22nd AUSTRALASIAN HUMOUR STUDIES NETWORK CONFERENCE 2016

6-8 February, Women's College, University of Sydney

UNFUNNY:
THE LIMITS OF HUMOUR

Cole's Patent Whipping Machine for Flogging Naughty Boys in School.

Cover illustrations from *Cole's Funny Picture Book No. 1* (Melbourne: E.W. Cole, 1918), first published 1879

THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

WELCOME AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We welcome you to the 22nd Australasian Humours Studies Network conference, and acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. It is upon their ancestral lands that the University of Sydney is built.

We would like to thank the School of Letters, Art & Media for its continuing support for the AHSN, and Andrea Yapp for facilitating the smooth processing of registrations. Our thanks also go to Women's College for hosting us, and to its events manager, Gineke de Haan, for arranging things so well.

We would especially like to thank all of you who are attending, and in particular those who are presenting and sharing their knowledge and insights. The theme of this year's conference is 'Unfunny: The Limits of Humour'. This is the first AHSN conference to focus on the cultural, political and ethical boundaries of humour: a subject of much debate following the murders in January last year of staff at the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*.

In association with this year's conference, Rare Books at Fisher Library is mounting an exhibition that showcases the history of Australian comic art and cartooning. 'Laugh Lines and Other Distractions', is curated by Lindsay Foyle and Peter Kirkpatrick from the AHSN, with Julie Price and Marissa Casson from Fisher Library. The exhibition is built into the conference program, and will be launched by Alan Moir, chief political cartoonist of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, at 10.30 a.m. on Monday morning, following the plenary session 'On Cartoons & Cartoonists'. We hope that you'll take some time out to explore it.

Very best wishes from the organising committee.

Peter Kirkpatrick
Jessica Milner Davis
Will Visconti

22nd AUSTRALASIAN HUMOUR STUDIES NETWORK CONFERENCE, WOMEN'S COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

PROGRAM

SATURDAY 6 FEBRUARY 2016	
12.30-1.15 **Foyer**	Registration/Refreshments
1.15-1.30 **Main Common Room**	Welcome: Peter Kirkpatrick, on behalf of the organising committee Launch: **Mark Humphries** from ABC's *The Roast*
1.30-2.30 **Main Common Room**	PLENARY SESSION: KEYNOTE ADDRESS **Michael Ewans**, Humanities & Social Sciences, University of Newcastle At the Limits of Humour
2.30-3.00	Afternoon Tea
3.00-5.00 **Main Common Room**	PLENARY SESSION: ON SATIRE **Conal Condren** *Yes Minister*: The Theoretical Dimension **Cale Bain** What's the News? How Comedy and Traditional News Content Compare **Béatrice Bijon** The Cheek of *Charlie Hebdo*: Laughter, Power, Authority **Bridget Boyle & David Megaritty** Onstage Couplings: Exploring the Limits of the Male/Female Comedy Duo
5.00-6.00	Drinks
6.00-	Conference goers make their own dinner arrangements

SUNDAY 7 FEBRUARY 2016	

9.00-10.00 **Main Common Room**	PLENARY SESSION: KEYNOTE ADDRESS **Michael Haugh**, Languages & Linguistics, Griffith University Jocular Mockery, Jocular Abuse and the Taking of Offence
10.00-10.30	Morning Tea
10.30-12.00	PARALLEL SESSIONS

Main Common Room	Library
PSYCHOLOGY	**LITERARY STUDIES**
Bruce Findlay Psychological Well-Being: What's Humour Got to Do with It?	**Marty Murphy** We Only Laugh When It Doesn't Hurt: Comic Effect and the Abstraction of Violence in Literary Comedy Narratives
Angus McLachlan Possible Implications of Laughing at the Beginning, During, or at the End of a Speaking Turn	**Claire Duffy** Radicalising the Feminine Grotesque: Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and Marie Darrieussecq's *Pig Tales*
Maren Rawlings Disparagement of Self – Who Would Do That!	**Ben Eldridge** 'Flexible Ethics for a Complex World': Retrofitting the Vampire in Peter Watts' *Blindsight*

12.00-1.00	Lunch
1.00-2.30	PARALLEL SESSIONS

Main Common Room	Library
LANGUAGE/LINGUISTICS	**COMMUNICATING HUMOUR**
Cliff Goddard The Semantics of 'Sarcasm'	**Alfred Vincent** *The Donkey's Tale*: Laughter and Its Limits in Medieval Greece
Scott Gardner Functions and Failings of Humour in Language Learner Error Correction	**Michael Meany** Twittering: Picking on the Powerful
Kerry Mullan, Christine Béal & Véronique Traverso Conversational Humour in French and Australian English: What Makes an Utterance Unfunny?	**Jessica Milner Davis** The Humour Transaction: A Conceptual Model

2.30-3.00	Afternoon Tea

3.00-5.00 **Main Common Room**	PLENARY SESSION: PANEL **On Satire & Offence in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia & the People's Republic of China** **Shuming Bai** Singapore-Based Satirical Humour: Interpretative Analysis of Satire News from *NewNation.sg* **Khin-Wee Chen** A Parliamentarian Plays the Fool: An Examination of the Consequences of Teresa Kok's Satirical Video **Ann Elizabeth Lever (Ann Lee)** 'Push Me, Pull You': The Complex Relations of Audience, Censorship and Political Satirical Theatre in Malaysia and Indonesia **Jocelyn Chey** Cantonese 'Sardonicism': Wit and Humour in a Regional Culture Under Threat
5.00-6.00	Free time
6.30-Late	Conference Dinner: Thai Pothong Restaurant, Newtown (15 mins walk)

MONDAY 8 FEBRUARY 2016

8.45-9.00	Walk to Fisher Library
9.00-10.30 **Fisher Library Seminar Room, Level 2**	PLENARY SESSION: ON CARTOONS & CARTOONISTS **Ronald Stewart** 'Extremely Regrettable' Cartoons: The Limits of Political Cartoons Across Borders in the Wake of Japan's 3.11 Disaster **Susan Elizabeth Foster** The Press Gang: The Role of Editors in the Careers of Three New Zealand Political Cartoonists **Lindsay Foyle** Not Always Unfunny: Political Cartoonists
10.30-10.45 **Fisher Library Seminar Room, Level 2**	Launch of 'Laugh Lines' exhibition of Australian comic art: **Alan Moir**, introduced by Lindsay Foyle
10.45-11.30	Morning Tea at Fisher, walk back to Women's College
11.30-1.00	PARALLEL SESSIONS

Main Common Room	Library
COMEDY & FILM	**MUSICAL THEATRE**
Sung-Ju Suya Lee *Bridesmaids*: A Critical Analysis of the Farce Comedy in the Case Study of a Successful Produced Screenplay	**John Carmody** *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* as Comic Opera: Can a Work of Art be Simultaneously Humorous and Anti-Semitic?
Debra Aarons & Marc Mierowsky Sarah Silverman, Public Conscience of the 'Chosen People'	**Elisha McIntyre** Hasa Diga Beg Your Pardon! Latter-day Saint Responses to *The Book of Mormon The Musical*
Josh Wheatley Filthy Openings and Thresholds: Trash as Philosophy in *Pink Flamingos*	**Will Visconti** The Personal and the Political in Contemporary Cabaret

1.00-2.00	Lunch

2.00-3.30	PARALLEL SESSIONS	
Main Common Room		**Library**
HUMOUR & THE WORKPLACE		**PERFORMANCE**
Daryl Peebles The Price of Inappropriate Humour in the Workplace		**Helen Walters** A Frolic of Fancy Dressers: How to Look Good as a Pumpkin?
Anja Pabel The Downsides of Humour Used During Tourism Experiences		**Anton Crouch** Insult as Humorous Entertainment – The Case of the Dozens
Sarah Attfield & Liz Giuffre Surely You Can't be Serious?: Considering the Limits of Using Humour in Teaching and Communication		**Sara Tomkins** The Ambivalence of the 'Mega Bigot' and Jewishness in the Comedy of Sarah Silverman
3.30-4.00	Afternoon Tea	
4.00-5.00 **Main Common Room**	PLENARY SESSION: KEYNOTE ADDRESS **Moira Marsh**, Indiana University Bloomington Unlaughter, the Unfunny, and the *Dreadnought*	
5.00-6.00	Farewell drinks	
6.00-7.30	AHSN Review Panel meets over dinner	

CONFERENCE DINNER

6.30 Sunday 7 February
Thai Pothong Restaurant
294 King St, Newtown, close to Newtown Station

Thai Pothong   **(King Street: 15 minute walk)**   **Women's College**

Aarons, Debra

University of New South Wales

Mierowsky, Marc

Queens' College, Cambridge

Sarah Silverman, Public Conscience of the 'Chosen People'

In *The Atlantic* magazine (May 2015) an article by Megan Garber titled, 'How Comedians Became Public Intellectuals', echoed an often made claim that stand-up comedy is, at its core, cultural criticism. In the USA, particularly, a renewed field of interest appears to be emerging, investigating this idea as a serious academic pursuit. In this presentation we focus on Sarah Silverman, a comedian who throughout her more than 25-year career has consistently seized upon the hypocrisies and contradictions inherent in American attitudes towards religion, sex and political culture. Premised on the setup that she is just an innocent Jewish girl, she skewers both mainstream and, specifically, Jewish, cultural attitudes and practices. In this presentation, we examine Silverman's contribution to promoting consciousness and activism in the development of a progressive public through consideration of her stand-up comedy, social media presence, and the public service announcements (PSAs) she has made for progressive political causes. We focus, particularly, on the way she has targeted an imagined Jewish audience.

Drawing on our previous work (Aarons & Mierowsky, 2014) tracing the arc of outrageousness and licence in Jewish comedy as social criticism, we situate Silverman within a robust tradition of ranters, ravers, and kvetchers, amongst them Lenny Bruce, Philip Roth, Jon Stewart, and Roseanne Barr. Focusing on two of her comedy specials, *Jesus is Magic* (2005) and *We are Miracles* (2013)*, we first address Silverman's general critique of religion and believers. Imagining a conversation explaining belief to the hypothetical child of an interfaith relationship (hers with Jimmy Kimmel), she concludes, 'Mommy is one of the chosen people and Daddy believes Jesus is magic'. Jokes such as this one are directed at two separate but overlapping publics: the wider public audience, and a more narrowly-focused target, 'the chosen people'. The focus of Silverman's political activism is to assault the sensibilities of both these audiences. We concentrate on the attack on her imagined Jewish audience, 'the chosen people'. In Silverman's comedy this ironic usage is intended to activate the Jewish conscience, as well as delivering a kick in the collective balls of that audience.

Although unlikely to see herself as a public intellectual, Silverman's performances belie this. Her PSAs are geared towards awakening political activism in under-represented and under-informed communities. 'The Great Schlep', urging young Jewish people to get their grandparents to vote for Obama, was aimed at the grandchildren of poorly informed and under-motivated Jewish retirees in Florida. In the event that the good reasons she supplied failed, she recommended they simply threaten not to visit their elderly grandparents. Wielding the much-mocked cultural weapon, guilt, she brought an important constituency to Obama's cause in 2008. In the 2012 presidential campaign, she utilised outrageously provocative sexual taunting to target Jewish billionaire Sheldon Adelson in order to embarrass him for donating money to the Republican candidate, Mitt Romney. In the PSA, 'An Indecent Proposal', she addresses Adelson directly, offering to 'scissor him to fruition' if he donates $100 million to Obama's campaign instead, asking how many billionaires can say they've been 'scissored by a nice Jewish girl with big naturals'.

