

The Humorous Times

Newsletter of the International Society for Humor Studies

Fall 2015

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Association News

2015 ISHS Membership and Finances

Martin Lampert, ISHS Secretary-Treasurer



The International Society for Humor Studies had another good year in 2015 with 292 affiliates, including 280 new and returning members and 12 additional Board Members and Consulting Editors of the journal, *HUMOR*. At the October 31 close of 2015 membership, the Society was again financially sound with \$60,093.80 in unaudited revenue including \$40,423.80 carried over from 2014 and \$19,670.00 from 2015 membership dues and fee. Operating expenses through October included \$102.00 for recognition awards, \$373.82 for online services, and an estimated \$14,826 for membership subscriptions to *HUMOR: International Journal for Humor Research*. Revenue over expenses by the end of 2015 is estimated to be \$44,791.98.

Between December 1, 2014 and October 31, 2015, Holy Names University received an additional \$1,231.04 for the ISHS Scholarship fund. On October 31, the scholarship fund held \$14,791.19. From this fund, the Society made one \$500.00 and two \$250.00 awards in 2015 to graduate students who attended the 28th ISHS Conference in Oakland, California. As always, I would like to thank the members who made contributions to the ISHS Scholarship Fund, and I would like to encourage others to make donations with their 2015 membership applications.

We look forward to another great year in 2016 with the publication of the 29th volume of *HUMOR* and the Society's 28th international conference to be held at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland from June 27 to July 1, 2016. You can register and submit paper proposals for the 2016 Conference online at the Conference website at www.irishcomedy.ie. For Conference information, you can also write to Conference Registration at ishsdublin2016@gmail.com or to the Conference Convener, Eric Weitz at weitzer@tcd.ie. If you would like to host a future ISHS Conference, you can contact me for more information on how to submit a Conference proposal.

If you would like to join the Society or renew your ISHS membership for 2016, please visit the membership page on the Society's website at www.humorstudies.org. On the membership page, you will find a link that will allow you to renew your membership. On the online application form, you will notice the Society's current fee structure, which allows for membership with either a print or online subscription to the Society's journal, *HUMOR*. For 2016, membership is \$110 with a print subscription and \$69 with an online subscription. Please note that online renewal includes a 3% plus \$1 processing fee. However, regular members who

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Next Issue

The next *The Humorous Times* is due February 2016.

renew before January 31, will can still take a \$5 discount on dues, allowing everyone to renew early with an online journal subscription for just \$64 plus processing. If you do not wish to receive the journal, but do wish to be a member to receive our other benefits, you can still join ISHS as an Associate member for just \$30 plus processing.

Finally, thank you for your support of the International Society for Humor Studies. Your participation in ISHS helps to advance the importance of humor research and, as always, is greatly appreciated.

2015 ISHS Election

Every two years, the International Society for Humor Studies holds an election for ISHS President and for two new Members-at-Large to the ISHS Executive Board. The new ISHS President will serve for two years, from January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2017, and will take over from Larry Ventis (College of William and Mary, USA), who will continue on the ISHS Board as the immediate Past President. The new Members-at-Large will replace Moira Marsh (Indiana University, USA) and Graeme Ritchie (University of Aberdeen, Scotland) and who have served on the ISHS Board since January 2012. The new Board Members will serve for four years from January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2019.

For our 2015 Election, the Society is pleased to present the following two candidates for ISHS President and six candidates for ISHS Board Member-at-Large. Current ISHS members will receive online access to an electronic ballot in mid-November 2015.

Candidates for ISHS President



Delia Chiaro, Professor (University of Bologna, Forli, Italy)

Delia Chiaro is Professor of English Language and Translation at the University of Bologna's Department of Interpreting and Translation. Born, bred and educated in the UK, Delia has spent her entire academic career in Italy where she has combined her passion for film and TV with her interest in visual and verbal ambiguity and duplicity—an interest which has provided her with the perfect excuse to study humour in all shapes and sizes, but especially how it is perceived in translation and its cross-cultural impact.

Since publishing *The Language of Jokes: Analysing Verbal Play* (Routledge 1992), she has written extensively on diverse aspects of language and humour, most recently *Gender and Humor: Interdisciplinary and International Perspectives* (with Raffaella Baccolini, Routledge, New York: 2014) while *The Language of Jokes in the Digital Age* is forthcoming with Routledge in early 2015. She has been invited to lecture on humour across Europe, Asia and New Zealand. Beyond academia, her hobbies include running, socialising, and socialism.



Władysław Chłopicki, PhD (Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland)

Wladyslaw Chlopicki, Ph.D., is a senior lecturer with the Institute of English Studies, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland, where he has worked since 1988. He is also the Head of the Faculty of Humanities at Krosno State College in southeastern Poland. He has studied and conducted research in the United States, Germany, Britain, and Denmark. His PhD thesis, *Sophistication in Humor: Character Frames*, was completed in 2000. He is particularly interested in translation studies and intercultural communication, and is involved in the international research on communication styles involving a number of European countries.

Wladyslaw is firmly engaged in the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary study of the language of humor. He is currently working on the application of cognitive linguistics and intercultural communication to the study of humorous texts. He is preparing his book, *Humorous Discourse: A Cognitive Study*, for publication. He is editor-in-chief of the international *Humour and Culture* series, published in Krakow, which included monographs on *Polish Humour* and *Hungarian Humour* in 2012. He has edited and co-edited several article collections, including *Cognition in Language* and the two volumes of *Estonia and Poland: Creativity and Tradition in Cultural Communication*.

