, along with the way we think and feel about it. Humans are socially dependent, formed and sustained through society, and the persistence of loneliness across cultures attests to the fact that humans are social creatures, that we need others. Still, most of us don’t want to be with others all the time (Lay J. C., 2018; Lay et al., 2019, 2020). Insufficiency of solitude, sometimes called “aloneliness”, is a significant problem; so is the inability to be at ease while alone (Coplan et al. 2019). If we deliberately avoid solitude or are unable to get enough of it, we lose an important space for destressing, affective self-regulation, self-reflection, personal insight, creativity and perhaps above all, joy (Larson & Lee, 1996; Long & Averill, 2003; Nguyen et al., 2018).

So, while extraversion is often equated with better mental health, (Kang et al., 2023), there’s increasing acknowledgment of

introversion's positive aspects, and of the value of ambiversion, of being able to move adaptively across the extraversion/introversion spectrum (Petric, 2022). Modern humans undergo frequent, sometimes dramatic, shifts of social engagement and detachment (Long et al., 2003). We want to show that laughter is deeply implicated in that, not least of all because it's been associated, seemingly paradoxically, with both social bonding (Scott et al., 2014) and emotional detachment (Aharoni, 2020; Nelson, 2012). And it's sometimes a vehicle for sudden transitions between the two... in either direction.

Consider a person sitting in a forest contemplating the nature around them, another reading a book at home, another alone watching a talk show on TV, someone walking along the street listening to music through headphones, another reading a book on a train, another sitting next to her enjoying the gentle rocking along the rails, someone at a party feeling self-conscious and unable to casually interact, another at the same party feeling just plain bored. We can feel significant degrees of aloneness in each of these, and laughter might arise in any of them, even if we sometimes conceal it, "laughing to ourselves". Those laughs alone have their own character.

We'll show in the course of the book that the situation of solitary laughter has likely been changing all along, sometimes gradually, more recently, almost frighteningly fast. Solitude itself has a history, or rather histories, with our experience of it, our attitudes towards it, shifting dramatically across time and space (Vincent, 2020; Barclay, 2025). Solitude was once a rarity for most people and subject to suspicion (Goldberg & Tarbin, 2021); now it's quite actively sought by many among all the busyness and noise. Laughter too has evolved, even if we can't be sure how it started. It's been identified more recently in other animals (Winkler & Bryant, 2021), and something

akin to laughter, the “laugh face”, has been observed even in chimpanzees playing alone (Spijkerman et al., 1996; Cordoni & Palagi, 2011). But the origin of laughter isn’t something we need to determine here. Human laughter is surely different from that of other animals, and changing, diversifying. It would be strange if the functions of this quite ubiquitous behaviour, including its solitary instances, remained unchanged across the ages and across vastly different cultures each undergoing its own transitions. The folklorist Vladimir Propp observed, “Laughter... has its own history... We do not laugh now as people once laughed” (Propp, 1984, p.127). There can be consistencies, then, but no singular laughter, or solitary laughter, for all time.

We’ve found indications that we’re gradually becoming a little more conscious of our laughter, and what it might do, and this includes its functions in the solitary side of life. The academic Ros Ben-Moshe (2017) writes:

We cry by ourselves and indulge in so many other emotional and physical states solo. We need to recondition our belief systems to empower ourselves to laugh alone and for our own sake.... I am OK about laughing by myself, for myself. (p. 71)

Solitary laughter is viewed here as in some part a self-administered therapeutic technique. It can also be intentionally self-induced, without a humorous trigger, to attain health and wellbeing benefits. The founder of Laughter Yoga, Madan Kataria, practices a ritual of intentional solitary laughter each morning and teaches it to student instructors (Kataria et al., 2023). It’s being deployed, too, in certain formal health contexts, including with assistive technology such as Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky’s Laughie laughter prescription (Kuru Alici et al., 2024).

Special motivations, methods, and a map

Across many cultures, we're spending more time alone. More people are remaining single, populations are aging, and technology is radically altering the way we connect with (and disconnect from) others, even in the workplace (Snell, 2017; Esteve et al. 2020). Being alone has been associated with depression, or "melancholy", for a long time (Barclay, 2025). (The historical marginalization of solitary laughter may even be implicated in a certain persistence of negative views of being alone, and vice versa.) Becoming more aware of how laughter operates when we are more or less by ourselves, how it can come from within as well as from without, can transform experiences of being alone. This won't magically eradicate loneliness, nor should it, since loneliness serves to reinforce our need for social connections (Barclay, 2025). But it fosters impressions of aloneness that are more balanced, allowing us to view it as a sometimes enjoyable, happier, even funnier place to be. This is crucial, because we know one's beliefs about time alone influence the way it's experienced (Rodriguez et al., 2025). So, it's time for more to be done on how laughter fits into that, why and how it might be cultivated.