We show how, also in 2012, Silverman's campaign against unfair voter ID laws is framed by a deliberately Jewish perspective. Silverman introduces herself as 'your Jewish friend, Sarah' and the campaign's website name, www.letmypeoplevote.com, invokes the biblical and historical oppression of Jews. Like all her PSAs, this one relies on the historical association of Jewish Americans with liberal and progressive causes; in this case one that rallies support for the elderly, poor, disabled, illiterate and otherwise disaffected citizens whom these laws would further disenfranchise. Her description of the effect of the laws takes political bawdy to new extremes.

We argue that what makes Silverman more than a campaigner and a lobbyist, is her genius in turning her biting critique inwards, focusing on 'the chosen people'. This changing perspective makes public those insular aspects of Jewish community and identity that embody powerful, ignorant and entitled behaviour. She lampoons these values and attitudes in an apparently light-hearted routine that stabs at the cultural hypocrisy in her routine about being raped by a Jewish doctor: 'It was a bitter-sweet experience for a Jewish girl.'

Our primary purpose in this presentation, then, is to show how Silverman's ironic use of 'the chosen people' serves to highlight the many different hypocrisies – religious, cultural and political – she exposes. Her role as a public intellectual and cultural critic is most evident in her relentless mockery of this public.

Bionotes

Debra Aarons, Linguistics, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, is co-author, with Marc Mierowsky, of *Obscenity, Dirtiness and Licence in Jewish Comedy* (2014). Her monograph, *Jokes and the Linguistic Mind*, was published by Taylor & Francis in 2012.

Marc Mierowsky, Faculty of English, Queens' College Cambridge, Cambridge, is co-author, with Debra Aarons, of *Obscenity, Dirtiness and Licence in Jewish Comedy*. His doctoral thesis is on popular sovereignty and political education in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Britain.

Attfield, Sarah

Giuffre, Liz

University of Technology Sydney

Surely You Can't be Serious?:
Considering the Limits of Using Humour in Teaching and Communication

There is a growing body of research work now dedicated to effective use of comedy as a mode of address beyond the creative industries. Comedy can serve as a useful icebreaker in 'serious' communication settings such as formal profession-based training and workshop sessions, as well as a legitimate method of delivering otherwise 'difficult' content in educational settings (Gamer, 2006; Banas et al., 2011; Chong et al., 2015). Building on this body of work we explore the limits of using humour in this way, particularly in relation to teaching in higher education to a diverse student cohort. There are certain universalities that are implied with the use of humour as a form of communication (for example, the use of a basic technique such as inversion which can be employed as a comedic device to engage students who may be otherwise frustrated or uninterested in a difficult topic), however there remain issues in using these when it comes to knowing how to 'pitch' to a group of students who may have a variety of expectations of the teacher/student relationship and have varying types of existing cultural capital (Cheng, 2003). Nearly 100 years ago sarcasm was isolated as a particularly ineffective, if not detrimental form of classroom engagement (Briggs, 1928), but other devices like the unexpected use of 'inappropriate' language have been noted as relatively useful as ways to bridge otherwise difficult gaps in otherwise formal learning spaces (Generous et al., 2014; Wanzer et al, 2006). We offer a work-in-progress examination of the utility of using humour in teaching, noting current experiences where humour was more of a hindrance than a help to effective communication.

References

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Bionotes

Dr Sarah Attfield is an Associate Lecturer in the School of Communication, University of Technology Sydney. Her research is focused on the ways in which working class experience is represented in literature and popular culture, and she has written on working class representation in British and Australian comedy. She also has an interest in the uses of comedy in educational settings and recently co-authored (with Liz Giuffre) a peer-reviewed chapter entitled 'Laughing While Learning: Using Comedic Commentary and Reporting in the Classroom' published in a book on higher education and media by Waterhill Publishing (USA).

Dr Liz Giuffre is a Lecturer in Communication at the University of Technology Sydney. She has researched and written on a variety of topics. with publications on comedy including the forthcoming co-edited collection *Music in Comedy Television* (Routledge), as well as chapters in collections on film comedy for Equinox Publishing, and journal articles on new forms of online comedy and sound. She has also written on comedy's role in learning and teaching, with the co-authored peer reviewed chapter, 'Laughing While Learning: Using Comedic Commentary and Reporting in the Classroom'.

Bai, Shuming

National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University

Singapore-Based Satirical Humour: Interpretive Analysis of Satire News from *NewNation.sg*

NewNation.sg is Singapore's principal satirical news website. Since December 2010, more than 2500 satirical news items have been posted by *NewNation.sg*, with an average monthly unique visitors' count of 100,000. The listed mission of *NewNation.sg* is to 'report 50% real news using 50% investigative journalism for 25% factual accuracy, with an effort to write funny commentary'. However, not all satirical articles are written with the same quality or gain the same appreciation. In the year of 2014, the top 10 percentile of articles had an average of 5000 likes, while the bottom 10 percentile of articles had an average of 50 likes. There are satirical news items in bad-taste which are principally offensive, as well as well-crafted satirical content to stimulate constructive critical thinking about the wider issues in society. Applying the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) framework and contextual interpretative analysis, I present a corpus of the most popularly liked and least popularly liked satirical news items. Specifically, I aim to cover the articles listed below:

Bad-taste:

http://newnation.sg/2015/02/tanjong-pagar-grc-residents-fail-to-send-much-needed-facebook-likes-to-help-lee-kuan-yew-get-better/ - 43 likes

http://newnation.sg/2015/04/spore-made-movie-unlucky-plaza-to-inflict-critical-thinking-on-sporeans-using-unchaste-woman-pastor-pinoy/ - 72 likes

http://newnation.sg/2014/10/what-drinks-will-sporeans-order-at-koi-outlet-at-boon-lay-mrt/ - 26 likes

Well-crafted:

http://newnation.sg/2014/11/economy-rice-seller-demands-sim-lim-square-scam-shop-owner-pay-1000-for-cai-png-warranty/ - 46,000 likes: highest ever

Bionote

Shuming BAI is a PhD student in Applied Linguistics at National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He completed his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology in 2014. His doctoral dissertation investigates humour as rhetoric in the winning Toastmasters' speeches.

Bain, Cale

University of Technology Sydney

What's the News? How Comedy and Traditional News Content Compare

Comedy news is a thing for real now. Satirical news informs certain audiences, in some cases, more effectively than traditional news (PEW 2004, 2008), and comedy news makers have shown a level of professionalism that is parallel to and, in some regards, more stringent than that of traditional newsmakers (Bain, 2015). This level of professionalism strengthens an audience's trust in news makers (PEW, 2014) and can increase political engagement (Ariely, 2015). If audiences are affected by comedy news in ways they arguably should be by traditional news, and if producers are operating in the same vein as traditional news makers, what, then, are the parallels in the actual contents of traditional and comedy news? This content analysis will look at specific news items that take place in both Australian public and commercial television news and current affairs and compares their representation with that of the news representations found in comedy news of the same stories. The analysis also compares what news items are and are not included in particular daily news cycles. Xenos and Becker (2009) have asserted that comedy news can expand an audience's understanding of news and current events by broadening the discourses around particular news items (Burton, 2010). This study aims to empirically prove that the content is more in-depth and rigorous in comedy news than traditional news, and to show what the disparities are between the contents of the two.

Bionote

Cale Bain is an academic, journalist and comedy improviser. He has worked in magazines, print and radio in Canada and Australia. Cale is the artistic director of Improv Theatre Sydney and has been lecturing and teaching in media studies and journalism at the University of Technology Sydney since 2009. He is currently undertaking a part-time PhD, examing the confluence of comedy and news and its impacts on democracy.

Bijon, Béatrice

University of Saint-Etienne, Lyon, France
Western Sydney University

The Cheek of *Charlie Hebdo*: Laughter, Power, Authority

Black humour has been likened to acid that dissolves order. This is the starting point for a paper that explores 'the perilous terrain… between humour and offensiveness', referred to in the call for papers. I am a long-term reader of *Charlie Hebdo* and was visiting my native country, France, when the mass murder of the magazine's staff occurred on 7 January 2015. While I offer a personal reflection on the place of *Charlie Hebdo*'s distinctive style of satire in France's political culture, I want to explore the relationship between the magazine's irreverent visual humour and the scriptural authority it lambasted. In *Sudden Glory: Laughter as Subversive History* (1995), Barry Sanders pointed to a tendency, first identified by Plato, in which writing and literacy centralise authority. Laughter, says Sanders, 'works just the opposite effect, decentralizing power by situating it in each individual.' In this close reading of *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons, and of the narratives surrounding the deaths of their creators, I will consider the place of secularism in French society, rooted as it is in the concept of *laicité* (the separation of state and church, as enshrined in French law since 1905). Secularism and religious dogma collided in the *Charlie* atrocity in a way that reveals much about the limits and possibilities of humour.

Bionote

Béatrice Bijon is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Saint-Etienne, Lyon, in France and an Adjunct Fellow at Western Sydney University. She is an English literature scholar with a particular interest in women's writing and culture. She has published widely on Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson, Janet Frame, Arundhati Roy, and Shirley Hazzard. She has edited books on women's travel narratives and postcolonial literatures. In 2011, she was Harold White Fellow at the National Library of Australia where she researched women's suffrage. Her next book is a study of the British and American women's suffrage movement to be published in French.

Boyle, Bridget

Independent scholar

David Megaritty

Queensland University of Technology

Onstage Couplings: Exploring the Limits of the Male/Female Comedy Duo

This performative paper will explore the limits of comedy as embodied by the male/ female musical comedy duo. Extant research demonstrates that such comedy acts are an extremely rare pairing, particularly in terms of live performance. Certain preconceptions about gender and comedy complicate the field, and indeed the comic tropes of the double act, making the heterosexual male/female duo something of a boundary-riding comic proposal.

Lena and Luke Warmwater are 'Warmwaters', a (straight, cisgendered female/male) pair of performance personae that present as a dysfunctional folk duo, whose songs all seem to be about sex and other bodily functions. The only people that don't seem to get this are the Warmwaters. This creative practice as research has developed via an iterative cycle of writing, performance and videography over two years in venues ranging from small cafes to the Woodford Folk Festival, resulting in a full-length performance premiering at the Brisbane Powerhouse's Queensland Cabaret Festival in 2015.

Through performing three classic formulations of the comic duo as they are manifested at critical incidents in the Warmwaters' show, the study examines these moments in terms of comic functionality and gender, whilst working towards a better understanding of the relative scarcity of the male/female musical comedy duo.

Bionotes

Bridget Boyle is a co-founder of debase productions and teaches in the Drama Department at QUT. She has worked extensively in the field of clowning as a director, performer and teacher, having studied with Philippe Gaulier in 2001. Her doctoral thesis (2015) was titled *Bits and Bumps: Understanding Gender in Contemporary Physical Comedy.* With debase productions she has been involved in the creation of many new comic works, the most recent being *The Furze Family Variety Hour*, which was staged as part of the Brisbane Festival in 2014. Other works include *Hurry up and Wait* (with Liz Skitch) which toured Japan in a co-production with Kazenoko Theatre Company in 2012 and *Lily Can't Sleep* (with Liz Skitch and David Megarrity), which was recently restaged at Perth's Awesome Festival, and which toured Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Melbourne and Queensland after a premier season in QPAC's Out of the Box Festival.