Wladyslaw has participated in numerous humour conferences since 1987 (19 ISHS conferences altogether at the latest count, plus any other humour conference he had heard of). He convened the 24th ISHS conference in Kraków in June 2012 as well as two International Conferences on Communication Styles in Krosno in 2013 and 2015. He has also co-organized national biannual linguistics conferences in Kraków since 2000, which have drawn scholars from various language, culture and teaching departments across Poland. He has guest lectured in Germany, Portugal, Northern Ireland, Estonia, and Taiwan. He is an Editorial Board member of *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research* and the *Israeli Journal of Humor Research*. He is also a member of the editorial team of the *European Journal of Humour Research*, which has just produced its 12th issue since 2013. He is President of the Cracow Tertium Society for the Promotion of Language Studies and served as an Executive Board member of the ISHS from 2006 to 2009.

Candidates for ISHS Board Member-at-Large



Sammy Basu, Ph.D. (Willamette University, Oregon, USA)

Sammy Basu is a Professor of Politics at Willamette University, a liberal arts college in Salem, Oregon, USA. He teaches courses in the history of western political philosophy, contemporary ethical and political theory, ethics and public policy, death, and humor. He received a B.A. and M.A. in political science from the University of Calgary in Canada, and an M.A. and Ph.D in politics from Princeton University, where he specialized in the study of political philosophy. Humor emerged as a central focus of his research as he recognized that the topic received relatively little disciplinary attention, especially in his field of political philosophy.

Sammy has attended ISHS conferences since 2000 and continues to do so regularly. In his view, the Society distinguishes itself in that it encourages both specialization and synthesis, originality and interdisciplinary sharing of ideas. Over the years, he has learned much from the research of other ISHS members, and presented his own work from a humanities perspective, using the literary and interpretive methods of intellectual history. More specifically, his interests in political humor as theoretical, epistemological, and communicative dimensions of the public sphere have led him to seek new routes through otherwise canonical and well-trodden texts such as Plato's *Republic* and Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. His publications on humor include "Dialogic Ethics and the Virtue of Humor" in the *Journal of Political Philosophy* and "'A little discourse pro & con': Levelling laughter and its Puritan criticism," in the *International Review of Social History*. He is working on a book manuscript on humor in the Weimar Republic and Nazi Third Reich.

If elected as a Member-at-Large, Sammy promises to affirm decisions that respect the interdisciplinary and international qualities of the Society, and to support methodological pluralism within humor studies.



Hsueh Chih Chen, Ph.D. (National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan)

Dr. Hsueh-Chih Chen is a Distinguished Professor and the Chair of the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling of National Taiwan Normal University. His work investigates humor from the basic research of cognitive neuroscience to the exploration of social and cultural influences with various techniques including eye-tracking, EEG, and fMRI. Moreover, his research team translates and develops the measurements to evaluate humor among normal and autistic people with great reliability and validity, including traditional Chinese versions of Humor Style Questionnaire and PhoPhiKat-45.

Dr. Chen has published 123 journal articles in national and international journals, 30 books/book chapters, and 291 conference presentations, and has managed 59 projects. This year, he received the Outstanding Research Award in Humanities and Social Sciences from the Ministry of Science and Technology, Taiwan, which recognized his exceptional contributions to academia, including the devotion to his beloved humor research for 25 years. Dr. Chen has also rendered excellent service to academic communities through a combination of leadership and public service activities.

Currently, he is the president to Chinese Association of Psychological Testing, the leader of the Chinese Creativity Association, and the chair of the Taiwanese Psychological Association, the most influential professional association of Psychology in Taiwan.



Holger Kersten, Ph.D. (University of Magdeburg, Germany)

Holger Kersten is a Full Professor of American Literature and Culture at Otto-von-Guericke-Universität in Magdeburg, Germany. In 1997, he joined ISHS and since that time has been a frequent presenter of academic papers at ISHS conferences and other scholarly conventions. His research interests in the field of humor include ethnic humor, dialect humor, and national humor. One area of special interest is humor in 19th-century American literature and culture with a long-standing emphasis on Mark Twain. His work has been published in international journals and books. He has been a lecturer at the annual International Summer Schools and Symposia on Humour and Laughter, has served on the Summer School's Advisory Board, and was the local organizer for the 2013 Summer School. In 2013, he became a member of the editorial board of the journal *Studies in American Humor*. He is a member of various national and international academic associations, including the American Humor Studies Association and the *Mark Twain Circle of America*. From 2005 to 2008, he was executive director of the *German Association for American Studies*, and he now serves on its advisory board.



