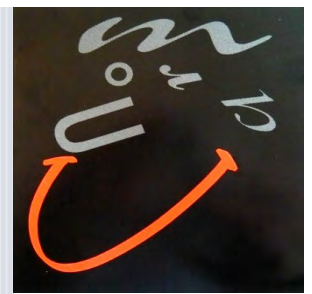


The Humour Studies Digest

Australasian Humour Studies Network ([AHSN](http://ahsn.org.au))

September 2017



Update - 24th AHSN Conference

Update from the Conference Convener:

Hello from beautiful Cairns. I am looking forward to welcoming AHSN delegates to the 24th annual AHSN conference, on the theme of "Humour: How Does it Travel?" The conference is proudly hosted by the Centre for Tourism and Regional Opportunities (CTRO) at Central Queensland University's (CQU) Cairns Campus and will run from mid-afternoon of Friday 2 February to evening of Sunday 4 February 2018.

The Call Has Now Closed

The formal Call closed on **18 September 2017** with a pleasing number of papers submitted and under review.

For any enquiries, please contact Dr Bruce Findlay, Chair of the AHSN Review Panel at: bfindlay@swin.edu.au

Registration is Now Open

All presenters and attendees at the conference, including our scholarship winners, are kindly asked to **register to attend** via the AHSN website -

<http://sydney.edu.au/humourstudies/events/index.shtml>

AHSN is a self-funding network and each conference depends on registration fees to pay its way. The fees paid cover administration and paperwork, including of course the conference brochure and participant list, lunches and morning and afternoon teas and welcome drinks. There will be an optional conference dinner to be arranged at the event.

Travel and Accommodation

For full details, please visit the AHSN website - <http://sydney.edu.au/humourstudies/events/index.shtml>

Central Queensland University's Cairns Campus is only a short distance from a wide range of accommodation facilities, cafes, restaurants, bars, boutique shopping, and also the famous Cairns Esplanade and Pier. The street address of CQU's Cairns campus is: Level 3 CQU Cairns Campus, Cnr Abbott and Shields Streets, Cairns QLD, 4870.

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Enquiries and tourism advice

Some of you have already asked me accommodation and travel related questions about your stay in Cairns. Apart from a PhD in tourism, I also used to work as a travel consultant here in Cairns so am well-placed to respond! There is a wealth of information to share on the many tours and activities that are possible in North Queensland, **so please continue to send me your questions.** ☺

You can also click on these links for more practical information about visiting Cairns:

Tourism Tropical North Queensland:

<http://www.cairnsgreatbarrierreef.org.au/>

Cairns Regional Council:

<http://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/region/tourist-information>

Best regards and see you all next year!

Anja



The inimitable Dr. Anja Pabel
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AHSN Members' News and Updates – Dr Karen Austin

Dr Karen Austin, College of Business, Government and Law, Politics, Flinders University.

In the April-May 2014 AHSN Digest, we profiled Karen as she was just beginning her doctorate. Now she is Dr Austin, we asked her to reflect on her experiences in studying humour.

After a 20-year career as a commercial litigation paralegal (specialising in database and document management for large trials), Karen returned to university to complete her BA in 2011. Her double major in Humanities and Politics was followed with an Honours project that investigated the photographic work of Indigenous visual artist, Nici Cumpston. She received a Chancellor's Commendation and University Medal.

Karen's subsequent doctoral research grew out of her passion for Indigenous Australian visual arts. She recognised that many Indigenous artists used their art to successfully express their own views on socio-political issues that were important to them, but it was the frequent use of humour in so many of these works that was surprising and this led to her postgraduate humour research.

In 2013 Karen attended the 13th International Summer School and Symposium on Humour and Laughter in Magdeburg, Germany. It was one of the highlights of her PhD journey. During the week-long event, she presented a paper on signs of humour in early colonial Australian Indigenous and non-Indigenous interactions that won her a subscription to *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* (Mouton De Gruyter). Most importantly, she met some wonderful humour scholars including Giselinde Kuipers, Willibald Ruch, Christie



Davis, Wladyslaw Chlopicki and Christian Hemplemann, to name a few. She also mixed with other post-graduate students who like herself were undertaking humour research in a wide variety of interesting interdisciplinary fields.