Dr David Megarrity is a writer, composer, musician and performer creating at the intersection of music, performance and projected image. Completely focussed on the creation of new work, often musicalising theatre and theatricalising music, he's compelled to entertain whilst innovating in form with a long track record on national stages. Recipient of a Brisbane Lord Mayor's Performing Arts Fellowship in 1998, his shows for children include *Backseat Drivers* (QTC's first overseas tour), *Ukulele Mekulele* (La Boite), *Show* (QTC), and *Lily Can't Sleep* (with debase), *Bear with Me* and *The Empty City* for Metro Arts.

His productions played at venues such as the Sydney Opera House across Australia and abroad. He's also written a number of large-cast scripts for young people such as *Bitter Streak*, *Gate 38*, and *Destinations* (Playlab) a collection of three plays. In 2012 he was a finalist in the Inscriptions Edward Albee Scholarship, and many other works have been creatively developed with the support of bodies such as the Australia Council, Arts Queensland and Hothouse Theatre.

Carmody, John

University of Sydney

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg as Comic Opera:
Can a Work of Art be Simultaneously Humorous and Anti-Semitic?

Humour can, like beauty, reside 'in the eye of the beholder'. It may be emollient or caustic, yet remain legitimately funny (or witty). It may be learned or caricature: political cartoons can certainly be hurtful as they exaggerate their victims' physiognomy to make sharp social or political comment.

The physical characteristics of those targets are no more their 'fault' than skin colour or 'race', yet the expression of those latter characteristics (and others) is often subject to legal limitation. So what of art? The recent Bill Henson controversy in Australia indicates that it is not legally immune either. When, therefore, is cruel humour legitimate in art?

Richard Wagner has long been a contentious figure and many of his operas (including *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*) have been criticised for anti-Semitism (though their significant anti-Catholicism has been noticed less often). That late opera is commonly called a comedy: Burbidge (1979) wrote that it 'is one of the great *comic* masterpieces of the lyric theatre'. Yet Millington (1991) considers it seriously anti-Semitic: so do I. The essential question of this paper is, then: Can it really be such a 'comic masterpiece' if it is genuinely anti-Semitic? A cognate problem touches on one's 'approach avoidance conflict' with these operas: the fact that the music is so emotionally powerful yet their texts so morally turbid.

Millington, for instance, drew on Wagner's rebarbative essay, *Das Judentum in der Musik* (1850) for the composer's views on the manner in which Jews' speak and sing and analysed the rhythmic infelicities of Beckmesser's music which he considers a musical realisation of Wagner's assertions. The important background is that, almost from the outset, Beckmesser was a caricature of Eduard Hanslick, the powerful Viennese music critic and Wagner-antagonist, who was Jewish (the character was Hans Lich in early drafts).

Just as disturbing, for me, is the 'comic' climax of Act 2, where, in a scene of mayhem and malice, the townspeople repeatedly assault Beckmesser. How can such violence towards a Jewish character be considered comedy?

The disgraceful (and crassly topical) anti-French attitudes of Hans Sachs's peroration to German Art in Act 3 are not quite at that offensive level, but the parallel conclusion to Act 1 is another matter entirely. Millington drew a cogent parallel between its text (which is difficult to hear in the musico-dramatic turbulence at that point) and the Grimms' appalling story, *Der Jude im Dorn* to which, he argues, it refers.

At its kernel, this opera is as unpleasant as it is lacking in real humour.

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Bionote

John Carmody studied medicine at the University of Queensland. During that time, under the influence of an inspiring (and eccentrically entertaining) Professor of Physiology, he became enthralled by

physiology as the most wonderful form of science that he had even encountered – a view which he still holds. This led, eventually, to a move to the newly-born Faculty of Medicine at UNSW – and meeting Jessica Milner (another life-long friendship) – and a deep involvement in the wider academic life there (long involvements with the Academic Board, the Biomedical Library and the governing Council, for example).

Throughout his time at UQ he was also continuously involved with music, journalism and student politics, notably as editor of *Semper Floreat* (the newspaper of the University Union) and co-editor of *Galmahra* (the literary magazine there).

During his years at UNSW he spent a number of periods of sabbatical research in Germany and attended international (and national) professional conferences as often as possible: these allowed him to greatly broaden his knowledge of the operatic and concert repertoire (as well as of history) and emboldened him to accept the offer, in 1978, to succeed David Malouf as the operatic writer of the *National Times* newspaper. He subsequently contributed music reviews to the *Australian Financial Review,* the *Sun-Herald*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Opera-Opera,* as well as writing book reviews for most significant Australian publications and doing numerous broadcasts (notably on music, science and medicine) for ABC radio. He has contributed to *Opera* (UK) and *Opernwelt* (Germany) for many years.

He has had an extensive involvement with the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* having contributed over twenty-five entries to it and has written several encyclopaedia articles.

He has long considered lecturing and writing as a form of performance – so an often tangential involvement with humour studies seems almost fated.

Chen, Khin-Wee

University of Canterbury, New Zealand

A Parliamentarian Plays the Fool:
An Examination of the Consequences of Teresa Kok's Satirical Video

Malaysian opposition Member of Parliament Teresa Kok's satirical videos on Facebook and YouTube echoed President Obama's use of humour to counter attack his critics (Frizell, 2014). Obama's media event is significant because it marked a renewed breach of traditional boundaries between journalism, entertainment and public affairs first observed in the advent of faux news programmes like the *Daily Show* (2012). Kok's video, 'ONEderful Malaysia CNY 2014 Video', posted on 28 January 2014, is similarly significant in the Malaysian context because traditional boundaries here have hitherto remained intact. Her video went viral, polarised Malaysians (including her own supporters and fans), and it provided an opportunity for her political enemies to twist her words and attack her (including levelling a sedition charge against her). However, her multi-modal performativity also allowed her to bring issues she could not officially raise in parliament into new political moments by forcing her targets and mainstream media to respond. The use of humour excused her from parliamentarian or journalistic standards and she circumvented restrictions to exercise considerable power to critique and interrogate the ruling regime. The value of this paper will be in the close analysis of how Kok breached convention and of the consequences of this breach.

Bionote

Khin-Wee Chen is a part-time lecturer in Media and Communications at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, where he is close to completing his PhD thesis. This deals with citizen satire in Malaysia and Singapore, asking why and how socio-political humour communicates dissent on Facebook. His 2010 (English language) MEd thesis at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, investigated the use of linguistic humour among Singapore youth. Khin-Wee has published 'The Singapore Mass Rapid Transport: A case study of the efficacy of a democratised political humour landscape in a critical engagement in the public sphere', *The European Journal of Humour Research* (2013: 1/2) and reviewed for *Media International Australia*. His paper, 'Malaysian *Kangkung* Politics: Harvesting Internet Visual Memes for Rhetorical Acts', presented at the 2014 Media, Persuasion and Human Rights Conference (Bangor University, UK), won Best Student Research Paper Award. With Robert Phiddian and Ron Stewart, he is currently preparing 'Who Does Disciplined Research into Political Cartoons and To What Ends? A Meta-analysis of a Widely Disparate Field', as a chapter for a forthcoming Palgrave Macmillan book on politics and satire.

Chey, Jocelyn

University of Sydney

Cantonese 'Sardonicism': Wit and Humour in a Regional Culture Under Threat

The continued popularity of Cantonese humour forms assumes extra significance because the language itself is under threat. This paper examines its current status in the light of the presently fraught relationship between the central government of China and the Cantonese-speaking region, recent government campaigns to restrict the use of local dialects and languages, and local resistance in Hong Kong and on the mainland. It should be noted that within the Sinosphere there are many regional and dialect cultures of which Cantonese is one of the strongest, being spoken by over 100 million people worldwide.

Cantonese language humour may be described as 'sardonic', using that term in the sense proposed by Vladimir Propp in his 1928 study of Russian folk tales: 'Laughter accompanies the passage from death to life; it creates life and accompanies birth. Consequently, laughter accompanying killing transforms death into a new birth, nullifies murder as such, and is an act of piety that transforms death into a new life' (134). Similarly, it will be argued, Cantonese speakers hope that through humour they may be able to give rebirth to their local culture.

Examples of popular Cantonese humour and proverbs to be discussed include importantly the form known as xiehouyu. These depend on unstated but shared cultural knowledge and as such can only be shared with others who belong to the same 'in-group'. They are common figures of speech in standard Chinese and related languages and dialects, the term often being translated into English as 'a proverb with the second part suspended.'

Reference

Vladimir Propp (1928/1984). *Theory and History of Folklore*. Trans. Ariadna Y. Martin and Richard P. Martin. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

Bionote

Jocelyn Chey is a Visiting Professor in the School of Languages and Cultures, University of Sydney, and a consultant on Australia-China relations. She holds her master's degree from the University of Hong Kong and her doctorate from the University of Sydney. She has held senior positions in both the Australian diplomatic service and academic life. After lecturing in Chinese Studies at the University of Sydney, in 1973 she joined the Australian Commonwealth Public Service and in the Departments of Trade and Foreign Affairs contributed to the development of Australia-China relations for over twenty years. She was posted three times in China and Hong Kong, including as Consul-General in Hong Kong 1992-1995. At the foundation of the Australia–China Council in 1979, she served as Executive Director, building its activities and reputation. Dr Chey is Honorary Fellow of the Oriental Society of Australia, Fellow of the Australian Institute of International Affairs and received a medal from the Australia-China Council and membership of the Order of Australia in 2009 for her contributions to the Australia-China relationship.

Condren, Conal

University of New South Wales

Yes Minister: The Theoretical Dimension

Abstract

To delineate humour with reference to social or political acceptability is important but provides an unstable and contingent point of reference. More promising for understanding humour *per se* might be its demarcation from the serious. As Terrell Carver once remarked in an analysis of *Some Like It Hot,* politics is the realm of the serious. It is with beliefs like this in mind that I shall look at the *Yes Minister/Yes Prime Minister* television comedies. In one way they are framed from the serious business of politics; but in more important ones they were part of the political processes and culture of the UK during the Thatcher years. I shall draw attention to the use of statistics and genuine political situations; the popularisation of contemporary theories of bureaucracy and constitutional convention; and of the comedies being taken as propaganda for political reform. These aspects of the series together with an acute and informative understanding of political language use and symbolism, raise the question of how far any hard distinction between the humorous and serious really holds water. The result might be to undermine simple understandings of humour and enhance those of politics.

Bionote

Conal Condren is an Emeritus Scientia Professor at UNSW and Honorary Professor in The Institute of Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Queensland. His most recent publications have been on English translations of Homer in early modern England. He is currently finishing a monograph on language change in politics.

Crouch, Anton

Independent scholar

Insult as Humorous Entertainment – The Case of the Dozens

The occurrence of female bawdy in the blues has emerged as a thread at recent AHSN conferences – see Gibb, 2013 and Aarons, 2015. This paper considers a late 1920s concomitant – the setting of the interactive game of insults known as 'the Dozens' to recorded blues.

Dollard (1939) defines 'the Dozens' as 'a pattern of interactive insult which is used among some American Negroes.' He notes that it is guided by well recognized rules which at once permit and govern the emotional expression and that it is for some a game the only purpose of which seems to be the amusement of participants and onlookers. Denigration of an opponent's mother is commonplace and the 'dirty' version of the game is characterised by references to sexual matters such as adultery and incest.

Examples are:

Participant 1: 'I hear your mother plays third base for the Phillies.'
Participant 2: 'Your mother is a bricklayer and stronger than your father.'
Participant 1: 'Your mother eats shit.'
Participant 2: 'Your mother eats shit and mustard.'
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dozens)

If you wanta play the Dozens
Play them fast.
I'll tell you how many bull-dogs
Your mammy had.
She didn't have one;
She didn't have two;
She had nine damned dozens
And then she had you.
(Dollard, 1939)

The *OED Online* (2015), in its entry on 'the Dozens', gives a first usage of the phrase in 1928 but makes no reference to a 'dirty' version or any recorded musical version. There were in fact 9 commercial gramophone recordings of a musical version, titled 'The dirty dozen', in the period 1929 to 1940.