Liisi Laineste, Ph.D. (Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu, Estonia)

Liisi Laineste (PhD, 2009) is a Senior Researcher at the Estonian Literary Museum, Department of Folkloristics. Her primary academic interest lies in the various expressions of folk humour, especially in how it manifests on the Internet. She defended her PhD (“Continuity and Change in Post-Socialist Jokelore”) at the Department of Folkloristics of the University of Tartu and has since then widened her scope of interest into globalization of humour, leisure and pleasure studies, caricatures, and the relations between flaming and humour. She has published a number of articles on ethnic, political and internet humour and is the editor of several humour-related volumes of articles, most recently “War Matters: Constructing the Images of the Other in Central and Eastern Europe (1930s–1950s)” (with D. Demski and K. Baraniecka-Olszewska, L’Harmattan, in press). She has also organized conferences, symposia and a summer school on humour and belongs to the advisory board of International Summer School for Humour Studies.



Sharon Lockyer, Ph.D. (Brunel University, London, UK)

Sharon Lockyer is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Communications at Brunel University London, UK. She is the Founding Director of the Centre for Comedy Studies Research (CCSR), the first international interdisciplinary research centre devoted to the academic study of comedy. Her research focuses on the sociology of humour and comedy, critical comedy studies, humour and identity and the ethics and aesthetics of humorous discourse. Sharon was awarded her PhD in 2002 for a thesis entitled *An Eye to Offensiveness: The Discourse of Offence and Censure in Private Eye* from Loughborough University, UK. She is the editor of *Reading Little Britain: Comedy Matters on Contemporary Television* (2010) and co-editor of *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour* (2005/2009), *Controversial Images: Media Representations on the Edge* (2012), and *Screening the Undead: Vampires and Zombies in Film and Television* (2014). She is also the author of numerous book chapters and journal articles on humour and comedy. Sharon has been a regular ISHS conference presenter since 1999 and was awarded an ISHS Emerging Scholar Award in 2004. She has taught on the ISHS-endorsed International Summer School and Symposium on Humour and Laughter: Theory, Research and Applications in Aberdeen, Scotland (2007), Tartu, Estonia (2011) and Sheffield, England (2014). Sharon has also been on the editorial board of ISHS’s journal, *HUMOR*, since 2012.



Jim Lyttle, Ph.D. (University of Minnesota–Duluth, USA)

Jim Lyttle is a Canadian who joined the International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS) as a doctoral student in 1998. His research interest is “the effective and responsible use of humor for persuasion,” such as in advertising and political discourse. In that context, he has studied the effectiveness of business ethics training, counseling interventions, and teaching with humor, as well as the ethics of using humor to bypass critical thought.

Jim has presented nine papers on humor at ISHS conferences, attended the American conferences and one in Bergen, Norway, along with the Summer School in Aberdeen. He has also presented a dozen papers on humor at academic conferences and more than twice that many at meetings of community groups such as the 2007 Mensa Colloquium on Humor in Chicago. He has contributed to the *Encyclopedia of Humor Research*, reviewed submissions to the Artificial Intelligence and Simulation of Behavior convention in 2008, and occasionally reviews articles for the journal, *Humor*.

Jim holds a degree in philosophy from Wilfrid Laurier University (Waterloo), a master’s degree from Western University (London), and a doctorate in organization studies from York University (Toronto). He is active in community groups that advocate critical thinking, such as the Lake Superior Freethinkers and the Iron Range Coalition of Reason. Until he takes early retirement in May, he is teaching in the business school at the University of Minnesota, where he encourages future business leaders to take a more thoughtful approach to their lives and work.

Upcoming Events

2016 International Society for Humor Studies Conference

Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, June 27– July 1, 2016

From Eric Weitz, Conference Converner



The 28th Conference of the International Society for Humor Studies will be held from June 27 to July 1, 2016, at Trinity College Dublin, in the heart of Ireland’s capital city. All conference business will take place in or near Trinity’s walled campus, with a conference home in the Long Room Hub, with major events hosted by the School of Drama, Film and Music’s Samuel Beckett Theatre.

Conference activities will begin on Monday, June 27, with pre-conference sessions, including what we call Interdisciplinary Huddles for attendees who would like to engage in specially moderated small-group discussions (no more than five in each), with the prime directive to get researchers from diverse scholarly and practical backgrounds to talk to one another. For maximum benefit, interested attendees should register in advance, although there is no added charge.

The Conference will open officially in the afternoon with a brief welcome from Conference Fool, Little John Nee—whose song, ‘The World Brings Fools Together’, provides the informal tag line for our gathering—followed by the Presidential Address. Attendees will then enjoy a wine reception in the historic Long Room of Trinity’s Old Library, with its vaulted ceilings and age-old holdings.

Tuesday, June 28 to Friday, July 1 will be full conference days with plenary sessions, panel discussions, practice-based workshops, installations, and paper sessions. A conference banquet will be held on Wednesday night in Trinity’s Hogwart’s-like Dining Hall with a dinner scheduled for the final night at a local eatery. On Thursday night, June 30, the conference will host a special performance event entitled, *Laughter in Our Bones: A Comic Cultural Buffet*, which will offer short, classic comic pieces from Dublin’s diverse ethnic communities and Irish sub-cultures, and will provide a free-moving, fairground-like atmosphere. Other events will include a limerick competition as a variation on the yearly joke contest.

The 2016 ISHS conference invites research papers, symposia, and workshops under the general theme of Humor as Embodied Practice. ***The deadline for submissions is March 1, 2016, and abstracts will not be accepted prior to formal online registration.*** Please note that 2016 marks an important centennial anniversary in the Republic of Ireland’s history, and so Dublin will be hosting many commemorative events at the time of the conference. We therefore advise conference participants to make travel plans and book accommodations sooner rather than later.