We've drawn on our own previous work to get started and to guide us here a little (Gonot-Schoupinsky et al., 2025), but most of the material in this book is new. The majority of the writing is our own, but we follow Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky's author-editor hybrid book format, combining principal author-editors (ourselves) and invited authors. It's greatest strength, we think, is that while for now we focus primarily on European or so-called western cultures, we gather research and ideas from an array of sources: history, cultural studies, philosophy, psychology, health science, artificial intelligence. We wanted to come at solitary laughter from a variety of perspectives, and through diverse methods, and sought the help of others with different

skills and approaches to our own. The chapters comprising the final section of the book are interviews and essays providing more personal and remarkably insightful perspectives on laughing, whether through humour or volitionally, alone.

We've already given some practical sense of how we use the terms "solitary", "laughter" and "solitary laughter" and we'll provide more formal definitions in Chapter Two. There the taxonomic Solitary Laughter Model (SLM) and Solitary Humour Model (SHM) conceived by Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky are also explained. The taxonomies allow important distinctions to be made, facilitating nuanced discussions of the numerous ways laughing alone functions across a variety of intrapersonal and social contexts. That chapter also expands on the issue of defining aloneness, discusses the earliest examples of solitary laughter in the Bible, and elucidates ethical issues relating to the behaviour.

The four chapters of the Section "Perspectives from European History" offer historical views on the subject of laughing alone. We can begin to glean some sense of how solitary laughter has been operating, at least for some, by relating notable discourse around the subject to historical information on changing attitudes and practices of solitude and laughing up to recent times. Chapter Three, by Mark Weeks and Kalle Lundahl, examines the instances of solitary laughter referred to earlier, in the legends surrounding the ancient Greek figures of Myson and Democritus. We examine how the treatment of solitary laughter in these cultural documents reflects certain ideas about both solitude and laughter around that time. In Chapter Four, we give some sense of Christian practices of laughing alone and attitudes toward it through an analysis of references to solitary laughter in the writing of the Doctors of the Church, from early Christianity to modern times. Chapter Five focuses on specific

instances of notable European historical figures from the Renaissance through to the 19th century, again discussing laughter alone in relation to solitude and laughter broadly. This starts out with the essayist Michel de Montaigne, proceeding through writings of Robert Burton, Giacomo Casanova and Arthur Schopenhauer. Chapter Six looks at what has been described as a high-water mark in the cultural history of laughing alone in modernism, from the late 19th to early-20th centuries, before focusing on figures who present unique and, we think, important and diverse discourses around the subject: Friedrich Nietzsche, Virginia Woolf and Hannah Arendt.

The book's second section, "Recent and Contemporary Investigations", approaches the subject from multiple perspectives, with different aims, and expands our geographical scope somewhat. First, Chapter Seven reveals the further development of discourses around solitary laughter in culture from around the middle of the 20th century to the present, and finds evidence of a gradual, rather quiet but marked escalation in its acceptance and conscious practice. Chapter Eight draws on the scientific literature to provide some sense of how solitary laughter has been approached and conceptualized scientifically in recent times. By dividing the scientific literature into three areas and organising these according to chronology, different and important trends are discerned. Chapter Nine discusses recent studies with the Laughie laughter prescription undertaken within the Faculty of Nursing, Hacettepe University, Ankara. The Laughie uses everyday technology to support laughter, often alone, through a user's recordings as prompts for more laughter. The chapter reveals characteristic attitudes to laughter and specifically solitary laughter in the culture before describing interventions using the Laughie in the treatment of people suffering from the effects of the 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes in Türkiye. Chapter Ten is a proposal by Iranian Artificial Intelligence (AI) scholar Roja Ghasemi for the use

of AI in the analysis of solitary laughter in various contexts. It also presents theoretical foundations for the use of AI in enhancing techniques such as the Laughie for health and wellbeing purposes through monitoring and feedback.

The book's third section, "Personal Perspectives on Laughing Alone", explores contemporary personal experiences of solitary laughter through two interviews with notable individuals, a brief interlude on humour types, and the autoethnographic essay writing of two others. In Chapter Eleven, we interview French Israeli philosopher Lydia Amir about her own experiences with intrapersonal laughter and her work on self-ridicule in the intellectual history of laughter. Chapter Twelve is an interview with Dr. Madan Kataria, the Indian founder of the Laughter Yoga movement, who describes his development of solitary laughter practice first for himself and then as an important part of broader intentional laughter training. In Chapter Thirteen, the American cultural studies and humour scholar Arthur Asa Berger considers how humour might be better understood and fostered by individuals to generate their own laughter responses. In Chapter Fourteen, Englishman Joe Hoare, himself a practitioner in volitional laughter for well over two decades, describes his journey into solitary laughter and the personal experiments he has undertaken there to find out what it can achieve. Chapter Fifteen is an essay by the American philosopher John Marmysz on his experiences of laughter while alone on his motorcycle. He integrates phenomenology with the Solitary Laughter Model and the Solitary Humour Model to explore the nuances of cause and effect. We believe his and the other voices in the Section make an extraordinary contribution to new understanding of the functions and potentials of various types and contexts of laughing alone.