Karen has also presented papers at several AHSN conferences including Newcastle, Wellington, Sydney, and her home town, Adelaide, where she says she was privileged to meet more wonderful humour scholars.

In conjunction with the 21st AHSN held in Adelaide in 2015, Karen convened a trans-disciplinary post-graduate study day on Humour and Laughter. Co-taught by Dr Jessica Milner Davis (Literature, Arts & Media, University of Sydney) and Dr Bruce Findlay (Psychology, Swinburne University, Melbourne), feedback showed that participants thoroughly enjoyed this challenging and informative class.

Karen's thesis, completed by November 2016, was entitled: An investigation into the nature and purposes of Indigenous Australian performance humour and its contributions to Australian culture. She contends that the humour forms and functions discussed in the dominant western academic theories of superiority, incongruity and release can also be understood within the cultural practices of non-western people. Such characteristics of humour are recognisable in early western records of Australian Indigenous communities and also present in some traditional narratives that today reveal the structure of some pre-colonial humour. While economic hardship and government intervention have largely obscured the existence of Indigenous humour in colonial Australian history, her research showed that humour emerged as a significant "weapon" in the armoury of Indigenous fights for socio-political recognition. In particular, theatrical and stand-up performances have become important avenues for Indigenous self-expression that often employ humour.

Most importantly, Karen interviewed several current Aboriginal humourists and attended some terrific comedy performances in the theatre and at comedy events including the Melbourne International Comedy Festival. Her thesis traces the chronological progression that has now established Aboriginal performance within Australia's mainstream arts world and critically analyses the humour used, exploring links between traditional and current practices. She concludes that physical humour and mimicry remain techniques found both in early and in more recent Indigenous live performances. Humorous yarning techniques also enable Indigenous performers to continue to impart their stories—often about the inequalities and hardships they face—to non-Indigenous audiences less judgmentally. Other commonly found humour forms that deprecate idiosyncrasies of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are humour noir and mickey-taking. These techniques are especially recognisable in stand-up comedy. But most significantly, Indigenous humour remains tied to an Indigenous political voice allowing Indigenous artists to raise issues of significance to their own people by providing their own perspectives. This sets much Indigenous performance humour apart as a significant aspect of communication within and to the mainstream and provides Australia's Arts culture with important elements of cultural diversity and complexity.

Karen's work has won attention from the press: as reported in the May AHSN Digest, she was interviewed on Sydney radio station 2SER on 3 April 2017 by Myles Houlbrook-Walk (at: <http://www.2ser.com/component/k2/item/28203-indigenous-comedy>). Now that she has completed her doctoral studies, Karen hopes to continue researching aspects of Indigenous Australian cultures that use humour to pursue particular social and political goals. As she sees it, humour research is a vital aspect of Australian culture that continues to be used in communications in many surprising ways.

Email: karen.austin@flinders.edu.au

AHSN Members' News and Updates – Ying Cao

Ying Cao, School of Humanities and Communication Arts, Western Sydney University

Ying is a PhD student who comes from Wuhan in the PRC. Enrolled at Western Sydney University in the School of Humanities and Communication Arts, she is working on a thesis entitled, "Humour and character's identity in Chinese sitcoms: A case study of *Ipartment*". This focusses on humour in the fictional conversations found in Chinese sitcoms, but also on the linguistic construction of characters' identities via humour. In discussing humour and character identity in Chinese sitcoms, Ying's work pays attention to how humour correlates with a character's personality and their gender identity. Her study also explores patterns of failed humour and the interplay between failed humour and a character's identity construction. None of these topics have yet received much attention in studies of Chinese sitcoms.