Registration, submission, and accommodation information for the 2016 ISHS Conference will be available starting November 18, 2015 through www.humorstudies.org and on the Conference website at www.irishcomedy.ie. Inquiries can be sent to the Conference Convener, Eric Weitz at weitzer@tcd.ie or to the Conference email address at ishsdublin2016@gmail.com.

Twenty-Second AHSN Colloquium

Women's College, University of Sydney, Australia, February 6-8, 2016

The 22nd Colloquium of the Australasian Humour Studies Network (AHSN) will be held from February 6 to 8, 2016 at the Women's College of the University of Sydney, A. The conveners are Peter Kirkpatrick, Jessica Milner Davis, and Will Visconti. The conference theme will be *Unfunny: The Limits of Humour*. For more information, contact Dr. Peter Kirkpatrick (Convener) at peter.kirkpatrick@sydney.edu.au or visit the AHSN website at <http://www.sydney.edu.au/humourstudies>.

Sixth Texas Humor Research Conference

Dallas, Texas, USA, February 19-21, 2016

The 6th Texas Humor Research Conference invites submissions for a multidisciplinary conference at the Dallas, Texas center for Texas A & M University–Commerce. The conference theme will be *Empirical Approaches to Humor*, and the conference will include an opening plenary, paper sessions, posters, and workshops. Paper proposals can be sent to CHSSA@tamuc.edu. The submission deadline is December 4, 2015 for early submissions and January 8, 2016 for late submissions. For inquiries, contact the Conference Organizers, Christian Hempelmann at c.hempelmann@tamuc.edu or Owen Lynch at olynch@mail.smu.edu, or visit <http://www.tamuc.edu/humor>.

Forty-Second Annual Meeting of The Association for the Study of Play

Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA, March 16-19, 2016

The 42st Annual Meeting of The Association for the Study of Play will be held from March 16 to 19, 2016 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA. The 2016 TASP Conference's theme will be *Play on the Move*. The proposal deadline is November 15, 2015. For information, contact Carrie Lobman at carrie.lobman@gse.rutgers.edu or visit the TASP website at www.tasplay.org/about-us/conference.

Twenty-Ninth Meeting of the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor

Phoenix, Arizona, USA, April 7-10, 2016

The 29th Conference of the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor will be held April 7 to 10, 2016 at the Hilton Phoenix/Mesa in Phoenix, Arizona, USA. The theme of the 29th AATH Conference will be *Rev'ing up Your Humor*. For more information, visit the AATH Conference page at <http://www.aath.org>.

Sixteenth International Summer School and Symposium on Humour and Laughter

Braşov, Romania, July 4-9, 2016

The 16th International Summer School and Symposium on Humour and Laughter will be held in Braşov Romania, Russia from July 4 to July 9. Stanca Mada, and Razvan Saftoiu are the local organizers. For more information, visit the summer school website at <http://humoursummerschool.org/16/>.

The Taboo Conference 2016

Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain, September 20-21, 2016

The 3rd Taboo Conference will be held at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, Spain from September 20 to 21, 2016. The theme of the Conference will be *Taboo Humour: Language, Culture, Society, and the Media*. Paper proposals should include a 300-word abstract and a brief bionote and should be sent to thetabooconference@gmail.com by January 15, 2016 with the subject line, *TaCo2016 – Proposal*. For more information, visit the Conference website at <https://portal.upf.edu/web/taco>.

Practically Joking

From Elliott Oring, California State University, Los Angeles

Moira Marsh. (2015). *Practically Joking*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press. 195 pp., ISBN 978-0-87421-983 8; EISBN 978-0-87421-984-5

In *Practically Joking*, Moira Marsh provides the first monograph on practical jokes for a scholarly audience. To write seriously about jokes is, in many minds, a suspect endeavor. To write about practical jokes is doubly suspect which is probably why we have had to wait so long for a book like this one.

The book comprises eleven chapters with brief introductory and closing sections. Chapter 1 deals with the definition of the practical joke. Marsh's definition: *a scripted, unilateral play performance involving two opposed parties—trickster and target—with the goal of incorporating the target into play without his or her knowledge, permission, or both* (12). Chapter 2 concerns the types of the practical joke which she identifies as *put-ons, fool's errands, kick-me pranks, booby-traps, and stunts* (21). The put-on requires little more than a false word or phrase that is taken for truth. The fool's errand involves sending someone to seek some bogus object or perform some undoable task. The kick-me alters the appearance of victims without their knowledge thus making them objects of attention for others. The booby trap surprises someone by means of some mechanism or behavior. It can be as simple as creeping up behind someone and shouting in order to scare them. The stunt involves hidden manipulations that erupt into everyday discourse or public space and redefine the ongoing situation. The elaborate "hacks" or pranks performed by MIT students fall in this category. Chapter 3 describes and analyzes an elaborate April Fools' Day joke played on a newspaper reporter by those in the newsroom and includes interviews with both the joker and the victim. Chapter 4 explores the relationship between practical jokes and legends since both turn on questions of truth and belief: the practical joke on the fact that the joker knows the truth of the situation while the victim does not. The next two chapters delve into the question of the ethics of practical joking; chapter 5 from the emic perspective of the jokers and chapter 6 from the perspective of the victims. In this latter chapter, Marsh considers the question of how jokers garner support for their jokes from both onlookers and victims. Marsh invokes Michael Billig's notion of *unlaughter*—a display of not laughing—as an index of a lack of "humor support." A detailed analysis of several pranks in chapter 7 further explores the strategies of gaining or displaying support for practical jokes including laughter, the aestheticization of the joke, ritualized—that is, exaggerated—displays of anger, self-depreciation ("I can't believe I fell for that"), and reciprocation. Chapter 8 looks at reciprocal joking between friends that might be regarded as cruel or dangerous by outsiders. Also examined are jokes traditionally played among strangers who are temporarily thrown together in college dormitories, summer camps, or military bases. Wedding pranks, initiation pranks, and hazing are the subject matter of chapter 9. Although such pranks are usually recognized as rituals, and not personal, there is a discussion of a case in which the impersonal definition of the prank was rejected and resulted in the victim seeking legal redress. Chapter 10 deals with pranks carried out by journalists on April Fools' Day and by college students. These are pranks directed at the general public, usually at a specific time of year. Chapter 11 is based on the author's interviews with several practical jokers about their history as jokers, the motivations for their jokes, and the management of their jokes' reception.