Although the recorded musical versions are clearly related to the game described by Dollard, there is an important difference – the 'dirtiness' of the published 'dirty' musical versions is euphemistic, reflecting record company avoidance of obscenity. The treatment of sex is by the standard jazz and blues use of double entendre and metaphor.

The presentation will be in two parts: a) an overview of the sociological/anthropological accounts of the origin and naming of the game; and b) an examination of some of the early musical versions. The contrast between the controlled aggressive and insulting nature of the game in a social setting and the humorous and apparently hokum nature of the blues recordings will be analysed.

*Reference*s

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Bionote

Anton Crouch is a retired geologist researching the applicability of biological classification to cultural phenomena. Present studies are based on the recognition of sound recordings as body fossils of palaeo taxa and particular attention is being paid to the relationship between late ninetenth-century vaudeville and the emergence of jazz and blues.

Duffy, Claire

Deakin University, Geelong

Radicalising the Feminine Grotesque:
Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and Marie Darrieussecq's *Pig Tales*

The grotesque is inextricably linked to the body and often to women's bodies. It is also typically associated with not only horror but also humour. This paper will analyse the ways in which Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and Marie Darrieussecq's *Pig Tales* proclaim the grotesque female body as a site of power. These novels portray fantastically and comically grotesque female characters, who blur the boundary between human and animal, in a powerful reclamation of female subjectivity in a patriarchal order. Mobilising Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection to theorise the grotesque, this paper argues that the grotesque, like abjection, reflects a tension between the security of (masculine) subjectivity and the repulsion of the (feminine) other. The other or the abject, as represented in grotesque figures, can never be separated from the self. Humour provides an avenue through which anxiety about the grotesque's monstrous reflections of human subjectivity can be alleviated. However, this paper also argues, utilising Rabelais' notion of carnival, that the comically grotesque works to disrupt the patriarchal social order, according to which women are abject. Carter's and Darrieussecq's feminist texts use grotesque humour in confrontational ways to encourage a rethinking of fixed ideas of gender identity.

Bionote

Claire Duffy is a PhD candidate at Deakin University, Geelong. She is interested in the transformative power of humour in feminist literature. She views writing as a powerful tool for voicing that which is not obvious, and that which is not easy – a catalyst for transformation. *Hecate*, *Swamp*, *Verandah*, *AntiTHESIS*, *In Stead*, *Intellectual Refuge* (US), and *Gold Dust* (UK) have published her short stories.

Eldridge, Ben

University of Sydney

'Flexible Ethics for a Complex World':
Retrofitting the Vampire in Peter Watts' *Blindsight*

'Whenever I find my will to live becoming too strong, I read Peter Watts' – James Nicoll, book critic

The fiction of Peter Watts is frequently described as bleak, misanthropic and dystopian, amongst a whole range of other equally grim epithets. And indeed, Peter Watts' *Blindsight* (2006) is, to a great extent, one of the darkest and most horrifying novels to emerge in the last decade; populated by a cast of radically transhuman characters – led by a reconstituted biological 'vampire' – who are sent to establish first contact with an unwilling alien intelligence. But, is this terror as unrelenting as popular consensus suggests? Through a reconsideration of *Blindsight*, I would like to suggest that there is actually no definitive line to be drawn between the previously overlooked humour and the obvious horror in Watts' ostensibly deterministic novel. The narrative of the novel constantly subverts recognisable generic and grammatical structuring, and this disruptive tendency is further reinforced by destablising paratextual material of both an epitextual (interior) and peritextual (exterior) nature. By engaging with elements both within the narrative, and on its periphery, I will begin to dismantle the perception of the novel as an unremittingly nihilistic piece; I hope to replace this bluntly sombre estimation with something that begins to account for the text's incredible ambiguity (and overlooked nuance) in a more productive manner. In fact, it will become clear that much of the horror is entirely informed by the novel's satirical extrapolation of contemporary scientific, technological, political and even philosophical constraints. However, as previously intimated, not only does the base narrative of novel exist as a blackened social satire, its complex generic constitution also simultaneously harnesses and sabotages generic expectations; overtly acting to critique the very science-fictional tradition within which *Blindsight* itself exists. Accordingly, this paper will be concerned with the manner in which the text blurs limits, complicating paradigms to ultimately create an extremely disturbing (perhaps uncanny) blend of both humour and horror.

Bionote

Ben Eldridge is a postgraduate student in the Department of English at the University of Sydney.

Ewans, Michael

University of Newcastle

Keynote Presentation

At the Limits of Humour

Are there limits to what is humourous? The short answer is 'yes, but they are in constant flux'. We will examine some examples of work by comedians which stretches the limits of humour in a particular society, and investigate the issues involved.

1: Rape jokes

My study will begin with the jokes made by Tina Fey and Amy Poehler, introducing the 2015 Golden Globe awards, about the accusations of rape that had then recently been leveled against Bill Cosby. Their performance raises complex issues. Indeed the 'rape joke' is problematic; it needs – and will receive – close examination, with particular attention to the work of Adrienne Truscott.

2: Excremental jokes

Then we will focus on two more types of 'at the limit' humour – excremental jokes, and anti-religious jokes. Examples of jokes about shit will be drawn from Aristophanes (*Peace*, 421 BCE) and *Tim and Eric Awesome Show Great Job* (2015).

3: Racist humour

The chosen example is a *fin-de-siècle* case study; a scene from the Wilde/Strauss opera *Salome* (1905). It satirises Jews mercilessly – but for what audience?

4: Cartoons satirising Islam

Next we will skip over 100 years to some notorious Danish and French contemporary cartoons which have been regarded by some Muslims as not merely highly offensive, but deserving of a murderous response.

Finally after (5: Summary)

In 6: Conclusion

I will address the issue with which the paper began, in the light of what we have learnt from the examples; I will suggest a tentative answer to the questions *how* and *why* the limits of humour are in flux.

Bionote

Michael Ewans retired from the Chair of Drama at the University of Newcastle, Australia in 2011; he is now a Conjoint Professor in the School of Humanities and Social Science. His eleven books include four volumes of Greek tragedy, and two volumes of Aristophanic comedy, translated for performance and with theatrical commentaries. In his other research field of opera his books are *Janáček's Tragic Operas, Wagner and Aeschylus: The 'Ring' and the 'Oresteia'*, *Opera from the Greek*, and his new book, to be published in February by Bloomsbury Methuen: *Performing Opera: a Practical Guide for Singers and Directors*. He has also published many articles, book chapters and reviews in both fields, and contributed to the *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies.* He has directed both plays and chamber operas. He was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 2005.

Findlay, Bruce

Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne

Psychological Well-Being: What's Humour Got to Do with It?

Ruch and Heintz (2013) reported on the finding that, once controlling for personality, humour, assessed by the Humour Styles Questionnaire (HSQ), adds little to the prediction of psychological well-being. They offered the explanation that perhaps there is so much overlap between personality items and the actual items of the HSQ that the personality measures swamp the humour measures in any assessment of their relationship with psychological well-being. They tested their assumption by creating two scales: one of the personality context in each HSQ item, and the second of just the humour parts of each item, without context. They found, using hierarchical regression, that once controlling for personality context, the humour scale added essentially no extra variance in predicting various measures of psychological well-being. The current presentation will describe in detail the Ruch and Heintz (2013) studies, with further reference to diary studies by Guenter et al. (2013) and Caird and Martin (2014). A conference presentation by Heintz (2015) and a paper by Heintz and Ruch (2015), suggesting that the convergence between the concepts of the humour styles as defined by Martin et al. (2003) and their operationalisation in the HSQ leave something to be desired may also show some light on these findings. The implications of this will be discussed.

Bionote

Bruce Findlay is a social psychologist with research interests in humour, relationships and psychological well-being. He is now retired, but holds an adjunct position at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne. He is a long-standing member of AHSN and is currently Chair of its Review Panel.

Foster, Susan Elizabeth

Independent scholar

The Press Gang:
The Role of Editors in the Careers of Three New Zealand Political Cartoonists

Can cartoonists only be as good as their editors? In the late 1970s/early 1980s, an art director at *The Press* (Christchurch), Bill Paynter, hired Trace Hodgson and Al Nisbet as advertising artists and in so doing established an unofficial nursery of cartoon talent, a place of cross-fertilisation of graphic styles, political beliefs and black, Pythonesque humour. All three had been drawing since they were crawling. Each aspired to have their cartoons and caricatures published. All shared a hatred for social injustice. Although not seeing a need for an editorial cartoonist, *The Press* was prepared to consider submissions on a pay-for-what-was-published basis. Inspired by Paynter, who sometimes worked all night on a cartoon, Hodgson and Nisbet joined him in what became an unspoken, three-way competition to score a published cartoon once or twice a week. From the cartoons they had rejected, it soon became clear that anything too contentious, anything that might upset the city fathers, had less chance of being approved. For each member of what I have dubbed 'The Press Gang', their opportunity to flourish and succeed as cartoonists came later in other newspapers and magazines under significantly more liberal editorships.

This paper looks at the highpoints in their careers when each was producing some of their best work, and explores how much the strength of their output can be attributed to the support, mentoring and freedom to express their opinions that they received from subsequent editors. Today, many cartoonists are lamenting an increased censorship in choice of topic, graphic style and approach, captions and dialogue. Only recently Al Nisbet was asked by an editor to replace the adjective 'friggin'' with 'flamin'' yet back in 1989 Paynter used words like 'wanker' with impunity. This paper also explores what factors have influenced the swing from editorial conservatism in the late 70s, to greater liberalism in the 1980s and 90s, and a return in recent years to a blander, play-safe, politically-correct taste in graphic satire. The basis of my research will be drawn from material from oral history interviews with New Zealand political cartoonists, including Bill Paynter, Trace Hodgson and Al Nisbet, as well as interviews with former and current newspaper editors.

Bionote

Independent scholar; oral historian; previously Manager/Curator, New Zealand Cartoon Archive Trust (1992–2000), established a cartoon collection now based in the National Library of New Zealand, developed a substantial fund to support the Archive through revenue-generating activities such as a programme of touring exhibitions; Executive Director, Museum Directors' Federation (1981-1991); Exhibition Officer, Wellington City Art Gallery; Curatorial Assistant, Robert McDougall Art Gallery. BA (Art History). Recently published: Foster, S.E., 'When the Quip Hits the Fan: What Cartoon Complaints Reveal about Changes in Siocial Attitudes to Race and Ethnicity', *The European Journal of Humour Research* 2.4 (2014).

Foyle, Lindsay

Independent scholar

Not Always Unfunny: Political Cartoonists

Political cartoonists have traditionally filled the void between humour and offensiveness. Sometimes intentionally and sometimes totally unintentionally.

The problem has been that defining what makes people laugh is not easy. You can use a dictionary definition and end up with 'an expression of emotion, typically mirth', but nobody is going to laugh at that. Nobody is going to laugh at the dictionary definition of a cartoon either, 'a drawing in a newspaper, magazine or the like, often accompanied by a caption which depicts a humorous situation or makes a satirical comment on a subject of current public interest'.

But the last part of each definition is the most important – 'mirth' and 'current public interest' are the main ingredients of successful cartoons. The trouble is that public interest is continually evolving and what made Australia laugh at the turn of the century, or last week for that matter, is not necessarily going to get the same result this week.