Ying's interest in Chinese sitcoms and their humour is based partly on the fact that Chinese sitcoms witnessed a tremendous development in the past two decades. *Ipartment* (爱情公寓), released in 2009, is both representative and influential. Its fictional world is regarded as the epitome of desirable life for young Chinese people living in a metropolis. Its humour strategies reflect the common features of humour in real conversations between young Chinese people. While there are numerous studies investigating humour exchanged between English-speaking friends (e.g. Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006, Coates 2007), there is almost nothing on humour between friends talking in Chinese. *Ipartment* is thus an ideal source. There is increasing scholarly attention for humour in China, covering topics such as historical and cultural views of humour from the late Qin dynasty to modern China (Chey and Davis 2011, Davis and Chey 2013, Rea 2015), the difference in humour-styles between Chinese and Canadians from a psychological perspective (c.f. Chen & Martin 2007) but almost no studies on linguistic humour in Chinese sitcoms. Ying's study intends to fill this gap.

The conceptualisation of *youmo* 幽默 (humour) in Chinese sitcoms is a significant issue because current definitions of *youmo*—which is used as a general term in Chinese in the same way as "humour" is used in English—are proposed by scholars who mainly focus on Chinese literary and philosophical works. These definitions are not very applicable to analysing *youmo* in sitcom discourse since that has to go beyond the textual level and pay attention to how *youmo* works at the interactional level. Ying's thesis adopts Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humour (the GTVH, 2001) to explore the unique linguistic patterns of *youmo* strategies that are used in Chinese sitcoms.

Investigating how sitcom characters construct their identities by choosing different humour strategies raises the concept of "identity" in people's real-life communications. Like humour, this is a broad and complicated term. Ying's study addresses a character's identity by exploring two major facets, namely, personality traits and gendered identity. Some linguistic studies have usefully explored how the language used by characters correlates to their personality (Bennison 2002; Culpeper 2001; Hubbard 2002); and numerous studies exist of humour and gender in natural conversations (Coates 2007; Holmes 2006) and also in fictional conversations (Bubel & Spitz 2006; Dynel 2011). Mullany (2010) argues that gendered identity, as one of the important categorisations of social identity, needs to be prioritised over other categorisations. Other studies exploring gendered identity focus on white, western, working-class females. In Ying's study, the gendered identity of young Chinese people is discussed alongside their personality traits.

Although humour scholars have begun to notice the importance of investigating failed humour in natural conversations (e.g. Bell 2015), any systematic investigation of failed humour in sitcoms is still lacking. Nevertheless, failed humour among characters is recognised as important in eliciting laughter from the audience in sitcoms. On this point also, Ying aims to open up new discussion with her study.

Ying Cao has twice won post-graduate scholarships to present on her evolving work at the 2017 and the forthcoming 2018 Conferences of the Australasian Humour Studies Network. We look forward to hearing more about her progress in Cairns next February! Congratulations and good luck, Ying!

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AHSN Members' News and Updates – Angelina Hurley

Let's Talk, broadcast on 98.9FM Brisbane, is also available as a podcast. A full list can be accessed here - <https://989fm.com.au/category/podcasts/lets-talk/>

In the 'Wild Black Woman' episodes Dr Chelsea Watego-Bond talks with AHSN member Angelina Hurley about all things that made them 'wild'.



The image shows a screenshot of a social media post. At the top, there is a profile picture of Angelina Hurley and the text "Angelina Hurley is with Chelsea Watego Bond and Mary Gedarrdyu." Below this, it says "31 mins · Twitter · 🌐". The main text of the post reads "Podcast - Here it is peeps. I love Thursday mornings at 98.9fm." Below the text is a video thumbnail showing a woman with dark curly hair, wearing a blue and orange patterned top, smiling. Underneath the thumbnail, the text says "Lets Talk- Wild Black Woman with Mary G" and "989fm.com.au".

Professor Emeritus Christie Davies (1941-2017)

Remembered by colleagues at University of Reading

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Professor Emeritus Christie Davies after a short illness.

Professor Davies was one of the early members of Reading's Department of Sociology that was founded in 1964 by Stanislaw Andreski. Christie belonged to that brilliant generation of intellectuals who brought about a renaissance in British political and moral thought in the 1980s and 1990s.