This book should begin a stimulating intellectual exchange about this long neglected type of humorous behavior. I will restrict myself here to raising a few questions. Play, unfortunately, is as difficult to define as humor or joke. Given the definition of the genre recapitulated above (a definition not all that different from that offered by Richard S. Tallman in 1974), are stings, swindles, grifts, and hoaxes forms of play? When the FBI or DEA stages a scenario in order to ensnare particular criminals, are they engaging in practical joking? One might argue that agents of these organizations are not playing but are in earnest—after all, lives may be at stake—yet they are fabricating roles, scenes, and events in order to produce outcomes that seem homologous to those of practical jokes. Many forms of play have earnest aims, and athletes "play" various sports and games which serve to enhance their privileges, reputations, and incomes in the real world. And if the above are indeed practical jokes, how should we regard the various deceptions and dissimulations enacted by the military during warfare?

Marsh regards the “playing the Whiteman” routines of the Cibicue Apache as practical jokes because they involve people in a performance without their prior consent (18). However, many kinds of joke performance are initiated without prior consent. Individuals are pressured into responding to a “knock-knock” joke or are thrust into a verbally explicit sexual scenario without their preparation or acquiescence. Are all such jokes performances practical jokes because they unilaterally incorporate individuals into play? It seems to me that when the deliberate effort to deceive and discomfort a target through the instigation of some kind of action is left out of the definition, too many possibilities may come pouring in.

A bigger question is raised by Marsh’s constructivism with regard to practical jokes and jokes in general. Marsh argues that “amusement is not something that happens to us when we are exposed to jokes.... Amusement is something we do, sometimes consciously and deliberately, sometimes less so. One is not amused *by* a joke but amused *at* it; the quality of funniness lies not in the joke itself but in the perceiver, and audiences are not at the mercy of the joke but choose when and how to respond with displays of mirth” (99). While there is no doubt that humor depends upon a subjective perception, that does not mean there is nothing objectively to perceive. An object may have a disposition to produce an experience even if that experience is not engendered in each and every individual. Not everyone can perceive certain colors. That does not make color entirely a subjective construction. If there were nothing objective to be amused by *in* a joke, we would be very hard put to explain why many people seem to laugh at the same jokes, why certain jokes survive for centuries in tradition, or why people bother to repeat jokes. Were amusement utterly subjective, what provokes it should be entirely random.

In the practical joke, a deception would seem to be its *objective* element. Of course it is possible that a deception will not be perceived or revealed, just as someone might take a joking remark literally or simply discount it as enigmatic, misspoken, or irrelevant. But there is considerable agreement during and after many practical jokes that a deception has been perpetrated. The temperament of the victim; the sense of the deception as dangerous, malign, unduly painful, artful, or just; and the relationships understood to obtain between jokester, victim, and audience are the major factors for subjective evaluation. On the basis of these *judgments*, the practical joke may produce amusement, satisfaction, consternation, embarrassment, or outrage. Further complicating the matter is the reaction of the victim which feeds back into the subjective evaluation by the joker and audience. (“Reaction” should properly be part of the morphology of practical-joke narratives which precedes, but is separate from, “evaluation” [32]). Amusement is subjective largely because the factors that promote or inhibit amusement are subjective. Because Marsh works primarily with practical jokes in which there is a real and potentially aggrieved victim, it is likely that many expressions of amusement are not genuine. Victims may simply *signal* amusement in order to communicate their acceptance of the deception and discomfort as play rather than abuse. That does not mean, however, that the experience of amusement is always a matter of voluntary control.

Because the practical joke has a real rather than a fictional target, practical jokes seem more aggressive than verbal jokes. Something is actually being *done* to someone. The jokes are often intended to exact some physical, psychological, or economic toll. Consequently, Marsh is attracted to the benign violation theory of humor proposed by Thomas C. Veatch and A. Peter McGraw which rests upon the notion that a violation of a moral rule is committed which somehow seems acceptable. I can only note here that there are numerous questions to be asked about benign violation theory, and I would challenge Marsh’s contention that it is a “major advance” over incongruity theories of humor (76). Even so, Marsh’s statement that benign violation theory proposes something “at once reprehensible and amusing is at the heart of all jokes” is slightly awry (90). What the theory states is that amusement is the *result* of a violation that is somehow regarded as acceptable or benign.