Then there is the dictionary definition of offence, 'an illegal act' or 'a wounding of feelings'. Again nothing funny about those definitions, however it is possible to make some people laugh while offending others.

Offence from humour has been going on ever since cartoonist started making fun of people in political cartoons from around the middle of the 18th century.

The intention of this paper is to look at the history of offending people while being at the limits of being funny.

Bionote

Lindsay Foyle has been drawing political cartoons since 1976 and writing on the history of cartooning for three decades.

Gardner, Scott

Okayama University, Japan

Functions and Failings of Humour in Language Learner Error Correction

How would a typical teacher respond to a student paper with the following assertion in it?

After opening of the country to the world, many western things that are essential for our modern life flew into Japan. So did bicycles.

If she were a teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), she might simply chuckle a bit, make a few correcting marks, and continue reading. Or perhaps she would point out the error with the question 'Bicycles fly?!' and a smiley face scrawled in the margin. But what if she were to take the passage as is and make a humorous example of it in class the next day? Would there be any instructional value in doing so?

EFL teachers choose to respond to student errors—spoken, written, or otherwise—in different ways, according to their own experience, research, and philosophies, such that one teacher's ostensibly sensitive or effective approach toward error correction may be seen by another as soft or negligent. Thus it is not without controversy that some teachers may take student samples as models—good or bad—for other students to learn from.

In the case of unintentionally funny student errors, the issue is even more complicated. Some English teachers have made lucrative writing careers laughing at student errors (e.g., Richard Lederer's *Anguished English* series), confirming their entertainment value. But could teachers strategically use humorous student output as class material—not to insult, but to instruct? And how much error exposure would students be willing to allow? These are interesting questions for any educator, but may be of particular interest to language teachers, whose students are uniquely focused on the linguistic and cultural aspects of communicating in another language.

In my presentation, after considering research in both error treatment and the recently surging area of humour in language pedagogy (led by Nancy Bell), I will show my own evolving approach to humorous EFL error correction and class instruction. This approach uses outside sources, including popular media (miscommunication in films, texting autocorrects, mondegreens, etc.) and moves gently into students' own humorous errors. A primary concern in the process is locating the point where the joking ceases to be 'playful judgment' (Fischer, 1889, cited in Freud, 1905/1960) and 'reproach of error' (Aristotle, *Poetics II*) and becomes gratuitous ridicule. Importantly, this point can vary by culture and individual. In all I hope to show students that real and perceived language error is ubiquitous among native speakers as well as language learners, and that errors need not be something to regret and suppress, but rather something to laugh at and learn from.

This research is part of a Japanese government funded project finding useful ways to teach English language learners about pragmatics, politeness, and (to some extent) humour's role in English language communication.

Bionote

Scott Gardner has been teaching English and Communication at Okayama University in Japan since 1998. His main research interests are utilising classroom humour, dialogism in education, and improving student writing.

Goddard, Cliff

Griffith University, Brisbane

The Semantics of 'Sarcasm'

This study brings linguistic techniques of meaning analysis to bear on the meaning (or rather, meanings) of the word 'sarcasm' in everyday contemporary English. Data about the use of the words 'sarcasm' and 'sarcastic' is presented from linguistic corpora (such as WordBanks Online) and other sources of naturally-occurring usage, and on the basis of this and other evidence, several semantic explications are proposed, according to the principles of the NSM (Natural Semantic Metalanguage) approach to meaning analysis (Goddard/Wierzbicka 2014). Semantic explications are explanatory paraphrases composed of very simple, cross-translatable words. Despite the large number of linguistic pragmatic studies into the uses and functions of sarcasm in speech, there have been few, if any, previous attempts at a systematic lexical semantic analysis.

Although pinning down the meanings of words like 'sarcasm' and 'sarcastic' indeed poses an inherently interesting challenge to lexical semantics, the exercise has implications that reach beyond linguistics and into the cross-disciplinary field of humour studies. First, elucidating the meanings of these important 'folk terms' can help shed light on shared insider understandings of 'humour-related' speech practices in mainstream Anglo culture. Second, since the term 'sarcasm' is used as a descriptive term-of-art in humour studies, clarifying the meanings at play in everyday usage can contribute to resolving, dissolving or circumventing some of the technical definitional debates surrounding 'sarcasm' and its even more problematical partner term 'irony'. Thirdly, 'sarcasm' is (as will be shown) a highly English-specific term, so semantic exegesis can help put humour studies on a firmer footing for contrastive cross-cultural work.

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Partington, Alan. 2006. *The Linguistics of Laughter. A Corpus-Assisted Study of Laughter-Talk*. Oxford: Routledge Studies in Linguistics.

Bionote

Cliff Goddard is Professor in Linguistics at Griffith University. His research lies at the intersection of language, meaning, and culture. He has published widely in theoretical and descriptive semantics, intercultural pragmatics, language description and typology, and Australian English. Goddard works primarily in the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach to the study of meaning in language and in its pragmatic 'sister theory', known as ethnopragmatics. He has published many studies in collaboration with Anna Wierzbicka, the originator of the NSM approach. He has authored two textbooks, both with Oxford University Press.

Haugh, Michael

Griffith University, Brisbane

Keynote Presentation

Jocular Mockery, Jocular Abuse and the Taking of Offence

Teasing and insulting are often associated with childhood, but they have been found to be ubiquitous, arising across a wide range of different interactional settings in different languages and cultures. While there are various forms of teasing and insulting, in this paper I focus on two types, jocular mockery and jocular abuse. The former refers to actions where the speaker somehow diminishes or ridicules something of relevance to self, other or a non-co-present third party within a non-serious, jocular or playful frame, while the latter refers instances where the speaker casts the target into an undesirable category or as having undesirable attributes using a conventionally offensive expression within a non-serious, jocular or playful frame. In both cases, then, participants are invariably mixing elements of provocation and non-seriousness. Yet while they are construed as non-serious by participants, or at least ostensibly so, jocular mockery and abuse can nevertheless give rise to offence in some instances. Drawing from analyses of interactions amongst American, Australian and British speakers of English, I explore the circumstances in which offence may be registered, as well as the moral constraints on doing so, given the taking of offence at instances of jocular mockery and abuse is itself very often a sanctionable action amongst (Anglo) speakers of English.

Bionote

Michael Haugh is Professor in Linguistics and English at Griffith University. His research interests include pragmatics, intercultural communication and conversation analysis, with a focus to date on analysing key pragmatic phenomena such as face, (im)politeness, teasing and humour, intention and implicature in interpersonal interactions. He works in particular with transcriptions of spoken interactions as well as interactional CMC data across a number of languages (English, Japanese, Chinese), as he is interested in the ways in which pragmatic phenomena have their own distinct local flavours across (and within) languages and cultures. An area of emerging importance in his view is the role that corpora can play in pragmatics and linguistic analysis more broadly, and has been involved in the establishment of the Australian National Corpus. He has published widely in journals and edited volumes, and recent books include *Im/Politeness Implicatures* (2015, Mouton de Gruyter), *Pragmatics and the English Language* (2014, Palgrave Macmillan, with Jonathan Culpeper), and *Understanding Politeness* (2013, Cambridge University Press, with Dániel Z. Kádar). He has also co-edited a number of books, including *Best Practices for Spoken Corpora in Linguistics Research* (2014, Cambridge Scholars Press) and *Situated Politeness* (2011, Continuum), and is also co-Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Pragmatics* (Elsevier).

Lee, Sung-Ju Suya

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University

Bridesmaids: A Critical Analysis of the Farce Comedy in the Case Study of a Successful Produced Screenplay

This paper presents a research-in-progress of a PhD in farce comedy screenwriting. Farce comedies can be money makers such as the recent *Bridesmaids* and *The Hangover* franchise. Yet, there is a gap in the literature on farce screenwriting, both academically and in industry/ professional discourse; there are numerous books and texts on comedy theory and comedy writing, and a handful of available books on farce theory (i.e., theatrical). There is one book on how to write a farce, but it is for theatre (Ellis, 1948). The gap in literature is highlighted in order to help inform not only comedy and/or genre researchers, but as well as other practitioners (i.e., future screenwriters). Since there is limited analyses and research from screenwriting and comedy theorists, my research led me to theatrical genre theorists such as Eric Bentley. Bentley divides genres into five categories: comedy, melodrama, tragedy, farce and tragicomedy. A secondary theatrical theorist, John Styan, complements Bentley's genre theories on farce. Audiences, critics and academics do not generally acknowledge what they are watching as a farce. Most prefer to just categorise it as comedy. Current types of the other comedy genres such as slapstick, satire and parody have components of farce, and some theorists consider these to stem from farce originally. Bentley's 10 farce elements have been narrowed down to six: violence and aggression, mocking, humour, plot and style, character, and finally, pace and tempo. In keeping with this conference's theme of 'Unfunny: The Limits of Humour', I will focus my paper presentation on the theme/topic of 'humour, mockery and aggression', which are the first 3 of Bentley's farce trope elements. Eric Bentley, Jessica Davis and Albert Bermel are considered the eminent theorists on farce. Their theories on these farce tropes will be examined in order to answer the question of how to write the farce comedy screenplay. This paper aims to investigate if Bentley, Styan and the other theorists (genre theorists, screenwriting theorists and comedy theorists) agree with the tropes, conventions and techniques of farce in order to sufficiently lay out a framework for the would-be screenwriter to utilise in order to write a farce screenplay. Hence, a critical in-depth case study analysis of the three farce trope elements of the screenplay of *Bridesmaids* will be presented.

Bionote

Sung-Ju Suya Lee is a PhD Candidate at RMIT University. Her research is in farce comedy screenwriting, and her creative project is a farce comedy screenplay. She has an MBA (with Merit) from Bradford University School of Management, UK, and a BFA Honours (Fine Arts) from York University, Canada. Her short film, *Not Committed*, went to the Cannes Film Festival. She won the Open Door Pitch Contest at the Innoversity Creative Summit, Canada, and won a TV development deal with Alliance Atlantis. She has been in numerous plays, cabarets, radio shows, other stage events and short films, both behind and in front of the camera.

Lever, Ann Elizabeth Lever (Ann Lee)

National University of Singapore

'Push Me, Pull You': The Complex Relations of Audience, Censorship and Political Satirical Theatre in Malaysia and Indonesia

Taking as its starting point Fredric V. Bogel's double structure of satire and applying that to two political satirical theatre shows by Instant Café theatre (Malaysia) and Teater Koma (Indonesia), this paper argues that the relationship between satirist, subject, and audience is indeed complex and that it can be more accurately seen as blurred by 'crossover' between the different roles. This necessitates making more fine-grained distinctions about audience than is normally done, including in those extended from Stuart Hall's reception theories, making for a better understanding of the dynamics of political satirical theatre. It is proposed that a distinction is made first between 'the State' as audience and 'regular' audience members, with the latter subdivided into 'present', 'proximate' and 'professional', terms which will be elaborated in presentation. Considering the practice of censorship, different structures – censorship laws, their interpretation by state bodies, and the practice of self-censorship – show that the State (as both audience and subject) is often not as programmatic, consistent or effective as is commonly believed in its proscribing of satire in the countries being studied.

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Bionote

Ann Elizabeth Lever (also known as Ann LEE) is a Lee Kong Chian scholar, reading for her PhD in Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore. She holds a degree in film studies from the University of Westminster and her MSc in History of Science, Medicine and Technology from the University of Oxford. Ann is also an award-winning playwright. Her plays, or excerpts, have been performed in Kuala Lumpur, Bali, Melbourne and New York, and are collected in the anthology *Sex, Stage and State* (Kuali Works, 2011). A past guest lecturer at Universitas Indonesia, Ann is a Fellow of the Asia Leadership Fellow Program (Japan Foundation and International House of Japan). She divides her time between Malaysia and Indonesia.