A Wrenbury scholar in political economy at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, he sparkled as an actor in the Cambridge Footlights, acting alongside Germaine Greer and the Python-to-be Eric Idle. Christie graduated in 1967 with a double first.

He was the funniest man on campus but also the wisest. A gifted and devoted teacher, always having time to talk to students and colleagues in offices and corridors anywhere, he received international recognition for his original and deep understanding of ethnic humour.

A radical advocate of intellectual freedom and personal responsibility, Christie was a Welsh eccentric teetotaller who loved England. He would later turn his hand to writing a series of humorous, magical science fiction stories for children called 'Dewi the Dragon'.

Actively involved in the think-tank, the Social Affairs Unit, he campaigned against Marxist domination of the social sciences and the British political establishment. An author of over 20 books and innumerable articles, his work was translated into many languages, including Japanese, Polish and Czech. An art lover, Christie was a prolific writer of reviews of art exhibitions in 'The New Criterion' in the USA.

After his retirement in 2002, he continued to write and give lectures and conference papers all around the world, and he had come back from one such successful visit to the USA just before his death.

He will be greatly missed by all those who knew him, studied with him, worked with him and talked with him - and saw him cycling across campus.

Dr Athena Leoussi, Modern Languages and European Studies

Dr Dawn Clarke, Politics & International Relations

Tuesday, 5 September 2017

AHSN Members will recall Christie not only from international conferences and summer schools but from his visit to Sydney in July 2010, when he conducted a masterclass for a few lucky students and presented a seminar at University of Sydney on "How and why joke cycles change as they move between countries, including Australia". Jessica Milner Davis has written a longer tribute to Christie, exploring his connections with Australia, which will appear in a Special Issue of the on-line European Journal of Humour Research, being edited by Delia Chiaro (University of Bologna), Giseline Kuipers (Amsterdam University) and Wladyslaw Chlopicki (Jagellonian University, Krakow). The Digest Editors will send you the link when that appears.

No Laughing Matter: Humour in Court

Kate Allman, journalist with The Law Society of New South Wales, interviewed the Chair of our AHSN Review Panel, Dr Bruce Findlay, for her recent article about humour in court. With many thanks to the author, we are reproducing her article, just published in the *Law Society of NSW Journal*, No. 37 (2017) which features Bruce in a delightful centre break-out panel.

The topic of humour and the law seems to be quite topical: there was a panel at the Oakland ISHS Conference a couple of years ago which featured Christie Davies (see obituary elsewhere in this Digest) and Marc Galanter (author of *Lowering the Bar: Lawyer Jokes and Legal Culture*, University of Wisconsin Press, 2006). Both these experts have contributed chapters to *Judges, Judging and Humour*, a book currently being edited by Jessica Milner Davis (University of Sydney), and Sharyn Roach Anleu FASSA (Flinders University), and forthcoming with Palgrave Macmillan in their Legal Studies series. Readers may recall that Sharyn co-presented with Kathy Mack FAAL (also of Flinders) at the AHSN Conference at Flinders University in 2015, giving an account of their joint research project which collected data on humorous exchanges in Australian Magistrate's Courts.

For those who are subscribers, here is the link the Law Society of NSW and its on-line journal:

<https://www.lawsociety.com.au/resources/journal/LSJOnline/index.htm>

Members' New Humour Studies Publications

Robert Phiddian and Haydon Manning. "Friday Essay: Political Cartooning – the End of an Era." *The Conversation*, August 11, 2017

At: <https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-political-cartooning-the-end-of-an-era-81680>

Nicholas Holm. 2017. *Humour as Politics: The Political Aesthetics of Contemporary Comedy*. Palgrave Studies in Comedy. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

New book by AHSN member, Nicholas Holm, Massey University

Nicholas Holm. 2017. *Humour as Politics: The Political Aesthetics of Contemporary Comedy*. [Palgrave Studies in Comedy](#). London: Palgrave Macmillan. eBook ISBN 978-3-319-50950-1 DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-50950-1 Hardcover ISBN 978-3-319-50949-5 <https://www.palgrave.com/in/book/9783319509495>