Certain of Marsh’s propositions seem worthy of deliberation and discussion. For example, “practical jokes are about relationships” (134) would seem to be belied by Marsh’s inclusion of graffiti in the class of practical jokes (18). Unless any and all expression is ultimately about relationships—not a very useful principle—it is hard to see how taggers who leave their signatures on the side of a stranger’s house or the door of their garage are involved in a relationship. Most often, a tagger is not likely to know the owner of a residence or shop, and although the tag is meant to be seen by a wider public, this would not seem to constitute what could be properly called a “relationship.” Marsh also approvingly cites British social anthropologist Mary Douglas’s famous dictum that “a joke is seen and allowed when it offers a symbolic

pattern of the social pattern occurring at the same time.” The proposition has often been repeated by scholars, but is it true? Some of Marsh’s own examples would seem at first sight to falsify it. A British professor’s colleagues regularly sent him used clock parts through the mail. The joke had no particular meaning, and his colleagues had no grudge against him. “He was well liked and respected and an extrovert who went in for self-mockery” (59). Where is the joke in the social structure that this joke purportedly symbolizes? And what does the reciprocal joking between friends symbolize? Why is reciprocal practical joking characteristic of only some, but not most, friendships?

A book worth its salt is supposed to raise questions and provoke debate. *Practically Joking* does what it has to do. It offers a comprehensive introduction to the phenomenon of practical joking with interesting, detailed examples and substantive commentary. It provides a platform for a wider discussion of the practical joke genre, its attributes, its social implications, and its relationship to other kinds of jokes. This is a book that has been long—too long—in coming. It will prove a benefit not only to the understanding of practical jokes but should contribute to sorting out issues that attend the analysis of humorous forms and processes more generally.

Anthropology of Humor and Laughter

From Jeffrey Goldstein, University of Utrecht

Eva Wasilewska, ed. (2013). *Anthropology of Humor and Laughter*. San Diego, CA: Cognella Academic. 360 pp., ISBN-10: 1609274040; ISBN-13: 9781609274047

The best way to classify this oddly organized book is as a reader with an extensive introduction by the editor. Following a wide-ranging introduction, the book is divided into ten sections, all but the last brief section accompanied by one or more readings. Most of these have been published before, between 1973 and 2012, but several have been written for this book by the editor or her former students.

You read this book at your peril, notes the Disclaimer, because of the editor’s belief that the potential for offense is innate to humor. She warns, “Some of the writings in this book may include material that conflicts with the core beliefs of some readers. Please review the content carefully to see if this book is one that you are committed to reading...”

Wasilewska notes that far more research focuses on humor than on laughter. She pleads for more laughter research. So it is a bit surprising to see that of the twelve readings, only three are directly concerned with laughter while the remainder are about jokes and joking. Included are articles by anthropologists, including Dan Ben-Amos, Mahadev Apte and Georges Tamer, sociologists such as Janet Bing, and curiously a chapter by the humorist P. J. O’Rourke.

The Introduction, which is about a third of the book, covers humor research and discussion of the topics that follow – humor and health, aggression, conflict resolution, ethnic humor, religion and humor, sex/ism. There are particularly interesting analyses of Jewish humor, humor and religion, and joking relationships -- many an anthropologist’s first contact with humor research.

Wasilewska says that humor is little studied by anthropologists, but a chapter by Mahadev Apte (reprinted from what the editor herself refers to as an important work on the subject) cites many anthropological studies of humor: “After the joking relationship, humor in religion has received the most extensive attention from anthropologists. Clowning and other comic performances have been reported as part of religious ceremonies in ethnographic accounts of cultures from various parts of the world. Both ethnographic and ethnological studies of humor in religion exist, concentrating on the American-Indians, and date from the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the present. The primary reason for the existence of such extensive anthropological materials may be that humor has been a major feature of both rituals and mythologies” (1985: 270).

Each chapter is titled “Toward...” something, such as “Toward aggression,” “Toward religion”: but there is no sense of movement and no destination in sight. There is an abundance of footnotes, many of which are jokes that illustrate and complement the text and do not much interfere with the flow of the narrative.

Wasilewska herself contributes two chapters to the section “Toward definition of laughter: Laughing Dogs, Panting Chimpanzees, and Pleasure-Driven Rats.” She explains that her interest in laughter came

about as a result of her own unexplained convulsive seizures. Her primary interest is in laughter, which evolved prior to the cognitive abilities necessary to process humor. She summarizes research on laughter in patients with brain damage or who were undergoing fMRI scans or direct stimulation of the brain and concludes that the left superior frontal gyrus triggers laughter, but also triggers feelings of mirth after laughter begins. Wasilewska notes the “close link between the motor, affective, and cognitive components of laughter” (128).

The editor also raises the possibility of animal humor: “Since tickling induces laughter in humans, primates and rats, there is also the possibility that other laughter-inducing activities are shared by them. Cognitive tickling, i.e., humor, might be one of them regardless of the presence of language or language-like vocalizations in animals. Humor is not limited to its verbal form so we cannot ignore the possibility that animals enjoy it too, whether as slapstick, chase, or playing pranks” (133).