McIntyre, Elisha

University of Sydney

Hasa Diga Beg Your Pardon!
Latter-day Saint Responses to *The Book of Mormon The Musical*

In 2011, the creators of *South Park* teamed up with the creator of *Avenue Q* to create a comic Broadway musical about Mormons. *The Book of Mormon* has been a smash hit ever since, winning 9 Tony awards and touted as 'hilarious' and/or 'blasphemous'. In 2015, *The Book of Mormon* toured to Salt Lake City, where the headquarters of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) is located. It is also a prominent butt of jokes within the musical. *The Book of Mormon* received extensive attention in the media upon its premiere, while Mormons have also been very vocal in their commentary on the show. The responses range from outrage and boycott, through to enjoyment and praise. Many Mormons were deeply offended, some uninterested, while some were happy that they were being talked about. Rumours spread about increases in uptake of the actual *Book of Mormon*, while missionaries began to loiter outside the theatre in order to use the musical as a springboard for conversion. Eventually, the official church bought full page advertisements in the playbills of the show. Mormons have a complex and diverse relationship with *The Book of Mormon The Musical*. This paper uses Mormon media (blogs, newspapers and magazines and social media) to examine Mormon responses to the musical, both positive and negative, and argues that this musical pushes the boundaries of this group and the discourse that surrounds it reveals much about Mormon relationships with humour, the relationship of humour to blasphemy and persecution, and much about Mormon culture in general.

Bionote

Elisha McIntyre completed her PhD in 2014 in the Department of Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney. Her research interests come under the broad umbrella of religion and popular culture with a particular emphasis on religion in the contemporary Western world. She has published articles on Christian worship music and Christian and Mormon film. Her recent research focuses on religion and humour as expressed in popular religious entertainment and material culture. Currently she is focusing on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). She has thus far managed to inspire interest in Mormon comedy film, and hopes this trend will continue to earn a place for religious humour as a serious field of study within religious studies.

McLachlan, Angus

Federation University, Ballarat

Possible Implications of Laughing at the Beginning, During, or at the End of a Speaking Turn

The significance of the specific location of laughter within a speaker's turn is only partly understood. Potter and Hepburn (2010) analysed laugh particles that occurred within a turn and concluded that these interpolated aspirations were used to mark the accompanying speech as somewhat problematic or 'to modulate the nature or strength of the action' that was being discussed. They argued that such laugh particles constitute a phenomenon that is discrete from the more coherent bouts of laughter occurring at the beginning or end of a turn, as observed, for example, by Gavioli (1995). In this paper, material drawn from dyadic experimental discussions will be examined with particular reference to the segments of talk during which participants established whether they had agreed or disagreed with their partners with respect to an earlier decision. The paper will explore the utility of Potter and Hepburn's formulation in understanding the curious instances of interpolated laughter that occasionally accompanied speakers' acknowledgements that they agreed with the other, when one might have thought that such laughter would have been more likely to accompany disagreement. Why disagreement should be more closely associated with laughter at the end of the turn will also be considered.

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Bionote

Angus McLachlan lectures in psychology at Federation University Australia. His main teaching areas are social psychology, research methodology, and statistics, which offers him ample opportunity to rant against the failings of his chosen discipline. In his first year as an undergraduate he wanted to study philosophy, along with geography and anthropology, but timetabling constraints meant that he ended up with ψ instead of φ. He has a continuing interest in laughter and humorous interaction, extending to notions of what it means to have a sense of humour, which partly explains his continuing appearances at AHSN conferences. But really he just enjoys the company.

Marsh, Moira

Indiana University Bloomington, USA

Keynote Presentation

Unlaughter, the Unfunny, and the *Dreadnought*

'The Royal Navy is not a fit subject for jokes.' Thus went one of the responses to one of the most notorious practical jokes of the twentieth century, when a group of pranksters disguised themselves as Abyssinian potentates and successfully fooled the British Royal Navy into giving them a tour of *HMS Dreadnought*, the pride of the British fleet. The hoax won headlines on both sides of the Atlantic, but it also provoked critical questions in Parliament, mockery of Admiralty on the street, and ritualized physical punishment of the hoaxers.

Given this mixture of positive and negative responses, we might ask whether the *Dreadnought* hoax was funny or unfunny, and whether it should be considered a success or a failure. We know from a first-person account by one of the group that the jokers considered their escapade a great success, in part because of the fact that not everyone was laughing.

This paper examines the metadiscourse of the *Dreadnought* hoax and of joking performances generally. Joke metadiscourse is where people respond to jokes and argue over what is funny or unfunny. Here, the rhetoric of laughter signals what is funny, but its opposite, unlaughter, indicates the presence of the unfunny. 'Unlaughter' was coined by Michael Billig (2005) to refer to those moments when laughter is desired or expected but is not forthcoming. In everyday discourse the simple absence of laughter is neither meaningful nor remarkable, but when it follows an attempted joke it carries a load of criticism, explicit or implied, against the joker.

Support for a joking performance may take many forms besides literal physical laughter. Similarly, unlaughter may take many forms, including retaliation, threats of retaliation, and assertions that the topic of the joke is inherently unfunny and not an appropriate subject for humour.

Unlaughter does not inevitably silence laughter. A characteristic feature of joke metadiscourse is that neither side definitively defeats the other. Unlaughter itself often becomes the object of humour and ridicule, and both positions are read as expressing the moral failings or personality flaws of the speakers.

'Unfunny humour' would seem to be an oxymoron. Yet, the danger of being unfunny is a constant element in humorous performance. Risk is part of the challenge and appeal of jokes; the louder the unlaughter, the more credit goes to the jokers for having risked it. Unlaughter is not always understood as a sign of failure. A successful joke may be one in which unlaughter is not avoided, but actively courted and managed.

Taking this observation a step or two further, Billig suggests that 'the rhetorical nature of laughter is possible because there is a corresponding rhetoric of unlaughter' (192). In other words, laughter and unlaughter are mutually constitutive; they need each other. The *Dreadnought* hoax succeeded as a joke only because some people thought it was not.

Reference

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Bionote

Moira Marsh is a folklorist (PhD, Indiana University) who specializes in humour studies. These interests began with her dissertation, *The Ritual Humor of Students* (1988), which was a study of capping festivals in New Zealand universities. These festivals are ritualized and traditional with a strong emphasis on constructing town-gown identities through humour and play. More recently she has followed up with several articles published in both humour studies and folklore journals. A recurring

theme in her approach to humour studies is to use examples of practical jokes (a genre that is under-studied in the field) to consider questions in humour theory generally, with a special focus on how we might understand the reception of jokes, especially the reception is negative. These questions are explored in her recent book, *Practically Joking* (Utah State University Press, 2015).

Moira is currently one of the three book review editors for the journal *Humor: The International Journal of Humor Research*. Her current research topics include the cross-cultural acoustics of laughter and an edited volume of articles on the subject of unlaughter – that is, exploring the situations in which laughter is expected or desired, but for a variety of reasons does not occur.

Meany, Michael

University of Newcastle

Twittering: Picking on the Powerful

This paper explores the use of Twitter as a platform for 'speaking truth to power' in the guise of humour. It will be argued the 140-character limit imposed on Twitter messages constitutes a technological constraint that favours ironic and metaphorical structures. This brevity encourages the use of communicative forms that allow the writer to engage with multiple meanings in a single statement. Further, these structures allow for multiple readings of the text.

The process of 'speaking truth to power' typically positions the writer as the less powerful (in one or more contexts) and the target as the more powerful (also context dependent). However, the ironic structure of a 'tweet' allows the writer and the target to be (re)positioned in various ways. For example, below is a tweet that suggests the Queen has no rights because she doesn't pay taxes. Further, in an extreme reading, it suggests the Queen is an animal.

Outrage as royal claims animals don't have rights 'because they don't pay taxes' http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/princess-michael-kent-sparks-outrage-6543850#ICID=sharebar_twitter … What does that mean for the Queen? (Meany, 2015)

The 'power' of the powerful, derived from their social, cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), makes them a 'fair' target for a high level of mockery and aggression. Power makes the target potentially vulnerable. Social media allows the writer to trade their cultural and digital capital, their ability to write within the technological constraints, for social capital. This social capital, if only for the briefest moment, allows the writer to perform from a position of power.

'Twitter affords a platform for condensed yet potentially rich and variably public or private performances of the self' (Papacharissi, 2012, p. 1989). These constructions of the self run the gamut from the sincere to the ironic. The paper concludes by arguing that the performances of self on Twitter oscillate between the sincere and the ironic due to, in part, the technological constraints of the medium.

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Papacharissi, Z. (2012). 'Without You, I'm Nothing: Performances of the Self on Twitter.' *International Journal of Communication*, 6, 1989–2006.

Bionote

Dr Michael Meany is a Senior Lecturer in Communication at the University of Newcastle, Australia. Michael's background includes careers as a freelance writer, a typesetter and publication designer, and a playwright. From these varied careers, Michael brings to his research an eclectic mix of skills. His research interests include comedy, humour, creativity, script writing and narrative/interactive media design. He graduated with a PhD from Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia. The topic of his research project was 'The Performance of Comedy by Artificial Intelligence Agents'.

Milner Davis, Jessica

University of Sydney

The Humour Transaction: A Conceptual Model

Humour is created by a humourist combining (or reciting a pre-existing combination of) variables that include structure, medium, modality and content. Alternatively, a combination of elements may accidentally present itself ready-made to an audience. The so-called three classical theories of humour identify some of these elements, namely: superiority; festive rule-breaking; and mechanical patterning. Incongruity (often cited as a theory in its own right) is integral to all three and probably to all instances of humour. However, humorous products vary widely in form and media, including in their 'comic style' (humorous tone or flavour, now recognised in psychological research).

Since such elements are not humorous in and of themselves, it remains mysterious what transforms 'humour potential' into an actual 'humour product' recognised as amusing by its audience (as necessary for humour as for any other aesthetic experience). Personological and environmental factors also impact audience reception. These and other factors inform a schema which has been developed over several years to describe stages in this transformational process. While this conceptual approach does not pretend to explain *why* humour is humorous, it may assist humour researchers to clarify the focal point/s of their selected studies. This paper revisits and refines thinking originally presented at the AHSN Colloquium in 2003 and most recently elaborated at the 2015 ISHS Conference in San Francisco.

Bionote

Jessica Milner Davis is an Honorary Associate in the School of Letters, Art and Media at the University of Sydney and co-ordinates the Australasian Humour Studies Network at: http://www.sydney.edu.au/humourstudies.

She has been a Visiting Scholar at Bristol and Stanford Universities, All Souls College Oxford, Università di Bologna and at Clare Hall Cambridge, where she is a Life Member. She researches history and theory of comedy and cross-cultural humour and laughter. Her books include *Farce* (2003) and two co-edited studies of humour in Chinese culture, as well as *Understanding Humor in Japan* (2007), winner of the 2008 Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor humour research book prize. Twice President of the International Society for Humor Studies (1996 and 2001), Dr Davis was a Commissioning Editor for the *Sage Encyclopedia of Humor Studies* (2014), is a member of the Editorial Board for *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research* and an Affiliated Researcher with the Centre for Comedy Studies Research, Brunel University UK (CCSR).