This book argues that recent developments in contemporary comedy have changed not just the way we laugh, but the way we understand the world. Drawing on a range of contemporary televisual, cinematic and digital examples, from *Seinfeld* and *Veep* to *Family Guy* and *Chappelle's Show*, Holm explores how humour has become a central site of cultural politics in the twenty-first century. More than just a form of entertainment, humour plays a central role in the contemporary media environment, shaping how we understand ideas of freedom, empathy, social boundaries and even logic. Through an analysis of humour as a political and aesthetic category, *Humour as Politics* challenges older models of laughter as a form of dissent and instead argues for a new theory of humour as the cultural expression of our (neo)liberal moment.



'Pushing beyond orthodox theories, this book draws attention to the aesthetics of humour, long-neglected by mainstream humour research. Challenging and insightful, the book offers food for thought to scholars of contemporary humour and comedy.'

- **Jessica Milner Davis** FRSN, University of Sydney.

'In a historical moment marked by lively debate over the political uses of comedy and satire, Holm's *Humour as Politics* arrives to bring us the conceptual tools we need. Witty, rigorous and convincing, *Humour and Politics* is a landmark work of cultural analysis.'

- **Will Straw**, McGill University.

'This is a remarkably erudite, rigorous and persuasive analysis of one of the most important, and under-studied cultural forms of our time. An important work of cultural studies and cultural criticism, this ground-breaking study sheds crucial new light on the operations of this most central, but still elusive, point of interface between everyday life, media culture and the wider public domain.'

- **Jeremy Gilbert**, University of East London.

Author bio-note

Nicholas Holm is a lecturer in Media Studies at Massey University, New Zealand. He has written widely on the politics and aesthetics of popular culture, in particular contemporary humour. He is author of *Advertising and Society: A Critical Introduction* (2016).

Film Report

By long-standing AHSN member Neil Harnisch, now retired from University of Waikato NZ

Dying Laughing (2016). Directed by Lloyd Stanton and Paul Toogood. (1:29 min)

If you are interested in what makes stand-up comics tick and wish to appreciate the peaks-and-pits journey that they undertake to become the entertainers who are our social and cultural mirrors, I recommend you have a sit down with this documentary (available from iTunes at: <http://dyinglaughingfilm.com/>)

Composed of interviews encompassing a wide diversity of these live performers (ethnicities, genders, and nationalities), the film allows you to glean what a struggle most undergo to take to the stage and hone their craft. You will recognise well-known show biz comics such as Chris Rock, Jerry Seinfeld, Billy Connolly, Jo Brand, Amy Schumer, Victoria Wood, Sarah Silverman, Jerry Lewis, Jamie Foxx, Garry Shandling and lesser known comics who are still working their way toward recognition.



The pithiest summation of this doco comes by way of reviewer, David Ferguson, "It plays not so much as 'how to become a comedian', but rather as a therapy session for those who already are. It's loosely structured into segments that provide very specific insight and real life stories on: the first time on stage, life on the road, dealing with hecklers, the devastation of bombing, how to connect with an audience, and what it's like to be 'on' or to really kill it."

Another reviewer pondered whether such stand-up humour arises from the misery of trying to make it as a comic. I recall Chris Rock's interview in which he points out that stand-up comedians are among the few folk who really have the freedom to say just what they want to in public. Other lenses into the world of comedians you might like to consider include *Comedian* (2002), produced by Jerry Seinfeld and the work of Ricky Gervais. Personally, I am tolerating today's intractable numbness of political idiocy and infotainment disguised as news by enjoying the joy-giving satire and irony that is delivered as "not the news" by those such as John Oliver, Colbert and Bill Maher. It keeps me sane.

Have You Seen the Latest from The Journal of Neuroscience? New Research on Social Laughter and Brain Chemistry

Report from Science Daily at: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/06/170601124121.htm>

The recent results obtained by researchers from Turku PET Centre, the University of Oxford and Aalto University have revealed how social laughter leads to endorphin release in the brain, possibly promoting establishment of social bonds.