The section on humor and religion is noteworthy, with an excellent introduction by Wasilewska and well-chosen readings, “Humor in Religion” by Mahadev Apte and Georges Tamer’s “The Qur’ān and humor.” Tamer discusses humorous statements and situations in the Qur’an, signified by physical indications of smiling and laughter. He also presents Arabic humorous literature into which Qur’anic verses have been assimilated via jokes and anecdotes. Tamer concludes by saying that the Qur’an can shape humor but is itself not permitted within Islam to be the object of humor.

The writing is sometimes stilted and the editing inadequate. Many of the concepts introduced in various chapters are neither used nor referred to subsequently. For instance, the chapter by Volfova and Douglass on humor as performance defines the role of intersubjectivity and voice, but these topics are to be found nowhere else in the book. Lack of an index in a scholarly book is always regrettable.

There is little new in this book for humor researchers. For its main audience of anthropology students, it can serve as an introduction to many of the topics within humor research that are of interest to anthropologists. But, as its editor notes, you must be committed to reading *Anthropology of humor and laughter*.

Reference

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Linguistic Analysis of Jokes

From Josiane Boutonnet, University of Wolverhampton

Graeme Ritchie. (2014/2004). *The Linguistic Analysis of Jokes*. London: Routledge. 243 pp. ISBN: 978-1-138-00873-1

Since its publication in 2004 Graeme Ritchie’s book has been ideal for anyone wanting to familiarise themselves with linguistic studies of humour focusing on jokes as texts. With its comprehensive coverage of research in the field and its critical insights into theoretical work on verbally expressed humour (VEH), it offers valuable perspectives on prior research on this topic. Ritchie’s detailed review of accounts of Incongruity and Incongruity Resolution models alerts the reader to the central place occupied by those concepts in humour research. He acknowledges that humour scholars have hoped to capture what might constitute the essential ingredient of humour, but does not make the claim that incongruity is the answer. In chapters 4 and 5 he presents an extensive overview of work done on incongruity in a range of disciplines, reflecting its influence on contemporary humour research. He also identifies what is termed the Forced Reinterpretation Model as the core of the Semantic Script Theory of Humour, something Raskin (in Popa and Attardo, 2007:222) has himself opposed, seeking to detach himself from the ‘baggage’ associated with the term.

Despite Ritchie’s strong reservations, nay, criticisms concerning the Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH) (Raskin, 1985) and the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) (Attardo and Raskin, 1991), he recognises that the latter’s work has been and remains highly influential in studies of VEH, the SSTH and the GTVH amounting to ‘one of the few attempts to approach verbally expressed humour in a systematic and theoretical fashion’ (69). One assumes that Ritchie adheres to a view of language similar to that of Raskin, in that both scholars consider themselves generative linguists. From the point of view of grammar, this approach is usually associated with linguistic models ‘that have a mathematical structure and with a particular view of the abstract nature of linguistic study’ (Keith-Brown, in Malmkjær, 1991: 162). It is,

however, still a matter of debate whether language can be examined ‘with the same scientific precision and formality that traditional science would apply to physical phenomena’ (11). Ritchie here draws consistently on generative linguistics and artificial intelligence for his conceptual frames of reference.

Much of his critique of the SSTH and the GTVH stems from definitional arguments and the extent to which the SSTH and the subsequent GTVH fulfill the necessary criteria for being formal theories. Chłopicki’s own 2015 response to Ritchie points to the equally problematic terminology used to define categories in this book, and such is perhaps the never-ending dilemma of linguists forced to devise a metalanguage appropriate for the task at hand. For linguists who embrace other theoretical models, such as functionalist linguists, focusing solely on the structural properties of language is necessarily an endeavour limited in scope, even when the aims are reduced to identifying ‘what a joke is’. A language after all is more than a set of sentences; meanings are created in interpersonal contexts and this is where creativity is situated.

Ritchie’s book provides detailed descriptions of some classes of jokes. Indeed, as Davies (2004) observed in his review of its original edition, Ritchie’s work on puns is particularly detailed and rigorous, while his section on computational studies introduces the reader to a number of humour-generation programs. This particular chapter highlights the importance of how scholarly research can lead to applications even outside an agreed theory of humour. His style of writing is clear and his approach methodical. Each chapter ends with a useful summary of the content discussed, making each section a coherent whole.

Ritchie does not claim to present an overall theory of joke structure, emphasizing on a number of occasions that his approach is clearly descriptive. He also recognises that research needs to be extended into a greater variety of joke classes. What he does offer is a systematic analysis of a range of empirical data from which he identifies certain observable patterns. Ultimately, the aim of further work would be to ‘achieve greater formality than past work on verbally expressed humour’ (187). This book is a significant step in such a direction and the new paperback edition is to be welcomed.

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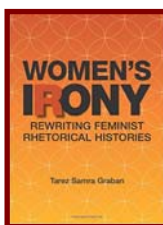
Recent Publications



Les «Nouveaux» Clowns

Delphine Cézard (2014). *Les «Nouveaux» clowns. Approche sociologique de l'identité, de la profession et de l'art du clown aujourd'hui.* Paris: L'Harmattan, 268 pp.