Mullan, Kerry

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University

Béal, Christine

Université Montpellier 3, France

Traverso, Véronique

Université Lyon 2, France

Conversational Humour in French and Australian English: What Makes an Utterance Unfunny?

This study on conversational humour takes place within the framework of a larger project on social interaction in French and Australian English. Two comparable corpora of naturally occurring conversations during social visits among friends in France and Australia were analysed to investigate how speakers use humour spontaneously in the course of social visits in the two cultures. The data consist of audio recordings of twelve visits (with sixteen speakers) in the Australian corpus and fourteen visits (with eleven speakers) in the French corpus. The corpora were recorded in two urban environments (Melbourne and Lyon), each of them mostly in the same location, i.e. the host's house. Approximately five hours of conversation were recorded in each corpus.

As has been shown elsewhere (Dynel 2011), we found that traditional folk categories of humour such as jokes, anecdotes, wordplay or teasing are not readily suited to a comparative cross-cultural discourse-based analysis of humour: humour is a complex area where many different aspects come into play simultaneously, and where the difficulty lies in separating these aspects. This led us to revisit the analysis of conversational humour using a cross-cultural and interactional approach, and to show that there are four dimensions involved concurrently:

1.   The speaker/target/recipient interplay

2.   The language dimension: linguistic mechanisms and/or discursive strategies used by speakers

3.   The different pragmatic functions

4.   The interactional dimension

Our earlier research has focussed on the pragmatic and interactional dimensions, showing that humour plays an important part in negotiating socially sensitive moments in interaction, such as opening rituals (Béal and Traverso 2010) or various face-threats (Béal and Mullan 2013). We have also shown that Australians show a marked preference for recipient-oriented humour in our corpus whereas the French speakers prefer to reinforce complicity at the expense of an absent third party.

In this presentation we concentrate on several examples of where humour clearly does not work. As well as examining some failed attempts at humour in interaction by analysing the linguistic mechanisms that render a particular utterance or exchange unfunny to the interlocutor despite the intention, we will also consider some examples of successful humour in one language that are not perceived as funny by speakers of the other. A number of representative examples from the two corpora will be presented by way of illustration and links to the participants' respective underlying ethos and cultural values will also be explored by way of explanation.

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Bionotes

Kerry Mullan is Coordinator of French Studies at RMIT University and a member of the Globalism Research Centre. She teaches French as a Foreign Language and introductory sociolinguistics. Her main research interests are cross-cultural communication and differing interactional styles – particularly those of French and Australian English speakers. She also researches in the areas of intercultural pragmatics, discourse analysis and language teaching. She is currently investigating humour in French and Australian English social interaction.

Christine Béal is Professor of Linguistics at Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3 and a member of Praxiling, a CNRS Research Lab specialising in linguistics and communication. She currently teaches French linguistics, interactional linguistics and cross-cultural pragmatics. Her work is based on naturally occurring data (spontaneous talk between work colleagues, meetings, job interviews, among friends) in French and English. She has focussed on terms of address, speech acts, politeness, rituals and routines, turn-taking and conversational humour.

Véronique Traverso is Director of Research at ICAR (Interaction Corpora, Apprenticeship Representations), dedicated to the study of spoken interaction. She teaches conversation analysis, interactional linguistics, and corpora of Spoken French at the University Lumière Lyon 2. Her work is grounded in the analysis of naturally occurring talk-in-interaction in French and/or Arabic, including verbal, prosodic and gestural aspects used by participants in a variety of settings: ordinary conversation during social visits and talk at work.

Murphy, Marty

Western Sydney University

We Only Laugh When It Doesn't Hurt:
Comic Effect and the Abstraction of Violence in Literary Comedy Narratives

In comedy, how are characters protected from pain and suffering of any consequence? Comic characters heal and recover faster than is humanly possible, but comic signals may surround the violent event even when characters really get hurt, causing Bergson's 'momentary anaesthesia of the heart' (1911) that allows the reader to laugh.

In this presentation I ask how diminished empathy is created in works of literary comedy narrative so that the reader may laugh at fictional violence without concern for the characters involved. In his classic work *An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, Bergson's conclusion was that we laugh at 'the momentary transformation of a person into a thing', which suggests an objectification of character at work in the moment of comic conflict. Comic effect is achieved around the violent event when its description removes the injured character with comic distance. The violent act is focused as a series of impacts to the character's body parts. In a sense, the character is separated from the injury. In addition to this treatment of the description I argue, using Silvan Tomkins' Affect Theory of personality, that the comic character's response to pain and injury is necessarily shallow so that the viewer or reader may experience the comic effect.

This paper will examine the comic distance created by the abstraction of violence using case studies of literary comedy narrative by Ian McEwan, Hilary Mantel and George Saunders.

Bionote

Marty Murphy is a Lecturer at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. He is a current PhD candidate, examining 'Comic Effects in Screen and Literary Comedy Narratives' at the Writing and Society Research Centre, Western Sydney University.

Pabel, Anja

Central Queensland University, Cairns

The Downsides of Humour Used During Tourism Experiences

The successful application of humour in tourism contexts can be a challenging task, since what exactly is perceived as funny is a highly subjective experience. Once a crude comment is made, it cannot be withdrawn and this can be detrimental to the overall tourism experience. Therefore it is important to ensure that humour delivery is designed appropriately for its tourism setting and audience. This research reports on a focus group study conducted with 103 participants at four tourism settings to gain a deeper understanding of the limits of humour in tourism contexts. During these focus group discussions, special emphasis was given to exploring the downsides of using humour from the perspectives of tourists. Participants were asked whether they felt if any of the humour they encountered actually offended them; if they could think of disadvantages when humour is used during tourism experiences; and if they could mention any tourism settings where they would not welcome the use of humour. The focus group discussions were audio-recoded and transcripts were subjected to analysis with Leximancer, a text analytics tool which produces visual maps based on the connectivity of related themes. The findings of the focus group study indicate that participants liked the humour they encountered at each of the four tourism settings. Most respondents stated that being overly serious during tourism presentations could have undesirable outcomes for some tourism experiences. The results also highlight some of the negatives when employing humour in tourism settings including language barriers since tourism often brings together people from multiple cultures and backgrounds. There were certain settings where participants considered the use of humour as unfitting such as places of human suffering. Essentially, the downsides of using humour in tourism settings depend on many variables including the skill of the tourism presenter to deliver the humour, the content of the humour as well as the tourists' own taste and preference for humour. Tour guides and other tourism presenters should aim for a balanced approach where humour is relevant and included with other educational material to be presented to tourists. In public tourist attractions and tours, it is important for tour guides to be aware of particular situations in regards to how and when to use humour.

Bionote

Anja Pabel completed her PhD at James Cook University in 2015. Her PhD research focused on the use of humour in tourism settings. Her research has been published in a book titled *Tourism and Humour* co-authored with Professor Philip Pearce. Presently she is a lecturer in tourism at Central Queensland University. Her main research interests are: humour research, tourist behaviour and marine tourism.

Peebles, Daryl

University of Tasmania

The Price of Inappropriate Humour in the Workplace

The dichotomy of opinion around the use of humour in the workplace appears to stem from a lack of clarity around the 'style' of humour being considered in a workplace context. A Humour Style Questionnaire developed by Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray and Weir (2003) provided a tool for researchers to differentiate the humour style preferences being displayed in workplaces.

Also emerging from the field of positive psychology, Luthans, Youssef and Avolio (2007) developed a concept called psychological capital (or PsyCap) based on the capacities of self-efficacy, resilience, hope and optimism associated with improved organisational productivity.

Given these observations, the differentiation between positive humour and negative humour is paramount in this paper. So, too, is the exploration of the relationship between PsyCap and positive humour. Specifically, the paper examines both the use and style of humour in workplaces and its relationship with the PsyCap of employees.

It also discusses the relationship between positive humour, psychological capital and indicators of workplace productivity from both the employees' and the employers' perspective using the results of empirical investigation.

The indicators examined include job satisfaction; staff turnover intentions; loyalty, teamwork and helping behaviours; creativity and innovative thinking; discretionary effort and civic virtue; and productivity and contribution to organisational effectiveness.

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Bionote

Daryl Peebles has enjoyed 'parallel careers' working professionally in media and communications and as a human resource manager for both the ABC and the Tasmanian State Government. In his 'other life' Daryl enjoys a theatre and entertainment career as both a writer and performer.

Seven years ago, Daryl merged his professional and performing careers and commenced a part-time PhD study within the University of Tasmania's School of Management researching *The Value of Positive Humour in the Workplace* from which he graduated in December 2015.

As part of his PhD research, Daryl surveyed small teams in over 50 Australian organisations including the private and not-for-profit sectors, and public sector teams from each of the three levels of government. This resulted in over 300 individuals participating. The study examined patterns between the use of positive, affirming humour and Psychological Capital (PsyCap) attributes such as hope, optimism, confidence and resilience. Daryl's study further demonstrated the potentially helpful effects of these constructs on workplace productivity.

Rawlings, Maren

Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne

Disparagement of Self – Who Would Do That!

A Google search by Janes and Olson (2015) for the term 'self-deprecating humor' of 750 000 hits led to the notion that disparagement of self is not restricted to minorities as formerly believed. Humour that is intended to elicit amusement through belittlement of the self is referred to as self-deprecating in Australia. Martineau (1972) analysed the in-group, the intragroup and the intergroup situation in which disparagement humour can occur, but humour reflexive of the self was not addressed as a separate phenomenon. McGhee (2010) recommended laughing at the self as a sign of maturity, although he believed it was a hard habit to develop. The aim of this paper is to examine some pieces of contemporary humorous journalism in the Australian media with respect to targets or butts of the horseplay, using an enhanced Martineau model.

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McGhee, P. (2010). *Humor as Survival Training for a Stressed-out World*. Bloomington: AuthorHouse

Bionote

Maren Rawlings was a teacher at city and country schools in Victoria before a 22 year stint at Methodist Ladies' College, Melbourne, finishing as inaugural Psychology Coordinator and a house coordinator in 2003. In addition to her day job she held casual lectureships at RMIT University and the University of Melbourne (both in psychology) and wrote pre-degree textbooks in Psychology with her husband David. In 2011 she graduated with a PhD in 'Humour at Work' at Swinburne University of Technology and is currently tutoring first and second year in Psychology at Swinburne University. In 2014, she lectured (as a maternity leave replacement) in the inaugural 'Critical Thinking in Psychology' in first year at the Australian Catholic University.

Stewart, Ronald

Prefectural University of Hiroshima, japan

'Extremely Regrettable' Cartoons:
The Limits of Political Cartoons Across Borders in the Wake of Japan's 3.11 Disaster

This paper will present analysis of internal and external political cartoon responses to Japan's March 11, 2011, or '3.11' disaster, and attempt to understand some of the limits of cartoon humour in dealing with disaster. At the time of this disaster, shocking images of the earthquake-triggered tsunami sweeping away whole towns as well as over ten thousand lives were broadcast across the globe and brought swift responses from cartoonists not only in Japan, but worldwide. The multiple reactor meltdowns and radioactive fallout that followed displacing tens of thousands more people, also drew the attention of cartoonists both inside and outside of Japan. Cartoon commentary was used to support, reflect and criticise the Japanese government, power companies and others as they struggled to control the situation, answer local and broader safety concerns, and attempted to rebuild. In order to highlight differences in the limits of Japanese and overseas cartoons related to 3.11, this paper will firstly give an overview of post 3.11 Japanese political cartoons, followed by a brief comparative sketch of the main themes and targets in Anglophone political cartoons on the disaster. The paper will then focus more closely on four overseas newspaper cartoons—one from a US newspaper, the *New York Times*, one from a Malaysian newspaper, *Berita Harian*, and the other two from a French satirical newspaper, *Le Canard Enchaine*—which upset many Japanese, and which drew formal objections from the Japanese Government. Through this brief comparison of internal and external cartoons, along with the examination of Japanese objections to a number of foreign cartoons, this paper seeks to highlight how publishing and cultural contexts, and the temporal and geographical distance of cartoonists from the disaster, affects and limits the humour they deploy.