Social laughter led to pleasurable feelings and significantly increased release of endorphins and other opioid peptides in the brain areas controlling arousal and emotions. The more opioid receptors the participants had in their brain, the more they laughed during the experiment.

Our results highlight that endorphin release induced by social laughter may be an important pathway that supports formation, reinforcement, and maintenance of social bonds between humans. The pleasurable and calming effects of the endorphin release might signal safety and promote feelings of togetherness. The relationship between opioid receptor density and laughter rate also suggests that opioid system may underlie individual differences in sociability, says Professor Lauri Nummenmaa from Turku PET Centre, the University of Turku.

The results emphasise the importance of vocal communication in maintaining human social networks. Other primates maintain social contacts by mutual grooming, which also induces endorphin release. This is however very time consuming. Because social laughter leads to similar chemical response in the brain, this allows significant expansion of human social networks: laughter is highly contagious, and the endorphin response may thus easily spread through large groups that laugh together, tells Professor Robin Dunbar from the University of Oxford.

The study was conducted using positron emission tomography (PET). The participants were injected with a radioactive compound binding to their brain's opioid receptors. Radioactivity in the brain was measured twice with the PET camera: after the participants had laughed together with their close friends, and after they had spent comparable time alone in the laboratory.

The findings were published on in the scientific journal The Journal of Neuroscience:

Sandra Manninen, Lauri Tuominen, Robin Dunbar, Tomi Karjalainen, Jussi Hirvonen, Eveliina Arponen, Riitta Hari, Iiro P. Jääskeläinen, Mikko Sams, Lauri Nummenmaa. Social Laughter Triggers Endogenous Opioid Release in Humans. The Journal of Neuroscience, 2017; 0688-16 DOI: 10.1523/JNEUROSCI.0688-16.2017

The research was funded by the Academy of Finland and the European Research Council.

“Social laughter releases endorphins in the brain.” ScienceDaily, 1 June 2017.
<www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/06/170601124121.htm>.

Report on “Singing and Laughing Against Fascism: Lost and Found Soviet Yiddish Songs of World War II”, Guest Lecture at University of Sydney

Three AHSN members Rodney Marks, Mark Rolfe and Jessica Milner Davis were able to attend this interesting lecture given at University of Sydney on 9 August by Associate Professor Anna Shternshis, University of Toronto.

She reported on research she has been conducting for the last decade on material she called “a time-capsule from the past”. To quote her abstract:

In the late 1990s, in the manuscript department of the Ukrainian National Library, archivists found a number of boxes. They contained hand-written Yiddish documents dating back to 1941- 1947. Upon examination, it turned

out that the pages contained thousands of songs, written by Yiddish-speaking Jews in Ukraine during World War II. Leading Soviet Jewish ethnomusicologists and linguists, including the legendary Moisei Beregovsky, had archived this music by Jewish refugees, Jewish soldiers in the Red Army and Holocaust survivors, who had defied Hitler in song. Stalin's authorities arrested Beregovsky and his colleagues in 1950, and the documents were sealed. Scholars believed them to have been destroyed forever.

Studying these Yiddish songs changes the way we understood the history of the Holocaust, especially how Jews in Europe made sense of the war, the violence and the destruction of their communities. Some ridiculed Hitler and fascism; others mourned victims, and all of them called for the ultimate revenge against fascism.

Accompanied by a rich media presentation, created together with an artist Psoy Korolenko, the lecture gave voices to the amateur singers who were not silenced by Hitler or Stalin, people who sang in the face of the unthinkable violence and injustice. It will also give voice to scholars who risked their lives and careers for collecting these songs during the war. Above all, the lost and found Soviet archive gives us a chance to glimpse into the world of Soviet Yiddish world of the 1940s – a treasure that will continue to inspire.