From Nelly Feuerhahn, Paris France: The examination of the clown’s identity undertaken in this study will interest all those who are concerned with social issues relating to that profession. The author is herself a circus artiste, so her sociological approach is reinforced by the point of view of an insider.



Women’s Irony

Tarez Samra Graban (2015). *Women’s Irony: Rewriting Feminist Rhetorical Histories.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 258 pp., ISBN-13: 978-0809334186

From the Publisher: In *Women’s Irony*, Tarez Samra Graban synthesizes three decades of feminist scholarship in rhetoric, linguistics, and philosophy to present irony as a critical paradigm for feminist rhetorical historiography that is not linked to humor, lying, or intention. Using irony as a form of ideological disruption, this innovative approach allows scholars to challenge simplistic narratives of who harmed, and who was harmed, throughout rhetorical history.



Humor in the Classroom

Nancy Bell and Anne Pomerantz (2015). *Humor in the Classroom: A Guide for Language Teachers and Educational Researchers.* New York, USA: Routledge, 222 pp., ISBN-13: 978-0415640534

From the Publisher: *Humor in the Classroom* provides practical, research-based answers to questions that educational researchers and language teachers might have about the social and cognitive benefits that humor and language play afford in classroom discourse and additional language learning. The book considers the ways in which humor, language play, and creativity can construct new possibilities for classroom identity, critique prevailing norms, and reconfigure particular relations of power. *Humor in the Classroom* encourages educational researchers and language teachers to take a fresh look at the workings of humor in today's linguistically diverse classrooms and makes the argument for its role in building a stronger foundation for studies of classroom discourse, theories of additional language development, and approaches to language pedagogy.



The Power of Satire

Marijke Meijer Drees and Sonja de Leeuw, eds. (2015). *The Power of Satire.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 277 pp., ISBN-13: ISBN 978-9027202291; EISBN: 978-9027268556

From the Publisher: In this edited volume, satire is studied for the first time as a dynamic, discursive mode of performance with the power of crossing and contesting cultural boundaries. The collected essays reflect the fundamental shift from literary satire or straightforward literary rhetoric with a relatively limited societal impact, to satire's multi-mediality in the transnational public space where it can cause intercultural clashes and negotiations on a large scale. An appropriate set of heuristic themes – space, target, rhetoric, media, time – serves as the analytical framework for the investigations and determines the organization of the book as a whole. The contributions, written by an international group of experts with diverse disciplinary backgrounds, manifest academic standards with a balance between theoretical analyses and evaluations on the one hand, and in-depth case studies on the other.



Comedy and Social Science

Cate Watson (2015). *Comedy and Social Science: Toward a Methodology of Funny.* New York, USA: Routledge, 198 pp., ISBN-13: 978-1138842595

From the Publisher: Humor may be regarded as a legitimate topic for social scientists, but in general, they present their research rather seriously. In academia, humor tends to be trivialized and dismissed. This is more than just a missed opportunity. To ignore humor is to reject a potentially insightful methodological approach, as the humorous worldview presents unique opportunities for investigating the social. This book constitutes a unique resource, presenting chapters on irony, satire and parody as tools for analysis and means of representation, as well as considering humor in the conduct of research, and offering guidance on getting published.

Recent Articles in Humor Studies

The Humorous Times announces recent articles from *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research* and by researchers who publish elsewhere within humor studies. The following list, compiled by the ISHS Executive Secretary, includes humor studies articles published since September 2015. If you have a recent publication, let us know. We will include it in a future newsletter.

- Bonelli, C. (2015). Eating one's worlds: On foods, metabolic writing and ethnographic humor. *Subjectivity: International Journal of Critical Psychology*, 8(3), 181-200. doi:10.1057/sub.2015.7
- Bright, A. (2015). Why are we watching funny videos in our pedagogy course? Deconstructing humorous videos to foster social activism in educators, *European Journal of Humor Research*, 3(4), 36-53.
- Caruana, F., Avanzini, P., Gozzo, F., Francione, S., Cardinale, F., & Rizzolatti, G. (2015). Mirth and laughter elicited by electrical stimulation of the human anterior cingulate cortex. *Cortex: A Journal Devoted To The Study Of The Nervous System And Behavior*, 71323-331. doi:10.1016/j.cortex.2015.07.024
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- Corbett, D. P. (2015). American laughter. *Art History*, 38(5), 967-970. doi:10.1111/1467-8365.12196
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- Dulamea, A. O., Matei, C., Mindruta, I., & Ionescu, V. (2015). Pathological laughter as prodromal manifestation of transient ischemic attacks—Case report and brief review. *BMC Neurology*, 15
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- Lindo, L. M. (2015). A man and his mic: Taking Chris Rock and Dave Chappelle to teacher's college, *European Journal of Humor Research*, 3(4), 54-74.
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- Martin, R. A. (2015). On the challenges of measuring humor styles: Response to Heintz and Ruch. *Humor: International Journal Of Humor Research*, 28(4), 635-639. doi:10.1515/humor-2015-0096
- Mora, R. A., Weaver, S., & Lindo, L. M. (2015). Editorial for special issue on education and humour: Education and humour as tools for social awareness and critical consciousness in contemporary classrooms, *European Journal of Humor Research*, 3(4), 1-8.
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