Bionote

Ronald Stewart is an Associate Professor at the Prefectural University of Hiroshima. He completed his PhD in cultural history at Nagoya University, and has published in both Japanese and English on Japan's cartooning history, late nineteenth to early twentieth-century humour magazines, and visual representation. In recent years his research has focused on contemporary political cartooning in post-3.11 disaster Japan.

Tomkins, Sara

University of Sydney

The Ambivalence of the 'Mega Bigot' and Jewishness in the Comedy of Sarah Silverman

The Jewish American comedian Sarah Silverman is well known for dealing with socially taboo topics in a provocative satirical style. Throughout her career, Silverman has shown a particular interest in issues around racial difference and has used a 'mega bigot' persona to address the topic. The 'mega bigot' comic persona is defined as someone who believes themselves to be extremely open minded and progressive but instead is just a naive bigot who says and does incredibly offensive things. Silverman uses the 'mega bigot' in her race-based comedy with the aim of making fun of bigotry by pretending to be a bigot.

While Silverman's use of the 'mega bigot' is often extremely funny and clever, it also entails significant risk. There is an ever-present risk of the persona's function being misunderstood and a risk of crossing the unclear line between anti-racist and racist humour. I will consider how Silverman tempers her 'mega-bigot' characterisation with moments where the distinction between her bigoted persona and her underlying social critique is made clear.

This paper is particularly interested in how Silverman deploys her Jewishness as a discursive and aesthetic resource within the 'mega bigot' persona. I will look at how Silverman's strategic use of her Jewishness plays a central role in reducing the risks associated with her particular style of racial satire. I will also investigate the ways in which Jewishness makes Silverman's humour more susceptible to criticism, largely due to the instability of Jewishness as a racial/ethnic category in the United States. Through close analysis of examples from Silverman's comedy, this paper aims to show how the ambivalence of both the 'mega bigot' persona and American Jewishness allows Silverman a unique, but often fraught, position from which to address the issue of race.

Bionote

Sara Tomkins is a final year PhD student in the department of Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney. Her research focuses on African American and Jewish American relations in contemporary Jewish American comedy. Her research deals with issues around racial satire and blackface as well as the role of identity politics in race-based humour. Sara is also a lecturer and tutor at the University of Sydney with a particular interest in the fields of Critical Race Studies and transnational American Studies.

Vincent, Alfred

University of Sydney

The Donkey's Tale: Laughter and Its Limits in Medieval Greece

The Pleasant Tale of Donkey, Fox and Wolf is a versified fable, of unknown authorship, in 270 rhymed couplets, written in an early form of Modern Greek around 1500 CE. First printed in 1539, it remained for centuries a much-loved work of popular literature. It tells how the two predators try to trick poor, downtrodden Donkey – but fail to realise that brains are not a monopoly of the learned and powerful.

The *Tale* is thought to have been written in Crete, which was ruled by Venice from 1211 to the Ottoman conquest of 1645-1669. It is a reworking of an unrhymed medieval Greek poem. The rhymed version can be related to a rich vein of humour in Cretan literature, from the provocative satires of Stefanos Sachlikis, a contemporary of Chaucer, to the neoclassical comedies of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which the *Tale* foreshadows in its lively dialogue, its clever irony and its neat characterisation. It can be linked to the Aesopic tradition, to Byzantine satire and to medieval Greek animal poems. There are obvious similarities with the Reynard the Fox tales, but also significant differences in the roles of the three animals.

The *Tale* can be read as a moral fable, but also, of course, as a satirical allegory of the three social classes or estates, circumventing the limits of allowable humour in its society. The characters of Donkey, Wolf and Fox are clearly aligned to these roles. But the poem also satirises aspects of religious practice, creating a problem of interpretation. The allegorical coding and reception of the *Tale* have been little studied, and will be discussed in this paper. Comments based on participants' knowledge of other literary traditions will be most welcome.

An English summary of the *Tale* will be provided in a handout, together with extracts in English translation. Those interested can also read translated extracts in *The Greek Poets: Homer to the Present,* ed. Peter Constantine et al. (Norton, New York and London, 2010), pp. 359-362.

Bionote

Alfred Vincent taught courses in Modern Greek studies at Sydney University from 1974 to 1998, and is now an affiliate member of the Department. Much of his research has been on comedy and other writing from medieval and early modern Greece, and especially from the island of Crete under Venetian rule. His PhD was a critical edition and study of the comedy *Fortounatos,* by Markantonios Foskolos (1655). As a visiting university teacher in Greece (1999 and 2000) he devised and taught courses on European comedy from Machiavelli to Molière. He has also published on the use of Bergson's theory of laughter by the famous novelist and thinker Nikos Kazantzakis, who was an admirer of the French philosopher.

Visconti, Will

University of Sydney

The Personal and the Political in Contemporary Cabaret

The primary aim of this paper is to examine the frequent blurring or elimination of boundaries within contemporary cabaret and neo-burlesque performances. From the political to the personal; being positioned as empowered or exploited, sexy or grotesque; or the limits of physicality and the audience's understanding of taboos and humour (and often all of the above combined), performers today play with these various demarcations for themselves and their audiences. The main points of reference will be the work of specific contemporary performers, whom I aim to situate within the broader framework of the cabaret and neo-burlesque scene in terms of their style as well as their position in terms of cabaret history and the legacy of previous generations of *cabarettistes*.

Of particular interest is precisely where, why, and how performers delineate between themselves, their onstage personae, and their personal lives or beliefs in relation (or contrast) to broader ideas such as body politics, gender roles and current affairs. Here, the use of humour is a key concern, and looking at specific instances where humour is or more tellingly is not used, particularly when paired with other theatrical conventions or specific material.

Beyond their performances onstage, there is further blurring of boundaries through the use of social media and virtual platforms. This can either continue or enable discussion about their performances and audience interaction, and in some cases can create material for future performances.

Bionote

Will Visconti completed his PhD in French Studies and Italian Studies at the University of Sydney. his thesis, entitled 'La Goulue and La Casati: Studies in the Performance of Belle Epoque Decadentism' was a comparative analysis of the lives and legacies of the dancer La Goulue and the Marchesa Luisa Casati, an Italian muse and patroness of the arts. Will's primary research interests extend from the nineteenth century to the present, examining, among other things, the links and continuities between the past and present in terms of the arts and representation. Will's research broadly focuses on ideas of gender, art, and transgression, with particular emphasis on late nineteenth-century Paris and early twentieth-century vaudeville and cabaret traditions.

Previous projects include an examination of the oeuvre of Mae West, the representation of the courtesan in Italian historical fiction, and representations of the cancan and cancan dancers during the fin-de-siècle and in contemporary media. Will is currently working on a biography of the dancer La Goulue.

Walters, Helen

University of Sydney

A Frolic of Fancy Dressers: How to Look Good as a Pumpkin?

My paper is an extension of my Masters thesis, which investigates the complexities of adult fancy dress and examines how humour is embodied at fancy dress parties. My thesis posits that fancy dress for adults is an amusing self-produced entertainment that is enjoyed in the company of others who are similarly attired.

My starting point is that the purpose of wearing fancy dress at parties is to draw people together in playful, shared celebrations and to have fun and be silly. The expectation is that by wearing funny clothes one will be in a humorous frame of mind. I ask is the humour in the fancy dress costumes or in the mind of the wearers. How do the clothes make it fun? It is the physicality of putting on everyday clothing in incongruous combinations or 'not everyday' items of clothing with unusual colours and shapes, textures and fabrics, using disguise or blatant trickery, that can not but help create a playground for fun times and making memories. Fancy dress is also a dress code that is part of the continuum of clothing and fashion etiquette that has boundaries of expectation and acceptance. There are many manifestations and interpretations of what constitutes and is experienced as a 'fun time' at a fancy dress party. However it is worth considering that for others fancy dress is uncomfortable, embarrassing and invokes feelings of coercion – it is the antithesis of fun. Fancy dress is not a one hat fits all scenario and that is part of its complexity and makes it a beguiling topic to study.

As part of my research I have been collecting news stories on fancy dress, and what often makes the headlines is when fancy dress crosses the line of political or cultural correctness. For example, during investigations into the sexual misconduct and pedophilia activities of the now deceased UK personality Jimmy Saville, there was outrage in Britain when a group of revelers dressed as Saville at a fancy dress function. It was an example of the power of the image and how fancy dress can be a disruptive force that challenges the cultural mores and pushes the boundaries of public decency. What was done in humour as a commentary on a disturbing public story through the medium of fancy dress was at the limits of humour and seen as highly distasteful by the public.

Bionote

Helen Walters has just completed a Masters of Arts Research degree in the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney. She investigated adult fancy dress practice as a form of socialisation, individual expression and lived experience. It was her long-term participation with fancy dress in her social group that led her to look inward and embark on an ethnographic study of this group of Baby Boomers' dynamic fancy dress costumes and parties.

Helen has presented a talk on the role of photography at fancy dress events for the History Council of NSW in 2013 and participated at Popcaanz in Brisbane in 2013. She studied fashion and textiles at Brighton University and has an Honours degree in English and Cultural studies from Macquarie University. She also has a passion for experimental embroidery and crochet.

Wheatley, Josh

University of Sydney

Filthy Openings and Thresholds: Trash as Philosophy in *Pink Flamingos*

This presentation will explore concepts of trash in cinema through John Waters' notorious cult film, *Pink Flamingos* (1972). Branded by one critic at the time of its release, 'Like a septic tank explosion, it has to be seen to be believed!' the film is a celebration of filth and bad taste, following the warped competition of Baltimore white-trash outsiders to claim the title of 'Filthiest Person Alive'. This independently produced, low-fi film has become one of the most notorious gross-out comedy films in American cinema, littered with spectacular sequences of symbolic transgressions and bodily openings, of singing assholes and chicken f**kers, closing with a coprophilic set-piece that has cemented the film's legacy of pure bad taste. *Pink Flamingos* is not only a film about trash, but it is also an object *of* trash – and presents us with an opportunity to explore dimensions of a trash aesthetic in cinema, through the material and symbolic networks of the 'trash' film.

This presentation will situate the cultural and formal contexts of the film's production, and present an analysis of the relationship to trash and comic philosophy through *Pink Flamingos*. The presentation will draw from Bakhtin's analysis of Rabelais, and concepts of the carnivalesque grotesque body, the monstrous, and the lower-bodily-stratum. Of particular interest are the ways in which trash can be explored as a liminal space, where material assemblages overturn cultural hierarchies and renew the world through festivity. Developing this analysis, I will examine the aesthetic composition of *Pink Flamingos* as 'bad film' assemblage, and the ways in which counter-aesthetics in trash cinema can provide a temporary space of carnival in the cult film theatre. In exploring the material and symbolic relations produced in Waters' film, we can consider the ways in which trash aesthetics and comedy can serve as a critique of act, image, and world.

Bionote

Josh Wheatley is currently undertaking his PhD at the University of Sydney. His area of research is trash aesthetics in contemporary American cinema. His thesis engages postmodern and ecocritical approaches to trash materialities in film, examining networks of value, waste and the image.