Author Bio-note:

Anna Shternshis holds the position of Al and Malka Green Associate Professor of Yiddish studies and the director of the Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto. She received her doctoral degree (D.Phil) in Modern Languages and Literatures from Oxford University in 2001. Shternshis is the author of *Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923 - 1939* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006) and *When Sonia Met Boris: An Oral History of Jewish Life under Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). She is the author of over 20 articles on the Soviet Jews during World War II, Russian Jewish culture and post-Soviet Jewish diaspora. Together with David Shneer, Shternshis co-edits *East European Jewish Affairs*, the leading journal in the field of East European Jewish Studies.

Remember the Online Survey on Benevolent and Corrective Humour?

Here's a quick report from Prof. Willibald Ruch and Dr Sonja Hertz of the Dept of Psychology, University of Zurich, who were conducting the survey:

"Thanks to all the AHSN members who participated in the brief "BenCo" online survey about beneficial and corrective humour earlier this year. Your response was much appreciated. Unfortunately, we didn't get a large enough sample to include Australians in the multi-nation study, but a special study making a country comparison with other English-speaking samples in the larger dataset (England, Northern Ireland and New Zealand) will be made, so as to embed the Australian data internationally."

So, watch this space for further reports.

In addition, Dr Bruce Findlay will be reporting on the AHSN response at the upcoming 24th AHSN conference in Cairns in February 2018.

Sincere thanks from Jessica Milner Davis (AHSN Co-ordinator) and from Bruce Findlay (Chair of the AHSN Review Panel and researcher into the psychology of humour) to everyone who took the time to log on and respond. Such participation advances the study of humour around the world and ensures that Australia's interest and contributions are noticed.

“Imagineers in Circus and Science”

Tuesday 3 April - Thursday 5 April 2018

Conference hosted by

Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University Canberra

Reminder: since the **Call for Papers closed on 15 September 2017**, this notice was circulated earlier to the AHSN list and is repeated here.

Full details at: <http://hrc.anu.edu.au/events/imagineers-conference>

Speakers

Professor Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (Emory University)

Professor Jane Goodall (University of Western Sydney)

Professor Richard Weihe (Accademia Teatro Dimitri/SUPSI Verscio, Switzerland)

Professor Peta Tait (La Trobe University)

The Convenor writes:

The Conference and its Relevance to Humour Studies

Circus is – and has always been – a breeding ground for performances, activities and characters that are humoristic, ambivalently comic, abject-funny and grotesquely hilarious. The out-of-proportion, physical humour of 19th-century circus pantomimes, accompanied by a lack of reason and over-determination of expression, is just one of the many facets of “humour in circus”.

In *L'essence du rire*, Baudelaire, for instance, recounts the humour of a guillotined corpse whose head rolls noisily up to the prompt box presenting a bleeding spinal disc, a frazzled vertebra, and all the details of freshly chopped butcher's meat ready for the display window. Similar examples of such grotesquery feature on the (sawdust) stage: a dentist curing a patient by means of a grenade fixed to his tooth; the massacre of victims of a shipwreck instead of their anticipated rescue; the killing of a pregnant cat, exploding in a rain of kittens; and a scandalising widower who chases his wife's mourners away wielding a garden hose, and then attempts to rape a display dummy, finally instigating a cataclysmic inferno. This type of literary and parodic pantomime plot remains fundamental to clown narratives of the 20th century, and is emblematically typified by the numerous comic-strip, film and TV treatments of *Batman*, all featuring the character of The Joker.

This Call is an invitation to explore humour in circus: clowns in relation to theories of laughter, the deep-black humour of performances themselves, “Fun Sciences”, or examples of wondrous science including 19th-century “Laughing Gas Performances”. Thus, the question is not, “Why so serious?” but, “Why not submit an abstract for a conference on Circus and Science”?

I look forward to seeing as many of you there as possible.

Thank you and best regards,

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Circus and related cultural phenomena, such as freakshows and 19th century 'scientific' museums, are reminders that science and its pursuits are matters of perspective, and the products and producers of good stories.

What do these stories tell us about the "two cultures" of the humanities and science?

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The Humour Studies Digest

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'We put the "U" back into "HUMOUR"!'

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