We conclude the book with a summary of major issues revealed by our research, as well as brief reflections upon what they might mean. We also consider where investigations into solitary laughter might go next.

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Chapter Two

Disentangling Solitary Laughter

Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky

In this chapter, we contemplate the concept of laughing alone in more detail. Our objective is to share our insight on how it can be defined, what it entails, and ways in which it can be classified. Solitary laughter is clearly a type of laughter that takes place away from social interaction, and yet, and this is where things get complicated, it can also take place during social interaction. This diversity within solitary laughter is encapsulated in our preliminary classification framework: the Solitary Laughter Model (SLM) conceived to explore the complexity of the behaviour and influenced by the Solitary Humour Model (SHM). Here we consider how these models can advance our thinking.

To begin, I address the issue of the compatibility of solitude and laughter and examine definitions of laughter, humour and solitary laughter. Then I discuss the nature of solitary laughter from the perspectives of aloneness and ethics, with examples of solitary laughter and how the behaviour relates to the environment in which it takes place. In the process, we consider possibly the earliest examples revealing the importance and complexity of solitary laughter. We delve into the ethics around laughing alone to provide insight into why solitary laughter, despite being a time-honoured behaviour, is sometimes contested, sidelined and undermined. We gradually introduce the SLM through these discussions. We end this chapter by presenting the SLM in detail and critiquing its capacity to disentangle some of the nuances of solitary laughter.

Embracing solitude and laughter

Many definitions of solitude have been offered and some of them are presented in Chapter 1. Some will be more – or less - relevant to our research, as laughter and solitude can seem rather incongruous, and thus may not be so commonly considered together. However, our book is testimony to our conviction that laughter and solitude are natural partners. Varying definitions reveal that solitude can embrace environments and behaviours that are quite diverse. For example, Weinstein, Hansen and Nguyen (2023) have stated: *“any time spent physically separated from others can constitute solitude, regardless of whether someone chooses to do nothing or something. Such “alone” time may include watching television, playing video games, reading a book, or working alone”*. Immediately, while reading such a description of solitude, we can envisage the possibility that laughter may also occur during such times. Weinstein et al. (2023), explain this as follows: *“While we often think of solitude as time that is free from disruptions and distractions and therefore allows unadulterated inner focus, in our research, distracted alone time still constituted solitude for many participants. In short, the pursuit of nothingness is not necessary for solitude”*. Moreover, the authors provide a range of examples where physical separation from others is not needed for solitude. And this is critical for us when we consider the boundaries of solitary laughter. What we can agree on is that solitude offers ample variety and embraces alone time both in private and or public, and with or without media.

Alongside these definitional perspectives, I also want to consider some practical implications. As solitude has a negative connotation for some, how we perceive and embrace it may be fundamental to our wellbeing. Solitude is about space, separation and as discussed in Chapter 1 also about a state of mind, yet it can even be considered as

behaviour that is essential for human well-being. As Albert Einstein wrote:

“Man is, at one and the same time, a solitary being and a social being. As a solitary being, he attempts to protect his own existence and that of those who are closest to him, to satisfy his personal desires, and to develop his innate abilities. As a social being, he seeks to gain the recognition and affection of his fellow human beings, to share in their pleasures, to comfort them in their sorrows, and to improve their conditions of life. Only the existence of these varied, frequently conflicting, strivings accounts for the special character of a man...” (Einstein, 1989, p. 125).

Recently, Bi et al. (2026) have investigated positive solitude as “an active choice of an enjoyable solitary experience” and highlight not only the need for “private solitude” but also for “public solitude” in public open spaces. As we will see, in the SLM, we take things further to investigate both disengaged private and public solitude and engaged, i.e. with others, including virtually, private and public solitude. But let us first turn to laughter!

Defining solitary laughter

There have been many definitions of laughter, yet most do not explicitly consider the phenomenon of laughing alone. To find one, we have to look at a definition that extends mainstream thinking. The following laughter definition acknowledges laughing alone and offers a comparative definition of humour. The latter is also of interest as laughter and humour are often, erroneously, conflated, yet as these definitions, published in 2020, articulate, they are not the same. We will consider additional differences between laughter and humour in Chapter 8, including those highlighted in the Humour Laughter Affect (HuLA) model (Gonot-Schoupinsky et al., 2020).